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GENERAL SURVEY

The year 1961 opened with signs that the international atmosphere might be slowly improving after a lengthy period of East-West tension, following the collapse of the Summit meeting in May 1960 and culminating in the angry top-level debate at the fifteenth session of the General Assembly. Mr. Khrushchov sent a relatively cordial message to President Kennedy upon his inauguration in January and shortly thereafter surviving crew members of the RB-47 United States aircraft, shot down by the Soviet Union in July, 1960, were released from Soviet custody. At the resumed fifteenth session of the General Assembly, most of the controversial items were dropped or shelved by agreement and the United States and the Soviet Union entered into bilateral discussions about the resumption of disarmament negotiations.

During 1961 the main cause of East-West tension was the renewed crisis in the Berlin situation. The Soviet Union began to draw attention to it in April by indicating that, if some progress were not made by the end of 1961, a peace treaty would be concluded with the East German regime, which, in effect, would terminate Western rights in West Berlin and on the access routes to the city. This marked the beginning of a period of mounting tension, which produced grave anxiety in international affairs during the late summer. Both sides took measures to improve their military preparedness and by early August a serious and potentially dangerous situation existed.

In the United Nations the Congo situation, with its constant drain on the over-strained finances of the Organization, continued to cause anxiety. The United Nations strove to maintain an uneasy truce between hostile factions and to promote the unity of the country and the establishment of an effective government. The greatest single problem was the position of the province of Katanga, which refused to recognize the authority of the Central Government. Fighting between the United Nations Force and the Katanga gendarmerie broke out in September and again in December. Hostilities were terminated on December 20, when Prime Minister Adoula and Mr. Tshombe met at Kitona.

The tragic death of Mr. Hammarskjold cast a dark shadow over the proceedings of the General Assembly at the beginning of its sixteenth session. It brought into sharp focus the Soviet demand for a troika approach to the composition of the Secretariat, including the Office of Secretary-General. Throughout 1961, there had been little abatement of this Soviet campaign against the United Nations. It had spread into the debates of the Specialized Agencies.