

The UN: An Evaluation

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The United Nations is the most ambitious attempt at world order-building in history. It was formed during the Allied effort to defeat Nazi Germany, in order to "kill another Hitler in the shell ere be become too great." That is, the UN was formed to prevent another World War II in the same way that its predecessor, the League of Nations, was formed to prevent another World War I.

The key factor in preserving the new peace was to be the unanimity of the "Great Five" of the victorious allies, namely America, Russia, England, France, and China. However, no one foresaw the Great Powers fighting among themselves; predictably, they soon began to do this, driven by vast ideological differences between the democratic and Communist blocs. The dissension-ridden UN was crippled at birth by defects implanted by its sponsoring governments.

Nonetheless, the UN is still alive, while the League, paralyzed during most of its life, died at a younger age. The UN now has 135 members compared to the League's transitory membership of 60; it almost reaches the goal of universality and has achieved a sense of permanence on the world scene.

A whole generation has grown up for whom the UN is not a new idea but part of the Establishment. Because of this staying power, the concept of a world without some sort of global organization has become inconceivable. That in itself is a major accomplishment. Also the many paths that the UN has blazed in pursuit of peace provide guidelines and experiences from which we may build a more effective peace-keeping system in the future.

Not a world government

The UN is not a "world government" in the strict sense of the term since it has no mandate to interfere in a nation's sovereign domestic affairs. Therefore the UN has never been able to compel a great power or a client state to act contrary to what it conceives of as its national interests. However, the UN has been credited with preventing war or at least limiting the fighting in at least four major areas the Middle East, the Congo, Cyprus, and twice between Pakistan and India. It is also said to have provided a restraining role in scores of other conflicts by providing machinery and a forum for negotiation.

According to former Secretary General U Thant, the UN has helped at least a billion people achieve independence... In a recent issue of *The Observer*, the public information director of the International Bank writes:

The UN was not conceived by the peoples of the world and is not answerable to them. It was conceived by... governments, many of them such as Stalin's -- pretty far from representing their people....

Shirley Hazzard writes in an article in *The Nation*:

... the organization's lines of public association have been ever more attenuated, its very humanity consumed in ritual absurdities and in an administrative pattern that makes Parkinson's Law look like jurisprudence.

Solzhenitsyn, in his Nobel address, assailed the UN for its deafness to "the groans, screams and beseeching of human individual plain people... Alas, in an immoral world, the UN too grew up immoral."

The essence of this immorality is revealed in this statement in a recent Secretariat publication: "The United Nations deals in the realm of what is possible, not of what is right and wrong." Thus by its own admission, the UN, repository of so much of man's cherished hopes for a moral world, turns out to be another field for the Machiavellian interplay of petty national self-interests.

U.S. at fault

Who is responsible for such a cosmic let-down? Unfortunately, much of the blame must be put on the United States. In terms of initiative, influence, and support, the role of the United States in shaping the UN far outweighs even the collective role of the other 50 original members.

When the UN was being formed it was widely thought that one of the main causes of the failure of the old League was the absence of the United States. Therefore the majority of members were eager to follow the leadership of the United States and the U.S. was able to count on an automatic majority. The Soviet Union, finding itself usually outnumbered in the Security Council and Assembly, cast some 100 vetoes, 90 percent of the total.

In 1945, just as John Maynard Keynes wrote in 1929 in reference to the formation of the League of Nations, "... an investment in political courage would have been marvelously repaid in the end." No such investment was made on the part of the United States; the reason was the absence of an investment in moral courage-the courage to distinguish and separate right from wrong.

The U.S. was certainly in the right in having defeated Nazi Germany. But after having put down Hitler, the U.S. lacked the moral courage to stand against an even greater and more militaristic tyranny—the reign of Stalin. Then, by allowing Russia the veto power, the whole concept of collective security was made into a travesty.

As one scholar puts it, "... the UN provided for a world-wide police commission and then made the top international gangster a member of that commission."

As this travesty became more obvious, the high hopes Americans had for the UN as a vehicle for peace and understanding have dwindled; they plummeted to almost nothing with the admission of Red China and the kangaroo court expulsion of Free China. Gallup surveys show that approval of the UN in the United States dropped from 87 percent in 1959 to 43 percent in 1971.

Third World influence

Having failed to exercise moral leadership, the U.S. eventually relinquished any real leadership of the UN. From the 51 original members, the UN membership has almost tripled to 135 members, most of them newly emerging African and Asian states. This gives the latter a clear majority in the UN General Assembly, making them able to dominate the debates whenever they choose. Colonialism, apartheid, technical aid, and economic development are their main concerns; seeing themselves shortchanged, by history and entitled to compensations, their tone is more and more demanding.

The Organization of African Unity, composed of black and Mediterranean African countries, has 41 members—nearly a third of the total UN membership. The Arab states generally vote with the Africans, as do almost all of the so-called "under-developed" countries.

The consequences of this new balance of power was shown recently when America was forced to cast its fifth veto in the Security Council this August to block a resolution to censure Israel for not giving up occupied Arab territory. Without the veto, the resolution would have been approved overwhelmingly.

Thus the U.S. is now in Russia's former position—in the minority -- and a favorite target for political badgering by the smaller nations.

Meanwhile, Red China is using its Security Council rostrum to make a bid for leadership, arguing that she, as a developing nation, has a better understanding of the "Third World." Red China is backing up its bid with \$318 million of new aid on easy payments to ten developing nations and a pledge to increase China's share of the UN budget to seven percent from the four percent formerly donated by the Nationalists.

