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W E E K L Y N E W S S U M M A R Y

(Main developments during week 9 - 15 January)

SECURITY COUNCIL OPENS DEBATE ON MIDDLE EAST QUESTION

The Security Council this week opened a debate on the Middle East question, with a new emphasis on the Palestinian issue.

At the outset, the Council decided by a vote of 11 in favour to 1 against, with 3 abstentions, to invite the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to take part in the debate with the same rights as a United Nations Member State.

In casting the lone dissenting vote, the United States argued that the PLO was not a State, that it did not recognize the right of the Member State of Israel to exist, and that it had rejected the Council resolutions which formed the only agreed basis for negotiation.

Speaking in support of the invitation, the Soviet Union, Libya, Panama, Romania and Pakistan generally argued that recognition of Palestinian national rights was crucial to a Middle East solution, and that the PLO was the authentic representative of the Palestine people. It was pointed out that the General Assembly had called for PLO participation in all Middle East deliberations on an equal footing with other participants.

Abstaining in the vote, the United Kingdom, France and Italy expressed reservations about the terms under which the invitation was extended.

Opening the debate, Farouk Khaddoumi of the PLO declared that there would be no just and lasting peace in the Middle East until the inalienable national rights of the Palestinians were fully realized. The Palestinian people, he said, were resolved to continue their struggle -- military and political -- until they could return to their national soil and establish their independent State; they rejected any alternative homeland; and they awaited meaningful measures from the Council. The PLO, he said, offered a democratic solution assuring all Arabs and Jews of Palestine a peaceful and democratic life.

X Mr. Khaddoumi said that the Palestinians rejected resolutions 242 and 338 adopted by the Council in November 1967 and October 1973, because they ignored the Palestine question. These resolutions called for both Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and secure and recognized boundaries for all States in the region -- touching on the Palestinians only in the context of the need for "a just settlement of the refugee problem" -- and provided the framework for the Geneva Peace Conference.

Esmat Abdel Meguid (Egypt) told the Council that its debate should be focussed primarily on the political aspect of the Palestine question, and that he regarded the current meetings not as an alternative but rather as a prerequisite to the reconvening of the Geneva Conference with PLO participation on an equal footing. He called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian entity and for complete Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied since 1967. Mr. Meguid said that Israel's negative attitude was drawing her into greater isolation, and that her claim to security must be viewed within the broader framework of Arab security.

Mouaffak Allaf (Syria) said that "the Zionist entity" was absent from the debate because it was "afraid of peace", knowing that it could be based only on justice. Stating that resolution 242 was inadequate, Mr. Allaf said that all relevant resolutions from 1947 to 1975 must be taken into account including those affirming the Palestinians' right to repatriation and independent statehood. The Syrian representative said that complete Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories and achievement of Palestinian rights were indispensable preconditions for peace. Once these were met, he said, the Council could consider peace requirements and guarantees.

Sherif Abdul Hamid Sharaf (Jordan) said that the survival of Israel was not at stake. "The survival of the Palestinian people as a national entity and the territorial integrity of the Arab states", victimized or threatened by occupation, were "now the issues", he said. Israel had to deal with "the Palestinian reality", he said, and must realize that territorial expansion was the opposite of peace. Mr. Sharaf said the Council could build peace if it set a time-table for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and endorsed the Palestinian right to national self-determination. A just settlement included the right to return of those who had been expelled, he said.

Chaim Herzog (Israel) told newsmen this week that his delegation was not taking part in the Council debates because the whole discussion was part of a Syrian-sponsored plan to destroy the negotiating procedure provided by the Geneva Conference. Another reason, he said, was the PLO's participation in the proceedings -- which he regarded as a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter. Israel, he said, was prepared to negotiate the issue of the Palestinian Arabs within the framework of a peace treaty with Jordan, but did not recognize the PLO as representing the Palestine people. Mr. Herzog said Syria was trying to distract the Council's attention from its "nefarious" role in Lebanon.

Among Council members who spoke this week, Louis de Guiringaud (France) said that the components of a settlement included Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, recognition of the Palestinians' right to an independent homeland, and reaffirmation of the right of all States in the region to secure and recognized boundaries. He said that France and her European partners would put forward proposals concerning guarantees at an appropriate time. He stressed the need for genuine negotiations among the parties, including expression of the Palestinian views.

Yakov Malik (Soviet Union) said there could be no solution of the Middle East conflict by "piece-meal arrangements" and that all relevant resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly had to be put into effect. He felt that the Geneva Peace Conference should be speedily reconvened with the participation of the PLO. The Arab countries, he said, had shown willingness to reach a just and reasonable settlement and were supported by the overwhelming majority in the United Nations. The other side should show the necessary spirit of realism, he maintained.

Ivor Richard (United Kingdom) said that resolutions 242 and 338 were the widely accepted foundation for a settlement and that his delegation would oppose any unilateral attempt to alter or detract from them. A further requirement, he said, was that the right of the Palestinian people to the expression of their national identity must be recognized. The primary aim of the Council, he felt, must be to help in the resumption of the negotiations "with the participation as appropriate of all the parties concerned".

Lai Ya-li (China) said that a Middle East solution required unity between the Palestinian and Arab peoples and their struggle against Israeli aggression and the hegemony of the two super-Powers. Solutions proposed by these Powers, he said, only sought to reinforce their respective positions. Mr. Lai said that the Council should modify its attitude toward the Palestine question, affirming the national rights of the Palestinian people and demanding total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Mansour Kikhia (Libya) told the Council that the Palestine problem was the crux of the Middle East question and that there could be no peace in the area until the legitimate rights of the Palestinians were restored. He fully supported the PLO position.

