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# JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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## PAPER ON THE UNITED NATIONS

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# PAPER PREPARED BY THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ON THE UNITED NATIONS

## PREAMBLE

This paper makes some attempt to evaluate the success or failure of the United Nations. It makes some judgement of what can be expected from it in the future. It draws conclusions concerning the support that Australia should give the United Nations.

The United Nations was established in 1945 with fifty-one members. It began, as did the League of Nations, as an International Organization whose prime purpose was to maintain the peace and to provide peaceful means for the settlement of international disputes. It can be argued that the United Nations has been hardly more successful than its predecessor in maintaining peace between nations, but that it has been successful in other fields, particularly through the specialized agencies, in promoting international co-operation in one form or another.

## NATIONAL OR INTERNATIONAL

We should ask ourselves why the Organization has been successful in its secondary role and why it is in imminent danger of failure in its primary role. In trying to understand this, it is necessary to make some judgements concerning the motives and intentions of nations in joining the United Nations. There are some who may have regarded it as a supranational authority whose will has to be respected. There are others who would only endorse its conclusions and decisions while they coincided with their own national interests. The unhappy fact of the United Nations, however, is that its constitution enshrines the divisions in the world itself, and thus the Organization was bound to become paralyzed on many questions which divided the great powers.

It is said that the great powers entered the United Nations believing that a spirit of unanimity would have to exist amongst them on major questions if such questions were to be handled successfully in the United Nations. At the same time, they might have known that the spirit of unanimity would be unlikely to prevail. The dominant powers entered the United Nations with the basic assumption that there could be circumstances in which the will of the majority of the Security Council would be contrary to their own national interests, and thus the veto was established to protect each great power above all against military force being used against it with the authority of the United Nations. It can be argued that if such force ever had to be used, the UNO would have failed in its purpose. Furthermore, the power of the veto protects the great powers against an irresponsible majority of smaller powers, not only in the Security Council but in the Organization as a whole.

It is quite clear that the veto has made it possible for a great power to oppose action on matters which it regards as contrary to its individual interests. Thus, it would seem that the great powers, particularly Russia, have some reservation in their own minds concerning the authority, power and scope of United Nations' activity. If this reservation had not existed, the veto would not have been necessary. The veto has made it possible for divisions between the great powers to paralyse the United Nations.

As a small country, perhaps Australia should note that countries in the United Nations are not treated as equals any more than in the world at large. There are five countries with vetoes and then there are the rest. The quality and nature of the membership of the five major powers is in quite a different category from that of the small powers. Some smaller powers, intent on their own national interests, might well want to be on such terms with a major power that that power might use its right of veto in the interests of the smaller power. This corresponds in the workings of the United Nations to what happens outside—with smaller powers seeking protection in defence pacts or other arrangements with other countries.

Unanimity between the great powers was never viable and it is hard to believe that the founders of the United Nations ever thought it would be. It is impossible to believe, in the present state of affairs, that the major powers would forego their right of veto, and it could well be argued that the United Nations as a body has not yet demonstrated the full responsibility which would give them any encouragement to do this.

## PEACE-KEEPING AND SOVEREIGNTY

The recent arguments over Articles 17 and 19 of the Charter concerning peace-keeping operations revolve around this basic question as to who shall have authority in the United Nations. Is major authority for authorizing such an operation to be restricted to the Security Council where the veto operates, or is the General Assembly to be supreme where the large and not necessarily responsible majority may prevail?

While many nations may argue that they want to uphold the rights of the majority in the General Assembly, as it has developed through twenty years of precedent and practice, it is probable that there are others who entertain doubts about the wisdom of giving the General Assembly pre-eminence in peace-keeping operations at this particular point of time.

