Were Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt the True Architects of the United Nations?

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Introduction

The United Nations (UN) was founded after the Second World War by 51 countries committed to maintaining international peace and security. Besides collective security, it is also an environment where countries meet and develop friendly relationships. It promotes social progress and advocates for better living standards and human rights. The UN has four main purposes: to keep the peace throughout the world; to develop friendly relations among countries; to help nations work together to improve the lives of poor people, to conquer hunger, disease and illiteracy, and to encourage respect for each other’s rights and freedoms; and to be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals.¹ Its unique international character, and the powers vested in its founding Charter, allow it to take action on a wide range of issues. It provides a forum for its 193 Member States to express their views and opinions, through the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and other bodies and committees. The work of the United Nations reaches every corner of the globe and affects our day to day lives in more ways than we can possibly think of. The UN and its specialized agencies, funds and programs are best known for peacekeeping, peacebuilding, conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance. However, they also work on a broad range of other issues, ranging from sustainable development, environment and refugee’s protection, counter terrorism and disarmament to promoting democracy, human rights, gender equality and many more. The UN sets goals and coordinates the efforts made to achieve them. It carries out all these tasks to secure a safer world for this and future generations.

Seventy years after its establishment, the United Nations remains one of the most important international organizations. Since its start, the world has witnessed several major conflicts between many different countries. However, unlike its predecessor, the League of Nations, it did not collapse. The United Nations might not have been able to stop or deter countries from fighting each other, but it did prove to be a useful tool to keep international conversation going. Its role cannot be underestimated. During any sort of conflict, no matter how heated it gets, it is of vital importance that the parties involved continue to communicate. Our interdependent and globalized world cannot allow conflicts and wars to destabilize the international system. The international community

cannot slip into deadlock, it has to continue operating. That is why the UN framework remains so important to this day. That is why it has 193 members. That is why they all remain engaged.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt in the creation of the United Nations. The first subject of interest is how these two men came up with their ideas and visions about peace. What were their goals? How did they want to accomplish their goals? Were there any roadblocks to overcome? What did others think of their ideas? To answer these questions, I compare Wilson’s ideas with Roosevelt’s thoughts. Clarifying the similarities and differences allows us to see the difficulties that these two men faced and how their thoughts and actions influenced the international community. It is useful to understand what Wilson and Roosevelt had in mind when they were dealing with postwar Europe and the future of the world. This understanding is especially valuable considering the interconnected world that we live in today. The United Nations is involved in so many complex processes, on so many different levels. Reflecting on and understanding the past can provide guidelines and direction for the future.

The second part of my thesis examines the execution of Wilson’s and FDR’s visions. Having a plan is not enough, it has to be accepted by others. How did Wilson and FDR approach their national and international colleagues? What were their strengths? What were their weaknesses? Are there any lessons to be learned? Did the context play an important role? Finding an answer to these questions will provide us with an overview of the road towards the establishment of the United Nations.

Finally, the third part of my thesis deals with the final step towards the creation of the United Nations: the San Francisco Conference. FDR died a few months before the conference. It was up to Harry Truman to complete his predecessor’s mission. Was he a worthy successor? Was he capable and ready to fulfill FDR’s mission? Did he have a full understanding of FDR’s vision? Answering these questions, it is important to keep in mind the changing international environment. During the few months between FDR’s death and the San Francisco Conference, the world had changed considerably.
I start with Woodrow Wilson. He was the President of the United States when World War One raged throughout Europe. When the war was over, a new international structure had to be built to establish and maintain world peace. Having contributed to the end of WOI, Woodrow Wilson felt it was his duty to create such a new framework. There were three key features in Wilson’s vision: self-determination, collective security, and the right to self-defense. Combined, these three features indicated what Wilson was trying achieve and outlined the purpose of the League of Nations: to ‘outlaw war.’ He was desperate to share his vision and ideas with the rest of the world. Wilson personally attended the postwar peace conference in Paris. The goal was to create a new international system. Rules were set and boundaries drawn. Eventually, his ideas did become reality, but along the way, crucial mistakes had been made. This resulted in the apparent failure of the League of Nations. With hindsight, however, it has become clear that it was not the big failure everybody thought it was. The League did serve its purpose. What arguably turned out to be even more important was that, while Woodrow Wilson was fully engaged in explaining, defending and implementing his plans, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) was witnessing his every move.

