

the steering committee, with 20 Latin American states plus Liberia and the Philippines—which he said were all controlled by one country—it needed only another one-and-a-half votes to constitute a majority in the UN. In those days the United States had an automatic simple majority.

“The Soviet Union desired to weaken the General Assembly because of its fear of this American automatic majority. But also, between the San Francisco conference and the meetings in London [of the Preparatory Commission], was the dropping of the atomic bomb, which must have made the Russians fearful of the increased power of the United States in the postwar world.

“Another reason for pessimism was the fact that, after the Dumbarton Oaks conference, the Americans began exaggerating the extent to which the United Nations would be an improvement over the League of Nations. Mike Pearson [who was then a high official in the department of External Affairs] pointed out in a memo at that time that, so far as taking action against a great power that was accused of aggression, the League’s Covenant went further than the Dumbarton Oaks charter.

“The United States and Britain were insistent on having a power of veto in the Security Council, but they were prepared to have a more limited veto than the Soviet Union wanted. It was on the veto over the chapter on peaceful settlements that the lines were most clearly drawn between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union wanted to be able to veto mere discussion by the Security Council of a threat to the peace, and on this issue the San Francisco conference nearly broke up. But the Soviet Union gave in after an appeal was made in Moscow....

“It was depressing that the four principal powers at San Francisco (France had been added by then) agreed on an absurd proposal, which was fortunately defeated, that each of the great powers should have a veto on the appointment not only of the Secretary-General but of four Deputy Secretaries-General. By this they obviously meant that each of them would nominate a Deputy Secretary-General. The UN Secretariat is difficult enough to operate as it is, but if it had been established with a Committee of Five—a Secretary-General and four Deputy Secretaries-General, all from the Big Five and all appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council—it would have been even more difficult to make an efficient operation.

“Australia fought a losing battle about the veto. Perhaps if countries like Canada and Australia and the Dutch had worked out, in advance of the conference, agreed proposals on precise limitations of the veto, it might have had some effect at San Francisco. We disliked the idea of the great powers having a veto over the admission of new members; and finally [in 1955, under the initiative of Paul Martin], they agreed not to exercise their veto. They made a deal: We agree to admit your friends if you agree to admit ours.... But I don’t think we realized at that time the importance of trying to develop, before an international meeting takes place, a substantial amount of agreement among influential countries likely to think the same way. I suppose that, if we had had before San Francisco the experience we have had in the years since, we