

# ALL TOGETHER NOW!

A UN75 reflection on our multilateral future

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The world's largest UN75 banner featuring the flags of the 193 UN Member States, installed on Broad Sanctuary Green in front of Methodist Central Hall Westminster to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco on 26 June 1945

December 2020

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### FOREWORD

We will be glad to see the back of 2020, with its awesome Coronavirus trail of death, bereavement, suffering, separation, anxiety, loneliness, disruption and destruction of livelihoods.

Yet we have been heartened and inspired by countless acts of courage and selflessness, and by the active concern, so widely shown, for the wellbeing of others. Worldwide, we are increasingly bound together in our interdependent future. To engage with it as we should, in the words of the Preamble to the United Nations Charter, "we reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small". "We have resolved", the Preamble continues, "to combine our efforts to accomplish these ends".

Our current preoccupations and restrictions inevitably led to less attention being paid than would otherwise have been the case to the great 75th anniversaries of 2020: the end of World War II, and the signing of the United Nations Charter. To the best of my knowledge, I am the only World War II veteran still in diplomatic circulation. My career in the British Diplomatic Service and the vagaries of "retirement" have together contrived to involve me closely in the affairs of both the United Nations and the Commonwealth, and in official and non-governmental capacities, and to impress on me as a result the invaluable symbiosis between the two.

What follows is the preliminary version of a study in continuation of work done with my dear friend and colleague for the past thirty years and more, Professor Nabil Ayad, a veritable pioneer in the organisation of the training of young and aspiring diplomats all over the world. We conjured up the concept of Geodiplomatics, the study of the management of interdependence.

The completion of the study will of course have to await control of coronavirus and a return to something like normal life, albeit recognising that "things will never be the same". In the meantime, I offer the preliminary version to my United Nations Association friends, in prospect of the 75th anniversary on January 10, 2021, of the opening session of the UN General Assembly in the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster. And in so doing, I express my unbounded admiration for all that David Wardrop, for many many years past the dynamic Chairman of the Westminster branch, has done, and is doing, to spread understanding of, and to arouse support for, the United Nations.

I address a final deferential plea to British historians. It is nearly a hundred years since the publication of the three-volume Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919. May we expect an early update?

Peter Marshall,  
December 2020

## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

"There is great disorder under the heavens, and the outlook is brilliant". This was the standard slogan of the Chinese delegates at the United Nations when I arrived in New York in 1975, to join the UK Mission.

We never knew what it meant, although we could be certain that it was not intended to be a tribute to the Soviet Union. Shorn of its hyperbole, however, the proposition assuredly has a central validity: namely, whatever their downside, disruption and discontinuity, especially on a grand scale, are a challenge both to reappraise our current priorities, and to seize the new opportunities which present themselves.

The point was never more comprehensively taken than in the unanimous adoption, without reservation, by the participants in the "United Nations Conference on International Organisation", held in San Francisco from April 25 to June 26, 1945, of the United Nations Charter.

### ***The UN Charter, the most important document in the history of diplomacy***

The Charter is by far the most important document in the history of diplomacy. It is written not in statesmen's ink, but in the blood, toil, tears and sweat of the people, shed or wrought over six long years of worldwide suffering and sacrifice, on a scale which is unimaginable today, its far-reaching and uplifting purposes are elaborated in a hundred arduously drafted articles. Its message is conveyed in the first hundred words of its iconic two-hundred-word Preamble<sup>[1]</sup>. Its opening words are:

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS, DETERMINED

- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom

The passage should be read at least twice over in order to grasp its full import. Familiar in parts though the wording may be, it is the text as a whole which demands our unwavering attention.

It was - and is - a commitment, unanimous and without reservation, and for the very first time, by all the members of a universal organisation, to replace the previous tradition of pursuing their supposed individual national interest at the incidental expense of anyone else, the devil taking the hindmost, with the collective sustained pursuit of the common good: thus "reaffirming our faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

To put it in the vocabulary of game theory, it was - and is - a collective pledge to abandon the previously prevailing Mercantilist zero-sum game, in which in essence one country could gain only at the expense of others and install in its stead a positive-sum game in which all the players, however many, can benefit simultaneously by undertaking jointly to pursue the common good - a veritable quantum leap forward in the management of international relations.

### ***Multilateralism is normative, as well as political***

The word "multilateralism" does not occur in the UN Charter. The passage from the Preamble to the Charter quoted above, however, spells it out instead. Some things are better defined by description than by analysis. As the Preamble illustrates so eloquently and so poignantly, "multilateralism" is no mere political concept: it is a many-faceted, many splendoured thing. It is the lore of society, and the lesson of history. It is a mindset.

At its core is the inescapable principle that, although the greater among us will inevitably make most of the running in the management of public affairs, the less influential must nonetheless have a fair hearing and a fair say.

Multilateralism is normative, as well as political and diplomatic, as well as legal and procedural. It is the instrument of interdependence, a word which likewise does not feature in the Preamble, because its inclusion is unnecessary. Its watchword is not a semi-defeatist "what could I do that would make any difference?" but a confident "what should I do?". Let us be ever mindful of the observation attributed (not perhaps accurately) to Edmund Burke that "all that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good people should do nothing."

Interdependence and multilateralism tell us how we should behave ourselves, and how we should treat one another, be it within or beyond national borders. We all need to be good colleagues and neighbours in our global village.

### ***Not leading people to heaven but saving them from hell***

Some would have it that the founders of the United Nations were "starry-eyed". My expletive-deleted answer to that feckless proposition would be the fervent Cromwellian invitation to "think it possible you may be mistaken". No-one who had been through what they went through "twice in our lifetime" could possibly be starry-eyed. Dag Hammarskjöld, the second UN Secretary-General, put it succinctly. "We are not leading people to heaven", he said, "we are saving them from hell", and in the 1940s, a large number of people thought they knew what hell looked like.

If you have never known real peril or want but have had a life of uninterrupted security and comfort, it is easy to discount the importance of the impact of suffering and sacrifice on a large scale on how best to manage public affairs. Yet Covid-19 should by now have sensitised us all to its harsh reality.

### ***UN 75***

The United Nations Charter entered into force on October 24, 1945, the date on which the prescribed number of ratifications had been deposited with the United States Government. Seventy-five years on, we are under an obligation to succeeding generations both to ponder the record and to interpret its relevance to our multilateral, interdependent future.

There is no better starting point for the process than the "Declaration on the Commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations"<sup>[2]</sup>, prepared by the delegations in New York, and adopted unanimously without reservation on September 21, 2020, by the General Assembly, meeting virtually at summit level the beginning of the regular annual session.

To this Declaration must be added the outcome of an astonishing Global Consultation launched in 2020 by the UN Secretary-General, under the rubric "The Future we want, the UN we need". To date it has attracted a million participants.

### ***A guide to what follows***

Chapter One tells the story of the outbreak of World War II, in the wake of the failure of the League of Nations, and of the UK's perilous state after the fall of France in 1940 in which the Mother Country received such vital support from the Commonwealth. The need for something that worked to replace the League, combined with reform at home, was felt more keenly than ever.

Little could be done until the USSR and the US joined in the war. Tripartite Agreement was arduously reached first, on the concept of general security organisation, and secondly on a draft (the Dumbarton Oaks proposals) to be put to a conference of all "peace-loving states".

Chapter Two describes in detail the crucial role of the six Commonwealth countries which had been members of the League of Nations - Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK - in reaching agreement on the text of the Charter, principally by starting it off with a Preamble.

Chapter Three examines the symbiosis between the Commonwealth and the UN in the past, and in the future.

Chapter Four recounts the saga of the proceedings of the San Francisco Conference. If the outcome was not a miracle, it was at least a revelation.

Chapter Five covers the work of the Preparatory Commission which had been set up at San Francisco to translate the Charter into three-dimensional reality. It was to meet in London. There was therefore every reason why the first ever meeting of the UN General Assembly itself should also be convened in London.

Chapter Six is an assessment, drawn from the wording of the Commemorative Declaration<sup>[2]</sup>, adopted unanimously on September 21, 2020, of UN activities in the last seventy-five years, as regards both substance and process. The Declaration's prescription is "re-invigorated multilateralism".

Chapter Seven joins in the call for resumption of US leadership of "the free world".

The *Envoi* looks to, and beyond, January 10, 2021. Boris Johnson's speech on September 26 to the General Assembly shows how well in focus the UK already has the mass of inter-connected issues involved.

## ***CHAPTER ONE: MULTILATERALISM EMBRACED***

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies but in battalions"<sup>[3]</sup>. Such was the lot of the UK in the years 1940 and 1941 in particular. In pursuit of our commitment to Poland, and along with France, we had reluctantly declared war on Germany in September, 1939, in the grim resolve, when the time came, to succeed in establishing enduring world peace, in contrast to the failure of the League of Nations in the aftermath of 1914-1918.

