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# The Role of the Security Council in World Affairs

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## THE JOHN A. SIBLEY LECTURE

### THE ROLE OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL IN WORLD AFFAIRS

*His Excellency Sir Crispin Tickell GCMG KCVO\**

I am honoured to be your Sibley lecturer. I chose the theme of the role of the Security Council in world affairs without knowing who would be in the audience. I now feel somewhat intimidated by the presence of Louis Sohn who was one of the drafters of the United Nations Charter over 40 years ago. I deeply respect his wisdom and experience. Beside him I am a mere practitioner. I walk delicately before him.

The Security Council is a unique institution whose purpose is simply put: the maintenance of international peace and security. Naturally, its past and future have to be seen within the framework of the United Nations as a whole. Both the United Nations and the Security Council within it are living bodies, and like all such respond to new circumstances and advance in constant evolution.

The United Nations was set up at the end of the Second World War. Its founders were anxious to avoid not only another such catastrophe but also the mistakes which had led to the failure of the League of Nations. The drafters of the Charter reflected the conditions of the immediate post war world. They worked on assumptions, some of which proved right and others wrong. For example, they assumed the continuation of the wartime alliance. They assumed that five Permanent Members of the Security Council could act as world

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policemen with real powers. They assumed that the one-man-one-vote system in the General Assembly was fundamental to political success. They assumed that the so-called enemy states - Germany, Japan, and Italy - must be excluded from the United Nations.

It soon became clear that things would not work out in the way that everyone had hoped. Wartime cooperation among the allies broke down into the Cold War. Far from being a forum in which they could cooperate in coping with post war problems, the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, became a battleground between East and West in which the West faced seemingly endless vetoes from the Soviet Union. By 1968 when the Soviet Union vetoed a resolution which would have condemned its invasion of Czechoslovakia, they had used the veto no fewer than 100 times. This East/West rivalry polarized and paralyzed international activity, most acutely before the death of Stalin. The sole, aberrant, exception was over the Korean War when the Soviet Union made the fatal mistake of absenting itself from the Security Council, thus allowing the West to put together an intervention force to fight on South Korea's behalf. This is the only example of the Security Council acting with military force in a way envisaged in the Charter.

In the second period in the history of the United Nations, there was a swing from East/West polarity to North/South polarity. Of course there was no fixed time at which one period ended and the other began. But during the 1950s and 1960s the old colonial empires ended, with the result that the membership of the United Nations greatly increased (from 51 in 1946 to 159 today).

This had two consequences. First, the newly independent countries wanted a different distribution of global power and resources. They had their own distinct priorities. They concentrated on economic issues and worked out demands for a new world economic order. This naive and fanciful notion is not totally dead even now. So long as material and human resources are unevenly divided, so will be the distribution of the world's goods. Expectations of what the United Nations could achieve then - as now - exceeded reality.

Secondly, with the increase in members, the character of the subsidiary bodies of the United Nations, including the Security Council, changed. The Security Council was expanded from 11 to 15 members in 1963. This meant that, together with the five vetoes of the Permanent Members, in practice a sixth veto was added: that of the non-aligned movement which usually holds seven seats on the Council, sufficient to block any resolution (which requires nine affirmative votes). The focus of the business of the Council began to shift from

East/West issues to issues of interest to the non-aligned: South Africa, Namibia, the Middle East, and Cyprus. The use of the veto also began to shift. We and the Americans cast more vetoes than before, and the Russians fewer. Incidentally, the Chinese have cast only two vetoes since the People's Republic took the Chinese seat in 1971. One of my distinguished predecessors once said that casting a veto was like adultery: the first time it gave a wicked thrill; but all too soon it became habitual.

