

US : UN - From World War Two to the Present

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The American origins of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945, and the duality of US usages and conceptions of it ever since: from the Cold War through the collapse of the USSR to today's war on terror and occupation of Mesopotamia.

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During the twentieth century, American leaders twice promulgated ambitious collective security institutions for resolving international conflicts. Each time, no sooner were the projects launched than they were undermined, or transformed, from within the United States itself. Wilson's idea of a League of Nations foundered on Republican opposition in the Senate. Roosevelt's conception of the United Nations was aborted by the Democrat Administration of his successor. By 1950, the Truman Administration, guided by Dean Acheson, had hit upon a quite different political framework for managing world politics. This did not require dismantling the UN or withdrawing from it; the world body and its agencies performed too many useful functions for the US for that. But it did mean demoting it to no more than a secondary role, as an auxiliary instrument of American diplomacy. As Dean Acheson later put it, the UN was 'certainly an American contribution to a troubled world, [but] I personally am free of the slightest suspicion of paternity'. [1]

The fact that American leaders had, by the end of the 1940s, sidelined the Rooseveltian project for the UN was not immediately or transparently obvious. Indeed, the moment this mutation became complete was, on the surface, a triumph for Washington in mobilizing the UN for its own uses: to back Western intervention in the Korean civil war. But by then the UN had, in fact, been abandoned as the vehicle through which American global dominance would find expression. It had been downgraded, and folded into a strategic and institutional framework alien to Roosevelt's initial design for the organization. By the 1960s, indeed, the UN was regarded in Washington as not only a secondary but in some ways a vexatious affair, once former European colonies and other states organized themselves into the Non-Aligned Movement and used the General Assembly as a platform to ventilate opinions unwelcome to the State Department. Such developments prompted Acheson to declare publicly that 'the votes in the United Nations mean less than nothing'. [2] In private, Acheson's sentiments about the organization were far more pungent. With WASP disdain for the Russian-born functionary who was the Roosevelt Administration's encyclopaedic UN technical engineer, he would refer to 'that little rat Leo Pasvolsky's United Nations'. [3]

Pasvolsky is long forgotten. Yet so too is the vast two-month conclave that established the UN order. There is an enormous Anglo-Saxon literature on Versailles and a very substantial one on the Congress of

Vienna. Large numbers of people have heard of the treaties of Westphalia. But San Francisco? The conference launching the UN Charter and the UN has been largely obliterated from the public memory of the Anglo-American world. If post-war Austria's great achievement has been to convince the world that Hitler was a German and Beethoven an Austrian, there have been periods in which conservatives in the US have achieved similar success in persuading many Americans that the UN has been the work—if not the conspiracy—of foreigners. Stephen Schlesinger's *Act of Creation* reminds us in vivid detail that the UN was as American in conception and construction as San Francisco itself. [4] His is the first book to supply a reasonably scholarly account of what actually happened in San Francisco between 25 April and 25 June 1945, about which there has been a fifty-year silence, even in the huge, diverse academic world of the United States.

Part of the reason why the Conference at San Francisco has not attracted much research is because so many of the key decisions on the new body had already been settled between the major powers, at the Dumbarton Oaks conference in September 1944 and at Yalta the following February. Yet an effect of this neglect has been that scholarly treatments of the whole course of the UN project, from the earliest Rooseveltian planning for the post-war world through to San Francisco itself, remain lacking. Schlesinger has now given us a fairly thorough treatment—there are gaps—of the proceedings in California, but his book is otherwise a somewhat shallow work, lacking any real historical perspective on the calculations of the Great Powers that determined its outcome. In that respect, it bears no comparison with Robert Hilderbrand's classic study of the negotiations at Dumbarton Oaks. [5] More general discussions of wartime American planning have not focused strongly on the UN strand within Roosevelt's strategy. Gabriel Kolko's *The Politics of War*, published almost forty years ago, thus still remains the indispensable, and almost the only complete guide to the whole picture.

FDR expansionism

Roosevelt was well equipped to develop the grand strategy required by the United States, once it was clear that Stalingrad had settled the military outcome of the Second World War. Fascinated by international politics from his youth, he studied Mahan enthusiastically at school and accumulated a personal library of books on naval warfare while at Harvard. A fierce admirer of his cousin Theodore Roosevelt, whose niece Eleanor he married, FDR followed quite consciously in the footsteps of his outspokenly expansionist relative. His political career began with what, for an American of his generation, was a crucial school in military strategy: the Navy Department, where he became Assistant Secretary in 1912. There he was a Big Navy man, pushing for a fleet to rival Britain's. In 1914, he looked forward to all-out war with Mexico to 'clean up the political mess' occasioned by the Mexican Revolution. In that same year he declared: 'Our national defence must extend all over the western hemisphere, must go out a thousand miles into the sea, must embrace the Philippines and over the seas wherever our commerce may be.' [6] Contemptuous of his superior, Navy Secretary Daniels, a pacific Methodist from North Carolina, he chafed to thrust America into the First World War.

At the end of that war Roosevelt backed Wilson on the League of Nations, but also—positioning himself to shape the Democratic Party's thinking on foreign policy—wanted to beef up American military power. Once installed in the Presidency, he sent Sumner Welles to crush the revolution of 1933 and install Batista's dictatorship in Cuba, pampered clients like Somoza in Nicaragua and—mindful of the need for Catholic votes at home—took care to assist Franco by embargoing arms to the Spanish Republic during the Civil War. Fascism had few terrors for him. Relations with Mussolini were excellent; Vichy a normal diplomatic partner. Nazi Germany, on the other hand, FDR—although unwilling to offer any shelter to Jewish refugees—viewed as the resurgence of an unmitigated expansionist menace; much as did Churchill, also of First World War naval background. Thus once fighting broke out in Europe, and even before the US had entered the war, the Roosevelt Administration was already looking ahead to a new, American-led world beyond it.

