

GOVERNMENT



OF CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 56/39

Special Session-22nd Parliament

Excerpts from a speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, in the House of Commons November 29, 1956.

...During the earlier discussion of this subject I was asked to enlighten the House in respect to several matters. One matter was the reason we had not previously taken action in regard to a United Nations police force in this particular area. Another was -- and this has been brought up again by the hon. member for Greenwood -- the relationship of our action to Commonwealth unity...

The hon. member for Prince Albert asked particularly for enlightenment, as he put it, in regard to our previous attitude toward a United Nations emergency force for this particular area. I think he is satisfied with what I said earlier about our general attitude toward putting forces under the United Nations for general purposes and the difficulty of doing that under the Security Council organization as it is at present. I am sorry he is not able to be here this afternoon to decide whether or not what I am going to say about this matter is enlightenment. I would point out, and I have made a pretty careful survey of our record in this regard, that it was as early as 1953 that we discussed, with representatives of the United Kingdom Government in the course of our diplomatic exchange of views, the possibility of replacing the truce supervisory organization in the Palestine area with a police force which would have greater powers, and greater authority, and be able to do things which the truce organization could not possibly do, thereby making the situation easier and making war more difficult.

At that time, in 1953, the matter also came up, though not in public discussion, at the General Assembly of the United Nations. We had previous discussions with the British and took the matter up with the Secretary-General, who had himself been considering it. We were told at that time that in his opinion it would not be a desirable move to make publicly at the United Nations General Assembly.

That was in 1953. Then later, in 1955, when I happened to be in Cairo, I discussed this question with General Burns who came over from Jerusalem to see me, and we went over the question of the advisability of making a proposal at the next Assembly -- that would have been the Assembly we are at now -- for a United Nations force to patrol the boundary not only between Egypt and Israel, but between Jordan and Syria and Lebanon and Israel. On my return to Ottawa we brought this question up again when Sir Anthony Eden and Mr. Selwyn Lloyd visited us here, I think in January, 1956. We also took the question up in Paris with the French Government. At that time the Governments which I have mentioned, the British Government and the French Government, did not feel that this was a practicable proposition.

One reason they did not feel that way was that they themselves had been discussing it with the United States and the United States was hesitant about the wisdom at that time of trying to introduce a police force on the borders, with a demilitarized zone. Behind all this hesitation and objection, if you like, was the fact that ... neither the Government of Israel nor the Government of any one of the Arab states was in favour of that kind of force. I can assure the Committee we have received arguments from the Government of Israel, which indicate why they did not favour that kind of force.

What it was thought might be done at that time was to increase the truce observation organization. That was done, and Canada did send additional officers to it. It was with that background that the discussion was introduced in the House here last January or February -- I forget the exact date -- by the hon. member for Prince Albert, and it was with that background that I expressed some hesitation as to whether it was a wise move to make at that time. But I did mention the matter again in the Committee on External Affairs ... on April 17, 1956:

"The idea of an international force for Palestine -- which a few weeks ago got a good deal of attention--"

I was referring to the debate in the House.

"-- does not appear now to be regarded on either side, the Jewish side or the Arab side, or by the others most concerned--"

I meant the United Kingdom, the United States and the French Governments,

"--as practicable".

That was my statement to the Committee, and no reference was made by any member of the Committee to that matter subsequently. Therefore I assumed that they accepted that statement of the impracticability of this move at that time.

As I think I said on another occasion, what the three countries most concerned, the United Kingdom, the United States and France, apart from Israel and the Arab states, desired to do was to use the tripartite agreement for the purpose of preventing an outbreak in that area. And it is one of the unhappy aspects of this tragedy that this agreement fell by the wayside in the events of last summer.

So much, then, for the origin of the idea of the United Nations force. There was an occasion, however, a few weeks ago, when a resolution of this kind, under the circumstances which then existed, could be taken up and made effective by the United Nations Assembly, and that was done. But I would point out to my hon. friends opposite who have all, I think, without exception expressed themselves as being in favour of the idea of a United Nations force and even felt that it should have been in existence long before this crisis, that if the Canadian Delegation had taken the action at the first meeting of the United Nations Special Assembly which some of them have suggested we should have taken, to support the United Kingdom and France in their efforts to prevent the consideration of this question at the United Nations Assembly in that action, and if that support and that of other members of the Assembly had been effective, there could have been no consideration of any United Nations force at this time, or possibly at any other time in the future.

I think that is a valid point to make, because when the Canadian Delegation voted against the United Kingdom and France on that first measure before the Assembly I was charged by some hon. members opposite as lining up with Russia and the United States. But if we had not defeated that move we would never have been able to introduce a resolution for a United Nations force, and when that resolution was first introduced it got--

Mr. Brooks: Did not Great Britain and France ask for a United Nations force?

