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Role of the UN in Maintaining Peace and Security

Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Paul Martin, to a Joint Meeting of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and the United Nations Association of Canada at London, Ontario, on March 12, 1964.

...Next year, the United Nations will celebrate its twentieth anniversary. 1965 has been designated as a Year of International Co-operation. It is intended to emphasize the widespread endeavours of the United Nations to meet international demands of our time. It will mark, I hope, a new determination on the part of all members to make the organization as effective as possible in all its spheres of activity.

This is very desirable, for the United Nations is here to stay. Even if the present organization should be torn apart by dissension and difficulty, the nations of the world would quickly realize the need to recreate a new system of international co-operation. Dean Rusk sharply and soberly underlined this need in his thoughtful lecture of January 10 in the Dag Hammarskjold Memorial series. I agree with much of what he had to say at that time.

Even in the light of substantial development, the United Nations can still be regarded as being in its formative stage. It has had to respond to a variety of situations, vaguely foreseen at San Francisco but by no means envisaged in their actual significance and scope -- the freezing effect of the cold war, the sudden and dramatic emergence of new states in Asia and Africa, the vast strides in science and technology.

How will the organization respond to the ever-increasing demands made in circumstances so vastly different from those in 1945? It is very easy to be pessimistic about the future, to be irritated and frustrated, as some world leaders have been, by the shortcomings and limitations of the United Nations, by the shifting opinion which frequently seemed more concerned about regional influence and national prestige than about the urgent requirements of the organization in a period of rapid change.

Delay in Cyprus

Today the tragedy of Cyprus is foremost in our thinking about the United Nations. It represents a new demand, a new trial, another steep hill. There have been expressions of annoyance and criticism about the delays in

starting United Nations peace-keeping machinery. There has been an unfortunate passing of time during which the actual situation in Cyprus has deteriorated. There is a potential danger of civil war and international conflict. The need for immediate action is clear.

The dilemma which the United Nations faces in Cyprus is a microcosm of the many difficulties which have been hampering the organization for some time -- the great powers are divided on how the situation should be dealt with, whether inside the United Nations framework or outside it. The parties directly concerned are widely divided on the kind of solution needed and quite obviously require outside and impartial assistance. In a sense, the situation on the island is a matter of domestic jurisdiction, normally precluding United Nations intervention, even though the international risks are great. Many members of the United Nations are either uninterested or hesitant about becoming involved. Already heavily engaged in the Middle East, the Congo and elsewhere, and beset by a financial crisis of serious proportions, the United Nations is hard pressed to find funds for a new operation. There is the question whether the Security Council, the General Assembly or the Secretary-General should have the main political control. There are issues of human rights at stake, questions of treaty interpretation and implementation, a problem of nation building from elements of diverse ethnic origin and religious belief. There may be a pressing demand for economic and social assistance if Cyprus is to have viable statehood.

These are some of the main elements of the dilemma. They go a long way to explain the delays in putting United Nations machinery to work in Cyprus. Some of them are worth examining more closely in order to illustrate the basic problems of the United Nations at the present time.

Political Factors

On the political front, it seems clear that the powers concerned cannot reach sufficient agreement among themselves to bring about a solution without United Nations assistance. The fact that earlier efforts outside the United Nations led inevitably to Security Council consideration of the problem demonstrated this point. The wisdom of the move was reflected in the fact that the Council adopted a resolution giving the United Nations, and specifically the Secretary-General, authority to act.

Canada believes that the Security Council should exercise its primary responsibility for maintaining peace and that the General Assembly should not try to usurp that responsibility unless the Council has failed to act. The UN can no more afford to be dominated by regional majorities than by the great powers or any combination of them. This position has been held by Canada ever since San Francisco and we have consistently sought to have it accepted generally in the United Nations.

Canada believes, too, that the United Nations should be able to respond effectively in Cyprus as it has in other situations broadly similar in nature. In Lebanon in 1958, it succeeded in quelling an incipient civil war and in helping to bring about national reconciliation. In the Congo in 1960, it assumed a heavy responsibility which it could not shirk for fear that deterioration there would lead to wider conflict. The assistance rendered in Yemen during the past year was similarly motivated.

Cyprus attained independence as a consequence of an international agreement reached outside the United Nations, but under the impetus of resolutions adopted in the General Assembly. That earlier action of mobilizing opinion in favour of an agreed solution forms a background for current United Nations efforts to preserve the peace in Cyprus.

This United Nations responsibility for the security and welfare of small states is a cardinal reason for keeping the United Nations in effective being -- both as a peace keeper and as a catalyst for economic, social and humanitarian causes.

Financing

It is not sufficient to pay lip service to this aim. The United Nations can have no real meaning in international affairs unless the many words spoken within its halls and on other public platforms are translated into deeds. At the present time, the most pressing practical requirement is to ensure that the organization has adequate funds for its many activities. Nowhere is the need more urgent than in the field of peace keeping.

For many years, Canada has been striving to promote sound administrative and budgetary methods in the United Nations, including the Specialized Agencies. We were instrumental in recent years in bringing about the establishment of the Working Group of Twenty-one on United Nations Finances in the field of peace keeping. The Canadian position has consistently been based on a conviction that financial contribution to support United Nations action must be shared by all members, great and small. Just as peace is indivisible, so is the financial responsibility for peace keeping. Political decisions designed to preserve security and stability must be backed by sound proposals for sharing the costs.

