

§ Introduction

We cannot indeed claim that our work is perfect or that we have created an unbreakable guarantee of peace. For ours is no enchanted palace to “spring into sight at once,” by magic touch or hidden power. But we have, I am convinced, forged an instrument by which, if men are serious in wanting peace and are ready to make sacrifices for it, they may find means to win it.

—Remarks by Lord Halifax, British ambassador to the United States and acting chairman of the UK delegation, San Francisco, 26 June 1945

“A new chapter in the history of the United Nations has begun.” With these confident words, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali greeted the end of the Cold War and hailed the “extraordinary opportunity” it presented his organization. The decades-long standoff between the superpowers had marginalized it, but the collapse of the USSR offered the UN not only challenges but renewed meaning. Its peacekeeping role could now be expanded and the mandate for its soldiers made more robust. It could take an active role not only in resettling refugees from war-torn states but also in facilitating political

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reconciliation, rebuilding bureaucracies, and supervising elections. Also to the UN would fall the mission to oversee global social and economic development, and to provide assistance and advice to the world's poor. And only the UN had the legitimacy to defend human rights robustly and intervene in its members' affairs on behalf of humanity at large. "The Organization," the UN's 1992 *Agenda for Peace* confidently proclaimed, "must never again be crippled as it was in the era that has now passed."¹

Here was the dream of a new founding moment—as if the world had turned back the clock to the hopes of 1945. Yet if such an opportunity really existed, it was gone almost at once. Civil wars in the Balkans and Africa, and above all the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, provoked critics to fume at the UN's impotence. A series of high-level initiatives designed to reform the organization since then have run aground, while new and previously unimagined layers of internal corruption came to light. Prodded by the Clinton administration, NATO bombed Kosovo without Security Council approval, setting a precedent in which the UN was bypassed in the name of humanitarian intervention. In the new millennium, the administration of George W. Bush advanced a national security doctrine whose advocacy of preemptive war marked an unabashed repudiation of the basic principles on which the UN had been founded. Under Ronald Reagan, the United States had earlier weakened ties with the International Court of Justice; now it also turned its back on the new International Criminal Court, and it undermined international arms control regimes as

well as efforts to reach a legally binding agreement for biological weapons. Although it paid lip service to the UN in the run-up to the attack on Iraq (mostly in order to help its ally, the UK government), the Bush presidency could scarcely mask its disdain for the organization: the war, it was clear, would go ahead whatever the UN said or did. But it was not only the unilateralists in Washington who thereby lost faith in it. For much of the rest of the world, overwhelmingly opposed to the idea of invasion, the UN failed too—to defend the principles of multilateralism and collective security. One thing was clear: the high hopes invested briefly in it as the center of a new global order had completely vanished.²

Today there is no shortage of proposals to reform it. Some want it to be streamlined to allow fast military action against rogue states and other international outlaws: maybe the Security Council can be enlarged, the veto power of the permanent members weakened, the idea of a UN military staff resurrected. Others feel it should move more toughly against human rights offenders among its own members and do more to stamp certain values—freedom, for instance, and democracy—on the world before it is too late (and, though the fear is rarely voiced, before the Chinese take over). There is the call for it to promote something called “human security”—a blend of development goals and rights—and to claim the right to intervene in defense of the world’s citizens when their own governments maltreat them. Yet the suspicion that it is basically too far gone for any reform to restore it to a central role in international affairs is pervasive. Few people seem to feel that the world would

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be a better place if the UN disappeared (though an American conservative think-tank did publish a 1984 study entitled *A World without a UN: What Would Happen If the United Nations Shut Down*). But few have much confidence in it either. Influential foreign policy pundits talk about creating an Alliance of Democracies instead to get things done when the UN, stymied by authoritarian powers in the Security Council and bogged down by despots in the General Assembly, is unable to act in order to bolster what they call “the democratic peace.”³

