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INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN A DIVIDED WORLD

Commencement Day Address by Mr. L.B. Pearson,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
at Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.,
on June 6, 1949.

On this occasion you are conferring on me a double honour. You are making me a member of this famous University. You are also giving me the opportunity of addressing your graduating class, and I consider this a mark of confidence equally important to the degree which I now bear. Both these honours carry also their responsibilities. Henceforth, I shall have to act in the decorous and judicious manner that you expect of your graduates, and uphold the traditions of learning which you cherish. I promise that I will take this responsibility seriously. I make only this qualification, that you will not expect me to let it inhibit me too much in the course of the election campaign which I am now conducting in Canada. After June 27 I may become the complete scholar, but please do not expect perfection before that date.

I have the more immediate obligation of saying something worthy of this distinguished company, and particularly, of my fellow graduates. Because I also take this responsibility seriously, I intend to depart from the usual precedents set by generations of convocation speakers. I shall not attempt to set forth a philosophy of education, nor talk about the role of the university in the life of the nation. I shall not dwell upon the rich promise which the future holds in store for you -- nor, for that matter, shall I even discuss my own future, though that is now a matter of almost daily communication between myself and the electors of a certain constituency in Canada. I intend instead to talk to you about one aspect of world affairs, as I see it from the position which I occupy in my country. In the divided world in which we find ourselves, what are the possibilities of success in our efforts to develop an international organization for the maintenance of peace?

Let me begin however by reaffirming my belief in the creative role which the scholar plays in human affairs. It is, I suppose, always a question to what extent political theory precedes rather than follows the growth of political institutions. One must admit also that the creations of the scholar are not necessarily good. There have been moments in history when large sections of mankind have been led astray by the dishonest or mistaken theories of their intellectual leaders. There is, for example, the infamous record of bad and dishonest scholarship in Germany. A small group of perverted but persuasive scholars had an extraordinary influence upon the German people, leading them to believe in false doctrines of racial superiority and national destiny, and thereby encouraging them to follow their political leaders over the most catastrophic precipice that a nation has ever encountered. We see evidences of comparable perversion under communist dictatorship. The cultural purges, the political attacks upon artists, scientists and scholars, the pathetic spectacle of intellectual leaders forced to prostrate themselves

because of some ignorant conception of the interest of the communist state -- these are all too familiar in our time. These lessons in history show that at the root of every human endeavour lies the choice between good and evil. They serve to remind us also of the importance of maintaining at any cost and throughout all emergencies the essential freedom of our scholars and of our institutions of scholarship. Given this freedom, the academic community itself corrects the errors which any of its members may commit. Again and again in history one finds the seeds of new forms of political organization nurtured in the universities, spread abroad by the scholars through their teaching and through their writing, taking root in the minds of ordinary people, and in this way, growing until they change the whole landscape of human affairs.

The experiment in international organization which is now being made in the United Nations is an organism of this nature. It existed in men's minds long before it was ever reduced to paper or made the subject of international negotiation. It grew out of the conviction that there is no problem in human affairs so great that, given the opportunity, human ingenuity cannot solve. It found expression in one of the most persistent and popular objectives of the war -- to renew the effort to maintain peace through international organization.

The nature of this conception in our own time has been influenced by the character of the last war, which in some slight degree at least, touched every corner of the world. In more fortunate countries such as yours and mine, of course, we did not experience the miseries of bombing or occupation. But in one way or another the war made its impact, great or small, on the life of almost every community. The peaceful tribesmen of the South Pacific, the Eskimos of the air routes of the Far North, peasants in the fields of a dozen countries, found the war on their door step. Everywhere, on a scale unprecedented in human history, people found the course of their lives changed -- often horribly distorted -- by the gradual spread of the conflict.