Any grand design for US global dominance had to address one fundamental problem: how to restructure American domestic politics for such an external role. Wilson had been defeated by this challenge, but the

configuration of domestic political forces had shifted by the end of the 1930s. In the first place, the dominant sectors of the American business class were now overwhelmingly wedded to the idea of US global leadership. The rise of Wilkie amongst Republicans and Dewey's candidacy against Roosevelt (advised by John Foster Dulles) during the war demonstrated the new consensus. So too did the important group of Republicans within the Roosevelt Administration itself, among them Stimson, Lovett and McCloy. What this bipartisan coalition of big capital wanted from Roosevelt was an assurance that international expansion would be in safe hands from the point of view of American business. In these quarters the brand of internationalism represented by Vice-President Henry Wallace was judged to be unreliably liberal, so Roosevelt dumped him and picked Harry Truman for his running-mate instead, as a man unlikely to offend conservatives. [7]

But popular isolationism was far from dead in the United States and there was a real danger that, once the war was over, domestic pressures would mount for America to concentrate on solving internal problems. The business-class coalition needed Roosevelt to come up with a commanding response to that—one with a powerful 'moralistic' component, as any mass politics capable of moving millions in a sustained way must have. Much of Roosevelt's effort in preparing domestic opinion for the UN involved building up such an idealistic appeal—without compromising in any way the requirements of an American state dedicated to global power politics and the international expansion of US capitalism. In wartime America there was no material available in the local political culture out of which the necessary internal banner for the nation's assumption of world leadership could have been woven, other than an updated variant of Wilsonian internationalism. Subsequent critics of Roosevelt's pieties about the UN would have preferred a different moralistic substance: not the lofty ethical appeal of a new and supposedly peaceful world order, but the more down-to-earth one of a robust anti-Communism. But that was not an option available for Roosevelt during the war, when continued military and diplomatic alliance with the Soviet Union appeared essential to victory.

In resolving its task, the Roosevelt Administration hit upon a fundamental insight: that international institutions could be constructed to face simultaneously in two radically different directions. One face would be turned in the direction of mass popular politics, both within the US and internationally. This would be the inspiring ethical face, offering promise of a better world. But simultaneously, the internal face of the organization could be shaped in an entirely different and indeed opposite way, as a framework for the power politics of the hegemon. Moreover—this was the key to success in setting up the UN—the two would not be in tension: the moralistic mask could both conceal and strengthen the inner countenance of the institution. Far from being an attempt to escape from the realities of great-power politics, Roosevelt's scheme for the UN was his way of confronting and pursuing them.

Great-power directorate

From the start, Roosevelt was committed to wrapping the UN Wilsonian banners around an inner structure shaped as a breathtaking dictatorship by a handful of great powers. On this, he never wavered. The new organization would give negligible power to its ordinary member states in the General Assembly: a sharp break from the League of Nations rules. Even the narrower 'executive committee', combining great powers and other member states, was for Roosevelt to be largely impotent. All executive power should be concentrated in the hands of a few permanent states. The chief problem for Roosevelt was how to ensure that, within this directorate, America should dominate.

Here Roosevelt confronted problems from both Churchill and Stalin. In many ways, his problems with Stalin over the new structure were easier to handle than those with Churchill. Initially, Roosevelt conceived the post-war directorate as a triarchy of the USA, UK and USSR; or as Hilderbrand dryly terms it, a modern version of the Dreikaiserbund of Bismarck's day. This notion, when put to him in Teheran, was eminently palatable to Stalin. But as victory neared, Roosevelt talked increasingly of the lofty goal of bringing the peoples of the earth together in a common assembly. For this Stalin had no enthusiasm. His priorities were essentially local and practical: he was determined that the outcome of the war must provide absolutely dependable arrangements for the geopolitical security of the Soviet state. But now he

had reason to fear that his partner might be drifting away from earlier understandings. For by the time the design of the UN was being thrashed out at Dumbarton Oaks, Hilderbrand notes, 'the Americans had turned away from regionalism, the principle by which the Kremlin expected to be given authority over its nearest neighbours, in favour of a universalistic approach that might open the way for the West to meddle in the Soviet sphere'. [8]

On sensing this change, Stalin set out to ensure that the new global body should be designed in such a way that it could not be used as a machinery for lining up states for a confrontation with the USSR. There were obvious difficulties in securing such safeguards for Moscow. Stalin could see the reality: the membership of the new organization would have a stack of states from the Western Hemisphere, brigaded under American control; and another stack from the British Empire, under UK control. So the USSR could easily be isolated on all the bodies and committees of the new organization. Stalin's first response was to demand that all Soviet republics be made members.

This caused panic in Washington, where the administration well knew it would never be accepted by US public opinion. But since Roosevelt had no intention of giving the membership significant powers in any case, it was not such a major issue. He convinced Stalin to confine himself to the award of just two extra seats—for Ukraine and Belorussia—in the General Assembly. At Yalta the US and Britain approved this concession in principle, while insisting that the actual decision on it would have to be taken by the San Francisco conference. More intractable was Stalin's requirement that the Great Powers be given a sweeping veto over all issues of substance and procedure in the new organization. This the US resisted, arguing that any such state that was directly engaged in a dispute with another state should not have voting rights on it, and that the veto should be restricted to policy, not procedural issues.

Centralization or regional spheres

Britain posed a comparable problem. According to Cordell Hull, Churchill wanted the UN to have a regionalized structure with a Council of the Americas, a Council of Europe and a Council of East Asia—leaving South Asia, the Middle East and Africa (that is, the bulk of the British Empire) splendidly unregulated. [9] This scheme had its attractions for Roosevelt. It catered to Washington's determination to retain its grip on Central and South America, while implying no exclusion of the US from either Europe or East Asia. American power would be firmly implanted in Germany, and could use the mantle of UN trusteeship to establish bases in the Mediterranean, West Africa, Indochina, Korea and Formosa. While gratifying US needs, the regionalist conception would also, Churchill calculated, provide the best defence of the Empire and of a British leadership role in Europe.

