

# AN EVALUATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Sixteen years have passed since the Charter of the United Nations was drafted at the San Francisco Conference. Sixteen years after the Versailles treaty, the League of Nations was on the verge of facing, and failing to meet, its biggest challenge: an evaluation written in the summer of 1935 would have been, on the whole, a positive one. Thus, any assessment of the United Nations' contribution to contemporary world order has to be cautious and provisional.

At any given time, the kind of order which exists in the world depends on the nature of the international system; the methods and the rules by which a minimum of security, assent and flexibility is insured depend on the structure of the world, on the domestic political systems, on the trans-national forces and on the scope and means which characterize the relations between the actors on the international scene.<sup>1</sup> Before 1919, world order consisted of two main elements: on the one hand, the legal norms which tried to delimit the rights and duties of the states and to regulate their competition or their cooperation in various areas; on the other hand, the empirical rules of behavior which resulted from the distribution of forces, from the calculations and strategies of the states, for instance, the "laws" of the balance of power system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The creation of an international organization was supposed to bring a drastic change into world politics and world order. It was intended to close the gap which had so often appeared between the legal order and the empirical one. At the same time, the legal order was becoming far more ambitious: international law would stop being the reflection of power relations which left sovereignty intact or submitted the sovereignty of a given state merely to those restrictions which were imposed by the greater force of its combined enemies. International law would become instead a body of rules determining the conduct of states independently from power relations and curbing the essential attribute of sovereignty, the right to resort freely to violence. International organization would be the motor of this new law. The world was assumed to be capable, so to speak, of leaping from Hume to Kant.

The drama of both the League and the United Nations has resided in one basic ambiguity and in one deep abyss. The ambiguity is that of the very concept of international organization.<sup>2</sup> It is a

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<sup>1</sup> For further elaboration, see the author's "International Systems and International Law," to be published in *World Politics* (October 1961).

<sup>2</sup> See Walter Schiffer, *The Legal Community of Mankind* (New York, 1954).

fictitious community; it represents no revolution in the structure of the world. The basic unit remains the state, but in order to be able to play an effective role in discharging such functions as the maintenance of peace, the settlement of disputes, the emancipation of non-self-governing territories, the protection of human rights or the promotion of economic cooperation, the organization should dispose of some real political power *over* the states, *i.e.*, enjoy a modicum of autonomy and supremacy. In reality, however, decisions within the organization are made *by* the states. Hence a contradiction: the basis of action and obligation is supposed to be an emergent community spirit, *as if* the states were no more than agents of this international community, *as if* the organization expressed a general will no longer divided into separate and antagonistic wills, no longer confiscated by governments. But the reality of action is precisely one of governmental interests, which remain most frequently divergent and which, even when they converge on the organization, tend to use it as an instrument, and to exploit the community fiction for their own purposes. Consequently, the efficiency and authority of the organization depend ultimately, not on its Charter, but on the state of the world outside. But it is here that we find an abyss opening under the organization. After 1919 and after 1945 there has been a tremendous difference between the kind of world which was supposed to be the starting point, the condition and the milieu of the organization's functioning, and the world which had emerged from a global war. Versailles did not create a world of satisfied nation-states and of safe democracies, in which public opinion operating freely across borders, and statesmen who recognize as a new international legitimacy the dogmas of open diplomacy and world parliamentarism would serve as trans-national forces. Now, the organization is unable to create through its own power the reality which the founders of the Organization had failed to deliver.

In the case of the League, it proved to be impossible to overcome the ambiguity and to bridge the abyss. Obviously, the deeper the latter, the stronger the former. But the paradox of the United Nations until now is that despite that abyss, the organization has been able to survive. Although totally different from the world envisaged at San Francisco, the post-war international system has, so to speak, found various uses for the United Nations; consequently, the role the United Nations plays has little in common with the role an international organization was supposed to play, in the grandiose Wilsonian design for a new world order: it is a more modest but far less utopian task and therefore the basic ambiguity, which, as we will see, is of course still there, is less destructive. I would like to examine first how and

to what extent the United Nations has been able to adapt to the post-war world despite the abyss I mentioned, and secondly, what are the uses of the organization in the present international system.

## II

1. In the case of the League of Nations, it became clear only gradually that the main authors of the Covenant did not agree on what they expected from the organization, and that the post-war world fitted the expectations of none of them. It took just a few months to make it clear that the world in which the United Nations was operating had no resemblance with the world envisaged by the men who made the Charter.

The world envisaged by them was full of complexities and contradictions. It was assumed, in the first place, that the Big Five would remain responsible for the maintenance of peace and act as a new Concert (but no longer restricted to Europe) in charge of security; hence, the well-known provisions of Chapter VII and the theory of the chain of events, the extension of the principle of unanimity to admissions and amendments. In the second place, the Charter embodied also another inheritance from the nineteenth century, but this one was a product of that very liberal utopia of international relations which had *opposed* the practices of the European Concert, and whose victory over those practices Wilson had tried to insure in the Covenant of the League. It was the expectation that major disputes between states would, on the whole, be few and limited. The solemn assertion of a very broad "domestic jurisdiction" principle showed that one still believed that domestic affairs and international ones could be kept separate. Another distinction was made between breaches of peace or threats to peace, and less explosive disputes. It was assumed that a hierarchy could be maintained, and that the lesser disputes could ordinarily be solved by traditional diplomatic techniques. In the third place, the Charter provisions on economic and social matters and the statutes of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund postulated a world which, after a brief period of reconstruction, would no longer be plagued by permanent financial difficulties (balance of payment troubles being primarily solved by domestic efforts), in which economic development would be assured mainly by private investors at ordinary conditions of security and profit, and in which quantitative restrictions and discriminatory measures would be gradually removed from world trade.

