

## Oman 1965-1976: From Certain Defeat to Decisive Victory

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### Introduction

An often-overlooked counterinsurgency campaign of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was the one that raged from 1965-1976 in the Sultanate of Oman. Overshadowed by the larger conflicts that engulfed Southeast Asia, by 1970 a communist-led insurgency in the Southern Omani province of Dhofar (Dhofar) came very close to achieving victory over the British-backed government of the Sultan. However, in a remarkable turnabout grounded in time-tested counterinsurgency ‘best practices,’ by 1976 the communist insurgency had been defeated and government control restored to this strategically located nation. This paper will describe the causes of the insurgency, the actions of the insurgents and counterinsurgents, and finally, the factors that led to the success of the government and the defeat of the insurgency.



The Middle East

## Background to the Insurgency

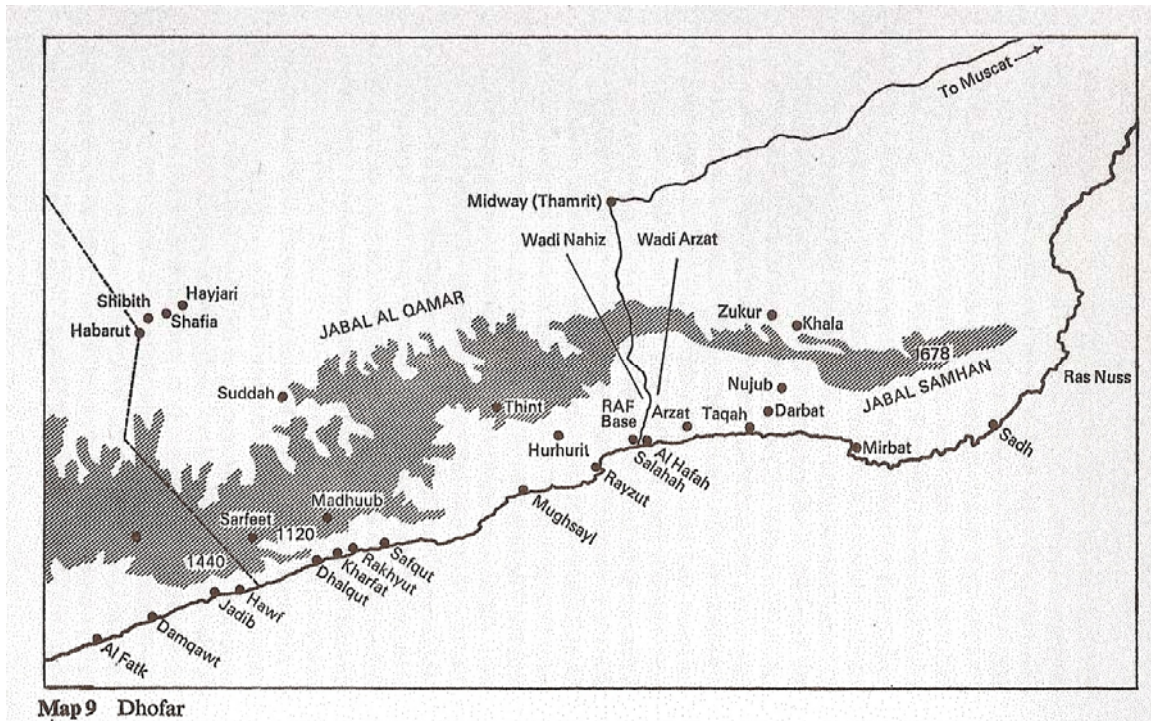
Oman is the second largest nation on the Arabian Peninsula and sits astride the southern half of the strategically important Straits of Hormuz, the entrance to the Persian Gulf. About the size of New Mexico, Oman's terrain varies considerably with a narrow coastal strip, areas of rugged mountains, to high plains and desert. At the time, Oman had a population of about one million people and was predominantly Arab, tribal and Muslim, with significant numbers of South Asian (Baluchi) and East Africans (descendants of slaves).<sup>1</sup>



Oman<sup>2</sup>

The insurgency that faced the Sultanate in 1965 was centered in the southwestern province of Dhofar located over 500 miles from the capital in Muscat. In many respects, Dhofar of 1965 still resembled “Ophir” the end of the known world described in Genesis. The northern part of the province encompasses the final 400 miles of the vast Arabian Desert the ‘empty quarter.’ Between the desert and the sea lies the Jabal, the rugged mountain range that parallels the coast to the border with South Yemen. In some places the mountains reach 5,000 feet, the entire area pockmarked with caves, gullies and other obstacles that severely restrict any cross-country movement. Finally, there is a coastal strip, heavily vegetated and offering some suitable land for habitation.

