

Chapter XI

Other questions relating to the Middle East

Matters concerning the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb

On 3 December 1971, the representatives of Algeria, Iraq, the Libyan Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council to consider the situation in the Arabian Gulf area arising from the occupation by Iran on 30 November 1971 of the islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb and the Lesser Tunb.

On 9 December 1971, the Security Council included the letter from those representatives in

its agenda and invited them as well as the representatives of Iran, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, at their request, to participate in the discussion without the right to vote.

The representative of Iraq told the Security Council that on 30 November 1971 his Government had received a cable from the Ruler of Ras al Khaimah stating that the islands of the Greater Tunb and the Lesser Tunb in the Arabian Gulf had been occupied and that in the process four

local policemen had been killed and two wounded. The two islands, the cable added, had always been part of Ras al Khaimah. Therefore the Iranian occupation was an aggression against all Arab people.

Stating that the occupation of the islands was a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter, the representative of Iraq charged that the invasion was the latest step in a policy of expansion by Iran and a demonstration of collusion between Iran and the United Kingdom. He rejected Iran's "historical" claim to the islands which, he said, had always been inhabited by Arab people, and rejected also the theory of a "power vacuum," which he said was a colonial and imperialistic concept. Referring to the argument that the islands were of strategic importance to Iran, he pointed out that the islands were of strategic importance to other littoral States in the Gulf, most of which were major oil-producing countries.

The Iraqi representative also said that the United Kingdom was committed, under treaties with the rulers of the Trucial States, to preserve the territorial integrity of the States concerned; it should be condemned for not living up to those obligations.

Kuwait, observing that it was concerned with the stability and security of the Gulf after the withdrawal of British troops by the end of 1971, said it had made many efforts to assist the Emirates of the area to form a federation. That federation was, however, blocked by Iran which made its acceptance of that development conditional on its possession of the Arab islands of the Greater and the Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa.

The stability of the Gulf area had been disrupted, Kuwait's representative said, and the security of the Emirates encroached upon. Therefore, it was incumbent upon the Security Council to call on Iran to withdraw its troops from the Arab islands immediately.

Algeria observed that the three islands occupied by Iran were part of the federation of the United Arab Emirates which had just joined the United Nations. Therefore, the matter could not be settled by agreement between Iran and the United Kingdom, but should be discussed among all the parties concerned. Iran's military action had violated the United Nations Charter and should be condemned by the Security Council.

The representative of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen maintained that the discussion of the islands concerned the entire Arabian Gulf because the islands were extensions of the Arab mainland. The representative put the responsibility for Iran's recent aggression on the United Kingdom, because under the prevailing treaties, he said, the United Kingdom had full authority in that territory until the end of 1971. The Council

should demand the withdrawal of Iranian troops.

The representative of Iran said that at a time when the flames of war were rapidly spreading in South-East Asia, the Council was convened not to discuss real acts of war but the wanton and fanciful preoccupations of a few. He rejected the charges made by the previous speakers against Iran as baseless, and said that the question was essentially a domestic matter.

The term "Arabian Gulf" used by the representative of Iraq, he noted, was a misrepresentation of facts, because the area from the most ancient times had been called the "Persian Gulf." Iran's position in the area of the Gulf was one based on creating conditions for peace and security for all the littoral States, which should work together in a spirit of friendship and co-operation.

Iran did not entertain any expansionist ambitions and had a policy based on settling disputes by peaceful means, as shown by its action the previous year in the case of Bahrain which had been acclaimed by the Security Council.

With regard to the islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and the Lesser Tunb, the representative of Iran recalled that Iran had tried to find a peaceful settlement, although there was no doubt that the islands belonged to Iran as shown in maps hundreds of years old. There had been reported threats by Iraq and the Libyan Arab Republic to send troops to the islands; however, Iran would not allow any violation of its sovereignty on its territory.

The representative of the United Kingdom recalled that on 1 March 1971 his Government's Foreign Secretary had declared that the existing treaties between the United Kingdom and Bahrain, Qatar and the seven Trucial States, would be terminated and British forces withdrawn by the end of 1971. In taking that decision, he added, his Government's primary concern was to see stability preserved in the area through a federation of the States and the settlement of outstanding territorial differences—which mainly concerned conflicting claims by the Arab States and Iran to certain islands in the Gulf.

With regard to the conflicting claims, he said that the island of Abu Musa, administered by the Ruler of Sharjah and having a population of 800, had been the subject of an agreement between that ruler and Iran. Concerning the Greater and the Lesser Tunb, the United Kingdom had made it known that it could not protect the two islands if agreement was not reached by the time of withdrawal.

The ending of the United Kingdom's special position and responsibilities in the Gulf, he noted, had meant the striking of a balance between the conflicting claims of neighbouring States and the taking into account of realities. While agreed

solutions to all problems could have been better, it was not for lack of trying.

The representative of the Libyan Arab Republic felt that from past deliberations of the Security Council it could be seen that big powers could do anything they wished while small ones were powerless. Moreover, other States with the support of a big power took liberties in violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Iran's occupation of the islands with the complicity of the British was an example.

The representative of the United Arab Emirates observed that the action of Iran in using force to settle a territorial dispute arising out of a claim—which he felt was untenable both historically and juridically—was not only contrary to the Charter but was incompatible with the traditional friendship between the Arab and Iranian peoples.

Iran, which claimed that the islands were Iranian, had failed to produce any convincing evidence in support of that claim. Those islands, in the opinion of the United Arab Emirates, were Arab and always had been, and the British had recognized them as such. However, Iran had chosen the method of force to settle its claims although thousands of Iranians lived and worked in the United Arab Emirates; the two countries should have friendly neighbourly relations.

