

Instrumental Internationalism: The American Origins of the United Nations, 1940–3

Stephen Wertheim

Columbia University, USA

Journal of Contemporary History

2019, Vol. 54(2) 265–283

© The Author(s) 2019

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0022009419826661

journals.sagepub.com/home/jch



Abstract

Why did the United States want to create the United Nations Organization, or any international political organization with universal membership? This question has received superficial historiographical attention, despite ample scrutiny of the conferences that directly established the UN in 1944 and 1945. The answer lies earlier in the war, from 1940 to 1942, when, under the pressure of fast-moving events, American officials and intellectuals decided their country must not only enter the war but also lead the world long afterwards. International political organization gained popularity – first among unofficial postwar planners in 1941 and then among State Department planners in 1942 – because it appeared to be an indispensable tool for implementing postwar US world leadership, for projecting and in no way constraining American power. US officials believed the new organization would legitimate world leadership in the eyes of the American public by symbolizing the culmination of prior internationalist efforts to end power politics, even as they based the design of the UN on a thoroughgoing critique of the League, precisely for assuming that power politics could be transcended.

Keywords

Internationalism, international organization, Second World War, United Nations, United States, world organization

When World War II began in Europe, few Americans imagined the United States would soon join a general organization of nations, let alone become the principal author of a new one. Leading advocates of the existing political organization, the

Corresponding author:

Stephen Wertheim, Columbia University, Department of History, 413 Fayerweather Hall, 1180 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027, USA.

Email: stephen.wertheim@columbia.edu

League of Nations, admitted as much. Quincy Wright, one of the preeminent political scientists of his day, privately predicted that international organization would be of 'secondary importance in world affairs' for decades to come.¹ The outlook was grimmer still by the summer of 1940. When Hitler seized France in six weeks, shocking the world, including his own generals, he initially confirmed to American observers that their country had been right to stay out of an international order that was so easily swept away.

Yet by the end of 1942, the United States was already planning to create a successor to the League. President Franklin D. Roosevelt gathered his State Department advisers to plan the postwar world, and they quickly resolved to set up a new international political organization, with universal membership and US participation. Few, by that point, seriously contemplated *not* creating a world organization, although FDR himself took further convincing into 1943. Why did the United States decide to create what became the United Nations Organization in the first place? Why opt for universality in form – embracing every state, no matter how small – as opposed to such alternatives as unilateral freedom of action, an Anglo-American partnership, a great-power concert, or separate regional systems?

To a surprising degree, this question remains unanswered. Scholarship on the American origins of the United Nations centers on the later years of the war, from the great-power negotiations starting in 1943, to the conferences at Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco, to the US Senate's ratification of the UN Charter.² But as the near unanimity of the Senate's 89–2 vote suggests, these events, however dramatic, mostly refined and implemented a basic conception already in place. That conception needs to be explained, not assumed. After all, the League looked to FDR's planners, among many others, like an abject failure. It had failed to solve the most important political disputes, and not only because America kept out. The League also seemed to

1 Quincy Wright to Manley Hudson, 12 December 1938, Addenda I, Box 15, Quincy Wright Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Chicago, IL (hereafter cited as QW).

2 D. Bosco, *Five to Rule them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World* (Oxford 2009); R. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America during World War II* (New York, NY 1971); R. Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London 1990); T. Hoopes and D. Brinkley, *FDR and the Creation of the U.N.* (New Haven, CT, and London 1997); S. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations* (Boulder, CO, and Oxford 2003). This article builds on a number of works that narrate postwar planning in the State Department and elsewhere from 1940 to 1943: E. Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA 2005); P. Hearnden, *Architects of Globalism: Building a New World Order During World War II* (Fayetteville, AR 2002); A. Husain, *Mapping the End of Empire: American and British Strategic Visions in the Postwar World* (Cambridge, MA 2014); A. Johnstone, *Against Immediate Evil: American Internationalists and the Four Freedoms on the Eve of World War II* (Ithaca, NY 2014); A. Johnstone, *Dilemmas of Internationalism: The American Association for the United Nations and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1941–1948* (Burlington, VT 2009); C. O'Sullivan, *Summer Welles, Postwar Planning, and the Quest for a New World Order, 1937–1943* (New York, NY 2008); N. Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley, CA 2003). Unlike those works, however, this article centrally seeks to explain why the United States wanted to create a universal political organization at all, emphasizes domestic legitimation as an explanatory factor, and argues that the pivotal transformation came in postwar planning conducted outside the government in 1940 and 1941.

have failed as a concept, having originally been designed not so much to project armed force against aggressors as to unleash the expression of ‘public opinion’, understood as a common consciousness immanent in the world.³ By the fall of 1940, such hopes appeared worse than naïve. Working to transcend power politics had meant watching the Axis powers conquer almost half the earth.

A revolution in American thinking took place from 1940 to 1942, but not because Americans reverted to a past internationalist project. Instead, officials and intellectuals repurposed the vocabulary of internationalism in order to forge something new: a commitment to US political-military preeminence in global affairs. Under the pressure of cataclysmic international events, foreign policy elites decided that their nation must seize the reins of world leadership after the war – and that world leadership precluded world organization. When postwar planners devised the first blueprints for US supremacy in 1940 and 1941, they envisioned the United States policing the globe through an intimate partnership with Great Britain and its white-settler Commonwealth but no one else. The point was to project ‘American–British’ power internationally, not to control power through international organization. Only in 1942 and 1943, once they determined that great-power exclusivity would put off the US public, did postwar planners, and then FDR, see merit in a wider world body. If American privilege could be reconciled with universal form, a new international organization could both facilitate US global supremacy and command the assent of the American people, as well as allay the suspicions of other states. Channeling their legacy of *opposing* power politics, internationalism and international organization would legitimate the American *domination* of power politics like no lone nationalism or limited alliance could.