The Jabal also affects the weather, as Dhofar experiences a summer monsoon period running from April to October, which brings heavy clouds, rain, and fog.<sup>3</sup>



Map 9 Dhofar

#### Dhofar<sup>4</sup>

In 1965, Oman had entered the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of the rule of Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur (Taimur). A despotic, secretive monarch, Sultan Said ruled via radiotelephone connecting his Dhofar palace in Salalah with his advisors in Muscat. Sultan Said was determined to keep his population from interacting with the modern world. As one visiting economist noted:

There was great poverty and disease...yet nothing was done because the Sultan would not permit it. No man could leave his village and seek work without the permission of the Sultan. No man could repair his house without the permission of the Sultan. This remote old man...had instilled such a fear in his people that very few of them dared defy him and undertake any initiative to improve their lot.<sup>5</sup>

If the climate and geography made life harsh, the repressive government practices of the Sultan made it intolerable. In 1965, there was only one primary school and no medical facilities in the province. There was no electricity or running water. Only one road, unpaved, connected the province with the rest of the nation. Omanis in general, and Dhofaris in particular, were not allowed to possess radios, play music, dance, smoke, wear Western clothes or take pictures; infractions were punishable by imprisonment or flogging. Communities that violated the Sultan's dictates were subject to collective punishments to include the cementing over of village wells and destruction of the walls protecting crops. Taxation policies were also extortionate, import taxes for Dhofar were

300% higher than the rest of the country, fishermen paid a daily tax on catches, and herders paid both monthly and annual taxes on their animals.<sup>6</sup> These conditions made Dhofar ripe for conflict - if a group could mobilize the population. In 1965, such a group came onto the scene.

J.E. Peterson remarked that the origins of Dhofari resistance lie in the emigration of both townsmen and jabbalis (hillmen) throughout the Gulf nations in search of education and employment. By 1962-1963, Dhofari opposition groups, such as the Dhofar Benevolent Society and the Dhofar Soldiers Organization, had begun to emerge and were particularly influenced by the anti-colonial, Nasser-inspired Arab Nationalists' Movement (ANM) in Kuwait, Egypt, and Iraq.<sup>7</sup> During this 'proto-insurgent' phase, the cause of the nascent Dhofari resistance movement was based on a strongly nationalistic/anti-Sultan Said ideology that simply sought to improve the lives of the Dhofari people. By 1963-1965, these various groups were conducting small ambushes, sabotage, and mine-laying. They were operating mainly underground in the Salalah area against the American-owned John Mecom oil company, the Royal Air Force (RAF), and the small Dhofar Force (DF), a fifty-man unit limited to duty in the province and not under the control of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).<sup>8</sup> In a blow to the insurgents, and as a shock to the Sultanate, in May 1965 Iranian security forces intercepted a dhow filled with armed Dhofaris and weapons bound for Oman. From the resulting intelligence, many sympathizers in Dhofar were arrested while others fled for the Jebel. There, in June 1965, the various groups organized the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF), formalized the leadership and prepared future plans. This 'First Congress' also issued a proclamation that reflected their hybrid ideology, a mixture of Dhofari separatism and Arab nationalism. On 9 June 1965, the DLF 'began' the war by ambushing a government patrol near Salalah.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Insurgency Ascendent, 1965-1970**