This is a position of principle which Canada has reiterated year after year. But we have not been so rigid in our belief in that principle as to blind us to practical needs in urgent circumstances. This is why we have supported ad hoc arrangements for financing operations in the Middle East, in the Congo, in West New Guinea. Throughout, however, we have continued to insist that these ad hoc arrangements -- never entirely satisfactory -- must not prejudice long-term financing arrangements which can form the basis for solid planning for peace, both by the Secretariat and by contributing governments. This is the basis of our approach to the financing of a Cyprus operation. We are acutely conscious that steps taken in the emergency situation now prevalent in that island may affect the attitude of member states toward the financing of peace keeping generally. They could influence the future deliberations of the Working Group of Twenty-one. They may even be seized upon by some as a further means of avoiding the Charter responsibility for sharing expenses of the organization -- a responsibility which has been reinforced by the 1962 advisory opinion of the International Court.

It is particularly important to keep these financial considerations in mind because this year Article 19, concerning the loss of vote in the Assembly, could become operative in relation to important members of the organization.

United Nations Preparedness

Once again, the urgent requirements in Cyprus have illustrated the need to prepare in advance for prompt United Nations engagement in peace-keeping operations. This is a matter of contingent planning in United Nations headquarters by military and political staffs, of earmarking, training and equipping units and personnel in national defence establishments, of improving methods for processing United Nations requests for assistance, of standardizing operational procedures.

Canadian views in this regard have been stated so often that it is hardly necessary for me to do more than mention them. We have been pressing for the establishment of a military planning staff which could assist the Secretary-General and his political advisers in establishing and conducting peace-keeping operations. Canada has been exploring ways and means of making its own stand-by arrangements more effective.

Other member states share our views about earmarking and training troops for United Nations service. The Nordic countries and the Netherlands have firm policies in this regard. Recent indications are that more governments are thinking along the same lines.

Last autumn, the Prime Minister, taking note of these developments, suggested that it might be useful to pool experience and ideas for improving United Nations peace-keeping methods. Because of prevailing international political circumstances, this cannot be done at the present time through formal action by the United Nations. For the time being, interested members may have to accept that a permanent peace-keeping force cannot be established, although it has emerged as one of the ultimate goals of disarmament programmes put forward in Geneva.

Yet Cyprus and other situations already on the international horizon show that peace-keeping operations by the United Nations may be needed on very short notice. The demands are almost as varied as the situations which arise. In Greece, Kashmir and Palestine, military observers on the ground were needed. In Lebanon and Yemen, air observers played a key role. In Gaza and the Congo, an international force was essential. On many occasions, the United Nations has urgently needed mediators and conciliators.

The obvious conclusion is that the United Nations cannot stand still in its preparations for such operations. It has accumulated experience but some of the lessons have been learned the hard way. The underlying risk of escalation to war demands more effective preparedness.

Other Factors

Other internal problems need to be solved -- problems of representation, admission of new members, administration. Many of these have resulted from the rapid enlargement of membership. The process of adjustment has not kept pace with that significant development.

Understandably, the new states from Asia and Africa have pressed for greater representation in the various organs. In part, their demands have been met. Last autumn, after nearly ten years of effort, the Assembly adopted resolutions containing Charter amendments for enlarging the Security Council and ECOSOC.

Ratification of those amendments is required and it remains to be seen whether Soviet opposition will be relaxed. Canada believes that these amendments should be made, but we also believe that the members should be equally concerned about improving the functioning of the Councils. We have urged that, in determining their composition as such, attention could be paid to the actual contribution which member states can make as to the factor of geographical representation.

More members means more work for the organization and longer sessions for the Assembly. Since San Francisco, Canada has pressed for improvements in its methods and procedures. This is why I support Dean Rusk's remarks about the desirability of making greater use of working groups and sub-committees, since obviously committees of 113 are cumbersome. As well, we have suggested that greater use could be made of regional groupings, like the Organization of American States and the Organization of African Unity. The Security Council could be given a greater share of the political burden; mechanical voting devices would shorten Assembly proceedings; and naturally all debates would benefit if repetitious statements could be avoided.

Steps like these would do much to enhance the United Nations in the public eye. They would dispel the notion that the Assembly is a noisy debating society. They would give credence to Dag Hammarskjold's vision in his last report of an international instrument for effective co-operation:

Two years before his death and ten months before the Congo crisis, Mr. Hammarskjold told a press conference that the United Nations must respond to those demands made of it. In his prophetic words: "It did take the very steep hill of Suez; it may take other and even steeper hills". There is no doubt in my mind that in the Cyprus situation the organization faces a long and arduous journey uphill.

This alone is not a cause for discouragement or lack of confidence. We should recall that the United Nations has successfully passed through periods of severe trial -- in Korea, at Suez, in the Congo -- and withstood upheavals, such as the intensive cold war debates of the early fifties and the Soviet assault on the Secretariat in the sixties.

I believe that the United Nations can and will overcome the present difficulty in Cyprus. In expressing Canada's faith in the United Nations way, I am voicing our continuing determination to follow a firm policy of support for the United Nations. Canada has always done its utmost to make the United Nations as effective as possible within the limitations imposed by the international situation. This policy has been patiently pursued notwithstanding doubts from time to time about departures from principle and the adoption of questionable methods.

Other nations have been voicing their doubts about Cyprus. Canada is not one of them, although we are concerned to see the maximum clarification of the United Nations role there. We shall not be found wanting in this new United Nations endeavour if other nations are prepared to play their part in what must be an international effort.

In particular, we deplore that lack of financial support should become an obstacle. Just as in the past we have been prompt and generous in responding with men, material and financial contributions, Canada will do all in its power to further the cause of peace -- which in essence is the cause of the United Nations and its members.