

U.N. WATCH

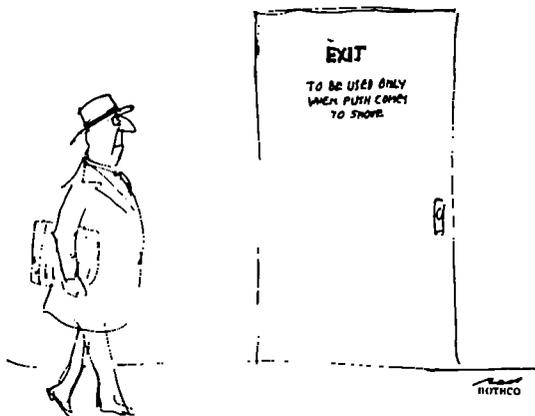
An Army for the World?

The United Nations is augmenting its troops at the border between Israel and Lebanon. Not that a few thousand soldiers can stop air raids into Lebanon or the firing of shells into Israel, but the increase in the size of the force is a sign of international concern. In Cyprus, under that same pale blue flag, another U.N. force keeps Greek and Turkish Cypriots at bay.

The U.N. Charter opens with the resolute words, "We the people of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war..." but nonetheless authorizes military action by the organization. Chapter VII of the Charter—"Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression"—recommends economic and diplomatic sanctions to deal with such threats. Should these fail, "action by air, sea or land forces" is the further step. Article 45 offers the key to such an undertaking: "In order to enable the United Nations to take urgent military measures, members shall hold immediately available national air-force contingents for combined enforcement action...." A military staff committee was authorized to carry out such action, consisting of the chiefs of staff of the permanent members of the Security Council—China, France, the USSR, United Kingdom, and United States—each with veto power in the Council.

The first U.N. peacekeeping unit was sent to Egypt in 1956 after Israeli troops had swept across the Sinai to the Suez Canal and after France and Britain, in support, had landed soldiers in Egypt to keep the Canal open. Russia protested at the U.N., offering to send its own volunteers to help the Egyptians. In the international uproar that followed, the troops were withdrawn. The General Assembly then asked Secretary-General Hammarskjöld to create a small force of six thousand soldiers drawn from ten nations to act as a buffer between Israel and Egypt. With an ordinary farm plow a demarcation line was drawn between the two countries. The troops in their national uniforms adorned with makeshift U.N. insignia carried out their patrols along this shallow trench.

In 1960 the U.N. stepped into the Congo. Independence from Belgium had brought tribal warfare and a disruptive, autonomous army led by Belgian officers.



A U.N. emergency force drawn from eighteen nations, mostly African, helped to restore order. There were brief but intense skirmishes that led to the first casualties in the ranks of a U.N. force.

Nothing prepared the United Nations for the Korean War, and Americans are wont to forget it was the Security Council that first ordered action against the North Korean invasion. General MacArthur led a multinational force, Americans predominating.

Will the U.N. ever field an army of its own? Not likely. An early indication was in the reaction of member nations when the General Assembly levied assessments to pay for the peacekeeping units in Egypt and the Congo. The Soviet Union and most Arab countries refused to pay for the force in Egypt. France, Belgium, and South Africa joined them in refusing to pay for the Congo troops. The General Assembly then asked the International Court of Justice (the World Court) for an opinion. The Court held that all U.N. members are required to pay such special assessments. No payments were made. The U.N. Charter holds that a nation two years in arrears will lose its vote in the General Assembly, but the provision has never been invoked.

Who Wants the U.N.?

Some while back it was America's isolationists who were saying "U.N. out of the U.S. and U.S. out of the U.N." Today we hear others iterate the first part of that phrase. These are the U.N. delegates who do not consider New York City a congenial site for a "world parliament," finding its pressure groups and ethnic diversity too distracting and its residents too indifferent. Former Secretary-General Waldheim seemed to consider Vienna a more suitable spot. What has been forgotten is how the United Nations came to New York in the first place.

The commission charged with finding the U.N. a home in the 1940s had little to choose from. Entire cities in Europe lay in rubble; Africa was still largely colonial; poverty-stricken Asia was not even considered. Only the United States had the wealth to support a world organization with dreams of expansion. The question then became, where in America?

The U.N. Charter was signed in San Francisco—a beautiful city, everyone recognized, but, as one commission member put it, really a company town. When the New York area was selected, another commission member remarked of the choice, "Of course we want to be near the fleshpots," by which he meant museums, concerts, the ballet. A group of site-searchers flew over the tri-state area and chose Fairfield County in Connecticut. Immediately the citizens of Greenwich and New Canaan rose up in protest. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in the meantime, was quietly buying up land and old slaughterhouses along the East River. The United Nations had been holding its meetings in makeshift quarters at Lake Success on Long Island and at Hunter College. When the East River site was proposed, it was an offer the commission couldn't refuse. Leave Sutton Place and the East Side townhouses, Bergdorf's and Tripler's, Lutèce and La Caravelle? Never!

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