The road to the United Nations, then, paved over contradictions. By refusing to suppress them, this article adopts a different explanatory framework from the linear one that appears in the few narratives that do take seriously postwar thinking and planning in the early years of the war. Those accounts tend to treat the United Nations as the elaboration of the Four Freedoms speech, the Lend-Lease Act, and the Atlantic Charter, even though none of the three statements mentioned a world organization.⁴ One gets the impression that world leadership and world

3 See H.-M. Jaeger, “‘World Opinion’ and the Founding of the UN: Governmentalizing International Politics’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 14, 4 (2008), 589–618; M. Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York, NY 2012), ch. 5; J. A. Thompson, ‘Woodrow Wilson and a World Governed by Evolving Law’, *Journal of Policy History*, 20, 1 (2008), 113–125; S. Wertheim, ‘Reading the International Mind: International Public Opinion in Early Twentieth Century Anglo-American Thought’, in N. Guilhot and D. Bessner (eds), *The Decisionist Imagination: Democracy, Sovereignty, and Social Science in the 20th Century* (New York, NY 2019), 27–63.

4 In most historical accounts of the subject, ‘the policies of the Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter and the UN’, as Dan Plesch phrases it, are reduced to a teleological progression and a single package. Plesch, for instance, argues that the postwar United Nations Organization grew out of the Allies’ wartime UN Declaration, which in turn ‘built on Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech of January 1941 and the Atlantic Charter he and Churchill had issued that August’. Likewise, Elizabeth Borgwardt links the Atlantic Charter to the principle of ‘multilateral institutions’, claiming that the Charter ‘prefigured the rule-of-law orientation of the Nuremberg Charter, the collective security articulated in the United Nations Charter, and even the free-trade ideology of the Bretton Woods charters that established the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund’. David Reynolds sums up the

organization were mutually implied, if not two sides of the same ‘internationalist’ coin (an argument made more or less directly by political scientist G. John Ikenberry).⁵ This conceptualization is one that the architects of world leadership constructed and promulgated at the time: they turned armed supremacy into the epitome of ‘internationalism’ by yoking it to the ideal of international organization and opposing it to their new coinage ‘isolationism’. The internationalism/isolationism dualism obscured that supremacy was a novel objective, antithetical to traditional ‘internationalism’ with its aspiration to end war and domination. Indeed, for a time, policymakers and planners preferred world leadership without world organization. Even after they melded the two, they prized the former over the latter.⁶

Rather than internalize and read backward the self-serving concepts deployed by advocates of US primacy, this article shows how concepts were generated as events transpired. It does so by first sketching how American experts conceived of postwar US global supremacy in 1940 and 1941 and then analyzing the turn to world organization in the State Department’s postwar planning in 1942 and 1943. If world organization was rescued in these years, the price was steep. The American designers of the United Nations valued their creation in thoroughly instrumental terms and did not hesitate to say so. No longer imagined as the apotheosis of the world spirit or the vessel of perpetual peace, international organization became a means to an end. Internationalism traveled full circle from the

consensus view: ‘The Four Freedoms, the Atlantic Charter, and the UN Declaration became benchmarks for a new international order’. D. Plesch, *America, Hitler and the UN: How the Allies Won World War II and Forged a Peace* (London 2011), 2, 9; Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World*, 5; D. Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War* (Oxford 2016), 328.

5 Ikenberry argues that the United States crafted a highly institutionalized postwar order in which it accepted restraints on the exercise of its power in order to cement and prolong its superior position. His argument rests in part on his assumption that the United States was by nature a ‘reluctant superpower’: because it did not seek to dominate others, it readily assented to institutional constraints. By contrast, this article reveals that American officials and planners valued the projection of overwhelming armed power above the creation of a universal political organization. As a result, they initially ruled out the latter altogether, and they changed course only by stripping what became the United Nations Charter of the most binding collective-security provisions of the League of Nations Covenant. G. J. Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ 2001), 201–2.

6 In so arguing, this article builds on interpretations by Robert Hilderbrand and Marc Trachtenberg, both of whom highlight power-political aspects of the UN Charter created in 1944 and 1945 but ignore the question of why US officials decided, between 1940 and 1943, whether to create a universal political organization at all. By concentrating on the early wartime years, this article challenges Hilderbrand’s suggestion that it was only at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference of 1944 where the Big Four’s ‘nationalistic dreams of hegemony’ scuttled American planners’ more visionary ambitions for international organization. To the contrary, planners devoted themselves to building a US-led postwar hegemony from the fall of 1940 onward, and, as Hilderbrand notes, seriously considered forgoing any world organization with universal membership. Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks*, x; M. Trachtenberg, ‘The Iraq Crisis and the Future of the Western Alliance’, in D. Andrews (ed.), *The Atlantic Alliance Under Stress: US-European Relations after Iraq* (Cambridge and New York, NY 2005), 218–9.

eighteenth century: the dream of abolishing power politics transmogrified into a tool for ruling the world.⁷

This outcome was nevertheless scarcely visible in the confusing, fast-moving two years before the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 put the United States into the war. Clear at the outset, however, was that the Wilsonian prescription for high politics had failed both practically and conceptually. When the State Department assembled its first postwar planning committee at the start of 1940, everyone agreed: ‘participation of the United States in a political unity such as the League of Nations is probably impossible’, as Assistant Secretary Adolf Berle put it. The committee wished to re-establish trade worldwide, preferably through some kind of international economic organization, but its 15 members planned to join economic universalism with political regionalism. The League would fracture into geographically separated bodies. In Europe, the planners fantasized, states would stop fighting, disarm, and join a continental political body, made capable of enforcing peace by the addition of an international air force and the subtraction of the rule in the League’s executive council that decisions must be taken unanimously. In any case, the United States would stay within its ‘natural and effective’ pan-American sphere.⁸

These plans reflected a lesson drawn from the 1930s: any effective system of security depended on the great powers’ willingness to deploy force to defend a liberal order. Yet what if one of those enforcers were Nazi Germany – or an Anglo-French bloc that cut America out of trade?⁹ What anyway was neutral America’s leverage for shaping the peace? Too many circles needed squaring, confessed one planner: ‘I have made several attempts to get onto paper my conceptions of world order and have destroyed the results since I found they tended to be too specific.’¹⁰ The committee disbanded after May 1940, when the German conquest of Europe rendered a conference of neutrals, on which the committee focused its plans, no longer desirable.