This is a discussion about the UN’s future place in the international system. But inevitably it rests on an understanding of its past. Indeed, the intensity of present disillusionment is closely linked to a sense of despair at how far it has fallen short of the standard supposedly set by its founders. Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali justified his expansive 1992 vision of what the UN should do as a way of belatedly realizing “the lofty goals . . . originally envisaged by the charter.” Critics agreed. The UN’s rules had long been in abeyance; said one commentator, defending U.S. policy in the spring of 2003, “There had been no progress for years.” The international system, he went on, had simply developed in a way that condemned the UN to fade into irrelevance, or at best, “to limp along.” The Bush administration was harsher still. It foresaw the UN headed for complete irrelevance—just like the League of Nations between the wars—if it failed to get tough with Saddam Hussein: the invasion of Iraq was, it claimed, adverting to the 1930s, its Abyssinia crisis, or perhaps even Munich.⁴

Yet the historical understanding implicit in this entire debate is astonishingly jejune. A great deal is assumed about the UN's past by both supporters and critics on the basis of cursory readings of foundational texts, and there is very little acknowledgement of the mixed motives that accompanied their drafting. Even the available scholarly accounts of how these texts emerged are vitiating by a heavier than usual dose of special pleading and wishful thinking. In them, internationalism is generally presented as something positive, and globalization is depicted as *the* current of modern history. Their guiding assumption seems to be that the emergence of some kind of global community is not only desirable but inevitable, whether through the acts of states, or nonstate actors, or perhaps through the work of international organizations themselves, staffed by impartial and high-minded civil servants.⁵

There is a good reason for this partiality. For many years historians of the postwar international order simply ignored the subject of the UN; for students of the Cold War in particular, and American foreign policy, it seemed marginal if not irrelevant to the main story.⁶ What brought it back into focus was first the "new world order" proclaimed by President George H.W. Bush as the Cold War ended, and then, with much greater urgency, and in a very different spirit, the shocked intellectual reaction to the foreign policy of his son. It was Bush II above all who prompted many historians to try to show why the UN matters—or at least, why it did once to the United States. Thus they saw it as their job to provide accounts of American internationalism and

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far-sighted multilateralist statesmanship as a means of criticizing the nationalistic Vulcans in the Bush cabinet. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, so the story generally goes, paved the way for the United States to provide global leadership in the early 1940s, and advanced the right kind of American values to garner international support. Drawing worthy lessons for the present has thus involved highlighting a contrast between the blinkered unilateralists of the early twenty-first century and the wise and prudent internationalists of 1945. Soon the protagonists of these accounts turn into visionaries and heroes—inspirations for our drabber and less strenuous times: Eleanor Roosevelt, Raphael Lemkin, Rene Cassin, and other leading figures in the emergence of the UN and especially of its human rights regime are now routinely invoked as reminders of what individual commitment and activism can accomplish.⁷

Utopias are not to be ignored, and the utopianism that has attached itself to international bodies like the United Nations and its predecessor, the League of Nations, was certainly a vital aspect of their appeal. It gave them energy, support, and in certain circumstances valuable political capital. But when historians confuse the utopianism of their subject with their own it is easy to be led astray. Reading what one wants back into history is an ancient practice, and today's human rights activists and advocates of humanitarian intervention are not the first to do so. But what has appeared over the last few years is a body of literature that gives a very one-sided view of what the UN was set up to do and generates expectations that its founders never intended to be

met. The result is, if anything, to deepen the crisis facing the world organization and to obscure rather than illuminate its real achievements and potential.

At this point, what we need is to take a more critical look at what the UN's founders actually had in mind and to take less for granted about how it started out or what it would become. When we turn back to the 1940s, warning-bells should go off, for we find that commentators then expressed a more wary view of the new world organization than historians currently tend to. Indeed many left the founding conference at San Francisco in 1945 believing that the world body they were being asked to sign up to was shot through with hypocrisy. They saw its universalizing rhetoric of freedom and rights as all too partial—a veil masking the consolidation of a great power directorate that was not as different from the Axis powers, in its imperious attitude to how the world's weak and poor should be governed, as it should have been. Insiders discreetly confided not dissimilar views to each other or to the privacy of their diaries. For the British historian and civil servant Charles Webster, heavily involved in drafting the Charter, it was “an Alliance of the Great Powers embedded in a universal organization,” and its key achievement was to have improved the machinery governing relations between the powers. Gladwyn Jebb, Webster's superior, cynically praised the ability of his American colleagues to “delude” human rights activists at San Francisco into thinking “that their objectives had been achieved in the present Charter.” This, as we shall see, is only half the story: because they are so rarely united, the great powers