One can defend those postulates by saying that they were not at all utopian, but realistic in the sense of defining the only conditions in

which an international organization can properly function.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the egalitarianism of the League had a utopian flavor, the Charter at least recognized that the success of an organization which is not a super-state depends on the existence of a concert of great powers which will be the driving force within and the mechanism thanks to which the world outside will be made such that an international organization has some chance of playing a useful role. As for the liberal conception of international relations which coexisted with the new Concert, did it not simply express the idea that an organization which is not a super-state can be effective only as long as not every dispute which it handles is a matter of life and death for some of its members? When such a matter arises, it is the Concert of the Big Five which must deal with it (and the Security Council was indeed made capable of overcoming the domestic jurisdiction clause in the case of Chapter VII). But one must assume that the organization will not have to live in the climate of tragedy all the time, for, indeed, the more often such a climate takes over, the smaller are the chances of great power solidarity. However, if this was realism, it belonged to the category which Raymond Aron has called "wrong realism"—the mistake which results from a misinterpretation of reality rather than from idealistic illusions.<sup>4</sup> The United Nations was launched in a world torn by the conflict between East and West, by the storm of decolonization, and by the quest for development.

2. The history of the Organization, and especially the history of what happened to its Charter, is that of a race, the race of the United Nations to escape from the consequences of the contrast between the world postulated by the Charter and the real world. Because of this contrast, the Organization was faced with the risk of a triple paralysis. First, the conflict between East and West was threatening not only to destroy the collective security function and apparatus, but also to cripple the procedure for the peaceful settlement of disputes by the Security Council. The race away from deadlock took the well-known form of a transfer of power to the General Assembly: on the one hand, more and more ordinary disputes and situations were brought before it, under art. 11, par. 2; on the other hand, the Uniting-for-Peace resolution of 1950, voted during the Korean crisis, constituted a daring attempt at shifting responsibility for collective security from the Security Council to the General Assembly, unburdened by the veto. Secondly, the violence of most of the disputes which broke out in the

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<sup>3</sup> See I.L. Claude, *Swords into Plowshares* (2d ed., New York, 1959), Chapters 4 and 8.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Aron, "En quête d'une philosophie de la politique étrangère," III *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 69-91.

post-war world, particularly between colonial powers and their colonies and protectorates or between the new states, was such that too faithful an observance of the careful tags with which the Charter tried to define a hierarchy of conflicts, and too persistent a respect of the prohibition against intervention in domestic affairs, would have condemned the organization to permanent frustration. The race, here, led on the one hand to an implicit or explicit rejection of the exception of domestic jurisdiction whenever a state invoked it in a case where its domestic troubles had serious international repercussions, and on the other hand to a discarding of the labels of the Charter by the Security Council and by the General Assembly. Ad hoc procedures were substituted for explicit references to such and such an article. Consequently, instead of the cautious and gradual diplomatic methods of Chapter VI, the Organization has resorted to a far more energetic "policy of presence" and to collective intervention. Thirdly, the kind of massive irrelevance to post-war economic problems other than the reconstruction of western Europe, which seemed to be the fate of the United Nations and of its agencies, was avoided by a determined switch of attention to problems of technical assistance and economic development.

This triple race away from paralysis presents two aspects which are worth noting. First, in order to justify practices which were so thoroughly at variance with its original Charter, the Organization had to accentuate, rather than overcome, the fundamental ambiguity I have described: it has interpreted its Charter as if this document were the equivalent of a national constitution, whose provisions frequently lose their old meaning or receive a new interpretation, without any formal amendment, but through the practices of governmental organs and thanks to the underlying political consensus. The trouble is, of course, that the international milieu is not a community yet, but the trend toward behaving as if it had, in Mr. Hammerskjöld's vocabulary, passed from the stage of an "institutional pattern of coexistence" to that of a "constitutional system of international cooperation,"<sup>5</sup> is nowhere more clear than in the role played by the Secretary General. Both Mr. Lie and Mr. Hammerskjöld—the former with excessive gusto, and the latter despite his initial reluctance—have acted not merely as administrators in charge of a secretariat, nor even as trustees discharging the functions which heavy and clumsy political organs cannot perform efficiently, but as leaders speaking for that international interest or community whose "existence" justifies the twisting of the Charter. It is precisely when the normal interplay of states' clashing

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<sup>5</sup> Address by Mr. Hammerskjöld at the University of Chicago Law School, 6 United Nations Review No. 12 (June 1960), 26-30.

policies threatens to reduce the Organization to impotence, that the Secretary General becomes the organ of continuity and "fills the vacuum" by taking an initiative.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, the postulates on which the re-interpretation of the Charter is based describe a world which is the exact opposite of the world assumed by the original postulates, but whose "realism" is just as questionable. On the one hand, it is now assumed that the conflict between the big powers should not prevent the exercise of collective security even against one of them, and indeed, in the practice of the United Nations, collective security has been set in motion only in the Korean case, and the only nations condemned as aggressors have been Red China and the Soviet Union! Breaches of peace which do not pit East against West have been handled with methods stronger than those envisaged by Chapter VI, but far less drastic than those of Chapter VII. On the other hand, it is also assumed that the very scope of the disputes between old and new states, or between the new ones—disputes in which the old barrier between domestic and international affairs collapses, and in which force is almost always used—makes collective intervention by the Organization not only desirable but likely to succeed.

3. Precisely because those new assumptions are of dubious validity, the outcome of the race has been most ambiguous. It is easy to point out that the Organization has been unable to eliminate all those factors of present-day world politics which resisted its attempts at asserting its role; but it is also easy to show that the Organization has nevertheless survived and played a remarkable part.

In many ways, the race looks like a circular circuit rather than a straight run away from the pitfalls of the Charter. The postulate of the need for big-power unity seems largely vindicated; whenever there has been a direct clash between East and West, the role of the Organization has been limited. The fact of "bipolarity" has been stronger than the machinery of "Uniting for Peace," collective security has been tacitly abandoned as a function of the United Nations,<sup>7</sup> and the procedure of resorting to an emergency session of the General Assembly when the Security Council is paralyzed has been used, not in order to organize collective security against a large or even a small power (ex-

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance the Secretary General's statement at the opening meeting of the General Assembly's third emergency special session on August 8, 1958, his initiatives in the Congo crisis in July 1960 and again in February 1961. Throughout the summer of 1960, the resolutions submitted by Tunisia and Ceylon to the Security Council on the Congo followed the suggestions spelled out by the Secretary General in his statements or reports.