FDR closely observed the actions undertaken by Woodrow Wilson. These observations turned out to be crucial. When FDR assumed the office of president in 1933, his first endeavor was overcoming the Great Depression. His New Deal policy was his first mark on history. He made another one in his fourth term as president. 27 years after Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt himself was confronted with a global conflict and the responsibility to deal with the postwar situation. Contrary to Wilson, Roosevelt had the benefit of hindsight. FDR had observed Wilson’s actions and the League of Nations struggle. Roosevelt knew what Wilson had done right and what he had done wrong. Learning from his mistakes, it was now his turn to try and establish a new international framework. Roosevelt came up with a revised version of Wilson’s plan. His document, the Atlantic Charter, is the fundamental link between the two presidents. Knowing why Wilson and the League of Nations had failed, it was now up to Roosevelt to successfully implement the same ideas in another space and time.

Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt had their own unique style, character and working method. Together with the broader context, space and time, their efforts led to the outcome we now know today. A comparisons of these two men helps us understand their individual impact on the
developments after the world wars and the environment in which they had to work. How did Wilson act and what did Roosevelt do differently? How crucial were their personalities in the endeavors they undertook? Was Roosevelt more successful and capable than Wilson, or were there other factors at play? The ultimate question is: Were Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt the true architects of the United Nations?
**Vision of Peace and Prosperity**

Franklin Delano Roosevelt has become one of America’s most iconic presidents. His legacy continues to exist today and is crucial to the world of international affairs. Politics was Roosevelt’s greatest passion. FDR was a fast learner, adapted quickly and loved to play the game. Like his Republican cousin Theodore Roosevelt, FDR was a born politician.\(^2\) At the age of 29, he successfully ran for a Democratic seat in the New York State Senate. Two years later, FDR’s support for Wilson’s successful presidential run earned him a promotion. One year before World War One broke out, he was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy. This position allowed him to show and develop his political talent. He negotiated with Congressional leaders and other government departments and succeeded in expanding the Navy. During his seven-plus years in office, FDR gained valuable experience in labor and naval issues, government management during wartime and logistics. In 1920, the Democratic Party Convention chose Roosevelt as the vice-presidential candidate alongside presidential candidate, Governor James M. Cox. They were, however, defeated by the Republican Warren G. Harding.

Harding was the first of three Republicans to occupy the office of president during the Roaring Twenties. The beginning of the 1920s turned out to be not so fantastic for FDR. As usual, the Roosevelt family spent their vacation at Campobello Island, the birthplace of FDR. It was here that he contracted polio in 1921. He temporarily retired from active politics, but remained engaged behind the scenes and gave speeches at the 1924 and 1928 Democratic Conventions. Paralyzed from the waist down, FDR learned to live with his disability. His handicap had little influence on his political ambitions. He was elected Governor of New York in 1929 and another three years later, he was ready for another attempt to get into the White House.

FDR was elected by the Democratic Convention as presidential candidate in 1932. The election campaign was conducted under the shadow of the Great Depression. FDR’s opponent was the incumbent Republican President Herbert Hoover. He proved to be no match for him. FDR had the uncanny ability to say the right things at the right time to the right audience.\(^3\) Hoover found little resonance with the public. He was being blamed for the Great Depression and his inability to find

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\(^3\) Ibid., 286-287.
a solution to all the misery. Hoover was so unpopular that he could not appear in public without a heavy policy escort. The outcome of the election was never in doubt. 40 million Americans casted their votes. FDR swept away the country and became the 32nd President of the United States.

