



**The United Kingdom and  
the United Nations:  
a Seventy Year Perspective**

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**Sir Peter Marshall, KCMG, CVO**

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**10 January 2016**

**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.

This article was written at the invitation of the Westminster Branch of the United Nations Association to mark the 70th anniversary of the inaugural meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in Methodist Central Hall Westminster on 10 January 1946. It is posted in the News pages on the Branch website [www.unawestminster.org.uk](http://www.unawestminster.org.uk)



*Photo.* Clement Attlee, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, opens the first session of the General Assembly on 10 January 1946. On the podium to the rear, from top right are: Trygve Lie, First Secretary-General of the United Nations; Paul Henri Spaak of Belgium, First President of the General Assembly; and Andrew Cordier, Executive Assistant to the Secretary-General.

On 10 January 2016, the service held in Methodist Central Hall Westminster to mark the anniversary was led by the Revd Tony Miles, Deputy Superintendent Minister and Media Chaplain, Methodist Central Hall Westminster who discussed with Sir Peter Marshall the record of the United Nations over the past seventy years. The large congregation included many members of the United Nations Association and the lessons were read by two members; Kishan Manocha, Senior Adviser on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and David Wardrop, Chairman of the United Nations Association Westminster Branch.

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# The United Kingdom and the United Nations: a Seventy Year Perspective

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## Summary

It was symbolic of the crucial part played by the UK, both in the Allied victory during World War II and in securing the peace in its aftermath, that the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council should hold their first ever meetings in bomb-scarred London starting on January 10, 1946.

The United Nations has decisively shown not only its worth but its indispensability. In the past seventy years, it has coped with a quadrupling of the membership, and a vast increase in the volume and complexity of the business which it transacts. It has also helped manage the transition of our collective habitat from World Economy to Global Village.

Continued strong UK support for the UN and deep involvement in its activities are essential to the promotion of British interests as well as to the maintenance of a secure and prosperous world.

## A] January 10, 1946: a Symbolic Hour for Britain

At the Methodist Central Hall, opposite Westminster Abbey, there is a plaque which 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, 1946"*.

That single sentence, in its deceptive simplicity, marks the launch of the greatest experiment in international co-operation the world has ever seen. At the same time, it encapsulates both the agonies of the thirty continuous years of world-wide warfare or turbulent "peace" which preceded it, and the collective determination of the world's leaders that future generations should be spared any such catastrophic experience.

It also hides a narrative in which Britons may take legitimate and durable pride. The UK had taken a leading role in framing the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks proposals for the creation of a universal organisation, the necessity of which was agreed on all sides. Those proposals were adopted at the San Francisco conference of 1945 under the title of the Charter of the United Nations. But, all-importantly, there was added by way of introduction, a brief and inspirational Preamble (Annex A), the wording of which has become household language all over the world and which has as a result been the principal means of familiarising men and women everywhere with the whole idea of the United Nations, its purposes and its deeds.

The Preamble was devised on the initiative of Jan Christiaan Smuts, the South African Prime Minister, at a "meeting of Commonwealth statesmen" in London on the eve of the San Francisco conference. Its presentation by Smuts at the Conference gained immediate support. That close Commonwealth co-operation which had been so pivotal a contribution to Allied Victory during World War II, as in the Great War, had manifested itself immediately as a powerful element in the ensuing peace. It was the Commonwealth which in effect brought the Charter to people the world over.

But that is by no means all. In recognition of the key role played by Britain in post-war reconstruction generally and in the creation of the United Nations in particular, it was agreed at San Francisco that the Preparatory Commission which was necessary to give practical effect to the provisions of the United Nations Charter should meet in bomb-scarred, war-torn, threadbare, emaciated London from the autumn of 1945. This work continued under British chairmanship until the first meeting of the General Assembly. Gladwyn Jebb, the principal Foreign Office official involved, became Acting Secretary-General of the United Nations pending the election of the first substantive holder of the office.

