

The United Nations in Historical Perspective

International organization can be traced back in history to the time when human beings first began to live in political communities. The ancient Greek city-states attempted through the Achaean League to build a system that would discourage rivalry and conflict and encourage some measure of cooperation. A thread runs through history from these early and rudimentary peace efforts to the contemporary world of the United Nations. Despite monumental and continuing failures to eliminate war, peoples and governments continue to reach beyond existing political boundaries to build on the orderly, brotherly, and cooperative side of human nature rather than give free rein to the suspicious, destructive, dark side. The founding of the United Nations is in this tradition. While falling short of its high ideals and purposes, the UN system nevertheless represents that human outreach toward peace and cooperation. In this chapter we will place the United Nations in historical perspective by looking at the modern state system that gave rise to it, describing the emergence of earlier international institutions, and briefly reviewing events leading to the establishment of the United Nations at the end of World War II. In Chapter 2 we will discuss the structure and operation of the United Nations.

THE STATE SYSTEM AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

As the many separate political units created during the European feudal era were fused into larger communities, the national state, on which the contemporary UN system rests, emerged as the dominant political unit. Through conquest and annexation the number of small political entities was progressively reduced, and a Europe of nation-states began to take shape. The legal inception of the modern state system is commonly dated from the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War and recognized the territorial state as the cornerstone of the system.

The new European state system was characterized not only by conflict and disunity but also by forces moving peoples and nations toward closer contact and agreed rules of conduct. Political and economic rivalries were the chief source of conflict, and periodic wars remained a constant testimony to the difficulty of resolving them peacefully. Nevertheless, increased contacts among the new states also brought an awakening in the realm of economic activity, and this created a need for state cooperation. In response to this need, rules were established for the adjustment of differences that inevitably arise through

commercial intercourse. This resulted in a progressive elaboration of the system of international law that had begun to develop before Westphalia and in the growing use of consular interchange for the promotion and adjustment of commercial contacts. As trade competition among the new nations increased, it began to spill over into a race to acquire overseas colonies. This, in turn, produced a need for further international rules by which nations could recognize one another's titles to new lands, settle boundary disputes, and undertake joint action against piracy. Nations began to deal more directly with such problems by entering into agreements and treaties with one another. Hence rivalries and antagonisms, while continuing to grow, tended to produce countervailing forces leading to increased cooperation.

The closing decades of the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of two powerful new ideas destined to have a profound effect on the nature of the state system. These were the twin concepts of *laissez-faire* and democratic nationalism, each of which dramatically recognized the new role to be played by the individual in human affairs. In the economic realm, the mercantilist doctrine of state controlled economic activity for the enhancement of state power gave way to a new concept of economic liberalism that placed greater emphasis on individual choice and initiative, rather than government regulation, as the focus of activity. This philosophy of *laissez-faire* was buttressed by a new technology that provided the means for producing goods with machines. The ensuing Industrial Revolution not only changed the methods of economic production but also spectacularly increased the interdependence of states.

The forces of science and invention responsible for developing the new machine technology also helped shrink the world through new and better devices for communication and transportation. Steamships, railroads, telegrams, and telephones made closer contacts possible, accelerated trade expansion, and produced a new awareness in the minds of Western peoples of their common

societal relationship in a larger community of nations. Thus, in a progressive and dramatic way, patterns of individual and national self-sufficiency began to erode and give way to new and rapidly developing systems of interdependence, which, in turn, produced the rudiments of a new philosophy of internationalism among Western nations.

At the same time, political developments triggered forces of individualism that were destined to have far-reaching effects on the state system. The salient events were the American and French revolutions. By producing, on a national scale, working political systems built upon principles of popular sovereignty and the importance of the individual, they ushered in an era of democratic nationalism. Democracy, as a political doctrine, presumes individuals to be rational creatures who will submit to a higher authority of their own choosing as a means of achieving order in society. Translated to the international level, democratic individualism supports a rational search for cooperative alternatives and agreed rules of state conduct. It has not been a historical accident that modern international law and institutions have been created largely at the initiative of nations enjoying the greatest measure of individual freedom.

The Process of International Organization

With the onset of the machine age and the appearance of democracy in the Western world, the stage was set for the emergence of modern international organization. Democracy fosters the growth of international organization because both involve, in essence, commitment to a *consensual process*. Just as democracy in a national political setting implies a process of public decision making by consent of the governed, international organization implies a process of international action achieved through the consent of sovereign states.

The process of building international organizations is thoroughly pragmatic; most, if not all,

international institutions have been created to achieve specific, practical objectives. The process assumes the multistate system as fact and seeks only to provide an effective means to reconcile the conflicts and contradictions that emerge from this system. As Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, observed,

The United Nations is not in any respect a super-state, able to act outside the framework of decisions by its member governments. It is an instrument for negotiation among, and to some extent for, governments. It is also an instrument forconcerting action by governments in support of the Charter. Thus the United Nations can serve, but not substitute itself for, the efforts of its member governments.¹

In the absence of supranational government, only voluntary agreement can succeed in mitigating international conflicts, and international organization provides an institutionalized means for eliciting such agreement. It provides the principles, the machinery, and the encouragement, but the catalytic agent needed to bring about tangible results is the will to cooperate. When cooperation is forthcoming, great things can be accomplished by international organs and agencies; when it is lacking, they become mere "debating societies." An international organization like the United Nations is only as useful as its members want it to be.

