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## THE UNITED NATIONS CRISIS

Address by the Honourable Paul Martin,  
Secretary of State for External Affairs,  
to the Vancouver Institute, February 20, 1965.

It would be easy, for anyone contemplating the course of events from day to day, to look upon the world in which we live as one in which crisis succeeds crisis. I have myself tried to resist this tendency for two reasons. First, because it is important to distinguish crisis from change. It is inevitable, I think, that a period in which a very large number of new nations have been emerging, in which traditional societies are being compelled to make the transition to modern status and modern structure, in which science and technology are being mobilized on a vast scale in support of man's efforts to control his environment and make it more amenable -- that such a period should be one of change. I believe it would be wrong for us to be daunted by the prospect of change or to be drawn to conclude that all change is necessarily critical.

My second reason for hesitating to apply the term "crisis" indiscriminately to the trends and developments to which Canadian foreign policy must be responsive is because I am confident, in my own mind, that the direction in which matters have been evolving over the past two decades has, on the whole, been right and beneficial. I say this because, over that period, we have come, over an increasingly wide area, to organize our affairs in common. We have come to recognize and accept the implications of our interdependence. And we have created the institutions that enable us to give substance and meaning to the conception of a world community. Among these the United Nations occupies, of course, a vital place.

I put these reflections before you today because they provide the setting for what I would like to say about the really critical situation which I think we have now reached in the affairs of the United Nations. In using the term "critical" in this context, I do so advisedly and in the sense of Mr. Adlai Stevenson's memorable speech to the General Assembly last month in which he said:

"We have reached a fork in the road ahead of this organization -- and thus in our search for world order and our journey toward a wider community."

Much has been said and written about the crisis which confronts the United Nations at this moment -- so much, in fact, that there has been difficulty in retaining the elements of that crisis in proper perspective. Perhaps, therefore, it would be useful if I were to try to disentangle the situation as I see it.

In the immediate foreground, there is what I might call the crisis of solvency of the United Nations. This can be summarized briefly as follows: An amount of some \$140 million is now owing to the United Nations in accumulated arrears. The net cash resources of the organization have dwindled to less than \$15 million, its Working Capital Fund is all but depleted, and it has debts amounting to \$45 million in addition to outstanding bonds in the value of some \$150 million which were issued to finance peace-keeping operations in 1962-63, and which must, in due course, be redeemed.

I think these figures tell their own story. They indicate that the United Nations is facing an acute financial crisis which requires attention quite apart from any of the issues underlying it. For it would surely be tragic if, in addition to being inhibited from conducting its normal business, the United Nations were unable, as the Secretary-General recently put it, in the weeks and months ahead "to keep faith with those who have kept faith with it".

Some two-thirds of the arrears owing to the United Nations is attributable to the unwillingness of certain member states to pay their assessed share of duly-authorized expenditures for keeping the peace. The major defaulter on that account is the Soviet Union, which accounts for just under half of the total arrears outstanding.

This brings me to the second element in the present crisis, which I might call the crisis of confrontation. This has tended, in recent discussion, to overshadow the underlying financial problem.

The crisis of confrontation has hovered, like a Damoclean sword, over the ill-starred nineteenth session of the General Assembly which has now adjourned until September. It could have been precipitated at any time -- as it almost was on Thursday of this week -- by a delegation refusing to go along with the consensus procedure by which the General Assembly has conducted its business since it first met on December 1. For a recorded vote could -- and in ordinary circumstances would -- have raised the issue of invoking Article 19 of the Charter against those member states whose arrears exceeded the contributions due from them for the preceding two full years. Article 19 stipulates that, in those circumstances, the defaulting member state shall have no vote in the General Assembly.

According to the latest count, 13 member states find themselves in that position, including two of the permanent members of the Security Council -- the Soviet Union and France. These countries have argued that Article 19 does not apply to arrears arising out of assessments for peace-keeping operations of the United Nations, in that such assessments are not binding obligations within the terms of the relevant articles of the Charter.

When that view was formally put to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion, the Court indicated that it did regard the costs of peace keeping as "expenses of the organization" to be borne by the member states in the normal way. The General Assembly subsequently endorsed that opinion by a very substantial majority. In doing so, it endorsed the legal character of assessments for peace keeping and, by implication at least, the relevance of Article 19 to arrears incurred on peace-keeping account.

But if the legal position was clear, the plain fact is that the generality of the membership were determined to avoid a confrontation in circumstances where they were not convinced that all other means of resolving the crisis had been exhausted. That position was, I think, underlined beyond any doubt by the events of the past week.

As far as Canada is concerned, we should have felt bound to support the application of Article 19 to the defaulting countries if there had been a confrontation on that issue. We accept the advisory opinion of the International Court. We regard Article 19 as relevant to the arrears accumulated on peace-keeping account. We consider the loss of vote in the General Assembly in this situation as mandatory. And we think that, on balance, there would have been great harm to the continued financial stability of the United Nations if there had been failure to apply the one effective sanction the United Nations Charter has for persistent financial default.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that a confrontation, whatever its outcome, would at best have yielded a Pyrrhic victory. For even if there had been a majority in favour of depriving the defaulting member states of their vote in the General Assembly, it is doubtful if those states would, in such circumstances, have been willing to settle their arrears. If, on the other hand, the move to invoke Article 19 had failed to command a sufficient majority, some of the most loyal supporters of the United Nations might have had difficulty in continuing to accept the principle of collective financial responsibility and the support in those countries for the United Nations cause would inevitably have received a serious setback. In either case, the financial problem of the United Nations would have remained unsettled. There would have been division and recrimination among the membership. The capacity of the United Nations for future collective action would have been weakened. And much of the patient work that has gone into providing at least a minimum basis of accommodation between the United States and the Soviet Union might have been undone. These are some of the considerations that seemed to many member states to argue against a confrontation if that could be avoided.

