

External Affairs

Canadian government is concerned, and I am sure so far as this house is concerned, we would not wish to do anything to complicate the secretary general's task by anything we might say here. I wish to reiterate, however, that our opinion is that, subject to the legal right of Egypt under the armistice agreement, and until those rights are altered, the United Nations and the United Nations emergency force have an important, indeed an essential role to play in the administration of that area.

Any policy or any action or any arrangement whereby the United Nations was refused Egyptian co-operation in the discharge of that role or in which the United Nations was denied a substantive responsibility for carrying out the purpose of ensuring peace and security in the Gaza strip, any arrangement of that kind which included non-co-operation on the part of the single government most concerned, the government of Egypt, would be doomed to failure.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Will the minister allow a question? Does the government of Canada recognize the sovereignty of Egypt over the Gaza strip?

Mr. Pearson: No, Mr. Speaker, I have already stated that no single power has sovereignty over the Gaza strip. Under the armistice arrangement between Egypt and Israel, which was endorsed by the United Nations, the responsibility for the civil administration of that strip was placed in Egypt's hands and that is where it is now legally, under the armistice agreement which has been endorsed unanimously by the recent assembly of the United Nations. Any effort, however, on any government's part to interfere with the practical necessity of United Nations action in the Gaza strip at the present time would, I think, be inconsistent with the basis of free co-operation which must underlie the discharge of United Nations responsibility in that area. It would deny to the area, and indeed to the people of both Egypt and Israel, the great practical benefits which could develop if the United Nations and its agencies were given a fair chance to make their contribution to the welfare and security of that unsettled region.

This situation, Mr. Speaker, in the Gaza strip points up, I think, the importance of a clear understanding of the relationship between Egypt and the United Nations emergency force, and I should like to say a few words about that.

There have been a good many questions in this house. It is true, I dealt with this matter at some length in the house on November 27, and I also referred to it in the white paper, at page 13, which I have mentioned.

[Mr. Pearson.]

We have from the very beginning, from the first statement of the Canadian delegate in New York on November 7, underlined the difficulties as well as the importance of this first United Nations emergency force. There is great hope in it for the future if it succeeds on this occasion, but it is an experiment and new ground, hard ground at times, is being broken. We have no illusions, and have had no illusions about the problems it would encounter. Cynicism has been expressed by some members in this house about this force and there have been jibes from some quarters in this house about the nature of Canadian participation in the force. But whatever the future may hold for this force, I think it is fair to say that the United Nations emergency force has already performed an absolutely indispensable role in securing and supervising the cease-fire, in preventing a recurrence of conflict, or the spreading of that conflict when it began.

Some weeks ago, General Burns wrote me a personal letter from his headquarters acknowledging a further contingent of supporting units that were going forward from Canada for the United Nations emergency force. In that letter he stated that the Canadians already in the force had made "all the difference in the world in the efficient operation of the administrative side of the military effort." He added that he "just could not have done without them." He also said, Mr. Speaker, that the R.C.A.F. element in his force had worked long hours in arduous conditions and deserved very great credit for its efficiency and devotion to duty.

There has been some argument about the status of this force. The government from the outset has accepted the guiding principle, included in the secretary general's report of last November, and specifically endorsed by the general assembly, that the United Nations assembly could not request the force to be stationed or operate on the territory of a given country without the consent of the government of that country. The rights of sovereignty of the country in the circumstances under discussion could not be infringed upon by other states, even acting through the United Nations assembly, which has no power in fact so to infringe in contrast with the security council, when actions are being taken by the security council under chapter VII of the charter.

Mr. Nesbitt: Will the Secretary of State for External Affairs permit a question? Is this resolution not based on the "uniting for peace" resolution, part A?

Mr. Pearson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, all of our action in the United Nations assembly at the special emergency session dealing with this