### ***Alone, but not alone***

The experience was traumatic. After six months of what the UK and France thought of as "phoney war", Nazi Germany unleashed the Blitzkrieg in the spring of 1940, with immediate devastating Europe-wide results. The miracle/disaster of Dunkirk quickly followed, as did the surrender of France. Italy joined in on Germany's side. All the west coast of France was available as a base for submarine attack on our shipping in the Atlantic.

Close-run victory in the Battle of Britain raised our morale, which was forthwith put sternly to the test by the nightly bombings of the "Blitz" through the autumn and winter of 1940-41. The raid on London on December 29, 1940, is immortalised in photographs of St Paul's Cathedral seemingly engulfed by fire.

A measure of relief was vouchsafed by the German onslaught on the Soviet Union in June 1941 but it was not until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour in December 1941, and Germany declared war on the United States, that we could at last be fully confident of ultimate victory, however long it took, and whatever the cost in blood and treasure.

Were we alone in this ordeal? In a geographical sense, it may have seemed so. But that is to reckon without the Commonwealth. Just how much the Commonwealth meant to us was expressed with habitual eloquence by Churchill, during the Commonwealth meeting in London on the eve of the San Francisco Conference: "on behalf of all his colleagues what a happy fortune it was that the Dominion and Indian delegates had been able on their way to San Francisco to pay this wayside call. On every occasion throughout the war on which representatives of the Commonwealth had visited London, the United Kingdom Government had been refreshed by their advice and buoyed up by their assistance and good counsel"<sup>[4]</sup>.

### ***Never, but never again***

There was much talk, both during the Great War and in its aftermath, of the "war to end wars". It was soon realised that this was an illusion, and the emphasis switched to the deeply discouraging alternative of avoiding any further such conflict. The soft option in this regard was to ignore or underrate the danger signs, and to adopt the policy which came to be known as "appeasement"<sup>[5]</sup>.

Strong, therefore, as was the country's determination in 1939 not to let history repeat itself yet again, it became even stronger in the wake of the ordeals of 1940 and 1941. And it focussed on the fundamental truth (i) that you do not stop wars between nations unless you stop the causes of war, and (ii) that this, in interdependent terms, puts the emphasis on how we treat one another at home, as well as how we deal with people abroad.

### ***Reform at home***

Reform at home was at a premium. Even in the darkest days, William Beveridge was already at work on his monumental report *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942), which laid the foundation stone of the Welfare State and the National Health Service<sup>[6]</sup>. Another great step forward was taken by the 1944 White Paper on Employment. Much influenced by John Maynard Keynes, it accepted Government responsibility for maintaining a "high and stable level of employment", in welcome contrast to the appalling levels of mass unemployment which had been such a dire feature of the 1930s in particular<sup>[7]</sup>.

### ***Reform of international relations***

We were clear that (i) no country had a greater interest in the establishment and preservation of a lasting peace than the UK; (ii) no country had a greater experience of the shortcomings, and the successes, albeit limited, of the League of Nations and hence a greater contribution to make to the fashioning any future arrangements; and (iii) no time was too early to start giving thought to the host of complicated questions involved.

Any realistic international discussion of the question, however, had in practice to wait until the Commonwealth had allies, i.e., until Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. Even then, any discussions with the Soviet Union were secondary in the eyes of the latter to the imperative of securing total defeat of Germany<sup>[8]</sup>.

### ***The Moscow Declaration, October 1943***

The Foreign Ministers of the USA, the UK and the USSR met in Moscow, in advance of the first tripartite summit, held in Teheran a few weeks later. The Soviets began by demanding to know whether the US/UK undertaking to launch an invasion of France was still valid. (They were less impressed by the invasion of Italy, after the Germans had been expelled from North Africa.) On receipt of the necessary assurance on this score, they were readier to talk about other pressing matters.

Chief among these, from the UK/US viewpoint, was, of course, managing post-war collective security. The Joint Declaration of the Four Nations - that is, the Three plus (Nationalist) China, - much to the Soviet Union's displeasure, both on ideological grounds, and because the USSR was not then at war with Japan - "recognised the necessity of establishing at the earliest practicable date a general international organisation, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all peace-loving states, and open to membership by all such states, large and small, for the maintenance of international and security".

The Declaration became the framework for construction of the United Nations. The next stage would be for the Four to prepare proposals for a treaty, as the basis for convening a conference of "all peace-loving states".

### ***The Dumbarton Oaks "Conversations" on World Security, August-October 1944***

Following up the Moscow Declaration, the Four Powers met at high official level from August to October 1944, at Dumbarton Oaks, a privately-owned mansion in Georgetown, the architecturally and socially distinctive part of Washington, DC. As Nationalist China and the USSR were scarcely on speaking terms, the conversations were at times somewhat stilted. It was therefore greatly to the credit of the US and UK delegations that there emerged from the meeting what was, by historical comparison, a notably forthcoming set of proposals to be put - without commitment, naturally - to the projected conference of "all peace-loving states".

A highly perceptive UK analysis of the proposals was published as a White Paper "*Proposals for the Establishment of a General International Organisation*", in November 1944<sup>[9]</sup>. Drawing heavily on League of Nations experience, the proposals could be said to have at least three distinguishing characteristics: more emphasis on economic and social affairs and an accompanying consciousness of the wide range of factors which could constitute a threat to peace; more authority for the major powers to act collectively on the general behalf; and greater scope for the Secretariat.

Each of the three merits individual consideration. As regards the first, Roosevelt's basic notion was that the task of the Security Council was to stop undesirable things from happening, while the business of the General Assembly and its underling, the Economic and Social Council, was to encourage desirable things to happen. The former would hopefully be a declining industry, while the latter was a growth stock.

The second feature illustrates perhaps the central dilemma of multilateralism and interdependence: namely, how to get things done for the common good by those with the power to deliver, while keeping the less powerful informed and content.

It is the third consideration which subsequently had bizarre consequences. Roosevelt was thought by some to harbour ambitions himself to become UN Secretary-General after his long stint at the White House had come to an end. But it was not to be. His sudden death, less than a fortnight before its opening, cast a pall over the San Francisco Conference.

The scope of the powers of the Secretariat of the League of Nations was to have a pivotal role in uniting Europe a generation later. Jean Monnet, the author of the Schuman Declaration of 1950 which launched the European project, and later described as "the Father of Europe", was appointed as the first Deputy-Secretary-General of the League of Nations at the incredibly early age of thirty, on the strength of his monumental work in promoting Allied co-ordination during the Great War.

Before long, Monnet became disillusioned with what he saw as inadequate Secretariat power. When, thirty years later, it came to the shaping of the Treaty of Rome (1956-7), he was determined that this would not be the case. The European Commission was vested with unprecedented power, with consequences which will be endlessly debated.

### ***The end of the beginning***

The adoption of the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals was in the familiar Churchillian phrase, "the end of the beginning" of the pilgrimage to multilateralism. The burdens and pressures of waging the most widespread and destructive war in history had induced the Four "sponsoring" Powers to sink their substantial differences to the point of agreeing among themselves on a text which they could jointly present to a conference of "all peace-loving states", as the basis for adopting a universal Charter.

The international community was indeed minded, to an extent never previously known, to come together to pursue the common good. But what no-one foresaw, nor indeed could have been expected to foresee, was how a combination of imaginative co-operation and of professional competence of the highest order would convert the Dumbarton Oaks proposals into a document of such excellence as the UN Charter, the enduring cornerstone of elaborate international management which we see today. To this I turn in the chapters "The Commonwealth input", "Commonwealth-UN symbiosis", and "the Revelation of San Francisco" which follow.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE COMMONWEALTH INPUT**

To describe the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals as "the end of the beginning" is in no way to belittle them. Rather it serves as a reminder of how much more had to be done if the international community was to achieve the enormously ambitious goal it had knowingly set itself.

### ***"An alliance of Great Powers, embedded in a universal organisation"***

Sir Charles Webster, the chief Foreign Office historical adviser, with personal experience of the negotiation of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, envisaged "an alliance of Great Powers embedded in a universal organisation". On that analogy, one could say that Dumbarton Oaks was (i) about as far as one could reasonably expect to reach by way of defining the nature and role of an alliance of the Great Powers; and (ii) a useful start with the embedding process.

The principal question to be pursued, therefore, in analytical terms in the first instance, but very much in political and diplomatic terms, thereafter, was how to elaborate and strengthen the economic and social provisions in the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals to the point where they reconciled the "non-Great Powers" to the inside track to be enjoyed by the Great Powers.