The third phase of the United Nations began in the 1980s and has continued until now. It has been a time of growing realism with good and bad aspects. Among the good aspects there has been better understanding, particularly by the poorer countries, that some of the theories of the 1960s and 1970s did not fit. We are all witnesses of the crumbling edifice of Marxism. I am also skeptical about the neo-capitalist ideas around at the time. Not everyone can take off into industrial prosperity, however much he would like to do so. Economic and political development - change for the better - came to be seen as elusive and related to the fundamental realities of the resources of each country and region. It became clear that neither rhetoric, nor paper resolutions, nor the overwhelming majorities that the poorer countries could command in the General Assembly, would in themselves change anything. Indeed, they tended to discredit the Assembly. People began to see the advantages of cooperation over confrontation. There was also growing realization of the precarious character of the world's environment with increasing pollution of land, sea, and air.

There were bad aspects too. The atmosphere was soured by the polemics of earlier years. Cynicism about multilateral institutions and about the United Nations in particular grew, especially among the industrial countries. A number of countries, including the United States, were tempted by go-it-alone policies. The General Assembly and the Security Council looked in many ways irrelevant. Council resolutions had little if any practical effect, while many UN agencies and programmes seemed a waste of money. Important ventures such as the Law of the Sea conference were flawed. Meanwhile, the multilateral institutions which seemed to work best were those which were regional in character and scope (like the European Community), or based on voluntary subscriptions (like the United Nations Development Program and the other voluntary funds), or recognized the realities through use of weighted voting (like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank).

The years 1987 and 1988 saw a change of sentiment and direction. Three factors stand out. There has been wider acceptance of the need

for global solutions to global problems. The Brundtland Commission report on the environment and development, and the Montreal Protocol on the ozone layer are outstanding examples of cooperation on the environment. The response of the United Nations to the AIDS pandemic, principally through the efforts of the World Health Organisation, was another example of the ability of the United Nations to tackle problems which transcend national frontiers. In the last General Assembly I spoke on the problems of likely global warming. Little had I ever imagined that my work on the subject at Harvard and since could have led to this result.

The second factor was a greater readiness to abandon confrontation for cooperation. Much of the rhetoric of the 1970s can now be seen for what it was, and a more cooperative approach to such issues as debt is seen to favour results where confrontation simply leads to deadlock.

Finally, and more specific to the United Nations, there is an apparent readiness by one of the superpowers - the Soviet Union - to make more use of the United Nations in its foreign policy, and to see it as a window on the world. Until a few years ago it would have been inconceivable for a Soviet leader to put forward the ideas that Mikhail Gorbachev did in an article in *Pravda* in 1987 and developed with such conviction in his address to the General Assembly last month; for the Soviet Union to pay its arrears both to the main budget and eventually to the peacekeeping account, and for the Russians to work together with the other Permanent Members of the Security Council on Iran/Iraq and an increasing range of the issues. The Soviet Union has also made use of the United Nations in its effort to withdraw from Afghanistan, an effort which led to the signature of the Geneva Agreements. The Soviet Union continues to put forward ideas, some new, some old, some bad, for the future work and role of the United Nations. This new Soviet attitude has greatly affected all UN activities, and has changed the psychological background against which the United Nations operates.

Unfortunately, this resurgence of the United Nations has coincided with an internal crisis at the organisation in which reform and money are linked. The process of reform was launched at the General Assembly in 1986, and progress has been made, notably at the end of last year. But there is a long way to go in tackling the endemic problems of wasted resources, overlap, personal empire building, lack of responsiveness, and poor coordination. There is, quite simply, too much bureaucracy and too little management. One of the main factors impeding the reform process has been the failure of several countries,

principally but by no means exclusively the United States, to pay their subscriptions promptly and in full in accordance with their obligations. It is ironic that the United States receives far more from the United Nations (by virtue of its presence in New York) than the US Administration pays - when it pays - in the form of its subscription. At the end of 1988 the United Nations was owed US \$395 million on its regular budget, and 73 countries were in arrears.

The character and work of the present Security Council are a far cry from what the drafters of the Charter intended. The original idea was that the Five Permanent Members would be willing to act together to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the military provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter (in particular Articles 42-47) supported by a Military Staff Committee of the Chiefs of Staff of the Five whose job was supposed to be "the strategic direction of any armed forces placed at the disposal of the Security Council". The Council was able to use these coercive powers only in the special circumstances of the Korean War. Since then, the Council has had to rely on persuasion and the gentler measures set out in Article 41: "complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations".