If Roosevelt had opted for a post-war strategy of off-shore balancing at each end of Eurasia, Churchill's plan would have had its attractions. A loose regionalist arrangement would enable the US to 'stand above' local quarrels in Europe or the Far East, while being able to intervene as necessary from its bases to prevent hostile coalitions from forming. But after some hesitations, Roosevelt rejected Churchill's scheme and came down instead for a centralized structure under a global great-power directorate. His Secretary of State Cordell Hull, obsessed with the idea of a free-trade order (opening the world's markets to American industry), was determined to sweep away all regionalist 'spheres of influence' which could block his rather narrowly trade-centred vision. Discussing the danger of such blocs, Pasvolsky—after committing the faux pas of reminding his boss that the Japanese had described their Co-Prosperity Sphere as a Monroe Doctrine for Asia—went so far as to observe that 'if we ask for the privilege, everybody else will', which would 'push the Soviets into a combine' of their own, a prospect to be thwarted. [10] Roosevelt was sympathetic to such considerations and also knew that Hull spoke for powerful forces in the Congress. In any case, FDR calculated, he could make a centralized structure work best for American interests.

His key move to ensure American dominance within a global directorate was to play the China card. Not three, but 'Four Policemen' would keep order round the world, he explained. Before producing this rabbit from a hat, he had made sure that Chiang Kai-Shek's hopelessly venal and demoralized regime—then reduced to a rump in Chungking—would play the game loyally as an American client. That made two US

votes out of four. So far as Britain went, it was clear that London would be critically resource-dependent on American military and financial power for a very long time, once hostilities ceased. That could turn two votes into three on all issues crucial to Washington. What then of the Soviet Union? At this stage, Washington's overwhelming priority was to expand American power and business across the capitalist world. This was the great structural goal confronting the White House at the time, not swallowing the USSR whole. Three votes in the directorate, plus respect for Soviet geopolitical security concerns, looked as if it would be a formula that could work.

Churchill, however, was alarmed and outraged by Roosevelt's plan when he learnt of it in October 1942. He repeatedly referred to 'the United States with her faggot-vote China' and had no trouble detecting the connexion between the Chinese ploy, a centralized vision of the UN and American designs on the British Empire. The 'pig-tails' Roosevelt was trying to foist on the Big Three 'would be a faggot vote on the side of the United States in any attempt to liquidate the British overseas Empire'. [11] Eden sought to head Roosevelt off by warning that China might 'have to go through a revolution after the war'. [12] When Roosevelt would not budge, Churchill launched a long battle for a 'faggot vote' of his own in the unlikely shape—given his feelings about De Gaulle—of France, whose own empire he resolved to see rebuilt after the war, to check American designs on Indochina, Tunisia and Senegal.

Roosevelt resisted vigorously, maintaining diplomatic relations with the Vichy regime long after D-Day in 1944, and still rejecting any recognition of De Gaulle's administration in France as late as September 1944, when the 'Big Four' were negotiating the structure of the UN at Dumbarton Oaks in Georgetown—a gathering that itself had to be split into two conferences because the Russians would not sit down with a Chinese government that had not yet declared war on Germany. Even when Roosevelt had finally abandoned Vichy and recognised De Gaulle's government, Washington dragged its heels on full French recognition as part of a Big Five. De Gaulle, who had little reason to trust the patronage of Churchill, gained no seat at Yalta. Even as the San Francisco conference assembled, his treatment by Washington tempted him to lead a revolt against Dumbarton Oaks and refuse to take his seat as a permanent member of the Security Council. But at San Francisco itself, the French relented and joined the Big Five, while the Americans were constrained to abandon their plans for breaking off bits of the French Empire as suitable locations for American bases.

The Rooseveltian model

Despite these growling power struggles, Roosevelt's dedication in the last months and weeks of his life to the project of the United Nations kept up sufficient domestic and international momentum to ensure that in the months after his death San Francisco gave birth to a body which was, in all essentials, the one which he and his collaborators had designed. It was an ingenious piece of institutional engineering. The UN package possessed, from the start, two banners inherited from the League. The first was its claim to cosmopolitan scope. This was only a promise in San Francisco, since the Axis powers were excluded and the European Empires were still not destroyed. But over time, thanks to post-war reconstruction in Germany and Japan, and decolonization in Asia and Africa, the UN would greatly surpass the League in scale and standing. The second banner was renewed dedication to peace and the resolution of armed conflicts. There was much else in the declaratory rhetoric of the Charter, and a host of specialized UN agencies eventually would come into being, but these two banners were and remain the major symbols of the world body.

At the founding conference the second was the most visible since, as noted, the first still had an element of political conditionality attached to it: not only Germany and Japan but any powers still their allies, and even pro-Axis neutrals were not allowed to attend. Schlesinger explains that the UN logo, showing a map of the globe within a wreath of flowers, was carefully designed to exclude Argentina from view because of its friendship with Nazi Germany. The Truman Administration's determination to bring Argentina in anyway enabled Molotov to make a modest propaganda gain in San Francisco, as much of the American press criticized the White House for Machiavellianism. But the deliberate tying of UN cosmopolitanism to the Allied coalition has nonetheless marked the body ever since; most obviously in the composition of the

Big Five and the exclusion of Germany and Japan from their ranks.

At the same time, San Francisco's declaration of the principle of the sovereign equality of states, and openness to the potential membership of all nations, carried the appealing message that it might one day gather within it representatives from the peoples of the entire world. This has given the UN a unique kind of popular aura: not of political democracy, let alone social justice, but simply of planetary inclusiveness. There was never any question of world government here: the Roosevelt administration had always vigorously opposed all those who pressed for even an embryo of that. But its ethnic span has always given the UN a potent if nebulous patina of authority. This in turn has strengthened its continuing role as a focal point for diplomacy in zones of incipient or actual armed conflict almost anywhere in the world. Protagonists either on one side or on both have consistently sought to use the UN as a platform for efforts to gain support for their cause—just as the United States has also fairly consistently used it as a body on which to dump responsibility for managing or containing conflicts in which the US itself identifies no pressing American strategic interest.

