

CHAPTER- IV

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE U.N. SECRETARIAT

The 14081¹ or so, staff members of the UN Secretariat, of whom about half are in New York itself, set up a U.N. Civil service. However, the purpose and nature of their work and the circumstances under which they perform their duties are in many respects so different, as they may not be compared with national bureaucracies

The General Assembly at the time of adoption of the regulations for the Secretariat declared that:

"The degree in which the objects of the Charter can be realized will be largely determined by the manner in which the Secretariat performs its task".²

The UN Secretariat is a functional wheel, which makes available kinds of assistance required by different organs and agencies of the United Nations in performing their functions. There is no appearance of the International institution's activity in which staff members of the UN Secretariat do not play a basic part. It is accepted in the first part of the report of the preparatory Commission. The report reveals that the framing and adoption of agreed international policies is the responsibility of representative members of the organization, however, the Secretariat is assigned the essential

1. See A/42/636, Agenda Item, 112(a), Oct. 1987, p.10.

2. John Maclaurin, The United Nations and Power Politics, (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1951), p.413.

tasks to make ready the ground for these decisions and of executing them in cooperations with the members.³

There are multifarious functions which the Secretariat has to perform. The first function might be called the role of the Parliamentary staff, so extended as to be effective for a parliament which work in many languages. It requires multifeatured servicing, such as interpretation, translation, minuting, drafting, reproduction of documents and provision of library facilities. In addition, the Secretariat make available the high - level legal and procedural assistance to the bodies required for drawing their authority from written documents. Numerically, largest proportion of the staff of the Secretariat is involved in doing the work of interpretation and translation and make themselves available round the clock, when the General Assembly in session.

All the planning and organizational arrangements for various meetings and conferences fall to the secretariat, as it makes available all the secretariat work, such as , the typing and reporting and taking of minutes and translating and sending the results to those, who need it. The secretariat works are required before any mission, meeting or conference it to be held, in gatheri:

3. See FC/20, Section 2-B, p.86.

information and documenting its members on the task ahead of them and on the local conditions they will encounter.

At every meeting of every UN organ, Secretariat member play their role. The visitors are impressed by their remarkable interpreting services. They equally make the journalists to be impressed by furnishing to the press, of brief, accurate summary records of all speeches almost as rapidly as the simultaneous interpreting. The chairman at every meeting of UN bodies manages one or more members of the Secretariat at his side in the full sessions to observe officials in the sub-committees. However, these unobtrusive staff members of the Secretariat infact involved directly or indirectly to a large extent in conducting the meetings. The reason being that they are available without any doubt with the rules of procedure at their fingers' ends, they remember the detailed course of events in former meetings and feed the official Chairman with the right documents, the right note and the right whispered word at the right moment. In other words, in all, more than a quarter of the Secretariat is engaged in servicing, in one way or another, the conference activities of the U.N.

bodies.⁴

The United Nations can not achieve its objectives unless the peoples of the world are fully informed of its aims and activities. To make it possible, the peoples of the world must be familiar with the activities of the UN family of organizations. The UN Secretariat makes the informations available to those, who are responsible for making policy decision in an international institution and most of the findings of experts or sepcialist groups such as the International Law Commission, the Economic Commission for Europe and this is also true of sepcialist bodies like Economic and Social Council, or the Trusteeship Council are based on information furnished by the Secretariat. This information is gracually making contribution in developing libraries for research purposes based on different set hypothesis in all the major fields of social, economic and political interest. The publications work of the Secretariat have gained a reputation for reliability and comprehensiveness. And praise of their efforts is one of the few exchanges in which all political groups regularly unite.

4. H.G. Nicholas, The United Nations; as a political Institution(Oxford University Press, London, 1971)p.162.

The Secretariat makes possible to keep the world informed almost on all matters and happenings which are taking place in the United Nations. The hundreds of correspondents of the press, radio and cinema have a smoothly working service at their arrangement. There is a very rich library and a quite remarkable documents file for delegates and research students. A regular stream of visitors, hundreds daily and a thousand or more during Assembly sessions, are taken on conducted tours, briefed on what is going on and are given seats in the meeting halls. The Secretariat is always available for a wide correspondence required by organization, schools, libraries and even individuals concerning any information. Lectures on the UN are provided, courses and seminars arranged. There is enormous output of informative booklets, charts, pictures, radio scripts, film scripts, and mimeographed material. The journalists and the radio correspondents, in fact inform the world what they observe about the activities of the United Nations with the approval of their employers.

