

REPORT FROM THE SECURITY COUNCIL



During the month of October, Canada assumed the presidency of the Security Council. While there were no major crises, Ambassador Yves Fortier did have to contend with a number of complex issues – Namibia being the most notable.

Namibia

The problems of implementing the Namibian independence plan percolated throughout the late summer. On 16 August the Council met at the request of the African Group and the Non-aligned States to discuss “South Africa’s non-compliance with the requirements of Security Council Resolution 435” – the resolution that laid the groundwork for Namibia’s transition to independence.

The key complaint concerned the activities of the South African-trained paramilitary force known as *Koevoet*, which had been “integrated” into the ranks of the South West Africa Police. African diplomats charged that *Koevoet* was intimidating rural inhabitants thereby threatening the prospects for free and fair elections in November. On 29 August, the Council unanimously adopted Resolution 640 which demanded strict compliance with the terms of the Namibian peace plan, especially by South Africa, and the disbandment of all paramilitary forces, “in particular, *Koevoet*.”

But even before Resolution 640 was adopted, South Africa, in an effort to deflect the criticism, announced it would remove *Koevoet* from the ranks of the territorial police and demobilize the force. In a speech to the Council, Ambassador Fortier welcomed the announcement. At the same time, he was critical of the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) forces in Angola: “Canada remains concerned that less than fully reli-

able information on SWAPO combatants remaining in Angola has contributed to instability more than once. The recent reduction of tension in northern Namibia, which we welcome, should be complemented by a corresponding increase in transparency in Angola,” Fortier told the Council.

The criticism of SWAPO reflected the desire by Canada to be perceived as fair and balanced. As an architect of the Namibian independence plan, Canada has striven to remain credible to both South Africa and the Namibian combatants.

It has been a complicated task, given the impatience of African states combined with the erratic and aggressive behaviour of South Africa. For months the African states complained that there were not enough UN forces in Namibia to ensure a fair election. Anger increased on 6 October when Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar reported to the Council that the South African-trained Namibian police force had withheld information and denied UN officials the right to visit people in detention. He also charged that the police were delaying investigations.

On 18 October African states asked for an urgent Council meeting. They accused South Africa of failing to disband *Koevoet* and other ethnic forces and commando units. Initially, they demanded that sanctions be imposed on South Africa. It was up to ambassador Fortier to try and find a compromise between African states and those members (mainly Western countries) opposed to such harsh language and measures. Fortier said his main task as president was “trying to ensure a consensus and to have the Council speak with one voice.”

The underlying concern was that if a resolution was introduced that was perceived to be unbalanced in its criticism of South Africa, it might be voted against by a number of countries. This would make the Council appear divided at a

time when it was felt that the Council would be most effective speaking with a single, impartial voice, so as not to threaten the impending elections.

The Council agreed on 31 October to adopt a mild resolution that demanded “full and strict compliance by all parties concerned, particularly South Africa,” and called for the complete disbandment of *Koevoet* and the South West Africa Territorial Force.

Central America

The Secretary-General submitted a report to the Council on 11 October outlining the creation of a United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA). Its function would be to conduct on-site verification of the cessation of aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements in the area, and the “non-use of the territory of one state for attacks on other states.”

The report was the outgrowth of the 1987 Esquipulas agreement signed in Guatemala by the five Central American presidents. But ONUCA, which would be made up of troops from various countries including Canada, initially faced a number of hurdles. One was uncertainty over immediate US backing. As well, the Secretary-General noted that the ability of ONUCA to carry out its mandate would depend “to a large extent” on the cooperation of the irregular forces and insurrectionist movements in the area.

On 11 August the Council heard a complaint by Panama that US military manoeuvres had violated established procedures. The US responded by saying that its military activities were in complete accord with the Panama Canal treaties. It added that it was the regime of General Antonio Noriega that had violated the treaties on almost 900 occasions. The Council agreed to continue discussion of the complaint at a later, undetermined, date.

Middle East

On 15 August the Council “urgently” appealed for an immediate

cease fire by all parties in the Lebanese conflict and expressed its support for the efforts of the Tripartite Committee of the Arab Heads of State to settle the Lebanese crisis. As fighting in Lebanon continued, the Council issued a similar statement of support on 20 September.

On the issue of the Israeli Occupied Territories, the Council on 20 August adopted a somewhat sterner resolution than the one it had voted for nearly a month before. The latest document “deplores” the continuing deportation of Palestinian civilians from the territories. Fourteen countries including Canada voted in favour of the resolution; the US abstained.

Diplomatic efforts to persuade Iran and Iraq to agree to a comprehensive settlement of their dispute continued to bear no fruit. On 29 September, the Council called on them to implement Resolution 598, which forms the basis of the UN sponsored peace plan; and extended the mandate of the Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group for a further six months.

Other Issues Before the Council

In October, five new rotating members joined the Council. They include Cuba, elected for the first time since Fidel Castro came to power in 1959.

In its recent bid to make greater use of the UN, the USSR proposed that the world body be given a greater role in preventing conflicts. On 4 October Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovsky urged that the Security Council become more active in safeguarding peace. During a news conference, he proposed authorizing the president of the Council to mediate between countries heading toward a dispute, as well as creating a chain of “war risk reduction centres” around the world. Mr. Petrovsky’s proposals were submitted to the Secretary-General. So far, the Council has not formally addressed them. □

– TREVOR ROWE