If officials struggled to see a future for a universal international political organization, League supporters outside the government fared little better. The devotees of Wilsonianism reacted to the arrival of the European war by forming the

7 For the long-range history of liberal internationalism in Europe and America, see D. Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, NJ 2016); M. Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York, NY 2012); M. Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ 2009); G. Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA 2013); G. Sluga and P. Clavin (eds), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge 2017).

8 A. Berle, ‘Organization of Peace’, 3 January 1940, Box 108, Harley Notter Files, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as HN); see also ‘Advisory Committee on Problems of Foreign Relations (January–May 1940)’, Box 108, HN. On the State Department’s postwar planning group in 1940, see J. Simon Rofe, ‘Pre-war Post-war Planning: The Phoney War, the Roosevelt Administration, and the Case of the Advisory Committee on Problems of Foreign Relations’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23, 2 (2012), 254–79.

9 A. Berle Diary, 29 January 1940, Box 211, Adolf Berle Papers, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.

10 H. Wilson, ‘World Order’, Memorandum, 22 January 1940, Box 108, HN.

Commission to Study the Organization of Peace (CSOP), perhaps the most influential non-governmental group to publicize international organization during the war. James Shotwell, the historian responsible for the antiwar Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, chaired the group, and Wright headed its attempt to draft blueprints for a new international order in 1940 and 1941.¹¹ The effort, however, only revealed the muddle in which these nominal Wilsonians found themselves. Having lost faith in 'public opinion' as the basis of international order, they faced an unwelcome choice: get the League out of high politics, reducing it to social and economic activities, or espouse coercive sanctions, which appeared to be a practical impossibility and a compromise with internationalist aspirations.

To some CSOP members, like the corporate lawyer and future Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, a 'merely consultative' League represented the most that could be achieved and the one scheme America might join.¹² In April 1940, Shotwell himself suggested CSOP might advocate a League devoted solely to economic and social work.¹³ The suggestion did not satisfy Wright, who refused to temper his ambition to transcend power politics. 'We must get at the crux of the matter and deal with the problem of security', Wright wrote. He criticized 'the welfare people' for repeating the mistaken assumption of the 1920s that cooperation in nonpolitical areas would trickle up.¹⁴ Yet the problem of security had no answer, as Wright came close to admitting. 'In the present state of public opinion', he wrote, effective international organization required 'overwhelming force', but it was impossible to say from where the force would come, much less how the force could be regulated.¹⁵ Unable to compose detailed plans, CSOP offered vague public pronouncements through the end of 1940. It focused on promoting the notion of US participation in world politics, reasoning that the will to participate mattered more than the form such participation should take.¹⁶

Postwar planning acquired new urgency when the *Wehrmacht* shattered the 'Phoney War' in the spring and summer of 1940. As the Nazis marched through Paris, Hitler suddenly stood alone as master of Europe. The German war machine seemed likely to seize the British Isles and perhaps the British Empire as well. For American observers, the overturning of the geopolitical power structure proved that liberal forms of intercourse, far from being capable of replacing armed force as internationalists had expected, actually depended upon armed force to undergird it. Especially in semiofficial circles like the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR),

11 See Johnstone, *Against Immediate Evil*; H. Josephson, *James T. Shotwell and the Rise of Internationalism in America* (Cranbury, NJ 1975), ch. 13; S. Simpson, 'The Commission to Study the Organization of Peace', *American Political Science Review*, 35, 2 (1941), 317–24.

12 J. Foster Dulles to Wright, 19 December 1939, Addenda I, Box 13, QW. Also see P. Jessup to Wright, 13 December 1939, Box 5, QW; A. Wolfers to Wright, 12 December 1939, Box 5, QW.

13 J. Shotwell to Wright, 1 April 1940, Box 5, QW.

14 Wright to C. Eagleton, 10 October 1940, Box 5, QW.

15 'Second Draft of Statement', Commission to Study the Organization of Peace, 22 June 1940, Box 5, QW; see also Q. Wright, 'Proposals Respecting Political International Organization', 25 March 1940, Box 5, QW.

16 C. Eagleton to Wright, 19 December 1939, Box 5, QW.

which conducted postwar planning on behalf of the State Department from the beginning of 1940 until Pearl Harbor, experts scrambled to calculate the area required to safeguard American interests and to be defended by force.¹⁷ At first, in June and July, they expected the postwar United States could inhabit no more than a 'quarter-sphere' extending from North America down to the middle of Brazil. Such an outcome did not look altogether disastrous in narrow material terms: the CFR economists found the largely self-contained US economy would perform adequately if future trade were confined to the quarter-sphere alone.¹⁸ In the autumn, however, Britain showed it could withstand the Nazi onslaught, and US foreign policy elites determined that the United States should defend not only the whole hemisphere but essentially the entire world, except a projected Nazi-dominated Europe. The result was a novel proposition in the history of US foreign relations: that the United States hold preeminent military power across as much of the globe as possible. This concept, dubbed the Grand Area within the CFR, became the basis for American postwar planning through most of 1941. In the spring, Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act to aid the allies; the American political system was acting on the presumption that US national security depended on the survival of the British fleet in the Atlantic and a favorable balance of power in Europe and Asia.¹⁹

It was in this context, in February 1941, that the *Time/Life/Fortune* publishing mogul Henry Luce issued his famous call for an 'American century'. 'The complete opportunity of leadership is *ours*', Luce announced. He said so in the name of 'internationalism', but without mentioning international organization once. On what grounds did he claim to be an 'internationalist'? The answer lay in Luce's invocation of 'those old, old, battered labels – the issue of Isolationism versus Internationalism'.²⁰ Luce stood for internationalism insofar as he was against 'isolationism', a moniker applied to opponents not of world organization but rather of military intervention. This internationalism/isolationism dualism, despite striking Luce as stale, was in fact new. Only in the mid-1930s did 'isolationism' start circulating in American political discourse, almost always as an epithet, not a self-description.²¹ Those who saw themselves as internationalists redefined that

17 See L. Shoup and W. Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council On Foreign Relations and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, NY, and London 1977), ch. 4; Smith, *American Empire*, ch. 10; C. Santoro, *Diffidence and Ambition: The Intellectual Sources of US Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO 1991); R. Schulzinger, *The Wise Men of Foreign Affairs: The History of the Council on Foreign Relations* (New York, NY 1984); S. Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of US Global Supremacy in World War II*, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University (2015), chs. 1–3.

