Misusing the Council
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pg. 44

Misusing the Council

Despite the exasperating, vituperative and protracted debates that are going on and on in the Security Council, the United Nations has managed to bring about the uneasy cease-fire that now exists between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

The Council has been handicapped by inadequate information from its own observers, by turmoil in the Arab world, by the swiftness of the Israeli advance. As a result it did not achieve any cease-fire until Israel had apparently reached her objectives in Egypt and Jordan. It has been even slower in gaining a cease-fire in Syria and it was understandable in the first stages that the Syrians, seeing their border territory occupied and fearing a takeover of Damascus, should have tried desperately to get the fighting stopped.

The Security Council, in this case as so often in the past, is still providing a sounding board where resentful and aggrieved nations can vent their bitterness and anger in words rather than with guns. This has been especially true of the Soviet Union, which has been trying to cover up its humiliation and its inability to help the Arabs by keeping the Council in a state of commotion, calling meetings of exhausted delegates at unconscionable hours.

However, now that the cease-fires have been arranged and United Nations observers are at their posts, nothing is to be gained by angry, false, personal attacks on the United States and Israel and their representatives. The meetings for the last three days and nights have been exercises in pure futility.

Having blown off steam and seen it evaporate into thin air, the Security Council should now try to start on something more constructive. The United Nations presence ought to be strengthened as quickly as possible so as to help avoid any renewal of hostilities. Afterward, a probably long and embittered series of debates on frontiers and political factors like the future of the Palestinian refugees must be expected.

The meetings will achieve their objectives only if there is more realism and less propaganda than in the current Security Council debates. Despite its setback, Moscow's influence in the Middle East is a fact of life in the contemporary world. This will doubtless be recognized by the United States, Britain and France, whose delegate, incidentally, was as inaudible as Banquo's ghost at the Council table during last week's crisis.

The Russians are threatening, with Czech support, to replace the MIG's, tanks and other arms that the Egyptians and Syrians used so badly or failed to use at all. It is hard to believe that Moscow would do anything so foolish. The arms race was what gave President Nasser his mistaken belief that he was strong enough to defeat Israel. The last thing the Middle East needs at present is fresh supplies of arms.

More than ever, the key to peace in the region lies in an understanding between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United Nations cannot solve any of the critical problems. It can merely help—if it is helped in turn by the great powers working in concert. The Security Council can be a valuable instrument for peace if it is used properly and not misused, as it has been in recent meetings.

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