

Preparedness for Peace-keeping Operations

What can be done, then, to prepare the United Nations for the kind of peace-keeping operations which we have seen in the past and others which we can expect in future? Ideally, the organization should have its own permanent international force in being, under its orders, for peace-keeping duties. But this is not now feasible for political reasons.

As a next best, all member governments should have elements in their armed services earmarked, trained and equipped for United Nations service; ready for call to such service. There should be a military planning staff in United Nations headquarters to co-ordinate the national preparations and to improve the operating procedures of the organization.

It has become apparent in the past ten years, however, that formal action by and in the United Nations to achieve even these limited ends is not immediately feasible because of political and practical difficulties. The most recent occasion when the United Nations showed some disposition to deal with the question of stand-by arrangements was in 1958. Dag Hammarskjöld had made his report on the experience derived from the establishment and functioning of UNEF. A number of countries, including the United States, wished to take action in the General Assembly, based on that report. Political circumstances, however, were not favourable. United States support roused the worst Soviet suspicions. So the matter was dropped. The report was not even discussed by the Assembly.

The Soviet bloc remained firmly opposed to any international security or peace-keeping force or any plan for such a force. The West were not willing to force the issue. The Arab world had been rocked by disturbances in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Some non-aligned countries, suspicious of Western motives and not wishing to become involved in East-West argument, were unwilling to authorize the United Nations to put force behind international decisions and organize for the purpose. They failed to appreciate that, by strengthening the United Nations capacity to meet threats to the peace, they would be strengthening as well their own security and creating conditions favourable to the economic and social development which they so badly needed.

Since that time - 1958 - there has been some shift in the attitude of member states but not sufficient to ensure the kind of support needed if formal UN stand-by arrangements are to succeed. Nevertheless, the need continues and increases.

A few members have recognized this. Like Canada, they have earmarked units for United Nations service. Following an announcement last year, the Nordic countries - Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden - have introduced legislation setting up contingents which are designed for United Nations service and each of which may be used in conjunction with those established in the other Nordic countries.

This is an encouraging development. The Netherlands has followed by earmarking troops. There have been indications that other states, representing other geographical areas, have begun to think along those lines.