If such were the normative promises it offered, the Rooseveltian package simultaneously sought to ensure that the UN could in no way become an obstacle to the pursuit of US global strategy. The cosmopolitan ideal was gutted by giving the General Assembly no significant policy-making power whatever. Decision-making authority was concentrated in a Security Council without the slightest claim to rest on any representative principle other than brute force. This radical break between the scope of the Assembly and the unaccountable oligarchy of the Security Council was, indeed, a topic of interminable debate in the Roosevelt Administration. Roosevelt himself was by instinct at the extreme end of the power-political spectrum, inclined to grant a complete diktat to the Four Policemen without much effort at a fig-leaf. He toyed with the idea of adding Brazil to them, as another liegeman of the US, but was dissuaded by his subordinates. He was persuaded instead to bring six other states, elected in rotation by the General Assembly as a whole (not by regions, as urged by Sumner Welles) onto the Security Council, essentially as window-dressing for the arbitrary prerogatives of his quartet of planetary gendarmes. Their sweeping veto powers could be counted on to render the elected members impotent and any representative principle void.

Orchestrating the birth

Such was the situation as delegates from 46 countries arrived in San Francisco in April 1945 to put the finishing touches to the broad outlines of the UN that had been devised by the US at Dumbarton Oaks, and refined in Washington over the following months. Roosevelt had died a fortnight earlier. His last Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, former chairman of US Steel, was dispatched—reluctantly—by Truman to preside over the proceedings. Stephen Schlesinger's book provides a graphic account of the complete American control of the occasion. Suitably enough, plenary sessions were staged in the Opera House, where the delegates sat like so many spectators of a Broadway musical—the auditorium having been transformed for the occasion by a designer of these. Four gold pillars tied together with olive branches, a semi-circle of flags aloft pike-staffs, twenty-four spotlights 'with blue filters for cosmetic effect', and an off-stage band playing martial music adorned the première. More humdrum affairs were attended to by specialized committees in the Veterans' Building nearby. If these were settings suggestive of passivity and impotence, no such connotations attached to Stettinius's penthouse in the Fairmont Hotel, which saw the real action as the other Great Powers were summoned to confer with their host.

Meanwhile, in the Army base in the old Spanish Presidio a few miles away, US military intelligence was systematically intercepting all cable traffic by the delegates to their home countries, whose decoded messages landed on Stettinius's breakfast table; while the FBI kept track of their movements in the city—as well as, of course, anti-colonial lobbies and other subversive groups congregating round the conference. Much of what was snooped on remains blacked out in transcripts even today. [13] Comprehensive surveillance of the foreign delegates (and even some from the US) was accompanied by the beguilements of American wealth and glamour. Already at the much more select gathering of Dumbarton Oaks, Stettinius had taken British and Soviet negotiators secretly to the flesh-pots of

Manhattan (the midnight floor-show at the Diamond Horseshoe night-club, Katherine Hepburn at Radio City, cocktails with Nelson Rockefeller) and the stately homes of Virginia (mint juleps on the terrace while Stettinius held forth on the beauties of the scene—in the words of a British colleague, ‘as if he not only owned it but had painted it’). [14] In San Francisco, Hollywood movies were shown daily free of charge in a special UN viewing theatre, while aerial tours of the Bay Area by blimp, marine excursions in Coast Guard cutters, special consignments of scotch, bourbon, champagne, rum, brandy and cigarettes, and many a dazzling reception were laid on to similar effect.

Amidst this bombardment of attractions, the conference resolved itself into two main issues. The first was the position the Soviet Union would occupy within the emergent structure designed to encase American global power, as Roosevelt had conceived it. Molotov and Gromyko arrived with briefs unchanged from Dumbarton Oaks. The veto powers of the permanent members of the Security Council must encompass matters not only of substance but of procedure, since—as Gromyko pointed out—nothing was easier than for the second to slide rapidly towards the first. Ostensibly, a homeric battle was engaged on this issue, the American press agog at the prospect of the conference failing through deadlock over it. In reality, Stalin’s thoughts were concentrated on securing Western assent to Soviet control of post-war Poland, where he had swiftly installed a satellite regime, to the indignation of Republican senators and much of the US press and public opinion.

Truman, often thought to have been a more principled anti-Communist than Roosevelt, committed to a firmer line against totalitarian usurpation in Eastern Europe, did not hesitate. To cut the Gordian knot over the scope of veto powers, he dispatched Harry Hopkins to Moscow with instructions to make it clear that ‘Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Austria (sic), Yugoslavia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, et al (re-sic), make no difference to US interests’—adding, with cynicism that outdid any aside by Roosevelt, that an election in Poland could be as free as Tom Pendergast’s in Kansas City or Boss Hague’s in Chicago. [15] With this assurance from the ‘heroic’ little democrat from Missouri in his pocket, Stalin dropped opposition to the American version of the veto with a wave of his hand, dismissing it as an insignificant matter. The founding conference of the UN ended with a Soviet retreat on every major point of contention. The hard-liners in the US delegation—Republican Senator Vandenberg in the lead—had every reason to be jubilant.

What explains the ease of this American victory at San Francisco? Essentially, Stalin accorded far more importance to his control of Eastern Europe than to the structure of the new global institutions and, to gain the acceptance he wanted for the one, yielded any significant say over the other. For all his legendary lack of scruple, he was a naive and provincial politician outside the wintry recesses of the CPSU in which he had built his empire. Easily fooled by Hitler, impressed even by Chiang-Kai Shek, the ‘Marshal’ was flattered and lulled by Roosevelt into believing the war-time alliance might become a peaceable division of spheres after the war—in which Stalin seriously thought only of a glacis to his West, contenting himself with the merest crumbs in the East: the Kuriles, exclusion from the occupation in Japan, and renunciation of half of Korea. Not a Soviet soldier was allowed to set foot in Rome, while Berlin was surrendered to joint Allied control without US or British troops having taken an inch of it. Once he had physically secured Eastern Europe—albeit with the gaping hole of West Berlin—what Stalin essentially sought was Anglo-American acceptance of the facts on the ground, for which he was quite prepared to sacrifice any independent stake in the construction of the UN, clinging to the belief that veto powers would neutralize any danger from it.

