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THE UNITED NATIONS: A PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

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I HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

- (i) **"To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war"** --how right, how wonderfully simple it sounded in 1945. Those were days of high hopes after an immense tragedy, of great lessons learned in the furnace of war, of determination to start anew in memory of the millions who had died, of poets as well as statesmen. In fact there was some question whether the sublime first phrase of the Charter had been written by Field Marshal Smuts or Archibald McLeish

Fifty-three years later very little seems simple, or indeed sublime. Illusion after illusion has been shattered, experiment after experiment discredited or aborted, and still the United Nations struggles on, regarded with little enthusiasm by most of its members except on the occasions when it provides them with a last resort for escape from yet another outburst of folly. **Ideas for developing or strengthening the organization are more strongly resisted than at any other time in its history.**

- (ii) Roosevelt's and Churchill's concept of post-war international organization was no starry-eyed vision of a democratic, egalitarian world. **It was a severely pragmatic system based on the primacy of the strong --the victorious wartime alliance reborn to monitor, and if necessary enforce, the peace.** Unfortunately this proved to be almost as unreal a concept as egalitarian world government would have been. The largest potential threat to world peace turned out to be the mutual hostility of the great powers whose unanimity was enshrined in the Charter as the basis of the new world organization's capacity to act. This was the fledgling UN's greatest weakness.

- (iii) **The incipient cold war soon made a mockery of the system of collective security set forth in Chapters VI and VII of the Charter.** The Security Council, far from being the Olympian arbiter and enforcer of the peace, became a sort of international family disputes court, with the permanent members of the court themselves often involved in the disputes. The Council thus soon lost much of the dignity and prestige which were to have been one of its major assets. It also lost sight of major objectives of the Charter. Two basic lessons of the disastrous 1930's were that future international peace would depend upon an effective collective security system, and that such a system could only work with a major degree of disarmament. The pursuit of these goals soon succumbed to the more pressing priorities of the cold war.

- (iv) The cold war gave the Security Council a role unanticipated at San Francisco, that of last resort, safety net, face-saver and gainer of time for the nuclear superpowers in their pressing need to avoid a nuclear confrontation. The founders of the United