The fact that these doubts are real is emphasized in that the provisions of the Charter which should have resulted in a permanent military force being attached to the United Nations have never been fulfilled. Under present circumstances, there is no likelihood that they will be. This causes us to ask what do we want from the United Nations? Is it to be an organization that will operate primarily through special agencies, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, and other organs that operate in an important but limited field which cannot get to the heart of a major conflict? Is this all we expect from the United Nations? Do we believe that security will have to rely forever upon our own national armaments and agreements with other like-minded countries? Even though we know that the United Nations can offer no guarantee of security to anyone at the present point of time, should we not look to the day when it can? If we are to look to this day, it is clear that national Governments would have to give up a part of their sovereignty to the United Nations. Forces would have to be provided by the Organization which would be larger and more substantial than any national force. It is probable that the right and power of the veto would have to be removed from the five permanent members of the Security Council. It is not practical to envisage such changes at this point of time, and it may not be practical to speculate on what may happen many, many years from now.

These points are made to demonstrate the fundamental changes that would have to take place within the United Nations before the United Nations can act as a proper peace-keeping authority, before strong national armaments can be forgotten as a thing of the past. All this would require a change in the thinking of nations for which they are not yet ready. There are few nations that would be happy with the idea of one world body with over-riding armaments and political power.

#### PEACE-KEEPING AND PEACE ENFORCEMENT

The United Nations has only embarked on one peace-enforcement activity, that was in support of South Korea against aggression from North Korea supported by China and Russia. This operation was only possible because Russia was absent from the United Nations at the time when the various resolutions were brought forward. Russia was absent because she had been arguing about the question of recognition of Communist China, and had walked out of the Security Council avowedly until such time as Communist China was seated in place of Nationalist China. Thus, she was absent from the Security Council at this point of time and, as a consequence, was unable to use her veto. Russia returned to the Security Council and then tried to veto any further activity in relation to Korea. Russian opposition was overcome by a procedural device which enabled the Security Council, with a majority of seven votes, to refer a matter to the General Assembly if the Security Council itself was unable to act. The General Assembly would then pass resolutions which would be translated into action to the Secretary-General.

Other operations of the United Nations have been of a peace-keeping nature. The mission in Kashmir, which held an uneasy peace for seventeen years, was one of these. Although this was recently shattered, it is probable that the cease fire now achieved is due not only to United Nations activities but also to behind the scene activities by several of the great powers. The operations in the Congo and in Cyprus are others. Whatever one may say for or against United Nations' activities in the Congo, the fact remains that the great powers did not become heavily embroiled against each other in this area, and they might well have if the United Nations had not stepped in to fill the void that was left by Belgium's withdrawal. In Cyprus we have an action which has so far been more successful. The United Nations seems to have been effective in averting conflict between the Greeks and the Turkish minority. It has accepted obligations that formerly devolved upon the United Kingdom which the United Kingdom felt unable to maintain or which she felt were more properly the task of the United Nations in view of Cyprus' own independence. If the United Nations had not acted, it may be that the great powers would not have become involved in this particular question, but nobody can be certain about that. We can, however, say that the UNO has acted and the great powers have not become involved.

What the United Nations does provide is a forum and machinery, imperfect as it is, which enables an independent approach to be made to various problems. If such machinery did not exist, it may well be much more difficult to avoid conflict between East and West.

#### WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

If this is an accurate judgment of the present situation, what does it say for the future of the United Nations as such? Except in the case of Korea, the peace-keeping or military enforcement operations of the United Nations have been conducted in areas in which the major powers have not been principally and directly concerned. Action over Korea was possible because of an almost accidental Russian absence from the Security Council at the time of the first Korean resolution. Since Korea, the membership

has increased enormously to one hundred and seventeen members (the original membership in 1945 was fifty-one). With the present composition of the membership of the United Nations, it is more than ever unlikely that the General Assembly would act in a manner that would lead to a direct confrontation between the Organization and one of the major powers. It may be said that the Suez operation was in contradiction of this, but this is not so because the two greatest powers were, to all intents and purposes, united in achieving British and French withdrawal from Suez. Thus, this withdrawal may well have occurred even if the United Nations Organization had not been in existence.

The United Nations was impotent to secure a Russian withdrawal from Hungary, and it would be impotent to act in the face of clear determination by either Russia or the United States, and it is probably impotent in relation to any Communist Chinese activities. It appears more than ever then that the peacekeeping operations in which the United Nations has been successful are ones in which the great powers have not been directly involved and in which they did not want to become directly involved. It has been argued that such operations may have prevented a small conflict growing larger in a manner that could have embroiled the great powers, but this is not necessarily or always so. If any of the major powers had wanted to become more deeply involved in some of these questions, they would have been able to do so, and it is probable that they would have been able to frustrate United Nations' action.