THE EMERGENCE OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

International institutions dating from the early nineteenth century represent a creative response to the need for a joint approach to common problems in such fields as commerce, communication, and transportation. The first examples of modern international organization were the river commissions in Europe. The Central Rhine Commission was created in 1804 by an agreement between France and Germany; it provided for ex-

tensive regulation of river traffic, the maintenance of navigation facilities, and the hearing and adjudication of complaints for alleged violations of the Commission's rules. The European Danube Commission was created in 1856 to regulate international traffic on the Danube River. Both river commissions function today much the same as they did when they were first established.

The development of international organization was carried a step farther with the creation of international public administrative unions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In many cases the public unions were developed as a result of demands placed on national governments by the members of private international associations. Such demands resulted in the establishment of the International Telegraphic Union in 1865 and the Universal Postal Union in 1874. The success of these two unions paved the way for the creation of numerous international public agencies in such diverse fields as narcotic drugs, agriculture, health, weights and measures, railroads, patents and copyrights, and tariffs. The prolific growth of technical international agencies reflected the new world of science and technology that was compressing space and overcoming political boundaries. States were willing to collaborate because it was essential to business and commerce and useful in protecting the lives, health, and other interests of their citizens.

As cooperation among states increased during the nineteenth century, a pattern of organization and procedures developed. Each new international agency established institutional machinery that was unique in some respects, yet each possessed certain basic characteristics in common with its contemporaries. The following pattern was typical:

1. Membership was usually limited to sovereign states. Unless regional in scope, such an organization typically held membership open to all states without political conditions.
2. Each organization was created by a multilateral treaty. The treaty served as a constitution that specified the obligations of members,

- created the institutional structure, and proclaimed the objectives of the organization.
3. A conference or congress was usually established as the basic policy-making organ. The conference included all members of the organization and met infrequently, typically once every five years.
 4. Decision making was based on the principle of egalitarianism, with each member having an equal vote and decisions reached by unanimous consent. In time this gave way to majoritarianism, especially in voting on procedural questions.
 5. A council or other decision-making organ of an executive nature was often created to implement policies. It usually had a limited membership, and its primary responsibility was to administer the broad policy decisions laid down by the conference.
 6. A secretariat was established to carry out the policies of the conference and council and to conduct routine functions of the organization. The secretariat was headed by a secretary-general or director-general, a professional civil servant with an international reputation.
 7. Some organizations, such as the river commissions, exercised judicial or quasi-judicial powers. Some created special international courts to decide controversies arising out of their administrative operations.
 8. Many organizations were endowed with a legal personality enabling them to own property, to sue and be sued in specified areas, and, in some cases, to enjoy a measure of diplomatic immunity.
 9. Financial support was provided by contributions from member governments, using a formula for contributions based on a principle such as "ability to pay," "benefits derived," "equality," or on a combination of such principles.
 10. The competence of the organization was usually limited to a functional or specialized problem area, as set forth in its constitution.
 11. Decision making was carried on in two ways: by drafting international treaties and submitting them to member governments for ratification, and by adopting resolutions recommending action by member governments. A few organizations possessed administrative and minor policy-making powers.
- Organizations of general competence in political, economic, and social areas were not established until the twentieth century.
- An important by-product of political cooperation on technical matters was the growth of the belief that political cooperation might be equally productive in securing agreement among states in the more weighty matters of war and peace. Such thinking helped prepare the ground for the calling of two conferences at The Hague, Netherlands, in 1899 and 1907, the first general international conferences concerned with building a world system based on law and order. The first Hague Peace Conference was attended by delegates from only twenty-six nations and was largely European in complexion; the second conference, however, moved toward universality, with representatives from forty-four states, including most of the countries of Latin America. The principle of the sovereign equality of states was accepted at the conferences, with the result that the Hague system helped break the monopoly of the great powers in handling matters of war and peace and economic and colonial rivalry. The Hague system also established precedents that contributed to the later development of international parliamentarianism. Headquarters at The Hague provided international machinery to facilitate the pacific settlement of international disputes. The Hague system in effect proclaimed a new era of cooperation and indicated that a global political organization to keep the peace and promote interstate cooperation was now a possibility. The League of Nations and the United Nations were in time to emerge as products of the creative thought produced by the Hague system.

THE LEAGUE EXPERIMENT

Americans were living in an age of innocence when the United States declared war against the Central Powers in 1917. Both sides were then close to exhaustion, their idealism and fiery nationalism largely dissipated by nearly three years of savage fighting. In the early years of the war, the carnage in Europe produced a U.S. consensus that involvement should be avoided at all costs. But as the war dragged on, that consensus was eroded by a growing belief that the New World somehow had to save the Old World from extinction. If Europeans of all nationalities could live in peace under the U.S. system of democracy, why not apply these same principles to the international community?