If the projected universal organisation had already been in existence, the appropriate course would have been to appoint a small expert review group, with a mandate to examine the situation. Particular attention would have been required to (a) what went wrong with the



League of Nations; (b) the consequences, especially for Europe, of its failure; (c) what the conduct to date of World War II had taught us; and (d) what (a) to (c) implied for our collective future.

***The adventitious Commonwealth high-level expert Review Group, April 1945***

Happily, just such an expert review group was available *de facto* in the shape of the Commonwealth delegations to the San Francisco Conference - Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK. They met in London for ten days on the eve of the San Francisco Conference.

They brought to their deliberations their unrivalled collective experience of what had happened in the previous thirty years, combined with a consummate joint grasp of how matters should be managed in the future. In short, they placed, to immense general benefit, their common history, their common outlook, and their common future at the disposal of the international community.

***The Commonwealth during and after the Great War***

Close co-operation in the making of war, as in the seeking and keeping of peace, has nurtured within Commonwealth countries individually an enhanced sense of national identity and nationhood. At the same time, it testifies to an enduring awareness within and between those same countries of their multiple affinities, and of all that they hold in common. That is no paradox: it is the fruit of constructive diversity and mutual respect, opening out to them collectively a vista of possibilities of serving not only themselves, but also the international community as a whole.

The Great War was followed within a generation by World War II, an even greater conflict, despite the best efforts of the champions of the League of Nations, the Commonwealth chief among them.

The Commonwealth, gathered round beleaguered Britain, was uniquely at the forefront of the Second World War from start to finish, and never more so than in the dark days of 1940-1941. We shared a grim determination that, after the end of World War II, there should be no repetition of the disillusion and bitterness which characterised the aftermath of the Great War.

***Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, May 1944***

For obvious reasons it was not possible for Commonwealth Prime Ministers to meet together until late in World War II, in the event shortly before D-Day. The five - Curtin, Mackenzie King, Fraser, Smuts and Churchill - were joined by the Representatives of India at the War Cabinet, and the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia.

They were naturally concerned in the main with the prosecution of the war. They did not hesitate to "give thanks for deliverance from the worst perils which have menaced us". They also paid close attention to post-war arrangements. In their Declaration of May 16, 1944<sup>[10]</sup>, they confirmed that "the peoples of the Commonwealth willingly make their sacrifices to the common cause". They went on to express the hope that when victory is won and peace returns, we will "be able to do further service to mankind". That hope was to be fulfilled more rapidly, and more extensively, than the Prime Ministers could have imagined.

### ***US absence from the League of Nations showed US leadership is indispensable***

It is time to return to questions (a) to (d) for the adventitious May 1945 Commonwealth high-level expert group mentioned above. The answer to (a) is simple. The absence from the League of the United States doomed it to failure in the political sphere, although it worked well enough on the socio-economic side (notably the International Labour Organisation (ILO)). This must never happen again. Sustained US leadership is a *sine qua non*. Most fortunately, President-elect Biden seems to be of that view<sup>[11]</sup>.

### ***Post-1918 continental Europe: part of the problem, not of the solution***

The answer to question (b) is that the destruction during and after the Great War of the Russian, Turkish, Austro-Hungarian and German Empires caused profound and lasting instability across the continent of Europe. The post-1918 political reconfiguration rapidly became part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. It created a happy hunting ground for dictators and autocrats of whatever political stripe. Continental Europe between the wars sank to a low political ebb.

### ***The dire situation in Europe after VE Day***

Such was the enormous physical destruction and the grave moral degradation on the continent of Europe during five years of war and Nazi tyranny, and such was the prospect of bitter Soviet determination to keep Germany down and occupied after its unconditional surrender had been secured, it was clear that any new universal organisation would have been very different in character from the League. The idea of German aggression being the prime source of danger to world peace was out of date<sup>[12]</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, the Cold War broke out almost immediately. Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri, was made as early as March 1946, a mere seven months after VJ Day.

### ***The game-changing nature of World War II***

Turning to question (c), the great difference between fighting the Great War and fighting World War II was the extent to which the latter ranged beyond the European continent and the North Atlantic, due mainly to Japanese aggression in South East Asia, as well as the Pacific. Tokyo proclaimed the creation of a "Greater Asian Co-prosperity Sphere". Hong Kong, Malaya and Singapore *inter alia* were occupied. Australia and New Zealand were under threat. Having conquered most of Burma, the Japanese were halted at the border with India and thereafter were pushed back through Burma into Thailand by the Fourteenth Army, the mightiest Commonwealth host ever assembled. The post-war political and economic implications for the region of these game-changing developments could not but be profound.

### ***Putting it all together is a matter of mindset, as well as of management***

This brings us to the answer to question (d). As explained earlier, we entered World War II grimly determined that never again would we allow such a catastrophe to recur, and that what was required was thoroughgoing reform, both domestically and internationally. This was to be achieved, not only by negotiation or administrative measures but also, and, perhaps more fundamentally and more enduringly, by a change of mindset occasioned not so much by the brainwaves of the elites as by the courageous response of the masses to adversity and suffering on a scale never previously known.

### ***The Notion of a Preamble to the Charter: "Something very great"***

As the world knows, the lodestar of the United Nations Charter is its iconic 200-word Preamble. What is much less well known is that it was devised and developed at the aforementioned adventitious Commonwealth high-level expert review group. The story is compelling<sup>[13]</sup>.

The brilliant, multi-talented, enigmatic, partly self-contradictory Jan Christiaan Smuts, at that time Prime Minister of South Africa, and internationally revered as the principal champion of the League of Nations, expressed his conviction that something was missing from the Dumbarton Oaks text. It was a legalistic document which did not fill the bill. We had been engaged in one of the greatest struggles in all history. Fundamental human rights had been at stake. Like all great wars, this had been at bottom a religious one. What the world expected was a statement of our human faith, of the things we had fought for, and which we should try to stabilise and preserve in the world.

Smuts went on to suggest that there should be a short preamble which would state our human faith and appeal to the common man and make him feel that he had fought to set up not simply a piece of political machinery but "something very great".

The idea was very well received by the meeting. Lord Cranborne, the Dominions Secretary, said that the UK had considered the case for a preamble in connexion with the Dumbarton Oaks "conversations". Charles Webster produced a copy of this earlier draft. With his assistance, Smuts compared it with his own, and drew up a revised draft which was a combination of the two.

The meeting concluded that (i) this revised draft formed an admirable basis for a preamble; (ii) the opening clause might be expanded to include a statement of the positive aims which it was hoped to achieve by setting up the new organisation; and (iii) their respective delegations would support at San Francisco the adoption of a preamble based upon the draft which they had before them.

### ***The work of the "Commonwealth adventitious review group" as a whole***

Although there was intense discussion of the notion of a preamble, it was far from being the whole of the "adventitious review group's" deliberations. These were summed up in the "final communique" the group issued on April 13, 1945, three weeks before VE Day. They confirmed that "the countries of the Commonwealth stood ready to play their full part in an international organisation for the purpose of preserving international peace and security and promoting human welfare"<sup>[14]</sup>.

They went on to say that they had "examined generally and in detail the tentative proposals resulting from the Dumbarton Oaks conversations". They were agreed that the proposals "provide the basis for such a charter.....fully recognising that in certain respects they call for clarification, improvement and expansion".

## **CHAPTER THREE: COMMONWEALTH-UNITED NATIONS SYMBIOSIS**

Although, as a Treaty-of-Versailles, League-of-Nations-seasoned and revered figure at the San Francisco Conference, Smuts was much in demand over the agenda as a whole and lost no time in pursuing the notion of a Preamble, on the basis of "the South African delegation's draft". He spoke eloquently on the subject in his address to the Plenary Session. The idea was favourably received. It was referred to the first of four Commissions (dealing with "General Provisions") set up by the Conference to handle various aspects of the agenda. The first

commission in turn assigned it to the first of the Technical Committees which examined the texts of individual clauses<sup>[15]</sup>.

This Committee, at its first meeting, agreed to consider the draft ahead of the documentation as a whole. As early as May 7, 1945 (less than a fortnight into the two-month conference), it agreed by acclamation to adopt, in principle, the South African delegation's draft as the basis for a preamble, with the reservation that the final form should be agreed later.

The rest, as we are apt to say, is history. Well yes, but quite a lot else is not yet history. And that is a matter of some importance to an understanding of how best to safeguard our future security and wellbeing. Three questions at a minimum need answering:

- (i) was there any group or body, other than the Commonwealth, capable of putting forward the idea of including a Preamble in the distinctive form with which we are familiar?
- (ii) if the idea had originated at San Francisco, would or could it have been processed in its distinctive form in the time available, and amidst the multitudinous competing pressures?
- (iii) how much difference has its inclusion made in practice?

