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BOOK REVIEWS

Nation Against Nation

*Reviewed by William M. Beaney**

Thomas M. Franck, *NATION AGAINST NATION: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE U.N. DREAM AND WHAT THE U.S. CAN DO ABOUT IT*, Oxford University Press, New York (1985); \$19.95; ISBN 019-503-5879, 384 pp.

This is an extremely important book on a very important, if indeed, unpopular subject — the experience of the United States with the United Nations since its founding in 1945.

The creation of the United Nations seemed to follow inexorably from the devastating experience of World War II and its 50 million dead. Having refused to join the League of Nations, largely the inspiration of Woodrow Wilson, and having tasted the bitter fruits of an isolationist policy that helped facilitate the rise of Hitler and a militant Japan, President Roosevelt and the American people gave a rapturous welcome to the concept of an international organization that would help ensure peace. But, as was recognized even then, the success of the peacekeeping efforts of the new organization depended on the determined collaboration of the victorious powers, and continued good relations between the Soviet Union and the United States. The confidence expressed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that he and the Soviet's leader, Joseph Stalin, could "get along" now appears an unbelievable miscalculation by a politically astute statesman. As events quickly demonstrated, wartime allies soon became rivals and an all-out "cold war struggle" began after the end of World War II began.

In the period 1945-60 the United Nations became a secondary platform in the struggle between the giant powers. The United States possessed the support of a majority in the General Assembly, and could count on the support or at least the abstention of most of the Security Council, leaving the Soviet Union in the undesirable position of using the veto.

Perhaps the high point of the period of early promise of the U.N. resulted from the successful action of the Security Council in June, 1950 when the Soviets absented themselves from Council deliberations in pro-

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test against the Council's actions in denying the China seat to Peking. In retrospect this was a victory that displayed the real weakness of the U.N. In the absence of good relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, the U.N. was a flawed instrument for the maintenance of peace. The 20 million deaths attributable to various wars since 1945 emphasize the limitations of the U.N. as a peacemaking and peacekeeping body.

After 1960 the successes enjoyed by the United States through the Assembly support became less and less frequent. The Third World came into being, formed of many small, developing nations (whose votes possessed trading value) and became a vital part of the Assembly. As Thomas Franck makes clear, they frequently do not vote solidly as a bloc, but, as a group with a generally socialist bent they are determined to propose measures and plans that require the wealthy nations (read United States and Western Europe) to share more of their resources with the poor nations of the third world.

As the Soviet Union has found the United Nations a more comfortable arena, and the United States has increasingly experienced defeat in the Assembly and several of the specialized U.N. agencies, in part due to the anti-Israel posture of the third world, questions have been raised in the United States Congress, and in high places of the Reagan Administration as to whether continued U.N. membership is in the national interest. The United States has already withdrawn from UNESCO, charging gross mismanagement by its Director-General, but plainly, it was a move dictated in large part by the unwelcome policies pursued by that agency. As the author points out, there are serious losses occasioned by the withdrawal from UNESCO, and he urges caution in considering such severe steps.

What the author shows, citing numerous examples, is that even with the apparent reluctance of the majority of the U.N. members to march in step with these United States policies, the U.N. has proved a useful forum for vital discussions and political maneuvers on many past occasions and, if diplomatic planning and skillful implementation become more evident in the future, the United States can win its share of successes. One of the strengths of Professor Franck's study is the citation of numerous instances where the United States simply plunged ahead without a coherent set of plans or goals. One of his conclusions is that:

The United Nations has shown, recently, that it can still win on issues ranging from Israel's right to participate in the system to respect for the status of Puerto Rico. . . Indeed, we could probably win more often, if we were willing to do the necessary long-range strategic planning and deploy seasoned personnel and equip them with sufficient carrots and sticks: in short, if we were to take the U.N. seriously as a place for politics. (p. 271.)

In short, he argues that if we are to participate effectively we must send a top team, with proper instructions, to play the nation's hand.