Mr. Pearson: Well, I shall try to explain that. What I am talking about now is the first session of the Special Assembly of the United Nations after everything had collapsed in the Security Council. When that Assembly met the first item before it was the putting of this Middle Eastern question from the Security Council on the agenda of the Assembly. If it had not been put on the agenda we could not have discussed the question at all, and the Special Assembly would have dissolved and there would have been no opportunity to bring up the United Nations force proposal at that time. The United Kingdom and France, for reasons which they thought were quite good, did attempt to keep this matter off the agenda. A few days later, when the proposal was made for a United Nations force, it got a very large vote and no member of the Assembly voted against it. But the United Kingdom and France again -- and I am not criticizing, because they felt this to be the proper course for them to follow -- abstained with regard to the proposal for a

United Nations force which they have subsequently found, I think, to be very helpful to them in the solution of the difficulties we are all in now. That abstention on their part, from their point of view, was a perfectly reasonable one, just as abstention on our part under certain circumstances seems to us also to be perfectly reasonable.

The hon. member for St. Paul's and others have asked me a good many questions about the functions of this force, how it is going to operate, what is the chain of command, and what is the relationship of this force to the government of the country in which it is operating. It is not easy to answer all these questions at the present time because the organization, the function and the principles under which the force is to operate, its relationship not only to the government of the country in which it is operating but to the governments which have sent troops to the force -- all these things we are now trying to work out. I assure my hon. friend that that work is certainly not completed. The force is operating under the resolution to which I referred earlier, which is now in effect and which authorizes it to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities in accordance with all the terms of a previous resolution, the resolution which was passed two or three days before, and which in general does lay down the functions of the force.

Those functions under that earlier resolution were to bring about a cease-fire, and that has been done; to bring about the withdrawal of forces behind the armistice line; to desist from raids across the armistice line into neighbouring territory; to observe scrupulously the provisions of the armistice agreement, and to take steps to re-open the Suez Canal and to restore and secure freedom of navigation.

The Assembly has ordered all these things to be done, and the force itself is to police the doing of them. In line with certain principles and functions which have been approved by the Assembly and which are put out in detail in a United Nations document which has been tabled (A-3302 of November 6) this is the final report of the Secretary-General on the plans for this emergency force, and especially paragraphs 6 to 12 which outline his idea of how it should function.

Now, it is of cardinal importance that in this functioning the force should be under United Nations control and not under the control or dictation of any one member of the United Nations, including Egypt. I tried to make it as clear as I could the other day, and I have tried to make it clear at the United Nations General Assembly, that we would not accept any other interpretation of the functions, the tasks and the duties of this force.

I know that in this debate some very hard and harsh words have been used against the dictator of Egypt, and I certainly am not here to defend him. But I think it is also well to remember there is a relationship between this force

and the Arab peoples, and we certainly do not want to divide ourselves completely from the Arab peoples in these matters. Therefore we have to recognize, I think, that those peoples, especially the people in Egypt as represented for better or for worse by their Government, do have a special relationship with a force which is operating in their territory. I can assure the Committee again, however, if assurance is needed, that we would not accept any principle of action at the United Nations, or participate for long in any force, if that force is in danger of being controlled and dominated by the leader of the Government of Egypt. That has already come up in the advisory committee of seven and it will come up again. I can give the Committee an assurance that that is the stand we will take, and I am quite sure we will have the support of practically all the members of the Committee in that stand and the support of the Secretary-General himself.

I have listened in previous discussions, Mr. Chairman, to a good many statements to the effect that the action of the United Kingdom and France has saved the world from Russian domination and control of the Middle East. Well, I am not going to go into that at this time, but there is another side to this question. We should also ask ourselves in considering all sides of the question whether the action that has been taken has weakened or strengthened the position of the U.S.S.R. in this area by giving the U.S.S.R. a special relationship to Egypt and to the Arab and Asian states, which has been illustrated by some of the alignments in the United Nations at this time. I do not for one minute criticize the motives of the Governments of the United Kingdom and France in intervening in Egypt at this time. I may have thought their intervention was not wise, but I do not criticize their purposes.

It has been suggested, and this is one of the questions that was asked me in the previous debate, whether by our own actions in not aligning ourselves on all occasions at the United Nations with the United Kingdom and France we had not contributed to the weakening and division of the Commonwealth and the weakening and division of the Western Coalition.