The United States entered World War I fired with a holy mission to “make the world safe for democracy.” U.S. idealism was summed up in President Woodrow Wilson’s peace program, submitted to Congress on January 8, 1918, in which he enunciated Fourteen Points aimed at rekindling Allied idealism and determination and weakening the enemy’s resolve by promising a just peace and a new world of security and democracy. In his fourteenth point Wilson declared that “a general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small powers alike.”

The chief architect of the League, unquestionably, was Woodrow Wilson. Without his support the idea of a League of Nations would probably not have gone beyond the point of intellectual germination. While many Allied statesmen thought more cynically of how the victory won at a terrible cost could be exploited for national gain and political advantage, Wilson sought to materialize his dreams of a just world based on law and democracy. Because his program appealed to millions of Europeans emerging from the trauma of war, Allied leaders were forced by public opinion to pay more than lip service to his

ideas. Wilson’s vision of a just peace was focused on the building of a League of Nations, and Allied statesmen accepted his demands that the League be created as an integral part of the Versailles peace treaty. Wilson believed that the League Covenant would support and reinforce provisions of the treaty, especially Article 10 of the Covenant which was aimed at preserving the territorial integrity of signatory states from aggression (see Appendix A). The subsequent failure of the United States to ratify the League Covenant, because of political conflict between President Wilson and Senate Republicans, is one of the great ironies of history.

Structure and Functions of the League

The League Covenant provided for the establishment of three permanent organs—the Assembly, the Council, and the Secretariat. Two semiautonomous bodies were created outside the Covenant framework—the Permanent Court of International Justice and the International Labor Organization. Their objectives were similar to those of the League, however, and the budgets of both were part of the League budget. The Council and Assembly also elected the judges of the World Court. Of greater importance than structures were the obligations that members assumed toward the organization and toward one another. Each state undertook to “respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League” (Article 10). Members agreed to submit all of their disputes to arbitration, adjudication, or Council inquiry and in no case to resort to war until three months after a settlement was offered. If any state resorted to war in violation of the Covenant, members would apply diplomatic and economic sanctions and consider the violation an act of war against the world community. Members further agreed to work together to control national armaments and to cooperate in solving

social, economic, colonial, humanitarian, and other common problems.

League Innovations

In its basic design and role, the League was both old and new. It was old in the sense that the system was based firmly on the sovereignty of the member states; no new obligation could be imposed on a member without that member's consent. As with earlier attempts to establish some degree of international order, the powers of the League were limited to recommendations. The Covenant, in keeping with the traditional guidelines of international law, did not seek to outlaw war but only to regulate a state's resort to this ultimate action. A special security role was accorded to the great powers, a role that they had always played (along with warmaking) in the international political system. The League's decisions were made on the basis of mutual agreements that reflected each state's particular interests, a decision-making system as ancient as the state system itself. Progress in technical, social, economic, and humanitarian fields was, as in the past, founded on common treaty actions and on recommendations for national statutory enactments. All in all, there was much in the new League of Nations system that was merely a continuation of the old traditions, customs, institutions, and decision-making procedures of the pre-League world.

But there was also much that was new, some quietly evolutionary in nature, some dramatically revolutionary in scope. The League, for example, was the first attempt to establish a permanent international organization of a general political nature with machinery functioning on a continuing basis. For the first time a community responsibility to use the collective force of the state system against an international lawbreaker was given institutional flesh and bone. Although the League could hardly be compared to a domestic political system with its superior authority, independent police force, and automatic action against lawbreakers, it was, nonetheless, a step

toward internationalizing the responsibility of enforcing peace. In the past, action against an aggressor had been a right of states; under the Covenant it became a duty.

The League in Action

The two major functions of the League, as stated in the Preamble to the Covenant, were "to achieve international peace and security" and "to promote international cooperation." These functions were expected to be complementary. A secure world would encourage state cooperation in many fields, and a common attack on economic, social, and technical problems would help eliminate conflict by developing a sense of community among states. Of the two functions, the security function was regarded as the more pressing.

There was little agreement, however, on how the League should pursue its security objectives. In French eyes the primary responsibility of the League was to enforce the provisions of the peace treaties and guard against a resurgence of German military power. Britain, in contrast, viewed the League as an agency for fostering the peaceful settlement of disputes and protecting the vital interests of the Empire. Each member, in fact, tended to define the League's peace-preserving role largely in terms of its own national interest, so that when the League was confronted with threats to the peace, it often spoke in a cacophony rather than with a single voice.

In its approach to the problem of war, the Covenant made no general statement that war was illegal. The traditional legal right of states to engage in war was circumscribed in the Covenant by provisions that made it illegal in most situations, mandated delay in all cases, and prescribed community sanctions against the warmaker.

The Manchurian Case

The League's first test in meeting war initiated by a great power came in 1931, when Japan, claiming Chinese destruction of its railway properties,

attacked Manchuria and occupied the capital city of Mukden. China, charging aggression by Japan, appealed to the League under Article 11 of the Covenant. Attempts by the Council to secure a cease-fire and a Japanese withdrawal were vetoed by Japan, which requested an on-the-spot inquiry into the facts before League action was undertaken.