Parallel to this development has been another which has led the Security Council in a direction undreamed of by the founders of the Charter, namely peacekeeping. The present system, which has grown up under the responsibility of the Secretary-General, is untidy. Until recently, even the concept was opposed by the Soviet Union. But it works, and the Russians have come to accept it (and even to promise payment of arrears). I will discuss it in more detail later. Peacekeeping has seen the United Nations at its best and secured it a Nobel prize. It has also, in the Congo crisis of the early 1960s, brought the United Nations almost to its knees. But there is no doubt that the blue berets of the United Nations have become a part of the landscape of international relations and a key factor in coping with some of the more intractable regional conflicts.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Security Council? What has it achieved? What can it achieve in the future? Perhaps the main strength of the Council is that there is no damned democracy about it. The veto power of the Five Permanent Members has always been an essential element. In saying something about the veto, I must declare an interest. Britain has a veto and uses it when necessary. The veto has created frustration, particularly among those who do not possess it, and it has also pushed a number of disputes out of

the UN framework (in particular almost anything that has an East/West flavour).

But the veto is vital. First, the veto, paradoxically, does more than anything else to ensure that the United Nations bears some resemblance to the real world and is treated seriously as an organisation. Imagine what would happen if there were no veto. Resolutions of mounting fatuity would be passed, instructing the Permanent Members to do things which they had no intention of doing. Through ignoring these resolutions, the leading countries of the world would soon ignore the Security Council, thereby devaluing not only the Security Council but the whole UN system.

Second, the veto ensures - Korea is again an exception - that genuine international consensus is required before action is taken which involves the international community as a whole.

Third, the permanent membership of those who exercise the veto brings to the Council a degree of continuity which it would not otherwise have. I add rather gently that those who sometimes criticize the veto (many of whom come from the non-aligned movement which, as I have suggested, exercises a sixth veto) are frequently glad enough to shelter behind the vetoes of others.

What has the Council achieved? Among its more impressive achievements in the past were the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Iran in 1946; the sending of a peacekeeping force to Suez ten years later which allowed the British and French troops to withdraw; and the creation of peacekeeping forces which helped establish the ceasefire during the Yom Kippur war of October 1973. The UN-supervised ceasefire was an essential precursor to the subsequent peace negotiations which led to the Camp David Agreement.

As the character of the United Nations has changed, so has the role of the Security Council. As well as taking specific actions, the Council has passed resolutions designed to establish an agreed international framework for dealing with particular problems. The most conspicuous examples are SCR 242 on the Middle East, SCR 435 on Namibia, and SCR 598 on the Iran/Iraq war. Implementation of the first is not yet on the horizon but may be closer over it than some people think. The second is already upon us, and if there are no upsets, Namibia should achieve its independence on 1 April. We hope soon to proceed from a ceasefire in the Iran/Iraq war to a permanent settlement.

Another less famous resolution is worth remembering. In November 1983, the Turkish Cypriot community in Cyprus purported to declare

an independent state. The British Government, which has special responsibilities as one of the guarantors of the Cyprus constitution, instructed my predecessor to request an immediate meeting of the Security Council and subsequently to table a draft resolution which, with a few amendments, was passed overwhelmingly as SCR 541. Our experience of this resolution helps to show how best to use the apparatus of the Security Council, what the Council can achieve and what it cannot.

SCR 541 underlined the importance of timely action. As a neutral and relatively disinterested party, we took the initiative in tabling a firm but moderate resolution. Anything tabled by the parties more immediately involved would probably have been unacceptable, not to say inflammatory, to the others. Our resolution was aimed at what we believed the Council could achieve. It was sharply focussed on the circumstances created by the unilateral declaration of independence. It sought neither to solve the Cyprus problem at a stroke, nor to redress the wrongs - real and imagined - suffered by the two communities at the hand of the other.