<sup>7</sup> See I.L. Claude, "The United Nations and the Use of Force," 532 *International Conciliation* (March 1961).

cept during the Korean war), but as a way of restoring peace or solving disputes without resort to coercion, after a failure of the Security Council. Even when the issue at stake was not a direct clash between East and West, one major condition of United Nations' success in restoring peace or in reaching a settlement has been at least a tacit concert of the Big Two. The postulate according to which the Organization would be most effective if the majority of disputes were not too violent or too deep has also been largely vindicated: the United Nations has dealt with countless conflicts in which the international status or the domestic regime of nations was involved, but it has repeatedly failed to reach a substantive settlement. The expansion of the technical assistance program, the switch in the lending policies of the World Bank—from Europe to the rest of the world—the creation of the International Finance Corporation and the International Development Association do not amount to a massive transfer of aid from bilateral to United Nations channels. The "haves" remain reluctant to abandon control of their funds. Various short-circuits such as the fiasco of the International Trade Organization or the failure to stabilize the price of primary products or the resistance to SUNFED have marked the limits of United Nations action in this area.

The lesson is clear: *legal* impotence has been overcome, *political* limitations have not been removed. The failure to influence the Soviet Union or China in cases such as Hungary and Tibet, not to mention disarmament; the inability to solve the issues of Kashmir or the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as the difficulties of the United Nations operation in the Congo; the slowness of the process of erosion by which the underdeveloped countries try to squeeze more money for capital development from the richer nations: all those facts show how deep an abyss there remains between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be in order to allow the United Nations to play the major role which both its founders and their successors wanted. Consequently, the basic ambiguity of international organization cannot fail to appear as a persistent obstacle; the world community has rarely looked more fictitious. In an area such as Laos, in which East and West clash directly, the "United Nations presence" established by the Secretary General was bound to evaporate; in the Congo crisis, there have been moments when the deadlock between conflicting camps—East and West, moderates and radicals among the new nations—was such that any attempt at pursuing a "United Nations policy" became both an exercise in fiction and a peril for the Secretary General. Indeed, in so far as this ambiguity is both summed up in, and revealed by, the Secretary General's role and fate, nothing is more discouraging for the believers in an international community than the destruction of one Secretary

by the brutal attacks from the Soviet Union (which followed degrading pressures of United States witchhunters) and the threats to the position of the other Secretary which come both from the Eastern bloc and from certain new nations whose policies conflict with the "international interest" as defined by Mr. Hammerskjöld.

However, despite such unfavorable circumstances, the Organization has done far more than survive. The contrast with the League in this respect is most remarkable. The Covenant was gradually emasculated, and when the "time of troubles" came, the nations' reactions were centrifugal. On the contrary, the United Nations has emerged as one of the most interesting aspects of contemporary international relations. The Organization has become indispensable as a result of a double process. On the one hand, each camp needs the United Nations as a field of manoeuvre; in this respect, the United Nations is neither a substitute for traditional diplomacy nor the beginning of a world community, but the form of multilateral diplomacy which corresponds to the extension of the international system to the whole world. The cold war involves not only an attempt by each bloc to preserve its own forces and, if possible, to weaken the adversary. One of its main stakes is the allegiance of the new and underdeveloped nations; consequently, it becomes necessary for both East and West to be present in the United Nations, which provides them with unprecedented possibilities of influence and mobilization. Even if the Organization cannot directly affect the "core area" held by each superpower, it can exert a more subtle action on the balance of power in the area of the "third world." The revolution against colonialism operates with a similar dialectic; here, the very divisions among the major powers (and not only between East and West) give an advantage to the smaller nations and incite them to exploit to the hilt an organization which those divisions put under their numerical control. Similarly, in the battle for economic development, the needy nations use the Organization as a lever against the richer ones and the latter dare not protest too much because it is precisely for the support of those poorer nations that they compete. Thus, there is a convergence of conflicting interests on the Organization as an arena of major importance. On the other hand, there are areas in which the Organization is useful not merely as an instrument to be used *by each group* in the international competition but as an institution necessary *to all members* because of identical or convergent interests in joint action. In such cases the United Nations is more than an arena, it is a force. Thus, the United Nations contributes to the establishment of a new world order in two distinct ways. First, it is the framework in which the nations hammer out many (although, as we have noticed and shall see again, by no means *all*) of



the empirical rules of behavior and of the legal norms which are supposed to prevent the present international system from resembling the war of all against all. Secondly, it is one (and only one) of the elements of stability and order in the present world.

### III

Thus, the role of the United Nations in the present international system is double. The Organization reflects the system; but it also affects it—both negatively and positively.

1. Precisely because the United Nations, since 1955, has opened its doors to almost all states, the Organization is a very faithful mirror of post-war world politics. It shows both the disastrous and the hopeful sides. Let us examine the disastrous aspects first. The present international system is a revolutionary one. As such, it presents two characteristics which account for many of the United Nations' own features. In the first place, it is a heterogeneous system. The diplomatic field embraces the whole world for the first time, but there are huge differences: (1) between states, both from the viewpoint of power (contrast between the states that dispose of a capacity of general destruction, and the others) and from the viewpoint of authority (difference between well-established states, and new nations, sometimes in search of their proper borders); (2) between political regimes, both from the viewpoint of the domestic formula of legitimacy and from that of economic policy; (3) between levels of economic development; (4) between ideological camps. Those factors of heterogeneity are felt in United Nations debates on practically any subject, whether the Organization discusses the future of colonialism or tries to draft covenants on human rights or attempts to intervene in the endlessly complicated disarmament dialogue which has been going on among the superpowers. The United Nations mirrors both the universal but superficial adherence of all states to the principles of conduct expressed in the Charter, and the reality of negative solidarities which link members of blocs or groups and divide the world into contending factions.