Roosevelt, though not immune to self-deception himself—he too vaguely believed that good relations between Moscow and Washington could continue after the war, if not on an equal footing—had altogether wider horizons. American power was global, not regional, and required an institutional framework to fit it. The UN that Stalin allowed him to construct in due course fulfilled the original Soviet fears. Over the next half century, it is difficult to think of a single material benefit the USSR derived from the institution in which, to adapt Hilderbrand’s phrase, the Soviets soon ‘found themselves feeling increasingly isolated and vulnerable, truly the black sheep in the family of nations’. [16]

On the other hand, Roosevelt’s conception of the UN did not survive the next years intact either. The most

revealing sections of Schlesinger's book lie in the evidence it provides that the first pointers towards an alternative political framework for American hegemony, including the UN but extending beyond it, were put in place at the San Francisco conference. Orthodox accounts of the origins of Acheson's grand strategy explain its emergence as the result of an increasingly conflictual evolution of relations between the US and the USSR. Some within this orthodoxy blame the Soviet Union for the rising tensions, others the Truman Administration. But there is another way of looking at the turn Acheson gave US foreign policy—one that stressed not collective security organizations for world peace (in which no one is, in principle, an enemy unless they break the rules), but bilateral security alliances built on friend-enemy lines, from the start—which points to an underlying ambiguity in Roosevelt's vision of the form that American hegemony should take.

Rockefeller's role

For while the bulk of the Roosevelt Administration was preoccupied with fighting a war and preparations to anchor American dominance through a collective security organization, the sector which handled Latin American affairs under the leadership of Nelson Rockefeller was involved in neither of these. Here there was no war to be fought, and the organizational construction in which Rockefeller was engaged was that of a hegemonic security alliance, based on friend-foe principles. Rockefeller had been Co-ordinator of Inter-American affairs in the Administration since 1940, where one of his major goals was, as he put it in an official memorandum, 'to lessen the dependence of Latin America upon Europe as a market for raw materials and a source of manufactured articles', not least by acquiring British assets in the region. As another official memo noted, there were 'good properties in the British portfolio' in Latin America and 'we might as well pick them up now', though there was also 'a lot of trash which Britain should be allowed to keep'. [17] To this end, Rockefeller had constructed co-ordinating committees in each Latin American country. As a senior American diplomat explained in a letter to Rockefeller's boss, the Under Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, the committees were 'composed of the biggest businessmen', including Standard Oil, Guggenheim, GE and United Fruit. 'They have very definite ideas as to what our general policy should be, and in general their ideas have been the most reactionary'. [18]

Such was Rockefeller's success in this work that in November 1944 he was promoted to become Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs. In early 1945 he organized an Inter-American conference in Chapultepec, Mexico City, to formalize US dominance in the region through a military-security alliance. Formally, the Chapultepec Pact committed the US to defend the states of the region from external aggression; in practice its aim was to protect pro-American regimes from internal subversion, in exchange for US access to whatever resources it wanted in the various states involved.

But Rockefeller's activity in Chapultepec raised fierce opposition from the State Department's international division, because it contradicted the Dumbarton Oaks principle that all international disputes should be handled by the UN. There was a further problem with Rockefeller's activism—the kind of political forces he patronized in various Latin American countries. Nicolo Tucci, the head of the Bureau of Latin American Research in the State Department, resigned, declaring that 'my bureau was supposed to undo the Nazi and Fascist propoganda in South America but Rockefeller is inviting the worst fascists and Nazis to Washington.' [19]

Rockefeller, however, won on Chapultepec and, despite the fact that he was not included in the American delegation at San Francisco, turned up there anyway and became one of the most powerful figures at the conference, for the simple reason that he, rather than the head of the US delegation, his formal superior Stettinius, had the loyalty of the Latin American delegations, whose votes had decisive weight. Rockefeller took care of every need of the Latin American bloc, ordering the US Navy to do its laundry and caucusing regularly to work out common lines on conference issues. Rockefeller had even closer relations with the FBI than did his own Secretary of State. He told the FBI's chief agent at the conference that he, Rockefeller, was to be the conduit for FBI reports destined for Stettinius. The FBI obliged, passing all its material on to Rockefeller, despite the fact that he had no official role in San Francisco. Stettinius never discovered this link. [20]

The first problem to explode was Argentina, with its unvarnished pro-Fascist government. Rockefeller's Latin American caucus insisted that it be allowed to join the UN. It further warned that unless Argentina was seated, the Latin Americans would block seats for Ukraine and Belorussia, thus threatening a large, public split with the Soviet Union. Stettinius found himself obliged to agree. Next, and much more serious for core UN principles, was Rockefeller's drive to ensure that the conference accept the Chapultepec Pact, despite the fact that Washington had been campaigning for a centralized world body, ending regional spheres of influence.

Stettinius tried to fight Rockefeller on this and the result was the most serious internal dispute within the American delegation at San Francisco. Rockefeller cleverly enlisted Vandenberg's support, to the fury of the Senator's adviser, John Foster Dulles, a key figure in the bi-partisan conclaves in the Fairmont Hotel. The War Department became involved and McCloy flew in from Washington to tackle what he called the 'have our cake and eat it too' issue: in other words ensuring that Washington controlled the Western Hemisphere while simultaneously being free to intervene in Europe. McCloy favoured the Rockefeller position and telephoned Stimson, who concurred that, 'It's not asking too much'. The pair also accepted that Russia should have its security belt in Eastern Europe—a sphere of influence of its own. [21]

Rockefeller therefore won the battle with Stettinius and a vague form of words was agreed in Article 51 of the Charter that allowed individual or collective self-defence at a regional level. Later Dulles would recognize what he called the 'incalculable value' of Rockefeller's intervention. In the 1950s, finding himself sitting next to Rockefeller at a dinner, he declared: 'I owe you an apology. If you fellows hadn't done it, we might never have had NATO.' [22] Striking enough, in a sense this remark by Dulles nevertheless betrays his narrowly legalistic cast of mind. The real significance of Rockefeller's activity in Latin America and at San Francisco went much deeper. He was offering a political model of how to organize American global power, in part alternative and in part complementary to the Rooseveltian model of the UN: the outlines of a capitalist world subordinated to the United States through a system of friend-enemy alliances centred on anti-Communism. This was the acorn Rockefeller planted in San Francisco that would eventually become Acheson's oak.