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did not, and do not, always have their own way. But it is a valuable corrective to the wishful thinking that has passed for historical analysis in the past few years.⁸

The implications for any attempt to read today's concerns back into the formation of the UN are profound. Texts do not speak for themselves, certainly not such bitterly contested texts as the UN's originary documents. One can view the Charter and especially its preamble, along with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Genocide Convention, as testifying to the foundational imperatives of the new world order established in the fight against Nazism. Or one can read them as promissory notes that the UN's founders never intended to be cashed. Their ambiguities should not be ignored. Indeed, several recent critics of the new idealist historiography point to the sheer implausibility of trying to trace the roots of our current humanitarian activism back to the mid-1940s, when talking about human rights was—for the key policymakers—often a way of doing nothing and *avoiding* a serious commitment to intervene. A. Brian Simpson has thus shown that it was not through the Declaration and the UN, but via the later, regionally focused European Convention on Human Rights that a muscular rights regime first emerged. Samuel Moyn has suggested that the modern human rights movement does not date back to before the 1970s at the earliest. And I have argued elsewhere that early UN human rights rhetoric masked the deliberate abandonment by the Big Three powers of serious and substantive earlier commitments to very different kinds of rights regimes. Rights could mean many

things to many people. When we remember that it was Jan Smuts, the South African premier and architect of white settler nationalism, who did more than anyone to argue for, and help draft, the UN's stirring preamble, it is surely necessary to be cautious about making our own hopes and dreams too dependent on the stories we tell about the past.⁹

Not that it is only the historians who have failed to do justice to the complexity of the ideas and ideologies that lie behind the UN. Scholars of international relations have been, if anything, even less up to the task. Perhaps, at the most fundamental methodological level, this has stemmed from their anxiety to demonstrate that theirs is a self-contained discipline, capable of generating general theories about world politics. Science envy—for that was what it has amounted to—has led them to idealize the abstractions of game theory and rational choice, and depreciate the role of ideology. This is not the place to explore the impoverished intellectual consequences. What does need to be borne in mind is the way such approaches eliminated the possibility of taking contests of ideas and philosophies seriously in world affairs—as though, for example, the entire epic struggle of the mid-twentieth century between Nazism, communism, and liberal democracy could be explained on the basis of a cost-benefit risk analysis.¹⁰

But the problem goes deeper. From the start, the professional discipline of international relations—in the shape of the doctrine known as realism—emerged in the 1940s *against* the pretensions of idealistic internationalists, and even at the time commentators such as Walter

Lippmann, George Kennan, and Hans Morgenthau decried the idea of a world organization as a chimera: like some contemporary commentators on the Left today they saw it as nothing more than (at best) a legitimating organ for great power interests. Of course, there is much plausibility in the idea that the UN was designed by, and largely operative as an instrument of, great power politics. Still, this is not the whole story by any means (and Churchill, who had hoped for this was disappointed). More abstractly, even if it were true, it would still remain important to see why certain powers at a certain point in history came to define their security needs in ways necessitating membership of a world body.¹¹

During the 1970s, following the collapse of the Bretton Woods system and the erosion of U.S. hegemony, the discipline of international relations did begin to take institutions more seriously. A new approach—known in the trade as neoliberal institutionalism—analyzed what bodies like the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization did for their member states and discussed the extent to which they had formed props for the postwar revival of capitalism under American leadership. Scholars therefore now do provide explanations for why states may opt for multilateral rather than unilateral policies, although for the reasons mentioned above they usually do so on the basis of “preferences” among bargaining actors rather than by analyzing ideas or philosophies of multilateralism in their ideological or cultural context. Rather like the post-9/11 historians alluded to earlier, they aim to demonstrate that unilateralism as pursued by the Bush administration runs against

the grain of a rational multilateralist tradition in post-war American foreign policy. But revealingly from our perspective, while designed to show American policy-makers and other readers why international institutions offer “real” benefits, such scholarship has little to say about the UN specifically. It simply does not regard it as a body of great importance. The political scientist recently appointed director of policy planning in the Obama administration State Department has suggested that transnational contacts across governments and NGOs—not the UN—constitute the real “new world order,” and she even looks forward to a “global rule of law without centralized global institutions.”¹²