What did it achieve? It established a definitive international position on the status of the Turkish Cypriot action. It called on all states not to recognize the so-called independent state; and no state (with the special exception of Turkey) has yet done so five years on. It helped take the heat out of a potentially explosive situation and reassure the Greek Cypriots that the international community was taking action to deal with the problem. But we must also recognize that the resolution, which called for the withdrawal of the declaration of independence, failed to achieve that aim. Nor is a solution to the Cyprus problem much nearer. In this we can see in microcosm the limitations of the Security Council. It can set frameworks; it can express the will of the international community; it can guide the actions of states not immediately involved in a particular dispute; it can help the parties to a dispute to resolve it; but it cannot solve it for them.

I have now been British Representative on the Security Council for almost two years. I came without previous experience. Many had warned me to expect the worst in sterile debate, frustrating games with words, and ambiguous results. It has not been like that at all. Of course there have been bruising moments: for example over the wisdom of imposing mandatory sanctions against South Africa. But generally the spirit has been one of understanding and cooperation between the fifteen members of what is one of the most exclusive clubs in the world.



There is another club within the club. The Five Permanent Members have been working together in unprecedented fashion throughout. As the coordinator of the group, I can testify that it is a workmanlike body of growing weight and experience. The war between Iran and Iraq was our first test case. Namibia has been the second. More are to come. You may be interested to know about the way we work. The Five Permanent Representatives meet privately, usually in my apartment in New York, and work in an atmosphere of tea, muffins, and sympathy. Our respective Counsellors also meet at working level, and are responsible for much of the initial drafting. Through the coordinator, or acting together, we maintain constant contact with the Secretary-General, and on occasion we have coordinator action elsewhere in the world. Throughout we work on the basis of an identification of common interest. But personal understanding and friendship counts for a lot - as it always does - in the conduct of international affairs.

What will the Security Council achieve in the future? Any analysis must be, at best, a guess. Obviously it will reflect the main trends in international relations: all three - the global approach to global problems, the search for cooperation and consensus, and the new role of the Soviet Union - will, I believe, continue to hold good. I am less sure of other points. The need for multilateral cooperation will grow. But the ability of some countries to recognize the obvious will remain uncertain. The interests of all will be more easily and effectively advanced by the precision tool of persuasion rather than by the blunt instrument of coercion. But the temptation to use the blunter instrument will not always be resisted either by powerful countries or by relatively weak ones. There is, therefore, a risk that the Security Council will remain an under-used asset. Its members and the rest of the international community must recognize both its potential and its limitations, the value of proceeding by consensus, and - perhaps most difficult - the difference between problems which are susceptible to successful treatment by the Council and those which are not.

Against this background, it is hard to sketch out a blueprint for its future development. But I suggest four ways in which it might more effectively carry out its business.

First, on the role of the Permanent Members, we believe in a wide agenda. We have already moved from the Persian Gulf to Southern Africa. Cambodia may come next. Sooner or later I hope we shall arrive at the Middle East. Two things are necessary for success. First,

as I have said, is an identification of common interest and political will to construct joint policies based on it. Second is a good relationship between the Permanent and non-Permanent Members: for while the Five can stop anything, they do not, by themselves, carry a majority in the Security Council. You will note an important point: the *negative* power of the Five has always been vital; but now we are seeing the development of the *positive* power of the Five, and that may turn out to be more important still.

Next, I believe that the Council should pay more attention to preventive diplomacy. The Council tends to be reactive, and it may always be. But if it is to fulfil any of the roles of an international fire brigade, it should not just fight fires when they break out, but also exercise some fire precautions. This would mean discovering potential trouble spots in advance, and identifying appropriate preventive action. The pressure of current business and the lack of resources in regional trouble spots make a systematic approach to this idea difficult. But the Secretary-General could play an important role, perhaps through more vigorous use of Article 99 of the Charter, which empowers him to "bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security".

