

# The United Nations Today

**T**HE past year has been full of uncertainty, tension and conflict. The international scene has never been more complex nor the old concepts of power so diffused. There have been sudden shifts in the political balance and unexpected developments rooted in a variety of forces—economic, political, social and even religious. There is an increasing uneasiness as to the manageability of the affairs, and especially the economic life and social organization, of the planet in the circumstances now prevailing. These uncertainties and unforeseen developments affect in different ways the lives and the future of virtually all nations and peoples and give rise to deep-seated feelings of anxiety and frustration which in turn create a climate favourable to new and unpredictable events.

If ever there was a time for serious reflection and stock-taking on the state and future of the community of nations, it is now. In our current anxiety we have to some extent, lost sight of the enormous advances that have been made on so many fronts in the past 30 years. What we now require is the necessary spirit of accommodation to take full advantage of those advances.

In the upheavals of our time we can discern certain general trends—the desire to remedy long-standing injustices or ancient grievances, the compulsion of national aspirations, anxiety over the possibility of a viable future for this or that nation, the fear of the designs and ambitions of others and the suffering frustration and resentment caused by gross economic and social inequities. A generation of unprecedented change has inevitably left many unresolved problems, old and new, as well as a sense of disillusionment at the failure to realize many of the great aims and objectives proclaimed in the optimistic aftermath of the Second World War.

Most of the symptoms and problems I have mentioned are ones which the United Nations, if effectively utilized as the working structure of the world community of the future could be of unique assistance in solving. We need, above all, to press on with the development of the elements of such a community on a global basis. This is not a matter of abstract idealism but of practical self-interest. It is also a matter of urgency.

There are a number of obvious reasons why the development of an effective world community will be difficult and slow. At one end of the scale we have the complex relationships of the greatest Powers, which are still to a considerable extent prisoners of their mutual fears and suspicions and of the fearful destructive capacity of their weapons systems.

At the other end of the scale the majority of nations and peoples are afflicted in varying degrees by acute problems of instability, poverty and economic weakness often exacerbated by political and economic developments elsewhere in the world. While the aspirations of their peoples are high economic dependence or instability shackles many of them to an

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economic system which no longer meets the requirements of an interdependent world of free nations. For many of them their first generation of independence has coincided with the challenge of coming to terms with a new world, a world in a state of revolutionary technological change. Thus the general longing for peace and equity is shadowed by a widespread unease and lack of confidence in the future.

Between these two poles many middle and smaller Powers, within the United Nations and in various groupings outside it, have steadily developed a sense of co-operative responsibility on many global issues. The non-aligned movement is a good example of this positive trend. In the United Nations they have shown by and large a mixture of idealism and pragmatism which constitutes a most constructive middle force in the affairs of the world. This in my view, is one of our best hopes and assets for the future particularly at a time when the polarization of the world situation caused by great Power tensions would appear to be becoming a less dominant factor of the international scene as other independent political, economic and social forces emerge.

The great Powers have special responsibilities and obligations in the United Nations system. They also have a special need for the world Organization as an alternative to the kind of confrontation which, in our nuclear age could well be fatal to us all. The United Nations, and especially the Security Council has played a vital, if sometimes unappreciated role for many years in providing alternatives to such a confrontation. In recent years the major Powers have on a number of occasions availed themselves of this moderating mechanism during periods of crisis. The United Nations has also played an invaluable role in insulating regional crises to the necessary extent from the delicate balance of nuclear Power relationships. This is certainly not the comprehensive system for the maintenance of international peace and security envisioned in the Charter of the United Nations but in the extraordinary and it is to be hoped, transitional conditions of our world, it represents an indispensable safeguard of world peace and survival.

Elsewhere the United Nations, through the process of decolonization, through its pioneering activities in development in its current search for a new international economic order and in an increasingly broad attempt to tackle global problems, has been and is, the centre of an effort to find new arrangements fitting and adequate for our interdependent world. The objective of such arrangements should

be above all to try to make the fundamental changes necessary to lessen the gap between rich and poor and open the door of opportunity to all. The problems and obstacles are uniquely complex and difficult and progress is slow but the focus and the objectives are there. Later in this report I shall revert in more detail to this central and essential part of our task.

It cannot be said that the past year has witnessed any striking progress on our main problems. Indeed, the lack of progress especially on the economic side, is distinctly disappointing and in strong contrast to the evident urgency of most of the problems. Political determination and a sense of pragmatism are necessary to reverse this debilitating situation.

Adjustment to change is inevitably a difficult and long process and we should not overlook what has already been achieved during the life of the United Nations. Indeed many of the developments which we now take for granted or complain about as inadequate would have seemed quite out of reach only a few years ago. What we are trying to create in the United Nations is a world order fundamentally different from any that existed before. This is no small task, and we must remind ourselves from time to time of how much has already been achieved, as well as of the formidable obstacles that remain.

In the relationships of the most powerful nations, for example much has been done to temper the adverse climate which coloured so strongly the post-war years. In spite of ideological, political and other differences accommodations have been reached which certainly contribute to making the world a safer and more productive place. We need only think, for example, of the positive development in the relations of China and the United States. This year, we should remember the conclusion, after most complex negotiations between the United States and the USSR of the SALT II agreement which offers hope of limiting the growth of strategic nuclear weapons, an indispensable prerequisite to progress on the general problem of disarmament.

The process of accommodation is vital to progress on the various acute regional problems which preoccupy the United Nations. International instruments are essential and useful only if their possibilities are utilized for achieving the accommodations—sometimes quite small in themselves—which could make enormous contributions to world stability.

I have been increasingly aware of the need to encour-

age by all means the kind of adjustments which could remove, or at least alleviate, the various regional tensions which are still, in my view, the most dangerous threats to world peace. It is mainly for this reason that I have travelled extensively in order to get a first-hand view of such problems and to discuss them directly with the Governments concerned. Very often of course, little can be achieved in the existing political circumstances but, if a channel of communications or good offices can be of help, I feel strongly that the Secretary-General should be available. In any case there is no substitute for getting to know the problems on the spot and at first hand.

It was with this end in view that I undertook earlier this year, an extensive tour of East Asian countries. During this trip I had especially the Indo-Chinese and Korean situations in mind and I very much hope that our talks in the various capitals may provide a basis on which the Governments and parties concerned may feel more ready to reconsider their positions and to use the possibilities the United Nations offers to assist them in solving their problems.

The United Nations has been especially preoccupied this year with developments in Indo-China—developments which not only raise fundamental questions of Charter principles but also have been accompanied by vast and tragic humanitarian problems. Naturally these matters were predominant in the discussions I had during my visit to the region. The concern of the international community has throughout this year, been focused both on the political and military developments in Indo-China and on their humanitarian consequences. It has seemed to me that, at the level of human tragedy now prevailing in that part of the world, humanitarian concerns must be attended to without delay.

This view is in no sense intended to downgrade the importance of a political settlement in the area. The situation which has followed the long and cruel war in Indo-China not only threatens the peace and stability of South-East Asia; it could very well also become a threat to world peace. It is of the utmost importance that the process of adjustment start at once and be carried on in a constructive and forward-looking spirit by all parties. As I have already informed them, I am ready to provide any assistance which the Governments concerned may think useful or desirable.

In this as in other situations that have recently arisen it is imperative that all efforts be directed towards finding a settlement in conformity with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular respect for the territorial integrity and political independence of all States, non-interference in internal affairs and the non-use of force.

To be continued.