The arguments over Article 19 have now been resolved by the United States' statement that she will not press the application of this article against the Soviet Union. Perhaps "resolved" is too strong a word, because the fundamental difference and disagreement remains. If a great power does not agree, there is now no obligation to support a peace-keeping operation financially. Thus, the collective responsibility of the Organization has been weakened; it will no longer be able to look upon automatic United States' financial commitment as it has in the past. A crisis has been averted, but the United Nations may be weaker as a result.

It is probable that this agreement over peace-keeping operations will lead to reduction in the effective authority and initiative of the General Assembly which, in turn, will lead to a strengthening of the Security Council and of the permanent members' right to veto.

#### ATTITUDE OF GREAT POWERS

The attitudes of the great powers to these problems have not been the same. Russia has shown a great unwillingness to accept the majority decision of the Security Council or of the General Assembly, and Russian argument against the uniting for peace proposals or some of the peace-keeping operations are arguments against the authority of the General Assembly in favour of the small exclusive Security Council where the veto operates.

With the great influx of the African and Asian members, it might have been expected that the Russians would place greater faith in being able to achieve a majority in the large forum against the United States and the Western countries. That this is apparently not so is an interesting reflection on Russian assessment of the future. The United States has tried to respect the United Nations and to accord the Organization an appropriate authority and stature. It has placed much greater faith in the majorities in the United Nations. In fact, of course, though it has sometimes had the majority against it in the General Assembly, it has never so far exercised the veto in the Security Council.

It is interesting to note that Russia is not the only country working for a reduction in the power of the majority in the General Assembly in order to protect her own national interests. France is in much the same position. The usual public arguments that revolve around the peace-keeping operations of the United Nations, and which threaten to destroy the whole pattern of the Organization, have not mentioned these elements. But when Russia argues in *quasi* legal terms that the General Assembly has no rights under the peace-keeping clauses of the Charter, and then argues in the same terms that the General Assembly cannot allocate the expenses for such operations, she is not interested in the legal argument for its own sake, she is interested in the seat of power in the United Nations. The motivation for her arguments is quite clear.

#### A PEACE-KEEPING FORCE

Canada places great store by the United Nations' peace-keeping force and argues that since the Articles in Chapter 7, which provide for a permanent force, have never been fulfilled, countries should earmark military forces specifically for United Nations' activities. It should not be argued as uncharitable to note that it is much easier for a country like Canada to do this than for Australia, because Canada is in a different strategic position. It is impossible to believe that there would be an attack on Canada that would not be regarded as an attack on the United States. Therefore, the Canadians know without any written guarantee that the United States must defend them if the United States herself is to be defended. This makes it easier for Canada to experiment in this wider international field than it is for a country like Australia which has its own strategic problems and difficulties of an acute kind. Despite this, there is some merit in the Canadian viewpoint, but again this is an argument on the periphery. Such forces would not and could not be used if the major powers were deeply involved in the problem, and thus the limitations of the proposals are clear. It should also be pointed out that



it would be quite possible for a country to have forces earmarked for such a United Nations' force and find that these forces would never be used simply because that country was not an acceptable one for a particular operation. There would be occasions when forces from a particular country would be unacceptable. The nature and nationalities involved in any particular United Nations' force have to be specifically tailored to a particular purpose. If it were politically possible, these limitations in the use of " earmarked " national forces would provide an argument for establishing a United Nations' force that would owe allegiance to no country but to the United Nations itself.

### NEVERTHELESS A WILL TO SURVIVE

Some qualification must be added to the argument that there would have been a world war but for the United Nations. It is much more likely that there has been no war because of the bomb than because of the Organization. This is a reality of international politics whatever may be the future of the United Nations.

