

## Lester B. Pearson Taking Hotspur's Advice for Suez

■ The most famous, and the most often praised, Canadian initiative at the United Nations was without doubt the lead Canada took in setting up the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in November 1956. UNEF helped to extricate the British and French troops from their ill-conceived invasion of the Suez Canal zone, and the peacekeeping troops provided a buffer between Israeli and Egyptian forces for 10 years. For his work in the General Assembly and his negotiating skills that brought all sides to support the peacekeeping operation, Lester B. "Mike" Pearson—then Canada's External Affairs Minister—was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

These events have been told in detail elsewhere many times. What has not been sufficiently underlined is the fact that Pearson (perhaps endorsing Henry Ford's axiom that "a problem is an opportunity in working clothes") hoped to use the Suez crisis to galvanize the major powers and the countries directly concerned into negotiating a long-term political settlement for the whole region. "Things can be done under the incentive of terror and fear that cannot be done when the fear disappears," he said. Pearson did not succeed, because others had less vision or had short-term objectives. But the extracts presented here, taken from the second volume of Pearson's memoirs, *Mike*, illustrate how he continually pressed this wider purpose throughout the critical days of November 1956.

Without trying to analyse the roots of the crisis (which go back further than the American refusal to provide assistance with the Aswan Dam and Egyptian President Nasser's subsequent nationalization of the Suez Canal), here is the sequence of events that immediately preceded these extracts from Pearson's account:

On October 29, Israeli troops moved against Egypt and toward the Suez Canal. The next day Britain and France jointly gave Israel and Egypt an ultimatum to stop the fighting and to withdraw 10 miles on either side of the Canal; they threatened, otherwise, to send in troops to occupy key points along the canal. Later that same day, Britain and France vetoed a U.S. draft resolution in the Security Council which called on Israel to withdraw its forces and on all members to refrain from the use of force or the threat of force. On October 31, the French and British air forces began bombing selected points in the Canal Zone. The same day in the Security Council, Yugoslavia presented a resolution calling for the Middle East question to be referred to the General Assembly, under the "Uniting for Peace Resolution." The resolution was adopted, despite resistance from Britain and France, whose negative votes in this instance did not constitute a veto. A special emergency session of the General Assembly was called for November 1.

At this all-night session of the Assembly, the U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, introduced a resolution that addressed only the most immediate concerns. This resolution called on all parties to agree to an immediate cease-fire and to halt movement of forces into the area, and called on Israel and the Arab states to withdraw behind the 1949 armistice lines. It also urged measures to restore freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal. On the roll-call vote, 64 countries were in favour, 5 were opposed (Australia, Britain, France, Israel and New Zealand) and Canada was among 6