

REPORT FROM THE SECURITY COUNCIL



Cyprus

■ There is growing optimism that the two sides in the Cyprus dispute may be inching towards a settlement of what has become one of the longest and most frustrating issues before the Security Council. After years of fitful efforts, hopes are now pinned to negotiations between Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş and George Vassiliou, the President of the Republic of Cyprus.

In a bid to advance the talks, the Council issued a terse statement on 9 June, during a routine meeting to renew the mandate of UN forces in Cyprus (UNFICYP): "The members note that 25 years have elapsed since the establishment of UNFICYP.... They regret that, in that time, it has not been possible to achieve a negotiated settlement of all aspects of the Cyprus problem."

Canada was particularly active in drafting the statement. It argued for the strong language in order to make clear that nations contributing troops were growing weary of the stalemated negotiations. "The prime purpose was to register a sense of impatience that there has been twenty-five years of peace-keeping and we don't want there to be twenty-five more," a Canadian diplomat explained. "The problem is that as long as both sides rely on the UN force, they don't do anything [to advance negotiations]."

The diplomat said the latest negotiations are "the most hopeful in years." The two sides are scheduled to come up with a broad outline for an agreement sometime in September. They are then to meet with the Secretary-General to work out the details.

"If it doesn't work out, there won't be a return to the status quo of UNFICYP. The Security Council is frustrated. If the two sides don't give it their best shot then they'll suffer the consequences," the diplomat said. He did not spell out the specific consequences but the implication was that troop contributors would consider cut-backs. Frustration led Sweden to withdraw all of its troops last year.

Canada is also concerned that UNFICYP's financing is voluntary and at present, \$165 million in the red. During Council consultations, Canada sought relief in a proposal for a mandatory assessment of all UN members, but the Soviet Union and France are said to have opposed the move.

Middle East

■ As in the past, events in Israel continued to be a major concern. In the space of a month, the Council voted on two resolutions critical of Israeli treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

The first resolution, which "strongly deplored" Israeli policies and practices "which violate the rights of Palestinian people" was vetoed on 9 June by the US. The remaining fourteen members, including Canada, supported it. Canada's backing of the document was grounded in the belief that Israel was not doing enough to respect the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilians under military occupation. The criticism of Israel was tempered by praise for the authorities in standing up to West Bank vigilantes.

The debate on the resolution was preceded by delicate negotiations. Initially, the document's sponsors had sought to use the strongest language available and "condemn" Israel. But Canada and others successfully lobbied for slightly softer language that instead "strongly deplored" Israel.

"We tried to get the language to be as acceptable as possible, then you have a resolution with moral weight," said a Canadian diplomat. "You don't want to show a divided Security Council."

Nonetheless, the US found the language unacceptable. It rejected the document for being "unbalanced," in that it failed to address the violence committed by Palestinians. As was the case with many previous resolutions critical of Israel, the US was left diplomatically isolated by its veto. The US, however, refrained from using its veto on 6 July, during a vote on a resolution expressing "deep regret" over the continuing deportation of Palestinian civilians. It chose instead to abstain, and the resolution was adopted.

In other Middle East matters, the Council, in one of its shortest meetings ever, renewed on 30 May the mandate for the UN buffer force in the Golan Heights (UNDOF) which stands between Syrian and Israeli troops. On 31 July, the Council renewed the mandate of UN forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Other Issues Before The Council

■ The Council also continued to monitor events in Namibia. Despite the problems of the initial phase of the operation, diplomats seem confident that the overall process is on track for elections in November. Nevertheless, they are conscious of the potential for what one diplomat termed, a few "hiccups."

One such problem arose on 28 June, when Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar warned the Council of an atmosphere of "fear and intimidation" in northern Namibia that jeopardized conditions for fair elections. He blamed the activities of a counter-insurgency unit of the South-West Africa Police Force for what he called "unacceptable" conduct.

■ The issue of terrorism was also the focus of Council deliberations. In a unanimous resolution the fifteen members called for an inter-

national regime for the marking of plastic or sheet explosives to make them more detectable. It urged all states to intensify research in order to prevent acts of terrorism against civil aviation.

On 31 July, the Council also adopted a resolution sponsored by Canada and Finland which condemned all hostage taking and called for the worldwide release of hostages and abducted persons. The resolution, although not directly related to the kidnapping of a Lebanese religious leader by Israel, was adopted on the same day the cleric's followers claimed they had executed Lt. Col. William Higgins, an American officer serving with UN forces in Lebanon. On learning of his death, the Council expressed its "outrage" and demanded that all hostages and abducted persons be released.

■ On 27 July the Council turned its attention to events in Central America. In a policy shift, the US went along with a resolution that called for the disbanding of the Nicaraguan Contras as part of the Central American peace plan. For the past few years, the US has prevented consideration of the issue. Its shift was balanced by the resolution's appeal to all countries to halt military aid to guerrillas in the region, an allusion to the conflict in El Salvador. The resolution also permits continued humanitarian aid to the Contras.

The vote was followed eleven days later by the surprise decision of the five Central American presidents to support the demobilization of the Contras. UN troops would be required to oversee this, as well as to guard the Honduras-Nicaragua border against infiltration and illicit arms shipments. Any such operation will require the approval of the Security Council, where the US has a veto. □

— TREVOR ROWE