Until 1939, Roosevelt’s involvement in foreign affairs was sporadic. During the 1930s, the United States concentrated on recovering its domestic economy. The problems in Europe and Asia seemed remote and FDR kept swimming along with the isolationist tide. When Germany occupied the Rhineland in 1936, Roosevelt was in the midst of running for reelection. When Japan invaded China in 1937, he was occupied with the Court-packing fight. The annexation of Austria by Hitler in 1938 came at the same time as the “Roosevelt recession”. During the Spanish Civil war, which started in 1936, the United States stood on the sidelines.

Roosevelt’s conduct of foreign policy was very similar to his domestic policy: intuitive, idiosyncratic and highly personalized. He disliked the career diplomats in the State Department. According to him, they were all prep school progeny with Ivy League pedigrees, predisposed to political conservatism. For the most part, he just ignored them. The State Department was not included during the negotiations over the recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933. When the war came, it was largely shut out. All communications with foreign leaders were handled by the Navy and delicate diplomatic missions were assigned to close trustees.

Meanwhile, events in Europe were taking a turn for the worse. Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and when Britain and France declared war on Germany, FDR addressed the nation in one of his fireside chats: “the influence of America should be consistent in seeking for humanity a final peace which will eliminate, as far as it is possible to do so, the continued use of force between nations.” He continued: “this nation will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well. Even a neutral has a right to take account of facts. Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience.” In January, 1941,

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4 Smith, *FDR*, 416-418.
5 Ibid., 417-418.
6 Ibid., 434-436.
Roosevelt addressed a joint session of Congress for his State of the Union and began outlining his aims for a global peace. Reviving some of the old League’s idealism, he told Congressmen that there are four essential human freedoms: freedom of speech and expression; freedom of religion; freedom from want; and freedom from fear. According to FDR, these freedoms were not ideals to be achieved in a “distant millennium.” He believed them to be an attainable goal for his generation and time.

Up until that time, the military situation in Europe was shrouded in fog. Hitler’s tactics and preparations allowed him to annex Poland without firing a single shot. Things changed when he began his conquest of the European continent by invading first Denmark and Norway, and later Belgium, the Netherlands and France. In a speech at a law school in Charlottesville, Virginia, FDR told the audience that: “it is an obvious delusion to believe that the United States could exist as a lone island in a world dominated by the philosophy of force. We will extend to the opponent of force the material resources of the nation; and at the same time, we will harness and speed up the use of those resources in order that we ourselves may have equipment and training equal to the task. Signs and signals call for speed - full speed ahead.” From this point on, the United States stood shoulder to shoulder with Great Britain and France.

With war came the obligation and responsibility to think about the postwar situation. To understand Roosevelt’s ideas and decisions, it is necessary to examine Woodrow Wilson’s vision and actions as the President of the United States during and after World War One.

The outbreak of the First World War took Americans by surprise. They considered major conflict to be unthinkable and believed in the settlement of international disputes by arbitration. When the first reports reached the United States about the fighting going on in Europe, they shared the general European belief that it would be short and sharp. The US was oblivious to the role it would play in World War One, let alone that it would actively participate in it. The fighting seemed far away and

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9 Smith, *FDR*, 443-449.
no vital US interests were threatened. Woodrow Wilson, elected as President of the United States in 1912, issued a proclamation of neutrality. Avoiding any kind of interferences with European problems was a hallowed national tradition. The European war was one with which the US had nothing to do and whose causes could not touch it.

While the general public in the US supported neutrality, it was impossible for the Americans not to take sides in a war between European countries. Nearly a third of the American people were either immigrants or children of immigrants and most of them sympathized with the Allies. Furthermore, the United States also hoped to continue trading with all the belligerents, as long as the traditional rights of neutrals were respected. Over time, the United States became increasingly bound to the Allied powers. On February 4, 1915, Germany declared the waters around Britain a war zone and announced that it would attack all merchant ships sailing in these waters. Wilson was a fervent Anglophile. Like many other immigrants in the US, Wilson’s mother was English-born. He was a devoted admirer of English literature and of the British parliamentary system. Wilson did not allow his prejudices to influence policy, but he nonetheless believed that a German victory was a potential threat to the US. If a single country could seize an entire continent, it was equally possible for it to invade the United States. At the very least, it also gravely jeopardized US commercial relations with Europe. Hence, Wilson was not predisposed to make difficulties for the British. Germany protested against this American favoritism. In a reaction, the United States made clear it was willing to sell arms to Germany, but could not do so because of British command of the seas.

