
Summary

During its first decade, 1945 to 1954, the United Nations remained small by today's measure. By 1955, there were still only 60 member states seated in the General Assembly, and only 11 members of the Security Council. The United States was able to dominate both bodies—except when the Soviet Union interposed its veto in the Council. Although, as Escott Reid recalls, hopes of harmonious relations between the permanent members of the Council had begun to fade even before the United Nations Charter was signed, those members collaborated in actions that later stirred the deepest controversy. In particular, they agreed on the partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel.

Most of the major specialized agencies were launched during this decade, and Canadians were prominent in this work. The Food and Agriculture Organization was born at a conference in Quebec City, and the International Civil Aviation Organization was established in Montreal. Dr. Brock Chisholm, a central figure in setting up the World Health Organization, became that agency's first director-general. But, as George Davidson and Gordon Goundrey point out in later sections, the opportunity was lost during this time to organize, through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), an effective mechanism for co-ordinating the work of these agencies and for preventing either gaps or overlap. A good many of the problems of later years date back to this failure to give any strength to the "relationship agreements" between ECOSOC and the specialized agencies.

Canadians were leaders in other early activities. John Humphrey tells how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights came to be written and approved, and Hugh Keenleyside writes of the first projects in technical assistance, an area of work almost unforeseen when the UN Charter was drafted a few years before.

In security matters, Canadians also played a full part. General McNaughton is credited with prodding the Dutch Government and the Indonesian nationalists into the talks that ended that colonial war (although Sidney Freifeld, in his lighthearted reminiscence about Canada's great soldier-diplomat, focuses on other actions). Lester Pearson was influential in the intense discussions that ended in agreed action over Palestine in 1949 and later tried his utmost to negotiate an early end to the Korean War. And there were Canadian generals helping in the wake of conflicts, leading the military observers in Kashmir and heading the relief agency set up for Palestinian refugees.

The Panmunjon armistice was signed two years before the end of this decade, but the Korean War had marked a decisive and enduring split between the great powers, and Asia, more than Europe, was by the mid-1950s the arena for active rivalry.