During Unficyp’s first three months tension in Cyprus was generally high, and there were many incidents. Demonstrations were held; arguments often broke out over the interpretation of local agreements; the control by one community of a key route tended to create a flashpoint; and exchanges of fire took place regularly, casualties being incurred. Nicosia was particularly tense, not least because there was ‘always a reaction’ by its people ‘to any incident however trivial anywhere on the island’. In the Tyllirian region on the north-west coast, where there were a number of adjoining Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot villages (Kokkina being one of the latter), economic and strategic factors gave rise to difficult problems. The mixed village of Ayios Theodhoros, between Limassol and Larnaca, was ‘a constant source of trouble’, as was the nearby Turkish Cypriot village of Kophinou, which lay at the junction of the Limassol-Larnaca road with that to Nicosia. And there was much Greek Cypriot chagrin over their opponent’s hold on the road going north from Nicosia through the Kyrenia Pass to the town of that name. Nonetheless, there was no indiscriminate fighting of the sort with which the crisis had opened in the previous December, and just one serious clash between the organized forces of the two sides.

This took place in late April, when the Greek Cypriots mounted an attack on Turkish Cypriot positions near the strategically important St Hilarion Castle, which lay in the mountains above Kyrenia to the west of the main road. A camp was overrun, but the castle was not taken. After a few days the fighting died down, but not before considerable international outrage had been directed both at the Greeks for what was seen as a calculated offensive move, and at Unficyp for not having
anticipated or quenched it. Among the Force’s critics was the UN Secretariat (this being when the practicality of interposition was under close discussion between New York and Nicosia). Others included Britain and the United States, who both called for greater toughness, with the Americans offering to supply any needed military equipment and helicopters.

However, although the UN Secretary-General, U Thant, had privately argued in favour of Unficyp interposing itself more readily, he was unwilling to authorize the proactive use of force. That, he said, was not covered by the Security Council’s resolution of 4 March, adding that when, in respect of the Congo, force had been specifically authorized by the Council, its use had still led to ‘tremendous controversy’. He was ‘determined’ not to ‘expose himself’ to the sort of ‘accusations’ which had then been made. If any member state wished to pursue the matter, it should approach the Council. That may well have been a tongue-in-the-cheek remark for, as Britain’s Permanent Representative to the UN pointed out to the Foreign Office, a Council debate would be sure to range widely and controversially over the whole Cypriot scene. This would not just be ‘embarrassing’, but would carry the ‘further risk’ of a Soviet veto if the proposed authorization of the use of force ‘did not exactly suit Makarios’. It was also extremely probable that most of the contributor states would have been unwilling to remain in the Force were it given a markedly more forceful role. It seems, though, that London would not let the matter rest, as some days later U Thant was reported to be feeling ‘unjustifiably harassed’ by Britain, ‘particularly in light of fact UK carefully refrained from use of force in Cyprus before UN took over and vigorously opposed’ its use in the Congo.

As to what Unficyp could and could not do in its existing form, its Deputy Commander (Major-General Carver), the new British High Commissioner to Cyprus (who happened to be a retired major-general), and the United States’ Nicosia Embassy all uttered cautionary but not pessimistic words. Carver also made the point that given Unficyp’s size and mandate, helicopters and heavier weapons were superfluous, and some junior officers from Ireland doubted whether they were hampered by the restrictions on the use of force and their manifest lack of fire power. This is not to say that Unficyp’s armament was irrelevant. When, for example, a Canadian battalion responded to the appearance of some home-made Greek Cypriot armoured cars by bringing in their anti-tank weapons, the troops’ morale was improved and the locals impressed. But the basic point