The answer to (i) is "absolutely not". The relevant experience of the delegates present at the London gathering was unrivalled. They represented a group of countries which had together fought the Great War from start to finish and were doing the same in World War II. Together they had played a principal part in trying to make the League of Nations work. They were used to discussing complex issues among themselves. A common language and common systems of education and administration facilitated joint appreciation of any given situation. "Consultation", former Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary A J Balfour used to say, "is the life-blood of the Commonwealth".

The answer to (ii) is likewise "absolutely not". The sheer mechanics of a major conference make it very difficult to process such a concentrated and many-sided stand-alone text, even if presented more or less complete at the outset. The fallback position of a sheaf of preambular paragraphs is much less satisfactory, although it can afford a valuable insight into what is really at issue.

The answer to (iii) is "it has made a profound difference". It is the only part of the UN Charter with the wording of which people are familiar, even though they may be unaware of its source. Its impact has been long-lasting. It is the "glue" of the Charter. It is not difficult to see why. It states the common objective with consummate conviction and clarity. It inspires confidence that its diagnosis is accurate and its prescription realistic. It simultaneously answers the three big questions "what?", "how?" and "why?"

### ***The Commonwealth and the United Nations: a case of symbiosis***

To what extent, then, does the adoption of the Preamble entitle, or indeed oblige, us to say that the nascent United Nations took its cue from the Commonwealth? The diplomatic answer would be "to a certain extent". For if it were put in the opposite sense, the proposition could be advanced with equal validity.

Smuts was, among his many qualities, a philosopher. He thought holistically: that is, he believed the parts of something are closely connected, and are explicable in terms of the whole. The core of the Preamble is nothing if not holistic. To repeat, it reaffirms our "faith in fundamental rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women, and of nations large and small". It does not apply to the Commonwealth alone. It is not a Commonwealth monopoly. It is the message of multilateralism, of which both UN and Commonwealth are prime, continuing, sustainable expressions.

### ***Flexibility, not rigidity***

The supposed arch-imperialist Leopold Amery, as he proudly recalls in his voluminous and highly informative memoirs, convinced General Herzog, the South African Prime Minister, that etymologically the word "empire" indicated no more than "any complex political structure"<sup>[16]</sup>. Yes, indeed, and the corresponding adjective should be "empirical", not "imperial". The point was exquisitely pursued when, in 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, explained to his fellow Commonwealth Prime Ministers that India wished to retain its membership although it was about to become a republic, thus not owing allegiance to the Crown. The London Declaration by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers collectively in April 1949 contains the ingenious formula by which this was achieved<sup>[17]</sup>.

### ***Bringing a "touch of healing to a troubled world"***

Nehru made the highly relevant observation that the Commonwealth could "bring a touch of healing to a troubled world". It is easy to cite cases in point as we look back on the past 75 years. But that is only the half of it. In explaining the Indian position, the four-paragraph Declaration, itself an object lesson in flexibility of outlook and conciseness of drafting, was at pains to emphasise that nothing else had changed. Human nature being what it is, the mere suggestion that something is not to be taken as a precedent suffices to ensure that it immediately becomes standard practice. That is what happened.

The "modern" Commonwealth, in the event, emerged overnight. Nehru had put a *de facto* end to *Britannia Imperatrix* at a stroke. Almost everything changed, some of it simply by way of what in musical terms is known as "enharmonic modulation": such are the conventions of musical notation, F sharp can become G flat without turning a hair but opening up all sorts of new possibilities of musical composition. It was the position of India which remained unchanged.

### ***The Commonwealth Charter 2013***

The post-1949 Commonwealth seemed to get along well enough without any formal definition, being content with general propositions such as "it is a force for good" or "Commonwealth is as Commonwealth does"<sup>[18]</sup>. However, the Eminent Persons Group, set up by Heads of Government at their meeting in Trinidad and Tobago to look to the future, strongly recommended the adoption of a Commonwealth Charter. A text was finally agreed between governments in December 2012 and signed by the Head of the Commonwealth at Marlborough House on Commonwealth Day, 2013.

The Commonwealth Charter, like the Preamble, is a many-splendoured thing. It recalls Nelson Mandela's observation that the Commonwealth made the world safe for diversity. It naturally uses the first-person plural. Its coverage of the issues individually is masterly. Its grasp of their complex inter-relationships is deeply reassuring. It reaffirms "the core values and principles of the Commonwealth as declared by this Charter" in the shape of a list of sixteen target items and priorities.



The marked similarity between these and the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 identified in General Assembly Resolution 70/1 of September 25, 2015 - i.e., two years later - is unlikely, shall we say, to have been a matter of pure chance.

Yet, ironically, the Commonwealth Charter makes no mention of the symbiosis between the Commonwealth and the United Nations. It was perhaps a sign of the times that the references in the Charter to the United Nations, where they occur, are functional, rather than systemic, and relate to specific UN activities and priorities, rather than to its irreplaceable over-arching normative and legal authority.

The Commonwealth Charter speaks instead of "influencing international society". In the brief UK White Paper, under cover of which it was presented to the Mother of Parliaments <sup>[19]</sup>, the adjective "overarching" is applied to the Commonwealth Charter itself, describing it as "bringing together the values and commitments of the Commonwealth that are set out in more detail in previous declarations and affirmations".

#### ***An "inter-regional sub-set"***

None of this is to suggest that the Commonwealth is the equal partner of the United Nations. Although we have on occasions been able to act as a pilot fish, we know our place: we are classified as "an inter-regional sub-set". But this is to get slightly ahead of ourselves.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE REVELATION OF SAN FRANCISCO**

Although it was potentially the most important international gathering in human history. the omens for the San Francisco, on any conventional reckoning, could scarcely have been less favourable.

#### ***The calamity of Roosevelt's sudden death***

The final decision to call the conference was taken at the Yalta Summit in February 1945, by which time "the Grand Alliance" with the Soviet Union was starting to come apart at the seams. A Soviet boycott or walk-out was not to be excluded. The reassuring underlying assumption, however, was that President Roosevelt was personally very much involved in the whole United Nations project and would guide the conference safely to harbour. What greater calamity, therefore, could have befallen the Conference, than Roosevelt's sudden death on April 12, 1945, less than a fortnight before it was due to open?

It had not been Roosevelt's practice to ensure that his Vice-President was kept abreast of what was going on. President Truman was therefore catapulted into the White House very largely uninformed. One of the first decisions he had to take was whether or not to postpone the conference. He rightly decided not to do so.

#### ***A bizarre Conference opening***

The Conference opened bizarrely. President Truman's address of welcome<sup>[20]</sup> was delivered from the White House and conveyed "by direct wire" to San Francisco. It began with a succinct eulogy of President Roosevelt. Truman made it tactfully clear that he himself had not appointed the members of the US delegation, but they had his confidence and support. He reiterated that nothing was more important to the future peace of the world than the continued co-operation of the nations which had had to muster the force necessary to defeat the axis conspiracy. The responsibility of the great states was to serve, not to dominate.

Truman further stressed that it "was not the purpose of this Conference to draft a treaty of peace in the old sense of the term", but rather to "the single problem of setting up the essential organisation to keep the peace. You are to write the fundamental charter".

### ***The organisation of the Conference***

The task was not one of diplomatic substance, nor yet of diplomatic process, but of diplomatic structure. And it was diplomacy of the peoples, and of governments speaking in the name of peoples. That the task was accomplished with such astonishing success was due in large measure to the procedure adopted under the influence of the Conference chairman Edward R Stettinius, Jr, US Secretary of State.

The amount of business to be transacted was prodigious <sup>[21]</sup>. Some 1200 amendments were proposed. Four Commissions were set up, dealing respectively with "General Provisions", General Assembly, Security Council and Judicial Organisation. These Commissions were subdivided into twelve Technical Committees, where a detailed examination of the various clauses took place. A Steering Committee on which all the member states were represented, and an Executive Committee, with membership pre-configuring the composition of the Security Council, exercised general oversight of the work of the Conference. A Co-ordinating Committee and a Jurists' Committee collated and finalised the texts produced by the Technical Committees.

In their outstanding report on the San Francisco Conference<sup>[21]</sup>, the UK Delegation commented that the procedure of the Conference "was one never before adopted by states in the consideration of such vital problems. The Sponsoring Powers submitted their proposals to the fullest discussion by forty-six other states. Each of these states had only one vote and everything in the Charter was passed in the Technical Committees by a two-thirds majority". The contrast with the secretive process leading to the Treaty of Versailles - Woodrow Wilson's dictum "open covenants, openly arrived at" notwithstanding - could scarcely be more different.