There is very much less freedom is given to the UN information services and in addition have to be very much accurate in everything they send out, which soon becomes second nature to any civil servant. The

officials of the information services have to avoid anything which might be taken as unfair by any government and indeed avoid all those things that even hints at criticism of governments as such. This becomes great hindrance in the way of functioning for the Secretariat's information officers. In spite of major obstructions, they have developed remarkable facility in producing readable descriptions of the complex UN machinery and many of their accounts of actual events are to some extent made intelligible by judicious quotations from critical statements given by opposing government delegates. The largest single publication, the monumental Yearbook, which the Secretariat put-out, is a complex compilation of very concise information covering almost all the fields which are under the UN areas of activities. The detailed annual and special reports officially assigned to the principal UN organs are also examples of skilled writing of the Secretariat. However, the inability to estimate with and at times expose remains a severe handicap in more popular publications, when the reader must be understood to be on wholly unfamiliar ground and can not make political interpretations possible for himself .

Moreover, it is by the centralizing of information and by furnishing it every kind of publicity, that the UN,

makes it clear to be much of its deepest impression upon the mind of the world outside its own conference chambers. To maintain it, no single department of the Secretariat is exclusively concerned with, however, it is a predominant activity of such departments as Trusteeship and Economic and Social Affairs, department of Public Information, department of Conference Services, Communications and Record Services, and of the Office of Legal Affairs.⁵

The UN Secretariat is seemed to play very small percentage of executive functions in comparison to any national civil service, for the obvious reason, that the U.N. is not a government. There are two areas, in which it administer certain executive service, of those providing technical assistance and pre-investment aid through the Expanded Programme for Technical Assistance (EPTA) and the UN. Special Fund for Economic Development (also called-special Fund). The EPTA scheme is mainly for providing expert advice and assistance to the under-developed nation-states. And Special Fund set up in 1958, not to provide funds for capital investment, however as a pre-investment aid-to help in research projects, surveys, or the provision of training facilities. Both these programmes combined into single United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1966 of which Mr. Paul Hoffman became administrator. One of the major problems which came in the way of administration of this programme is that of coordination, the efficient harmonizing of the efforts of all the international agencies through which the Funds resources

5. Ibid pp.162-163.

are distributed. The only body which involved in the execution of the Fund's projects is the Inter Agency Consultative Board (IACB), composed of the Secretary General and the heads of the various agencies twenty in number.

The Jackson Report of 1969, criticised the UNDP for being devoid of enforceable powers and having only few of persuasion. There is also provision of a Resident Representative of the UNDP in each country on a project at the local level, however, he is too devoid of powers to compel or induce efficiency. The Jackson Report made it clear that it might be the most complicated organization in the world and made it public the 20 per cent of deadwood in the operation. The consequence of it might be seen in the fact that the First Development Decade came to last in 1969 with a widening gap between rich and poor. And only twenty seven countries out of the whole developing states achieved the target of a 5 per cent rate of growth, while many of those who more in need remained far behind.

The Secretariat is also assigned a quasi-executive function of completely different nature, which is discharged by the UN, Field Service. It was established in 1949. It is a body of force having its own uniform. The members are not given arms except to carry side arms on special occasion. Their duty is to provide transport, maintain communications and

look after security for UN Commissions in the field. It does not engaged itself to take any functions of observation, supervision of peace-treaty or the like, However, is being permanently available to help any UN bodies who are so engaged.⁶

Managing the administrators for the United nations administration is an additional and most necessary function of the Secretariat. There were some administrative problems, which the UN faced in general and the Secretariat in particular as a gift of the circumstances in which the organization took the operation. The secretariat was to be composed of , in 1945 and 1946 out of nothing. There were necessity, zeal, and hustle altogether combined to foster a recruitment rate so rapid that some quality was inevitably sacrificed to quantity. At present, however, the most sever consequences of these early errors have been removed by developing many new administrative procedures and the effluxion of time. The UN bureaucracy certainly remains deemed to be further improvement.

The last function of the UN Secretariat is the diplomatic or the political In every democracy, the civil servant, seemed to be a part and parcel of a politician. He needs a politician to be his minister in the front line for all his political activities. Whereas, the UN Civil Servant not

6. Ibid. pp. 163-65.

only works without any front line protector, what is worse, he has a hundred ministers competing to instruct and order him about his duties. Consequently, it may result in a vacuum of decision which,

"if the purposes of the Organization are to be realized, the official may have to fill himself by practising that most delicate of arts, making policy without appearing to do so. Of course there will be levels and hideaways in the Secretariat where the winds of international politics will hardly be felt to blow, but for most of its thousand odd administrators the complex politics of a hundred interlocking states are, in greater or lesser degree, both the context and the content of their labour. It is the Secretary General himself, of course, for whom this holds most completely, but.....the rest of the Secretariat are just his emanation".⁷

