

The clarion call to multilateralism in Ukraine's finest hour

If there were any reason to be grateful to President Putin, it would have to be for illustrating in the most spectacular fashion that (i) nowhere does the writ of the Law of Unintended Consequences run more freely than in the field of international affairs; (ii) if you live in a deluded world of your own, surrounded only by sycophants, you are almost certain fatally to misjudge other people; and (iii) there is a strong worldwide distaste for aggression, and for the wanton collateral damage which cannot but in practice accompany it.

On this last point, I invite attention to the terms of the outspoken Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in their Emergency Special Session, summoned in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Annex 1). Out of 193 possibles, 141 votes were cast in favour of this admirable polemic. China and India were among the 35 who abstained. In voting against, Russia enjoyed the select company of Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea and Syria.

Centres for the study of diplomacy, international relations, international law and international lore will feast themselves for decades to come on the lessons to be learned from the Putin Experience. The world's leaders will likewise be engrossed for many a year in dealing with its ghastly impact and its aftermath, inextricably mixed as these are with such fearsome considerations as pandemics and the dangers arising from climate change.

While those no longer at the coal face can, in the fast-moving and erratic nature of things, have little to contribute as regards the *substance* of managing our interdependence, they may hope to render service by keeping a close analytical eye on the hydra-headed *process* involved in tackling it.

While responsibility for the content of this essay is, of course, mine alone, I continue to be immensely grateful to David Wardrop, Chairman of the Westminster branch of the United Nations Association; to David Banks, for ten years the Public Affairs Adviser to the Commonwealth Secretary-General; to Professor Nabil Ayad, assuredly one of the great Founding Figures of diplomatic training; to my son Guy; and to my grandson Raffy.

Finally, I draw attention to the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, marked again this year in London by an impressive wreath laying ceremony at the Cenotaph on May 26. Those participating included the Minister for the UN, the Chief of Defence Staff and army units recently returned from serving with the UN in Cyprus and the Sahel.



There are few activities more automatically taken for granted than UN peacekeeping yet its scale has been vast, and its value immeasurable. The UN75 Commemorative Declaration recorded that "more than one million women and men have served under the UN flag in more than 70 peacekeeping operations. 4197 peacekeepers have made the supreme sacrifice."

Peter Marshall,
Eastertide. 2022

INTRODUCTION

It was in 1952 that I first attended a session of the General Assembly, at the shining new UN headquarters, in the guise of additional Private Secretary to the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. I cannot believe that I was of much service to him. But the assignment, in addition to inspiring a life-long affection for the Big Apple, lodged in me a consciousness of the potential of multilateral diplomacy, alongside bilateral diplomacy, which has remained with me ever since.

I confess to a certain frustration, at the failure of the diplomatic services of the leading nations, for a variety of reasons of varying degrees of validity, to grasp to the extent that the situation merited, the advantages to be gained from the multilateral way of doing business. There has been an a seemingly invincible in-built propensity to think in bilateral terms. "Are you telling me", Lord Carrington asked in 1982, "that I am neglecting Geneva?" "If you put it like that, Secretary of State", I replied, "the answer is 'yes'". "I take your point", he said.

Six weeks later, the Argentinians invaded the Falkland Islands, putting a definitive end to the somewhat desultory Anglo-Argentinian discussions on the future of the Falkland Islands which had been proceeding discreetly for some time in the environs of Geneva. Lord Carrington became a distinguished NATO Secretary-General.

I The new beginning in 1945

If something needs to be done, and no-one else seems able or willing to do it, the appropriate course is to have a go yourself. Fools rush where angels fear to tread. Hence this essay, the third in a series surveying (i) the history of the United Nations,

on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the signature of the UN Charter on June 26, 1945, at the conclusion of the San Francisco Conference: (ii) the role the UN has played in world affairs in the intervening seventy-seven years: and (iii) the part that multilateralism, as we now call it, must play in the demanding - yet exciting - future we should prudently expect.