During the period 1965-1967 the DLF managed little military progress in their insurgency. While striking at targets of opportunity, they concentrated on gaining outside support and establishing control over the province. While the DLF did obtain some training and propaganda support from Iraq and Egypt, neither provided much in the way of material support. However, they were more successful in organizing the DLF to operate and fight in the province. In an effort to break up tribal boundaries and rivalries, they split the province into three sectors – Eastern, Central, and Western.<sup>10</sup> Militarily, as Halliday notes: "fighting was concentrated in the central region...around the Salala-Thamrit road, and mainly involved small hit-and-run actions" designed to assert their presence and obtain weapons.<sup>11</sup> The most spectacular DLF action during this period was the attempted assassination of Sultan Said by Dhofari members of the DF in April 1966. Following this incident, all Dhofaris were excluded from serving in either the SAF or DF. Salalah was sealed off with barbed wire, and measures to control the movement of people and materials in and out of the city were imposed.

For a variety of reasons, the period 1967-1970 saw significant changes to both the character and strength of the insurgency. Foremost among these was the 1967 British withdrawal from Aden and the subsequent establishment of the Marxist-dominated,

People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). This new nation became increasingly important to the insurgency, as it came to fill that vital role – providing the DLF with sanctuary and support. A second significant change was the conversion of the insurgent ideology from the DLF's localized mixture of Dhofari separatism and Arab nationalism to one of Marxism under the banner of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). This ideological conversion enabled the Dhofari insurgents to gain significant logistical and moral support from various communist/socialist nations and organizations, including the People's Republic of China, Iraq, the PDRY and radical Palestinian organizations.<sup>12</sup>

By 1970, the PFLOAG was successful in forcing the SAF onto the defense; this ceded control of the Jabal and the major population centers in the province (except for Salalah) to the insurgents. They were aided in this by the SAF's preferred tactics of cordon and search, uncoordinated and indiscriminate air attacks, and continued use of collective punishments, all of which contributed to a marked decline in popular support. The weapons and training being funneled through the PDRY also saw the SAF being 'outgunned' on the battlefield. As Peterson noted:

When the new CSAF, Brigadier John Graham, arrived in April 1970, he was dismayed to be confronted with a 'truly wretched' situation in Dhufar. Although the SAF confidently held most of Salalah Plain, it had no positions on the Jabal. Outside of Salalah town, which was completely wired in, his impression was that the people were sullen, disloyal and not to be trusted. The insurgents, well armed and in strength on the Jabal, were coming down on to the plains and probing at the outer defences of RAF Salalah at will, at least once a week.<sup>13</sup>

Partially inspired by the PFLOAG, several other small Northern Omani resistance groups formed during this period. The most significant group was the National Democratic Front for the Liberations of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (NDFLOAG). The NDFLOAG was comprised of Northern Omanis who had gone abroad for educational purposes, principally in Kuwait, and were influenced by the ideology of the AMN. By 1968-1969, the NDFLOAG had entered into a 'pragmatic' alliance with the PFLOAG and were able to capitalize on their support network in the PDRY as well as training in Iraq, the PRC and by the PLO. Like their allies in Dhofar, the NDFLOAG were able to utilize the popular dissatisfaction with Sultan Said's rule to mask their activities, and as a result, their initial attacks on 11 June 1970 took the SAF by surprise. Unfortunately for the NDFLOAG, the SAF quickly responded and through actionable intelligence, destroyed most of the group by mid-July.<sup>14</sup> Although the NDFLOAG was quickly neutralized, its existence and attacks reinforced to all involved (except perhaps to Sultan Said), that unless drastic action was taken, the insurgents would likely succeed in defeating the government – and time was rapidly running out.

## **The Government Resurgent, 1970-1976**

By July 1970, the government of Sultan Said was clearly faced with a dire situation that included losing in Dhofar against the PFLOAG, increased threats in the north from the NDFLOAG, and rapidly diminished support of the entire population by his increasingly harsh rule. In London, there was a growing concern about the situation in Oman. A PFLOAG victory in Oman could severely affect British relations in the Gulf as a whole, and pose a potential threat to the flow of oil through the Straits of Hormuz.<sup>15</sup> However, change was to begin on the afternoon of 23 July 1970, when Sultan Said bin Taymur was overthrown by his son and heir, Sayyid Qabus bin Said in a virtually bloodless coup.