Rashleigh Jackson (Guyana) felt that resolutions 242 and 338 needed updating to take account of the legitimate rights of the Palestine people and that the PLO must be fully involved in the process of securing peace.

Shizuo Saito (Japan) said that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people must be acknowledged and that Israel and the PLO should "conduct a dialogue" with a view to facilitating a peaceful solution.

Olof Rydbeck (Sweden) stressed the need for a decision that could receive broad support, emphasized the special responsibility of the big Powers in helping to create conditions for agreement, and urged an end to the arms race in the area.

Iqbal Akhund (Pakistan) said the Council should promote a comprehensive settlement by outlining principles to guide the negotiating process, and in so doing should take cognizance of the national rights of the Palestine people.

Thomas Mboya (Benin) said that the Palestinians' right to their own State, as well as the right of all States in the area to exist, must be recognized and that Israel had to withdraw from the occupied territories.

Among non-members of the Council who spoke this week, Jasim Jamal (Qatar) said that a solution required the restoration of Palestine and other Arab lands to their people.

Saif Ghobash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, said that the Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism had paved the way to placing Israeli actions "under scrutiny".

Jamil Baroodi (Saudi Arabia) said he hoped the moderation shown by the PLO representative would cause Israel to heed the voice of reason, and that the key to a solution was in United States hands "even though this is an election year".

Abdalla Bishara (Kuwait) urged the Council to set a time-table for Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories and for active measures to restore Palestinian national and human rights.

Jaksa Petric (Yugoslavia) favoured the earliest reconvening of the Geneva Conference with PLO participation and viewed with sympathy the idea of a time-table for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories (SC/3688-3692).

SOVIET UNION CALLS FOR PLO PARTICIPATION IN GENEVA PEACE CONFERENCE

Meanwhile, the Soviet delegation transmitted to the Secretary-General a letter from Foreign Minister Gromyko as Co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference in response to a November resolution of the Assembly calling for PLO participation in Geneva.

Mr. Gromyko said that in a letter dated 9 November to the United States as the other Co-Chairman, the USSR had proposed a joint initiative to resume the work of the Conference, with the PLO participating on an equal footing with all the parties concerned.

Mr. Gromyko said that various ideas which had been advanced regarding an unofficial preliminary meeting without PLO participation were nothing but an attempt to block the resumption of the work of the Conference (A/31/44, S/11931).

BOMBS FOUND NEAR HEADQUARTERS AT START OF DEBATE ON MIDDLE EAST

Some hours before the Security Council opened its new Middle East debate on Monday, 12 January, three pipe bombs were found in the entrance to a New York subway maintenance area at 42nd Street adjoining United Nations property. The United Nations Library building was evacuated while the devices were dismantled and removed and the United Nations security services decided that the United Nations buildings should remain closed to the public for the time being.

A United Nations spokesman said the New York City police had informed the United Nations that an organization called the Jewish Armed Resistance Strike Force had claimed responsibility for the bombs.

SECRETARY-GENERAL HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE ON 9 JANUARY

At a press conference last Friday, 9 January, Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim expressed hope that the Council's Middle East debate would contribute positively to peace efforts in that part of the world. But he warned that it should not be expected that the Council would be able to solve such a complex problem in one series of meetings.

Questioned about the situation in Lebanon, Mr. Waldheim said he regarded the unity of the country as being of crucial importance for peace in the Middle East. He also stressed that the problems in Lebanon were a Lebanese affair that should be dealt with by the people without foreign intervention.

On Angola, Mr. Waldheim said that any foreign intervention from any source -- whether human or material -- was detrimental to the future of that country and should be stopped immediately. He recalled that he had repeatedly appealed for an immediate cease-fire, an end to foreign intervention, and national reconciliation.

Following the week-end Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit conference on Angola in Addis Ababa, a United Nations spokesman said the Secretary-General shared the disappointment that no agreement was reached, but added that he was confident that efforts would continue to find a satisfactory solution to stop the bloodshed and to achieve national reconciliation.

Mr. Waldheim opened his first press conference of the new year by stating that 1976 promised to be an active and, hopefully, constructive year for the world Organization. Determination and stamina in seeking solutions to the great human problems of the world were needed more than ever, he said.

Although the recent General Assembly session was highlighted by considerable controversy, said the Secretary-General, there was wide recognition of the need to make the United Nations work and to use it to build a more peaceful and prosperous world. Mr. Waldheim felt that the earlier special session on economic problems marked a turning point in United Nations history and that it should be possible to make progress in carrying out its decisions.

At the outset of his press conference, the Secretary-General expressed deep sorrow at the death of Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. The world, he said, had lost a statesman of the highest stature and a historic figure of our times.

Tributes to the memory of Chou En-lai were also heard in the Security Council before it began its Middle East debate (SG/SM/2291).

SECRETARY-GENERAL EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER GROWING ARMS SALES IN WORLD

The Secretary-General spoke Wednesday night of the ever-growing menace to world peace and security of the production and sale of weapons of mass destruction.

At a ceremony observing World Peace day in the Holy Family Church on Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, Mr. Waldheim recalled the words of Pope Paul to the General Assembly 10 years ago that peace was built "not only by means of politics and the balance of force and interests, but with the spirit, with ideas and with works of peace" (SG/SM/2293).

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