In the first of the essays, *All Together Now*, my concern was to explain how, battered and awed by the catastrophe of two terrible World Wars, a mere twenty years apart, its world's leaders launched, by means of the UN Charter, the widest and most far-reaching co-operative experiment ever launched in the conduct of international relations.

I also drew attention to the Herculean efforts, made at breakneck speed under British leadership in London to translate the words of the UN Charter (once a sufficient number of ratifications had been lodged to enable it to enter into force) into physical and political reality - in the shape of the inaugural session, opening on January 10 1946, of the General Assembly, at Westminster Methodist Central Hall, the renowned place of worship facing Westminster Abbey across hallowed ground, known as "Broad Sanctuary Green", in the heart of London. Broad Sanctuary Green, I am delighted to recall, was officially re-named "United Nations Green" on January 10, 2021, the 75th anniversary of that historic event.



The purpose of the second essay, *Capability our Compass, Multilateralism our Lodestar*, was to pursue the examination of how the mighty experiment has fared in practice. And the answer is "very well". Since 1945, to quote the iconic Kohima Military Cemetery epitaph, the international community has managed its collective Tomorrow in such a way as to honour the sacrifice of those who gave their Today in the Second World War.

Seventy-five years on, the lot of the average human being has improved immeasurably; and there are now three or four times as many of us as there were in 1945 inhabiting four times as many member countries. World GDP has grown exponentially. So has life expectancy. General conditions and amenities of life have altered beyond recognition.

The famous Beveridge Report on *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, the foundation document of the Welfare State, published in 1942, spoke in Bunyan-like terms of the

five giant evils of the day - in Britain, one of the richest countries in the world - as Idleness, Ignorance, Disease, Squalor and Want. What would be our list of the five giant evils today? Mental health? Obesity? "Fuel poverty"? Disruptive and divisive social media? Mediocrity, superficiality and insouciance in high and learned places? All of these, and many others could be described as features of affluence, not of indigence. We do not fully realise how far we have already come, nor how we have come so far. We need to update ourselves in both respects.

All this is proof positive that the vision in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter of "promotion of social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom", and "the economic and social advancement of all peoples" was no mere pipedream. It has shown itself to be an inspiring reality

II Unanimous endorsement, 2020

To attribute such a vast achievement in its entirety to the United Nations network, as it has now become, would be fanciful. A plethora of bodies, national and international, governmental or intergovernmental, non-governmental, professional, confessional or voluntary have made, and are continuing to make contributions of the greatest value.

But to deny the vital overall role to play in ensuring our future security and prosperity, and to leave it all to "market forces" or political chance would be suicidal. Classical, zero-sum diplomacy and the mentality which it fostered are as outdated as Mercantilism and the Inquisition.

That was where the world's leaders were coming from when, on September 21, 2020, at a virtual summit level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, they unanimously adopted, without amendment or reservation, the "*Declaration on the Commemoration of the UN Seventy-Fifth Anniversary*". It is a text of extraordinary importance, monstrously ignored by the great majority of those whose responsibilities should properly include a lively appreciation of its content (full text at Annex 2).

The core of the world's leaders' message is simple: "multilateralism is not an option, it is a necessity". "We are not here to celebrate" they note, " we are here to take action.... We commit to take this declaration to our citizens in the spirit of *We the Peoples*" Yes, multilateralism is not a sofa, it is a springboard.

III Multilateralism in practice: "Skills in the detail of business"

The second essay, sought in addition to fathom the significance of UN practical experience in operating over a very wide range of activities, in every part of the world, and at every level.

It is a matter of fundamental significance. In any type of diplomacy *substance* and *process* are inextricably mixed. We are dealing simultaneously with the "*foreignness*" of foreign affairs and their "*affairishness*". But that is only the start. We also have to take into account (i) the added complications when a whole posse of countries are involved, and (ii) the blurring of the erstwhile relatively clear distinction between internal and foreign affairs.

This overall mixture of substance and process; of the international and the internal; and of the military, security, economic, social and humanitarian, requires expert joint management of a sort previously not merely unknown but not even imaginable.

