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The United Nations: Its Successes, Failures, and Future

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THE UNITED NATIONS
Its Successes, Failures, & Future

By
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Presented to
Dr. Bob Riley

#271

The United Nations

Alfred Lord Tennyson expressed his hope for the future peace of nations through a world federation in his poem "Locksley Hall" written in 1842.

For I dipped into the future, far as human
eye could see.
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the
wonder that would be; . . .
Till the war-drum throb'd no longer,
and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of Man, the Federation
of the world.
There the common sense of most shall
hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber,
lapped in universal law.

Organization for peace, avoidance of war, freedom from invasion, universal brotherhood of all nations and peoples-- these have been the hopes and dreams of the peoples of the world for centuries. But not until the 20th century have these goals been both far away and yet so near. This century has witnessed the most horrible wars of mankind's history and the greatest advances in the organization for universal peace. But which has gathered the most support? Does the world have protection from another major war? Perhaps, an understanding can be obtained through the following examination of the successes, failures, and future of the United Nations.

Twenty four years ago, the United Nations war organization was organized in San Francisco. War in Europe was ending and war in the Pacific was in its final stages, with victory

assured. The time was right for the organization of a world government to keep the peace. Today, however, the United Nations faces problems that are humiliating to its reputation as world peacemaker. Again there is war in Asia. The Middle East is a constant crisis, and questions such as the seating of Communist China and the control of nuclear weapons constantly split the United Nations in bitter debate. But, the United Nations has had its problems from the very beginning, even when the nations of the world were in a negotiating mood.

The United Nations, at its founding, was kept apart from the peace settlements of World War II, but it was quickly caught up in the United States and Russian cold war. United States plans to give the United Nations control over atomic weapons were blocked by the Russians. So were plans for a permanent peacekeeping force of the U. N. It was not long in becoming clear that Russia would use its veto power to block any effective functioning of the U. N. Security Council.

In 1950, the General Assembly adopted a resolution called, "Uniting for Peace". The United Nations was able to enter the Korean War only because the Soviet Union which would have vetoed the resolution was boycotting the Security Council. The result of this action was the only major war fought in the name and under the flag of the U. N. with 15 member nations helping the U. S. and South Korea in blocking Communist conquest.

Actually, the decision to stop the Reds in Korea was not made by the members of the U. N. It was personally decided by President Truman and his advisors before our representatives brought it to a vote in the Security Council. Thus, the U. N. forum has provided the United States a quick instrument for mobilizing world opinion behind its efforts. There has been no peacekeeping operation that was not first discussed, planned, and agreed to before it was put to a vote in the U. N.

Most of the mistakes made in the United Nations, therefore, were originally made in the White House, or in the State Department, and were merely blamed on the U. N. The failure of the Truman Administration to make it very clear to the world that we would defend Korea is probably what led to the Communist aggression in the first place.

As President Kennedy said in his inaugural address, "The U. N. is our last best hope for peace in an age where the instruments of war have far out-paced the instruments of peace." But only eight months after his speech, he found it necessary in the defense of national security to by-pass the U. N. altogether. During the Cuban missile crisis, "Kennedy's and Khrushchev's confrontation found all the members of the U. N. with their mouths shut and their eyes closed prayerfully."

Thus, in reality, the peace of the world in times of crisis does not altogether lie in the hands of the U. N.

The real value of the U. N. has been a forum where all of the nations can learn the views and plans of other nations. Thus, foreign policies can be more realistically formed. It helps to keep nations from following foreign policies that would be in direct conflict with other national interests, and makes nations aware of the opinions of others. It also allows the nations to know who^m they can count on for material aid and support in the event of a military, political, or economic crisis.

For a time, after Korea, the U. N. hopes of peace-keeping rose. Then, in 1960, came a reversal with the Congo Crisis. The U. N. sent troops to support a unstable young government and put down a rebellion. The fighting continued, however, and the U. N. backed government fell.

Intervention of the U. N. peacekeeping forces probably prevented a direct confrontation between U. S. and Russian troops, but it could also be considered a failure of the U.N. The Congo Crisis showed that the U. N. has over reached itself and had tried to exert more power than it really has. Once again, the blame goes more to the confusion in our State Department than in the U. N.

One of the obvious reasons for the U. N. 's inability to carry out its peacekeeping duties is lack of money. The

regular budget of the U. N. is financed by dues paid by member nations on a scale determined by the General Assembly. The wealthier the nation, the more it pays.

A financial crisis arose in 1964, when 12 countries, including the Soviet Union and France, refused to pay. The United States threatened to invoke the U. N. charter to take away the voting power from the 12 nations, but finally backed down. Most of the nations then agreed to make voluntary contributions, but the agreement did not provide for the financing of any future U. N. special operations. Actually, the crisis was a political crisis over the U. N. 's role in the national policies of its members.

As to the question of how to raise money for any future peace force, it would still be possible to authorize peace-keeping actions by a 2/3's vote of the General Assembly, and finance it through voluntary contributions by those members who thought it important. Actions of the U. N. involving armed forces since the financial crisis struck have been financed in this voluntary way.

The solution of the financial crisis, that had threatened to wreck the U. N., is evidence that the U. N., just by existing, can encourage steps toward international cooperation.

