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Canada on the UN Security Council 1989-90

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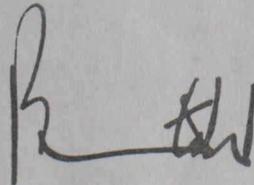


Dear Reader,

The attached is the second in our series of newsletters "Canada on the United Nations Security Council". We acknowledge with thanks the many positive responses to our first letter. Mr. Escott Reid, a former senior official at the Department of External Affairs and a leading member of the Canadian delegation to the San Francisco Conference, wrote to say that while he appreciated the difficulty in summarizing the functions of the Security Council he thought we should include reference to the powers of the Council to decide on the terms of settlement of a dangerous international situation and to impose those terms by the threat or use of sanctions (see Chapter VII of the UN Charter). He also suggested that readers be reminded that Permanent Members of the Security Council cannot veto a decision of the Council taken under Chapter VI of the Charter if they are a party to the dispute. We also note that Professor Harald von Riekhoff has produced a very interesting Background Paper entitled "Canadian Attitudes and Approaches to the United Nations Security Council" for the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security.

This newsletter provides an overview of events on the Council, from January 1st, as well as some insights on the current atmosphere and dynamics of Security Council deliberations with a particular focus on Canada's activities and role. We have selected the most important of the hundreds of pages of documents issued by the Council since January 1st.

The dynamics of Council deliberations have changed dramatically since Canada's last term in 1978-79. The easing of tensions between the superpowers has led to much greater cooperation and common action amongst the Permanent Members. This in turn has influenced the dynamics of other sub-groups both within and outside of the Council such as the Non-Aligned Movement (of which there are seven members on the Council), the OAU, the Front Line States and the Arab countries. Canada, Brazil and Finland are the only members of the Council which are neither permanent nor members of these other groups. While the interplay between the Permanent Five and these other groups can create difficulties, the situation does provide Canada with a degree of freedom to pursue its traditional role as mediator.



C.W. Westdal
Director General
International Organizations Bureau



Canada assumed its seat on the Security Council on January 1st in the expectation that the first item of business would be the long awaited implementation of UNSC 435/78 leading to the independence of Namibia. However, just as negotiations began, two Libyan planes were shot down on January 4th by United States fighter aircraft over the Mediterranean. Within hours, members of the Council were meeting individually with the President of the Council (Ambassador Rana of Nepal was President during the month of January). This was followed by an informal session of the Council and finally a formal meeting on January 11, 1989.

During informal negotiations on the draft resolution, Canada joined other western members of the Council in an effort to draft a text which would present a balanced account of the event. When this failed, Ambassador Fortier informed the Council that, after having carefully considered the information provided by both parties Canada had accepted the American version and would vote against a resolution condemning the United States. The resolution was not adopted as the United States, the United Kingdom and France all exercised their veto.

Just prior to the vote on the draft resolution, the Council was faced with a complicated procedural issue related to the status of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO, which enjoyed Observer status at the UN, asked to address the Council under the procedural rule (37) which relates to states, rather than being sponsored by a member state as provided under the rule (39) for observers and other organizations or individuals. In explaining our decision to abstain on the motion, Ambassador Fortier noted that Canada "does not oppose the Observer of Palestine's being heard in UN bodies, but it believes that the past procedure should continue to be followed. Furthermore, Canada recalls that it has not recognized the Palestinian State proclaimed in Algiers". Although the USA voted against the motion, it was carried as the veto does not apply to procedural matters (Canada abstained with the UK and France).

At the same time as the Libyan discussions were taking place, informal consultations continued on Namibia, the mandate for the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was renewed, a date was set to fill a vacancy on the International Court of Justice and informal discussions continued on the ongoing conflict in the Israeli-occupied territories.



With the end of the debate on the Libyan incident on January 11, attention was once again focused on Namibia. Debated at length was the direction to be given to the Secretary General in preparing his report on the implementation of UNSC 435. The Permanent Five demonstrated uncommon solidarity in their quest to seek reductions in the costs of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) which was to implement UNSC 435. They argued that the original budget for UNTAG had been inflated and did not reflect recent developments in southwestern Africa such as the Tripartite Agreement which had improved the climate for the successful implementation of the plan. In contrast, the NAM, FLS, SWAPO and African member states sought to maintain and even augment the size of UNTAG to counter increases in the police and para-military forces in South Africa since 1978.

Canada acknowledged that the high costs of the exercise could strain the UN's resources, already burdened by the demands of new peacekeeping operations, and possibly threaten the UN's ability to respond to future peacekeeping requests. Nevertheless, we maintained that priority had to be given to the effectiveness of the operation at whatever cost. In an effort to offset the growing rigidity of the negotiating positions of the Permanent Five and the FLS and NAM, Canada sought to provide language that would meet the concerns of both parties and end the deadlock. Finally, on January 16th, Resolution 629 calling upon the Secretary General to prepare his report on the implementation of UNSC 435 was adopted by consensus.