For the first six months of the war, there were no serious disputes between Germany and the United States, but the opening of the German submarine campaign abruptly changed the situation. All ships entering a designated war zone around the British Isles would be sunk without warning. This submarine declaration greatly worried Wilson and he reacted very cautiously. He made clear that Germany would be held strictly accountable if they attacked American vessels, without really explaining what he meant by this phrase. Neither did he say which punishment could follow.

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13 Ibid., 415.
Americans steadily became more pro-Ally. Although they remained basically neutral and pacific, the submarine crisis had clearly demonstrated the military weakness of the United States. Fearing the republicans might exploit this weakness in the 1916 presidential election, Wilson ordered the revision of defense needs and presented a modest preparedness program to Congress in November, 1915. He was also trying to come up with possible solutions for the European conflict and was thinking about how the international system should be reformed in order to avoid a similar situation in the future. Wilson was convinced that tangible changes could only be accomplished if none of the fighting countries achieved a military victory. If one side prevailed over the other, the result would be an unjust peace. Victors write the history and dictate the postwar settlement. Enforcing the terms of surrender upon others can lead to grievances, especially when those terms are designed to punish the losing party. To avoid issues from lingering and possibly leading to new conflicts, Wilson hoped that the war could end with a ‘peace without victory.’

Reforming the international system to avoid future conflict was Wilson’s main interest and an integral part of his peace plan. In 1915, he drafted a four-point program that would serve as the framework for the creation of a new world order. Firstly, “No nation shall ever again be permitted to acquire an inch of land by conquest.” Secondly, “everyone must recognize the reality of equal rights between small nations and great.” Thirdly, “the manufacture of munitions must no longer remain in private hands.” The final and most important point, “There must be an association of nations, all bound together for the protection and integrity of each, so that any one nation breaking from the bond will bring upon herself war; that is to say, punishment, automatically.” Every time he called for a peace without victors, he referred to the idea behind these four points.

Wilson gradually revealed his vision to the world and slowly edged forward towards announcing his belief in a League of Nations. The League would allow for a more open and wholesome diplomacy. International politics had to become more transparent because secret counsels and

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agreements had caused a global war.19 The great nations of the world had to determine which
interests they had in common, find a way to protect these interests together and devise a plan for
punishment when one nation or a group disturbed those fundamental interests. He went on to say
that “Americans believe in these fundamental things: First, that every people has a right to choose
the sovereignty under which they shall live … Second, that the small states of the world have a
right to enjoy the same respect for their sovereignty and for their territorial integrity that great and
powerful nations expect and insist upon. And, third, that the world has a right to be free from every
disturbance of its peace that has its origin in aggression and disregard of the peoples and nations.”20

In his second term as president, Wilson continued to believe that the only way of ensuring the non-
involve ment of the United States in the war was to end it.21 Attempts to achieve a negotiated
settlement failed, for both sides were confident of complete victory. Furthermore, neither the
British, nor the German leaders cared for Wilson’s moralizing. Despite this reluctance to cooperate,
Wilson persisted. On January 22, 1917, he once more outlined to the Senate the kind of peace he
envisioned. A conqueror’s peace would breed hatred and future wars; the only basis for a lasting
settlement was a ‘peace without victory,’ one founded on the principles of equality among nations,
national self-determination, freedom of the seas, and limitation of armaments. If such a peace was
made the, United States would help maintain it through membership of a permanent international
organization. As it turned out, time ran out and Wilson’s efforts were in vain.