Chinese influence

In many issues brought before the General Assembly, such as Panamanian control of the Canal (which forced the U.S.'s third veto) the Third World countries have more and more been inclined to follow China's lead.

Professor John Stoessinger wrote in a recent study, "Is it not becoming increasingly evident that instead of China's coming around to the United Nations' position, the United Nations appears to be coming closer to the Chinese?" As a result of this situation, the U.S. is inclined to bypass the UN, doing more and more of its international dealings independently of the world body.

However, now is not the time for the U.S. to abandon the UN, for the UN is the only world forum where the smaller powers can meet and bargain with the Great Powers. For the U.S. to become alienated from the "Third World" at this time would be disastrous, considering the growing economic leverage that the Third World is able to exert against the U.S. The U.S. is heavily dependent on the Third World for its energy supplies and other natural resources; the extent of American dependence was shown dramatically this year by the effect of the Arab's oil cut-off. If they so desire, other Third World nations could follow the Arabs' example by withholding other resources, hiking up prices, or discriminating against American customers in favor of European or Japanese markets. Thus the Third World will pose an increasingly critical threat to the industrialized states in the years ahead; the U.S. must, for its survival, try to win the confidence of and exercise political and moral leadership over the smaller nations.

Ironically, the "anti" tactics of the Third World nations are actually helping to wreck the only organization that can be of much help to them and are hastening the deterioration of world civilization as a whole. A world organization such as the UN demands the leadership of a nation which is worldwide in its thinking and habits; in other dependence through its trusteeship system, which aided the peaceful liquidation of colonialism. Also, the UN has been a major dispenser of politically unattached aid in technical and economic areas. Under a ten-year program adopted by the General Assembly in 1970, for example, the industrialized nations agreed to set aside at least one percent of their gross national product annually to help underdeveloped countries. It has also achieved notable progress in law-making, having pioneered a new body of law for exploring the sea floor and outer space. Also the Secretariat has developed an invaluable new human resource—an international civil service fostering habits of global statesmanship.

Ineffectual in peacekeeping

However, when we compare what the UN has achieved with today's needs to create world peace, we find it to be ineffectual, indeed. The great powers continue to arm themselves with dreadful weapons and oppression, wars, and poverty continue unchecked while the UN grinds out papers and endless rhetoric.

The premise of a "world forum" was that as long as people "keep talking" they will be less likely to go for their guns; but in the words of Shirley Hazzard, author of *Defeat of an Ideal*, "The UN has kept talking through wars, civil strife, military aggression, religious persecution, tidal waves, starvation, and millions of violent deaths...." Most of the major traumas of the modern world- Vietnam, Biafra, Czechoslovakia, Hungary- were barely discussed by the UN, much less acted upon.

The shortcomings of the world organization were catalogued in a recent book by Charles W. Yost, the former American Ambassador. The United Nations, he says,

is extremely weak in the most essential fields of peacekeeping and peaceful settlements... has no standing armed force... no decisive power to control national armaments, limit national conflicts or enforce peaceful settlements... The Security Council is often immobilized by Great Power antagonism and the veto... The General Assembly... cannot order but only recommend... The International Court of Justice is impotent to enforce international law or to settle international disputes.... Perhaps most serious of all, action by the United Nations is tightly circumscribed by the niggardliness of its members particularly the wealthiest....

Not conceived by the people

A survey of articles on the UN shows a great deal of pessimism from many who have a long acquaintance with the world body. In other words, only a nation which can sacrifice its limited national interests and turn its loyalty to the world as a whole can make the UN work. Naturally all of the "developing" nations are fiercely nationalistic in their outlook, and usually can't see beyond their own domestic needs and problems.

The only other Great Powers with a global outlook besides the United States are the Soviet Union and Red China. The Soviet Union seems at least as discredited in the eyes of the Third World as the U.S., and is as reluctant to work through the UN. That leaves China- but what sort of prospect faces us if Red China achieves the leadership of the Third World?

Looking at the example of corporate violence and insanity demonstrated by China during the Great Cultural Revolution, China's leadership of the Third World would bode ill for the survival of civilization as we know it. The resulting scenario calls to mind the metaphorical situation that confronted the boy-hero in *Lord of the Flies*.

At the end of the story we find him fleeing for his life from an uncivilized mob, led by the "kill the pig" bully who is out to behead the hero of the last remaining center of civilized values.

Need for moral leadership

Only a powerful investment in moral courage can prevent such an event on a global scale. America is the last major center and heir of Christian civilization in the world today and among all the powers, she is the only one having the power and spiritual values to stand against what Solzhenitsyn called "the world-wide tide of violence that never ends" generated by the "permanent state violence" of the totalitarian regimes.

The experience of the UN has shown that no less than genuine world government having a clear authority to compel nations to act for the benefit of the whole can effectively bring about world peace. However, as Arnold Toynbee has shown in his *Study of History*, the authority of governments is founded primarily on moral authority-a government can survive only according to its ability to inspire the people to look beyond themselves and work for a common spiritual ideal. Therefore, the U.S., to reform the UN and restore its leadership among the Third World, must find in its Christian values and ideals the global ideology which can transcend the divisiveness of national interests. The first step is for America to establish this ideology within herself so that she can lead the way by setting the highest example of service and self-sacrifice for the peoples of the world.