United Nations Day

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

We are now beginning the 13th year of the United Nations. In human society, as you know, the 13th year of life is widely regarded as a kind of time of transition. It is the year when the things of childhood are usually put aside and a human being enters upon a new era of responsibility and purpose. In short, the 13th year is a decisive year.

What is true of humans may be no less true of the United Nations. In retrospect, 1958 may well appear to have been the decisive year in the history of the organization. It may be the moment which, 20 or 50 years hence, will be seen as the time when the pattern for the evolution of an enduring international peace and the pattern for an enduring United Nations were both established. I link the two together -- that is, peace and the United Nations -- because in practice I believe they are inseparable. The world may have war despite the United Nations; I have no illusions about that point. By the same token, however, I am persuaded that the world will not have peace without the continued existence of the United Nations.

In matters of war and peace, I believe the United Nations is like a fever-chart. It measures, in its own vitality as an organization, the vitality of the peace of mankind. It measures, too, the ascending temperatures of nations whenever the world edges towards war.

As one of President Eisenhower’s delegates to the current General Assembly of the United Nations, I have had an opportunity to look closely at the fever-chart. For the past few weeks, I have been at the United Nations as often as possible. I have talked with the delegates of other nations; I have debated matters with them. Within the United States Delegation itself, under the direction of Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, we have considered at great length the issues and problems which confront the nation and the world.

These experiences have led me to the conclusion which I expressed to you at the outset of my remarks; in short, that the 13th year of the United Nations may indeed be decisive both for the organization and for the peace from which it is inseparable. That such is the case is indicated by the fact that the foreign ministers of more than 50 nations -- an unprecedented number -- are in attendance at this session of the General Assembly.

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I believe this year takes on a particular significance because the threats of conflict which have long existed in various regions are now beginning to press forcibly upon the world and to demand solutions. We have already seen evidence that such is the case in the near-breakdown of peace in the Middle East a few months ago. We are witnessing a similar situation now in the Formosan area. Before too long we may see other dangerous eruptions elsewhere in the Far East and, perhaps, even in Germany and Central Europe. We delude ourselves if we believe that stability exists in any of these areas. The truth is that we have scarcely begun to negotiate solutions to the basic problems which stand in the way of durable peace. For too long, this nation and others have put off the job. We have been too ready to assume that if the guns do not fire today they will not fire tomorrow. Now we have had the warning signs, in the Middle East and the Far East.

This year may well be the year, then, in which the die is cast, finally and decisively, for peace or war, the year in which we determine to do the exacting job of peacemaking or fall into a slumbering and smug inertia oblivious to the rising pressures for war. In a similar fashion, it may well be a year of decisive transition for the United Nations. I say that because, if the world is prepared to face the challenge of building a durable peace, then the United Nations may move into a new era of responsibility and purpose in the process of building and maintaining that peace.

The job of peacemaking, of course, is not one for the United Nations alone or even predominantly. Peacemaking requires the quiet methods of traditional diplomacy such as are now being employed in the Administration's negotiations with Communist China in Warsaw. It may also call for many special conferences outside the United Nations and for other techniques. When that has been said, however, the fact still remains that there is an essential role for the United Nations which can be played by no nation alone. We have seen evidence of what the United Nations can do for peace in the work of the United Nations Emergency Force in the Middle East and in the brilliant and successful efforts of conciliation which have been put forth by the Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjold, on many occasions. In these and in other ways, there are many tasks for peace which the United Nations can and must discharge.

Because the United Nations is essential to peace, it is essential that the organization be prepared to play its part as effectively as possible. I would be less than candid if I did not report to you that, in my opinion, the United Nations is not so prepared at present. Its procedures are cumbersome and time-consuming and there is sometimes a vast divergence in that organization between the readiness of Member States to vote actions and a willingness to accept the responsibilities which these actions entail.

There are reasons for this state of affairs. The organization has grown from an original membership of 51 nations to the present total of 81, and procedures do not seem to me to have evolved to meet this change in an adequate fashion. Further, the principal action body of the organization under the Charter, as you know, is the Security Council. That relatively small body of 11 Member Nations was designed as a kind of Executive Committee whose votes would be a more accurate reflection of the realities of world power and responsibility. As you know, too, it has not been able to act very effectively as an Executive, except in isolated instances. The net result has been that the General Assembly of 81 nations has tried to take on the functions of an Executive body. Unfortunately, it is neither organized nor empowered to discharge these functions very effectively.

I speak now not as the President's representative to the United Nations, but as a Senator from Montana, when I say that I believe ways must be found to streamline and simplify the procedures of all United Nations bodies. I believe, further, that ways must be found either to restore the integrity and the functions of the United Nations Security Council so that it can act with...
reasonable decisiveness on dangerous political questions or, alternatively, ways must be found to produce in the General Assembly a more accurate relationship between votes and the international responsibilities of the Member Nations. These changes are essential if the United Nations is to play its full part in building and maintaining worldwide stability.

This year, 1958, as I have said, may well be the decisive year for international peace and, hence, for the United Nations. I can think of no better way to celebrate the 13th anniversary of the United Nations, then, than to resolve to face frankly its avoidable limitations and to do what can be done to eliminate them. In so doing, we shall serve not only the welfare of the organization, but the interests of the United States and the needs of mankind. I repeat, in closing, the thought I expressed earlier: The world can have war in spite of the United Nations. The world will not have peace without it.

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