The Zimmermann telegram, combined with the death of twelve Americans who were travelling
aboard a torpedoed ocean liner, launched the United States into World War One. This provocation
and German hostility provoked a strong reaction. Public opinion reversed drastically and was now
in favor of war. On April 2, 1917, Wilson addressed Congress and advised to declare war.22 In his
speech, Wilson unveiled his vision of democracy. “A steadfast concert of peace can never be
maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations. The world must be made safe for
democracy.”23 The United States would not be fighting out of mere self-interest. It was to be a

19 Cooper, Woodrow Wilson, 327.
20 Link et al., eds. The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vol. 37, 114-116.
21 Ibid., 420.
22 Cooper, Woodrow Wilson, 385-386.
23 Link et al., eds. The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vol.41, 124-126.
crusade for righteousness. These were the things that Americans would fight and die for in Europe. These were the battle cries. Arguably, this particular speech was the best and most important one Wilson ever gave.\textsuperscript{24} He did not proclaim the United States to be the sole power that would bring democracy to the world. They were only to achieve this goal by cooperation with other nations. America was forced to take action, the choice for war was inescapable. He finished his speech with the words “God helping her, she can do no other.” With these words, Wilson asked his country to commit the greatest collective sin in history for he hoped that this would secure a more just and peaceful world. It was one of the boldest gambles of his life. A war resolution was passed by both houses and officially signed by Woodrow Wilson on April 6, 1917. The United States was at war and Wilson became a war time president.

The first units of American soldiers arrived in Europe in June 1917. In the meantime, Wilson was busy thinking about what should happen when the fighting stopped.\textsuperscript{25} He ordered his close friend and diplomat, Edward M. House, also known as Colonel House, to go to the meeting of the Inter-Allied War Council and to set up an organization to plan a peace settlement. House did what he was asked to do. He went to the War Council in November and established the Inquiry. The Inquiry was separated from the State Department. It consisted of a wide range of experts who used their knowledge and brainpower to think about possible peace settlements. The end product was a memorandum which proposed issues that a future peace conference would have to deal with. Wilson, together with Colonel House, reviewed these points, made adjustments and rearranged them. These fourteen points became the pinnacle of his next speech.

On January 8, 1918, he appeared in the House chamber and delivered his Fourteen Points speech. Each one was preceded by a roman number:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[I.] Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at;
  \item[II.] Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas;
  \item[III.] The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers… among all the nations consenting to the peace;
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{24} Cooper, \textit{Woodrow Wilson}, 387-389.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 419-421.
IV. Adequate guarantees… that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety;

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims… [in which] the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight;

XIV. A general association must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.26

The closing words of his speech were a pledge to fight for these points because they would remove the main causes of war and provide a just and stable peace. Wilson’s biggest hope was that his Fourteen Points would bring friend and foe together to accept a liberal, non-punitive settlement and accomplish a peace without victory.

The first three of Wilson’s points laid down general principles of international behavior and economics. Before the war broke out in 1914, the United States was ‘insulated’ from the rest of the world. Separated by a large ocean from the Old World, the US adhered to a policy of non-interference with European politics. The American people focused on building their own nation, economy and power. When Woodrow Wilson was president, he was one of the few men who fully understood just how powerful the United States had become. The British, for example, were relatively ignorant to rise of the United States. In the beginning of the 20th century, Great Britain was still in control of its British Empire. The period between 1815 and 1914 is even referred to as Britain’s ‘imperial century.’27 They were unchallenged at sea and adopted the role of global policeman. The British rule over their colonies gave them a dominant position in world trade and meant that they effectively controlled the economies of many countries. Consequently, Wilson’s Fourteen Points envisioned and attempted to break down this old way of international economy and conduct.