From Dulles to Huntington

If Paul Nitze is to be believed, Dulles never quite grasped Acheson's idea in its full political sense. Nitze, Acheson's assistant in designing the new American-centred world order at the end of the 1940s, explained his differences with Dulles in a piece called 'Coalition Policy and the Concept of World Order' which he contributed to a book by Arnold Wolfers at the end of the 1950s. [23] In this, Nitze explained that there were two schools of thought on Cold War alliances. One was that these were generated by the need to protect American and allied security against the hostile power of the 'Soviet-Chinese communist bloc'. Of this school, he said, 'Mr. Dulles is sometimes but not always a member'. But, he went on, there was a second school of thought, to which he himself adhered. This held that:

"United States foreign policy is, or should be, positive and not merely negative and defensive. It maintains that United States interests and United States security have become directly dependent on the creation and maintenance of some form of world order compatible with our continued development as the kind of nation we are."

This positive effort, explained Nitze, which began in 1946 and continued through to its completion in 1953, centred on the construction of a system of regional alliances. This machinery of power, he acknowledged, did have 'its world-wide aspects geared into the United Nations structure'—but only in one field. This was economics, where the IMF and the World Bank were vital.

Nitze's conception was later spelt out more bluntly by Samuel Huntington:

"Throughout the two decades after World War Two, the power of the United States Government in world politics, and its interests in developing a system of alliances with other governments against the Soviet

Union, China and communism, produced the underlying political condition which made the rise of [business] transnationalism possible. Western Europe, Latin America, East Asia and much of South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa fell within what was euphemistically referred to as 'the Free World', and what was in fact a security zone. The governments of countries within this zone found it in their interests: (a) to accept an explicit or implicit guarantee by Washington of the independence of their country and, in some cases, of the authority of the government; and (b) to permit access to their territory by a variety of US governmental and non-governmental organisations pursuing goals which those organisations considered important . . . The 'Pax Americana', as I. F. Stone put it, 'is the "internationalism" of Standard Oil, Chase Manhattan, and the Pentagon.' [24]

In such a world order, whatever the roles of the UN and its various agencies, they could be no more than ancillary within the political structures of American primacy.

Staging the finale

The San Francisco Conference ended in fitting style, with a last-minute gala thrown by Nelson Rockefeller in the St Francis Yacht Club, 'highlighted by the appearance of Carmen Miranda, "the Brazilian Bombshell", to celebrate the wind-up'. [25] This was followed by a splendidly choreographed finale in the Opera House, klieg lights blazing over a décor of luxurious props in various shades of blue, a flow chart to track the movement of delegates, rehearsals of each signature of the Charter in a hidden room behind the stage, and last-minute manoeuvres to prevent Argentina from leading the otherwise alphabetical parade of signatories. [26] As soon as the ceremony was completed, 'armed guards rushed the Charter upstairs and placed it in a seventy-five-pound fireproof safe'. The precious cargo was then transported in a special Army plane—wrapped in its own parachute in case of mishap—to Washington by no less a personage than Alger Hiss, the Secretary-General of the Conference. Expecting a corresponding full-dress reception on delivering it to the White House, Hiss was mortified to find the President relaxing in his shirt-sleeves, a shot of bourbon in hand, indifferent to the majesty of the new Covenant in its Ark of combination-locked steel.

The aftermath of the Conference was no less symbolic. Where the League had been killed off in the US Senate, the UN was greeted ecstatically on Capitol Hill, where the assembled legislators sped its ratification through with almost indecent haste—of the 49 signatories to the Treaty only Somoza's Nicaragua and El Salvador beat them to the punch. There were only two dissenting votes. Senator Vandenberg, who could fairly count himself one of the architects of success in the Opera House, gave a stem-winding performance—'I am prepared to proceed with the great adventure. I see no other way. I believe it will bless the earth', etc—in the course of which he allowed that people might say that some signatories 'practise the precise opposite of what they preach even as they sign'; but 'I reply the nearer right you may be in any such gloomy indictment, the greater is the need for the new pattern which promises to stem these evil tides . . . the nearer right you are, the greater is the urgency for invoking the emancipations which the San Francisco Charter contemplates'. [27] No better maxim for the characteristic hypocrisies of the UN could have been found: the more brutal and cynical the conduct of its dominant powers, the more essential to 'invoke' and 'contemplate' the balm of its uplifting principles. The fate of Stettinius, unceremoniously jettisoned by Truman within days of completing his mission in San Francisco, was a more candid barometer of the actual status assigned to the UN in American grand designs in the coming years. Throughout the Cold War, US global strategy proceeded along Achesonian lines.

Schlesinger's book exults that the creation of the UN was 'from the beginning, a project of the United States, devised by the State Department, expertly guided by two hands-on Presidents, and propelled by US power'. He makes no bones of the fact that in San Francisco, 'Stettinius was presiding over an enterprise his nation was already dominating and moulding'. [28] In his eyes, the result was a magnificent feat—'for a nation rightly proud of its innumerable accomplishments, this unique achievement should always be at the top of its illustrious roster', and other peoples owe gratitude to Americans for having bestowed it on them. 'The United Nations', he exclaims, 'might eventually turn out to be the most

resplendent gift the United States has given the world'. [29] Is this disarming vision—America's supreme gift to humanity the outcome of its domination over it—historically realistic?

