The Crisis over Peace-keeping Costs

When the first UN peace-keeping force was established in 1956 the arrangements for financing it, like everything else connected with the force, had to be improvised. Because there was no provision in the Charter for peace-keeping, there was no guidance about the way such forces should be paid for (the Charter did not even define how the type of security force it did provide for, to undertake enforcement action under Articles 42-8, should be financed). Either special ad hoc arrangements would therefore have to be made, or it would be assumed that the costs represented normal running expenses of the organization, and would be undertaken by all member-states through their regular contributions. Certainly many governments hoped and assumed, when it was established, that UNEF’s costs would be borne by all members: this seemed to accord with the notion of collective action by the international community to maintain the peace.

In his report on the detailed arrangements for that force of 6 November, 1956 (p. 39 above) Hammarskjöld proposed that the basic costs of equipment and salaries for each contingent should be borne by the state contributing it, but that other costs should be financed by the United Nations, though outside the normal budget, that is in a separate account for the purpose. This proposal was implicitly endorsed by the General Assembly when it approved Hammarskjöld’s proposals for the force (Resolution 1001 of 7 November). It was approved in a more direct way in the Assembly’s resolution 1089 of 21 December that year: this provided that ‘the expenses of the UN Emergency Force, other than for such pay, equipment, supplies and services as may be furnished without charge by governments of member-states, shall be borne by the United Nations’.
That decision (or rather recommendation, since the Assembly had no power to make other than recommendations) was immediately challenged. It was contested above all by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, it will be recalled, refused to vote in favour of the resolution setting up UNEF on the grounds that under the Charter the Security Council had the primary responsibility for questions of peace and security and she claimed that this meant that the Security Council alone could set up any force which had the role of keeping the peace. This was for the Soviet Union a vitally important point of principle, since not only was it what the Charter seemed to lay down: it was only in the Council that she wielded a veto. To accept the right of the Assembly to establish a force would mean that she accepted that such a force could be created to operate against her will, and even directly against herself (for example the Assembly might have established a force to operate in Hungary at the very same moment it established one to operate in Sinai). On these grounds, the Soviet Union declared, she would refuse any responsibility for sharing in its costs, including the indirect costs. They were not in her view part of the normal expenses of the organization to which every member-state must contribute. The cost of the force, she maintained, should be undertaken by the 'aggressor states': that is, in the case of the Suez conflict, by Israel, Britain and France.

The Soviet Union was not alone in its reluctance to pay. A number of Arab countries objected to having to help pay for an operation made necessary by an attack on another Arab state. Other states, mainly Latin-American countries, objected for another reason. They were not concerned that the Assembly, rather than the Security Council, had authorized the force. It was rather that, under the Charter, the Security Council, and especially the permanent members, had been given the main responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security. This meant that the permanent members were also, in their view, the states which should bear the financial burden. It was wrong to place responsibility for finding the money on poor states which found it hard enough to pay even their normal contributions. They therefore demanded that arrangements should be made for allocating the cost of the force which placed the major burden on the permanent members.