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No. 51/13 THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN A TWO-POWER WORLD

An address by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, delivered to a meeting of the Canadian Bar Association, on March 31, 1951.

Recent international developments have prompted in various countries a re-appraisal of the proper functions of the United Nations. Such a re-appraisal has become all the more necessary by the growing tendency of the General Assembly to pass resolutions which ask the United Nations to do things it has not the resources to do, particularly when those resolutions are passed by a majority which includes many whose countries cannot or do not wish to contribute much to their implementation. It is necessitated also by the political lessons of the war in Korea and by the dilemma in which the United Nations found itself last January when it was called on to decide whether the People's Government of China by helping a declared aggressor in Korea had not itself engaged in aggression.

While I think that this re-examination is wise, I do not think that it will or should weaken our continued faith in the world Organization, or our recognition of its value. In the first place, the cause of free democracy, which we must maintain, will be sterile unless it is inspired by an ardent belief in freedom itself, and, we should not forget, the United Nations is committed to this belief by the obligation of its members to promote the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Secondly, the United Nations provides a framework within which men of good-will can work together for the coming of the day when the rule of law will replace the rule of force in international relations. The avowed policy of the Soviet group to bring about a contrary result - substitution of force for law - does not alter the fact that the rest of us, in the United Nations, can work together to frustrate this purpose and to achieve - however painfully and slowly - the ideal of nations under the law, an ideal which must sometime, somehow be achieved if free political society is not to be destroyed. Thirdly, by reason of its universal character, the Organization keeps alive the idea of the human community - however remote that idea may seem at the present to be from reality.

These and other functions to which the United Nations is pledged, are all of great value, even though the practice of the United Nations in each case falls short of the theory it embodies and of the ideal it holds out. Although it is committed to the advancement of freedom, in some of the countries which are members of the Organization, millions of wretched people are imprisoned in slave labour camps, while in others freedom is circumscribed by the ambitions and desires of arbitrary rulers. Then also, though

one of the primary purposes of the United Nations is "to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace and for the suppression of acts of aggression", we have had a recent and very vivid experience of the extreme difficulty under which the United Nations operates, when it tries to enforce its lawful will on those who have committed aggression. Finally, although there is implicit in the Charter of the United Nations the idea of human brotherhood, the countries which compose it are split by what seems to be an irreconcilable gulf.

The hopes we once had and the expectations which are aroused by the Charter of the United Nations are, therefore, far different from its present character and capabilities. Nevertheless, I still think that the work of the United Nations, provides ground for a reasoned faith in its future. In any event, there is no other machinery for international action which provides a satisfactory alternative, though there are some, such as the Atlantic Pact, which may be more important as buttresses to our security in the immediate circumstances of the present.

Tonight I should like to advance the argument further by considering the role of the United Nations in the preservation of peace and security, particularly in the light of recent events in Korea. To do so, I will ask you to regard the Charter much as you might regard a legal document, to look at it with a careful and critical and unsentimental eye. Read in the light of existing circumstances, the passages in the Charter which deal with security matters - with the keeping of the peace - seem to present one glaring inconsistency. The preamble of the Charter and its first chapter would lead one to believe that the Organization is designed primarily to prevent or defeat acts of aggression launched by one state against another. Those opening pages of the Charter suggest that the United Nations is essentially a security organization and imply that there will be no limits on its efforts, as there is no limit on its obligation or on its purpose, to keep the peace and to frustrate acts of aggression. The language used in the opening pages is of a very comprehensive, and indeed universal, kind. The first Article of the Charter, for instance, lists this as the primary purpose of the United Nations:

"To maintain international peace and security, and to that end to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace."

Anyone reading that article, I think, would be forgiven if he inferred that if an unprovoked attempt were made on any state anywhere in the world, the United Nations would be expected to take action - take it at once and effectively - against the aggressor.