As fighting spread in Manchuria, the Council appointed a Commission of Inquiry under Lord Lytton's direction to go to Manchuria and ascertain the facts. By the time the commission arrived in the Far East, in April 1932, the Japanese had changed Manchuria into the new independent state of Manchukuo and had begun an attack upon China proper at Shanghai. China, deeply affronted by Council procrastination, asked for transference of the dispute to the Assembly. The Assembly condemned the Japanese aggression and adopted the U.S.-initiated Stimson Doctrine of nonrecognition of new states or governments created illegally by the use of force. A voluminous report from the Lytton Commission condemning Japan's aggressive actions in Manchuria was adopted unanimously by the Assembly but was too late to affect the outcome since the conquest was an accomplished fact. The Assembly's action in fixing blame and condemning aggression, however, led to the withdrawal of Japan from the League of Nations.

The Manchurian case emphasized that situations involving overt aggression could not be successfully handled by using League procedures for peaceful settlement. Japan proved, and the lesson was not lost on potential European aggressors, that the cumbersome machinery and procedures of the League could be used to stifle effective collective action. The League suffered also because great power leadership was lacking on the Council and because the United States, the major power most concerned about Japanese aggressive tendencies, was not a League member. U.S. concern was expressed by sending to Geneva an observer who sat quietly listening to the debates and offered nothing but moral condemnation of Japan's actions. Clearly, this was not

enough. The first major test found the League weak and indecisive.

The Ethiopian Case

A second critical test for the League was not long in coming. In the winter of 1934, League-member Italy attacked League-member Ethiopia in violation of their mutual Covenant obligations to respect each other's political and territorial integrity and to adjust their differences peacefully. Italy, following the Japanese example, launched a diplomatic offensive in Geneva, claiming that Ethiopian forces had attacked first. Ethiopia, not recognizing the Italian master plan to build an African empire, sought to negotiate and to use the power of the League facilities for conciliation rather than collective action. Under cover of negotiations, Mussolini mobilized Italian reserves for war, granting minor concessions each time it appeared that the Council would intervene. Outside the main arena of the League, a diplomatic web of intrigue developed as Britain and France, concerned more with the rising power of Nazi Germany, sought to keep Italy as a buffer to Germany. Permitting Mussolini to seize a piece of African territory seemed to the statesmen in London and Paris a small price to pay for the containment of German power. Incredibly, the United States remained aloof and President Franklin Roosevelt refused Emperor Haile Selassie's request that he call on the parties to observe their commitment under the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 not to use war as an instrument of national policy.

By the autumn of 1935 Italy had completed its mobilization, and on October 2, disregarding many League resolutions and Covenant provisions, it launched a full-scale attack on Ethiopia. Ethiopia at once invoked Article 16 of the Covenant, holding that Italy's resort to war before fulfilling Covenant requirements must be considered an act of war against each League member. The Ethiopian delegate at Geneva argued that all members must honor their Covenant obligations by applying immediate economic sanctions

against Italy, and he called on the Council to recommend military sanctions as well. Under an interpretation of the Covenant agreed on in 1921, however, neither the Council nor the Assembly was empowered to determine that aggression had been committed; each member state was entitled to decide for itself. The levying of economic and other sanctions was likewise controlled by each state, emphasizing the veto power held by each member under the League system. Of the fifty-four League members polled, fifty indicated that Italy was the aggressor, thus obligating them to apply economic sanctions at once and to undertake military sanctions if these were recommended by the Council.

For the first time in history, economic sanctions were levied against an international law-breaker, with fifty member states participating. Numerous questions arose immediately concerning what kinds of materials should be embargoed, whether imports from Italy should be banned, what would happen to private long-term contracts, and whether an effort should be made to prevent nonmember states from violating the embargoes. A League consensus soon developed that economic sanctions should include an embargo on arms and a number of essential minerals (but not coal and oil), a ban on loans and other kinds of financial help, a restriction against all imports from Italy and its possessions, and mutual support among League members to minimize their economic injury from the embargoes. By November 1935 the economic sanctions were in effect, and within a period of several months the sanctions began to have a telling effect on Italy's economy.²

In spite of economic sanctions, the Italian armies swept into Addis Ababa, and on May 5, 1936, Mussolini boasted that victory had been achieved. Eight months after sanctions had been imposed, the Assembly voted to withdraw all sanctions against Italy. Why had the economic sanctions failed? Why were they terminated after Italy had completed its conquest, thus condoning the aggression? Why had the Council not recommended military sanctions? These and similar

*why
failed*

questions were aired in Assembly debates following the withdrawal of sanctions. The answers to them, incomplete as they may be, help explain the difficulties of carrying out an effective collective security action against a great power within the international milieu of that day.

Basic to the League's problem was the real-politik British and French objective of building a coalition to balance the power of Hitler's Germany. In much the same way that the East-West split weakened the great power concert on the UN Security Council during the first forty years of United Nations operations, the struggle in the 1930s to contain Nazi power replaced collective security as the prime concern of British and French statesmen.