Multilateralism is *subjective* as well as *objective*. It is *qualitative* as well as *quantitative*. It is *organic* as well as *mechanistic*, administrative and *legal*. It is a function of *culture*, of *loyalties* and of *collective memory*. It embodies the subtle, and frequently esoteric, relationship between *nationhood* and *statehood*. It is *normative*, concerned with values as well as interests. It has to be grasped comprehensively; it goes as widely as what there is to think about, and how best to think about it.

In that same connexion, we need to probe further not only the complexities *within* various realms of multilateral diplomacy, but also the extraordinary web of interrelationships *between* them. Let us note in this connexion the three "pillars of the United Nations", as the Commemorative Declaration calls them - namely "peace and security, development and human rights". As the Declaration says simply: "they are equally important, interrelated and interdependent".

There is further the massive question of how substance and process have *interacted* in the past seventy-seven years, and of how close study of that interaction can help to improve the management of interdependence.

Geodiplomatics: a new conception of international co-operation and management

It all adds up to a new conception of international co-operation and management, requiring the attention of the nation's thinkers to a far greater degree than heretofore. Multilateralism is indeed a formidable discipline in the academic sense: we may call it *Geodiplomatics*, to keep the company of Geopolitics, Geophysics and the like.

"Skills in the details of business"

More important than its merit as an academic discipline is its value at the coal face. This is what Macaulay wrote about Machiavelli:

"The qualities of the active and the contemplative statesman appear to have been blended in a rare and exquisite harmony. His skills in the details of business had not been acquired at the expense of his general powers. It had not rendered his mind less comprehensive; but it had served to correct his speculations, and to impart to them that vivid and practical character which so widely distinguishes them from the vague theories of most political philosophers."

That passage is not only a magnificent verdict on Machiavelli himself. It is also a stark warning to us all that unless we acquire the necessary "skills in the detail of business", our "speculations" and our policies will be "uncorrected", and thus open to those severe criticisms which Macaulay visits upon "most political philosophers".

Secondly, the inescapable corollary of the passage is that in conditions of great and growing interdependence the acquisition of the necessary skills in the detail of business is so massive that it cannot possibly be a matter for the individual alone. It is a matter of national and international teamwork.

In the EU, "*l'acquis communautaire*" is a very useful phrase to describe the accumulation since the signature of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, of law, procedure, software, know-how and lore: *i.e.*, "the details of business". There is already a substantial, but as yet little examined, UN/multilateral equivalent, which, for the moment, we may call *l'acquis onusien*, and which needs much further analysis.

IV Keeping up the momentum: An end to more of the same?

Coming now to this, the third essay, my intention at the outset was (i) to pursue the numerous lines of multilateralist inquiry prompted by the second essay, and (ii) to do so in the hydra-headed context of Covid 19, climate change. and the pressing need for wholesale world economic and social re-balancing and reform, arising not least from the 2008 financial crisis.

This triple whammy would constitute of itself a full international agenda for decades in "normal" times. Mixed with the challenges of management of the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, it will unfailingly claim our unceasing attention.

Preserving the vitality and motivation of multilateralism

The problem with international organisations, however well-constructed and directed, is twofold: within the organisation itself, there is an inevitable tendency over the years for the Secretariat to become ever more deeply concerned with its own concerns, at the expense of the issues with which it was set up to grapple; and among the member states there is a tendency to leave the organisation to its own devices, especially if it displays competence in dealing with complex questions.

The UN network of agencies, subsidiary bodies and programmes has of course been subject to these tendencies. The Commemorative Declaration is disarmingly frank about UN failures. But the shortcomings would have been much greater if there had not been an iconic Commonwealth-led Preamble to the UN Charter.

V We are a values-based community, not a rules-based polity

The UN Charter, with, and without, the Preamble

The proposition that familiarity breeds contempt seems unnecessarily aloof. But that it induces loss of wonderment is nearer the mark, as would appear to be the case with the Preamble. People are vaguely aware of its existence and of its dramatic opening words "we the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war....". But the passage of time has inevitably dulled public consciousness of its crucial importance in the achievement of the objectives set forth in the body of the Charter.