Anyone who had come to this conclusion however would be surprised when he came to Chapter 5 which deals with the power of the Security Council, as the primary security organ of the United Nations. Voting procedure in the Security Council, as described in Article 27, ensures that any one of the permanent members of the Security Council (i.e., the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, France and China) can prevent action against itself by the exercise of the veto. It emerges, therefore that the organ primarily responsible for security matters

in an organization primarily designed for the maintenance of peace and security is, if all the permanent members of the Security Council are present and voting, incapable of taking action (except - and this may be important - moral action) against a great power; or, indeed against a smaller power if that smaller power has been able to secure the support of one of the permanent members. Now, we all know that major wars are started only by great powers or by smaller powers allied to and instigated by great powers. At this stage in his study of the United Nations Charter, a reader coming to that document for the first time might be inclined to rub his eyes in astonishment. The Organization purports to offer security in a troubled world and yet is precluded from taking any effective action in such situations as are most likely to lead to major breaches of security. Confronted by this seeming inconsistency in the Charter, the student might begin to feel that, in spite of its pretensions to provide security, the United Nations is really naked of any authority which would enable it to do so.

He might then wonder whether those who framed the Charter at San Francisco had not in reality perpetrated a pious fraud. Of course, that was not the case. I was present at San Francisco and well remember the current of determined optimism and high idealism which flowed through our discussions there. Moreover, if you will recall a fundamental assumption made at that time, it is possible to remove the inconsistency in the Charter which I have outlined. For the purpose of drafting a Charter for an international security organization of which the five great powers were to be members, we assumed at San Francisco that the degree of understanding which had been created between those powers during the war would be maintained. When we are criticized now for making this assumption, I reply, how could we possibly at that time have made any other? We were drawing up a Charter but we realized that it would be impossible to frame principles and procedures in a written instrument which would be fully effective in preserving peace and security, if agreement and co-operation between the great powers were not maintained. Expectation of continued agreement on major issues between the great powers, therefore, was necessarily taken as the basis of our work at San Francisco. When the various sections of the Charter, which now seem so inconsistent, are placed on that foundation, they fall into a pattern and make, I think, a coherent picture.

As we all know, the comparative harmony between the great powers which existed in the spring of 1945 has been shattered. The problem of what the role of the United Nations should now be in security matters - a problem which is troubling many who sincerely believe in collective action to prevent war as our only hope - for peace - springs ultimately from that fact.

The issue has been raised in concrete and almost frightening form by the unprovoked attack on the Republic of Korea which occurred last June. The Soviet Union at that time had absented itself from the Security Council; and that fortuitous circumstance allowed the issue to appear with particular sharpness. We all know what action was taken by the Security Council last June. On the initiative of the United States, the North Korean Government was declared an aggressor. That initiative we honour, but it came, I think, as a surprise to most observers and without it, let us not forget, any effective United Nations action, certainly any military action, would

not have been possible or even, I think, attempted. Fifty-three members of the United Nations supported this decision, and resistance to the aggression was organized through the Security Council.

Let us return for a moment, then, to the situation as it existed for some forty-eight hours in June before President Truman had decided to give military assistance to the Republic of Korea. At that time, because of the absence of the Russians from the Security Council, there were two possible courses open to the United Nations. The Organization could either decide that it must do its best to implement its primary purpose, as laid down in Article 1 of the Charter, and take effective collective measures for the suppression of an act of aggression, or it could argue that this attack had almost certainly been prepared with the support both of Communist China and of the Soviet Union and for that reason it would be unwise for the United Nations as such to attempt to defeat an act of aggression involving one of the great powers. I have no doubt myself that President Truman and his advisers made the right decision when they brought the matter immediately to the attention of the Security Council, when they ordered General MacArthur to provide cover and support for the forces of the Republic of Korea, which the United Nations had itself set up, and when they then urged the Security Council to take action against the aggression. They had to choose between a course which would deny formally and possibly finally the claims of the United Nations to be a general security organization, or alternatively, one which would overlook any implications of Article 27 of the Charter that enforcement action could not effectively be taken against the declared will of one of the great powers. They chose the latter course and by their choice did much, I think, to determine the future of the United Nations in a world where, in effect, power is now shared between two great super-states, around which most of the rest of us gather in varying degrees of confidence or uneasiness. We should approve and support this fateful Korean decision, I think, but we should do so with an awareness and understanding of all its implications; not merely because of a natural elation over a decision which proved that the United Nations could act as well as talk.