However, there is clearly a will amongst the members of the United Nations to survive as an organization. The consensus procedure worked out in the last session of the United Nations indicates this. Confrontation over Article 19 was avoided. This desire for the Organization to continue and to prove its worth may well be strengthened by the new members from Africa and Asia, who have won their own independence since the United Nations came into being. They have had recent successes in establishing their mark on the Organization. The Security Council is being expanded to give them a more balanced membership, as is the Economic and Social Council. The United Nations Committee for Trade and Development is a further example of the Influence of the under-developed countries and of the extension of the interests and responsibilities of the United Nations.

### INFLUENCE ON THE ATTITUDES OF GOVERNMENTS

There are times when the United Nations may appear to be an ineffective organization, especially so when it is confronted by some embarrassing and difficult problem, but the United Nations' influence should not be under-estimated. The mere fact of the organization's existence is worth while, to enable people to meet together, to talk in the corridors, to seek a solution which will not involve too great a clash between nations. The United Nations has undoubtedly assisted in the end of colonialism; it has undoubtedly assisted in the establishment of self-government in many countries. The increase in the membership of the United Nations from fifty-one to one hundred and seventeen in twenty years is proof that the existence of this Organization makes Governments more sensitive to international obligations and to the need for international aid; it makes them more sensitive to the need to do not a little more but much more for the under-developed countries which are struggling to establish a reasonable standard of life for their own people. It has done a great deal to make Governments aware of the special trade requirements of under-developed countries. The existence of the United Nations and the forums of this Organization may well have been influential in causing Australia to be the first of all the countries in the world to offer special trading preferences to under-developed countries.

All this represents an influence for the better. It provided a meeting ground for different ideas, different cultures and different traditions. It is quite impossible to make any firm assessment on the advantages of such a meeting ground, but it would be a great mistake to under-estimate its importance.

### CONCLUSION

To the present point of time, this paper has been designed to define the limits and nature of effective United Nations activities. It has not been concerned to establish what the United Nations should do in an ideal world, but rather to describe what the United Nations can do taking the world as we find it. This is the only practical course, even recognising the short falls of the Organization.

- (i) It can be assumed that there is a real will amongst the nations of the world for the United Nations to survive.
- (ii) The work of the specialised agencies has a valuable impact on co-operation between nations. It is right that it should continue and, if possible, that it should be extended.
- (iii) The value of the United Nations in the peace-keeping field is open to much more argument. It may be fair to conclude that the Organization has played a useful part in helping to settle or limit certain conflicts between small nations where the major powers have not been directly involved. It is possible to argue that the United Nations has prevented the spread of such conflicts in a manner that could involve the major powers, although this, in itself, is open to question.

It can be said with certainty that the Organization is impotent or, at least, of limited influence in a conflict between the major powers and often will be impotent in any conflict in which one of the major powers is involved. Thus, the United Nations can play a useful role in peace-keeping but not in the major sense. The normal means of diplomacy will have to be used as they have been in the past.

- (iv) It is unlikely that the power and influence of the United Nations will extend in the foreseeable future. It is possible even that the power of the United Nations has been reduced by the expedient solution to the argument over Articles 19 and 17 concerning peace-keeping operations. It is likely that the effectiveness of the uniting for peace proposal will be reduced with a consequent reduction in the power of the General Assembly and an increase in the power of the Security Council. This, in turn, would increase the power of the five permanent members with their right to veto. Thus, the different status of the five permanent members and the rest may be re-emphasised.
- (v) The two classes of members in the United Nations, the five permanent members with the veto and the others, make it impossible for the Organization to act as a supranational authority, if that was ever the intention of the founders of the United Nations. It is probable that many smaller powers accept this view and that they are content for the great powers to possess the right of veto knowing that, from time to time, that veto may, perhaps, be used to their own advantage by a friendly great power.
- (vi) It can be argued that the under-developed world, the Africans and the Asians, have won most from the United Nations, but it is significant to note that one at least of this number—Indonesia—has publicly scorned the Organization and turned its back upon it on the narrow ground that Indonesia believes that continued membership was not in her own national interest.
- (vii) Because of the unwillingness of nations to subordinate their own national authority to an international Organization, it is most improbable that the provisions of the Charter which provide for a permanent United Nations military force will be fulfilled. The secondary Canadian proposal of earmarked national forces has strict limits to its effectiveness. It can deal with the smaller conflicts, but not the major ones.
- (viii) On balance, then, it is clear, in the present state of opinion, that there will be strict limits to United Nations' authority and activity. Thus, as permitted in the United Nations Charter, bilateral and multilateral security pacts and defensive arrangements will continue to be necessary.
- (ix) Australia should continue to play a full and active role in the United Nations and make every effort to increase the area of international co-operation and goodwill. Australia should, however, bear closely in mind the limitations that the facts of political life place on effective United Nations activity. So long as the rights of individual nations are always maintained, and so long as any changes that may be undertaken safeguard these rights, we should work to extend the scope of useful United Nations activity and to increase the Organization's authority.

