

Neither the procedure nor the collective measures proposed were pursued with any vigour in the next few years. The fighting in Korea died down. The wave of that crisis receded and with it the urge to be ready for time. The Soviet bloc was naturally opposed to the "Uniting-for-Peace" resolution and violently denounced it as a violation of the Charter. In the event, East-West tension had eased after the "summit" meeting at Geneva, and the West lost interest in the matter. In short, great-power deadlock destroyed the hope of establishing the United Nations Security Council force envisaged in the Charter. Inertia and wishful thinking, among members generally, postponed any significant action on the 1950 resolution calling for the alteration of stand-by units. The world community was to wait for another crisis.

It came in 1956, mounting with increasing menace in the Middle East. In late October, Israeli armed forces raced to the Suez Canal. Britain and France delivered their ultimatum and moved in. The Soviet Union and later Communist China issued threats. War seemed imminent and the United Nations was called upon to intervene for peace.

The main demand was to end the fighting and bring about the withdrawal of the British and French forces. What was needed to accomplish this was an impartial military force to secure a cease-fire and withdrawal and to supervise a buffer zone, first near the Canal and later along the line dividing Israel and Egypt. Some security had to be restored after the shock of fighting, the humiliation of defeat, and the frustrations of withdrawal. But the United Nations force to be organized for this purpose would do no fighting except self-defence and would rely mainly on its presence as representing the United Nations to accomplish its aims. "Intervention" by the United Nations was to acquire new meaning.

Problems of Ad Hoc Peace-keeping

The "Uniting-for-Peace" procedure had made it possible for the General Assembly to meet in emergency special session to deal with the Suez crisis. It was able quickly to adopt broad directives governing the establishment and functioning of UNEF. But the Secretariat found little on their files concerning collective measures which might give a lead on how to proceed. It was a new course on new ground. Some experience could be drawn from the earlier activities of the military observer groups but no real precedent existed for a major, genuinely United Nations military operation which had to be carried out with speed, efficiency and even daring, if it were to succeed.

The Secretary-General and the participating governments had to start virtually from zero. There was no time for detailed planning, either in New York or in national capitals. An international command staff had to be gathered in the Canal Zone, and an ad hoc team of military advisers assembled overnight at the United Nations headquarters. Contingents, selected from the offers made, had to be moved to Palestine within a few days after the adoption of the Assembly resolution.

That UNEF did succeed in its initial tasks can largely be attributed to the ingenuity, skill and energy of Dag Hammarskjöld; to the solid core support which existed in the Assembly; and to the prompt response of the participating governments which provided the original contingents; finally, to the fact