The keynote speech at the opening meeting of the General Assembly was made by Clement Attlee (Annex B). Attlee was no Churchillian orator but he spoke with a commitment, a brevity and a directness which were very effective. His words on that occasion speak volumes as to what we had endured, as to the new dangers and tasks which we faced, and as to our determination to succeed in our quest.

We take all too easily for granted the heroic achievements of the Labour Government of 1945-50 in bringing into being, in spite of immense difficulties at home and abroad, the ambitious range of reforms agreed by the war-time Coalition Government, notably the Beveridge plan for Social Security. Hardship would be our garment for years to come but at least there was peace and there was hope for a better life.

"Our Finest Hour" was on another occasion. But January 10, 1946, was assuredly a "Symbolic Hour" for the United Kingdom. Buffeted and weakened from leading the way in six years of worldwide conflict, we nonetheless led the way in the ensuing peace, to the establishment of a fairer deal and a brighter future for the peoples of the earth.

## **B] The background to successful UN management**

The question which immediately catches our attention is "why has the management of the aftermath of the Second World War been so much more successful than the performance of the victors after the Great War?" The answer is tragically clear. Just as the Crowned Heads of continental Europe and their exclusive advisers never really understood how they had blundered into the Great War, so the world's leaders did not understand how to manage matters in the devastated aftermath, in such a way as to avoid a recurrence of such a calamity.

There was no similar confusion in the case of the Second World War. Its prime cause was obvious, the need for far-reaching measures, both domestically and in the conduct of relations between states, no less so. Reference has already been made to the radical domestic reforms which were being explored very early on in the war. Internationally the same prescience was in evidence. Roosevelt and Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter in August, 1941, in very dark days for Britain, before the attack on Pearl Harbour, albeit two months after Hitler had invaded Russia.

From 1942 onwards the United States and the United Kingdom were heavily involved in post-war planning. When the time came to manage the peace, they hit the ground running.

## **C] How the UN has turned out: characteristics and performance**

### ***An Alliance of Great Powers embedded in a universal organisation: overall it has worked***

The UN was conceived as an Alliance of Great Powers embedded in a universal organisation. To some extent that is a contradiction in terms. It needs the continual striking of delicate and at times unsatisfactory balances. But overall it has worked. The UN has not gone the same way as the League of Nations. There has been no Third World War. The essential condition of continued beneficial UN activity is that both aspects of its unique composition are kept in good repair.

### ***A changed way of doing international business***

The UN is not utopian. Dag Hammarskjöld talked not of leading the world to heaven but of saving it from hell. Less dramatically, Jean Monnet maintained that institutions did not change human nature but could make people behave better. By and large, we have indeed behaved better. The UN has played a key role in changing international relations from the zero-sum game of classical diplomacy to the positive-sum diplomacy of the modern world. The benefit to humankind has been enormous.

### ***Enforcement and International Law***

The UN lacks the powers of enforcement widely regarded as essential. But international law has its inevitable fragilities as it has to assert itself among sovereign states, jealous of their sovereignty. It is no surprise that its prescriptions may often be basically an appeal to morality or conscience. Hence

some would have it that international law should be regarded as a branch of ethics rather than of jurisprudence. Others say “law” should be spelt “lore”.

To the extent that the actions of governments are determined by events, it could be said that in practice the most important law in international affairs is the Law of Unintended Consequences.

