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PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

PCS 310

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

ASSIGNMENT

Question

Since Its involvement in the Suez Crisis in 1956, the United Nations (UN) had intervened in quite several African conflicts with mixed record of successes and failures. Discuss the UN conflict management experiences in the Congo OR Angola.

ANSWER

THE UNITED NATIONS MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCES IN ANGOLA .

THE UN’S ANGOLA MISSION underwent four phases, starting with the first UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM I) in 1988, through UNAVEM II and III, and ending with the UN Observation Mission (MONUA) in 1999. Angola is an illuminating case, not only because it is a point of temporal comparison with the Congo and Cyprus cases, but also because the evolution of the mission itself illustrates how an expanding political space was created for the UN in relation to the conflict. UNAVEM II, marked a transition from inter-state peacekeeping to intra-state peacekeeping. During this transitional period the scope and size of UNAVEM were significantly changed.

Angola was colonized by Portugal in 1575. In January 1975, after two decades of struggle for decolonisation, Portugal finally initiated talks for Angola’s transition to independence. The talks at Alvor (Portugal) took place with the participation of three separate Angolan liberation movements: the MPLA, UNITA, and FNLA. The Alvor Agreement soon fell apart, and the three groups began to fight one another, with the FNLA subsequently losing its military importance. The MPLA emerged as the strongest of the three groups, and on 11 November 1975 established the People’s Republic of Angola. Soviet and Cuban support for the MPLA was countered by South African and US backing for UNITA.

Gradually, the UN’s active involvement in the intra-state dimension of the Angolan conflict came to be considered legitimate. During UNAVEM I and II, concern over ‘respect’ for sovereignty of the Angolan state was paramount. If one of the reasons for the limited observation role assigned to UNAVEM II was the failure of the Bicesse Accords to include the UN more prominently in its provisions, the other reason was that the implementation as well as direct supervision of the Angolan peace process was considered a responsibility of the Angolan people. In a Presidential Statement the Security Council reemphasised that ‘Angola being a sovereign and independent country, the organisation and supervision of all tasks under the Peace Accords is the responsibility of the Angolan parties themselves’.

The major problems during the attempted implementation of the peace plan were in fact of a non-military nature for both sides. Transport to remote assembly areas had proved a significant problem. Shortage of food and medicines in the assembly areas, and poor accommodation were among other reasons cited by several soldiers who revolted and ran back to their homes, depleting the number of troops in the assembly camps. Military personnel, who were often accompanied by their families, continually delayed mass mobilisation, citing among other reasons lack of civilian clothing.

UNAVEM officials and teams found that they had to play a role beyond their observation mandate: in order to play a part in the maintenance of peace and security they found it necessary to address several non-military, indeed civilian, tasks. They often took the initiative, arranged countings, organised meetings, or mediated over disputes. UNAVEM was also instrumental in getting the UN and other organisations to assist in supplying food to the assembly areas.

Although UNAVEM II was not given the necessary authority and resources to conduct extensive field operations, none of the UN’s competent organs, including the Security Council and the Secretariat, raised any objections to the relatively flexible interpretation by their field officers of UNAVEM II’s mandate.

CONCLUSION

Although there is little evidence of a strong international will to ensure observance of human rights in Angola, the normative emphasis put on human rights and humanitarianism was now much more visible and clearly defined than before. This did not mean that that the maintenance of international peace and security, understood primarily as regional stability, did not persist as the international community’s chief preoccupation.

Initially, the principle of non-intervention, understood as the primary manifestation of the principle of state sovereignty, had a marked impact on the UN’s role in Angola. The intra-state parties were not keen to invite UN intervention – an attitude reinforced by the unwillingness of the Observer States to involve the UN. However, the mood would gradually change for two discernible and interconnected reasons. To begin with, a settlement of the Angola conflict, long considered a major contributing factor to regional instability, became a high priority of regional states