Other nations contributed to the weak-sanctions syndrome. The United States condemned Italian aggression but avoided any cooperation with the sanctions decision other than placing both belligerents off-limits for arms shipments under the Neutrality Acts. U.S. trade, especially shipments of oil, increased sizably, with most of the increase going to the Italian African colonies, which were supply bases for the military campaign. Many Latin American countries, nearly suffocating under gluts of primary commodity surpluses, agreed in principle to sanctions but failed to apply them in practice. Four League members refused to apply any kinds of sanctions, one refused to reduce imports from Italy, and seven never applied the arms embargo. The bait of stimulating national economies stagnated by the world economic depression proved to be a more powerful motivator of national actions than idealistic considerations of collective security.

Yet, ironically, the gains of appeasement were illusory. Italy joined the Axis powers, the United States was eventually drawn into war against the dictators, and potential aggressors in Europe and the Far East were encouraged by the League's vacillation and irresoluteness. As for the League, the imposition of sanctions by an international organization for the first time in history was a signal achievement; but the Ethiopian case illustrated that it takes more to deter aggression than

covenants, organizations, institutions, procedures, and decisions. In the final analysis, effective collective security depends on the states that make up international organizations and the policies they pursue. With Hitler's attack on Poland in September 1939 and the beginning of World War II, the League experiment in collective security ended.

An Appraisal: The League's Balance Sheet

A review of the League record might be summarized as a study in utility and futility. Conclusions about the degree of success or failure attained by the League must obviously depend on the standard of measurement employed. If it is measured by what the Covenant framers intended, or what millions of people hoped for, or what the principles of the Covenant actually called for, the League fell far short. If, on the other hand, it is measured by what other international organizations in the past had accomplished, or what skeptics and critics predicted for it, or what the nature of the rivalry-ridden state system would permit, the League probably rated high. Any evaluation faces the danger of falling into the old pro-League–anti-League controversy that characterized the great American debate on the subject and kept it on a largely emotional level for twenty years.

A Capsule History of the League

Obviously, an appraisal of the League must recognize that its effectiveness varied in response to changes in the international environment. The peace, stability, and relative prosperity of its first decade permitted the League to make a promising start in several directions. Numerous international disputes were settled peacefully, the complex problem of disarmament was tackled, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 attempted to close a gap in the League Covenant by outlawing war as an instrument of national policy. Cooperation in welfare areas was explored, and foundations were

laid for extensive programs that flowered during the subsequent decade.

The period from 1930 to 1935 was one of challenge and uncertainty for the League. The economic depression that started with the U.S. stock market crash in 1929 and spread across the world in a chain reaction reduced the League's carefully cultivated channels of cooperation to a shambles. Economic nationalism and ideological rivalries spawned in the depression's wake split the status quo world into hostile camps. Japanese, Italian, and German fascism posed successive political and military challenges with which the organization and its members were unwilling or unable to cope. A new wave of nationalism erased many of the gains of internationalism during the 1920s as League members became increasingly obsessed with their own limited conceptions of national security and with domestic problems. Government after government fought desperately to rescue its people from the brink of economic and financial collapse, social disintegration, and political revolution. As Germany rearmed, disarmament talks collapsed and the world witnessed the start of a new arms race. Economic and monetary conferences failed, and the world depression deepened. The world of the 1930–35 era was not of the League's making, but it was the one in which the League had to function.

The world stage was now set for the League's inevitable collapse. Nine members withdrew between 1935 and 1939, some for political reasons, others claiming financial problems. A desperate reform movement initiated by the Assembly in 1936 sought to stem the tide and refurbish the League's tarnished image by updating its security provisions and by divesting the Covenant of all references to the peace treaties of World War I. The Axis powers, bent on aggression, were not interested in returning to the League, nor were other former member states, which continued to pursue independent courses. With the failure of the reform movement, the League became inoperative in the security field, except for voting the Soviet Union's expulsion because of its attack on Finland in 1939, and a majority of the members

professed neutrality in the crises growing out of German annexations in Central Europe. When general war came to Europe in September 1939, the League became quiescent, a posture it retained through the six years of World War II. A shell of the League organization lived on at the Geneva headquarters through the war period, only to be ignored by the architects of a new world organization, who did not want their creation tainted by association with the League's failure.

An Autopsy

Just as friends of the League in its early years tended to exaggerate its novelty and its potential, critics have in retrospect emphasized its failures and undervalued its contributions. All evaluations, however, eventually return to the central question: Why did the League fail to keep peace? Since the maintenance of peace and security was the primary objective of the League, it is only natural that the historical verdict on the League has been delivered mainly in that area and in condemnatory terms.

In fixing blame, some observers have sought to explain the League's demise as a failure of its member states to support the principles of the Covenant. Such a rationalization fails to recognize that in the field of international organization members *are* the organization, that the League had no real existence independent of its component parts. No organization made up of sovereign and independent entities can possibly be stronger than the will and support for common action that exists within the group. Thus, to blame the members rather than the League is a circular argument. One could as well make the point that the pre-World War I balance of power worked well in keeping the peace but eventually failed because the states involved did not play their proper roles within the system.