The senseless, irrational, incalculable effect of the war on people whose lives were remote from its origin has been written a thousand times into the records of our age. It is graphically illustrated by one story from my own country, of two men, talking a strange language, who turned up in a prisoner of war camp in Canada. As their record was gradually unfolded, it was found that they were tribesmen from Tibet who, on an innocent expedition, had come down out of the mountains into territory controlled by the Soviet Union. They had been conscripted into the Soviet army and had been sent to fight against the German armies. They had been captured by the Germans and then sent to forced service with the German armies on the Italian front. There they had again been captured, this time by the Canadians. By this means they turned up amongst a group of German prisoners of war in a prison camp in Canada. The brief and innocent journey which they had originally undertaken finally led them around the world, for they were sent home across the Pacific Ocean. For three years these poor bewildered Tibetan peasants had been tossed about on the surface of the war like chips in an angry sea.

Because the war had been waged universally and totally, people demanded also that peace should be established upon a universal total basis. This popular conception was caught up in the phrase symbolized in the travels of a famous American -- "One World". The possibility of giving reality to this conception was enforced by the enormous and impressive example of international co-operation which had brought about the victory. What men could do in the way of international organization during the chaos and confusion of war should

surely be possible in the less difficult and dangerous conditions of peace. The hope was genuine and pervasive. It inspired everyone, certainly in the western world, who had anything to do with the problems of international organization. I know of no more compelling and indeed poignant expression of the confidence which illuminated our efforts for peace in those days than a passage from Robert Sherwood's recent book, "Roosevelt and Hopkins". It is to be found on page 870 and it is an account by Sherwood of a remark which Hopkins made concerning the Yalta Conference. Hopkins words are:

"We really believed in our hearts that this was the dawn of the new day we had all been praying for and talking about for so many years. We were absolutely certain that we had won the first great victory of the peace -- and, by 'we', I mean all of us, the whole civilized human race. The Russians had proved that they could be reasonable and far-seeing and there wasn't any doubt in the minds of the President or any of us that we could live with them and get along with them peacefully for as far into the future as any of us could imagine."

Perhaps if we had remembered our history better we would have given less easy rein to our hopes. Wars, after all, often create more problems than they solve, particularly when the emergencies are so great that men act in desperation to save their very lives, having little time for long term calculations. We had set ourselves the necessary task of destroying the military power of two of the world's great nations, Germany and Japan. There was neither much nor great desire in the press of securing our own salvation to consider the vortex in world affairs that would be created by the vacuums left by the obliteration of these two powers. Nor could we in those strenuous days reflect upon the persistent way in which ancient ambitions and rivalries are maintained even in periods of national emergency and disaster. We should perhaps have recalled the fact that for three centuries the expanding power of the political organization that originated in Moscow has been pressing westward in Europe. We should have remembered that earlier in history Russian armies had been in Berlin and even Paris, and that the presence of Russian armies now upon the Elbe is an expression of similar forces in Russian policy. Now, however, something worse and more sinister has been added. As a result of our historical studies we should also have shown greater concern about the smashing destructive force of a great revolutionary idea when it falls into the hands of political leaders who are determined to use it in the national interests of one state and of their own ruthless and totalitarian rule. In any event, we must now admit that in our plans for post-war international organization, we set our sights too high for immediate achievement. The objective of universal collective security which was written into the Charter of the United Nations did not correspond, we know now, to the realities of the political situation that quickly emerged from the turbulence of the post-war period.

In these circumstances, we are under an obligation to reassess the commitment which we have made in establishing and joining the United Nations. I cannot think of a better environment or a better occasion in which to attempt such a re-evaluation. I hope that in doing so I may help to set up a kind of chain reaction which will have the effect of making available for people like me in public office the advantage of the considered judgment of this and other academic communities.