### ***The outcome, as measured by the changes made to the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals***

The outcome of the Conference, as measured by the difference between the Dumbarton Oaks proposals and the text of the Charter, was a marked increase in the weight attached to the handling of economic and social questions, without impugning the authority or the responsibilities of the Security Council. The Economic and Social Council, while still under the sway of the General Assembly, was raised to the dignity of "Principal Organ of the United Nations", along with the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretariat and the International Court of Justice.

More important still, perhaps, was the creation of a wholly new section of the Charter, beginning with a "Declaration regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories" (Chapter XI), and establishing a Trusteeship Council to enjoy the status of "Principal Organ of the United Nations", thus bringing the number of the latter to six. As the world knows, there are now four times as many UN member states as there were in 1945. The Trusteeship Council ceased operations in 1994.

The creation of these two further Principal Organs denotes in the clearest manner the determination of the peoples of the United Nations, as expressed in the fourth clause of the Preamble, "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". It is also the international application of the inalienable right set magisterially forth in the Declaration of Independence to "the pursuit of happiness".

### ***Tone as well as well as content***

It was not only the content of the discussion which was new to diplomacy. It was also the spirit, the tone, in which the business of the Conference was conducted. Smuts, as ever, reflected it. In his speech to the closing plenary session, he spoke of the Charter not as a

perfect document but as "a good workmanlike plan for peace - a very real and substantial advance on all previous plans for security against war".

"But more was needed", Smuts continued, "than a machine for peace. Unless the spirit to operate it was there, the best plan or machine might fail. The human factor had to play its part. All the social and political and spiritual forces of our peoples should be mobilised behind this plan. For this total mobilisation of the human spirit, we must look to all who labour in the wider sphere of our human advance - to the press, the churches, the schools and universities, and to all intellectual forces, all the vast network of social and moral agencies which are the support of our civilisation".

Was that excessive? By the standards of the day, by no means. If you have geared yourself up over the years to fight a total war, it does not seem unreasonable to think in terms of waging total peace and security.

### ***The contribution of the Commonwealth delegates***

The Conference was noteworthy for many reasons. Not the least of them were the vital contributions of the Commonwealth delegations. The *New York Times* had this to say of H V ("Bert") Evatt, Attorney-General and Minister of External Affairs of Australia: "He came here virtually unknown. He leaves recognised as the most brilliant and effective voice of the Smaller Powers, a leading statesman for the world's conscience". Ramaswamy Mudaliar, the leading Indian delegate, was to be accorded the signal honour of being elected the first President of the Economic and Social Council.

### ***The delegates realised full well what they were voting for***

The outcome of this arduous, two-month conference was a veritable international New Deal. The delegates were fully conscious of the significance of their labours. On June 25, 1945, they met for the last time, to vote on the text they had so arduously negotiated. Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador to the United States, presided. "The question we are about to solve with our vote", he said, "is the most important thing that can happen in our lives". Therefore, he proposed to conduct the vote not by show of hands, but rather by having those delegates in favour stand. Each of the delegates then stood and remained standing. There was a standing ovation when Lord Halifax announced that the Charter had been adopted unanimously.

### ***A signing ceremony to remember***

The next day, June 26, the participating states signed the Charter. China signed first, as the first victim of Axis aggression. It is of particular interest to compare the text of President



Truman's closing speech, delivered in person, with his address of welcome from Washington at the outset. It shows not only how much had happened - including, of course, the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany - but also to what an extent he had mastered the massive problems which awaited his attention. I limit myself to quoting one passage from his closing address:

*"the Charter which you have just signed is a solid structure on which we can build a better world. History will honour you for it. Between the victory in Europe and the final victory in this most destructive of all wars, you have won a victory against war itself....."*<sup>[22]</sup>



### ***What it meant in the UK***

What it meant for war-emaciated, bomb-scarred Britain can be gathered in its full poignancy first from the pre-San Francisco debate in the House of Commons on April 17, 1945, initiated by Clement Attlee who, as Lord President of the Council, was co-leader, with Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, of the UK delegation; and secondly from the debate to ratify the Charter on August 22-23, 1945, in the House of Commons, again initiated by Attlee, by now Prime Minister.

On the latter occasion Attlee noted that "this declaration does not start by saying 'We, the Governments'. It starts by saying 'We, the peoples'. This, I think, is right, because it expresses the fact that this Charter is an endeavour to put into practical form the deep feelings of all the peoples, including the fighting men who have made it impossible to have a Charter at all".

Eden followed, non-controversially, of course, for the Opposition, and Ernest Bevin, as Foreign Secretary, wound up. Many of those who spoke were in uniform or just out of it. There has seldom been a better debate. There has never been a better report by a UK delegation to a major meeting than that furnished by our representatives to the San Francisco conference, on which the debate was based.

The Sponsoring Powers at Dumbarton Oaks contemplated and embraced multilateralism. The United Nations Charter established it. It might be an exaggeration to describe the San Francisco Conference as a miracle. But it was certainly a revelation.

### ***"The buck stops here"***

President Truman was a Great War veteran. He knew the score and was not afraid to make big decisions. Five weeks after San Francisco, he decided to use the atomic bomb.

When the Soviet Union started the Cold War in Europe almost on the morrow of the end of World War II, the United States led and funded a vital collective Western response: the Marshall Plan and NATO. The saga of the Berlin Blockade countered by the Berlin Airlift of 1948-49 stands as a reminder of how near we were again to war. The immediate US-led reaction to the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, was even more striking. The fledgling UN organisation, under firm and responsible US leadership, had decisively passed muster.

## **CHAPTER FIVE PREPARATION AND LAUNCH**

"And how do you propose to translate that into administrative fact?" Such was the stringent question put to me by William Strang, the doughty Scots scholar-administrator Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from 1949 to 1953, when, in retirement, I was favouring him with some of my best ideas.

Had I been quicker of wit and readier of speech, I would have cited in reply to my august and charitable questioner the almost incredible feat of the Preparatory Commission set up by the San Francisco Conference on June 26, 1945, the date of signature of the Charter, with a mandate "to make preliminary arrangements for the first sessions of the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Trusteeship Council, and for the convening of the International Court of Justice".

Turning at once into fact the most complicated international bargain ever struck, the uninitiated could be forgiven for imagining that this was a task which could be safely entrusted to any moderately competent firm which specialised in organising major public events. What in reality was involved was the "translation into administrative fact" of the most complicated international bargain ever struck.

But that was not all. As from the time of the four-power Moscow Declaration, let us recall, the necessity had been recognised of establishing the proposed "general international organisation" at the earliest practicable date. It would therefore have been otiose to add to the Conference injunction the words "without delay". The near-impossible had to be done at once.

### ***Getting down to business immediately***

On June 26, 1945, the very day of its signature of the United Nations Charter, the San Francisco Conference set up the Preparatory Commission to translate the United Nations Charter into administrative fact. London was to be its seat. The war against Nazi Germany was over, and the UK was no longer the recipient of V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets. When it was not in session, the Commission's business was to be transacted by an Executive Committee. The latter held its first meeting in London on August 16, i.e., the day after VJ Day. It established no less than ten technical committees. It had been further decided that the full Commission was to gather as soon as sufficient ratifications had been deposited for the Charter to enter into force - in the event on October 24.

The full Preparatory Commission duly toiled from November 24 to December 23, taking over the intensive work already accomplished by the Executive Committee. The Commission set up only eight technical committees instead of ten, two amalgamations having been successfully achieved meanwhile.

### ***The report of the Preparatory Commission***

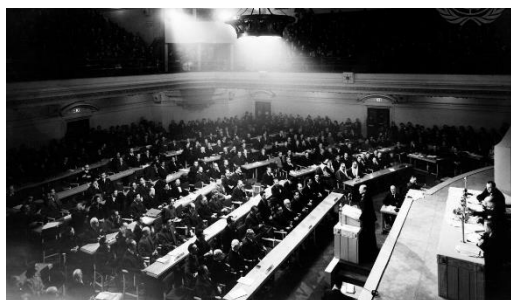
The fruit of these Herculean labours is set out, in its jaw-dropping detail, in the report which the Preparatory Commission submitted to the General Assembly in time for its first meeting on January 10. It runs to some 170 pages, the last eight of which are occupied by a most comprehensive index.

In publishing the report as a White Paper<sup>[23]</sup>, the UK delegation somehow found time to contribute a very informative and helpful eighteen-page Commentary. "The fact that it was possible to achieve so much preliminary work", the Commentary observed, "is a tribute to the co-operative spirit shown by the delegates and is a good augury for the success of the United Nations".