Procedural difficulties growing out of the League's machinery have also been blamed for its failure. It is quite true that the requirement of

unanimity in both Council and Assembly on most substantive questions enabled aggressor nations to veto some countermeasures. Also, because war was not outlawed, the Covenant permitted some members to use the provisions regulating resort to war to block effective collective action. Covenant provisions dealing with disarmament were so loosely worded that no definite responsibility existed for members to reduce their arms. The sanctions system was weakened in the League's early years by a Covenant interpretation permitting each member to decide for itself the question of invoking an economic embargo. Many other technical deficiencies also contributed to the League's failure, but it would be inaccurate to assign organizational weaknesses a major role in the debacle since most of the weaknesses could be, and many were, overcome by interpretation and by the use of alternative pathways.

Probably the most popular explanation for the League's failure, in the United States at any rate, was U.S. defection. Unquestionably the refusal of the United States to participate in a world organization sponsored by its own president created a psychological and power vacuum that the League never fully overcame. In the security field U.S. policymakers offered only moral condemnation of aggression, while permitting U.S. businessmen to continue extensive trade with the aggressors. The popular myth that U.S. military force combined with that of other League members would have made the League successful against aggressors overlooks the fact that U.S. power during the 1920s and 1930s was only a potentiality awaiting the full mobilization of World War II. Contributions from the small, garrison-bound U.S. Army could hardly have influenced the outcome of any major military action during the League period, and Americans were psychologically unprepared for a major effort until Pearl Harbor. The U.S. defection, then, weakened the League but was not the central reason for its ultimate collapse.

Some critics of the League have sought to explain its failure as resulting from its close association with the "unjust" peace treaties of World

War I. The League, it is argued, was placed in the impossible position of defending the status quo of the victors against the attempts of the vanquished to undo the peace treaties imposed on them. The League itself recognized this argument officially when it appointed a committee in the late 1930s to propose reforms that would free it from this incubus and, hopefully, regain the support of nations—especially Germany—that had been alienated. Yet the League would still have had to operate within a world based on the peace settlements even if it had in no way been associated with them. Moreover, to the League's credit, the status quo was not tenaciously defended and justice often took precedence over the status quo, as in the case of the Saar, whose people, in a League-supervised plebiscite, voted for reunion with Germany.

Finally, some groups of critics have seen in the League's failure an example of the fundamental inability of a collective security system to keep the peace. One such group rejects the League as an impractical and idealistic concept that was foredoomed to failure because it ignored the power realities of the world. Only by fostering a balance of power through military preparedness and alliances can peace be preserved, so runs the argument of these critics, and the League diverted the status quo great powers from such a course, making disaster inevitable. Another group has also criticized the League's utopianism, but its alternative is a world government with substantial powers acting directly on individuals. Since peace can be adequately preserved within nations by a federal government, this group has argued, the world scene likewise demands a world authority with a near monopoly of power. Compelling as arguments favoring world federalism may be in theory, the world of sovereign states was hardly ready then, nor is it now, to undergo such a radical metamorphosis. Moreover, if the will to resist the aggressors had been broadly based and deeply rooted, if conditions approaching a consensus had existed, the cooperation of member states could probably have done the job as expeditiously as a world federal system. Con-

versely, the absence of consensus under either system would have had equally deleterious results.

In conclusion, no single theory suffices to explain the League's failure. One might even conclude that bad luck had something to do with it. A combination of many factors, often appearing at inopportune times, made success in the security field a difficult and elusive quarry. Unquestionably the economic nationalism engendered by world depression created an environment uncongenial to international cooperation. And once the world had been irretrievably split between revisionist and status quo powers, the malfunctioning of the League's collective security apparatus became a matter of course.

ORGANIZING THE UNITED NATIONS

Like the First World War, World War II created an international climate of opinion receptive to the ideas of international cooperation. In the early war period, as the Allied powers suffered serious military reverses, the role of international organization was blurred from international consciousness. The League remained immobilized and discarded, playing no role in the global struggle it had sought to prevent. But as the Allies marshaled their power and launched a worldwide offensive, some thinking, official and unofficial, began to take shape concerning the nature of the postwar world. What kind of a world would emerge from the carnage of the most deadly war in history? How could the mistakes made by the previous generation be avoided? Could the peace be won just as the war was being won? How could talent and effort be mobilized on a massive scale to build a new world of peace?

The Road to San Francisco

The UN Charter, which emerged from the San Francisco Conference on International Organiza-

tion, was a product of extensive wartime planning. The seed of the idea for a new postwar world organization was planted by President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill in the Atlantic Charter of August 14, 1941. The date is significant because it was four months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the entry of the United States into the war. Churchill wanted explicit endorsement of a postwar international political organization included in the joint statement of aspirations. Roosevelt, however, recognized that U.S. public opinion, still basically isolationist, might react unfavorably to such a clear-cut internationalist objective. In final form the Atlantic Charter called for "fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field" and hinted of the future "establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security." Even in this watered-down form it carried the clear implication that progress toward a world organization having security and economic responsibilities was a joint objective of the two leading democracies. On January 1, 1942, with the United States now in the war, twenty-six nations subscribed to a Declaration by United Nations that reaffirmed the principles of the Atlantic Charter. This declaration established the United Nations military alliance, to which twenty-one other nations subsequently adhered, each agreeing to employ its full resources against the Axis, cooperate with one another, and not make a separate peace.

