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SEVENTEENTH SESSION

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## SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 354th MEETING

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**Chairman: Mr. Leopoldo BENITES (Ecuador).**

### AGENDA ITEM 79

**Question of Oman (A/5149, A/5284; A/SPC/73) (continued)**

1. Mr. EL-ZAYYAT (United Arab Republic) said that the United Kingdom representative in his statement at the 353rd meeting had attempted an exposition of the simple facts. He would like to state those facts as they were seen by his delegation and to conclude by suggesting how the Committee might dispose of the item under discussion.

2. First, the British had initially enforced their authority on the port of Muscat on the coast of Oman in the eighteenth century, in order to secure yet another strategic point along the imperial route to India. They had concluded their first agreement with the ruler of Muscat in 1798 and other treaties and agreements had followed. The British had then undertaken to support the Sultan of Muscat and he in turn had guaranteed that the coast would be virtually theirs.

3. Until the end of the First World War, the British had cared little about the interior of Oman, which was left in the hands of the Omani people and their leader, the Imam. They had treated the coastal zone, with Muscat at its centre, as an entity and left the rest alone. At the last meeting, the representative of Iraq had read the Committee parts of a letter sent to the Imam of Oman in 1919 by the British Consul in Muscat. The letter had stated that Muscat was used by British ships on their journey to the East and that it was necessary for trade that it should be peaceful and secure; it stated further that the British wished the Imam no harm and were ready to give him the same advantageous treatment as they gave to the Sultan of Muscat. At the same time, the letter reminded the Imam of British mastery of the seas and implied that the fate of Oman was also in British hands. In the end, the Imam of Oman had signed the non-intervention Treaty of Sib<sup>1/</sup> with the Sultan of Muscat in 1920.

4. In the middle of the twentieth century, Oman had moved into the oil era with its attendant problems. British oil companies which had obtained concessions from the Sultan of Muscat became interested in the interior. When they were unable to reach an agreement with the Imam, British oil interests adopted the thesis that every ruler of Muscat was also ruler of Oman. In

the age of imperial expansion, therefore, British military and trade interests had dictated that the port of Muscat and the coast should be put under virtual British authority, treated as an entity, and cut off from the hinterland of Oman. In the oil age, however, British interests dictated that Muscat and Oman should be considered as one sovereign State. In even that most primary book of reference, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Oman was described as a "nominally" independent country and Muscat as the "capital of the nominally independent state of Oman".

5. In the 1930's, the Sultan of Muscat granted a concession to a British oil company and the Imam of Oman tried to block the company's operations in what he considered to be Omani territory. Thus there arose a series of clashes with forces from Muscat and, in December 1955, the British-led troops of the Sultan crossed Omani territory to reach and capture the capital of Nazwa. Men and equipment had been brought in immediately, and drilling for oil had started in Oman. By 1957, the Imam and other Omani leaders had been able to reorganize their people and to inflict considerable losses on the Sultan's forces. The British Royal Air Force had then entered the battle, presumably with a two-fold aim: to secure Oman for the British oil companies, and to defend British prestige which had suffered in the area as the result of the Suez failure of 1956. The superior weapons of the Royal Air Force had inflicted great losses on the Omani people. Some of the Omani leaders had fled abroad, where they were now conducting a resistance movement called by the United Kingdom "sabotage". Some of those who had stayed in the country were still actively engaged in what the United Kingdom described as terrorism. Still others had been made to "accept" the admittedly British-imposed authority of the Sultan—Britain's "devoted friend".

6. When the campaign in Oman had become known to the outside world, the question had been brought to the United Nations.<sup>2/</sup> Subsequently, British Government agents had met with the leaders of the Omani people. British offers made at meetings with the Omani leaders in Lebanon in 1961, however, had failed to satisfy the national aspirations of the Omani people, who were determined to regain their independence.

7. The United Kingdom representative had said (353rd meeting) that a discussion of this question constituted an interference in the internal affairs of the sovereign State of Muscat and Oman, which had merely sought the assistance of its friends in subduing a rebellion. But the United Kingdom delegation could hardly feel comfortable posing as the defender of the independence and unity of an Arab country against such delegations as those of Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and the United

<sup>1/</sup> See Royal Institute of International Affairs: *The Western Powers and the Middle East; a documentary record* (Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 46.

<sup>2/</sup> See Official Records of the Security Council, Twelfth Year, Supplement for July, August and September 1957, document S/3865 and Add.1.