### ***The UN Charter, the Commonwealth Charter and Magna Carta***

The addition to the Charter, at San Francisco, of a Preamble was a Commonwealth stroke of genius. In its brevity, clarity, comprehensiveness and forthright proclamation of common purpose, the Preamble is a superb example of the organic inspiring and animating the formal, the legal and the administrative. It is one of the greatest texts in the history of diplomacy. The absence of any reference to Great Power status and the emphasis on the equal rights of states, both great and small, is particularly noteworthy. Beginning with the Preamble, the Commonwealth, which in 2015 celebrated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of its Secretariat at Marlborough House, has had a close relationship with the UN. Its expertise resides in the problems of small and vulnerable states in particular is widely recognised. The Commonwealth Charter, adopted in 2013 and reaffirmed at the recent hugely productive Heads of Government Meeting in Malta in November, is the most up-to-date formulation of generally accepted norms and principles. The theme of the CHOGM - “adding Global Value” - illustrates its firm concern is to contribute to the management of the problems facing the international community as a whole in addition to tackling its own concerns.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, is often referred to as the international Magna Carta. In fact the Preamble to the UN Charter, with the Commonwealth Charter in its wake, is the true successor. It was particularly appropriate that the Hereford copy of Magna Carta, dating from 1217, was on display in Valletta during the CHOGM.

### ***The changing pattern of UN membership, waning US hegemony, the Cold War and the emerging Third World Coalition***

In 1945 there were something like equal numbers of what would later be called “developed” and “developing” countries. Central and South American membership more or less guaranteed a US majority where it was required. The US alone had the atom bomb and US GDP represented a higher proportion of world GDP than ever before or since. US generosity to a stricken world was likewise on a scale previously unknown. It is frequently overlooked that Canada’s contribution to collective post-war relief, as to the common war effort, was on a relatively comparable scale, and equally deserving of our admiration and gratitude.

This unique situation of US super-hegemony did not last long. It was as early as March 1946, a mere two months after the opening in London of the first session of the General Assembly and of the first meeting of the Security Council, that Churchill delivered his famous Iron Curtain speech in Fulton, Missouri. The Cold War became a grim reality a year later. The Berlin blockade began in the autumn of 1948. NATO was formed in 1949. The Korean War broke out in 1950. Our post-war cup was full.

The shape of the UN was altered radically and permanently by the accession of large numbers of Asian, African, Caribbean and Pacific countries gaining their independence. UN membership effectively quadrupled by the end of the twentieth century.

A natural consequence of this fundamental change in the composition of the membership was the making of common cause by the large group of new and “developing” members, not only in order to enhance their own domestic performance but also to change to their advantage or, as they tended to see it, less to their disadvantage, the basic conditions of world trade arrangements as enshrined in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The most spectacular manifestation of this emerging association was the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) convened in Geneva in 1964. It was permanently established as an organ of the General Assembly. In 1974 and 1975, a combination of the non-Aligned Movement under the semi-mystical leadership of President Boumedienne of Algeria and the “oil weapon” generated very effective pressure for the creation of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). It led to the summoning of two Special Sessions of the General Assembly. Unsurprisingly, there was an imperfect meeting of minds on this vast array of issues.

### ***Human rights and the priority of poor people rather than of poor countries***

Whatever its attractions as regards establishing a level economic playing field, the limitations to the usefulness of intergovernmental economic negotiations as a means of promoting "social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" - as the Preamble to the Charter puts it - became increasingly apparent. Indeed it was vigorously argued in some quarters that concentration on intergovernmental economic negotiations positively hampered the achievement of social goals.

In the event, the confrontational approach gradually gave way to a more harmonious collective quest. This found expression notably in the formulation of an International Development Strategy directed to benefiting individuals as distinct from governments in the developing countries.

A welcome breath of fresh air was provided by the Brandt Report which proved to be the first in a series of far-reaching surveys of key issues by high level "independent" Commissions. As the Cold War came to an end, there followed a series of mega-conferences on social issues in which swelling ranks of non-governmental participants greatly outnumbered the official delegates.

While discussion over the years would seem to have become more sophisticated and less confrontational, the concept of a "Third World Coalition", concerned in the first instance to advance the welfare of the less advantaged members of the international community, has persisted and rightly so.

### ***Democracy vs development?***

There is nonetheless something of a geological fault running across the field of international development co-operation. It is essentially a matter of priorities. "What art thou, Freedom?" Shelley asks, "For the labourer thou art bread". Roosevelt listed Four Freedoms: of Speech, of Worship, from Want, from Fear. (The prepositions are important.) If you are more or less free from want and fear, the happy state of many, or indeed of most, people in richer countries, you may attach more importance to freedom of speech and worship for everyone than do those who suffer from chronic poverty and insecurity.