Some of the doubts over the UN may stem from American liberals’ mistrust of its ideological diversity. That dictators may rub shoulders there with democratically elected politicians, authoritarian or Communist delegates with liberals and social democrats, strikes them in an era concerned with the universalization of human rights as something less than positive. Social science increasingly employs a sanitized language that banishes overt reference to politics by deploying concepts such as governance, best practice, and the vocabulary of managerialism, but this scarcely hides its authors’ deeply rooted value judgments. The so-called liberal democratic peace thesis—based on an argument to the effect that democracies supposedly do not go to war with one another—reflects a common contemporary normative orientation: in this, liberalism is naturalized and presented as the only form of political rationality capable of meeting the challenges of the modern

world, and Kant is invoked (though Mill is the real ancestor) to argue for the spread of peace through democracies banding together—and perhaps, even, for some, spreading democracy around the globe. Construed in this vein, American liberalism is rendered unviolent and pragmatic—there is nothing very ideological about it at all—and is soothingly detached from its more coercive legacies of empire and domination. In the words of political scientist G. John Ikenberry, “When all is said and done, Americans are less interested in ruling the world than in creating a world of rules.” What is more, they have history on their side for “there is ultimately one path to modernity—and that it is essentially liberal in character.” Obama’s America may encapsulate very different values from George W. Bush’s but in the mind of some of its leading foreign policy theorists, at any rate, it still embodies the World Spirit.¹³

Thus, although multilateralism and democratic cohesion are internationalist ideas that have gained currency across the partisan divide in U.S. politics, far from reconciling Americans to the UN, they have raised further doubts about its value precisely because it is now so far removed from any model of what an alliance of rights-promoting democracies should look like. We may argue over whether the desire to make the world “safe for democracy”—once famously articulated by President Woodrow Wilson—was realized in Bush’s unilateralism, or repudiated by it. But even those who think the latter, and still believe in the value of international institutions, regard the UN as a pretty poor vehicle for the projection of freedom. And, in any case, all of this is basically

an argument—couched in pseudohistorical and pseudoscientific terms—about what the direction of American foreign policy should be. For those interested in where the ideological origins of the UN lie, it offers little.¹⁴

For the latter, Wilsonianism is obviously one point of departure and the first port of call for standard accounts of modern internationalist thought. Yet we should not ask Wilson to bear too much of the posthumous burden of standing for another, better America. As I suggest below, his global stature was not matched by a commensurate ability to articulate a precise program for the international “community of power” he looked forward to. Was he aiming for a new world democratic order, or focusing on what was necessary to bring peace to Europe? Did he believe that national self-determination was globally applicable, and if so, when? Such well-defined American strains of internationalism as did exist—whether radical pacifist, the muscular imperial civilizing mission of Teddy Roosevelt, or the idea of arbitration through international law—he tended to ignore (as do his contemporary revivalists), and the ambiguities in his own thought, if not deliberate, certainly had the effect of allowing successive commentators to pick and choose among his various pronouncements.¹⁵

I should like to suggest that at least as important as (and for) Wilson and certainly more neglected in the formation of the League, and hence the entire edifice of twentieth-century world institutions, was the contribution of British imperial thought. The British Empire was the world hegemon in the late nineteenth century when the United States was a second-ranking power, and one

of the key places where thinking about international organization emerged. What is offered in the following pages is nothing more than the sketch of an argument; it certainly does not aim to provide the whole story of the ideological origins of the League or the UN. But it is a neglected and salutary part of the story, and in some ways, one might even claim, the decisive part—since so much of the world historical interest of both the League and the UN turns out to have lain in their impact on, and involvement in, the endgame of empire.