Sultan Qabus (or Qaboos) was a Sandhurst graduate who upon his return from England in 1966, was placed under house arrest by his father for being 'too western.' Sultan Qabus, probably aided by British Foreign Office and Special Air Service (SAS) planners, quickly announced a broad five-point plan:

1. Offering a general amnesty to all those of his subjects who had opposed the Sultan.
2. Ending the archaic status of the Dhofar province and its incorporation in the state of Oman.
3. Opposing those insurgents who did not accept the general amnesty offer by conducting effective military operations, and
4. Improving the lives of the populace through a vigorous nation-wide development program.
5. A diplomatic initiative with two aims:
  - a. Having Oman recognized as an Arab state with a legal form of government
  - b. Isolating the PDRY from the support it was receiving from other Arab states.<sup>16</sup>

The significance of the Sultan's five-point plan was that for the first time, the government adopted a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy, one built on a foundation which coordinated political, social and military actions and was focused on gaining support, both internally and externally. While the strategy was to take another five long years of implementation and fighting, it laid out the course for eventual government success.

One element of the plan, the amnesty program, began to reap benefits for the Sultanate almost immediately. As details of these incentives were widely distributed, in September 1970, the traditional Islamic members of the PFLOAG staged a 'counter-revolution' against the communists. It was ruthlessly suppressed by the communists causing many of these former insurgents to defect. Combined with the financial incentives for weapons and a resettlement program, by March 1971 over 200 of these 'surrendered enemy personnel' (SEPs) had come over to the government side.<sup>17</sup> The effectiveness of the amnesty program was, as Peterson notes: "Even the originator of the rebellion, Mussallim Nufal, declaring that there was no need for Dufaris to go on fighting as the new Sultan was willing to give them even more that they demanded" and, by 1975, well over 1,500

insurgents had opted for amnesty.<sup>18</sup> One other important aspect of the amnesty program was the establishment of the *firqas*, tribally organized militias of SEPs who were trained and led by the British Army Training Teams composed of SAS soldiers. As former insurgents and jabbalis, the *firqas* were not only at home operating in the Jabal but were also very knowledgeable of PFLOAG tactics and infrastructure. As a result, the *firqas*, and their SAS trainers, played an increasingly important role in many of the SAF's military operations until the end of the insurgency.

Sultan Qabus also moved quickly to address the critical issues of national development and to strengthen the SAF. To achieve these goals, he was able to draw upon the revenues derived from Oman's newly developed oil fields. With these funds, the Sultan was able to focus on developing Oman's infrastructure with a special emphasis on Dhofar. During the period of the counterinsurgency "some 40 per cent of government expenditures went to Dhufar...despite the fact that Dhufaris constituted only 10 per cent or so of the country's total citizenry."<sup>19</sup> Many of these expenditures went towards basic services in the Jabal to include wells, schools, mosques, roads and hospitals. In Salalah, the British opened a model experimental farm, conducted soil analysis for agricultural improvements, deployed veterinary teams and imported animals to help improve the native stock. All of these activities were directly supported by an aggressive psychological operations campaign aimed at winning the 'hearts and minds' of the population.

Another major portion of the Sultanate's increased oil income went to expanding and upgrading the capabilities of the SAF. Under Sultan Said, the SAF consisted of four small infantry battalions, equipped with WWII-era small arms and two medium howitzers. The SAF Air Wing consisted of six to eight lightly armed training aircraft, while the Navy had only a few dhows. Officers were mostly British contract officers, and the troops were mostly Baluchi and Omani. In addition, throughout the 1965-1970 period, the SAF never deployed more than one reinforced infantry battalion to fight the insurgents in Dhofar. In contrast, from their sanctuary in the PDRY, the PLFOAG could deploy up to 1,800 personnel (both fulltime fighters and militia) and was able to draw upon Soviet-style weapons from AK-47s to RPGs and heavy machine guns, 82-107mm rockets and mortars. In short, as a counterinsurgency force, the SAF was woefully inadequate—outmanned, outgunned and ill-supported.<sup>20</sup>

