

From time to time, complaints had been raised in the United Nations which served only further to irritate relations between Cuba and the other members of the Organization of American States. The acute crisis of October developed rapidly and placed the United States and the Soviet Union in sharp confrontation. Almost from the outset, the Security Council was seized of the dangerous situation and, during the period in which tension was at a peak, the regular work of the General Assembly was disrupted, though not suspended. Responding to a request from a number of members of the non-aligned group whose views reflected general anxiety in the United Nations, the Acting Secretary-General intervened by appealing for restraint to the parties directly concerned. In the end, the speed with which agreement was reached on the removal of Soviet offensive weapons from Cuba and the consequent resumption of direct contacts between the two great powers had a beneficial effect on the atmosphere at the United Nations. The part played by U Thant in stimulating and assisting the negotiations on which settlement was finally based enhanced the prestige of the United Nations, even though it was precluded from performing the role of supervision envisaged for it.

Before the end of the seventeenth session, United Nations members were rudely shocked by the massive attack by Communist Chinese forces on India's northern frontiers. Possibly as a consequence, there was noticeably less interest than in earlier years at the General Assembly in changing the representation of China in the United Nations and a Soviet resolution to that effect again failed to be adopted.

Although the United Nations played no part in the Sino-Indian dispute and even though its role in the Cuban crisis had been largely supplementary, these two situations of danger underlined the need for maintaining the peace-keeping machinery in effective working order. The role of the organization in the field of peace and security in recent years has been developing in new and interesting ways, but the conduct of costly peace-keeping operations, particularly that in the Congo, has produced serious strain on the resources of the United Nations, both political and material.

During 1962, most member states and the Acting Secretary-General showed a growing awareness of the need for early action to improve the situation in the Congo. In consultation with a number of interested governments, U Thant developed a plan for national reconciliation which was pursued vigorously with the Congolese political leaders. The crucial issue continued to be the re-integration of Katanga and, in view of the frail stability existing in other parts of the Congo and of the growing financial difficulty in which the United Nations found itself, it was desirable to lose no time in bringing about the reconciliation of Congolese views. It was particularly disturbing, therefore, that, just before the end of the year, new fighting erupted in Elisabethville after the Katangese gendarmerie opened fire on United Nations troops.