26 Point VI: Assurance of unhampered and unembarrassed sovereignty of Russia; VII: Evacuation and restoration of Belgium; VIII: Alsace-Lorraine was a wrong done to France and was to be returned; IX: Readjustment of Italian borders along clearly recognizable lines of nationality; X: The peoples of Austria-Hungary were offered the freest opportunity of autonomous development; XI: Balkan states would be granted independence and security; XII: Promise of sovereignty to the Turks; XIII: Independence for Poland.

Wilson was an idealist who saw himself as the architect of a new international political and economic system, but he was also protecting the continuation of the American growth. His first point, open diplomacy, was clearly an attempt to prohibit treaties, sections of treaties or understandings that were secret.\(^{28}\) It was not meant to exclude confidential diplomatic negotiations, but wanted to prevent that nothing which occurred in the course of such confidential negotiations would be binding unless it appeared in the final covenant made public to the world. Secret treaties were considered to be a threat to the solidity of the whole structure of international covenants which Wilson proposed to establish. Wilson’s second and third point were mainly economical, but were also an attempt to curb Great Britain’s global power. Besides the obvious economic benefits of freely navigating the high seas, Wilson’s second point was also an attempt to curb the British domination of the seas. The third point, removing economic barriers and creating equal economic opportunities built further onto this freedom. Similarly, its goal was to improve trade and diminish imperial British control.

Eight of Wilson’s Fourteen Points dealt with territorial questions. The idea behind these eight points was self-determination. As later formulated in Chapter One of United Nation’s Charter, self-determination means that nations, based on respect for the principle of equal rights and fair equality of opportunity, have the right to freely choose their sovereignty and international political status with no external compulsion or interference.\(^{29}\) All these independent nation states could then work together within the framework of the yet to be created League of Nations. Adhering to the principles of open diplomacy and economic freedom, they were expected to cooperate and devise measures to ensure a safe and secure world.

The fourteenth point was the all-important one to Wilson: the creation of a League of Nations. Wilson envisioned the League as an environment where countries could meet and discuss their problems and worries with each other. It would keep the peace by arbitrating international disputes, guarantee political independence and safeguard the territorial integrity of all member states. After

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all, who, in their right mind, would ever want to relive the horrors of the First World War? Nobody. Debate and mediation were to be the key to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

World War I and the fight for the League of Nations taught Roosevelt important and invaluable lessons. 30 27 years after Wilson’s apparent unsuccessful attempt to come up with a permanent solution for peace, FDR was given a chance to prove his political skills and succeed where his predecessor had failed. However, the biggest difference was that Roosevelt had the benefit of hindsight. Having witnessed how Wilson fought his battles, FDR was familiar with the fine line dividing failure and success. He carefully designed and constructed his plan accordingly.

FDR was no stranger to Europe. Before he became president, he had made thirteen trips and spent almost three years of his life there. 31 Gaining even more experience under Wilson as his Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt developed a strategic vision of the globe early in his life. Armed with all this knowledge, FDR was ready for his biggest task yet: creating a lasting and worldwide peace. Roosevelt knew Wilson’s intentions for creating the League of Nations were sound, but due to its apparent failure during the inter-bellum period, it had lost all of its appeal. FDR had to come up with a plan to create a new global architecture, with the same ideas and visions as the League of Nations.

In order for this new and yet to be created peace organization to succeed, it was vital to understand why the League of Nations had failed. 32 The first observation was the need for the major international states to join the new institution. Their military power was indispensable to make it work. Should they fail to use their armaments to maintain and ensure peace, the new organization would not be better than the League. A second observation was that the governments had to respect their obligations under the Covenant and other international agreements. Only on a basis of mutual respect for one another could the new organization be effective. Disputes had to be settled by peaceful means, not by war. The organization also needed more power than its predecessor. In case

31 Schlesinger, Act of Creation, 29.
all measures failed, and violence erupted, a framework had to be created to undertake collective military action and stop the aggressor. In essence, it all came down to trusting each other, if not fully, then at least on a basic level. Furthermore, to help the creation of peace, emphasis was also laid on improving living standards and world prosperity. Society was rapidly changing. Friction between the industrialized and advanced world and the undeveloped world needed to be softened. By co-operation, international trade could be increased and development aid given to improve social standards. The sources of friction had to be tackled in order to avoid conflict. Lastly, growing nationalism was also a force to be reckoned with. To a certain extent, this movement went hand in hand with the general demand for social improvement.