Donors may also wish to attach conditions relating to those freedoms to their offers of international development assistance and to do so in situations where concern for democracy and good governance is not fully shared by the neediest of the recipients. There may thus arise a conflict between perceptions of democracy on the one hand and the imperatives of development on the other.

However, any hard and fast distinction between democracy and development is misleading. The Declaration issued by the General Assembly on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations reaffirmed that "democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, are interdependent and mutually reinforcing".

### ***From World Economy to Global Village: managing a multi-polar UN***

Both as regards substance and process, the UN has adapted itself remarkably well to the change in our collective habitat, moving since 1945 from World Economy to Global Village. It has likewise responded to the massive increase in the volume of business brought about in the first instance by the quadrupling of the membership.

This success in adaptation owes much to the real scope for flexibility contained in the provisions of the Charter, not least for non-governmental participation. As a result, the word "governance" has increasingly to be used in preference to "government", for the sake of accuracy in depicting the nature of the management of international affairs.

As a consequence of the great increase in the volume of UN business transacted, particularly in the economic and social spheres, it was not long before Geneva, the headquarters of the League of Nations and thus somewhat eclipsed by the establishment of UN Headquarters in New York, started to regain some of the prominence it had previously enjoyed. The UK Mission in Geneva (UKMIS) in its present form was set up in 1966 by means of the amalgamation of the previously separate delegations to the UN on the one hand and to GATT and EFTA on the other. The prime reason for this move was UNCTAD's establishment in Geneva rather than in New York. UK ambition to enter the EEC, at that time still thwarted by de Gaulle, was another.

The increase in business transacted in Geneva, and, to a less extent, in Vienna and Nairobi, has in fact been vertiginous. As Permanent Representative there from 1979 to 1983, I was accredited to a dozen

different organisations. The figure has now risen to 30, to the budgets of which the British government contributes approximately £0.5 billion a year.

The long standing convention at UN Headquarters in New York, whereby the permanent members of the Security Council refrain from seeking office in any other UN bodies based there, does not apply in Geneva. This confers on the UK a scope for managing the business transacted in Geneva of which we have not always taken full advantage.

### ***The UN at the Summit: the coming together of the world***

There can be few clearer indications that we have evolved from a World Economy into a Global Village than the manner in which the United Nations has brought virtually the whole expanding range of its activities together in a series of Declarations, adopted by the General Assembly meeting at the level of heads of government. The first of these Declarations marked the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995. Others followed on the respective occasions of the Millennium, the sixtieth anniversary and, on September 25 last, the seventieth anniversary.

This latter Declaration (A/RES/70/1) is entitled *“Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”*. Listing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (replacing the Millennium Development Goals), to be achieved by 2030, it is an expression both of extraordinary ambition and international commitment and of confidence in a continuing general state of peace and collective security, unthinkable in pre-UN days.

Not only are the individual topics specified in the Declarations sufficiently complicated in themselves, their inter-relationships are ultimately innumerable. In the case of the 2005 Declaration, the issues are grouped under five main headings: values and principles; development; peace and collective security; human rights and the rule of law; and strengthening the United Nations. In a large number of cases, the issues could be convincingly regrouped under different headings. One may wonder, too, how many of the different issues could be plausibly grouped under an alternative main heading “Soft Power”.

The 2015 Declaration states that the 17 goals *“seek to realise the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated, indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental”*. Pursuit of the goals, the Declaration continues alliteratively, will stimulate action *“in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership”*. All “stakeholders” are invited to join in.

## **D] UN “software”, the quest for reform**

Not only do the successive summit level General Assembly Declarations bear witness to the advent of the Global Village, they also testify to the acquisition over the years of some very effective UN “software” in the shape of accumulation of expertise in both the substance of the issues and the manner in which they can be most efficiently processed.