A more advanced agenda

Given the fact that the Rooseveltian design did ensure US dominance over the politics of the capitalist world (with veto-protections for the USSR), it might seem odd that American leaders should have found the organization insufficient as the principal instrument of US hegemony. A clue can be found in another of Acheson's remarks about the world body. He claimed that the UN was a nineteenth-century idea. This was clearly an exaggeration, but his meaning was surely that its conception belonged to an epoch before American hegemony. For the formal *raison d'être* of the UN, like the League before it, was to bring great-power wars amongst (capitalist) states to an end, by laying down rules for collective action to stop them. For the British and other satisfied powers of the inter-war years, that was an admirable principle. By then London had grabbed what it wanted—and more—across the globe, and the liberal legalism, so perfectly captured and criticized by E. H. Carr [30], that was embodied in the League and made the basis of its jurisprudence, answered to its interests.

This remained at the heart of Roosevelt's conception of the UN, albeit with the Wilsonian amendment for self-determination which helped open up the British and other European empires. Yet the collective security function of defending the status quo against revisionist powers was irrelevant under US hegemony for the simple reason that America, unlike Britain, possessed the resources to impose a unipolar control over all the other capitalist powers, both in Western Europe and in East Asia. In this sense, Acheson was right: the collective security principle was old-fashioned and supererogatory under US hegemony. It basically still addressed what had been the most intractable problem of the Europe-centred world that existed before American dominance.

Of course, for the US to play the role of guardian and manager of the entire core required militarizing the American state on a permanent basis. But that in turn looked as if it might help resolve tricky problems of the domestic political economy. In these conditions, the UN was not only redundant as an instrument for stabilizing relations among the main capitalist centres. From an Achesonian angle, it was worse than redundant because, in the cause of collective political defence of the status quo, it advanced a juridical principle which was, at best, unhelpful: absolute national sovereignty. This again was a principle more attuned to the era of British than of American imperialism. The British never had the capacity to reshape coercively the internal arrangements of other capitalist states. Their speciality was taking over and reshaping pre-capitalist societies, defeating traditionalist forces of resistance within them. So the principle of absolute states' rights and non-interference was perfectly acceptable to the British, once they had reached the limits of their empire.

But Washington had a different and more advanced agenda: first, to penetrate existing capitalist states and reorganize their internal arrangements to suit US purposes; and second, to defeat any social forces there that rejected the American path to modernity in the name, not of traditionalism, but of an alternative modernity. The UN model simply did not address these issues which were so central for Washington. Indeed, it offered a notional defence against American interference in its emphasis on national sovereignty. As a result, the UN politico-legal order was a cumbersome obstacle to a great deal of US post-war activity, forcing much of its drive for internal regime-change to be organized covertly. The Achesonian principle of uniting the free (market) world against all resistance—thematized as 'Communism'—to the American way of organizing modern life, made short work of the phraseologies of the UN Charter. Ratcheting up the Soviet threat, it turned the two main centres of capitalism in Eurasia, Western Europe and Japan, into quasi-protectorates of the US—so enabling Washington to rebuild Germany and Japan as the industrial hubs of their respective regions without fear that they might once again develop geopolitical strategies for re-organizing their regions as rivals to it. Paralysing the UN system, with its prominent symbolic place for the USSR, was thus a necessary component of Achesonian primacy.

After the fall

The first Gulf War of 1991 was as much a false dawn for the post-Cold War UN as Korea had been at the start of the Cold War. In violating the principle of unconditional state sovereignty, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait enabled the US to exploit the UN to the full for a demonstration of the new reach of American hegemony, as the Soviet Union tottered towards extinction. But now more than ever, the UN's utility to the US in the post-Cold War world required that its core principle of state sovereignty be scrapped. For that principle suggests that states are free to organize their domestic political economies as they wish, whereas the profit streams of American (and much of European, especially British) business depend crucially on internal arrangements in other states that provide unfettered freedom to external financial operators, unfettered rights for foreign companies to buy out domestic concerns and unfettered protection of monopoly rents on intellectual property. The UN Charter guarantees none of this: theoretically, indeed, it works against it.

Thus during the 1990s, the US and its European associates sought to rework the traditional discourse of the UN, arguing that sovereignty was not unconditional, but should be viewed as a revocable licence granted to states by the 'international community', to be issued or withdrawn according to the palatability or otherwise of their internal regime. If a state failed to meet appropriate international standards, blockade or invasion were warranted against it. In constructing this revision, on which a host of jurists and diplomats has laboured, Washington (and London) were able to draw on other strands in UN ideals to good effect. The eclectic repertoire of the Charter itself, with its salmagundi of contradictory clauses, offered a ready antidote to any too narrow insistence on national sovereignty. For, after all, it was also a resonant statement of universal human rights. These were the higher values the time demanded, legitimizing a new 'military humanism' in defence of them. In the Balkans, war could be waged by NATO in the name of both human rights and free markets, with the blessing of the UN Secretary-General, and after-sales service ministered by the Security Council. In the late 1990s, Roosevelt's original vision of the UN as the central instrument of American global power looked as if it might come alive again, beyond even his expectations, since Russia too could now be numbered among its dependents in a way he could scarcely have imagined at Yalta.

But even this change has not been enough to persuade successive presidents to rely on the UN as their chosen instrument of hegemony. The White House has remained committed to the model of primacy, organized through hub-and-spokes security alliances that make the other main capitalist states dependent for their security on the US. Under the current Republican Administration, however, the geopolitics of Achesonian 'containment' has been turned on its head: instead of protecting the two Eurasian rimlands through a confrontation with the Eurasian heartland, Bush is pushing US power deep into the centre of the heartland—a zone from the Eastern Mediterranean through the Gulf and the Central Asian region up to China's western borders. This internally unstable zone generates anxieties in all the main Eurasian powers. It also holds the energy reserves needed by all of them except Russia. By holding this zone, Washington could hope to gain leverage for an extended version of the primacy it enjoyed in the Cold War, encompassing even its former adversaries in Moscow and Beijing. In that light, a new global cleavage against 'terrorism' offers a much more flexible basis for wide-ranging interventionism than any legal formula the UN Secretariat, however good-willing, could provide.