Starting in late 1971, the SAF moved to regain the initiative and control of the Jabal. Using a 'clear and hold' strategy, the SAF conducted a number of attacks to divide the Jabal into sectors, by establishing lines of strongpoints with the aim of curtailing PFLOAG access, movement, and resupply. Operation Simba focused on the eastern part of the province, while Operation Jaguar sought to reestablish control in the West along the PDRY border. While neither operation was completely successful, they began the process of reestablishing the Sultanate's presence in the Jabal and in regaining the initiative. Of particular note, throughout the monsoon season, the SAF was able to maintain the established strongpoints even though air support was severely curtailed by weather. In response to these operations, the PFLOAG sought to regain battlefield dominance in July 1972 by striking the town of Mirbat. This was the PFLOAG's largest

attack and in a desperate fight it was decisively defeated by the small British SAS team, *firqas*, and SAF garrison. At the same time, a major PFLOAG sabotage and assassination campaign planned for Muscat and in the East was discovered and the members arrested. Peterson asserts the defeat at Mirbat was particularly important:

Apart from boosting Sultanate morale and seriously depleting insurgent ranks, the defeat gave the Front a crushing psychological blow. It was never able to mount such a large-scale attack. The Front undoubtedly lost much credibility because of its defeat in open combat when the odds were heavily in its favor. In addition, the faith of the youngest fighters in the leaders was shattered, while the latter attempted to maintain their authority through repressive measures... leading to an increase in SEPs in the following months<sup>21</sup>

In addition to increasing the size and capabilities of the SAF, Sultan Qabus used diplomacy to gain regional recognition and assistance. Through his personal efforts, between late 1971 and early 1972, Oman joined the Arab League and the United Nations and had reached an accord with Saudi Arabia, a long-time antagonist. Through these diplomatic efforts, Oman was able to increasingly isolate the PDRY and PFLOAG, while also garnering military assistance. For example, by 1974 Iran had deployed a 1,200-man infantry battle group that included helicopter and logistical support; Jordan sent a Special Forces and an engineer battalion, and the United Kingdom provided seconded officers, helicopter support, two SAS squadrons, and contributed other vital equipment.<sup>22</sup> Using these forces, along with the expanded SAF, the 'isolate, clear, and hold' strategy of establishing security lines throughout the Jabal gained momentum. In early 1974, the Iranian Battle Group secured the Red Line, the road from Salalah north to Midway. This operation was followed by the seizure and construction of the "Hornbeam Line," a fifty-mile security belt of strongpoints reinforced with mines, barbed wire, and sensors that greatly constrained the PFLOAG supply lines to the center of the Jabal. Finally, in early 1975 the final phase of security operations began to clear and hold the western portion of Dhufar. In January, the Iranian Battle Group seized the PFLOAG 'capital' of Rakhut while other SAF forces began to establish the Damavand Line, which replicated the security measures incorporated in the Hornbeam Line.<sup>23</sup> These successive security lines proved to be highly successful in curtailing PDFLOAG movement, and in conjunction with the on-going civic assistance programs, support for the PFLOAG evaporated. On 11 December 1975, Sultan Qabus declared that the Dhofar War over, and by May 1976, a further 350 insurgents had accepted the Sultan's renewed offer of amnesty. The insurgency was finally defeated.

### **Factors and Conclusion**

It is rare in an insurgency or counterinsurgency to be able to pinpoint the event that turned the tide of the conflict. In the case of Oman however, that point was 23 July 1970, when Sultan Qabus assumed the mantle of leadership. Prior to that, the communist insurgency was well on its way to victory, but after the Qabus coup, although hard fighting and reforms were still required, insurgent victory was no longer assured. While Sultan Qabus clearly acted in a decisive manner at a key point in time, he and his British



advisors also appear to have applied many counterinsurgency ‘lessons learned’ from past British operations in Malaya, Kenya, and elsewhere.