The functions of the Secretariat have a less dramatic feature than the role of the Secretary General. The scope of the Secretariat's work has also expanded as a result of evolving role of the Secretary General in varied circumstances to solve the multi-facial problems. To make the role of the Secretary General indispensable, the second part of the report of the Preparatory Commission dealt with the Secretary General. The chief functions allotted to the Secretary General in one way or another by the Charter were classified by the Preparatory Commission under the six headings.⁸

7. Ibid p.169.

8. See PC/20 Section 2-B, Chapter VIII, P. 87.

- a) General, administrative and executive;
- b) Technical,
- c) Financial,
- d) Organization and Administration of the Secretariat;
- e) Political, and
- f) Representational

The administrative role of the Secretary General is given in article 97 of the Charter, which states that :

"he shall be the chief administrative officer of the Organization". Article 98 provides that he shall act in his capacity as Secretary General at all meetings of the Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, and the Trusteeship Councils and "shall perform such other functions as are entrusted to him by these organs".⁹

It necessarily compelled Trygve Lie, the first Secretary General to tackle the initial administrative problems of the Secretariat, such as the financial structure, terms of employment, and similar questions. However, these administrative problems were dealt with by the end of Lie's tenure of office. By assuming his office as Secretary General, Mr. Dag Hammarskjold revealed that his contribution would be firstly administrative, more especially in the social and economic field. To solve the administrative problems, he at the outset examined thoroughly the

9. Francis O. Wilcox and Carl M. Marcy, Proposals for Changes in the United Nations (The Brookings Institution Washington, D.C. , 1955) p.403.

structure of the Secretariat and gave a proposal for making reforms in the structure of the Secretariat, which was approved by the General Assembly in 1958 with these reforms, most of the administrative problems concerning to personnel and finance were solved. Consequently, the post of Assistant Secretary General for Administration and Finance was granted to be lapsed with the retirement of Byron Price, for reason that only a residuum of administrative problems remained to be solved, which should not demand more than about an hour a day on the part of the Secretary General. And the Secretary General was seemed to be in a position to take that task.¹⁰

The report of the Preparatory Commission revealed that though the Secretary General would primarily delegate large number of his duties to his staff members, however the sole responsibility remained with him alone. In prospect of his administrative and executive duties he is the channel of all communications with the United Nations or any of its organizations. He is also able to provide expert technical assistance relating to the work of the Economic and Social Council, and Trusteeship Council,

10. M.W., The United Nations, International Organization Administration (The Macmillan Company New York, Collier Macmillan Limited London ,1967)pp.147-48.

which clearly affect the degree in which these organizations achieve their set goals.

The Secretary General being the head of the Secretariat, appoints all staff under regulations established by the General Assembly (Art. 101 of the Charter) and assigns suitable staff to the various organizations of the United Nations.¹¹

The role of the Secretary General regarding the administration of the Secretariat is thirstly required for the reason that the international civil service is still to recent an innovation for many men and women. They vocationally have engaged in the UN Secretariat and have to be fully molded to its special urgent needs. These newly appointed officials become for the most part exiles, living in such circumstances, which are alien to them. Consequently, the disintegrative tendencies become strong in an international Secretariat. To deal with these disintegrative tendencies,

"a conscious effort is required to develop the corporate spirit capable of absorbing into itself the energies of the individual members of the Secretariat and of imparting to them a sense of "belonging" in order to compensate

11. Rumki Basu, Personnel Administration in United Nations pp. 23-24.

in some measure for their alienation from their own natural background. This infusion of a common sense of purpose requires a conscious and tireless effort, and in the development of this common purpose the leadership of the Secretary General is vital. In the absence of such leadership each department, even each division or section, may tend to become a segregated area in itself, taking its character to only too great an extent from the qualities of its head".¹²

It is in the political sphere that the distinction between the Secretary General and the Secretariat, referred to at the start has been most distinct. It is known to all that in any national government, the Prime Minister does not frequently take, the responsibility under his own direction, of the predominant role in the formulation and conduct of foreign policy except in circumstances of national crisis. Where as in an International Secretariat, the tendency of the Secretary General to keep the direction of political matters with himself and to discharge his duties through collaborators well known to him and specially selected by him is necessarily even more clear. At most it is the nature of his personal ability to have the confidence of governments in his conduct of political activities.