Whatever one may think of her personal ideology, is not one dismayed to learn that Ambassador Kirkpatrick was known for her “. . . penchant for gratuitous truculence, the personal put-down, and indifference to others that has made her, by far, the most personally unpopular representative, ever, of the U.S. in the U.N.” (p.269.) In partial defense of Ambassador Kirkpatrick and her predecessors, it must be a difficult task for any United States representative to perform effectively when one's superiors display a negative attitude toward the U.N. which they wish, or allow, to be reflected in the conduct of our delegation to the world organization.

If Professor Franck refuses to give very high grades to the professional conduct of the United States at the U.N., what is to be said about the behavior of the U.N. and its organs? In 1946 Stalin referred to the United Nations Charter as “a rather good document,” but as the author observes, “Stalin plainly had not for one moment considered redefining Soviet self-interest to accommodate the idea that his nation might have a significant stake in the new system of collective security and conflict resolution.” The United States at first seemed willing to make an accommodation, but even before losing control of the system, began to abandon it as a primary instrument of diplomacy. With the superpowers devoted to other means for advancing their respective interests and resolving their conflicts, the U.N. assumed a quite different coloration from the dreams of its founders. Professor Franck describes most vividly the development of the various instruments and components of the U.N. system. Perhaps only the Security Council has performed approximately as envisaged. With the dramatic exception of the Korean episode, described above, each of the superpowers has used the veto to forestall action harmful to its interests. The reproving comments of the United States spokesmen and media when the Soviets made liberal use of the veto in the early period of the U.N.'s life, disappeared when it became evident the use of the veto served the interests of the United States.

More interesting has been the growth in the powers of the General Assembly and the office of the Secretary-General. The author's description of how Dean Acheson as part of his 1950 Korean policy pushed the General Assembly into a new peacekeeping role through the “Uniting for Peace Resolution”, is a masterful example of how short-range considerations may produce long-range disaster. Once having tasted the heady experience of involvement in situations where the Security Council was incapable of acting, the General Assembly became the willing instrument for peacekeeping during the 1956 Suez crisis and other future threats to peace. As a consequence, the growth in the membership of the General Assembly has resulted in the interesting, though unanticipated spectacle of the Third World pursuing various goals and enterprises that have little to do with the major powers, but which produce an unrealistic sense of power among nations whose equal vote belies their impotence on the world scene.

The story of the growth in power of the Secretary-General is equally fascinating. The title of Professor Franck's chapter dealing with this sub-

ject is highly descriptive, "The Secretary-General Invents Himself". (ch.7.) This is perhaps the high spot of the U.N. story. As the author reminds us, "[p]recisely because [the Secretary-General] role is not spelled out by the Charter, it is also not hedged with debilitating limitations and procedural incapacities. In this sense, the Secretary-General has had the freedom to invent himself in the light of the experiences and realities of the postwar world and has not been hobbled to a bad guess as to what those realities might be." (p. 118.) A series of strong personalities shaped the office — particularly the Norwegian Trygve Lie and Dag Hammarskjold, a Swede. U Thant and Kurt Waldheim, while less innovative did little to shrink the role. On numerous occasions, the Secretary-General throughout U.N. history, has chosen to speak directly to popular constituencies throughout the world, and has not hesitated to prod governments, both large and small, when peace was threatened or the moderation of conflict seemed possible. The current officeholder, Javier Perez de Cuellar, like his predecessors, decried the state of world affairs in which the U.N. has been unable to play the role planned for it, and warned that the nations "are perilously near to a new international anarchy." (p.133.)

This brief account of *Nation Against Nation* barely suggests the richness of Professor Franck's brilliant account of the occasional successes and many failures of the U.N. Clearly written, replete with case accounts involving events and people, this is a book that deserves reading by every national policy-maker and interested citizen. For apart from his scrupulous respect for the facts, Professor Franck's judgments are always objective and well-conceived. This is a book written from an international perspective by one who has seen the U.N. from the inside.