

REPORT FROM THE SECURITY COUNCIL



Invasion of Panama

■ On 23 December 1989 the Soviet Union denounced the US invasion of Panama as "a flagrant violation of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of states." In a heated debate, the USSR, its allies, and the non-aligned members of the Security Council backed a draft resolution that "strongly" deplored the intervention.

For its part, the US argued that it had been acting in self defence, protecting both the 35,000 Americans in the area as well as upholding the Panama Canal Treaty. Canada, while regretting the use of force, agreed that the US "relied on force as a last resort and only after the failure of numerous attempts to resolve the situation in Panama peacefully."

Canadian Ambassador Yves Fortier pointed to the harassment of US citizens as justification for the US action. He added that General Manuel Antonio Noriega's statement that Panama was in a "state of war" left President Bush "with few options."

Britain and France sided with the US in vetoing the draft resolution; Canada also opposed it. Finland abstained, and the other ten countries voted in favour of the document.

The US invasion raised a ticklish diplomatic issue. During the debate, the Council was unable to decide who should represent Panama. The sitting Panamanian representative, named by Noriega, demanded to speak to the Council, as did the envoy of the newly installed government of President Guillermo Endara. The matter was finally settled on 29 December in the General Assembly, which also held a debate on the invasion. A

diplomat accredited to the UN under the Noriega regime, who switched his allegiance to Endara, was allowed to occupy his country's seat in the Assembly, but he was not allowed to vote on a resolution critical of the invasion. On 8 January, the Secretary-General accepted the credentials of a new envoy appointed by the Endara government.

One element of the invasion did force Canada to break ranks with the US. On 17 January, it voted in favour of a draft resolution that censured Washington for allowing its troops to break into the Nicaraguan ambassador's home in Panama. Canada noted that the action was a violation of international law, particularly with regard to the inviolability of diplomatic missions. The US vetoed the resolution; Great Britain abstained, and the remaining thirteen members voted in favour.

Other Central American Issues

■ On 7 November, the Council decided unanimously to create a new peace force to monitor the borders of El Salvador and Nicaragua. The role of the 625-person Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) is to prevent the infiltration of insurgents and arms. One hundred and forty Canadians are involved, with the rest coming from Spain, West Germany, Ireland, Columbia and Venezuela.

On 30 November, the Council met at the request of El Salvador, following the crash on its territory of a plane carrying surface-to-air missiles. El Salvador charged that the missiles were destined for anti-government guerrillas and had been sent from Nicaragua. It accused Nicaragua of violating the Central America peace accord. Nicaragua did not deny the charges, instead responding that it was the US that had first introduced such missiles into the region when it gave them to the Nicaraguan Contras.

The Middle East

■ On 7 November, the fifteen members debated a draft resolution that "strongly" deplored

Israeli practices "which violate the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territory." The document singled out the "siege of towns, the ransacking of the homes of inhabitants, as has happened in Beit Sahur, and the confiscation of their property and valuables."

Canada voted in favour of the resolution which was vetoed by the US on the grounds that it was unbalanced and failed to address the violence committed by Palestinians. This marked the third American veto in one year of resolutions dealing with the Occupied Territories.

The Council also devoted time to the continuing instability in Lebanon. On 22 November, it condemned the assassination of René Moawad, the newly installed president of Lebanon. On 27 December, the Council called on the Lebanese people to support Elias Hrawi, the newly elected Lebanese president whose authority is challenged by Christian Gen. Michel Aoun.

Cambodia

■ On 16 January, during a meeting in Paris, the five permanent members proposed "an enhanced UN role" in Cambodia. They called for a cease-fire, as well as for the dispatching of UN peacekeeping troops, the creation of an interim UN administration, and UN supervision of free elections.

Friction on the Council

■ On 3 November, the United States and the Soviet Union held their first joint news conference to announce "an encouraging new trend" for cooperation within the UN. Proclaiming an end to their confrontation, the two superpowers announced their first joint draft (General Assembly) resolution. The document called on "all states to intensify their efforts to assure international peace and security."

The new harmony among the five permanent members, particularly between the two superpowers, has at least once led to friction with the other ten members of the Council. Last October the non-permanent members expressed their irritation when the five issued an appeal on Lebanon without consulting the entire Council.

"It wasn't just Canada, others spoke critically of that behaviour," Ambassador Fortier said during an interview. He added that communication between the five and the other members had returned to normal and he suggested that the incident was an aberration resulting from the permanent members adapting to the new climate.

However, there is a sense among some of the countries, that as the Cold War winds down the intimate relations they enjoyed with one or the other superpower are cooling. There is also wariness among some developing countries at the sight of the permanent members working so closely together. Last year, Third World countries opposed an effort by the permanent members to expand the authority of the Council to deal with issues like drug trafficking. There was concern that the move would merely put more power into the hands of the permanent members.

Other Business

■ On 29 November, the Council renewed the mandate of the UN Disengagement Observer Force which monitors the cease fire between Israel and Syria. On 14 December, the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus was renewed and on 11 January, it approved a two-month extension of the presence of forty military observers with the Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan. □

— TREVOR ROWE