18 Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World*, 93–5, 104–6.

19 On the origins of US globalism in 1940 and 1941, focused on FDR and high diplomacy, see D. Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt's America and the Origins of the Second World War* (Chicago, IL 2001); D. Schmitz, *The Triumph of Internationalism: Franklin D. Roosevelt and a World in Crisis, 1933–1941* (Washington, DC 2007).

20 H. Luce, 'The American Century', *Life* (17 February 1941), 63.

21 B. Blower, 'From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941', *Diplomatic History*, 38, 2 (2014), 345–76; Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World*, 57–62.

word, and reconceived their own project, in opposition to their new 'isolationist' image of their opponents. America's 'isolationism', they repeated, had brought on the world crisis by clinging to outmoded hemispheric restrictions on US political and military commitments.²² 'Internationalism's' connotations against nationalism and power politics therefore fell into the background. Internationalism now meant anti-isolationism; it entailed first and foremost the projection of US military power beyond the Western Hemisphere and, in principle, wherever armed strength and its sources could be found.

As a result, one could be against 'isolationism' without being for international organization. As more Americans came to advocate intervention in World War II, and armed preeminence thereafter, they did not necessarily rally to the League of Nations or any new league. A very different way to order the postwar world rose to prominence instead. Through most of 1941, postwar planners foresaw the United States forming an exclusive partnership with Great Britain and its white settler empire. In July, the CFR planners outlined a 'permanent political tie-up' with the British Commonwealth.²³ For the group tasked with political planning within the Council, headed by Whitney Shepardson, an international businessman and longtime proponent of Anglophone unity, an American-British combination was attractive for just the reason that a universal one was not: only the former could wield overwhelming military force, 'under the control of those whose self-interest will ensure its utilization', as one member, the military affairs commentator George Fielding Eliot, phrased it.²⁴ The CFR planners sought models for American-British collaboration less in the League than in the inter-imperial conferences of the British Empire and the intergovernmental machinery of the allies in World War I.²⁵

One reason why US elites converged around an 'American-British' framework was that 'American' came before 'British': they believed the postwar United States would be the senior partner, a prospect that seemed dubious in World War I but that now, in 1941, was perceived as likely on both sides of the Atlantic. 'Pax Americo-Britannica' and 'Americo-British world order' was how Arnold Toynbee, writing for the Foreign Office-sponsored British Foreign Research and Press Service, characterized his hoped-for future.²⁶ *Fortune* magazine's in-house foreign affairs intellectual, Raymond Leslie Buell, likewise coined the phrase 'Americo-British leadership'. Buell had spent most of the interwar period directing research for the Foreign Policy Association and criticizing what he called

22 See, for example, W. Lippmann, 'Tried and found wanting', *The Washington Post* (27 February 1941), 11.

23 'The Political Considerations of American-British Partnership', Prepared by W. Sharp, Political Group, No. P-B20, 4 June 1941, *Studies of American Interests in the War and the Peace*, Council on Foreign Relations Library, New York, NY (hereafter cited as CFRWPS).

24 Memorandum of Discussions, Political Group, No. P-A5, 19 February 1941, CFRWPS.

25 'Institutional Arrangements for Postwar American-British Cooperation', Prepared by W. Sharp, Preliminary Draft, Political Group, No. P-B28, 17 September 1941, CFRWPS.

26 Quoted in R. M. Douglas, *The Labour Party, Nationalism and Internationalism, 1939-1951* (London and New York, NY 2004), 107-8.

'American imperialism' in Latin America and European colonialism in Africa; he had wanted great-power interventions placed under international control and disciplined by public opinion.²⁷ But in 1940, alarmed by the Nazi New Order, he left to direct the 'Post-war Department' of the Luce publications. Now he mocked the League as a 'leaderless international body'. 'In the future', Buell wrote, 'America cannot fight in support of a security system the operation and responsibilities of which it does not control.'²⁸

In August, the idea of exclusive American-British cooperation culminated in the Atlantic Charter, declared by FDR and Winston Churchill off the coast of the British Dominion of Newfoundland. Historians often cast the Atlantic Charter as a step toward the revival of world organization.²⁹ To FDR, it was nothing of the kind. When Churchill proposed to endorse an 'effective international organization', Roosevelt struck the phrase, watering it down to a 'wider and permanent system of general security'. He told the Prime Minister that only America and Britain, not some world body, could keep peace in the aftermath of war.³⁰ Roosevelt's own adviser, Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, protested, disheartened by Roosevelt's casual suggestion that 'nothing could be more futile than the reconstitution of a body such as the Assembly of the League of Nations', in Welles's paraphrasing. Roosevelt did not budge. Perhaps a new League might become useful sometime in the future, he said. Until then, the United States and Great Britain would exercise police trusteeship and no other nation could take part effectively.³¹ As the CFR planners commented, 'the Eight Points' of the Atlantic Charter 'fall far short of Wilson's Fourteen in advocacy of any general (or even regional) international machinery by and through which Roosevelt's "essential human freedoms" might conceivably become realities'.³²

The Charter marked the zenith of American interest in joining with the British Empire to police the world. In substance, it comported with Navy Secretary Frank Knox's call, two months later, for American-British domination of the seas one

27 R. L. Buell, 'The Intervention Policy of the United States', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 138 (1928), 73.

28 Buell to TIME Inc. Post-War Committee, 'Americo-British Power in the Post-War World', 13 January 1942, Box 25, Raymond Leslie Buell Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, DC.

29 For example, Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and the Creation of the U.N.*, 40; P. Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (New York, NY 2006), 25; D. Plesch, *America, Hitler and the UN*, 24-7.

30 Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, 11 August 1941 (11 a.m. meeting), Box 151, Sumner Welles Papers, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY (hereafter cited as SW).

31 Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, 'British-American Cooperation', 11 August 1941 (afternoon meeting), Box 151, SW.