In looking at the counterinsurgency actions taken in Oman, it may be useful to compare them to the nine key elements of a possible counterinsurgency strategy outlined in Anthony Joes book, *Resisting Rebellion*. In his work, Joes suggests three strategic and six operational elements as critical factors in developing a successful counterinsurgency strategy. These elements are:

1. Shaping the strategic environment
  - a. Provide a peaceful path to change
  - b. Commit sufficient resources
  - c. Isolate the conflict area
2. Defeating the insurgents
  - a. Display rectitude
  - b. Emphasize intelligence
  - c. Divide insurgent leaders from followers
  - d. Offer amnesty
  - e. Drain disturbed areas of firearms
  - f. Disrupt insurgent food supplies<sup>24</sup>

### **Shaping the Strategic Environment**

a. *Provide a peaceful path to change.* Prior to 1970, Sultan Said clearly failed to provide for a ‘peaceful path to change’ for any group in Oman, particularly, none for Dhofar. He treated the province as a private fiefdom and displayed absolutely no interest in the well-being of the population. Although one of his wives was from Dhofar (Qabus’s mother) and he lived exclusively in Salalah from 1958 until overthrown, he is alleged to have said: “If you are out walking and meet a Dhofari and a snake, tread on the Dhofari.”<sup>25</sup> This attitude, combined with his repressive social, political, taxation, educational, and other policies left no room for the possibility of peaceful change.

In contrast, Sultan Qabus quickly instituted a key reform, by formally incorporating Dhofar as a province of Oman. His social, economic, and educational civic action programs indicated an interest in the well-being of the population. Since the end of the insurgency, he has taken further measures to include incorporating representatives of the population in the government. For example, in 1981 he formed the State Consultative Council with representatives drawn from each district of the provinces.<sup>26</sup> While Sultan Qabus remains an absolute monarch, he has instituted measures by which he can consult and consider the needs and concerns of the population.

b. *Commit sufficient resources.* From 1965 to 1970, Sultan Said never committed sufficient resources to combat the insurgency. At any one time, he would only allow the SAF to deploy only one infantry battalion with minimal artillery and limited air support. Except for the small Dhofar Force, which was not under SAF control, there were no other

security forces in the province. Because of the limited government forces available, the insurgents were able to seize the initiative and dominate the countryside.

Conversely, Sultan Qabus quickly recognized the need to increase the number of government security forces needed to defeat the PFLOAG. In one of his first acts, he requested support from the British government which deployed SAS training teams and seconded officers. From 1970-1976, the SAF grew from 4,000 to 16,000 personnel and added several new units, such as the Desert and Jabal Regiments and the Frontier Force. SAF capabilities were enhanced through new equipment such as the FN-FAL rifle, armored cars, and helicopters that provided the Sultan's forces with the firepower, mobility, and protection to counter the high quality Eastern block weapons of the insurgents. Sultan Qabus also filled a major security void with the establishment of the Oman Gendarmerie (OG) and the *firqas*. The OG assumed the role of a national police force, responsible for routine patrolling and local response while the *firqas*, as tribal militias, provided protection to their local settlements. Thus, these organizations took on the static security and routine patrolling functions that permitted SAF forces to conduct combat operations against the insurgents. Last, since building these forces and capacities took time, the Sultan used diplomacy to obtain critical military assistance from Iran and Jordan to augment the SAF. As a result of these efforts, "the SAF came out of the Dhofar war as an experienced, disciplined, and successful counter-insurgency force."<sup>27</sup>

*c. Isolate the conflict area.* By 1970 rather than isolating the insurgents, the opposite had occurred and the insurgents had isolated the government to the area around Salalah. Following the coup, and with the assistance of British planners, the SAF began to execute an 'isolate, clear, and hold' strategy to regain control of the province and isolate the conflict area. Starting in late 1971, Operation Simba began this process in the eastern part of Dhofar, followed by Operation Jaguar in the West. As previously noted, while neither operation was completely successful, they did lay the groundwork for a strategy that would eventually isolate the conflict area. These initial operations were expanded between 1973 and 1975 with the construction and occupation of the Red, Hornbeam, and Damavand Lines; security barriers that constricted the ability of the insurgents to easily move or resupply their forces. Last, the strategy of 'isolate, clear, and hold' provided the Sultanate with secure areas to execute the vital civic action programs which were critical to gaining the support of the population.