There is anyway a greater role for the Secretary-General. As the leading international civil servant, with the confidence of big powers and small, his potentialities are enormous. The negotiations on Iran/Iraq have brought out the importance of his relationship with the Security Council, especially its Permanent Members. In all respects the two have complementary roles. The Secretary-General conducts negotiations, and the Security Council gives general direction. Both can act independently of the other. Use of the Secretary-General's good offices independently of the Council can help maintain international peace and security. Similarly, the Security Council is free to pass resolutions which do not closely involve the Secretary-General. But the two work best together, and there is scope for closer liaison between them.

Finally, I turn again to peacekeeping. I have described how peacekeeping came into being. Nineteen-Eighty-Eight was a spectacular year. Apart from the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, 1988 saw the creation of three new UN missions to preserve or maintain the peace: A UN monitoring force was established in Afghanistan following the Soviet Union's decision to withdraw its forces; UN observers were put in place following the agreement to a ceasefire in the Persian Gulf; and a UN verification mission was established for Namibia

following the agreements between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa. In prospect for 1989 is a massive operation by the United Nations to supervise the transition to independence in Namibia, possibly a UN presence in the Western Sahara following the Secretary-General's launch of a peace initiative last August, and possibly a UN monitoring group in Central America. Let us not forget the five other peace-keeping forces which have been in position for many years: in Cyprus, in Lebanon, along the Golan Heights in Syria, in Jerusalem, and - sometimes forgotten - the 37-strong force in Kashmir. Almost 500,000 military staff from 58 countries have at one time worn the UN blue helmets. Seven hundred and thirty-three have lost their lives in UN service. At present, some 10,000 troops and observers from 35 countries operate under the UN flag.

It is difficult to quantify the costs of peacekeeping, but they are in the order of US\$350 million per year. We believe it essential to put such operations on a better financial and organizational footing. At present, the United States is among those withholding their contributions to the normal peacekeeping budget. The different budget for the UN force in Cyprus, which is on a voluntary basis, is several years in arrears. The burden falls heaviest on the troop contributors, whose patience may not be inexhaustible, as Sweden's recent decision to withdraw from the forces in Cyprus has shown.

The success of peacekeeping operations sometimes produces loose thinking about the concept itself. We should, I think, distinguish carefully between peace-making, peace-keeping, and peace-enforcing. Within the United Nations peace-making is primarily the function of the Secretary-General, naturally supported by the Security Council and the international community generally. Peace-keeping we have already discussed. It cannot be practiced in its present form without the agreement of the parties between whom the peace is being kept. An obvious hazard is that by interposing a peace-keeping force, an intolerable status quo can thereby be preserved. There are dangers of this happening in Cyprus. Paradoxically, peace-keeping forces can therefore become one of the obstacles in reaching a solution.

Peace-enforcing is quite different. It implies the coercion of the parties to keep the peace even against their will. The only time the United Nations has done this was in the case of Korea, although it came close to doing so in the Congo. UN experience there, including the death of the Secretary-General, had the political effect of removing peace-enforcing from the agenda. But it may not be off it forever. Not long ago, the Russians showed interest in creating a peace-enforcing naval force in the Persian Gulf, and they have shown

interest in reviving the Military Staff Committee of the Security Council. The time may not have come to look into ideas of this kind; but in the future it is not inconceivable that situations might arise in which the international community through the Security Council might wish to act against some aberrant government possessed perhaps of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, planning to endanger world peace. There are some aberrant figures around already, from Pol Pot to Quaddafi, and no one has forgotten Hitler.

I conclude that the future of the Security Council as the instrument for ensuring international peace and security is more promising and interesting now than perhaps ever before in the history of the United Nations. The value of diplomacy is self-evident. It is immeasurably cheaper than the use of force. Some governments have still to reckon for this in their internal accounting procedures. Perhaps, as one eminent Russian once said to me, it would be best to send bills for peace-keeping to Ministries of Defence rather than to Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

The Security Council is a vital and certainly the most conspicuous part of the machinery of the United Nations. The world has come to seem a little place, and conflicts in one area can rapidly become conflicts in another. We need the best controlling mechanism that can be invented. The Security Council, like the world it is meant to protect, is the only one that we have got.