The Secretary General presented his 22 page report (S/20412) on the implementation of UNSC 435 on January 23rd. It recommended a number of changes to the original plan, including increases in the size of the police force (from 360 to 500) and military observers (from 200-300). The most controversial change was the consolidation and streamlining of UNTAG operations to allow a reduction in the number of infantry battalions from seven to three. The Secretary General explained that the actual reduction in the number of infantry personnel was less than would at first appear since the three battalions would be larger than those envisaged in 1978 and would have a higher ratio of operational troops to headquarters and administrative staff. He also noted that the original total of 7,500 military personnel would remain the upper limit with reserve battalions to be deployed if deemed necessary.

Representatives of the NAM, FLS and SWAPO raised a number of concerns with the report and Canada sought further clarification from the Secretariat. For example, we expressed our concern with the decision to fund UNHCR activities separately, in view of their central importance to the success of the plan. (Canada subsequently provided a donation of 2 million dollars to UNHCR for this program). We also encouraged the Secretary General to provide assurances on the size and tasks of UNTAG and on his

ability to call upon reserves if needed. This he did in his Explanatory Statement (S/20457) to the Security Council on February 9th.

The Canadian delegation was actively involved in drafting the enabling resolution, which was adopted unanimously by the Security Council on February 16th. Resolution 632 approved the report of the Secretary General and affirmed the full support and cooperation of the Council in implementing UNSC 435, set to commence on April 1, 1989. To help meet the immediate need for cash to launch the operation, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Joe Clark, on February 24th presented a cheque for \$11.9 dollars Canadian (representing approximately 80 percent of Canada's assessed share of the budget) to the Secretary General's Special Representative to Namibia, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari. Canada was the first country to provide an advance contribution to UNTAG. We will also be providing 262 logistical personnel to support both the military and civilian components of UNTAG. The General Assembly finally approved the budget for UNTAG on March 3, 1989 (A/RES/43/232).

The Secretary General had indicated earlier that he would require a minimum lead time of 6-8 weeks to deploy UNTAG. As the composition of UNTAG could not be confirmed until the budget had been approved, this lead time was compressed to four weeks. Consequently, UNTAG forces were not deployed as originally planned by April 1, 1989. There have been allegations that the delay in the deployment of UNTAG seriously undermined its ability to respond swiftly and effectively when the ceasefire between South Africa and SWAPO was broken on the first day of implementation. The UN is currently actively involved in efforts to reestablish the ceasefire and have accelerated deployment of UNTAG forces. The Secretary General has provided status reports on the situation in Namibia on several occasions to the Security Council which has supported his efforts and reaffirmed their continued commitment to the full implementation of UNSC 435.

On February 8th, Tunisia, as Chairman of the Arab group, with the support of the PLO, requested a Security Council debate on the continued violence in the occupied territories. In its intervention in the debate, Canada reiterated that we are "a determined supporter of Israel's right to security and recognition... Indeed it is the shared values upon which Canada's historic bond of friendship with the State of Israel is established that compels my Government to express its deep concern over the continued violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people of the occupied territories." After a series of lengthy negotiations, much of the strongly condemnatory language of the Arab group draft resolution was moderated in an effort to obtain consensus. Although the resolution received 14 votes in favour (including Canada's), it was vetoed by the United States.

Despite numerous allegations and counter-allegations of violations of the ceasefire agreements between Iran and Iraq, the mandate of the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group was on February 8 extended until September 30, 1989.

In response to the escalation of conflict in Lebanon, the Security Council met in an informal session on March 31st to review the situation. The President (Ambassador Diallo of Senegal) made a statement on behalf of the Security Council in which she "express(ed) encouragement and support for all ongoing efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Lebanese crisis (and) urge(d) all the parties to put an end to the confrontations, to respond favorably to the appeals launched for an effective ceasefire and to avoid any action that might further heighten the tension."

The question of the continuing conflict in Afghanistan was brought to the attention of the Council in March at the request of the Afghan government, which charged Pakistan with interference in its internal affairs. When the Council debated the matter, in April, Canada reaffirmed its support for the efforts of the Secretary General in promoting a political solution to the Afghan dispute, and for humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugees.

In summary, the first three months of Canada's membership on the Council have been active and challenging. We are most encouraged by the constructive spirit of cooperation evident on the Council. The Permanent Five have demonstrated uncommon solidarity on several issues, most notably Namibia. Major differences remain, particularly on matters related to the Middle East, but debates are less rancorous than in the past. While we are concerned by the continued existence of negotiating blocs, alliances appear more flexible and responsive to calls for pragmatic action on the issues of the day. We have been impressed by the commitment, hard work and competence of the successive Presidents of the Council.

In the months ahead the Security Council will likely be called upon to address security concerns in Central America, Cambodia and the Western Sahara. Canada has been asked to sustain our participation in the United Nations Good Offices Mission (UNGOMAP) in Afghanistan for its full 20 month mandate and to assist peacekeeping or observing efforts being planned for Central America and Cambodia. The transition process in Namibia will be a major challenge as the United Nations undertakes its largest operation since the Congo in 1960.



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