The rapid growth of the U. N. in the last twenty four years indicates its growing importance. The U. N. started with the Security Council members--United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, France, and Nationalist China, and

grew rapidly as colonies became new nations. Total membership now is 126, a majority Asian and African, This means that the United States will not always be about to control the majority vote, and the day will come when the U. N. will probably vote for some major actions contrary to U. S. interest. Indeed, this has happened. But when and if this presents problems, the precedent of veto set by Russia and France has provided the United States a solution.

Each assembly session is presented with problems and crises, but one recurring question is the admittance of Communist China to the U. N. Communist China was again denied representation in the U. N. this month, and the votes, thought more than last year was less than three years ago. Sooner of latter, the United States will have to face the reality that world opinion is favoring the admittance of Communist China to the U. N. The Peking Government, representing 600 to 800 million Chinese, is here to stay, and probably will be represented in the U. N. of the future.

The latest war in the Mideast erupted after U. Thant, Secretary-General of the U. N., withdrew truce teams that had kept the two sides apart since 1956. This withdrawal was ordered by U. Thant at the request of President Nasser of Egypt, on whose territory the U. N. forces had been stationed with Nasser's permission. U. Thant made the decision without consulting the other powers.

The United Nations then talked out the war until

after the defeat of Egypt and its Arab Allies by Israel. The Soviet Union called on the U. N. General Assembly to condemn Israel for "Aggression", to pay for damage done to Arab forces and to withdraw to its original borders. The Russian demand got 53 votes--not even a simple majority.

The Arab states then indicated a willingness to have U. N. observer teams police the existing cease-fire lines. Thus, U. N. observer teams returned to assist in the preservation of the cease-fire until some more permanent arrangements could be made.

Does the failure of the U. N. to play a stronger role in the Mideast and elsewhere mark a new decline in its power of peacekeeping?

In reality, it is remarkable that the U. N. peace-keeping operations of these various kinds have gone forward because of the many differences over issues and principles. It is a tribute to the talents and dedication of the nations of the U. N. to accomplish what they have.

It seems that the emerging role of the U. N. is that of a "peace-watching rather than a peacekeeping." peace-watching can be used effectively only when the U. S. and the Soviet Union are agreed that this is to their mutual advantage.

"The U. N. is providing simply the means of communication between opposing forces, both of which, for reasons of their own, have had enough war--for the moment."

Perhaps, the most significant part of the U. N. work has been the fight against the basic causes of wars-- poverty, disease, and illiteracy. The U. N. helps remove the causes of war through such special agencies as the Economic and Social Council, which promotes welfare and improves living conditions of people of the world. It studies the economic and social matters and makes reports to the General Assembly. The U. N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural organization fosters understanding among the nations and encourages respect for the rule of law. The International Bank lends money to member nations for reconstruction and development of industries. Thus, it also helps develop cooperation in trade and finance. Through these and numerous other special agencies, the U. N. has promoted the exchange of ideas and a respect for human rights.

Those, doubtful that the U. N. can function as the international keeper of the peace, believe that the U. N. should devote itself to the developmental projects of the special agencies. These special agencies have been very successful and should continue, but the writer is of the opinion that the U. N. can fulfill its obligation of peacekeeping.

Though the future of the United Nations seems in doubt due to the many failures and few successes, it will survive, because the big powers want it to. The super powers will preserve it to use it as an instrument of their own national foreign policies.

The Russians, like the United States, still use the Security Council to propogandize, but they don't obstruct it as they once did. There will probably be more cooperation among the U. N. and its members, big and small, to end the many problems and crises confronting it.

The real value of the U. N. in the future will be maintenance of peace among the small emerging nations. Many of the small nations cannot afford embassies in all of the capitols of the world, but their diplomats can meet at the U. N. This is the only place that many of these nations have a chance to make contact with the great powers. The U. N. should become more effective as a peacekeeper by helping the new nations control their growing pains.

There is a possibility of solving some of the major problems of the world in the U. N., but the probability is small that universal peace will come directly through the efforts of this organization. As Authur Goldberg has said, "One of the clearest signs of the U. N.'s coming of age is that it has begun to look at itself less grandiosely. Some of its more high-flown ambitions have been hauled down, to be replaced by a more realistic self-awareness. There is no magic in the U. N. save what we its members bring to it."

If the U. N. ever completely fulfills its goals, the nations of the world must give some of their sovereignty to the international community. The nations will do this

only when they recognize that their best interests and maybe their survival depends upon the U. N.

Just as the American states had to accept the idea of a stronger central government nearly two hundred years ago, so the nations of the world will also have to come to this reality. It will be a long struggle, and many ugly crises will occur before the U. N. will reach its real goal. Political freedom is new, however, because its been practiced for only two centuries on a continental scale. The U. N. is at least a start in applying some of its principles on a global scale.

As U. Thant has said, "If we want some better system for peace and security than an unsteady balance of nationlistic power and aspiration, we have got to work long and hard to remove the many obstacles in the way, and in that process develop a new system of relationships between states ~~whidh~~ really corresponds to present needs and conditions, and the importtant thing is that when nations are ready to develop this new system, the means to develop it will be there." Thus, the United Nations, despite its failures, is still the best effort that mankind has made.