## **Defeating the Insurgents**

*a. Display rectitude.* Throughout his reign, Sultan Said's actions clearly prove Joes' assertion that: "In country after country, century after century, misbehavior by counterinsurgent forces has played into the hands of rebellion."<sup>28</sup> The use of cordon and search, destruction of wells and orchards and other communal punishments against villages and their populations only stoked the fires of rebellion. When combined with his disregard for the economic development and the social well being of the Dhofari population, Sultan Said's actions only reinforced the message of hope offered by the DLF and the PFLOAG.

The actions of Sultan Qabus stand in stark contrast to those of Said. His five-point strategic plan, implementation of extensive civic actions programs, and other social and economic programs displayed his concern for the population. As previously noted, the initiator of the rebellion, Mussallim Nufal, declared “that there was no need for Dufaris to go on fighting as the new Sultan was willing to give them even more that they demanded.”<sup>29</sup>

b. *Emphasize intelligence.* Joes notes that “One of the most important tasks of intelligence is to discern to what degree the insurgency is truly a popular movement.”<sup>30</sup> Again, Sultan Said’s actions so significantly constrained information gathering that developing intelligence about the insurgency was near impossible. As a result, the SAF was completely surprised by the Dhow seized by the Iranians in 1965 and by the existence of the NDFLOAG in 1970. An assessment by SAS planners in early 1970 also pessimistically noted:

The SAF’s overall aim was purely military, to kill insurgents. There was no political aim apart from unconditional surrender and therefore no political or civil measures to support the military campaign, no police or special branch, no measures to resettle or gain the support of the population, and very little intelligence.<sup>31</sup>

Again in contrast, the five-point plan of Sultan Qabus helped to turn this problem around. Particularly important were the *firqas*. As locals, and in many cases as SEPs, the *firqas* were able to provide the vital local information needed to combat the insurgency. At the national and regional level, the intelligence void normally filled by police forces was bridged through the creation of the Oman Gendarmerie and a national security service. The development of all of these organizations, along with reorganization of the SAF intelligence staff, eventually helped the Sultanate close the intelligence gap.

c. *Divide insurgent leaders from their followers and offer amnesty.* The amnesty program implemented by Sultan Qabus clearly demonstrated the concept that a successful counterinsurgency must separate the guerrilla from the population. In the first six months after amnesty was announced, about 200 former insurgents changed sides, and by 1975 that number was in excess of 1,500.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the amnesty program expanded the fissure between the two wings of the PFLOAG, the Islamic nationalists and the communists. One result was the ‘counter-revolution’ that the Islamic nationalists attempted in September 1970. While unsuccessful, it did alert the government to the divisions within the PFLOAG that were exploited by psychological operations and also resulted in numerous insurgent defections. As previously noted, the PFLOAG’s defeat at Mirbat also provided a major psychological (and tactical) blow to the insurgency. Never again was the PFLOAG able to mount a large scale attack, and in the aftermath of this defeat, many younger insurgents lost confidence in the Front’s leaders.

d. *Drain disturbed areas of firearms and disrupt insurgent food supplies.* Throughout the Dhofar War, both the Sultanate and the insurgents relied greatly on outside support. Without the weapons, funds, and training provided by Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the PLO,

the DLF would never have been unable to begin operations in 1965. Similarly, the PFLOAG received substantial material, training and propaganda support from the Chinese and Soviets through the sanctuary of the PDRY. In contrast, the government of Sultan Said enjoyed little external support. Aside from some British contract officers, Said's deliberate policies of minimal outside contact placed his regime at a great disadvantage. These competing levels of support also translated onto the battlefield. By 1970, the SAF was outgunned by the insurgents and the PFLOAG had succeeded in cutting all ground supply lines to Salalah.