Without the Preamble, the Charter is a high-minded, wise and comprehensive rule book, indicating how the members of a *polity of states* should behave in their dealings with one another. With the Preamble, it is the covenant of an interdependent values-based *community of nations and peoples*, with all that the comparison implies for participation and involvement at all levels of society, and - no less important - with all the responsibilities which stem from that distinctive identity.

VI Re-enter the Bear

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has cast a pall of uncertainty, possibly a nuclear pall of uncertainty - over the future of us all, it raises a host of questions about how we should now interpret the past, as a guide to discerning the wise way ahead.

Well, is it *Deja vu* all over again? Were the years between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the invasion of Ukraine a return to "Western liberal normalcy", or a habitual aggressor's pause for rest, re-equipping and re-conditioning, prior to resuming? Was the diseased Putin, harbouring a visceral grudge against the West; emboldened by the feebleness of Western reaction to his seizure of the Crimea? Or fearing the relative economic decline of Russia; did he see the disarray of the West as a "now or never" moment? Or, more fundamentally, is it true that a bear can only stand on its hind legs for a certain length of time, and then has to flop back on all fours?

Diplomats tend to avoid making choices, where possible: every "on the one hand" is accompanied by an "on the other hand". My answer would have to be "all of the above, and doubtless much more besides".

VII A fresh look at Article 1 of the UN Charter

Asking relevant questions, even while it is obviously too early to attempt to frame specific answers, has it uses not least to establish agreed principles on which those answers should be based when the time comes.

In that perspective, I invite attention to a theme, which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been the subject of international examination since the adoption of the UN Charter: namely the significance of Article 1 which sets out, with admirable brevity, the "purposes of the United Nations". (Full text at Annex 3).

The "purposes" specified in the first three paragraphs are successively "to maintain international peace and security"; "to develop friendly relations among nations": and "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character".

The text of Article 1 originated in the "Tentative Proposals for a General International Organisation" agreed at Dumbarton Oaks in the autumn of 1944 between the four "Sponsoring Powers" (USA, UK, USSR and Nationalist China) as the basis for calling a conference of all "peace-loving" states in San Francisco the following year. It therefore carried the *imprimatur* of the Soviet Union.

The text earns high marks both for its notion of the *business* the organisation should embrace, and for the *approach* which it envisages for tackling that agenda. That approach is of a more general character than that of the UN Charter as a whole. It could be thought of as reflecting the outlook of the "Sponsoring Powers" rather than that of the whole membership of a universal organisation, such as was deliberately fashioned by heroic collective effort at San Francisco. Seventy-five years on, and against the tragic Ukraine background, it merits close re-examination.

Article 1(4) of the UN Charter is different

The purpose set out in paragraph 4, the final paragraph, is "to be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations in the attainment of their common ends". Its purpose, while obviously related to the purposes set out in the first three paragraphs, is qualitatively different from them.

It can be read variously as recognition of the limitations of UN *machinery*, however carefully devised and conscientiously applied. For example, there is no suggestion that "common ends" in this context means only the purposes set out in the preceding paragraphs. Today, for example it must be taken to include the content of the UN 75 Commemorative Declaration.

Secondly, there is no suggestion that the harmonising process should be conducted solely in accordance with the provisions of the Charter. Indeed, it implies that other ways of doing collective business may be required.

Thirdly, there is no suggestion that peace and security questions should be handled any differently from others: there is thus much less scope for Permanent Member obstructiveness,

In short, Article 1(4) by virtue of its very general wording provides an element of flexibility in the multilateralist management of our interdependence, which we have not so far thought to exploit but which may be of great service in the future. Not least it offers a way out of a stalemate which enjoys the full authority of the UN Charter.