This paper suggests that it is idle to speculate concerning the future. The United Nations may gain more and more authority at the expense of nationalism. It may, at some stage, have its own force capable of imposing its will on any nation in the world, but it would be equally easy to foresee a decaying United Nations, decaying because of a lack of power to deal with the major problems which it was originally designed to tackle, but which its Charter, through the power of the veto, coupled with the suspicion of nations, makes it impossible to do.

However, the fact that the United Nations, at this point of time, cannot solve major problems in the world should not lead one to under-estimate the usefulness and adaptability of the Organization. Those who suggest that the United Nations has failed may well have been expecting too much from the Organization in an imperfect world. They may have looked to the United Nations alone to settle disputes between nations and to establish peace on earth. They may have looked to it to take the place of defensive treaties and bilateral or multilateral agreements between nations. Unfortunately, the United Nations has not been able to perform this function. It does not completely displace the normal means of diplomacy; it has not yet, although it may one day, reduce the need for defensive treaties of one kind or another. But, basically, it should be looked upon as an adjunct to the normal channels of diplomatic relationships. It is an addition, not a substitute. It is a useful addition. If we recognize its limitations, it is much more likely that it will not be put to undue strain, and thus it will be able to grow slowly into an Organization of greater and greater value to the world.

H. B. TURNER,  
Chairman.

Parliament House,  
Canberra, May 1966.

## APPENDIX

The fact is recorded that Mr D. J. Killen, M.P., dissents from the conclusions expressed in the paper.

The following is a summary of his reasons as agreed between him and the Chairman:—

- (1) The paper fails to take account of the reality of international association, namely, that this can be effective only if nations possess goodwill and an honest sense of obligation.
- (2) Many members of the United Nations have not been honest in their dealings and have not recognized what may be called "the international rule of law".
- (3) It is not true that the veto held by the five "great" powers in the Security Council protects them against an irresponsible majority of smaller nations, because the Uniting for Peace General Assembly Resolution of the 3rd November, 1950, may be invoked.
- (4) It is a travesty to regard many of the new members of the United Nations as having genuine international personality and being capable of fulfilling their obligations under the Charter.
- (5) It is absurd that many small nations should have the same voting strength as the great powers.
- (6) A gathering of smaller powers could, under a veneer of respectability conferred by a "Uniting for Peace" resolution, embark on action gravely challenging world peace.
- (7) There has been a growing disposition within the General Assembly to interfere in the domestic affairs of member nations.
- (8) The peace-keeping operations of the United Nations are not a subject for exultation. For example, few member nations accepted their proper obligations in Korea. In the Congo it was principally pressure from the United Nations which forced the Belgians out, bringing chaos in place of orderly progress. The disregard for civilized values which accompanied United Nations intervention does not encourage the belief that there has been a generous acceptance of the ideals of the United Nations Charter.
- (9) The United Nations has shown a double standard. It has failed to heed the plight of countries overrun by the international communist conspiracy; it failed to take effective action over Soviet aggrandisement in Hungary; it was silent regarding El Salvador's appeal for action over Communist Chinese aggression in Tibet; it apparently condoned India's rejection of the rule of law respecting Goa; and it has not sought to insist on Israeli observance of the partition line in Palestine.
- (10) Predominantly, influence goes with power, and this is not a matter to be put in the attic of history. There has, however, come out of the United Nations a new kind of power which depends for its efficacy upon the constant clamour of spokesmen for many nations that they "are voicing world opinion". It would be a fatal delusion for the welfare of the world if this new power within the United Nations were to be ignored.