

## A Dispassionate Look at Peacekeeping on Its (More or Less) Silver Anniversary



AT THE END of World War II Canada was almost a great power — it had an army of half a million, the world's fourth largest air force and the fifth largest navy.

It could not (and did not) think of itself as a great power; by population, history and desire it was a middle-sized nation and if the world were to polarize, Canada clearly would not be one of the poles. Still, it had an active, positive role to play, defined by the facts of the post-war world and by Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and Lester B. Pearson, his Secretary of State for External Affairs. It would help build a peaceful, prosperous world.

Mr. Pearson became the conspicuous Canadian spokesman at the United Nations and Canadian soldiers went to Palestine and Korea. Canada's emerging image as peacekeeper took more definite lines with the Suez crisis in 1956. Historian William Kilbourn has described the occasion: "On October 30, after the government of Egypt declined to obey a British ultimatum to withdraw

troops from a portion of Egyptian territory on twelve hours' notice, the Royal Air Force bombed Egyptian airfields. Five days later British troops landed in Port Said as if nothing had changed since the days of the Khedive and Lord Cromer. About a thousand Egyptian soldiers and civilians were killed. The Soviet Union threatened to rain rockets on London and Paris. The Americans, at the climax of a presidential election campaign, were determined to push through a flat condemnation of the invasion of Egypt. . . . The Western Alliance was on the verge of dissolution. . . . The solution came from the United Nations. The Canadian delegation headed by Pearson proposed a UN Emergency Force, which would be headed by a Canadian, General E. L. M. Burns."

The solution was accepted with relief by the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, but with reluctance by both Britain and France and by Egypt. The Egyptian reluctance, which seemed unwarranted at first glance, had, at second, an understandable basis: The British and the Canadian soldiers wore uniforms that were almost identical and the Canadian regiment