Arab Republic. When Oman regained its independence and when Muscat and similar princely States, sheikhdoms and sultanates were freed, the Arab nations would welcome their unity. At present they demanded an end to the aggression that had deprived Oman of its freedom.

8. The people of Oman were willing and eager to reach their goal peacefully. They had no quarrel with the people of Muscat, who were, as the United Kingdom representative had stated, their kinsmen. They would have no quarrel with the British either, if the British would only give heed to the wind of change in that part of the world as they had done elsewhere. The United Kingdom delegation could not really believe that the struggle of Oman for independence could be closed by the offer of an amnesty or by putting a price on the heads of the Omani leaders. The representative of the United Kingdom had referred to a declaration by Mr. Heath, the Lord Privy Seal, in the House of Commons on 15 March 1961,<sup>3/</sup> to the effect that the British Government sincerely wished for a settlement under which the Omani leaders could return to Oman on terms satisfactory to the Sultan and to themselves. Certainly the Government of the United Kingdom was quite aware of the kind of settlement that would be satisfactory to the people of Oman. Nowadays, Ministers of the British Crown took pride in announcing liberations and disengagements, rather than annexations and conquests. The question was how the freedom of the Omani people would be achieved. They and their leaders wished to achieve it peacefully. They had sought to settle the dispute in accordance with the principles of the Charter. The UAR delegation, therefore, together with other delegations, intended to introduce a draft resolution, similar to the one adopted at the last session, which would, it hoped, be accepted by all members or at least by a great majority.

9. Mr. ASTAPENKO (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) observed that the question of Oman was one of the colonial questions occupying an important place in the agenda of the General Assembly's seventeenth session.

10. The examination of those questions clearly revealed the attempts of the colonial Powers to render null and void the United Nations Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples, contained in General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV). It was precisely because of those attempts that 50 million people—a large number of them in the United Kingdom colonies—were still living in a condition of colonial bondage. In striving to preserve the vestiges of colonialism and colonial Powers had recourse to a variety of tactics, including the promulgation of fictitious constitutions, efforts to establish puppet federations, the provocation of conflicts which could be used as a pretext for delaying independence and, as in the case of Oman, attempts to put down the national liberation movement by force of arms. His delegation shared the apprehensions of the African and Asian delegations sponsoring the item as expressed in paragraph 3 of their explanatory memorandum (A/5149). For the past seven years United Kingdom ground, air and naval forces equipped with the most modern weapons, had been waging war against the defenceless Omani people. As many of the previous speakers had indicated, the conflict had its origin in the desire of United Kingdom monopolies to

retain control over the oil of Oman and the country's strategic position. It was in defence of those interests that the United Kingdom representative had tried to make it appear that there was no connexion between colonialism and the question of Oman. Its claim that peace and order reigned in Oman and its strict censorship of news from that country could not conceal the truth. The Omani people were continuing their struggle for freedom and independence, a struggle in which they had the sympathy and support of the progressive forces of the world. The United Kingdom forces of occupation must be withdrawn from the country and the people of Oman be given the opportunity to be the masters of their own house.

11. His delegation would support any proposal which would be in the interests of the people of Oman and of their struggle for freedom and independence.

12. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) said that the election of Prince Ghalib as Imam by the Omani people in 1954 had marked the end of British attempts to annex Oman by political manoeuvring and in 1955, the United Kingdom had resort to military intervention. It had sought to justify that intervention by a number of legal pretexts. By the Convention of 1798, the United Kingdom had established a Protectorate over Muscat and control over its Sultan. Although it was well aware of the territorial limits of the Sultanate and the limits of the Sultan's authority, it had been able to use the Convention in order to act against Oman. All its attempts to intervene, however, had met with stubborn resistance and in 1920 the British authorities had been obliged to enter into conversations with the Imam of that time. The Treaty of Sib of 1920 had clearly limited the jurisdiction of the Sultan of Muscat to the coastal zone, and had prohibited the Sultan from intervening in the internal affairs of the Imamate which was recognized as an independent entity.

13. The United Kingdom had soon changed its attitude. The period between 1920 and the Second World War had coincided with the period of British expansionism throughout the Arab peninsula. In September 1955, British forces had captured the Saudi Arabian oasis of Al Buraymi and quashed all attempts at resistance by the local chiefs. Three months later, British forces coming from Al Buraymi had invaded Oman and captured its capital. A legal dispute over oil concessions illegally granted by the Sultan of Muscat had served as the pretext for that occupation. The occupying forces had been closely followed by oil prospectors.