I am not being cynical, or lacking in admiration for the leadership given at that time, when I say that the United States decision to lead and help organize the United Nations in its resistance to North Korean aggression was perhaps somewhat easier than it might have been because at that time the possible consequences of the course on which we were embarking had not been fully revealed. That was only to happen in November when the intervention of the Chinese Communists showed unmistakably the degree of support which the puppet regime in North Korea could count on from its friends in China, and, indeed, in the Soviet Union. In general, it was possible, even easy to believe in June 1950 that this was not a case where a great power was involved or would intervene, and that if the aggression by North Korean forces were defeated those who had encouraged the attack in the hope of increasing the area in the world under Communist domination would be prepared to write off the defeat as a consequence of a miscalculation. Such a triumph for the United Nations in defeating an aggression would have been - and would still be - a tremendous development for security in other parts of Asia and the world. After all, this had happened on at least two other occasions. When the Greek Government had beaten off

the attacks made across their borders by neighbouring Communist states and had shown that with financial assistance and arms from the United States and other Western countries they were prepared to resist similar attacks in future, those attacks gradually died away. Also, when the Soviet Union ultimately accepted the fact that they could not starve out Berlin without risking a general war, they abandoned the attempt and a settlement over Berlin became possible. Last spring it was thought that the Soviet Union and its friends and allies were still not prepared to run the risk of World War III. If that were true, United Nations action against the North Korean aggressors might be expected to lead to a settlement in Korea, and have a salutary effect throughout the Far East. These calculations, as we now know, were not well founded. But they were widely shared and seemed realistic on the basis of the information available to us at that time. It was only when it became plain towards the end of last year that the Soviet Union and the People's Government of China were prepared to run the risk of a general war over Korea that the dilemma of how far the United Nations could and should go in enforcing by military action collective security in a two-power world became most acute. We are still faced squarely with that dilemma.

Before considering it, however, especially as it was revealed in extreme form last November, I should like to say something of a structural development which had occurred in the United Nations in the intervening months. Having decided that the United Nations should not necessarily feel prevented from taking action against aggression in which the Soviet Union was interested and having only, by the accidental absence of the U.S.S.R., been able to organize collective resistance in Korea through the Security Council, the United States and other governments were anxious that decisions should be taken by the United Nations which would enable the Organization to act in the future with similar vigour if the Soviet were present and vetoing. There was even a temptation to suggest a drastic reconstruction of the United Nations which might have precipitated the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and its satellites and which would have converted the Organization formally and finally into an anti-Cominform coalition. This temptation, fortunately, did not prevail. In my opinion, there are at least two reasons why such a course would be highly mistaken at the present time. The first and most important reason is that it would eliminate any possibility of the United Nations still being used as a means of composing the major differences between the free world and the Soviet Union. You will remember that the dispute over Berlin was concluded very shortly after Mr. Malik, the Soviet Representative at the United Nations, entered into conversations with Dr. Jessup of the United States Delegation. This precedent alone would be enough to warrant the hope that, if the Soviet Union were convinced that because of the increasing strength of the free world, it could not achieve its objectives by force, it might seek through the United Nations at least a temporary accommodation with the countries of the West. Anything which might jeopardize that possibility, slim though it may be, would be, in my opinion, an error. Another disadvantage of a reconstruction of the United Nations involving the withdrawal of the Soviet Union would be that it might also lead at the same time to the withdrawal of some of the free countries which for various reasons do not now feel in a position to align themselves irrevocably either with the Soviet Union or the anti-Cominform coalition. The disadvantages of reducing the contacts between these countries, many of

them in Asia, and this free coalition would be very great. We must not delude ourselves that all the non-Communist countries in the United Nations automatically and approvingly range themselves in our camp in every conflict with the Soviet bloc at Lake Success. Moreover, much of the support we do get from these "third force" countries on many issues is due, not to their conviction that we are 100 per cent right, but to the extreme and uncompromising policy of the U.S.S.R. which at times seems to invite and even encourage opposition.