Were this prospect to materialize, the UN would be slotted into the framework of American hegemony as an auxiliary machinery once again, as in the days of the Cold War, but this time with the other four permanent members of the Security Council firmly subordinated to US directives—an awesome engine of world dictatorship. If it is frustrated, Washington can at least be sure that there is no chance of any other forces being able to use the UN as an effective check on the predatory instincts of the US and its British side-kick. For many years, the only vetoes actually cast in the Security Council have been American.

Bush's 'unilateralism' represents the revival of a global cleavage structure of friend-enemy relations, with a new set of security alliances and greatly expanded basing arrangements to match. To allies grown accustomed to the conventions of the nineties, this has come as quite a shock. But, even if more precariously, the Rooseveltian framework still holds. After the most brazen of all American wars in

violation of the UN Charter, every hand in the Security Council—some eagerly, others more sullenly—has gone up to endorse the puppet authority installed by the conquerors, ratifying their conquest. [31]

The Iraqi maquis, capable of hitting not only the US and UK occupiers but their UN collaborators too, has nevertheless shaken the confidence of the ‘international community’ in the hegemon. Secretary-General Annan has even been moved to tell the world that ‘one has to be careful not to confuse the UN with the US’, as if such an error could ever have occurred under his stewardship. [32] But there is little sign as yet that much is likely to change within the United Nations. Any real reform of it would probably require—as Danilo Zolo, its most acute critic, has intimated [33]—the withdrawal from the organization of one or several big Third World countries, to force a change in the status and composition of the Security Council, and an unambiguous shift of power to the General Assembly. Only that kind of shock could break the armour-plated settlement created in 1945. But it is enough to glance at the corrupt or pliant leaderships in the most obvious candidate nations to see how utopian such a prospect remains. For the moment, resistance to American power lies in the alley-ways of Fallujah and Baghdad, not the lobbies of the Upper East Side.

P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] See Robert Beisner, ‘Wrong from the Beginning’, *Weekly Standard*, 17 March 2003.

[2] Douglas Brinkley, Dean Acheson. *The Cold War Years, 1953–1971*, New Haven 1992, p. 304.

[3] Beisner, ‘Wrong from the Beginning’. Pasvolsky, violently anti-Bolshevik, liked to boast he had debated with Trotsky in New York in 1916.

[4] *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations*, Boulder 2003.

[5] Dumbarton Oaks. *The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security*, Chapel Hill 1990.

[6] Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945*, New York 1979, p. 9.

[7] Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 482–3.

[8] Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks*, p. 215.

[9] *Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, New York 1948, vol. II, p. 1640.

[10] Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks*, p. 248.

[11] Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War. The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943–1945*, New York 1968, pp. 266–7. Churchill’s phrase had no homophobic meaning. Originally a term for someone temporarily hired to make up a deficiency at a military muster, by the early 19th century faggots were a bundle of votes (as in sticks) manufactured for party purposes through the transfer to persons not otherwise legally qualified of sufficient property to make them electors, by sub-dividing a single tenement among a number of nominal owners. In Churchill’s youth *The Times* was still (1887) publishing articles on ‘The Question of Faggot-voting’.

[12] Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 389-90.

[13] 'The military man in charge of the San Francisco eavesdropping and code-breaking operation indicated his own sense of accomplishment: "Pressure of work has at last abated and the 24-hour day has shortened. The feeling in the Branch is that the success of the Conference may owe a great deal to its contribution": Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*, p. 331.

[14] Later, 'the cavalcade arrived at Stettinius's home, Horseshoe, where the party ate a buffet supper and were entertained by a negro quartet singing spirituals': Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks*, pp. 82-83.

[15] Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*, pp. 213, xvii.

[16] Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks*, p. 254.

[17] Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Rockefellers. An American Dynasty*, New York 1976, p. 230.

[18] *The Rockefellers*, p. 233.

[19] *The Rockefellers*, p. 236.

[20] Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*, p. 87.

[21] Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men*, New York 1986, pp. 275-6.

[22] Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*, p. 174.

[23] Arnold Wolfers, ed., *Alliance Policy in the Cold War*, Baltimore 1959.

[24] Samuel Huntington, 'Transnational Organizations in World Politics', *World Politics*, April 1973.

[25] *Act of Creation*, p. 243. Rockefeller went on to sell the Manhattan real estate on which the General Assembly was built to the fledgling world organization.

[26] *Act of Creation*, pp. 243, 251-7. This was not the only diplomatic contre-temps. When Truman arrived for the ceremony, Stettinius held an all-American banquet for him in his Fairmont penthouse, recounting the meetings of the Big Five and their seating arrangements in the jovially anecdotal style of a tour guide with sight-seers. The only woman on the US delegation, the high-minded Virginia Gildersleeve—a figure out of J. K. Rowling—complained of this 'international bad manners' and 'scandalous breach of etiquette'. It is to Virginia, keen on education and human rights, that we owe the most sonorous strophes of the Charter.

[27] *Act of Creation*, p. 266.

[28] *Act of Creation*, p. 174.

[29] *Act of Creation*, pp. xiii, xviii, 279.

[30] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, London 1946.

[31] The Security Council, 16 October 2003: 'welcomes the positive response of the international community to the establishment of the broadly representative Governing Council'; 'supports the Governing Council's efforts to mobilize the people of Iraq'; 'determines that the Governing Council and its ministers are the principal bodies of the Iraqi interim administration, which without prejudice to its further evolution, embodies the sovereignty of the state of Iraq'; 'authorizes a multinational force under

unified command to take all measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq'; and 'requests that the United States on behalf of the multinational force report to the Security Council on the efforts and progress of this force'. Signed: France, Russia, China, UK, US, Germany, Spain, Bulgaria, Chile, Mexico, Guinea, Cameroon, Angola, Pakistan, Syria. Compare the seating of Pol Pot's representatives in the UN for fourteen years after his regime was overthrown by the DRV.

[32] *Financial Times*, 22 August 2003.

[33] *Cosmopolis*, Cambridge 1997, p. 170. This work and its sequel, *Invoking Humanity. War, Law, and Global Order*, are the best critical appraisals of the United Nations to date.