NATO to ward off the threat of military attack in the treaty area and, in essence, to safeguard peace by deterring aggression. NATO was not an alternative to the United Nations but a practical and regional means of cementing cracks which had appeared in the Charter security system.

In some ways, the situation in 1950 was unpleasantly like that of 1935. The international peace-keeping machinery was virtually stalled; the powers were once more turning to defence pacts. Tension in Europe remained explosive. A single incident from this tension could, and more than once almost did, result in general disaster.

But the flash of fighting actually occurred on a distant horizon - in Korea. This was no mere incident with possible alarming repercussions. This was an armed aggression, carefully calculated and prepared, and bolstered by the conventional military weapons of the Communist arsenal. It was a direct challenge which had to be met squarely by the Western powers if there was to be any hope of containing Communist military expansion. They were able to use the United Nations for this purpose because, luckily, the Russians stayed away from the Security Council when the Korean resolution was passed. It was an absence not likely to be repeated.

If the great powers had intervened in the manner of earlier times, Korea could have been the spark which ignited nuclear world war. Instead, the conflict was localized by improvising a collective response from the United Nations, by carefully defining the objectives of the United Nations military action and by making effective but limited use of United States military strength. In his thoughtful lecture in this series, Mr. Adlai Stevenson suggested that "perhaps Korea was the end of the road for classical armed aggression against one's next door neighbour". It may also have signified the end of Communist gambling on direct aggression in areas of great-power interest.

Intervention for Peace

In any event, Korea was the beginning of a new development in international affairs - the deployment of armed military force under the control and the flag of the United Nations. At San Francisco, this possibility had been provided for in Chapter VII of the Charter. But the international security force of that Chapter - intended to be the strong arm of an effectively functioning Security Council and to include all its permanent members - withered in the angry cold-war debates of the late forties.

With the Security Council "frozen in futility", the General Assembly, under the stimulus of the Korean emergency, took its own action to give sinew to the United Nations peace-keeping arm.

It adopted certain recommendations under the heading "Uniting for Peace", including one to the effect that each member should maintain within its national armed forces elements so trained, organized and equipped that they could promptly be made available for service as a United Nations unit or units upon recommendation by the Security Council or the General Assembly. The same resolution provided for the General Assembly to act on short notice when there was a threat to the peace and the Security Council had failed to act because of the exercise of the veto.