

Cyprus Dilemma

How can we be complacent about this chronic state of unpreparedness; this necessity of improvising during a crisis when failure could mean war? Today in Cyprus, the United Nations is facing another severe test of its capacity to respond, without preparation, to a challenge to peace. On tomorrow's horizon, there may be other sudden and equally exacting demands. The halting response which the organization made, after the Cyprus issue had been raised in the Security Council, reflected the deep-seated political dilemma which handicaps the United Nations peace-keeping role. It also served to remind us again that the protection of international peace should not be left to preparations made on the brink, to ad hoc arrangements and hasty organization.

Hesitations and difficulties over Cyprus were increased by division among the great powers. But this was a normal situation in the United Nations and outside it. More disturbing was the widespread disinterest or suspicion on the part of many middle and small powers. Some were too preoccupied with national and regional interests, which dulled their sense of danger at tensions smouldering in other parts of the world. Others had grown weary of the burden of international crises, and of finance, which, in recent years, has fallen heavily on the shoulders of a few states. All-pervading also was the suspicion that the Cyprus conflict was just too difficult and too domestic for United Nations treatment. It was too small a local tail to wag such a big international dog.

But, as in the Suez and the Congo, the United Nations, while hesitant and unprepared, did not abandon its peace-keeping responsibilities, thanks to the initiative taken by certain of its members.

So we can take comfort from the fact that in the Cyprus crisis, occurring even before the liquidation of the Congo problem, the Security Council decided to establish a force in that troubled island; that five member governments agreed to provide contingents and ten to make contributions to the voluntary fund for financing the operation; that the force became quickly operational and that a mediator was chosen who took up his difficult assignment without delay.

While this result gives cause for satisfaction, it should not blind us to the need, demonstrated once more, to organize, plan and prepare in advance for prompt United Nations engagement in peace-keeping operations. It has become glaringly apparent that the organization and its individual members must improve their capability to act quickly. I believe that there is a growing resolve to do this, reflecting a conviction that United Nations preparedness in the field of peace keeping falls far short of the urgent demands being made on the organization with increasing frequency.

The requirements of peace preservation in the future may not always be satisfied by skilful improvisation and by the willingness of a few to do their duty. The growing interest in improving peace-keeping methods must be broadly stimulated into advance planning and preparation. Canada, I know, is resolved to draw on its own experience in a way which will give leadership and encouragement in this effort.