14. The British Government had made no secret of the real motives for its military intervention in Oman. In the Cabinet and in the House of Commons, leading figures had admitted that the British decision had been inspired by oil interests and by a desire to renew dwindling British prestige in the Persian Gulf. The British Government had also been aware of the Oman's intention to associate his country more closely with the activities of the Arab nationalist movement.

15. Even while it had been defending its interests by force in the Arabian Peninsula, however, the United Kingdom had been pursuing a different but very profitable policy in other parts of the world. In Asia and Africa it had been loosening the chains of empire and forging new bonds with its former colonies, to the sound of praise from all over the world. It was strange that that policy had not been tried in the Persian Gulf. British protestations of friendship for the Arab world were welcomed but, although the scars left by recent

<sup>3/</sup> See *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) Fifth Series*, vol. 636 (London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960-1961), p. 124.

events were gradually disappearing, wounds which remained open unnecessarily presented a threat of infection and were a legitimate cause for concern.

16. The Omani delegation had again stated at the current session (352nd meeting) the willingness of the Omani people to establish good relations with the United Kingdom. The prestige which the United Kingdom had won in its former empire since the Second World War would be increased, in the Arab world in particular, if it chose the friendship of a proud people over that of a puppet Sultan, the continued protection of whom could only compromise its position and its interests. The United Kingdom should, therefore, withdraw its troops from Omani territory. Negotiations should take place between Oman and the British Government on conditions of complete freedom. Only the friendship of the Omani people could provide the United Kingdom with a really secure foundation for its interests.

17. Mr. PAVLIK (Czechoslovakia) stated that the reason why the question of Oman was once again included in the agenda was that the Assembly at its previous session had not taken the steps which would have enabled the Omani people to assert their independence and that the United Kingdom had not drawn the correct conclusions from the debate of that session and from the adoption of the Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples.

18. In Oman the United Kingdom, seeking to protect its political, strategic and, above all, its economic interests, was trying to reduce to colonial slavery a people who had been free for centuries. It had resorted to every means at its command, from the application of the colonialist "divide and rule" principle, in other words the provocation of fratricidal strife among the sheikhdoms, to the waging of a war of extermination against the peaceful civilian population. There could be no question that the policy followed by the United Kingdom in Oman constituted a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and the provisions of Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1654 (XVI). Although the United Kingdom claimed that the United Nations was intervening in the domestic affairs of the Sultanate of Muscat, it was well known that Oman had existed as an independent State for centuries and that its independence had been officially recognized in the 1920 Treaty of Sib, in connexion with which the United Kingdom had acted as mediator between Muscat and Oman. The truth of the matter was that the United Kingdom itself, both directly and with the aid of the

Sultanate, was intervening in the domestic affairs of Oman. The national liberation struggle of the Omani people was part of the whole struggle against colonialism which was characteristic of the age. That was the essence of the situation and no one would be deceived by the claim that the struggle was merely a revolt by a handful of armed rebels. If that description were correct, the United Kingdom would hardly have found it necessary to launch a military campaign in which the most modern weapons, including jet aircraft and rockets, were being used, towns and villages were being destroyed and the civilian population was being killed. Many Omani patriots had lost their lives and many were in prison. It was hard to believe that a "handful of rebels" who allegedly had no support in the country should be able to resist such a campaign for seven long years.

19. The United Kingdom colonialists were doing everything in their power to isolate the area from the outside world. For example, delegations from the International Red Cross had been refused permission to enter Oman, a circumstance which gave rise to fear that the situation might be even worse than available evidence indicated.

20. Owing to its geographical situation, Oman had long been coveted by the United Kingdom, desirous of protecting its political, military and economic interests in that part of the Arabian Peninsula. The main attraction was, of course, the immense natural wealth of Oman and of the Peninsula as a whole. It was a well-known fact that United Kingdom operation against Oman had begun only after the existence of oil deposits in that country had been confirmed and Oman had refused to give United Kingdom oil monopolies a concession to exploit them. His delegation considered that the Omani people were entirely justified in resisting those efforts to deprive them of the natural wealth of their country. Yet as Prince Talib bin Ali Al-Hanai had made clear in his statement to the Committee, the Omani people would much prefer to be given the opportunity to settle the dispute by peaceful means.

21. The United Nations could not maintain a passive attitude towards the situation but should take the necessary measures to ensure the withdrawal of all United Kingdom troops from Oman and the consolidation of that country's independence. His delegation would support measures calculated to achieve that purpose.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.