32 'A Comparative Analysis of the Wilsonian and Roosevelt-Churchill Peace Programs', Prepared by W. Sharp, Political Group, No. P-B32, 3 December 1941, CFRWPS.

hundred years hence. 'You may say it is a dangerous power when controlled by so few,' Knox said,

and there is truth in that reflection. But, feeble and inadequate as may be the impulses in American and British hearts for the common good and the advancement of civilization, and likely as it may be that this power will sometimes be abused, it is far safer thus than if that power should be permitted to pass into the hands of aggressive nations who seek their own selfish aggrandizement.³³

A dream fulfilled for Shepardson struck Knox as a tragic necessity, but both made clear their preference for American-British armed hegemony over any universal scheme.

If the highest officials repudiated the common control of international power, former backers of the League scarcely disagreed. They deferred world organization to the distant future, following a transition period under American-British leadership. Such was the position of CSOP from November 1940 until February 1943. In June 1941, CSOP came out in favor of a 'joint American-British sea and air force, with the necessary bases and servicing facilities, strong enough to police the seas and to localize outbreaks of violence in land areas'. This arrangement would last 'at the initial stage, or', rather differently, 'as long as may be necessary'.³⁴ In other words, one member complained, CSOP envisaged a 'rather indefinite dictatorship by Britain and America'.³⁵

This dissident CSOP member was not alone. When Roosevelt and Churchill put forth the Atlantic Charter, they failed to impress one of their key audiences: the American public and its representatives. It was not just anti-interventionists who denounced the Charter.³⁶ The interventionists in the CFR could not help but conclude that the Charter 'fell like a dead duck' upon Congress and the public.³⁷ Arthur Sweetser, a journalist who had been on the League's Secretariat, led the CFR's political group in penning a stinging rebuke to the Atlantic Charter, less for its content than for its optics. As the group advised the State Department: 'An *imperialistic* connotation may all too easily be given to the projected American-British policing of the seas, not only by Axis propaganda-mongers, but by perfectly sincere people as well.'³⁸ The planners worried that an alliance with Britain alone would be too naked and narrow to command popular support at home.

33 F. Knox, 'World Peace Must Be Enforced: We Should Prevent the Rise of New Hitlers', Address to the American Bar Association, Indianapolis, 1 October 1941, in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 8, 1 (1941), 18.

34 CSOP, 'Outline of Program', 7 June 1941, Box 5, QW.

35 R. S. Greene to C. Eagleton, 23 October 1941, Box 5, QW.

36 For example, 'Johnson Says Alliance Forged by Peace Aims', *Los Angeles Times* (20 August 1941), 6; R. Taft, Radio Broadcast to the Citizens of Ohio, 29 August 1941, in C. Wunderlin, ed., *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 2 (Kent, OH 2001), 284.

37 Memorandum of Discussions, Political Group, No. P-A14, 26 August 1941, CFRWPS.

38 'A Comparative Analysis of the Wilsonian and Roosevelt-Churchill Peace Programs', Political Group, No. P-B32, 3 December 1941, CFRWPS.

Having heaped scorn on the very concept of universal political organization for the past two years, American policy elites now began to discuss whether to create one. On August 26, less than two weeks after the declaration of the Atlantic Charter, the Council planners held extensive discussions on international organization for the first time since of the fall of France.³⁹ By November, leaders of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation were noting ‘very definite indications of the return to public interest and favor of both Mr. Wilson and the program for which he stood’.⁴⁰ This was a subtle but significant shift, triggered by domestic considerations more directly than external ones. Postwar planners feared that under the Atlantic Charter formula, the US public would recoil from world leadership, perhaps from international participation altogether. What necessitated world organization was the ‘critical importance of beginning here and now to re-educate the American people up to their international responsibilities’, historian Henry Wriston, the president of Brown University, told the rest of the CFR’s political group. The best antidote, in Wriston’s opinion, was to involve the United States in international institutions and joint obligations in uncontroversial areas, eroding public resistance through symbolic acts of cooperation.⁴¹ Secondly, now that the Soviet Union was surviving the Nazi invasion from June, US planners also worried that an exclusively Anglo-American arrangement might alienate the Soviets and other states. As Sweetser summarized, ‘alliance begets alliance’. His memorandum to the State Department in September warned that ‘Anglo-Americanism, if not carefully directed, may be made to appear as an attempt at world hegemony and Pan-Americanism as an exclusivist or divisive effort’.⁴² For the same reason that American-British exclusivity offended the US public – the optics of power politics – it might provoke rival states. Perhaps some kind of wider, world body could better implement the objectives of American-British leadership.

How, exactly? When brought down to specifics, how would world organization convey a sense of common participation without involving common control? This question only started to be posed in 1941 as the paradigms of American-British policing and world organization jostled against one another. Nevertheless, before their nation formally entered the war, American foreign policy elites were moving toward a new position: the United States had to lead the postwar world, and world organization could make it happen.

In the four months between the Atlantic Charter and Pearl Harbor, the idea of world organization rose from the dead, but not via a linear resurrection. American policy elites did not revalue the League, originally conceived and still perceived as an outlet for expressing public opinion and controlling military power. To the

39 Memorandum of Discussions, Political Group, No. P-A14, 26 August 1941, CFRWPS.

40 A. Sweetser to the Board of Directors of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, 7 October 1941, Box 5, Woodrow Wilson Foundation Records, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

41 Memoranda of Discussions, Political Group, No. P-A16, 15 October 1941, CFRWPS.

42 ‘Approaches to Postwar International Organization’, Prepared by A. Sweetser, Preliminary Draft, Political Group, No. P-B30, 17 September 1941, CFRWPS.

contrary, a new world organization gained appeal as a device for *managing* public opinion and *projecting* military power. Planners hoped to synthesize the substance of American global supremacy, in partnership with Britain, with a universal form. Any new organization would adorn what really provided order: overwhelming coercive power at the ready of America first. As Sweetser wrote, 'It would be one kind of world with America active, another with America inactive.'⁴³

Two weeks after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, sending the United States into the war, President Roosevelt approved the establishment of a fully governmental planning committee to pick up where the CFR had left off.⁴⁴ The State Department's Advisory Committee on American Foreign Policy convened on 12 February 1942, in the office of Under Secretary Welles.⁴⁵ Welles, FDR's man in the department, led the committee into 1943, guiding discussions and pronouncing when consensus on a subject had been reached. He also went over the head of Secretary of State Cordell Hull to keep Roosevelt apprised of the committee's work. More than anyone, it was Welles who convinced the skeptical president to get behind a universal political organization by March 1943 and persuade the British and the Soviets to follow suit.⁴⁶