### ***The perennial question of money***

When it came to the budget, the US was initially assessed at 25%, the UK at 15% and the other five Commonwealth countries' assessments together amounted to 16.60%. Thus, the Commonwealth paid more than the US, and together they accounted for more than half the total budget.

### ***January 10, 1946***



Traditionally undemonstrative and somewhat reserved, the British are not much giving to sentiment. But we have no immunity from the power of symbolism. Surely nothing could be more symbolic than that the birthplace of the United Nations should be the Methodist Central Hall, a hallowed place of worship, in the heart of London, facing Westminster Abbey across Broad Sanctuary Green, and more or less un-bombed. It had to be considerably modified within in order to meet the requirements of this historic occasion.

The UK, as has already been noted, had, with its Commonwealth partners, been at the centre of World War II from start to finish. Gladwyn Jebb, a British diplomat and key member of the UK delegations to both Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco, had been appointed Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission, and went on to be the acting UN Secretary-General until the appointment of the first official holder of that eminent post, Norwegian Foreign Minister Trygve Lie. (The Preparatory Commission had done its work in nearby Church House, Westminster)

The President of the Preparatory Commission, Ambassador Edward Zuleta Angel of Colombia, one of his country's leading jurists and diplomats, started the proceedings off by quoting the opening passage of the Preamble to the Charter. "We have come to this British capital" he went on, "which bears upon it the deep impress of a heroic majesty, to constitute the General Assembly and to make a genuine and sincere beginning with the application of the San Francisco Charter".

He did not fail to observe that "the unique privilege of opening this Assembly of the United Nations", comprising so many eminent personalities, "has fallen to the obscure representative of a small Spanish-American Republic". Given the part he had played in presiding over the work of the Preparatory Commission, subsequent speakers made it clear to him that his self-deprecation was entirely unwarranted.

### ***Attlee's keynote speech***

It fell naturally to the British Prime Minister to make the keynote speech<sup>[24]</sup>. Attlee was no consummate orator, but he was a highly effective communicator, and an excellent chairman.



His incisiveness made him a master of the illuminating one-liner<sup>[25]</sup>. What he said on this unique occasion was all that one could desire. He had three connected themes: the Rule of Law, as proclaimed by the adoption of the United Nations Charter; the control of atomic energy - the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had "concentrated people's minds wonderfully" - and "Promotion of Social Progress" in its just connexion with sacrifices made during the conflict by ordinary men and their millions. His words can be read and re-read today to our great profit.

Between January 10 and February 14, this first meeting of this "town council of the world" despatched its business quietly and without fuss. London remained the home address of the United Nations until it moved to its permanent headquarters in New York.

This historic moment in world history is commemorated with typical British understatement. A small plaque reads "To the Glory of God and in prayer for peace on earth, this tablet commemorates the first meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations in the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, Jan 10 - Feb 14".

## CHAPTER SIX: "REINVIGORATED" MULTILATERALISM

Let us fast-forward to June 26, 2020, the 75th anniversary of the signing in San Francisco of the UN Charter. On that day, the UN Secretariat and the delegations in New York approved, for adoption by the Heads of State and Governments at their Summit meeting scheduled for September 21, (at the opening the regular annual session of the General Assembly), a Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations<sup>[26]</sup>.

It is a fascinating document. Its thought is as deep as its language is expressive. It is simultaneously a paean of praise to the Founders of the UN; a generally positive account of our stewardship over the past seventy-five years of the mightiest political organisation ever bequeathed to humankind, in the wake of the greatest calamity which had ever befallen it; a ready recognition of shortcomings; and an expression of confidence in our collective future. "We are not here to celebrate: we are here to take action". The bulk of the Declaration is given over to a baker's dozen of issues requiring priority attention.

There is at the same time the intention to listen: "through the Global Conversation launched by the Secretary-General this year<sup>[27]</sup>, we have listened to the concerns and aspirations of the people. We are here to respond, to ensure the future we want and the United Nations we need".

### ***Style as significant as content***

But perhaps, as with the conduct of the proceedings of the San Francisco Conference itself, the style in which the whole Declaration is written is even more significant than its up-beat content. The first-person plural, used only, as regards the United Nations Charter, in the Commonwealth-devised Preamble alone, is now standard for the UN as a whole, and increasingly in official documentation generally. Enthusiasts might say that the Commemorative Declaration is the Preamble to the Charter writ large.

The style of the Declaration imparts an aura of recognition of mutual responsibility and accountability which traditional third-person formulations cannot provide and indeed may be concerned to avoid providing. That aura derives uniquely from the acceptance without reservation by every member state of the provisions of the United Nations Charter.

The Declaration's opening words speak for the whole:

*"We the Heads of State and Government, representing the people of the world, have gathered on September 21, 2020, to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. We do so with a sense of awe and deep respect for the founders who created this organisation. There is no other global organisation with the legitimacy, convening power and normative impact of the United Nations. No other global organisation gives hope to so many people for a better world and can deliver the future we want. The urgency for all countries to come together to fulfil the promise of the nations united, has rarely been greater".*

There was never any intention that the United Nations should be a blueprint for the management of our interdependence. Its purpose rather is to provide a single, universal authoritative, conceptual, legal, structural, administrative, normative and flexible, repeat flexible, framework, repeat framework, for such management.

By definition, the framework loses much of its validity if it is not single and universal. But that is not to detract from the role of other agencies and efforts with analogous fields of activity and serving the common purpose. It does not weaken them. It supports them, even empowers them. It can help them put into clearer focus their respective priorities. It encourages their various insights and aspirations.

### ***The ingredients of multilateral co-operation: (1) the 'What' of it***

If this dish of multilateralism pleases, what are its ingredients? The short answer is "hard work and good will". A longer answer might take the form of asking successively "what are the 'What' of it, the 'How' of it and the 'Why' of it?" representing respectively substance, process and rationale. The Commemorative Declaration explains that "the three pillars of the United Nations - peace and security, development and human rights - are "equally important, interrelated and interdependent".

"Peace" is rightly in pole position. We have been spared the catastrophe of another global war. But there have been lesser wars aplenty. The Declaration notes that more than one million women and men have served under the UN flag in more than 70 peace-keeping operations. 4,500 of them, including Dag Hammarskjöld, lost their lives in so doing.

"Security" has, over the years, acquired a far wider significance than just the threat of armed aggression which so preoccupied the Founders: to subversion, terrorism and nuclear attack must be added cyber-security, environmental security, climate security and pandemic security. Its vista is enormous. One great manufacturer of motor cars describes the future as "an attitude of mind". So is security.

"Development" is likewise many-faceted. In UN terms, as distinct from those of the "Bretton Woods twins"- the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the International Monetary Fund, based in Washington - development was held primarily to be a matter of "technical assistance", the transmission by developed countries of "know how" to the developing countries.

It rapidly became apparent that there was much more to it than that. Development - and international co-operation on development - became an increasingly immanent element in a world economy which was transforming itself into a global village. The adoption in 2015 of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals by the General Assembly, meeting at Summit level on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations<sup>[28]</sup>, represented an almost exponential advance in "promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". It would have dumbfounded the delegates at San Francisco.

### ***The fly in the development ointment: persistent or growing inequality***

"Promoting social progress and better standards of life" is of course a general proposition. It envisages the delivery of general benefits. Economic growth is spoken of as a "rising tide which lifts all boats". The trouble is that it does not lift them all equally. In the electronic and digital spheres, the benefits of progress accrue primarily - and cumulatively- to those at the forefront. In some ways inequality has never been greater.

How serious a threat is this seemingly ineradicable phenomenon to our sense of solidarity and our perception of the common interest? We are happy for footballers to be paid astronomical wages. Interest in the extravagances of the celebs is all-consuming. Economic terminology even includes a phrase to describe enjoyment of the evidence of other people's lavish lifestyle: the external economies of consumption <sup>[29]</sup>.

What matters is when inequality is seen as the product of exploitation of the "have-nots" by the "haves", a state of affairs which it is the purpose of positive-sum society, be it national or international, if not wholly to eradicate, at least substantially to reduce. Progressive taxation provides a comprehensive method. So does a deeply ingrained tradition of philanthropy.

Experience of the last seventy-five years has taught us much. "We have the tools and now we need to use them", says the Commemorative Declaration, "the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is our road map".