In the second place, a revolutionary system is one in which the relations between states are no longer marked by any moderation in scope or means. The end of moderation in scope entails the following developments. On the one hand, the violence of the competition between states brings about the collapse of the zone of domestic affairs and of the principle of non-intervention; the choice of a regime determines the international conduct of a state and each major contender tries to influence the choices of lesser ones. United Nations' discussions on the French Cameroons in 1959, and even more the debates on the Congo, have reflected this aspect: not only is the United Nations' oper-

ation in the Congo caught in the contests between Congolese leaders, but various groups of states fight for the recognition of antagonistic leaders. On the other hand, in a revolutionary period, "functional" sectors previously removed from the political struggle and left to the free activities of private citizens become once again stakes in the struggles of the states: consequently, not only has the sphere of international economic affairs become one of the main battlefields, but even more technical subjects have been affected with a political interest. United Nations' discussions on economic development or on the right to nationalize natural resources have reflected this extension of world politics, while many of the specialized agencies were faced with the dilemma of eliminating from their agenda controversial issues in order to stay out of politics—but at the cost of irrelevance—or else facing the storm, but at the risk of possible deadlock. As for the end of moderation in means, it entails in particular the unlimited resort to techniques of propaganda and subversion against the enemy camp or in order to obtain the allegiance of third parties; it also entails the willingness to use force in order to wrest local gains and the determination to exploit fully the temporary advantages one may enjoy in the technological race. A list of the problems discussed by the United Nations shows that this is indeed what has kept the organization so busy, despite all the restraints which the principles of the Charter were supposed to impose on the behavior of the members. But this is also what makes agreement on the international control of atomic energy, or on reserving outer space for peaceful uses, impossible to obtain.

By definition, a revolutionary system is one in which world order is almost non-existent; and to the extent to which the United Nations has been a mirror of the system, it has been permanently threatened with paralysis. The United Nations translates into parliamentary terms the fundamental divisions of the world. The danger of paralysis has even augmented over time. Thus, the more membership has increased, the more difficult it has become to obtain a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly; the outcome of debate is often either no resolution at all, or a compromise version which verges on the meaningless.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the United Nations has suffered not only from the fact of the cold war between East and West, but also from its evolution. Soviet tactics have switched, after Stalin's death, from an essentially defensive attitude, reflected in Russian behavior and arguments in

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<sup>8</sup> See for instance, during the 14th session of the General Assembly, the failure to adopt a resolution on Algeria; during the 15th session, the failure of the resolution proposing sanctions against the Union of South Africa because of apartheid, and the compromise resolution on Algeria.

the United Nations, to a much more daring strategy which adds to the continued defense of the integrity of the Soviet bloc a determined effort to win over uncommitted nations, or at least to exasperate their antagonism toward the West. The fifteenth session of the General Assembly has been particularly spectacular in this respect. The effect of this change on the United Nations has been a faithful reflection of the effect in the world. It has meant not so much a net addition to the strength of the Soviet bloc, as a loss of influence for the United States (which finds it far more difficult to get its own viewpoint adopted by two thirds of the members, must more and more frequently leave the initiative to the uncommitted nations, and merely tries to soften or weaken their suggestions) and an increasingly deep split between moderates and radicals among the uncommitted nations.

This shift in Soviet tactics poses a very serious problem for the United Nations. Until recently, the organization's efficiency in political matters was limited by two main obstacles: the "impenetrability" of the Soviet bloc, which became sufficiently recognized so that issues like Tibet or Berlin were either barely discussed or avoided altogether, and the rockbottom obstacle which stops any international organization, *i.e.*, the unwillingness of any state to accept a substantive settlement of a dispute which goes against its interests. Here, the United Nations merely reflected the contradiction between the extension of the diplomatic field and the maintenance (and mushrooming) of separate sovereignties. Those obstacles were serious enough, for they contributed to the reluctance of UN members to allow the establishment of a permanent non-fighting force. Many states feared that it might be used either in an East-West dispute, thus endangering world peace, or against their own interests, should a conflict involving them arise. However, in between those limits there remained the area described by the Secretary General in his report to the fifteenth Assembly: "Keeping newly arising conflicts outside the sphere of bloc differences,"<sup>9</sup> filling the power vacuum between those blocs whenever a conflict breaks out there, so as to prevent them from rushing in. This was feasible as long as both superpowers tacitly agreed on the need for "decolonization" or on the way of handling the crises which this process provoked. But if each superpower tries to affect the process in such a way that the outcome will be a "friendly" new state, the dream of the UN filling the gap becomes the nightmare of the UN turned into a battlefield. The contrast between the Suez and Congo crises indicates the extent of the deterioration. In the Suez crisis, the UN was able to act without too many difficulties because of a joint pressure

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<sup>9</sup> 7 United Nations Review No. 4 (Oct. 1960) 24.

from the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. toward a restoration of the status quo, and because of the support of most "uncommitted" nations for such a policy. Consequently, the Secretary-General was able to act as the "executive" of the Assembly, which gave him massive political backing. In the case of the Congo, the superpowers agreed only on one thing, the need for Belgian withdrawal,<sup>10</sup> but each one chose his own favorite among the contending leaders, and the Afro-Asian nations split and chose sides as well; consequently, from October 1960 to February 1961, the Secretary General, far from filling any vacuum, was left on his tightrope walking above a political vacuum, as was shown in most spectacular fashion by the failure of both the Security Council and the General Assembly to adopt any resolution at all in December. The long race from the Security Council to the General Assembly, from the Assembly to the Secretary, seemed to have ended in fiasco. The lesson is clear—the UN can escape from total paralysis only to the extent to which, in the sphere considered to be *the* proper UN sphere of action by the Secretary General, the states that belong to neither bloc are able to reconcile their differences and to resist the pulls and pushes of both blocs.