In public Welles positioned himself as the second coming of Woodrow Wilson. Standing at Wilson's tomb in November 1941, he became the first member of FDR's inner circle to endorse US participation in world organization. Americans, he said, 'must turn again for light and for inspiration to the ideals of that great seer', Woodrow Wilson. 'How rarely in human history has the vision of a statesman been so tragically and so swiftly vindicated.'⁴⁷ High praise, yet faint; a prophet sees but does not do. From the start of the planning, Welles held up the League as an anti-model. What was needed, he said, was a 'completely fresh approach'.⁴⁸ A decade after the war ended, 'we would not have arrived in any Utopia'; rather, 'the same old jealousies and fears and hatreds and tensions would be reasserting themselves'.⁴⁹ Led by Welles, the State Department planners set out to determine how the United States could project its full power in a world prone to war.

Early in 1942, with the United States finally in the war, the diplomats and semiofficial experts assembled by the State Department treated America's postwar supremacy as an established fact. Extending the ambition of the Council men, the planners foresaw the whole postwar world unified under US leadership. Gone were

43 Ibid.

44 'Advisory Committee on Post-War Foreign Policy: Preliminaries', n.d., Folder 'The Advisory Committee on Post-War Foreign Policy (General)', Box 54, HN.

45 Advisory Committee Chronological Minutes 1, Meeting of 12 February 1942, Box 54, HN.

46 Folder 'Talks with FDR, 1942-1944', Box 54, HN. See Hearden, *Architects of Globalism*, 156.

47 S. Welles, Address at Memorial Services at the Tomb of President Wilson in the Washington Cathedral, 11 November 1941, in S. Welles, *The World of the Four Freedoms* (Columbia, SC 1943), 29, 32.

48 Subcommittee on International Organization Chronological Minutes 4, Meeting of 14 August 1942, Box 85, HN.

49 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 2, Meeting of 14 March 1942, Box 55, HN.

the elaborate geographical calculations performed in the year after the fall of France to determine how much of a divided world the United States should seek. Now globalism was axiomatic, requiring no justification. American interests and responsibilities 'embrace the whole world', confirmed geographer Isaiah Bowman, one of several CFR planners transplanted into the State Department group.⁵⁰ Although news from the battlefield was mixed in the spring of 1942, the planners imagined a prostrate postwar world looking to America for direction. 'The peoples now sunk under the pressure of the enemy forces would really need leadership with respect to everything', Bowman commented in March. 'It had been so in 1918 and 1919. Their minds no longer were self-reliant and independent, and they looked desperately for someone to give orders.' Hitler's wrecking of the old international order appeared to have wiped clean the slate of history, only it was the United States, not Germany, that would define the future. In discussing the problem of minorities in Europe, for instance, Welles remarked that although the current generation saw the transfer of populations as a harsh practice, 'the next generation would not feel that way, and we must look a long way ahead'. Bowman, who chaired the Subcommittee on Territorial Problems, agreed. 'People were getting used to the idea of moving minorities', he said, 'because Hitler had carried the process so far'.⁵¹

If 'the kind of a world we want', in one planner's phrase, seemed within reach, one obstacle stood out above the rest.⁵² It was not the Soviet Union and international communism. Although some planners worried about Russian domination of Eastern Europe, and thence Germany and Western Europe, such fears stayed toward the background of their discussions through 1942, while the Soviet Union was still battling for survival. By contrast, the problem of American 'public opinion' preoccupied the planners. Few meetings elapsed without someone interjecting that everything they were working toward depended on the public overcoming its traditional aversion to extra-hemispheric political and military participation. 'Our very biggest problem may be at home', as Bowman said, to Welles's affirmation. 'How should we go about keeping our present sense of responsibility, so prevalent today throughout the American public – keep it into and throughout that postwar period?'⁵³

Opinion polls were heartening to a degree. 'Every poll of opinion', Welles noted, showed the public willing to enforce peace and join an 'international organization with teeth'.⁵⁴ But no amount of data could quell the planners' anxiety, convinced as they were that 'isolationism' might always surface. Shotwell, now among the State

50 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 3, Meeting of 21 March 1942, Box 55, HN.

51 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 2, Meeting of 14 March 1942, Box 55, HN.

52 Advisory Committee Chronological Minutes 1, Meeting of 12 February 1942, Box 54, HN.

53 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 4, Meeting of 28 March 1942, Box 55, HN.

54 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 9, Meeting of 2 May 1942, Box 55, HN.

Department planners, wrote that ‘the present war has caused a major revolution in American thinking with reference to the problem of national security’ – and yet, sentences later, ‘the innate longing of Americans for their old-time isolation is probably as strong as ever’.⁵⁵ Understanding global supremacy to be un-American, postwar planners sought to reconcile their project with the values of the American public and political system.

This was planners’ most salient concern as they decided to create a new world organization. On 7 March 1942, the Subcommittee on Political Problems, composed of the principals of the larger committee, ended its inaugural meeting with Welles stating that the planners ‘should definitely assume that an international political organization would be established’. Hardly any conversation had taken place as to how such an organization would look. The planners had mostly discussed when to hold a peace conference, and despite feeling the last conference in Paris had tried to solve too many problems at once, they concluded that the United States should orchestrate a peace conference during rather than after the war, lest ‘our national *will* to handle the peace problems, with all their difficulties, might be dissipated’.⁵⁶ The next meeting, on 21 March, reiterated the point. Only one aspect of international organization merited discussion: the need to set it up quickly so as to lock ‘internationalism’ into the public mind and keep ‘isolationism’ down. Were international organization delayed, ‘American opinion might not be in support of our program to the extent necessary “to put it across”’, warned the lawyer Benjamin Cohen, from FDR’s brain trust. Intensive work now ‘would give time for ideas to crystalize [sic] favorably prior to the armistice’. Welles agreed. ‘Postponement of international organization’, he said, ‘might give American opinion time to veer away from necessary international participation’.⁵⁷ The matter was decided, Welles affirmed: the United States should establish a world organization and do so before the war was through.