Specifically, then, this book challenges two interconnected historical axioms: one is that the United Nations rose—like Aphrodite—from the Second World War, pure and uncontaminated by any significant association with that prewar failure, the League of Nations. And second, that it was, above all, an American affair, the product of public debate and private discussion in which other countries played little part. Instead I present the UN as essentially a further chapter in the history of world organization inaugurated by the League and linked through that to the question of empire and the visions of global order that emerged out of the British Empire in particular in its final decades.

For although it could never be publicly admitted during or after the war—the League had become politically toxic by the late 1930s—the truth is that the UN was in many ways a continuation of the earlier body. State Department officials meeting to draw up the outlines of the new postwar organization in the spring of 1942 found Jan Smuts's 1918 pamphlet outlining the League “surprisingly apt today,” while many of the experts involved,

such as geographer Isaiah Bowman or mandates guru Benjamin Gerig, had been heavily involved in the earlier experiment. The influential American think group—the Commission to Study the Organization of the Peace—which played an important role in helping draft wartime ideas in Washington, had basically been set up at the end of the 1930s by Wilsonian internationalists associated with the League of Nations Association. One CSOP member, John Foster Dulles, used to the intensity of discussions in the United States, found “virtually no thinking about a revived League of Nations” in wartime London. But that was not true; in Whitehall many of those policymakers coming up with proposals for a new world organization were the same men who had been involved establishing the League the last time around. The example of the League of Nations “dominated all the discussions on the drafting of the Charter of the United Nations” noted Charles Webster, in his 1946 Creighton Lecture.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, therefore, what emerged after the Second World War bore no resemblance to any of the alternative models that circulated—neither a system of powerful regional councils with a small coordinating center run by Roosevelt’s “Four Policemen,” nor a world government run by civic-minded rights activists or technocrats, nor the alliance of democracies some briefly toyed with. It was basically a warmed-up League—an association of states—and its main novelty was the priority attached to the principle outlined by Webster in 1944, that “the entrance of the United States and the USSR into a permanent organization is more important

than the exact form of the organization itself.” Following the Dumbarton Oaks conversations, the *New York Times* hailed “the return to the idea of a League of Nations, to be called the United Nations.”¹⁷

Doing what was necessary to keep the wartime alliance of the Big Three together into the peace was its major point of differentiation from the League: the veto power granted them and the other permanent Security Council members was the result. Important consequences flowed from this, of course. The great powers were simultaneously both more willing to support the UN—since it could not act against them—and more willing to ignore it (for the same reason). And there were other differences too—the abandonment of collective rights; the greater respect for nationality; and the waning confidence in international law as an impartial expression of civilization. But the League and the UN bore a close resemblance to one another, and it was understandable that a leading American congressional supporter, Senator Arthur Vandenburg, should have referred to the latter as “a new League,” and that Maurice Hankey—perhaps the most powerful British civil servant in the first half of the twentieth century—should have described the 1943 Moscow Declaration on the new world organization as sounding “very like the League of Nations.”¹⁸

As for the central position of the United States in setting up the UN, this too was something of an optical illusion. Not that Washington was not the driving force in this matter during the war: neither Whitehall—where Churchill was still thinking in terms of European

stabilization through enforced disarmament—nor Moscow (which largely followed the Anglo-American lead for the sake of great power understanding) were nearly as involved or important. Several authoritative works naturally therefore trace the history of wartime policy preparation back to the United States and testify to the energy and effort that American civil servants expended on getting the new world organization right. But if we take the view that much of the effort of American planners in the Second World War was essentially involved in revising the League system, and if we bear in mind that many of the proposals of lower-level American internationalist policymakers were simply ignored or repudiated by Roosevelt and Truman and never shaped what emerged, then we need to go further back in time to understand where we ended up. Here is where the British imperial dimension enters as a key strand of early twentieth-century internationalism. The UN's later embrace of anticolonialism—discussed here too—has tended to obscure the awkward fact that like the League it was a product of empire and indeed, at least at the outset, regarded by those with colonies to keep as a more than adequate mechanism for its defense. The UN, in short, was the product of evolution not revolution, and it grew out of existing ideas and institutions, their successes and failures as revealed by the challenge of war itself—the Second World War, the First, and further back still, the Boer War at the turn of the twentieth century. To understand how the UN started out, then, we need to begin not in Washington, and certainly not in the early 1940s, but with the debates about international

order, community, and nation that were taking place at the start of the century in the heart of the world's leading power, the British Empire.¹⁹