In making this reassessment the first question we must ask is whether it was a mistake to establish the United Nations as a universal organization, and equally a mistake to try to maintain it on a universal basis. Or to put the question in another way, should

now frankly admit that we cannot make an international organization in which the U.S.S.R. as it is at present constituted and directed, a member. Should we either attempt to reorganize the United Nations without the Russians or seek some other form of organization which includes them? My own answer to this question is most definitely that we should maintain at all costs the universal character of the organization, recognizing the limitations of a universal organization in a divided world. We are now fully aware of the difficulties and limitations which the organization encounters because the U.S.S.R. has objectives different from ours, and because they have methods of operation with which we are not familiar and which at times tempt us to despair. In spite of these handicaps, however, I am myself satisfied that we must persevere in the experiment, because an international organization like the United Nations represents the application of the principle which all nations must recognize as valid in international affairs, that no nation can live in peace and attain its own national security save in collective action to maintain international peace and security. The alternative would take us back to the position which existed before 1939. During those earlier years an attempt was made to establish an international organization which did not include all the great centres of material strength and military power in the world. We found that it was no use trying to make important decisions in the absence of the United States and -- for most of the period -- of the U.S.S.R. Decisions which depend on the co-operation or at least the acquiescence of all the great powers, if they are taken in an organization in which those powers are not all present, will inevitably be unreal and impractical. It is better therefore to do whatever is possible within the limits of the existing organization. For this reason, I feel we are committed to carrying out and carry on the experiment, however much it may cost in time and effort and patience -- and in the weariness that comes from long negotiation, often for small results.

Perhaps we are now in a better position to persevere with the experiment because we have, during recent months, frankly admitted that the United Nations does not, in present circumstances, fulfil its primary purpose -- that is to guarantee the security of its members. Not only have we admitted this fact, but we have set about providing against the present deficiencies of the United Nations. We have done this through the North Atlantic Treaty, which was recently signed in Washington and which is now in the course of being ratified by the States which signed it. I am glad to say that Canada has already ratified it, the first amongst the signatories to do so. In this respect we have, I think, given to the nations of the western world the means by which they can gain that kind of safety which comes from a pooling of resources amongst like-minded people. We have also given a greater measure of stability to the international scene. The events which are now taking place in Germany are, I am confident, a direct result of the determination which the Western Powers have shown to maintain with firmness their essential interests, and are an evidence of this new stability.

Because we have now admitted the existence of a divided world, it is a good deal easier for us to devise practical means of coming to terms with it. One of the first results of this admission is that we have realized that the division may not be as easy to maintain as the Soviet Union which forced it upon us seemed to think. There is an imperative quality about the conception of one world which in the long run will make it prevail. We are operating on the assumption that we can bring about that unity by agreement and without major conflict. This will obviously not be accomplished as easily as quickly as we had hoped in 1945 and 1946. One encouraging sign, however, is the mounting evidence that the iron curtain casts its darkest shadow on those who built it and put it in place. The economic ills of Europe alone are demonstrating how desperate and unnatural a

venture it is to attempt to divide the world into two watertight compartments.

We are beginning to realize, also, that this division is not so formidable as it seems. One of the greatest successes of Soviet propaganda since the war has been to spread abroad the idea that the world is divided into two parts of relatively equal strength and power, and integrity. Far too many people have been willing to think that there are the Russians and their satellites on the one side, and all the rest of us on the other, and that these two opposing political forces were approximately equal in moral and political strength. If we assess the real strength of these two parts of the world, we cannot help coming to the conclusion that this assumption is quite fantastic. We can make one computation on a purely physical basis and come to that result. Better still, however, we can take into account the total strength of our two communities, in terms not only of physical resources but of training, experience, technical skill, ingenuity, the ability of the public to understand and support the policies of their governments, the freedom of scholars to push out new frontiers of knowledge -- all the incalculable elements which go together to make up the physical force and moral strength of any community.

If, as a result of these observations, we reaffirm our belief in the integrity of the experiment of the United Nations as we originally conceived it, we must ask ourselves an additional question. Is the United Nations also a useful and practical instrument to us now, in immediate circumstances, for the prevention or settlement of international disputes?

