

The disagreements are hardly surprising. For the first time in human history, something resembling a world community is emerging from the dissolution of empire and the simultaneous spread of technology. Everywhere men pursue the same goals. Yet few are able to measure significant progress in reaching them. Disparities in national wealth, the indignities of racial discrimination, the rivalries stimulated by artificial boundaries and uncertain loyalties -- all of these generate tension and conflict on a scale which is world-wide. Yet, if the complexities are greater, so is our determination to act together to find solutions.

If we do not act together, then the dangers of losing control are all too familiar to our post-Hiroshima generation. Every schoolboy has heard the term "escalation" and knows immediately to what it refers. This, too, is a new phenomenon. In the past governments have been prepared to go to war if necessary to gain their ends or to defend their interests, knowing that defeat, while never expected, would not destroy the nation state itself. Today no government can take or contemplate military action, whatever the reason, without a strong sense of the limits beyond which all such action would be suicidal.

Thus, on the one hand, the conditions which make for conflict and the use of armed force in world affairs are of unprecedented scope. On the other hand, the potential effects of modern weapons impose on the conduct of states and the calculations of statesmen unprecedented limits. In these circumstances, the UN is bound to be both a battlefield and a conference room. It must reflect as well as contain the impulse for change. It has served, in the words of one student of the subject, as the registrar of prudential pacifism.

The conditions I have just described were not all foreseen by the founders of the UN. Certainly, none would have imagined a membership of 122 states after only 22 years. Nor could they have anticipated that one of the major premises of the Charter would prove to be unworkable. This was the assumption that the permanent members of the Council would co-operate in order to maintain peace. True, the statesmen of 1945 were not so naive as to expect such co-operation to be automatic. But they did assume that without great-power understanding the security system laid down in the Charter would not function. The governments which had won the war were quite naturally determined that it should not happen again and that the combined strength of China, France, the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and the U.K. should serve to deter any potential aggressor. If these powers could not agree, it was thought, then no security system could save the peace.

It was not until later that peace keeping by consent, as we now understand it, and by the lesser powers, came to be regarded as the standard form of UN military action. It was this reversal, however, which enabled Canada to participate in peace keeping in quite unexpected ways. Instead of the great powers banding together to threaten any aggressor with overwhelming force, the middle and small powers were called upon to police situations which otherwise might have led to great-power intervention.