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NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

A speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, delivered at Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., on April 15, 1952.

In discussing this subject, I should like to look tonight behind the headlines for a brief period and consider some of the movements and forces now operating in the field of international organization; forces ranging from the narrowest nationalism to those which advocate the "Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World".

National sovereignty in its present-day form is generally considered to have originated in the rise of unified states in Western Europe during and after the Renaissance. With the development of such states the doctrine of national sovereignty was elaborated as one of the basic principles of international law and politics. Sovereignty is a concept which, of course, has a number of meanings. In one common usage it refers to the jurisdiction over the land surfaces of the globe. In this sense of territorial sovereignty there is now not much international dispute. The land areas of the world have practically all been divided up among sovereign states, although there are still issues regarding the demarcation of boundaries and a few serious conflicting territorial claims.

Nationalism, as a spur in the scramble for territory in the old manner is, then, largely extinct. Nationalism, however, as an expression of the desire of a people for self-government and independence, is still very much alive. Indeed, at a time when long-established states are becoming increasingly aware of the disadvantages of a rigid adherence to the principle of national sovereignty in international dealings, there is a wave of insurgent nationalism throughout the Islamic and Asian world and throughout the overseas dependencies of the European nation states. Perhaps it is inevitable and right that nationalism must find expression in political freedom before its limitations are realized.

In any event its strength has been shown in recent years by the partition of existing political entities and the emergence of new independent states. So we have Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Philippines, Burma, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Israel, Indonesia, and, most recently Libya. The Wilsonian principles of self-determination are, in a delayed reaction, adding to the multiplicity of independent nations throughout the world. Nor is the process yet completed, for a number of new states will probably appear in the years ahead. This national and anti-colonial feeling may often result in disturbance and confusion and, indeed, in some premature and unrealistic decisions in those international agencies where it now has a powerful platform on which to express itself.