Again I think the answer is positive, provided we understand clearly the limits within which it is possible for the organization to operate. During the past three years it has been demonstrated that there are certain types of situation in which the United Nations can operate with great effect. Techniques and procedures have also been worked out which enable the United Nations, through the exercise of its influence, to perform certain important tasks of maintaining peace which have been assigned to it, even though at present it lacks the power to impose its decisions.

The capabilities which the United Nations possesses have, for instance, already been demonstrated in the circumstances which have arisen in Palestine, Indonesia and Kashmir. In all three places, situations have developed which could not be handled by any single state without the threat of a major conflict. In all three cases, an appeal has been made to the United Nations. In all three cases, whether it wished to do so or not, the United Nations could not avoid accepting the responsibility which was given it, and doing its best to assist in working out a peaceful settlement.

The "best" which the United Nations has been able to do perhaps not been very dramatic or spectacular. In all three cases, however, a major conflict has been avoided. Procedures for peaceful settlement of these bitter and dangerous disputes have been undertaken under United Nations auspices, and the chance of their success is good. Direct intervention on a large scale by any power outside the area has been prevented. The record is encouraging, it gives us reason to believe that by adapting the methods which the United Nations uses to the strength which it possesses, we may achieve very useful results.

I do not intend to make a detailed examination of the course of events in Palestine or Indonesia or Kashmir, although I think that the case history of any one of these situations would make a rewarding study for your students of political science and international

affairs. I wish, however, to mention certain general principles which I think have emerged as a result of events in these three areas. They are principles which may guide us in determining the way in which the United Nations can function in existing circumstances.

In the first place, it has been demonstrated by experience that no agency of the United Nations should embark upon a course of action unless there is a reasonable chance that its recommendations or decisions can and will be put into effect. A national government can make decisions, knowing that it has instruments at its command by which, within its own borders at least, it can make sure that its will is observed. Even a national government, however, has to calculate whether there is likely to be a sufficient degree of support amongst its people to ensure the success of its policies, and it must be certain also that this support will be given such practical expression as the payment of taxes, the observance of regulations, or the performance of services on the part of individuals. The same considerations apply in the case of the United Nations. It is, however, much more difficult for the United Nations to make the necessary calculations either of its own strength or of the possibility that its decisions will be accepted by the parties concerned.

There are a number of examples that I could give of this principle, but I refer to only one of them --- the action of the Security Council in relation to Palestine. The resolution of the General Assembly in 1947 in regard to Palestine made certain recommendations for the future of that area, and in general terms it gave the Security Council responsibility for supervising the process by which a settlement was reached. The present position in Palestine does not correspond in detail to the General Assembly resolution, and many adjustments have had to be made in that recommendation. The general principles of the settlement, however, are those which the Assembly recommended. The process of adjustment was unfortunately interrupted by sharp and intermittent bursts of warfare, and the Security Council has been called upon to deal with the problem thus created. There have been frequent demands that the Security Council should intervene with force, and that it should suppress the fighting. There might have been a good deal to recommend such a course of action if it could have been carried out firmly and quickly. The question had to be asked, however, what force was going to be used, and how it was going to impose its will. The effect of this question -- and the Canadian delegation on the Security Council has been one of those which most frequently asked it -- has been to force the Security Council to formulate its decisions within the limits of what it could accomplish. In general, therefore, it has simply called upon the parties to stop fighting, without prejudice to the final settlement, and then offered them the means by which they can work out that settlement by negotiation rather than by conflict, with the United Nations using its influence as a third party to moderate the dispute.

The second principle which has emerged in connection with the events to which I have referred is that, to the greatest extent possible, responsibility for the solution of a political problem should be left primarily with the people who are immediately affected by it. It is sometimes tempting to think that an international organization should simply move in on an area, suppress disturbances, and decide upon the terms of a settlement. This is a temptation to which the United Nations could not in present circumstances very well succumb. The effect of adopting such a course would be greatly to reduce the extent to which the results achieved corresponded to the realities of the situation. Let us take Kashmir as an example. The major question is who shall control this territory, and it is complicated by the problem of fighting which has already taken place, and the constant menace of communal warfare.