The UN system may be thought of as three communities: a political community, responsible for helping to solve difficulties which may arise in the relationships between sovereign member states; a community of management of the activities undertaken in common; and a community of reflection, probing and discussing areas requiring attention, either in the present or in the future. The communities are composed of delegates, members of the Secretariat, observers, both official and non-governmental, and other interested parties coming under the rubric, already mentioned, of “stakeholders”. The UN has great achievements to its credit in the second and third of these communities which in turn have both cast helpful light on the activities of the political community and reduced the various sources of difficulty with which it had been previously troubled.

In brief, the UN has evolved *functionally*. What is at issue has been most tellingly, succinctly and readably set forth in *The Power of UN Ideas: Lessons from the First Sixty Years* (UN, New York, 2005) by Richard Jolly, Louis Emmerij and Thomas Weiss: an Englishman, a Dutchman and an American respectively. Presented unassumingly as “A Summary of the Books and Findings from the UN

Intellectual History Project" (a massive undertaking), it could properly be re-titled "Just about all you really need to think about when it comes to managing 21<sup>st</sup> century worldwide interdependence".

### ***Reforming the UN?***

Reform of the main UN structures has been on the agenda virtually since the outset. The two-tier membership of the Security Council has been an obvious target for criticism. But any change in the permanent membership of the Council or in the right of veto is likely to be a sticking point indefinitely either for the Russians, or for the Chinese, or for the Americans, or for all of them together. This means that France and Britain will continue to enjoy indefinitely the advantages of permanent membership of the Security Council on what others might picturesquely regard as a pocket-borough basis. It is up to us to continue to justify this privilege by our contribution as a whole to the work of the UN.

More generally, is anything in the nature of comprehensive UN "reform" feasible? Can a system of universal inter-governmental institutions, fashioned for a World Economy, be fully adequate for a Global Village seventy years later however well we may manage to update them?

If, on the other hand, we went back to the drawing board, would we be able to muster an adequate measure of agreement among two hundred member states? Are we not in that case better off if we adapt *de facto* the existing institutional arrangements with the type of functionalism which can already be seen to emerge, not least as a response to tackling "global" issues, and which has attracted a great deal of thought in the past, as recorded in current issue of *International Affairs*, the Chatham House journal?

### ***The G20***

Given the degree of dissatisfaction with the role and composition of the Security Council and the prominence which economic and financial matters have come to assume, it is somewhat surprising that the G20 has failed to develop its great potential. Although originally a grouping of finance ministers and central bank governors, it met at Heads of Government level, on the suggestion of President Sarkozy of France, to grapple with the dire financial crisis of 2008. It continues to meet at the Summit as well as at lower levels. But some of the vitality has forsaken it. The world is assuredly the poorer as a result.

Perhaps matters will change for the better now that the significant changes in IMF Quotas, agreed by the IMF Executive Board in 2010, have at long last secured Congressional approval.

## **E] The United Nations at 70: a strongly positive verdict**

No organisation is better than its members. Theirs is the ultimate responsibility. The United Nations is neither a panacea nor an alibi. Its possibilities and its limitations were recognised from the outset. As the official UK report and commentary on the Charter, after its adoption at San Francisco conference, puts it:

"It is not suggested that all this machinery, however impressive it may be, can by itself preserve or increase the welfare of the peoples of the world. That depends on how governments use such machinery, and their actions in turn will largely depend on the public opinion of their countries as expressed through their legislative and other bodies. This fact cannot be overemphasised. As it is, a powerful and flexible organisation will shortly be at (members') disposal, an organisation, moreover, well adapted to the political realities of the modern world".

That confident and sensible comment has stood the test of time remarkably well. On any historical basis, the UN must be judged a great success. Its membership and it itself has weaknesses and inadequacies. It has had its failures. That the world is overall a much better place because of it cannot, however, be seriously open to doubt. As already suggested, the Declaration on Sustainable Development would have been unimaginable in pre-UN days. It would not have been possible even in the present day if member governments had not absorbed a deep awareness of the potential of the UN system.