12. M.W. The United Nations, International Organization and Administration, p.149.

One thing is clear that the Secretary General has discharged the political duties given to him by the Charter to a far less degree through the ordinary machinery of the Secretariat than in other fields.¹³

The Charter of the United Nations has allowed the Secretary General to assume his political role under article 99, which authorizes 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". Being chief officer of the Secretariat, he too draws considerable political power from the fact that Article 7 establishes the Secretariat one of the "Principal organs of the United Nations".

Other legal power given to the Secretary General which can be used as a political influence by him if he has a strong will to do so is found in Article 98, that he must submit an annual report to the General Assembly regarding the work of the Organization, and in Article 100, which makes it clear that the Secretary-General and his staff members are not to seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the organization.

Although the Secretary General has been given a wide range and strong basis by the Charter to exercise his

13. Ibid. pp. 156-57.

political influence than the Covenant of the League of Nations provided the Secretary General, however, the question arises whether he should be a general manager or a leader with political influence was, still indistinct according to one study.¹⁴ Consequently, the proposed suggestions were accepted at the San Francisco Conference to require that the Secretary General of the United Nations should bring peace and Security matters to the attention of the Security Council, and the General Assembly as well. However, the final decision was taken for his authority in this respect would be permissive rather mandatory and would be applied only to the Security Council and to the General Assembly. Moreover, the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations described this authority as a quite special right which went beyond any power previously given to the head of an international organization.¹⁵

Despite some ambiguous language of the Charter regarding the nature of the duties of the Secretary General, the opinion has been made that :

There was wisdom in their conclusion to entrust the solution to the process of growth and experiment. But at the same time the general direction of the desired evolution

14. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The United Nations Secretariat (1950)p.11.

15. See Doc. PC/20(1945) pp. 86-87.

was clearly indicated; the Secretary General of the United Nations is intended to be a more powerful official than was the Secretary-General of the League".¹⁶

Trygve Lie, the first Secretary General at the outset, took immediate steps to develop the political powers of the office. According to one analyst, Lie made it clear that his time and energy should be devoted to political negotiations in the interests of the world peace, and that the administrative role of his authority should be delegated to assistants.¹⁷ Lie himself has said that when he took office, he was adamant that the Secretary General should be a force for peace. However, he opined that the influence he might exert would be a moral power rather than a physical one, and the Secretary General should be more the general than the Secretary. Nevertheless, Lie did not clarify that where the division would be made between the general and the Secretary.¹⁸

Consequently, the Lie's term of office was criticised at the outset when the second Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld assumed the charge of office on the plea that the Secretariat had lacked effective leadership

16. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The United Nations Secretariat p.11

17. Waldo Chamberlin, "Strengthening the Secretariat ; Analysis and Proposition" (Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol.296 (1954) p.131.

18. Francis O. Wilcox and Carl M. Marcy, Proposals for Changes in the United Nations, 1955, pp. 405-6.

for seven years, with the result of deterioration of official morale. The new Secretary General was seemed to give more attention to the administrative problems than political and latter one might be delegated to his under-secretaries.¹⁹ At the very moment, the decision of the General Assembly in the fall of 1954 in giving Hammarskjold responsibility for acting on behalf of the Organization in its efforts to make possible the release of American flyers held by the Chinese communists indicates the importance of the political influence vested in the office of the Secretary General. Despite it, the Secretary General opined that his role was not as what had been described "a third line" in the international debate. Neither it was for him to initiate compromises that might encroach upon the areas that should be exclusively within the jurisdiction of responsibility of the respective national governments. Moreover, in the Second decade of the existence of the United Nations, the role of the Secretary General came to be realised with remarkable rapidity the centre point of international activities of a relatively novel feature, added by the crisis of October 1956. which gave rise to the circumstances in which the political forces required the Secretary General as their catalytic agent, The experience,

19. Doc. A/2731 (Sept. 21, 1954) p. 5.

which the Secretary General gained from this crisis was proved to be very helpful in later crises. However, the new political obligations of the office necessarily had a basic claim on the responsibility of the Secretary General and somehow his increasing close relations with national governments and delegations were achieved at the cost of greater remoteness from the generality of the Secretariat. He himself came to be realized that this was so, and it is significant that his last speech, on September 8, 1961, was a speech to his own official members:

"Undoubtedly, if the Secretariat is to maintain a lively sense of unity, it is essential for any Secretary General to ensure that his office functions as a center from which the sense of purpose and dedication permeates the entire staff."²⁰

In later crisis, particularly in Iran-Iraq war, it was the only result of the efforts of the Secretary General, Peres de Cuellar, the eight years war of uncompromising attitude of both sides came to end in 1988.

These are various major problems, the UN Secretariat has been facing since its creation some of these problems are studied in coming chapter V.

20. M.W., The United Nations, International Organization and Administration, p.148.