Is this possible? The answer is yes. Here we must turn to a far more positive side of the picture. The present revolutionary system contains one fundamental element of stability—the fear of total war. The very uncertainty which marks the danger of "escalation" has acted as a dampener on limited wars as well. Consequently the contest between the two blocs, including the competition for allegiance of the other nations, is primarily a non-military one and each superpower tries to seduce or subvert, but not to conquer or coerce. Two chances open therefore for the United Nations. First, the amount of arm-twisting which each superpower can do at the expense of the smaller nations is limited, and the United Nations reflects the desire of the latter to preserve their independence from outside encroachments, wherever they may come from, just as much as it reflects the blocs' efforts to penetrate this independence. Whatever their ambiguity, the resolutions adopted by the Security Council in February 1961 and by the General Assembly two months later, concerning the Congo, as well as the resolution adopted by the Assembly's emergency session on August 21, 1958, concerning the Middle Eastern crisis, show the restraints which the need to gain consent imposes on the superpowers. The failure of the Soviet plan to "reorganize" the Secretariat indicates the same thing. Secondly, the fear of general war re-enforces the desire of all states, and particularly of those which have the weapons of gen-

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<sup>10</sup> Even on this point the two states have disagreed about the speed with which it should take place and the scope it should have.

eral destruction, to "keep talking." Negotiations may be fruitless, but the dialogue must be maintained and the UN provides an ideal forum for such a dialogue. But we are here at the limit between the United Nations' role as a mirror and its role as an actor.

2. Every contemporary development toward world order has two faces; one which threatens chaos, one which promises order. There is a negative contribution by the United Nations which tends too often to be submerged behind pious expressions of faith or gallant efforts at presenting what may well be inevitable as being actually beneficial. It results from the fundamental ambiguity which was mentioned in the beginning. It expresses itself in three ways.

There is, first, a contradiction between the realities of international politics and the fictions which the UN seeks to preserve in order to be able to operate. Now, any resort to fictions conceals a weakness and multiplies difficulties. One such fiction is the principle of equality, according to which each member has one vote. Equality symbolizes the idea of homogeneity, but as we know, the members represented in the UN are neither equal in power nor homogeneous from any point of view. The idea of homogeneity and the dream of community combine in producing "majoritarianism"—the belief that the resolutions adopted by two thirds of the members really represent the opinion of mankind. Another fiction, which has gotten the Organization into all kinds of trouble, is that of non-intervention. We have seen that the UN has actually reversed the hierarchy established by the Charter, and rejected the exception of domestic jurisdiction invoked by a member whenever there was an international interest attached to the matter. But the principle of non-intervention is one to which each member clings for himself, and which the UN must proclaim in its own operations; it was supposed to be the guideline of its action in the Congo. Unfortunately, the revolutionary character of world politics has played havoc with the principle. In a situation of quasi-civil war, non-intervention can only mean staying out completely; once one goes in, it becomes almost meaningless. Indeed, in the Congo crisis, the myth of non-intervention has had three effects: it has managed to infuriate in turn each of the Congolese factions, which interpreted the "neutrality" of UNOC as an act of hostility. It has obliged the Secretary General and the members to resort to highly debatable devices in order to justify intervention while preserving the dogma of non-interference in domestic affairs: thus, the idea that what makes UN intervention necessary, and what explains the crisis, is the persistence of Belgian intervention, or—at the time when Mr. Hammerskjöld's antagonism with Mr. Lumumba was at its most heated—the distinction between internal political conflicts, which were "off-limits," and "flagrant vio-

lations of elementary human rights," which had to be stopped.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the myth of non-intervention itself collapsed, when the Security Council adopted a resolution asking for reorganization of the Congolese army. The main trouble with the resort to fictions is that they increase the resistance of minorities; a state or a faction which objects to a UN resolution finds in the lack of realism of the organization a good reason to stick to its guns. In a world where states are not equal, where they have no obligation to obey, and no way of being obliged to obey resolutions adopted by UN majorities, and where domestic and international problems are intertwined, the UN exposes itself to failure either when it tries to bully a reluctant state (be it a Communist state like Russia, a colonial power like Portugal, a racist country like South Africa, or the industrial nations which have been resisting SUNFED) or when it pretends to respect a principle which will merely give to the pygmies some rope with which they can bind Gulliver.

Secondly, there is a contradiction between the nature of the problems submitted to the Organization and the way in which they are handled by it. On the one hand, there is an excessive fixation on procedure: the emphasis is put less on the methods by which the issue could be solved, even less on the substance of a solution, than on the measurement of "international public opinion" as represented by the delegates. In other words, the UN tends to indulge in "barometrics" rather than in diplomacy. This is a by-product of the transfer of power to the General Assembly, but the practice of inviting "interested" states which are not members of the Security Council to come and present their views generalizes this development. Hence huge amounts of time are spent on finding the right words or the right sponsors. It is a search for the degree of indignation, concern or exhortation which will make the machine tilt—I mean, obtain the necessary two-thirds majority. Much of the criticism of parliamentary diplomacy is unfair; the length and heaviness of debate and its inevitable propaganda aspects should not make one forget that there is as much negotiation going on behind the scenes as there is posturing on the rostrum. What is seriously disturbing, however, is that so many of the secret discussions and deals in the lobbies are concerned not with action, but with wording—with symbols rather than substance. On the other hand, when the Organization in emergencies resolves to act, there is another kind of fixation. The extinction of fires, I mean the end of the use of force, seems to be the ideal and the goal; it is, of course, a fine and noble task, especially in a world in which "escalation" and general embroilment are permanent threats. But there is a formalism in this

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<sup>11</sup> Statement by the Secretary General to the Security Council, 7 United Nations Review No. 4, 47 (Oct. 1960).

approach, which is not without its own peril.<sup>12</sup> Groups or nations often resort to force because it is the last avenue which remains open to them for the redress of a grievance or because underlying problems have received no solution. The United Nations, by putting so much more energy into the admittedly more spectacular act of rushing to smother the flames than into the difficult task of rebuilding the charred house, tends to leave too many cinders smoldering in the ashes. This was the weakness of UN action during the Suez crisis. The handling of the Congo emergency has shown a tendency to concentrate once more on the avoidance of "military solutions"; it was made inevitable both by the danger of foreign military intervention at the request of the various contending factions, and by the difficulty of recognizing openly that the cause of the drama was the lack of preparation of the Congolese for independence and the absence of any Congo-wide nationalism. However, as long as the source of the trouble remains hidden, the Organization has no choice but to see the domestic political struggles continue, the peril or the reality of outside military help resume, the lack of competent Congolese administrators and technicians persist, and its own forces treated as a party to the conflicts without disposing of all the means a party ordinarily can use. A policy of presence with limited authority may bring about the worst of all worlds. This contradiction between the nature of the problems and the UN approach tends to aggravate matters, to the extent to which attention is diverted from what is fundamental to what is merely an effect, and often from what is relevant to what is not. In particular, the concentration on the evil of force incites nations either to shift their strategy from outright violence to subtler forms of intervention (which may go unnoticed or be handled far less energetically by the UN) or else to provoke new explosions after the problems which led to previous ones have remained unsolved long enough.