The five-point plan of Sultan Qabus clearly recognized the strategic importance of external support, as item five of the plan directly addressed this issue by calling for:

A diplomatic initiative with two aims:

1. Have Oman recognized as an Arab state with a legal form of government.
2. Isolate the PDRY from the support it was receiving from other Arab states.<sup>33</sup>

As noted, Qabus moved quickly on the international and regional fronts to obtain the support necessary to counter the PFLOAG. By normalizing relations with the Arab League and Saudi Arabia, and by joining the United Nations, he was able to gain regional and international legitimacy. Qabus was further able to capitalize on this legitimacy to gain badly needed military support from Iran, Jordan, and the United Kingdom. Through these diplomatic efforts, the Sultanate was gradually able to deny the PFLOAG access to their outside support and the sanctuary of the PDRY. Militarily, through increased troop levels, application of the 'isolate, clear, and hold' strategy and the secured resettlement program allowed the SAF disrupted the PFLOAG's freedom of movement and denied them access to support from the population.

## **Conclusion**

The Dhofar War is a tremendous historical example of the application of the nine elements of a counterinsurgency strategy as outlined in Joes, *Resisting Rebellion*. It is also a clear message that if a government mistreats or ignores basic human needs—social, political and economic, then they do so at their peril. Dhofar also demonstrates that it is possible for a government, albeit in this case a monarchy, to quickly turn about and correct the situation.

When Sultan Said's actions are compared to Joes' nine elements, we clearly see that he did everything wrong up to 1970. At the strategic level, Said alienated the population, did not allow for a 'peaceful path,' failed to deploy sufficient security forces, and was unable to isolate the conflict area. Operationally, he did not offer amnesty or display rectitude, and as a result, he was unable to obtain intelligence, divide the insurgents from their followers, or disrupt their arms or food supplies. As a result of these failures, by July 1970, his regime was facing defeat.

In contrast, from 1970-1976, Sultan Qabus did everything 'right.' His five-point plan was inclusive; he offered amnesty and repaired international and regional ties that in turn provided him much needed support. His civic action programs addressed the basic social and economic problems faced by his people. He was able to take the 'cause' away from the insurgency. Militarily, Qabus was able to convert oil revenue into an expanded security force and, with his allies, the British, Iranians and Jordanians, he wrested away the initiative from the PFLOAG. Once Qabus addressed the needs of his population, seized the military initiative, and reduced the PFLOAG's access to support and sanctuary, he had laid the foundation for his eventual victory—one that finally came in 1976.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Background Notes - Oman*. (2008). Retrieved July 12, 2008, from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35834.htm>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Oman*. Retrieved July 27, 2008, from <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/c2417.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Cheney, S., *The Insurgency in Oman, 1962-1976*. (Quantico: Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1984) par. 10. Retrieved July 2, 2008, from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1984/CSA.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Halliday, F., *Arabia without sultans*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) 328.

<sup>5</sup> Geraghty, Tony, *Inside the SAS*. (New York: Ballantine, 1982) 133-134.

<sup>6</sup> Halliday, 325-326.

<sup>7</sup> Peterson, J., *Oman's Insurgencies*. (London: SAQI, 2007) 186-187.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-189.

<sup>9</sup> Halliday, 373-375.

<sup>10</sup> Cheney, par. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Halliday, 330

<sup>12</sup> Cheney, par. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Peterson, 227.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-239.

<sup>15</sup> Geraghty, 135.

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<sup>16</sup> Townsend, *Oman*, 101, quoted in Zimmerman, F. H., *Why insurgents fail: Examining post-World War II failed insurgencies utilizing the prerequisites of successful insurgencies as a framework*. (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2007) 105.

<sup>17</sup> Geraghty, 140.

<sup>18</sup> Peterson, 245.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

<sup>20</sup> Cheney, par. 30-32.

<sup>21</sup> Peterson, 301-302.

<sup>22</sup> Cheney, par. 37.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 39-41

<sup>24</sup> Joes, A. J., *Resisting Rebellion*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006) 233-242.

<sup>25</sup> Newsinger, 2002, 140 quoted in Zimmerman, 2007, 101.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson, 419.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 429

<sup>28</sup> Joes, 237.

<sup>29</sup> Peterson, 245.

<sup>30</sup> Joes, 238.

<sup>31</sup> Peterson, 229.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>33</sup> Townsend, *Oman*, 101, quoted in Zimmerman, 2007, 105

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