### ***"We will leave no-one behind"***

The first of the specific issues demanding priority attention in the Declaration puts the matter in a non-traditional way: "we will leave no-one behind". Special emphasis is placed on the vulnerable, in whatever category. The motivation is humanitarian and derives from respect for the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The concept of "human rights" cannot but be at the heart of multilateralism which, to repeat, is "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

### ***The Universal Declaration of Human Rights***

Just as the Preamble to the United Nations Charter selects "fundamental human rights" as the first item in which to reaffirm humanity's faith, so it was entirely right and proper that the first great pronouncement of the United Nations, was on the theme of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was "proclaimed" by the General Assembly, meeting in Paris, in Resolution 210, on December 10, 1948. It was not unanimous. It was no surprise that those whom by now could be described as the "usual suspects" abstained.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was motivated in large measure by the desire to show up the blatant failure of the Soviet Union to respect the letter of the Charter, let alone the spirit of the Preamble. Churchill, as previously noted, had delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech some two-and-a-half years previously. The Marshall Plan to rescue Western Europe economically was already in operation. The infamous Berlin blockade had already started <sup>[30]</sup>.

### ***The right to self-fulfilment and endeavour?***

In the grave international circumstances in which they were formulated, the emphasis in both great texts on justiciable and basic positive rights was eminently comprehensible. But over a long period of relative tranquillity and the rule of law, they cannot be said to measure up in full to requirements. Is there perhaps too much of the element of the Welfare State, and not enough about the ensuing scope for enterprise and encouragement to seek and take opportunities?

### ***Freedom "to" and "for", as well as freedom "of" and "from"?***

The "unalienable rights" set forth by the US Declaration of Independence included "the pursuit of happiness". There has been a great deal of inconclusive discussion as to the full meaning of this enigmatic phrase. But its basic message surely is that it is not enough for those in authority on the one hand to refrain from taking oppressive measures against the people, and on the other hand to provide essential services and amenities: they should also take measures to encourage them to seek individual and collective self-reliance and self-fulfilment.

President Roosevelt's Four Freedoms<sup>[31]</sup> were (i) Freedom of Speech; (ii) Freedom of Worship; (iii) Freedom from fear; and (iv) Freedom from Want. Should we perhaps add two more: (v) Freedom for Self-fulfilment, and (vi) Freedom for Creativity and Enterprise.

### ***(2) The "How" of it***

In diplomacy, substance and process are inextricably linked. The traditional proposition that "foreign policy is about what to do, and diplomacy is about how to do it" has its uses as a reminder that it is one thing to want to do something "abroad" and quite another to be confident of being able to do it. But it is far from being an adequate account of the relationship between substance and process. It omits the all-important advisory function.

The UN Charter installed a "New Deal" in the management of international relations. Its motive and substance were co-operation for the common good, rather than detachment and rivalry. The manner in which the business was transacted inevitably changed with it. And the changes in process had their effect on the substance.

The extent of the changes in diplomatic practice which the last seventy-five years have wrought seems not only to have escaped the attention of academics in general and historians in particular, the Commentariat and other branches of the intellectual elite<sup>[32]</sup> but even many of the practitioners themselves. This is understandable: in the sphere of bilateral diplomacy, much has remained broadly the same. A single or occasional foray into the multilateral world is insufficient to grasp the scope the 'New Deal' offers for improved handling of perennial issues.

But it has been otherwise with leading figures in the UN Secretariat. In 2005, three such produced "*The Power of UN Ideas - Lessons from the First 60 Years*"<sup>[33]</sup>, a summary of a larger UN Intellectual History Project. One could call it "the Story of UN Software".

### ***The UN as three communities: political, management and reflective***

My experience was that the UN could usefully be thought of as three communities: a political community, concerned with reconciling conflicting views among member states; a community of management, be it of common action or joint action; and a community of reflection, examining the present and looking into the future. It was in the last of these that one could most easily recognise the advantages and the possibilities of multilateral diplomacy.

It was also in that configuration that the UN showed how it was a respecter of the grasp of the issues, rather than of diplomatic dignity or status as such. If you knew what you were talking about you would be readily heard, regardless of rank. If you did not, you would merely be heard politely out.

### ***Expert Groups***

During Sir Shridath Ramphal's long and distinguished tenure of the office of its Secretary-General, the Commonwealth developed an outstanding series of expert groups on key topics. All the members participated in a personal capacity, whatever their official or other responsibilities might be. Their collective wisdom was awesome. The lists of the participants together constitute a "Who's Who in international economics"<sup>[34]</sup>.

### ***(3) The "Why" of it***

The short answer to the question why multilateral diplomacy is to be preferred to its classical predecessor is "because it's efficient, because it's effective, and because it's right". The validity of the first two of these three assertions can easily be demonstrated. There is no doubt that positive-sum trading systems are more efficient than beggar-my-neighbour policies or competitive devaluation. The great improvement in the lot of humankind since 1945 is testimony enough to the effectiveness of multilateralism.

If then, the truth of the first two assertions is self-evident, what need have we of the third? The answer lies in human weakness or human perversity. We don't always do what our better selves tell us we should do. *Homo economicus* is a figment of the imagination, rather than a portrait of reality. Mutual respect and understanding - which constitute the "glue" of society, national or international - do not derive from reason alone.

Adam Smith was not a "desiccated calculating machine" as Aneurin Bevan categorised Hugh Gaitskell. He is described on the title page of *Wealth of Nations* as "formerly Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Glasgow". His fundamental doctrine was that all our

moral sentiments arise from "sympathy" which, he said, "leads us to enter into the situations of other men, and to partake with them in the passions which those situations tend to excite"<sup>[35]</sup>.

Moral philosophy and behavioural science teach us that it is not our intellect alone which will sustain us in honouring our undertakings to other people. What sustains us is our faith: if we do not have faith in a deity, the Preamble reaffirms our faith in other people, and in our collective recognition of how we all should all conduct ourselves in relation to one another. To commit such recognition to paper needs more than a Treaty: it needs something warmer, such as a covenant or a Charter.

One of the most precious human instincts is the desire not to let other people who depend on you down. Multilateralism is a formidable support and spur to that desire.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: RESUMPTION OF UNITED STATES LEADERSHIP**

No great enterprise will get real lift-off without leadership. Lack of it will soon be evident. The League of Nations was never more than the shadow of its potential self because Woodrow Wilson became *hors de combat* and the US Senate deserted it. In 1945, matters were very different. As already explained, President Truman's leadership was decisive, especially against the Cold War in Europe waged by Stalin and Communist aggression in Korea. But it did not stop there. The Truman years have rightly been called "the Golden Age of American diplomacy". In response to the Soviet threat to Europe in the immediate post-war years, the United States led the way with what became NATO and OECD<sup>[36]</sup>. The UK organised the response on this side of the Atlantic and took the initiative with what became GATT/WTO, and with the Council of Europe.

### ***Pax americana, 1945-1974***

Preponderant American power - military, economic, cultural and political - was the principal influence in international affairs for a generation after the end of World War II. The United States was the most enlightened and compassionate of hegemons.

That preponderance inevitably shrank as the rest of the world recovered from the devastation of the war years. The burden Uncle Sam willingly shouldered at the outset became heavier, absolutely as well as relatively; and he was increasingly unwilling, and ultimately unable, to bear it. The system of IMF-governed fixed currency parities drew to an end with the suspension of dollar convertibility on August 15, 1971. There was a phenomenal rise in oil prices which the "third world coalition" competently exploited in United Nations fora<sup>[37]</sup>. The combination of the Vietnam War and Watergate, culminating in the resignation of Richard Nixon on August 9, 1974, effectively marked the end of *pax americana*.

### ***A period of economic and technological advance, but growing systemic disorder, 1974-2016***

The years 1974-2016 present a number of contrasts, if not of contradictions. Chief among these, perhaps, is on the one hand the enormous increase in the scope and scale of communication worldwide which one would expect to have led to increased understanding, and on the other hand the no less significant increase in the sense of alienation experienced by so many individuals or societies. There would appear to have been rather more pronouncing than listening.

The Cold War ended in 1989. Partition of geographical Europe by an Iron Curtain came to a joyous end. The Charter of Paris, bringing together the members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, held out hopes of a period of genuine tranquillity for *le vieux continent*, after its terrible



record of twentieth century fratricide. The European Union could at last extend to the countries of Eastern as well as Western Europe. The expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait by an overwhelming US-led force gave rise to hopes of a New World Order. Francis Fukuyama wrote of "*The End of History*". Russia joined the G7, to make it G8.

But it was not to be. Cold War, it seemed, had been replaced by Hot Peace. The twenty-first century opened with Nine-Eleven. Terrorism, variously titled and justified, if not glorified, gained a prominence previously unknown. Its links with the hydra-headed problem of migration were all too clear. Migration, in its turn, was all too clearly associated with the ever-growing problem of protecting the environment.