There is a third contradiction, this time between the stakes of political conflicts in the world and the means at the disposal of the Organization. Those means are extremely limited: small sums of money, either for the regular budget, or for economic programs, or for special operations such as UNEF and UNOC, sums which are obtained only after painful debates, and at the cost of heavy arrears or defections; then, there are mechanisms such as emergency forces, observers, committees of conciliation or investigation, mediators and special representatives; finally, there are resolutions, pure and simple. As we have seen, there is no collective security machinery, the organs which the Uniting-for-Peace resolution was supposed to establish have faded

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<sup>12</sup> See Père R. Bosc, "Ideologies et Institutions de l'O.N.U. depuis 1945," *Revue de l'Action Populaire* No. 147 (April 1961), 403-14.

away, and the emergency forces themselves are doubly limited by the principle of consent of the host and by the freedom of withdrawal of the participants. The result is that the UN impact on world affairs remains necessarily limited. The UN does not reach domestic opinion, does not affect the choice of a regime, the selection of alliances, the military policies of the main powers. Attempts to handle vital problems with insufficient means may aggravate international troubles in two ways. On the one hand, whenever the UN hits (deliberately or accidentally) a vital interest of a state, and in particular whenever the UN seems to threaten what a nation considers to be its very fabric or its essential values—in other words, the image the citizens have of their nation—the reaction is bound to be violent and bitter: French attitudes toward the UN because of Algeria, South African refusals to cooperate with UN Committees, Portugal's walk-out over Angola are only the more extreme examples. The total fiasco of UN action in the field of human rights, *i.e.*, the most sensitive area of governments' relations with their citizens, points to the same moral. On the other hand, the contrast between stakes and means tends to weaken the UN as an instrument for the solution of disputes and thus to reduce the effectiveness of one of the few elements of order available in the present international system. Thus, the presence of 20,000 men in the Congo looks at times like the attempt of a few shipwrecked passengers on a raft trying to stop a storm. Coping with interventions from abroad, and with civil war and political turmoil within, is simply too much for an expeditionary force which far from being able to seal off hermetically the Congo from the outside world, must suffer the consequences of decisions taken elsewhere—for instance in Casablanca—or in the Congo itself—for instance in Matadi. The force which was supposed to act as a buffer is too weak to be effective; and the other two contradictions—the myth of non-intervention, the fixation on force—added to the present one tend to perpetuate the crisis, even if only in softened form. One may well ask if an endless, if muted, terror, is better than a terrible end—or will prevent it ultimately.

3. The more positive effects of the UN on the international system are, however, far from negligible. The organization contributes to a transformation of three aspects of the system.

In the first place, the Organization has a double impact on the structure of the world. On the one hand, there is a subtle action on the international hierarchy, one might almost call it a gradual subversion. The effect of "bipolarity" on the hierarchy is in many ways neutralized, *i.e.*, the super-powers, far from possessing an influence proportional to their potential (specially their military potential) are



obliged to let smaller powers enjoy greater freedom of action than in many periods of history. Two qualifying remarks must be made. First, the UN does not "destroy" the international hierarchy, not only because it does not have the means to do so, but also because it has shown, in its treatment of states on which the Organization wanted to put pressure, a healthy respect for differences in power, i.e., small states have been dealt with far less cautiously than either the Soviet Union (even in the Hungarian case), or the United States (see the resolution of April 22, 1961 on Cuba), or even the United Kingdom and France. Secondly, what prevents the superpowers from playing toward the small nations a role corresponding to their overwhelming might is primarily the double factor I have singled out before, the desire to avoid general war, and the resulting reliance on persuasion or subversion rather than violence for the recruitment of clients and friends. This is the fundamental cause which explains why, in the international hierarchy of today, sheer military strength is less decisive than it has been in the past. The very destructiveness of the nuclear arsenal, which gives to the superpowers a superiority great powers never had before, also tends to neutralize this advantage as long as a war has not started.

However, the UN has not only benefited from this singularity, it has exploited and enlarged it. The transfer of power to the General Assembly has given to the weaker states a splendid opportunity to push their advantage to the hilt, and they have used it. In the UN, because of their number, they can even thwart the designs of the superpowers. The debate on the Congo has shown for instance that the very violence of Soviet attacks on the UN operation has brought the African and Asian nations close enough together to allow them to compromise for the preservation of UNOC, and both the Soviet Union and the United States, despite their objections to various provisions, had to follow. As Mr. Hammerskjöld put it recently, "the United Nations has increasingly become the main platform—and the main protector of the interests—of those many nations who feel themselves strong as members of the international family but who are weak in isolation. Thus, an increasing number of nations have come to look to the UN for leadership and support in ways somewhat different from those natural in the light of traditional diplomacy. They look to the Organization as a spokesman and as an agent for principles which give them strength in an international concert in which other voices can mobilize all the weight of armed force, wealth, an historical role and that influence which is the other side of a special responsibility for peace and security."<sup>13</sup> It is precisely this role of the UN as a counter-

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<sup>13</sup> 7 United Nations Review No. 4, 27 (Oct. 1960).

vailing force that corrects the effects of the traditional hierarchy, to which a statesman like General de Gaulle objects so strongly, for he is attached to the classical formula of a directory of the great powers. Paradoxically, such a directory was more powerful in the League, despite a very egalitarian Covenant, than in the UN, despite a hierarchical Charter. Thus, each small state sees in the UN the one forum in which it not only "is somebody," but in which it is able to make its presence felt. Furthermore, in so far as the processes of parliamentary diplomacy resemble those of any parliamentary system marked by a multiplicity of factions and consequently by great difficulty at reaching compromises, certain small states gain considerable prestige and influence by playing a key role as brokers and conciliators, due not to their own strength but to their political position. They are the "friends of all parties," the truly non-aligned states, which play the role which isolated but centrally located and skillful personalities played in the Parliament of France's Third Republic, for instance, Ireland, Sweden, Tunisia, and often Canada and Yugoslavia.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, the UN influences the structure of the world by accelerating the increase in the number of states. The very prestige conferred by membership in the UN, and the opportunities for influence which are thus opened, are factors which confirm many nationalist leaders in their desire to press not only for full-fledged independence rather than mere internal autonomy within a crumbling empire, but also against mergers between newly independent nations. Furthermore, the Organization's own interpretation of its powers under Chapter XI, its very strict supervision of political developments in trusteeship territories, its attacks on colonialism both in separate instances of trouble and as a matter of principle, have made of the UN a matrix of new states.

