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Fifteen Men on a Powder Keg: A History of the U.N. Security Council

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BOOK REVIEWS

FIFTEEN MEN ON A POWDER KEG: A HISTORY OF THE U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL

Andrew Boyd. New York: Stein and Day, 1971.
pp. xvi, 383. Index. \$8.95.

"The Security Council is no Everest; but it is there."¹ With these words the author, who is no stranger to the operations of the United Nations, closes his study. Such a pronouncement is particularly telling at a period in the Council's history in which it was repeatedly deadlocked by a series of Soviet vetoes cast against draft resolutions designed to halt the Indian-Pakistani war. Once again the Council revealed its chronic inability to resolve the underlying issues which caused the conflict. Even more important, from the present standpoint, was its failure to achieve agreement on a resolution calling for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of armed personnel. Although the General Assembly considered the issue under the 1950 "Uniting for Peace" Resolution and overwhelmingly adopted a proposal which called for the immediate cessation of hostilities and for the withdrawal of armed forces,² India ignored the Assembly's recommendation and war continued until the new state of Bangladesh was formed.

Surely such lessons will not be lost on the members of the international community. Israel as a small state, for example, having had considerable experience with the United Nations including its peace-keeping forces is not likely to overlook the manner in which the incident was handled. The United States has belatedly come to realize the overall shift in the balance of power between Suez and the Bay of Bengal. To redress this disadvantage Washington has decided to establish a naval presence in the Indian Ocean; it concluded an executive agreement with Bahrain for a permanent naval station on that island in the Persian Gulf; built a communications station on the British island of Diego Garcia in the middle of the Indian Ocean; agreed to resume the shipment

¹ A. BOYD, FIFTEEN MEN ON A POWDER KEG: A HISTORY OF THE U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL, at 369 (1971) [hereinafter cited as BOYD].

² G.A. Res. 2793, 26 U.N. GAOR Supp. at, U.N. Doc. A/Res/2793 (1971)..

of Phantom jets to Israel; and reportedly offered to help defray the expenses of British military bases on Malta.

Such are the political facts of life, and action or inaction on the part of the Security Council is merely a manifestation of political reality. Inevitably the question must be posed whether a resolution approved over the objections of one of the super-powers in a veto-free Council would be more conducive to the cause of peace than one which fails of adoption because of the negative vote of such a member. It is in this light that the author examines the history of the Council during its first quarter-century.

While not analyzing the entire range of the Council's activities, the book's ten chapters deal with the more vivid episodes and often describe them in a colorful and humorous fashion. Indeed, at times some of the terminology seems to be misplaced. For example, Ambassador Hans Tabor of Denmark, the "Councilman"—the term employed by Mr. Boyd to describe a permanent representative—who presided over the Security Council during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, is called "a new boy" in the Council.³ And some of the similes are unfortunate. Thus Secretary-General Thant's attempts to raise funds for UNFICYP are likened to those of a "Buddhist monk with a begging bowl".⁴ But such comments are of minor import and do not detract from the value of the book.

More serious are certain of the factual and legal lapses which are found within its pages. The claim, for instance, that the Soviet Union "has not contested the legality"⁵ of proposals of the Council which were passed with the participation of the Republic of China is not borne out by the facts. As early as 1950, the then Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Andrei A. Gromyko, stated that the resolutions of June 27 and July 7, 1950 which recommended assistance to Korea and established the Unified Command, were not properly adopted and had "no legal force" because they received six votes, the seventh being that of the "Kuomintang representative Mr. Tingfu F. Tsiang who has not legal right to represent China".⁶ The statement that the United States Senate "ratifies" treaties is an only too common discrepancy, as

³ BOYD, *supra* note 1, at 209.

⁴ *Id.* at 289.

⁵ *Id.* at 12.

⁶ See 5 U.N. SCOR, Supp. June-Aug. 1950, at 29-30, U.N. Doc. S/1517 (1950); 5 U.N. SCOR, Supp. June-Aug. 1950, at 77-8, U.N. Doc. S/1596/Rev. 1 (1950). See also 5 U.N. SCOR, Supp. June-Aug. 1950, at 69, U.N. Doc. S/1579 (1950) and the statement of Ambassador Y. Malik in 5 U.N. SCOR, 480th meeting 15-6, 20 (1950).

is the interchange of "naval blockade" with "naval quarantine" in referring to the action during the Cuban missile crisis.

Certain other observations are unclear. Among these is the initial failure to distinguish between provisions for financing ONUC and UNFICYP, although in fairness it should be noted that the manner in which the Cyprus operation is financed is ultimately clarified. Still other views are quite controversial. In the strong defense of the Secretary-General's withdrawal of UNEF in 1967, the position is taken that the invitation of the host state to station peace-keeping forces within its territory necessitates continuous consent. It is argued that if attempts are made "to keep the force there against the hosts' will",⁷ it is highly unlikely that a state will ever again permit such units in its territory. Politically speaking, however, is it realistic to expect the formation and acceptance of a future peace-keeping force such as UNEF in an area as volatile as the Middle-East, if it is constantly at the mercy of its hosts? Juridically is it not far sounder to suggest that a state by accepting the forces has legally agreed to curtail its sovereignty and limit its freedom of action with regard to them? Thus the units do not perform their mission at the sufferance of the host country. And under the doctrine of estoppel, consent once given cannot be withdrawn arbitrarily—*allegans contraria non audiendus est*.

In spite of these shortcomings this is a useful study. Even though there are certain instances of sarcasm, it is basically a volume which is in favor of the world organization at a time in which strong criticism has been directed at the United Nations. It is basically an attempt to show that with all its shortcomings the Security Council has functioned quite well. Whether discussing the Middle-East, the Congo, Cyprus, Rhodesia, the *Pueblo*, Czechoslovakia, or Northern Ireland the author repeatedly indicates that, given the circumstances, the Council did its best in each of these instances.

Above all the reader is constantly reminded, explicitly and implicitly, that the Council merely mirrors the international picture and that its movements result from this reflection, not from the organ *qua* organ. This is even more vividly detailed in the changed positions which members have adopted with the passage of time and in this regard the admission of new states and the enlargement of the Council are cases in point. To be sure, the volume is not on par with those

⁷ Boyd, *supra* note 1, at 197.

of Bailey, Rosenne, or Sharp on the different bodies of the United Nations. Still, it is certainly worthy of attention on the part of those who are interested in the operations of the world organization.

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