The most prominent failure in the political field has been over the question of relations between Israel and its neighbours. The reasons for this are as much a function of the relationship between the Great Powers and their respective principal priorities as of the all-too-familiar complexities of the region. Advocates of fair and balanced reporting may often feel that they plead their case in vain. However they should not give up. They are an essential feature of a healthy democratic process.

In this anniversary year, the record of unprecedented UN achievement has been taken very largely for granted. It has gone unreported – “good news is no news” too often seems to be the watchword of today’s media - while its failures and shortcomings have inevitably received attention.

And there are occasions on which a problem is dumped on the UN as a last resort, all local attempts to achieve a settlement having failed. Yet even if in the circumstances the prospect for finding a way forward under UN aegis seems remote, the effort is worth making. The Law of Unexpected Consequences can play a beneficial part.

## **F] Whither Britain within the United Nations?**

That the United Kingdom made an outstanding contribution to the establishment of the United Nations and to its operation from the early years is beyond doubt. The speeches to the General Assembly in New York by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary on the occasion of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Declaration were heart-warming. Our commitment to the UN development assistance target of 0.7% of GDP is the most practical guarantee of our continuing positive involvement.

What then of Britain and the United Nations in the next seventy years? Do we not have a responsibility to be as much as ever to the fore in guiding this “powerful and flexible organisation”? Are not our future prospects worldwide as bright as we have any right to expect them to be? Does not our economic growth exceed the average for developed countries generally? Do we not have a government entrusted by the electorate, seemingly against all expert predictions and expectations, with an absolute majority and a mandate to tackle our slate of problems of domestic adjustment and renewal? Have we not had throughout 2015 a cavalcade of major national anniversaries, enough to set the blood coursing in our veins and to rouse us to the heights of endeavour of which we have been shown historically to be capable?

### ***EU hesitations***

The realistic answer to this volley of questions would certainly be a good deal more positive were it not for the obsession now gripping sections of the Conservative Party over the defects of the EU and the case for leaving it.

For reasons which it would be tedious to rehearse, the holding of an In-Out referendum has long since become unavoidable. Once announced, it has inevitably generated a good deal of excitement and misinformation. Its own momentum easily detaches it from the stern realities of our situation, both national and international. One ex-Cabinet Minister went so far as to describe it as the most important decision to take since the Reformation. It is thus no real surprise that, on the eve of the December meeting of the European Council, pollsters could claim that as many as half of our compatriots could favour Brexit.

While we should certainly listen to the arguments both for and against continued EU membership, we should not approach the issue as if were to be considered on its own self-sufficient merits and isolated from any current or historical context. Yet that is often what is happening.

I find it hard to resist the impression that what people think on this potentially toxic question is less important than why they think it. As a nation we share so much in thought and practice. The great majority of us want the best for the future, for the sake of our children and our grandchildren.

In that responsible long term perspective, there is indeed scope for legitimate doubt about the wisdom of our present contractual involvement with a continent-wide political structure magnificently fashioned for the urgencies of the mid-twentieth century but ill-adapted to the needs of the twenty-first.

Yet it is equally clear that the radical adjustments required in our domestic economic, social and even political arrangements far outweigh in their importance for our future well-being any improvement in EU overall performance or, in our relationship with our EU partners, which we can hope to achieve by the end of 2017. A significant improvement in our productivity, for example, would dispose of many of our EU concerns. It follows therefore that we should resist any temptation to think that adjusting our ties with our continental neighbours will suffice to cure our ills.

***To thine own self be true***

It would be utterly out of character to vote to leave the EU. I do not believe for a moment that, when the time comes, the British people would be so misguided as to do so. I am confident that they will heed instead the measured, experience-laden, words of Sir John Major: “flirting with leaving at a time when the whole world is coming together is very dangerous. If we leave the EU, it won’t be a friendly departure. It will be very acrimonious”. We would be “less well off, less secure and less influential.”