### ***The near-infinite human capacity to take things for granted***

While it should have been obvious that the prime requirement in the face of this panoply of problems was to maintain the solidarity of the like-minded countries under US leadership, which had served us so well and so long, the harsh fact of the case is that the necessary political will was not forthcoming. Europeans were neither willing to play their part in sharing the burden of defence, nor in curbing the abuse of the liberal trading regime which the US were striving to maintain. China exploited these divisions.

### ***The Trump experience***

Given the extent to which other countries were taking advantage of American forbearance and sense of responsibility, a backlash in heartland America was inevitable. The surprise should not be so much at the bluntness of President Trump's successful "America First" election campaign, as at its persistence, idiosyncrasy and even caprice, combined with the very large number of votes he garnered in the 2020 campaign.

This should put us on notice that, while President-elect Biden can be relied to exert the leadership the vast majority of like-minded countries want, and of which the unanimously adopted Commemorative Declaration, so forthright in most of what it says, discreetly avoids mention. It will certainly not be on the easy-going lines of yore.

### ***WTO reform should be at the heart of the resumption of US leadership***

When I want to annoy my fellow diplomats - a rare occurrence, of course - I explain to them that economics is politics studied seriously. The point is straight-forward. A standard definition of the role of economics is "the allocation of scarce resources between competing ends". You have but to substitute "countries" for "ends" to grasp the relevance of the analogy.

The problem will be eased if the supply of the scarce resources in question can be increased, or if the competing ends can somehow be reconciled. The process for peaceably so doing within national borders is known as "democracy, a system of counting heads, instead of breaking them". The process for doing so internationally is known as "free trade", the great engine of growth.

Originally, "trade" in this context referred to the exchange across national borders of visible goods. But, as national economies expanded and became more and more sophisticated, the word "trade" acquired much wider significance. It was not a mere matter of exchange of goods across borders, but rather of the intertwining of whole economies.

The logic of the situation was perceived at the meeting in 1944 at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, which gave birth to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The original idea was that there should be in addition an International Trade Organisation (ITO), carrying with it the implication that the

three together would provide more or less complete coverage of international economic arrangements.

An ITO Charter was duly drafted (the *Havana Charter*, 1948) but it did not find favour with the US Senate. Its commercial policy provisions were rescued and became the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). GATT evolved into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). While it does much useful work on the regulation of trade in the narrow sense of the term, WTO has never been adequate for the much more complex task of the management of interdependence. It must be reformed as a matter of urgency to meet modern requirements. The work of a reformed WTO should be under the general supervision of the G20, currently the world's principal under-performing asset.

## **ENVOI**

When, on January 10, 2021, we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the opening of the inaugural session of the General Assembly in the Methodist Central Hall, London, Boris Johnson, as UK Prime Minister, will be in a unique position: host and custodian of the birthplace of the United Nations; Chair-in-office of the Commonwealth; President of the G 7; and President of the next Climate Change Summit COP 26, to be held in Glasgow in November 2021.

His speech on September 26 to the General Assembly<sup>[38]</sup> shows how well prepared he is for this historic assignment. The UK was the right country, he said, to give a lead, and was ready to do so. January 10 will highlight not only the interdependence of the member countries of the UN, but also the interdependence of the issues which engage their attention and the interdependence of the fora in which they handle them.

Important as all these organisations are in their work individually and together, we know that the mechanics of interdependence are not the answer on their own. No impersonal, over-arching 'rules-based international order' will sustain us indefinitely in labouring in the common interest, and for the common good.

As the UN Charter proclaims, and as Coronavirus is forcibly reminding us, we need more than that to hold us to active faith in our fellow human beings, in their fundamental rights, in the dignity and worth of the individual, and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

We will have been heartened by the season of hope and good will and buoyed up by the prospect of vaccines putting a gradual end to the bereavement, the suffering and the disruption to our lives and livelihoods caused in the year past by the Coronavirus.

My watchword, from the cheering side-lines, will be the first verse of a ditty popularised during World War II by the late Bing Crosby and the late Misses Andrews, and surely relevant to today:

You've got to accentuate the positive,  
Eliminate the negative,  
Latch on to the affirmative,  
Don't mess with Mister Inbetween

Sir Peter Marshall, KCMG, CVO, joined the UK Diplomatic Service in 1949, rising to Economic Under-Secretary in the FCO and then Deputy for Economic and Social Affairs. He then joined the UK Permanent Mission to the UN in New York and later served as UK Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva (1979-83). 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 *Positive Diplomacy* (Macmillan) was published in 1997.

## NOTES

1. Full text at Annex 1
2. Full text at Annex 2
3. Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act IV, Scene 5
4. Churchill, at the close of the meeting in London of the Commonwealth delegates on the eve of the San Francisco Conference. See Annex 5.
5. It is at least not impossible that if the Allies had firmly resisted the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936, Hitler would have been toppled. Too few people had read *Mein Kampf*.
6. "William Beveridge" is no longer a household name. It ought to be.
7. He refers, almost Bunyan-like, to the five "giants" - idleness, ignorance, disease, squalor and want. Idleness is given pride of place.
8. "Second front now!" was a popular communist slogan in Britain after the USSR was attacked.
9. White Paper Cmd 6571, November 1944. Cmd 6560, of the same date, contains the text of the Dumbarton Oaks proposals.
10. Full text at Annex 4.
11. President-elect Biden wrote an excellent article in the March/April 2020 issue of *Foreign Affairs*: "Why America must lead again".
12. In Jean Monnet's view there was indeed a danger of another war, but next time Germany would not be the aggressor, but the prize in a struggle between the West and the USSR. Hence the content of the Schuman Declaration.
13. See Marshall, *Smuts and the Preamble to the UN Charter*, The Round Table, Vol 90, no 358.
14. See Annex 5
15. See Chapter 4, for details of how the Conference was organised.
16. L S Amery, *My political life*, Vol 2, p 383.
17. See Marshall, *Shaping the New Commonwealth*, 1949, The Round Table, Vol 88, no 350.
18. All manner of suggestion has been made as to how best to describe the Commonwealth: Church? Club? Beehive? Or "the Mother of all Networks"? Further suggestions are welcome.
19. Cmd 8572, March 20, 2013.
20. Full text at Annex 6.
21. See the first-class report of the UK delegation to the San Francisco Conference, Cmd 6666, 1945.
22. Full text at Annex 7.
23. Cmd 6734, January 1946.
24. Full text at Annex 8.
25. In August 1957, Attlee came to a meeting of diplomats from East and West, organised by the American Friends Service Committee in Montreux. He addressed us on the Commonwealth. A questioner asked whether Britain was part of Europe or not. "We're semi-detached", he replied, and did not elaborate.
26. Full text at Annex 2.
27. See Annex 3.
28. See Annex 10.
29. The Ceausescus' lifestyle evidently counted in the Romanian view as an "external diseconomy of consumption". They were disposed of summarily.

30. The Berlin blockade lasted from September 1948 to May 1949. The Berlin airlift in response was a logistic and aviation triumph.
31. President Roosevelt's State of the Union Message, January 1941.
32. The requisite portmanteau term used to be "the Establishment". Recent trends seem to have fragmented it, and no satisfactory successor term has yet emerged.
33. Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij and Thomas G Weiss: *The Power of UN Ideas -Lessons from the First 60 Years*.
34. Commonwealth Secretariat: International Economic Issues, Contributions by the Commonwealth 1975-2010.
35. Adam Smith: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.
36. The plethora of institutions, known by their initials, led to unconvincing complaints of "alphabet soup".
37. Algeria, skilfully combined leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement with chairmanship of OPEC (the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) to secure the proclamation by a General Assembly Resolution of a New International Economic Order. It had no binding force but it established what became known as "the third world coalition", mobilising the developing countries in seeking a fairer deal.
38. Full text at Annex 12.

## ANNEXES

Click on indicated annex for full document

1. [Preamble to the UN Charter, June 26, 1945](#)
2. [UN 75 Commemorative Declaration, September 21, 2020](#)
3. UN Global Consultation, 2020: [The Future we want, the UN we need](#)
4. [Declaration by the five \(Commonwealth\) Prime Ministers, May 16, 1944](#)
5. [Communique issued by the Commonwealth delegations to the San Francisco Conference, London, April 13, 1945](#)
6. [President Truman's opening address to the San Francisco Conference, April 25, 1945](#)
7. [President Truman's closing address, June 26, 1945](#)
8. [Prime Minister Clement Attlee's keynote address to the inaugural session of the UN General Assembly, Methodist Central Hall, London, January 10, 1946](#) (page 39)
9. [Communique, Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting, April 26, 1949](#)
10. [The UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2015](#)
11. [UK Statement Commemorating the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, September 21, 2020](#)
12. [Prime Minister's speech to the UN General Assembly, September 26, 2020](#)

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