The vague references to international organization in these early war documents were made explicit in the Moscow Declaration on General Security signed in October 1943 by the foreign ministers of the Big Four (Hull, Eden, Molotov, and Foo Ping-sheung). The Moscow Declaration pledged continuance of wartime cooperation "for the organization and maintenance of peace and security" and explicitly recognized "the necessity of establishing at the earliest practicable date a general international organization." It was also the first definite commitment by the Soviet Union to support the establishment of a world organization.

The Dumbarton Oaks Conference

With the three major powers diligently working on drafts of a constitution for a general international organization, the American State Department suggested to the Russian and British governments that they meet to work out a single set of proposals. After negotiations the three governments agreed that they would participate in the drafting of a proposed charter and that China should participate, although not directly with the Soviet Union, since the latter desired to preserve its position of neutrality in the Far Eastern war. The four governments met at Dumbarton Oaks, an estate in Washington, DC, in two separate phases. Conversations were held among the U.S., Soviet, and British delegations from August 21 to September 28, 1944, and among the U.S., British, and Chinese delegations from September 29 to October 7, 1944. At the conclusion of the conference, the areas of joint agreement were published as the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals.

A surprisingly large area of agreement emerged from the conference in an atmosphere that was cordial and cooperative. Although the Allies were taking the offensive on all fronts by the summer of 1944, victory was not yet assured and all four governments still felt the close attachment of nations seriously threatened by common enemies. This wartime spirit of unity and common cause that prevailed during the years leading up to the drafting of the UN Charter is sometimes obscured from view by the hindsight of the cold war.

The Dumbarton Oaks Proposals were intended by the four governments to constitute a basis for discussions at the forthcoming general conference on international organization. The following summarizes some of the major areas covered by the Proposals:

Purposes: To maintain international peace and security, encourage friendly relations among nations, and achieve international cooperation.

Nature: To be based on the sovereign equality of its members, in the tradition of early interna-

tional organizations and the League of Nations.

Membership: To be open to all peace-loving states, on the assumption that all states will eventually become "peace-loving," hence eligible for membership. New members to be admitted through action by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Organs: To have five major organs: a Security Council including all great powers as permanent members, a General Assembly comprising all members, a Secretariat, a Court, an Economic and Social Council, plus such subsidiary agencies as might be found necessary.

Competence: To have primary responsibility, through the Security Council, for maintaining peace and security, with all decisions in this crucial area reached only by unanimous agreement of the permanent members.

The Yalta Conference

Several important topics were not settled in the Dumbarton Oaks conversations. No decision was reached on whether a new court should be established to replace the existing Permanent Court of International Justice. The question of how the new world organization would deal with the mandates system and the general problem of colonialism was avoided. More important than the omissions were the disagreements that were to prove too fundamental to settle at any but the highest levels. These disagreements were eventually resolved at the final wartime conference of the Big Three—Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin—meeting at Yalta in the Russian Crimea February 4–11, 1945. At Dumbarton Oaks the Soviets had demanded a comprehensive and unlimited veto power in the Security Council; at Yalta Stalin accepted a compromise that the great power veto would not apply to decisions on procedural matters and could not be invoked by a party to a dispute. At Dumbarton Oaks the Soviets had sought the admission of each of the sixteen Soviet republics as original members; at Yalta this demand was reduced to additional seats for two

republics, the Ukraine and Byelorussia, and it was accepted by Roosevelt and Churchill. The term *peace-loving*, adopted at Dumbarton Oaks as a criterion of fitness for membership, was defined at Yalta to provide original membership for any state that had declared war on the common enemy by March 1, 1945, a definition that was somewhat anomalous but operational. Agreement was reached on the question of territories then governed under mandates from the League of Nations: a trusteeship system would be established, and the territories placed under it would include existing League mandates, colonial holdings from the enemy states, and other areas voluntarily placed under trusteeship. A Trusteeship Council would be established to oversee the trust system. Finally, at Yalta the Big Three agreed that the five great powers would sponsor a UN Conference on International Organization to meet on April 25, 1945. San Francisco was selected as the site of the conference.

The Yalta Conference helped resolve outstanding issues among the Big Three, but the publication of the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals raised murmurings among the small powers. The views of some of the small states were carefully set forth, somewhat to the annoyance of the U.S. delegation, at the Inter-American Conference on Problems of Peace and War held at Mexico City in February and March 1945. These states called for universality of membership, a more powerful General Assembly, more emphasis on a world court, a special agency to promote intellectual and moral cooperation, adequate representation for Latin America on the Security Council, and the settlement of regional disputes by regional organizations, such as the Inter-American system, acting in harmony with the new organization. Clearly, the small powers were not going to accept passively great power domination in the framing of the new Charter or in the power structure of the organization itself.