It is from such a perspective that this book offers a series of probes into the ideological prehistory of the United Nations and the postwar world order. For comprehensive studies of wartime planning and of the diplomacy that surrounded the UN's emergence, or for institutional histories of the world body itself, the reader should look elsewhere. Instead, I proceed by exploring a number of key individuals and their thought. The book opens and closes with two of the outstanding statesmen of the late phase of the British Empire—Jan Smuts of South Africa and Jawaharlal Nehru of India. Between them, their UN experiences define the rise and fall of the idea of an imperial internationalism, articulated by Smuts in the aftermath of the Boer War and definitively demolished by Nehru in a series of policy moves between 1946 and the mid-1950s. In between, two studies of second-tier thinkers show how their writings made explicit many of the assumptions of their age and revealed some of the contradictions. One of these was perhaps the best-known theorist of interwar internationalism, Alfred Zimmern, whose career spans the liberal reaction to the Boer War at one end, and the American deployment of the UN in the Korean War at the other and whose thinking illustrates precisely why liberal supporters of international cooperation tended to become disillusioned with the results. The other chapter focuses on the mid-1940s and explores the wartime

thought of two Jewish social scientists—the lawyer Raphael Lemkin, and the demographer Joseph Schechtman—in order to show how their analysis of the war contributed to a complete sea change in postwar attitudes toward national self-determination, international law, and minority rights—attitudes that would be reflected in the actions of the new world body. Cumulatively, these studies, which connect the world of diplomacy to that of intellectual and cultural history, are designed to help sketch out a rather different perspective on the formation of the world of the United Nations than the one we are accustomed to.



My starting point is a question: What to make of the fact that Jan Smuts, the South African statesman, helped draft the UN's stirring preamble? How could the new world body's commitment to universal rights owe more than a little to the participation of a man whose segregationist policies back home paved the way for the apartheid state? Smuts, exponent of racial superiority, believer in white rule over the African continent, casts an enigmatic shadow over the founding of the new United Nations Organization at the end of the Second World War. Yet it was not a shadow many people at the time gave any sign of noticing. One who did was the veteran African American activist W.E.B. Du Bois who had earlier slammed Smuts for presiding over "the worst race problem of the modern world."²⁰ But almost no

one else felt any awkwardness and certainly not Smuts himself. He was a fervent supporter of the idea of international organization, and a believer in the UN.

This commitment of his grew out of many years of thinking about how to make nationalism compatible with broader international affiliations of sentiment, loyalty, and interest. His role in the making of the new South Africa had actually been critical. Mindful of the way the North American colonies had broken away at the end of the eighteenth century, and wishing to keep other white settler colonies (notably his own Union of South Africa) within the safety of the empire's embrace, Smuts and other theorists of the British Empire had turned to the concept of commonwealth to imagine a way of unifying nations in a common cause for the sake of democracy. In his view, South Africa needed to remain within the empire, not only for its own safety but in order to carry out its mission as bearer of civilization to the Dark Continent. The commonwealth idea offered not only a template for this but a way of imagining a new world organization.