Having accepted the bare idea of international organization, the planners then turned to its structure. The outline of what became the UN Security Council can be traced to this 28 March meeting. Here the planners figured out how to reconcile great-power privilege with universal form. Three objectives guided them: establishing an effective policing apparatus directed by the great powers, making the small powers feel included, and ensuring American freedom of action and the Senate’s ultimate approval of US participation.

The solution, they decided, should begin with vesting the power to make decisions in the US-led Big Four, including Britain and the Soviet Union and perhaps France or China. As a small body possessing the force of arms, it could take decisive action as the League Council did not. Yet this could and should be

55 J. Shotwell, ‘Preliminary Draft on International Organization’, 31 July 1942, Subcommittee on International Organization Document 2, Box 86, HN.

56 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 1, Meeting of 7 March 1942, Box 55, HN.

57 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 3, Meeting of 21 March 1942, Box 55, HN.

accomplished without kicking out the small powers. The aim, said the CFR's Hamilton Fish Armstrong, should be that of 'instilling the fullest possible sense of participation'. A sense of participation could be *instilled* because it was essentially to be a simulacrum of participation. The planners mused that four or five small powers, each representing a region on a rotating basis, could sit on the new council as long as they were stripped of the veto power that all representatives had enjoyed under the League's unanimity rule. Perhaps the Big Four would also 'hand pick' the delegates sent by these nations in order to assure their suitability. When Berle objected that the plan sounded like the 'sterile intellectual mold of the Council and Assembly of the League of Nations', Bowman assured him of the contrary. The Big Four would retain control in a 'quiet intangible organization' behind the scenes. All the planners desired was some method whereby 'all states could be given recognition and given opportunity to regard themselves as participations in the decisions made'. 'Speaking frankly', Welles summed up, 'what we required was a sop for the smaller states: some organization in which they could be represented and made to feel themselves participants.'⁵⁸

In mid-July, Welles formed a new Subcommittee on International Organization, chaired by himself, in order to formulate a draft constitution to present to FDR. After some hesitation, the planners decided to retain a successor to the League Assembly so that defeated powers and small states could 'meet and ventilate their grievances'.⁵⁹ FDR would cite similar reasons next March, when he proposed a new world organization to the British, in the person of Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. The Big Four would make 'all the more important decisions', the president said. Once a year or so, the universal assembly would meet, but not to take action. Small countries, the president said, would merely 'blow off steam'.⁶⁰ For Roosevelt and his planners, a world organization would enhance the agency of the strong and pacify the weak. The latter's contributions to 'international public opinion' no longer counted as they did for the Wilsonian generation which is why Roosevelt's planners first envisioned an American-British alliance, and only later added on.

In addition to granting more exclusive authority to the great powers than the League had done, the planners also determined in 1942 to free the hands of those powers to act as they liked, rather than constrain them, even nominally, to follow and enforce international rules. Shotwell had spent much of the interwar period searching for criteria to define aggression so that the international community could make effective binding pledges to punish aggressors, but now he led the way in rejecting any such thing.⁶¹ The planners jettisoned the parts of the League, embodied in Articles 10 and 16, that obligated member states to apply

58 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 4, Meeting of 28 March 1942, Box 55, HN.

59 Subcommittee on International Organization Chronological Minutes 2, Meeting of 31 July 1942, Box 85, HN.

60 Quoted in Hearden, *Architects of Globalism*, 156.

61 Josephson, *James T. Shotwell*, chs. 7-9.

sanctions. This time, the great powers on the Security Council would enjoy full discretion to identify what the UN Charter would call ‘threats to the peace’ and decide whether and how to act.⁶² Rather than attempt to strengthen international law and the juridical settlement of disputes, the planners self-consciously sought to subordinate them to great-power politics. Shotwell himself decried ‘the American tendency (in contrast to the British) to lump together all kinds of international disputes within a juristic framework. The identification of acts of aggression was a political matter which could only be handled by a politically constituted agency.’ Shotwell even suggested discarding the Permanent Court of International Justice in order to revert to the informal methods of arbitration ascendant before World War I.⁶³ He stood ready to undo the attempts of liberal internationalists, over more than two decades, to judicialize international politics by setting up a permanent court and promoting or requiring its use in settling disputes.⁶⁴

Shotwell’s reference to an outmoded ‘American tendency’ underscored how far ideas of internationalism had traveled in a short period. American leaders now viewed international society from a position of paramountcy, and they grew as jealous of political discretion as the British had been in the last war.⁶⁵ For President Roosevelt, world organization did not seem worthwhile at all when Welles sent him a preliminary sketch of a ‘United Nations Authority’ in April 1942.⁶⁶ Roosevelt felt firmly, throughout 1942, that the Big Three or Four, depending on China’s inclusion, should dictate the peace.⁶⁷ The president was not about to relinquish control of war and peace to another League with dozens of signatories to satisfy.

Then Welles showed him he did not have to. In a two-hour meeting in January 1943, Welles laid out how the postwar planners had squared great-power control with universal participation.⁶⁸ Embedded in a world organization, the United States could exert *more* control than in a four-power concert. Welles’s draft, for example, required every member nation to make their forces and facilities available to the great powers, as the UN Charter would do. By internationalizing

62 Subcommittee on International Organization Chronological Minutes 2 and 4, HN.

63 Subcommittee on International Organization Chronological Minutes 2, HN; Subcommittee on International Organization Chronological Minutes 3, 7 August 1942, Box 85, HN.

64 See D. Burks, ‘The United States and the Geneva Protocol of 1924: “A New Holy Alliance”’, *American Historical Review*, 64, 4 (1959), 891–905; B. Coates, *Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Relations in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York, NY 2016), ch. 7.

65 G. Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations: Strategy, Politics, and International Organization, 1914–1919* (Chapel Hill, NC 1978), 92–4; P. Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy, 1914–1925* (Oxford and New York, NY 2009).