Mr. Chairman, I have just one thing to say about that. That division within the Commonwealth resulting from the British action would have occurred whether or not we had voted on every occasion with the British Delegation down there. We did not create the division. It certainly would have existed between the Asian members of the Commonwealth and the other members whether or not we had lined up with those other members, and I think we have to be very careful when we talk about the unity of the Commonwealth and co-operation within the Commonwealth -- and it is something we should not only talk about but should do what we can to bring about -- never to forget there are three Asian members of that Commonwealth. However, our efforts to bring them into closer association with the Commonwealth and to keep them there surely should not mean that even within this association we have not got a very special relationship

of intimacy and friendship with the old members of the Commonwealth including above all our mother country in the Commonwealth, the United Kingdom.

All I am trying to point out now is that our actions at the United Nations, criticize them if you like, did not bring about a division in the Commonwealth. Indeed I am compelled to say that our actions and the attitude we adopted did help and are still helping to heal the divisions which are within the Commonwealth at this time. If we had not taken the position we did take on these matters at the United Nations we would not have been in the position where we could have performed what I think to be a constructive role by bringing not only the members of the Commonwealth closer together again, but, and this in some respects under the present circumstances is even more important, by bringing the United States, the British and the French closer together again.

No Canadian at the United Nations who has to get up and declare the policy of his government can feel anything but an agonizing regret when he finds himself on the other side of an issue from the representative of the United Kingdom. Over the years since we have had to take charge of our own foreign affairs we have had ample reason to respect and be grateful for the wisdom and experience of the United Kingdom at international conferences and in international matters, and over the years we have nearly always found ourselves in substantial agreement with the United Kingdom. At times we have been in agreement with the United Kingdom but not in agreement with the United States, but on this occasion in some of these measures before the United Nations and indeed in respect of the original cause of this meeting of the United Nations we could not support 100 per cent the actions of the United Kingdom and France.

Believe me, Mr. Chairman, that does not mean we are weakening in any respect in our feeling of admiration, respect and affection for the mother country of the Commonwealth. It was in that spirit, even when we disagreed at the United Nations, that we tried to be as helpful and constructive as possible, and to bring about a situation where disagreement would not be necessary in the future; I think, Mr. Chairman, that has happened. I am optimistic enough to believe that in so far as co-operation within the Commonwealth and co-operation within the Western Coalition is concerned we have gone through the hardest of our experiences in the last two or three weeks, that the situation is changing and that we will come closer together again. The speech made this afternoon in the House of Commons in London by the Foreign Secretary of the Government of the United Kingdom gives some indication, I believe, that this is true. We must all devoutly hope, and I am sure all hon. members of this House do hope, that it will be true. If there is anything any of us can do to bring about this work of restoration and reinvigoration within the Commonwealth and within the Western Coalition all of us, I know, will be very proud indeed to do it.

The hon. member for Prince Albert said this morning when he made the interesting proposal that there should be a high level conference in Quebec to pursue this objective that Canada was in an enviable position in these matters, and that because of that position we have special privileges and special responsibilities.

I agree that we have in many respects an enviable position, but it is also a position of some responsibility. If it is enviable I venture to suggest that our actions at the United Nations in the last three weeks have not made it less enviable.

Leaving these controversial aspects of the question aside for the moment, I know I am speaking for every hon. member in the House when I say we can now look forward to the time when there will be a closer and more intimate relationship in the Commonwealth, which includes three great nations of Asia, and in a Western Coalition which must have as its core the closest kind of co-operation and intimacy among the United States, the United Kingdom and France. That is the job for us to do from now on, and I hope we will all be able to pursue it so that we will bring about a better state of affairs in the world than we have been experiencing in these last months.

Mr. Hansell: ... On page 64 of Hansard of November 27 he is reported as having said:

"Twenty-three nations have offered contributions to that force and eight of them including Canada, have seen their contributions embodied in the formations on the spot which are now working together under the United Nations blue flag of peace."

Could the Minister enumerate the 23 nations and also indicate who the 8 are so that we can be brought up to date? I am interested in knowing how many of what are usually called the Russian satellite states are interested in this force.

Mr. Pearson: The following eight countries have offered contributions which are now embodied in the United Nations Emergency Force in one form or another: Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, India, Norway, Sweden and Yugoslavia.

There are 15 countries which have offered contributions which have not yet been taken up though they have not been rejected. If hon. members will follow this list carefully they will realize that the Secretary-General has a delicate and difficult task in bringing about what he called a balanced composition in the force. This may help to understand the delicacy of his relationship to the Government of Egypt. In connection with the composition of this force, he is the man who with the advice of the Advisory Council and in the last analysis the full Assembly determines the composition. He is

trying to bring that about in a way which will secure the maximum co-operation from the government of the country in which the force is operating. The following are the countries which have not yet been asked by him to send forward contingents to this force: Afghanistan, Brazil, Burma, Ceylon, Chile, Czechoslovakia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, New Zealand, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines and Roumania.

S/C