The first attempt to revive Wilson’s ideas came during the Atlantic meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill in 1941. Both nations met in order to establish some broad principles and make sure they acted in accordance with each other. Together, they came up with the Joint Declaration.\textsuperscript{33} It consisted of eight points:

1. Neither the United States, nor Great Britain were in pursuit of territorial gains;  
2. No territorial changes without taking in accord the wishes of the peoples concerned;  
3. All people had a right to self-determination;  
4. Trade-barriers were to be lowered;  
5. A need for more global economic cooperation and introduction of social welfare;  
6. Work together for a world free of want and fear;  
7. Freedom of the seas;  
8. The aggressors were to be disarmed, and when the war had finished, there had to be a common effort amongst all countries to disarm as well.

The Joint Declaration was signed on August 11, 1941 and became known as the Atlantic Charter.\textsuperscript{34} Keeping in mind that at the time of the signing of the Atlantic Charter, Roosevelt was still trying to get the United States out of the Great Depression by means of his New Deal policy. The Second World War, however, gave it the final push it really needed. Preparing the military for another war

\textsuperscript{34} Russell, \textit{A History of The United Nations Charter}, 39.
boosted employment. Later, when the war was over, new markets throughout the world became available for export and the time of insulation was over. All this was enabled by the signing of the Atlantic Charter. The charter resembled Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points in that both declarations expressed idealistic objectives for a postwar world, but also contained provisions that would greatly benefit the American economy.

The first three points of the Atlantic Charter dealt with territorial claims and self-determination. Unlike the Fourteen Points, the charter did not state terms for any specific country, nation or people. It was more general and applied to basically everyone involved in the conflict. The British had most to lose. They were reluctant to admit that their empire was in decline and coming to an end. When World War One ended, Great Britain was forced to reassess its imperial policy. They nonetheless continued to exert their power throughout the world. However, when Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter, he set a chain of events in motion that could not be stopped. The wording of the third point, considering the issue of self-determination, was ambiguous as to whether it referred to European countries invaded by Germany, or the peoples colonized by European nations. It failed to mention what changes were necessary in both social and economic terms, so as to achieve freedom and peace. It would later be interpreted differently by the British, Americans, and nationalist movements. At the time, Churchill was convinced that it was only applicable to the states under German occupation, and certainly not to those peoples who were part of the British Empire. The British colonies were convinced that, by signing the charter, Great Britain acknowledged the right of self-determination for peoples. This gave hope to all independence leaders in British colonies. When the war was over, the British, the Americans, and the nationalist movements all had their different interpretations on the notion of self-determination and its applicability.

The fourth, fifth and seventh point of the charter are similar to Wilson’s third point and dealt with the economic aspect. FDR was determined not to make the same mistakes as his predecessors had done after World War One. Point four of the charter emphasized that both the victor and the vanquished would be given market access on equal terms. One of the many reasons for the outbreak of the Second World War was believed to be the payment of reparations by the Germans and the accompanied punitive trade relations after the first war. Roosevelt’s seventh point is literally the
same as Wilson’s second: freedom of the seas. Roosevelt included it for the same reasons as Wilson had: further diminish the British rule over the seas and open up new global trading opportunities. Lastly, points six and eight covered the issues of disarmament and collective security and were a call for more international cooperation. Unlike Wilson, the establishment of a new international organization was not mentioned in the Atlantic Charter. There was a commitment to intensify international cooperation, but how and when this was to be achieved was unsure. Nonetheless, the charter was the first building block and ultimately led to the creation of the United Nations.
Negotiations and Results