It was Goethe who said of us that we have the courage to be what Nature made us. He did not define exactly what he meant. Yet what he saw in his lifetime is indication enough: Our destiny and our duty is to look outward and forward, rather than inward and backward, and think big, rather than small. We have a reputation for consistency and tenacity. We are guided by interest not sentiment. We do not on the whole bear grudges. And it is not long before we feel disposed to dismount from any high horse on which circumstances may have contrived to seat us.

We may not have had a sufficiency of Goethe’s courage in the inter-war years. We were certainly required to manifest it in full measure from 1939 to 1945. We have embraced it in the seventy years of the existence of the United Nations. We know that we shall need to regain it once we have purged ourselves of our current bout of *Brusselitis*. As the Sustainable Development Declaration makes crystal clear, there is more than enough for us all to do together in our common interest. Nobody is better at this mode of co-operation than the British. We, this happy breed, must realise that we are at our best when we are fully involved in it.

Peter Marshall  
January, 2016

## **Annex A**

### **Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations**

#### **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,

#### **AND FOR THESE ENDS**

- to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
- to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
- to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
- to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

#### **HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS**

Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.

*<http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/preamble.shtml>*

## Annex B

### **Speech by Clement Attlee, British Prime Minister, opening the first UN General Assembly, 10 January 1946 (as reported in *The Canberra Times*, 12 January 1946)**

#### **'WE MUST AND WILL SUCCEED'**

"It is for us to day, bearing in mind the great sacrifices that have been made, to prove ourselves no less courageous in approaching our great task, no less patient and no less self-sacrificing. We must and will succeed" These concluding words of the Prime Minister (Mr Attlee) in his opening speech brought deafening applause.

The coming of the atomic bomb is only the last of a series of warnings to mankind that unless the powers of destruction could be controlled, immense ruin and almost annihilation would be the lot of a very highly civilised portion of mankind ' said Mr Attlee.

"I welcome, therefore the decision to remit the whole problem of control of atomic energy to a commission of the United Nations Organisation. We, perhaps, in these islands which for so long have been immune from attack behind the barrier of the sea, feel more than any others that we are living in a new age. The development of powerful weapons of destruction from distant bases have destroyed the illusion of isolationism. The atomic bomb has set clearly before us in tangible form the question that faces the modern world. It is for the peoples of the world through their representatives, to make the choice between life and death.

'We have always with us sceptics and pessimists who will tell you there always has been war and always will be war, who point to the failure of the League of Nations as a reason for scepticism as to the success of the United Nations Organisation, but the progress of civilisation has been one of continual failure and learning by experience. To take an example, the history of the trade union movement is marked by failure after failure. After every defeat, the sceptics and the timorous said 'You cannot get the workers to combine. The self-interest of the individual is too strong.' I have intense faith that we will make the United Nations Organisation a success.

'We have learnt from past mistakes that the old League of Nations suffered from many disabilities, most of all perhaps because two great nations, the United States and the USSR (who) were not present in formative stages. 'To-day, as never before, the world is united. The Constitution of the new organisation essentially is realist in that it provides for the sanction of force to support the rule of law. Every individual can be brought to realise that things that are to be discussed in this conference are the concern of all and affect the home life of every man, woman and child. Without social justice and security, there is no real foundation for peace for it is among the socially disinherited and those who have nothing to lose, that the gangster and the aggressor recruit their supporters. Important as is the work of the Security Council, no less vital is to make the Economic and Social Council an effective international instrument. A police force is necessary for part of the civilised community, but the greater the social security and the contentment of the population, the less important is the police force.

"Finally, let us be clear as to what is our ultimate fate. It is not just a negation of war but the creation of a world security and freedom, of a world governed by justice and the moral law: We desire to assert the pre-eminence of right over might and the general good against selfish sectional aims".

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