I have spoken of the crisis of solvency, which continues. I have also spoken of the crisis of confrontation, which, for the time being at any rate, has receded into the background. Beyond these, however, lies what I consider to be the real crisis facing the United Nations and on the outcome of which will depend whether or not the United Nations will continue to have an effective and assured capacity of maintaining peace and security. And that is the constitutional crisis.

To explain the origins of that crisis, it is necessary to go some way back. When the Charter of the United Nations was drawn up, it was assumed that the great powers would carry the major responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security. It was part of that assumption that any really effective security system would have to rest on the continued collaboration of the great powers. That is the assumption that lies behind the veto, as it does behind Chapter VII of the Charter, which provided for United Nations forces to deal with threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression. It was implicit in that assumption, of course, that lack of unanimity amongst the great powers would prevent the proper functioning of the enforcement system laid down in Chapter VII.

As matters turned out, the great powers were unable to agree on procedures for raising the security forces contemplated by the Charter and member states were compelled to turn to regional means of organizing their security, as in the case of the North Atlantic Alliance. But the United Nations was still capable, with the consent and at the invitation of its member states, to interpose its presence in situations of conflict or potential conflict -- to hold the ring, as it were, until longer-term solutions could be worked out at the political level. And that, in a sense, has been the essence of United Nations peace keeping from the appointment of a United Nations Military Observer Group to supervise the truce in Kashmir in 1947 to the latest United Nations operation on the island of Cyprus.

What is at issue in the present constitutional crisis are the respective authorities of the Security Council and the General Assembly in relation to peace keeping. The Soviet Union, and the countries of the Soviet bloc, hold that the Security Council is the only organ competent to deal with the maintenance of international peace and security, that it alone has the authority to initiate, direct and make provision for the financing of peace-keeping operations, and that any other procedures are illegal and invalid.

I think it is fair to say that the primacy of the Security Council in the matter of maintaining international peace and security is acknowledged by the generality of the membership of the United Nations. With the adoption however, of the important "Uniting for Peace" resolution in 1950, the General Assembly asserted certain residual rights and responsibilities in these matters for which provision is made in the Charter. These rights and responsibilities were invoked by the General Assembly for the first time when it authorized the despatch of the United Nations Emergency Force in response to the Suez crisis. They have been invoked on two subsequent occasions, and there is a general feeling that they must be preserved to deal with situations where the Security Council is unable to act.

It is also generally acknowledged, I think, that there may have to be special scales and procedures for the financing of peace-keeping operations. What is at issue is the extent to which any such special arrangements can be reconciled with the need to give the United Nations as assured capacity of keeping the peace.

I have endeavoured to describe the elements of the crisis which is at present facing the United Nations. It is not, of course, the first such crisis to have preoccupied us but it may well be the most serious. For its outcome may determine the shape of the future destiny of the United Nations. Is the United Nations to endure -- as the Secretary-General recently put it -- "as a dynamic and effective instrument of international action" or is it to survive -- in the words of The Economist -- "merely as a spectacular talkathon, pickled and powerless"? That is the real issue we are facing today.

I would not wish to conclude these observations without saying something about the Canadian position. Canada has a vital stake in peace keeping. We have participated in every major peace-keeping operation undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations since 1948. We have set aside standby forces within our military establishment to be at the disposal of the United Nations in situations of emergency. We look upon the evolution of the idea of peace keeping as reflecting the will and determination of the world community to work towards a peaceful and securely ordered world. Much as we might wish it were otherwise, we do not think that the need for a United Nations capacity to keep the peace is likely to diminish in the foreseeable future.

The present crisis did not break upon us suddenly. It has been building up for some time and we have played an active part, over the past year or two, in the working group that was set up by the General Assembly to look into possible solutions. It was our hope that, if reasonable arrangements could be devised for future peace-keeping operations, there would be no difficulty in liquidating the past. But that assumption has turned out to be unrealistic, and it is now clear that all aspects of the peace-keeping problem -- present, past and future -- will need to be brought within the compass of negotiation. In the process of negotiation it is accepted, I think, that the permanent members of the Security Council will have a special responsibility for staking out the area within which an accommodation may be possible. This does not diminish, however, the stake which each and every member of the United Nations has in the outcome of the present crisis.

As far as Canada is concerned, our objectives in the impending negotiations are simple and clear-cut. They are:

First, to restore the United Nations to solvency and to prevent the possibility of a recurrence of the present crisis;

Second, to preserve the capacity of the United Nations to play its rightful part in the maintenance of international peace and security;

Third, to accomplish these objectives on the basis of the broadest possible consensus, which alone will ensure that the solutions devised with regard to peace keeping are effective and durable and that the United Nations is once more enabled to press forward with other urgent business.

The French writer Francois de Callières once wrote that "the secret of negotiation is to harmonize the real interests of the parties concerned". For my own part, I believe that a strong and viable United Nations is and will continue to be in the real interest of all the parties to the negotiations which are about to commence. If I am right in that belief, then surely the Secretary-General is justified in expressing the conviction that, given the will to reach them, it should not prove "beyond the capacity of reasonable men to reach reasonable accommodations".

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