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## Escott Reid Hopes That Vanished at San Francisco

Escott Reid joined the Canadian foreign service in 1939 and retired from it in 1962, moving on to work with the World Bank and with the Canadian International Development Agency. He was a leading member of the Canadian delegation at the San Francisco Conference, where the United Nations Charter was drafted, and at the Preparatory Commission meetings that followed. Towards the end of his foreign service career, he was Canadian High Commissioner to India and later Ambassador to Germany. He has written three books about different periods in his career, including one book, *On Duty*, about the 1945 to 1946 period. The following is part of a conversation that took place in 1986, during which Reid looked back 40 years to San Francisco.

"I don't understand how anyone who was at San Francisco, and who knew what was going on there and in Europe, could have had high hopes. I am trying to recall whether I had high hopes before San Francisco, which is a different question. I think I had fairly high hopes until we knew of the difficulties which the Russians and the Americans and the British had at the Dumbarton Oaks conference in arriving at a sensible draft charter of the UN. But it was at the San Francisco conference that whatever hopes I had nearly vanished.

"The main reason for pessimism about what was happening at San Francisco was that what was happening at San Francisco was not as important as what was happening in Europe. The breakdown of co-operation in Europe between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, which was occurring before and during the San Francisco conference, was the basic reason for pessimism. The UN could only work if there was a high degree of co-operation between the three great powers, and the evidence from Europe was that this degree of co-operation was highly unlikely.

"I don't know whether people realize now the shock of the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe. I think we now tend to assume that this was inevitable, but we didn't at the time think [that] this was inevitable. The Polish issue was a divisive one for a long time before San Francisco, and the takeover of Poland was the alarm bell. Most people in the foreign offices in London and Washington, and in countries like Canada, assumed that the Soviet Union would be satisfied if, on its border, there were countries friendly to it; that it would not demand countries which would be subservient and would, in fact, be incorporated into its empire.

"A main reason for pessimism at the San Francisco conference itself was the determination of the Soviet Union to curtail as much as possible the powers and influence of the United Nations. This was very natural. The United States had a simple majority in the General Assembly in its pocket, and it put on, at the very beginning of the conference, an unwise demonstration of its power over the issue of the admission of Argentina to the San Francisco conference.

"Argentina was not entitled to attend, according to the criteria which the great powers had agreed on. Only countries that had participated in the war against Hitler were to attend, and Argentina had not. But the United States managed to get a majority and, as Molotov pointed out at a private meeting of