As Britain fought the First World War and struggled to secure active American backing, imperial self-interest was grafted onto Wilsonian rhetoric. Smuts himself became a leading wartime theorist of international order, and he played no small role in shaping the League of Nations and brokering accords between Wilson and Whitehall. He was convinced of white racial superiority and believed international organizations should ensure that white leadership of the world continued (rather as Henry Stimson, later Roosevelt's secretary of war, sought

to defend “the Caucasian civilization of Europe”). The League itself was an eminently Victorian institution, based on the notional superiority of the great powers, an instrument for a global civilizing mission through the use of international law and simultaneously a means of undergirding British imperial world leadership and cementing its partnership with the United States. After the League collapsed in the 1930s, making sure that the United States would join in a similar organization the next time round became an imperial priority. Smuts was satisfied that the UN represented an improvement on the League because it would keep the United States and the USSR as members while helping the British Empire carry on its civilizing mission in Africa. There was not the slightest hint, in his mind, of the empire’s imminent disintegration. A democratic imperial order had been preserved, thanks to the formation of the UN, even as fascist militarism had been defeated. The work of civilizing inferior races, and keeping them in order, could continue.²¹

Smuts’s pronouncements were shot through with a sense of moral righteousness that was characteristic of his epoch (not to mention our own). Indeed it was his appeal to a higher morality that constituted his main contribution to the preamble to the UN Charter. In chapter 2, I take this moralizing seriously and ask what pattern of ideas lay behind it, since a fundamental characteristic of first British and then American internationalism has been its powerful and generally unself-consciousness invocation of the language of right. There are a number of thinkers whose views would be worth exploring to

get at this issue. Chapter 2 focuses on one of them—Alfred Zimmern, a classicist, political theorist, and war-time drafter of the League blueprint in Whitehall. Through his ideas, I trace how this form of “international-mindedness” emerged out of a primarily ethical conception of community that trusted more in education and the transformation of men’s minds and souls than it did either in law or in institutions. Smoothly blending the ancient Greeks, Hegel, and a secularized Christianity, Zimmern placed his faith in “civilization” and the values of British liberalism, and refused to believe men of goodwill could make other ideological choices. But this gamble on the future was bankrupted by the rise of fascism. Once the interwar European crisis showed Zimmern that Britain’s world leadership role was doomed, he—and others like him—turned instead to Washington to train the young democracy across the water in its new global responsibilities. Zimmern told Americans to see themselves as leaders of freedom and to regard the United Nations as an instrument for that greater purpose. And he had a bit part in making it so. Before the war he had been a key figure in the League’s International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation; in 1945, briefly, he played a key role in the formation of UNESCO, the body that such believers in the potency of ideas and education hoped would create the International Mind that would save civilization after 1945 and contribute to a “moral rearmament” to save the values of freedom from their new totalitarian enemies. But the UN was not designed for such a program and when Zimmern was replaced at UNESCO by the biologist

Julian Huxley, it was a sign that his kind of appeal to a notion of “culture” based on the values of Victorian elite society had been overtaken inside the UN by proponents of a different model of universalism, based instead on deploying science across the ideological boundaries of the Cold War in the service of mankind. Zimmern’s moral universalism, which had started out disposing him toward international institutions, ended up by making him impatient with them—much like some of his American political descendants today.²²

Before the Second World War, imperial internationalism was articulated in a world that took the durability of empire for granted; few, if any, African or Asian nationalist claims to independence seriously registered. The League confined Wilsonian talk of national self-determination almost entirely to Europe and allowed the victorious European imperial powers to expand their informal empires elsewhere. But the possibilities for imperial internationalism, though not instantly disappearing, narrowed sharply in the 1940s. As the struggle with Germany and Japan left the British and other European empires weakened, world leadership passed to the United States. There wartime arguments about the one national group whose fate lay at the heart of the Nazi war—the Jews—showed the shift in attitudes. The Jews were symbols par excellence of the perils of statelessness, and the American debate over their post-war fate showed how thinking about nations had changed. In 1919, anxieties about their plight in Eastern Europe had prompted the creation of the League of Nations minority rights regime. The League had made

recognition of new states dependent on their pledging to treat minorities properly and grant them new rights under international law that the League itself monitored. During the Second World War, that regime was decisively repudiated. The Nazi New Order helped undermine it, creating a global refugee crisis that called for a global response. Upholding the Palestine Mandate and committed to restricting Jewish immigration, the British ceded leadership on the issue of refugees and stateless persons to President Roosevelt who had long seen the world's demographic crisis as an underlying cause of the drift to war.