To some extent, the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals also collided with the views of informed public opinion in the United States. The wartime propaganda for a new world organization had fostered

a wave of idealism bordering on utopianism among segments of the public. The Proposals, conversely, were based on the bedrock of diplomatic realism, as were the compromises reached at Yalta. Consequently, many idealists regarded the Proposals as a step backward from the League of Nations Covenant, pointing out that the principle of national sovereignty was proclaimed more strongly than it had been in 1919, that great power domination was more solidly entrenched, and that references to law and justice were vaguer. Idealists who had been thinking in terms of a world federal union were brought harshly back to reality.

The great powers, however, could not wait for the building of a full public consensus; to prolong the process of constructing the framework of the new organization might run the risk of destroying existing areas of agreement as the war drew to a close. Suggestions for revisions and improvements could be explored at San Francisco. In the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt, addressing the Congress on his return from Yalta, "This time we shall not make the mistake of waiting until the end of the war to set up the machinery of peace."

The UN Conference on International Organization (UNCIO)

The UN Conference on International Organization opened in San Francisco on April 25, 1945, with forty-six nations represented. Four additional delegations representing Argentina, Denmark, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine were subsequently admitted to participate in drafting the Charter. The fifty nations represented, plus Poland, became the original members of the United Nations. The latter did not participate in the San Francisco Conference because the United States and Britain refused to recognize the Soviet-sponsored Provisional Government, but Poland was permitted to sign the completed Charter as an original member. The controversy over Poland's participation hinted strongly of the

coming ideological conflicts within the new organization.

The process of writing the UN Charter resembled that of a democratic constituent body drafting a constitution. The Big Five provided the leadership and initiative in most of the decision making. The U.S. delegation was particularly conspicuous in its role as godfather of the new organization. Although diplomatic practice demands that the foreign minister of the host country be chosen as the presiding officer of an international conference, in the interest of great power unity the conference chose the foreign ministers of the four sponsoring governments as cochairmen.³

The conference agenda was based on the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals as modified by the Yalta Conference. The conference rules provided for freedom of discussion, voting equality, and substantive decision making by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting. These ground rules theoretically gave the small states an opportunity to undo the work of the great powers, but in fact no substantial change in the great power position was effected. The threat of empty great power chairs at the UN table was incentive enough for the majority to defer to the few. The middle and small powers did sometimes obtain concessions on matters of secondary importance that, in total, added up to a significant modification of the Proposals. Bloc politics were also used at the conference, with the twenty Latin American states and five Arab states particularly active and effective. The Commonwealth states, however, did not join Britain in a voting bloc, preferring to provide leadership to the attempts to modify the great power position.

The completed Charter was signed on June 26, 1945, by the delegates of fifty-one nations. On the same date the delegates also established a Preparatory Commission consisting of representatives of all member states. The Preparatory Commission met in London during November to make arrangements for the first meetings of the new organization's major organs and for the

transfer of certain activities from the League of Nations.

Public Support and Ratification

After signing the UN Charter, the fifty-one signatory states undertook its ratification through their respective constitutional processes. The process of ratification varies from nation to nation, although it generally involves some measure of approval by the national legislative body. Such approval may be automatic in authoritarian nations, and it may even be perfunctory in democratic nations, but in some nations, such as the United States, it may be the crucial test for a treaty. Although the great majority of treaties submitted to the U.S. Senate over the years have received its consent, some of the most important ones, such as the Covenant of the League of Nations and the Statute of the first World Court, have been rejected. Many others have been effectively killed by remaining buried in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

On July 28, 1945, the Senate of the United States approved the Charter of the United Nations by a vote of 89 to 2. The lopsided vote surprised no one. Never before in U.S. history had a treaty been studied and debated so extensively both before and after its writing. Never had the Senate participated so directly in the major steps of the treaty process or had bipartisanship operated so successfully in removing a major treaty from politics. Never before, or since, had the State Department been so successful in stimulating organized group support for a major policy objective. In a very real sense the U.S. decision to participate in the United Nations was in accord with the democratic principle expounded in the Preamble of the Charter: "We the peoples of the United Nations . . . have resolved to combine our efforts . . . and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations."

On August 8, 1945, President Truman ratified the Charter of the United Nations and the Statute

of the International Court of Justice, which was annexed to it. The United Nations came into being on October 24, 1945, which has since been established as United Nations Day. At that time the Soviet Union deposited its ratification and the Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes, signed the Protocol of Deposit of Ratifications affirming that a majority of the fifty-one original signers (twenty-nine nations), including all five great powers, had deposited ratifications with the United States. All fifty-one signers of the Charter had ratified it by December 27, 1945. On January 10, 1946, with the opening of the First General Assembly, the United Nations began its work.

NOTES

1. *New York Times Magazine*, September 15, 1957, p. 21.
2. Within two months following the levying of sanctions in November 1935, Italian exports had declined 43 percent over the same month of the previous year, and imports had dropped 47 percent. In three months imports fell to 56 percent of the previous year and imports of strategic items such as iron ore, tin, and raw rubber had almost ceased. Thus, within a short period of time economic sanctions proved effective in significantly reducing Italy's economic activity.
3. France was invited to become a sponsoring government but declined.

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