Both aspects of this action on the structure of the world tend to strengthen the basic ambiguity of international organization, for there is a sharp contrast between the "community" symbolized by the UN (with its predominance of the smaller nations and its collective drive for independence from colonial rule) and the outside world, in which the superpowers remain the leaders and in which the increase in the number of states only multiplies the prospects for disputes and crises, consequently undermining whatever community there may be. What matters here, however, is that the UN does more than reflect this ambiguity, which may well condemn it to impotence at frequent intervals, it is one of its chief architects.

In the second place, the Organization affects the means at the disposal of the states in their relations. The role of the UN in this

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<sup>14</sup> See Sidney D. Bailey, *The General Assembly*, Ch. 2 (London, 1960).

respect consists of fostering at least a partial return to moderation. It has been felt in three areas. First, there is the area of the one identical aim of all states, the avoidance of general war and the desire to see even limited conflicts purged of violence because of the danger of extension. There, the UN has not been able to affect the superpowers directly, despite pleas for the suspension of nuclear tests and for disarmament, but it has skillfully handled the "limited war" in Korea—except for the blunder of crossing the 38th parallel in Oct. 1950 without sufficient awareness of the consequences—and it has developed numerous techniques, put up various kinds of alarm bells to prevent clashes between smaller nations or within a smaller nation from becoming trial grounds for a direct East-West clash. The tacit consent of both superpowers in this respect—a negative concert which does not prevent either from trying to affect the outcome of the dispute as long as resort to force is avoided or maintained at a low level—has been continuous. French and British evacuation of Egypt in 1956, U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon in 1958, and the Soviet retreat from the Congo after the fall of Lumumba have been possible not only because of the fear of war but also because the UN provided both a guarantee against excessive loss of face and a fairly impartial mechanism for removing the element of violence—without prejudging the result of the contest. This is the area in which the Secretary General has played a vital role, and acted as the representative of the one identical purpose of all segments of mankind.

A second aspect of this action of the UN corresponds to convergent interests of the various members, *i.e.*, the setting up of instruments for technical and administrative assistance as well as the expansion of channels for multilateral economic aid. The logic of the competition has forced not only the West to retreat from its hostility and to concede that a sizable portion of its aid should be granted through the UN (although the risk of giving too much control to the recipients is an unpleasant one) but also the East to abandon its initial refusal to participate at all. The desire of the underdeveloped countries for aid devoid of the political strings or implications of bilateral agreements has conversely forced them to accept, in the case of loans from the World Bank, more of a check on their own plans than they often might have wished. The results remain limited, but the partial convergence of competing interests on common channels is definitely an element of stability, whereas the separate channels of bilateral and regional agreements perpetuate the centrifugal elements of the present international system. In this area, it is the Secretariat whose role must be underlined.

A third aspect of the stabilizing role of the UN is more contro-

versial: in the parts of the world which are not under the control of the Soviet Union, the United Nations has made it almost impossible for the stronger states to employ toward the lesser ones the more brutal means of coercion traditionally used; this is a result of, both, the fear of general war and the increased role of small powers within the United Nations. The best example was the Suez affair. It is a doubly controversial "improvement" of world politics. The Soviet bloc feels under no compulsion to observe similar restraints, and the outcry against a "double standard" of UN action arises quite legitimately. This abandonment of gunboat diplomacy also has its hypocritical aspects, since it does not prevent bigger powers from trying to impose their will on lesser ones by methods of subversion. Nevertheless there is here a partial contribution to a partial world order, and it must be taken into account as one of the consequences of the existence of the Organization.

In the third place, the UN has an impact on the trans-national forces that cut across borders. The action of the UN in this respect is twofold. On the one hand, the Organization reinforces those "separatist" solidarities which bind various nations into groups or blocs. Those entities are usually created outside the UN, but once again the world organization is more than just a mirror, it is a catalyst and an accelerator. It is easier to meet in the lobbies of the UN than in Accra or Bandung. The blocs or groups are, with the exception of the Soviet one, anything but united. Recent votes on Algeria or on the Congo reveal for instance a three-way split among the Afro-Asians.<sup>15</sup> But the fact is that the basic negotiating unit tends to become the bloc, that drafts are discussed first by each caucus, and that deals between groups take place only at a later stage, after a common stand has been thrashed out within each of the principal groups, or after attempts at achieving unity within them have failed.<sup>16</sup> The very fact that most of the major issues of international politics are brought before the UN and to a vote obliges groups which would otherwise remain vague associations of states with ideological affinities, to react in a way which either consolidates their solidarity, or decisively shows that it was fictitious.

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<sup>15</sup> The Pakistani resolution on the Congo, adopted by the General Assembly on April 15, 1961, received the support of 12 African and 12 Asian states (in addition to Turkey); 7 African states voted against it; 6 African and 8 Asian states abstained. The paragraph of the resolution on Algeria which decided the organization of a referendum by the United Nations was supported by 27 African and Asian states, rejected by 11 African ones, while 5 Asian ones abstained. The resolution as a whole was supported by 31 African and Asian states and opposed by 6 African states, while 7 abstained. The resolution asking for sanctions against South Africa was supported by 23 African and 7 Asian nations and opposed by one Asian state; 13 Asian and 1 African state abstained.