These considerations were kept clearly in mind when the United States Government framed their proposals last September at the General Assembly, by which the United Nations would be enabled to resist aggression even if the Security Council were unable to act. The aim of their proposals, indeed, was to go as far as possible in giving the Assembly the right and power to organize resistance to aggression without running any risk of so transforming the Organization that the Soviet Union might feel impelled to withdraw. The United States proposals, which were later embodied in the resolution of the General Assembly entitled "Uniting for Peace", were well adapted, I think, to achieve this aim. They provide that if the Security Council has failed to discharge its primary responsibility in the case of a breach of the peace, then the General Assembly may be called into session within forty-eight hours to deal with the matter. They also recommend that each member of the United Nations should "maintain within its national armed forces elements so trained and organized that they could promptly be made available for service as a United Nations unit or units upon recommendation by the General Assembly or the Security Council". If member states carry out this recommendation, the United Nations should never again be in the position in which it found itself last June when smaller countries not in possession of large standing armies had to improvise as best they could in order to make a suitable contribution to the collective forces in Korea.

Our security machinery is now streamlined so as to circumvent the Security Council veto, and to permit quicker and more broadly based United Nations action, through the Assembly. But we are faced now indeed more directly than ever with the question whether the United Nations should try to take military enforcement measures against a secondary aggressor when that action might either dissipate our strength in the face of the main aggressor or lead to a new world war in which our strength would be so dissipated. What should we do if the main aggressor should exploit the provisions of the Charter for the maintenance of the peace everywhere, in order to weaken us so that one day the peace cannot be maintained anywhere? What can we do to prevent the principle of collective security being used to weaken collective security in practice? There is no doubt that this poses a serious problem and one which we should think over very carefully.

The outlines of a way out of this dilemma, what the role of the United Nations should be in trying to maintain general security in a two-power world, are beginning to emerge. Those outlines require acceptance of the following principles:

- (a) In every situation, our obligation under the Charter to do whatever we can to maintain the principle of collective security should be discharged. In other words, we must recognize

unprovoked aggression, whether committed by great or small powers, for what it is, and take appropriate action. This action may have to vary, however, according to circumstances.

- (b) We should never formally condemn an aggressor until the fact of his aggression is clearly proven by impartial evidence, and until the mediatory and conciliatory functions of the United Nations have been exhausted.
- (c) Condemnation of aggression should not mean that in every case economic and military sanctions must follow. The enforcement action to be taken against an aggressor must be related to the practicability of such action; to the general strategic and political situation, and to the possibility of such enforcement action weakening the peaceful and law abiding powers in other areas, thereby tempting another and a far more serious threat to the peace.
- (d) We should recognize our limitations in this way, even when condemnatory action has to be taken. There is nothing immoral in this. It is immoral, however, when passing resolutions at the United Nations condemning aggressors, to give the impression that they will be followed by strong and effective economic and military action, when we know that, in fact, such action will not or cannot be taken. It was not, for instance, the reluctance of the League of Nations to condemn the aggression of Fascist Italy against Abyssinia, which so fatally weakened that organization. That condemnation was easy and it was given in ringing and defiant resolutions and speeches. The wrong done was in giving the impression that these resolutions would be implemented, and then doing nothing about it.