VIII The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

One avenue of exploration has already been opened up. It has long been apparent that how one country treats its own citizens can have serious implications for the stability and wellbeing of other countries, especially those in the near neighbourhood. But it has also been a key feature of the nation-state system by which we have lived for the past four hundred years that nations do not interfere in one another's internal affairs,

No provision of the United Nations Charter has been more frequently cited than Article 2 (7) which states categorically that "nothing in the present Charter shall authorise the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state"

The realities of interdependence, however, could not be permanently defied. In 2000, Lloyd Axworthy, the Canadian Foreign Minister, took the initiative in setting up the Independent Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). Under the leadership of Gareth Jones, former Foreign Minister of Australia, Mohamed Sahnoun of Algeria and Michael Ignatiev of Canada, the Commission pursued its inquiries worldwide, holding *inter alia* a number of structured "hearings". I was glad to take part in one such, held in London.

The Commission ingeniously stood the subject on its head by emphasising not the right of the UN to intervene in the affairs of sovereign states but on its responsibility to protect people against oppression everywhere.

The world's leaders took the point in the voluminous document they issued on the occasion of UN60 in 2005. But what they said was very closely confined in its scope to certain types of maltreatment, and it had an equally close eye to the prerogatives of the permanent members of the Security Council.

These restrictions were, of course, of far less significance than the solid fact of the establishment of a secure beachhead on a hitherto jealously defended Article 2(7) coastline. The opportunity would assuredly come to exploit it. The invasion of Ukraine has provided it in spades. I enthusiastically commend what Ambassador Barbara Woodward, the UK Permanent Representative to the UN, had to say on May 5 in the Security Council in "condemnation of Russia's continued aggression towards Ukrainian civilians". (Annex 4)

IX Wanted: a second Brandt Commission

Article 1(4) of the UN Charter represents the tip of an iceberg. Since 1945 we have been living an increasingly multilateral existence and enjoying its fruits without understanding to the extent necessary either its problems of management or its unceasing and extensive incumbent responsibilities. The situation is disappointing rather than surprising; and it can be no great task to set about remedying it. My great antiquity brings forcefully home to me that there is at our disposal both an immense amount of relevant talent and a vast pool of high-level coalface experience.

In 1980 there was published "The Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues under the Chairmanship of Willy Brandt".

The report was entitled "*North-South: A Programme for Survival*". The impact of its exceptional content was greatly enhanced by the prestige of the Commission chairman, for many a year the mayor of beleaguered Berlin. "We live with our problems", he used to say. He knew what that meant. In his introduction to the Report, he records the words of a "distinguished African leader"; "the Commission could contribute to the development of worldwide moral values".

Today we need a second Brandt Commission, and a second Brandt Report.

Sir Peter Marshall, KCMG, CVO, joined the UK Diplomatic Service in 1949, serving in several capacities, including in the UK Permanent Missions to the UN in New York and Geneva. He also served as Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General (1983-88). He was Chairman of the Commonwealth Trust and Royal Commonwealth Society (1988-92) and Chairman of the Joint Commonwealth Societies Council (1993-2003). His book *Public Diplomacy* (Macmillan) was published in 1997.

His previous articles published in these pages include:

- 'Multilateralism a year on'
- charting progress in the year since marking the UN's 75th anniversary (26 June 2021)
- chronicling the UN's seventy-five years (23 June 2020),
- Britain after Brexit must be as "global" as it was when it hosted the inaugural meeting of the United Nations in 1946 (12 January 2020)
- marking the 70th anniversary of the inaugural meeting of the UN General Assembly held in Methodist Central Hall Westminster (6 January 2016) prior to participating in the morning service held there on 10 January.

Annex 1

[General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Demanding Russian Federation Immediately End Illegal Use of Force in Ukraine, Withdraw All Troops](#)

Annex 2

["Declaration on the Commemoration of the UN Seventy-Fifth Anniversary"](#).

Annex 3

UN Charter: Article 1

The Purposes of the United Nations are:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;

To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace;

To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and

To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

Annex 4

Ambassador Barbara Woodward, UK Permanent Representative to the UN:
[statement delivered on May 5 2022](#)