

To explain the origins of that crisis, it is necessary to go some way back. When the Charter of the United Nations was drawn up, it was assumed that the great powers would carry the major responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security. It was part of that assumption that any really effective security system would have to rest on the continued collaboration of the great powers. That is the assumption that lies behind the veto, as it does behind Chapter VII of the Charter, which provided for United Nations forces to deal with threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression. It was implicit in that assumption, of course, that lack of unanimity amongst the great powers would prevent the proper functioning of the enforcement system laid down in Chapter VII.

As matters turned out, the great powers were unable to agree on procedures for raising the security forces contemplated by the Charter and member states were compelled to turn to regional means of organizing their security, as in the case of the North Atlantic Alliance. But the United Nations was still capable, with the consent and at the invitation of its member states, to interpose its presence in situations of conflict or potential conflict -- to hold the ring, as it were, until longer-term solutions could be worked out at the political level. And that, in a sense, has been the essence of United Nations peace keeping from the appointment of a United Nations Military Observer Group to supervise the truce in Kashmir in 1947 to the latest United Nations operation on the island of Cyprus.

What is at issue in the present constitutional crisis are the respective authorities of the Security Council and the General Assembly in relation to peace keeping. The Soviet Union, and the countries of the Soviet bloc, hold that the Security Council is the only organ competent to deal with the maintenance of international peace and security, that it alone has the authority to initiate, direct and make provision for the financing of peace-keeping operations, and that any other procedures are illegal and invalid.

I think it is fair to say that the primacy of the Security Council in the matter of maintaining international peace and security is acknowledged by the generality of the membership of the United Nations. With the adoption however, of the important "Uniting for Peace" resolution in 1950, the General Assembly asserted certain residual rights and responsibilities in these matters for which provision is made in the Charter. These rights and responsibilities were invoked by the General Assembly for the first time when it authorized the despatch of the United Nations Emergency Force in response to the Suez crisis. They have been invoked on two subsequent occasions, and there is a general feeling that they must be preserved to deal with situations where the Security Council is unable to act.

It is also generally acknowledged, I think, that there may have to be special scales and procedures for the financing of peace-keeping operations. What is at issue is the extent to which any such special arrangements can be reconciled with the need to give the United Nations as assured capacity of keeping the peace.