

REPORT FROM THE SECURITY COUNCIL



The Gulf War

■ The outbreak of hostilities in the Gulf on 17 January was preceded by intense diplomatic activity both inside and outside the UN. On 27 October, Soviet ambassador Yuli Vorontsov told the Security Council that a special envoy from his country was in Iraq and that there were great hopes for the success of his mission and a peaceful solution to the crisis.

During the same meeting, the Kuwaiti representative told the Council of Iraqi human rights violations in his country. He demanded that those involved be tried in the future as “war criminals.” The Council took no action aimed at laying the groundwork for a tribunal, but on 29 October the Security Council adopted resolution 674 which stated that Iraq is liable for loss, damage or injury caused to foreign nationals and corporations in Kuwait. Resolution 674 invited member states to collect information regarding claims against Iraq with a view to establishing future arrangements for restitution or financial compensation.

On 27 November, Kuwait presented testimony of atrocities it said were committed by Iraqi troops against its citizens. The following day, the Council unanimously condemned Iraq’s attempt to alter Kuwait’s demographic composition by destroying its civil records. Britain charged Iraq with attempting to destroy the national identity of Kuwait. By adopting Resolution 677, the Council also voted to authorize the Secretary-General to take custody of a computerised copy of certified population records that had been

smuggled out by the Kuwaiti resistance.

On 29 November, the Council adopted the most momentous resolution of the crisis. Resolution 678 authorized the use of “all necessary means” in order to force Iraq out of Kuwait. Twelve countries voted in favour, Cuba and Yemen were against, and China abstained.

Sponsored by Canada, France, Rumania, the USSR, the UK and the US, the document gave Iraq “one final opportunity” – until 15 January – to comply. Further underlining the historic nature of the resolution was the presence of the foreign ministers of thirteen out of the fifteen nations represented on the Council, including External Affairs Minister Joe Clark.

During his speech to the Council, Clark touched on an issue that had dogged the Persian Gulf crisis – the need to find a solution to the Middle East problem. The issues had become intertwined after Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein directly linked a withdrawal from Kuwait to an Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. The linkage was strongly opposed by the US which argued that to accede would merely reward Iraq’s aggression.

Clark noted that one of the consequences of the Gulf crisis could be a “window of opportunity” to solve other regional problems:

If we can sustain our collective determination, then a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute, which Canada views as necessary and urgent, may be within our grasp. This is a matter than can only be addressed, however, separately from the current crisis.

However, both Hussein and events in the region kept bringing the two issues together. On 7 November, the Council met to consider recommendation by the

Secretary General that a meeting of the high contracting parties to the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War be held to discuss what additional measures could be taken as a result of Israeli practices in the Occupied Territories. Israel opposed such a meeting.

On 9 November, the Observer for Palestine played a videotape of the violence at the Temple Mount (al Haraam alShareef) on 3 October, and said it proved contrary to claims by Israel that Israeli lives were threatened by Palestinians – the opposite had been true. He argued that the action by Israeli authorities was premeditated and aimed at causing a large number of Palestinian casualties.

On 16 November, non-aligned members of the Council introduced a draft resolution that proposed convening an international Middle East peace conference. The draft sparked intense and protracted negotiations. Throughout, the US was at pains to avoid using its veto and thereby alienate Arab members of the international coalition arrayed against Iraq. On the other hand, it did not want to anger Israel by seeming to endorse an international conference, a move it also feared would be seen as caving in to Iraqi demands.

The Council voted on 8, 10 and 12 December to defer a vote on a draft resolution calling for an international conference. Finally, on 20 December, after a series of exhausting rounds of negotiations, the Council unanimously adopted a diluted version of the original draft calling on the Secretary General “to develop further the idea” of convening a meeting of the signatories of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Resolution 681, made no mention of an international conference. However, in a symbolic gesture, the US agreed to have the president of the Council read a non-binding statement that such a conference, “at an appropriate

time, properly structured, should facilitate efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement and lasting peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict.”

Final Canadian Initiative

■ The Cyprus issue, dominated Canada’s final efforts on the Council. On 14 December, the Council voted to extend the mandate of the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for six months – Canada abstained. The vote was a reflection of Canadian frustration that UNFICYP’s expenses were paid by voluntary rather than assessed contributions. In a statement to the Council, Canada said that this had resulted in a number of countries failing to volunteer money, and troop-contributing countries like Canada were left to carry an inordinately heavy share of the costs. Since 1964, the cost of UNFICYP had totalled an estimated \$ 2 billion and that 149 men and women had died in the service of the UN in Cyprus.

A draft resolution calling for assessed contributions was presented to the Council but both France and the USSR were said to oppose the draft. On 21 December, the Council unanimously adopted a watered-down resolution in which it agreed to “examine” the costs and problems of financing and report back by 1 June on alternative arrangements which “could” include the use of assessed contributions.

In a final speech to the Council, Yves Fortier expressed regret that some permanent members (the Soviet Union, France) had threatened to veto the original draft resolution and that the final resolution did not solve the problem.

December 31 saw the end of Canada’s two-year term on the Security Council. □

– TREVOR ROWE