The representative expressed his country's hope

that Iran would reconsider its position regarding the islands and would find it possible to settle the matter in a way that befitted neighbours.

Somalia said that the statements made in the Council led to the conclusion that the parties in the dispute before the Council were all concerned with the well-being of the people of the region. This was a reason to settle the dispute amicably so that peace, security and stability could reign in the area.

In dealing with such sensitive matters, Somalia continued, the Council must always act in strict conformity with the letter and spirit of the United Nations Charter. While Chapter VI of the Charter provided for the peaceful settlement of disputes, it would be precipitate at that stage to recommend any recourse under Article 36,¹ as some States friendly to both the complainants and Iran were attempting to bring both sides together. Somalia therefore suggested that the Council defer consideration of the matter to a later date to allow sufficient time for quiet diplomacy. In case the third-party efforts should fail, the Council could resume consideration of the complaint.

The Council agreed to the proposed course without objection.

¹ For text of Chapter VI of the Charter, including Article 36, see APPENDIX II.

DOCUMENTARY REFERENCES

Security Council, meeting 1610.

S/10409. Letter of 3 December 1971 from Algeria, Iraq, Libyan Arab Republic and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (request to convene Council and participate in discussion).

S/10431. Letter of 6 December 1971 from Kuwait (request to participate in Council's discussion).

S/10434. Letter of 7 December 1971 from Iraq (transmitting cable of 30 November 1971 from Ruler of Ras al Khaimah).

S/10436, S/10437, S/10439. Letters of 9 December 1971 from Iran, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and United Arab Emirates (requests to participate in Council's discussion).

S/INF/27. Resolutions and decisions of Security Council, 1971. Decisions, p. 11.

The question of Oman

Consideration by Special Committee

The General Assembly's Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples took up the question of Oman on 17 September 1971.

The Special Committee took into account the General Assembly's request of 14 December 1970² to follow closely developments regarding the colonial situation in the territory and to report thereon in 1971.

On a proposal of the Chairman, the Special Committee, having followed recent developments concerning Oman and having noted that the Security Council had under consideration the application of the Sultanate of Oman for membership in the United Nations, decided to suspend consideration of the question pending such action

as the Assembly might wish to take in that connexion at its 1971 session, due to open on 21 September 1971.

Consideration by General Assembly

On 6 October 1971, on the proposal of Iraq, the General Assembly's Fourth Committee decided to give priority to the question of Oman.

Iraq also submitted the text of a draft consensus on the item which the Committee approved without objection.

By the consensus the Fourth Committee, noting that the Security Council on 30 September 1971 had recommended to the General Assembly that Oman be admitted to membership in the United Nations, recommended that the Assembly decide

² See Y.U.N., 1970, pp. 289-90, text of resolution 2702(XXV).

to conclude consideration of the item by taking note with satisfaction that Oman had achieved the goals set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (contained in the Assembly's resolution of 14 December 1960)³ and by extending to the Government and the people of Oman its best wishes for peace and prosperity in the future.

At a plenary meeting on 7 October 1971, the Assembly considered the text recommended by the Fourth Committee.

Explaining his vote before the vote was taken, the representative of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen stated that, with due respect to the Fourth Committee, his delegation was astonished to see it suddenly change its position and

cede to the allegation that Oman had achieved the goals set forth in the Charter and the Declaration on the granting of independence. In fact, he said, Oman had not achieved such goals and was still under colonial rule. No independence had been declared and British political and military presence had not been eliminated.

The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen maintained its view, expressed on several occasions, and would vote against the Fourth Committee's recommendation.

The consensus was adopted by a recorded vote of 115 to 2, with 1 abstention.

(For text of the consensus, see DOCUMENTARY REFERENCES below.) (See also pp. 219-20.)

³ See Y.U.N., 1960, pp. 49-50, text of resolution 1514(XV).

DOCUMENTARY REFERENCES

Special Committee on Situation with regard to Implementation of Declaration on Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, meeting 827.

General Assembly—26th session
General Committee, meeting 191.
Fourth Committee, meeting 1920.
Plenary meeting 1957.

A/8401. Report of Secretary-General on work of the Organization, 16 June 1970-15 June 1971, Part Two, Chapter IB 8.

A/8423/Rev.1. Report of Special Committee on Situation with regard to Implementation of Declaration on Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (covering its work during 1971), Chapter XIII.

A/C.4/L.987. Draft consensus, submitted by Iraq, approved without objection by Fourth Committee on 6 October 1971, meeting 1920.

A/8456. Report of Fourth Committee, draft consensus.

A/8429. Resolutions adopted by General Assembly during its 26th session, 21 September-22 December 1971. Other decisions, p. 112: Consensus, adopted by Assembly on 7 October 1971, meeting 1957, by recorded vote of 115 to 2, with 1 abstention, as follows:

In favour: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Bhutan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burma, Burundi, Byelorussian SSR, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Ceylon, Chad, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Dahomey, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland,

France, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Khmer Republic, Kuwait, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Republic, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukrainian SSR, USSR, United Republic of Tanzania, United States, Upper Volta, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia.

Against: Cuba, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

Abstaining: Saudi Arabia.

"The General Assembly, having examined the chapter of the report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples concerning the question of Oman, and noting that the Security Council in its resolution 299(1971) of 30 September 1971 has recommended to the General Assembly that Oman be admitted to membership in the United Nations, decides to conclude consideration of the item entitled 'Question of Oman' by taking note with satisfaction that Oman has achieved the goals set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and by extending to the Government and the people of Oman its best wishes for peace and prosperity in the future."