

REPORT FROM THE SECURITY COUNCIL



Namibia

■ The agreement to implement Security Council resolution 435 which paves the road to Namibian independence, was widely hailed as a reflection of the new world order and the enhanced role of the United Nations. But the resolution, a product of nearly a quarter century of diplomacy, had proven far more difficult and embarrassing to execute than initially anticipated by the Council.

No sooner had resolution 435 gone into effect on 1 April, than over 1,500 SWAPO guerrillas crossed the border into Namibia in apparent violation of the US-brokered agreement between South Africa, Cuba and Angola. As South African troops engaged and killed close to two hundred guerrillas, the independence plan began to look as if it might be falling apart. As members of the Security Council met during a series of informal consultations, criticism of the UN role mounted. The Secretary-General, virtually powerless to stop South African forces from engaging SWAPO, reluctantly endorsed Pretoria's action. The UN suddenly found itself in the embarrassing situation of countenancing the military activities of what until then had been the "illegal occupier."

The powerlessness of the UN to prevent South Africa from acting was mirrored in the Council where no formal debate was scheduled out of concern that it could quickly degenerate into an exercise in finger-pointing that would further imperil the independence plan. "Everybody is conscious of the fact the UN was criticized, that the UN image was tarnished," a Canadian diplomat observed at the time, "but the question is how to

deal with that and how to restore the lustre."

Behind the scenes, both at the UN and in capitals, intense pressure was brought to bear on the parties, particularly SWAPO and South Africa, in an attempt to secure the rebels' return to Angola. In the meantime, diplomats began to ponder what had gone wrong. While resolution 435 originally called for the deployment of 7,500 UN troops, this was reduced to 4,650 at the insistence of the US and the USSR who argued that the original number was not needed and constituted an unnecessary expense. Approval of the budget became bogged down in wrangling, leaving little time to dispatch UN troops. As of 1 April, there were only 900 members of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia, and virtually none of them in northern Namibia where SWAPO rebels crossed the border.

"The six to eight weeks lead time which I had reiterated on many occasions as being the absolute minimum necessary to be fully effective, was instead reduced to four weeks," Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar complained to the Council.

In theory, the Council could have delayed the implementation of resolution 435 until preparations were complete, but diplomats feared that any postponement threatened the integrity of the independence plan and would have led to demands for other changes. "Everybody knew UNTAG wouldn't be fully in place by April 1, we also knew that in the course of the months there'd be violations, but nobody expected them so quickly," a Western diplomat said.

Afghanistan

■ While Namibia dominated the attention of the Council in recent months, it did focus its attention on other matters. In mid-April it

met at the request of Afghanistan which charged neighbouring Pakistan with political interference and military aggression. Afghanistan also accused the US of being a "tool" for the implementation of Pakistani expansionism.

The charges of interference came amidst news reports of US aid to the Afghan Mujahideen and as planeloads of Soviet war materiel were arriving in Kabul on an almost daily basis. Pakistan denied the charges and accused Afghanistan of refusing to bow to political reality and to recognize that the Kabul regime was unacceptable to the Afghan people. Peace and stability in Afghanistan, it added, could only be restored if power was transferred from the present regime to a broad-based government.

In a speech, Canadian ambassador to the UN Yves Fortier, said that in the absence of a request from "all the Afghan people" there was little the Council could do to help Afghanistan establish representative government and ensure a return of the millions of refugees. "My government believes that it is for the Afghan people to determine their common future without interference from outside parties," Fortier told the Council. Afterwards, when asked if by "interference" he meant not just the Soviet Union but the US and Pakistan, he replied: "definitely." What was left unclear is how vigorously Canada intends to pursue this objective, particularly in Washington and Islamabad.

The Middle East

■ In February, the Council met informally to discuss the situation in the occupied territories as the PLO pressed an initiative to have Israel condemned. When it became clear that an attempt to obtain a statement from the President of the Council on the matter would be vetoed by the US, the initiative was taken to the General Assembly where, following a debate, Israel was condemned by an overwhelming majority including

Canada. Only Israel and the US opposed the resolution. Liberia abstained.

Other Issues Before the Council

■ The Council also dealt with the ongoing civil war in Lebanon. Once again, it issued an appeal for a ceasefire in the conflict. After a brief lull, the fighting resumed between Syrian troops and their allies, and Christian forces. The statement also endorsed the effort of the Arab League in seeking to resolve the conflict.

■ On 28 April, the Council heard a complaint from Panama that there had been "flagrant intervention" by the US in its economy and its political system. The complaint followed news reports that the US administration had approved a secret fund to channel \$10 million to Panamanian opposition candidates in the 7 May elections.

During a debate, the US denied there was any plot against Panama. It countered that Panamanian strongman General Manuel Antonio Noriega was intent on subverting the elections in that country. The US delegate added that the Panamanian foreign minister, who had travelled to New York to address the Council, would be wiser to return home and debate the issues with his political opposition. "The election can't be won in Panama through a debate in the Security Council," the US delegate said.

The Council took no immediate action on the complaint which, in the event a resolution was introduced, faced an almost certain US veto.

■ The Council also faced some routine business – the renewal of mandates to various peacekeeping forces is coming under closer scrutiny in the wake of events in Namibia. With the possibility that UN troops could eventually be sent to Central America, Kampuchea and Western Sahara, there is keen awareness that future operations must be better coordinated.

— TREVOR ROWE