If we apply these principles to the present situation in Korea, what conclusions do we reach? We were right, I think, in voting for the U.S. resolution of February condemning Communist Chinese aggression. I still think, however, it was unwise to force a vote on that Resolution until we had made a further and final effort at negotiation along lines which would have picked up Peking's ambiguous reply to the Cease-Fire group's proposals, and confronted that government with a detailed and practical programme for implementing those proposals; one which would have had to be rejected or accepted, and which could not have been used for bargaining or delaying purposes.

We were right, I think, in refusing to allow the resolution of condemnation to be followed by immediate enforcement action against the Peking Government. This would not, in my view, have been effective in ending the war in Korea; it would have been effective in extending the conflict to the mainland of China, with all the political and military consequences of such extension. I am not one of those who think that the Peking regime would soon collapse from such a conflict. I am one of those who think that Moscow would be its main and possibly only beneficiary. We should not, therefore, in my view, take any avoidable action against China or in Korea which would weaken what is still the main front of the Free World - Western Europe.

From this it follows we should continue to localize the war in Korea and end it as soon as possible. We should

do this, if we can, by negotiating terms of peace, which will be honourable and will not be a betrayal of our obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. We must not forget, however, that while one side can begin a war it takes both sides to end it. If negotiation is not possible, we have no alternative but to do our best to stabilize the military position, force the aggressor to pay as high a price as possible for his crime, avoid rash actions and words and unnecessary provocation in doing this, and hope that the Chinese Communists will soon desire to extricate themselves from a dangerous and costly adventure.

The safety of those who are fighting in Korea is a first consideration. It should be possible, however, to maintain our military position in Korea while keeping the door open for every possible opportunity to negotiate a settlement. This means refusing to be stampeded into action, such as a massive attack towards the Manchurian border, if such action were possible militarily but felt to be unwise politically. The chances for a settlement in Korea are also not increased by the kind of talk which weakens the unity of action of those who are participating in that operation.

There are, I think, two main threats to this unity of action. One is a feeling of impatience and even irritation in the United States, that, while they are bearing the brunt of the fighting, their friends in the United Nations do not give them sufficient backing, even at Lake Success. I think that we should recognize this feeling, just as we should gratefully recognize the special responsibility which the United States has accepted and the leadership it is giving in the struggle against Russian Communist imperialism. Such recognition carries with it the obligation to cooperate and to give support. But this support, if it is to have any value, does not mean an automatic response of "Ready, aye Ready" to everything that Washington proposes. It may mean constructive criticism of, and even opposition to, courses or proposals which we in Canada may think are unwise and concerning which it is our duty to express our views. I know that such criticism and opposition will be exploited by our Communist enemies for their own nefarious purposes. Because of this we should put forward our point of view, whenever we can, in private and try to persuade our friends as to its reasonableness. If we succeed, well and good. If we do not, we will have to decide whether to maintain our position in public or whether to abandon it because the acceptance of our viewpoint may not be so important as the maintenance of the united front.

The other danger to our free world unity arises when those who have been charged by the United Nations with military responsibility make controversial pronouncements which go far beyond that responsibility, and create confusion, disquiet and even discord. It seems to me to be as unwise, indeed as dangerous, for the generals to intervene in international policy matters as it would be for the diplomats to try to lay down military strategy. This is a case, I think, where the specialist should stick to his speciality. Otherwise, unnecessary difficulties are created, and that whole-hearted co-operation between friends which is so essential is hindered.

These difficulties are, I hope and believe, only chips off the block of unity. We should try to prevent them, of course, but they cannot destroy or even dangerously weaken the structure itself. Their greatest danger lies in



the hopes they may arouse in totalitarian minds, that the free democracies are divided and therefore becoming weaker. Dictators, as we know from grim experience, feed on, indeed often act on, such false hopes. They count on conquest by division. So in our international relations, as in our domestic policies, let us give Communist dictators no more of this comfort than we can help.

That is one reason why - if I may return to where I began - we must maintain and strengthen our faith in the United Nations, as a vehicle for co-operation among the free nations and for the organization of their security, as the forum for the expression of the conscience of the world, and as the symbol of the fundamental unity of all democratic peoples.

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