Chapter 3 explores this subject. It looks at two émigré Jews, Raphael Lemkin and Joseph Schechtman, and considers their ruminations on the postwar fate of the Jews and its international implications. Authors of perhaps the most outstanding wartime studies of the Nazi occupation, they reached diametrically opposed conclusions on the broader issues. The question was whether, as Lemkin wanted, to restore minority rights, and perhaps extend the reach of international legal protections through the successor to the League, or to move in the other direction, and to stop interfering in member states' internal affairs altogether and, as Schechtman implied in his studies of forced population movements, to bring stability by uprooting the minorities themselves. What today's UN reformers call "the right to protect" was thus on the table at the outset—indeed had formed a central part of the work of the League of Nations. In 1945, however, it was rejected: advocates of minority rights lost the argument, and as events in Eastern Europe and

Palestine showed, minorities would find less protection under the United Nations than they had done under the League. Lemkin's 1948 Genocide Convention, often hailed as a stride forward, was in fact a last genuflection to a past in which international law had been accorded more weight than could be allowed in the late 1940s. The United Nations became an even fiercer defender of national sovereignty than the League had been and stringent domestic jurisdiction clauses in the Charter, as objectors at the time pointed out, made "much harder the task of dealing with any future persecution of the Jews." Or, for that matter, other minorities as well. Treating national self-determination as a right was not only liberating; it was also a doctrine that trampled over the rights of others.²³

Thus minorities disappeared in Eastern Europe, and the states of the region became ethnically far more homogeneous thanks to the uprooting of millions of people. And the same principle was extended outside Europe too. In 1947, the UN General Assembly narrowly approved the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish national state. But this was only the start. In the 1950s and 1960s, the principle of national self-determination was globalized in a startlingly rapid fashion, and the UN turned from being an instrument of empire into an anti-colonial forum. Smuts, an architect of the League and one of the authors of the preamble to the UN Charter, suddenly found himself outflanked by this dramatic shift. As early as 1946, South Africa was put in the dock for its treatment of its Indian minority and the General Assembly backed Indian demands for South Africa to justify its

policies. Anticolonialism won out, South African claims that such matters were not the UN's concern were ignored, and the result was the first act of assertion by the colonial world against the principles of racial hierarchy and European rule.

The General Assembly's support of the Indian delegation shocked the South Africans and suggested that the new world organization contained within it—however embryonically—the potential to become a very different organization from that envisaged by the wartime great powers. Unfettered by legal considerations—at San Francisco it had been decided that the remit of the domestic jurisdiction clause would *not* have to be decided by international law—the General Assembly marked the triumph of politics over law. (The General Assembly's decision in 1947 not to let the International Court of Justice adjudicate on the fate of Palestine followed the same logic.) Neither the Americans nor the British had wanted any criticism of the South Africans; nonetheless, caught between competing international constituencies, they were unable to prevent it.²⁴

India's victory in 1946 was real but double edged. On the one hand, it marked the rise of what contemporaries referred to as "Asia." On the other, it altered very little in South Africa itself and offered yet another reminder that the new international organizations, flexible though they had turned out to be, might not be designed to respond to all of the enormous hopes invested in them. With the Nationalists' rise to power in South Africa in 1948, things got a lot worse for all nonwhites. The General

Assembly, it turned out, could do little in the face of Security Council resistance.

And there was another point too. Anticolonialism and antiracism quickly lost their radical edge once states won independence—at that point they often turned into defenders of the status quo and the Indian government was to resist UN intervention in its internal affairs as strongly as the South Africans had done earlier. The UN expanded further and more rapidly than its founders had thought possible. But it remained suspended between its twin functions as great power talking shop and supporter of national self-determination across the world. What had started out as a mechanism for defending and adapting empire in an increasingly nationalist age has turned into a global club of national states, devoid of any substantial strategic purpose beyond the almost forgotten one of preventing another world war. Freezing intact the power configuration at the end of the last one, it looks—so far in vain—for a political *raison d'être* more suited to the needs of the present.