The main question is now to be decided by a plebiscite conducted under the supervision of the United Nations, which has been able to secure the services for this purpose of a famous and distinguished American -- Admiral Nimitz. In making these arrangements, however, the United Nations have been careful to leave it to the people of Kashmir and to the Governments of India and Pakistan to arrange the actual settlement. It is these people -- the interested parties -- who must see to it that the plebiscite is conducted in an honest and orderly manner. It is they who are responsible for keeping the peace while the settlement is being worked out. It is they who must arrange for the administration of the territory until a settlement has been reached. The United Nations can help them -- and I am sure that under the direction of Admiral Nimitz this help will be prompt and efficient -- but the success of the experiment rests primarily with them.

A third general principle which I think we may discern in the events which I have mentioned is that the United Nations is on strong grounds when it begins its efforts to deal with a situation or dispute insisting that disorders shall cease. In Palestine, in Kashmir and in Indonesia there has been fighting -- too much fighting. The members of the Security Council have always said to themselves and to the parties that the first thing is to get the fighting stopped. They have insisted on getting it stopped without too much arguing about who started it or about the merits of the strategic position at any particular moment. They have also insisted that it should be stopped without prejudice to the political settlement which might finally be reached. I do not think that any member of the Security Council has blinded himself to the fact that the nature of the settlement has sometimes been affected by the fighting, but they have done their best to reduce that effect as much as possible.

Once a cease-fire order has been issued, the United Nations has then offered a variety of services to maintain the truce which has been established. The record of the various truce commissions is, I think, one of the most impressive examples of the work of the United Nations. It is made even more impressive by the fact that the United Nations has been able to command the loyal and devoted service of a group of courageous men, drawn from many nations but moved by a common ideal, who have risked their lives, and in some cases given their lives, in carrying out the missions which were assigned to them. They have gone unarmed and without military support into areas where heavy fighting had taken place in order to report on the way in which truce provisions were being observed. They have brought together disputing parties under difficult circumstances and made it possible for them to negotiate with one another. They have gone back and forth across the lines between the contending forces carrying out the work of negotiation in the most dangerous possible circumstances. To these men, and to the techniques which they have applied, we owe the fact that warfare in three dangerous areas of the world has been contained and stopped rather than been permitted to take on dangerous proportions. The fact that it has been possible to work out these techniques, to find men who will apply them and to put them successfully into operation is an encouraging proof of the practical resources of the United Nations.

The conclusion we must reach from this kind of re-assessment of the United Nations is that the organization, though it may have little power, has growing influence. No one would pretend that the United Nations can in present circumstances stop a big power that is determined to go to war -- or even a truculent small one that is sure of the support of a big neighbour. But it is constantly exerting its influence on world affairs, sometimes in purely administrative matters, like the control of narcotics, sometimes on idealistic subjects of long range rather than immediate importance, like human rights, sometimes in political matters of great and urgent importance, like the

ature of Italian Colonies. Because of this influence -- and its
power for good or bad -- we must now estimate carefully what we
should ask the United Nations to do -- and use it so that, even with its
limited resources, it can serve the high purpose for which it was
founded.

From what I have said you can judge that I do not think that
the United Nations is a perfect organization or cannot be improved.
But I do believe that the important work which the United Nations is
doing even now should be recognized and encouraged. The success of
the United Nations depends upon the voluntary co-operation of the
nations and upon the effective support through informed public opinion
of the peoples of the world. If I have done anything today to con-
tribute to your understanding of the United Nations and your interest
in it, I shall consider that I have in some measure warranted the con-
fidence in me you have shown by conferring on me an honorary degree.