66 S. Welles, *Seven Decisions That Shaped History* (New York, NY 1951), 133.

67 In May, for instance, CFR president Norman Davis spoke with FDR and reported to other members of the Subcommittee on Security Problems that ‘his mind is already pretty well made up’: the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and China must control the postwar settlement alone. Subcommittee on Security Problems, Chronological Minutes 4, Meeting of 20 May 1942, Box 76, HN. Also see R. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY 1995), 342, 389–90.

68 O’Sullivan, *Summer Welles*, 72–3; B. Welles, *Summer Welles: FDR’s Global Strategist: A Biography* (New York, NY 1997), 334.

colonies and strategic bases, it opened the world to American access.⁶⁹ Welles's detailed exposition might have converted Roosevelt; by then, too, Roosevelt was more willing to make territorial settlements and more suspicious of Soviet intentions, deciding to revive France as a counterweight rather than disarm it completely.⁷⁰

From 1943 to 1945, Roosevelt convinced his allies to sign up to a new world organization, which neither Stalin nor Churchill, thinking along regionalist lines, had favored.⁷¹ Without the initiative of the United States, nothing like the United Nations Organization would have come into being. But the subsequent negotiations over the veto power, and related provisions on which historians have focused, shed dim light on why the United States made a top diplomatic priority of establishing the organization, an objective that ranked as high as any other in the horse-trading at Yalta and other summits.⁷² More illuminating is the moment of conception – revealing in particular that the American decision to create the United Nations Organization is explicable only as part, and a subordinate part, of the American decision to seek global political-military supremacy.

As FDR's planners contemplated what kind of world they wanted, they worried chiefly that the American people would stand in the way. World organization emerged as a means to this end, as a device for suppressing what they perceived as the public's deep disinclination to sustain global preeminence. Yet the planners' instrumental attitudes toward world organization should not obscure the genuine, hierarchical ideal that the organization symbolized for them. In the coming epoch of American leadership, the United States would exercise control but every nation would speak. The small powers would 'ventilate' in America's forum, the United Nations, bestowing recognition upon the order even as they blew off steam.

One of the planners put the matter concisely at the end of an early, winding meeting full of uncertainty about how to redraw the map of Europe. 'The endurance of our terms of settlement would be the great test', said Anne O'Hare McCormick, the *New York Times* columnist. America needed to see 'popular acquiescence in those settlements'. Welles agreed. 'If the people agree to their destiny as we see it', McCormick continued, 'we can expect the peace to last.'⁷³ Whatever course the United States chose, no matter how arbitrary the choice, would be the only way. All others should be expected to follow. That they might act otherwise, and fail 'the great test', the planners did not discuss.

69 Subcommittee on International Organization, Document 123-e, 'Draft Constitution of the International Organization', 26 March 1943, Box 88, HN.

70 Hoopes and Brinkley, *FDR and the Creation of the U.N.*, 52–4.

71 Churchill entertained a variety of proposals, but in 1942 and 1943 he landed on a regionalist solution featuring a Council of Europe armed with an international police force. E. J. Hughes, 'Winston Churchill and the Formation of the United Nations Organization', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9, 4 (1974), 177–94.

72 Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 519–22.

73 Subcommittee on Political Problems Chronological Minutes 5, Meeting of 4 April 1942, Box 55, HN.

Others did act otherwise. The peoples of the world did not emerge from the war looking passively to America for direction; they had their own agendas, starting with Communism's ascent in Eastern Europe. By 1947, just five years after the State Department postwar planners initially convened in Welles's office, their vision of one open world – organized under American leadership, with great-power cooperation and universal participation – gave way to Cold War division. The Security Council deadlocked, and soon the General Assembly turned into an anti-colonial forum, as rapid decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s sent the global South into the majority and the United States 'into opposition'.⁷⁴ Within the United States, the United Nations itself became the object of nationalist attacks and conspiracy theories. One might conclude that America's World War II vision of internationalism proved a failure, and thoroughly so.

Yet if the United States has displayed an instrumental attachment to international organization since 1945, using it when convenient and bypassing it when necessary, this conduct does not necessarily contravene the vision of the Americans who originally opted for and designed the United Nations. Those officials no longer reposed trust in an international society that could stand above individual nations and for a higher, global interest. After the Nazis had nearly claimed world leadership, Americans came to see the international as 'little more than the arena in which [states'] battles would be fought out', as Susan Pedersen writes of the UN Trusteeship system.⁷⁵ They determined to maintain armed primacy in the international arena, deciding it was the only way to keep the world aright. As the wartime planners perceived, international organizations have often served as powerful vehicles for that project by furnishing US endeavors with a legitimacy that no one nation could obtain alone. Starting in the Korean War, for example, UN authorization for military interventions has substituted for the consent of Congress, and UN agencies have cleansed US-backed governance initiatives of their particular provenance.⁷⁶

Not least, the concept of anti-isolationist internationalism that emerged in World War II played an important role in converting the American political system to global supremacy, and in maintaining its commitment to supremacy ever since. By conceptualizing the category of isolationism, and positioning internationalism against it, wartime officials and intellectuals elided the contradiction between dominating power politics and transcending it. Now both objectives, being antonyms of isolationism, came to seem wholly compatible if not one and the same. So, perhaps, they have remained as the project of American world leadership waged the Cold War and outlasted it.

74 D. P. Moynihan, 'The United States in Opposition', *Commentary*, 59 (1975), 31–43.

75 S. Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York, NY 2015), 401.

76 Illustrating how UN agencies can launder US funds in global governance programs is Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, MA 2008).

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Matthew Connelly, Daniel Immerwahr, Joris Larik, Mark Mazower, Amy Sayward, Anders Stephanson, and Marilyn Young for commenting on portions of this article, and especially to Kristen Loveland and J. Simon Rofe for their invaluable edits and insights.

Biographical Note

Stephen Wertheim is Visiting Assistant Professor in History at Columbia University and Visiting Scholar at the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies. He is a historian of US foreign relations and international order from the nineteenth century to the present. His articles have appeared in *Diplomatic History*, *Journal of Genocide Research*, *Journal of Global History*, and *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, and he is writing a book on the birth of US global supremacy in World War II. He received a PhD in History at Columbia University in 2015, after which he held research fellowships at Princeton University and King's College, University of Cambridge, and a permanent lectureship at Birkbeck, University of London.