<sup>16</sup> See Thomas Hovet, *Bloc Politics in the United Nations* (Cambridge, 1958).

It will be interesting to see, in this respect, to what extent a sub-group of the Afro-Asian group such as the French-speaking African one is just a transition from the former Community to totally different alignments, or to what extent on the contrary it is a genuine bloc. The UN, in which such groups rub against one another, puts them to a kind of test of truth which would probably operate much more slowly if the Organization did not exist.

Partial and often divisive solidarities are however not the only ones which the UN consolidates. The Organization also strengthens the germs of universalist tendencies which can be detected in the present world. Thus, the UN crystallizes elements of a new international legitimacy which are still weak and questionable but which might otherwise get lost altogether in the turmoil of separate interpretations and calculations. The origin of those elements is double. There is first of all the internationalization of European principles—those of the old Liberal ethos of international relations—as was shown, for instance, by the Bandung provisions on coexistence. They simply reflect the fact that the vision of a world of harmonious nation-states uncoerced by superior power is a kind of common denominator in a universe where nationalism still spreads. Secondly, there is this fear of war and the resulting restraint on the competition for allegiance which I have mentioned. What results is a kind of consensus on principles such as the avoidance of force, the need for an international presence in emergencies, the right to self-determination and the right to economic development. Needless to say, the balance sheet is mixed; not only does the Soviet bloc have its peculiar interpretation of each of those principles, but, as we have seen, there is not any of them which does not have its own limitations, drawbacks or dangers. However, there has never been any international legitimacy without inequities or flaws, and the role of the UN consists precisely of trying to put some flesh on those bones—for there can be no international legitimacy without a minimum of performance.

The United Nations tries to strengthen these principles not only by promoting common actions, but also by fostering a process of what I have elsewhere called “political mobilization,” or a gradual leveling of concern.<sup>17</sup> The UN accelerates the effects of the extension of the diplomatic field to the whole world, by obliging all its members to take stands on all questions, thus bringing home to an unprecedented degree the idea that what concerns one part of the planet may affect all the others. The UN is unable to achieve “one world” in the sense of an orderly and unified system for collective security, the settlement

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<sup>17</sup> “National Attitudes and International Order: the National Studies on International Organization,” XIII International Organization 202.

of disputes, etc.; such a system requires a unity, or an overwhelming convergence, of national attitudes and responses. But at least the UN tries to bring about the prerequisite, "one world," in the sense of universality of concerns. This is precisely the area in which the League of Nations, with its *de facto* predominance of the Council, its essentially European aspect, and even more its link with the status quo of the peace treaties, had failed most dismally.

#### IV

Ambiguity has been the key of our assessment of UN history and of UN action. It remains at the center of any projection one may try to make into the future.

If we look at the general trend of UN action in the world, it becomes almost too easy to denounce the Organization as the second most powerful force of disruption of the status quo, next to Communism. The break-up of Empires, approval of measures of economic nationalism which hit mainly Western interests, a majority of anti-status quo nations which obliges the West to choose between ineffective and unpopular opposition, and giving its blessing to resolutions which weaken its positions further—all those aspects of the role of the UN may give serious worry to statesmen who fear that the only beneficiaries of disruption will ultimately be the Communists. On the other hand, we must not forget that the assault on the status quo which is thus being waged is in many ways a conservative revolution, inspired by slogans and principles which belong to the Western, and particularly to the Liberal heritage. If the cry for political and economic self-determination and the desire for welfare and development provide Communism with admirable opportunities and turn more often than not against the West in the present phase, they may at a future date provide in reverse the West with opportunities and serve as barriers against Communist imperialism. The UN merely accelerates a liquidation of the status quo which would proceed anyhow; the degree to which this should mean a liquidation of the West depends on the West's reactions far more than on UN actions.<sup>18</sup>

If we look at potential UN contributions to a new world order, we must realize first that such an order will still be based on the state as the main unit, and consequently that order will be possible only if conditions of stability are resolved in the international system. Now, for such a restoration we cannot count on material developments (for they may tend to accentuate the competition), on general common

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<sup>18</sup> On this point see Lincoln P. Bloomfield, *The United Nations and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boston, 1960) and the author's "Sisyphus and the avalanche: the United Nations, Egypt and Hungary," *XI International Organization*, 464-9.

principles (for they may be interpreted in conflicting ways), or even on what Raymond Aron calls the dawn of universal history (for there are violently divergent manners of living the same history).<sup>19</sup> We cannot count on legal prescriptions, for international law loses much of its authority in revolutionary systems. We cannot count on the UN to maintain or establish such conditions of stability as an equilibrium of power between the major states (for the Organization has no responsibility in preserving the balance of terror and no way of checking nuclear diffusion) or a return to the limited state in domestic regimes, or an end of the ideological clash between East and West. But a restoration of stability presupposes also a return to moderation in the scope and means of international relations and it is here that the UN becomes important. Moderation in scope would necessitate both the end of the cold war, and improved political and economic relations between the western powers and the newly independent states. Moderation in means would require a strengthening of the measures taken to prevent the outbreak of general war or of wars which could degenerate into global conflicts. The end of the cold war is beyond the possibilities of anyone at this time; but on the other two issues, despite the persistence of the cold war which interferes with a reconciliation of "North" and "South" and makes agreements on disarmament or even arms control unlikely, the United Nations has a major role to play. It is not an exclusive role, but it is a crucial one precisely because the Organization is the only agency which includes almost all states and symbolizes, in its weaknesses as well as in its strengths, the idea of a universal world order. Nothing is more important therefore than to avoid wasting United Nations' efforts on areas where failure is guaranteed; nothing is more important than to exert leadership so that in the two areas where constructive action is possible, the United Nations do indeed contribute to world order, rather than fail to act altogether, or even act to increase tensions further.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Dimensions de la Conscience historique*, Ch. VIII (Paris, 1961).

<sup>20</sup> For recent evaluations of the UN, see Erich Hula, "The UN in crisis 27 *Social Research*, 387-420, and Hamilton Fish Armstrong, "UN on trial," 39 *Foreign Affairs*, 388-415.