Returning to 1918, Wilson’s Fourteen Points were enthusiastically received by the public at home, but the foreign leaders abroad were more skeptical. At no point in time had Wilson bothered to consult the Allied leaders to share their views on the postwar situation. Some points even ran counter to their interests. This caused confusion and contradictions during the peace talks in Paris. The United States insisted on creating a new international organization, but at the same time did not want to infringe on sovereignty. The French were torn between advocating self-determination while simultaneously securing their claims on the Rhineland. While the British wanted to create stability in Europe, they were also committed to a reparations policy which would unavoidably destabilize the continent. Furthermore, they were also trying to protect the British Empire. The Italians wanted self-determination for the Balkan states, but they also actively participated in the Treaty of London (1913) which made territorial adjustments after the First Balkan War and consequently violated the principle of nationality. The lack of international support eventually became one of the reasons for the failure of the League of Nations.

With hindsight, it becomes clear that Wilson’s intentions were sound, but the world was not ready for his ideas and vision. When he talked about collective security and self-determination, it seems like he forgot whom he was addressing. Great Britain and France, two major imperial powers, were still coming to terms with their diminishing roles in world politics. Having fought a four year war, they hoped to return to a pre-war situation and cling on to what they had left. However, all of a sudden, the president of a country which traditionally did not want anything to do with Europe was now telling them how he was going to fix all their problems. Nonetheless, Wilson’s ideas turned out to be very important. We are still witnessing their aftermath today.

On October 6, 1918, the new German Chancellor, Prince Maximilian of Baden, requested peace negotiations with the United States on the basis of Wilson’s Fourteen Points. A fierce debate broke out in Congress. Mainly the Republicans, but also some Democrats, saw this move by Germany as an attempt to get out of the war without suffering. They thought Germany did not deserved such an easy solution and called for a total and crushing victory. To make matters worse,

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the Allied powers, Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau and Vittorio Orlando, had already met as the Supreme War Council in Versailles. Here, the three had drafted a harsh armistice with very specific terms and demanded a punitive peace. Wilson objected to these terms because they had been drafted without the consent of the United States. It is ironic that a few months later, he expected the European powers to accept a peace plan that he had singlehandedly designed.

To make matters worse, in the elections of 1918, the Democrats lost their majority in both the House and Senate. Wilson had asked the American people for a broad endorsement of his policies. Turning peace issues into a partisan assault, he irritated the Republicans who were already disenchanted with his moral dictates. This had consequences for the United States’ foreign policy. The Republican Party member Henry Cabot Lodge, perhaps Wilson’s worst enemy, was now both majority leader and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. This meant he would be able to exert a substantial amount of influence over any peace treaty or pact that came out of the Paris Peace Conference.

Wilson had no intention of stepping down his efforts, but he recognized that his role as president had just gotten a lot more difficult. The armistice came six days after the elections. Slow means of communication had delayed the agreement, but there was also opposition from the Allied powers. Germany had approached Wilson for an armistice on the basis of the Fourteen Points, but the Allied powers were only willing to accept if Wilson added explicit reservations. Georges Clemenceau was unwilling to accept Wilson’s Fourteen Points and Lloyd George objected to the freedom of the seas point. Wilson replied as follows to the French and the British: “It is my solemn duty to authorize you to say that I cannot consent to take part in the negotiation of a peace which does not include freedom of the seas, because we are pledged to fight not only to do away with Prussian military but with militarism everywhere. Neither could I participate in a settlement which did not include a league of nations because peace would be without any guarantee except universal armament which would be intolerable.”

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37 Cooper, Woodrow Wilson., 446-448.  
38 Ibid., 448-499.  
39 Link et al., eds. The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, vol. 51, 513.
The armistice of November 11 would be Wilson’s cruelest irony of fate in foreign affairs.\(^\text{40}\) It was his greatest triumph, but also his greatest tragedy. It contained elements of its own destruction. There were those who thought the Germans got off with only a slap on the wrist. This allowed them to rise again and fight another war. An opposite view was more sympathetic to the Germans and found the punishment to be too harsh. This embittered them and put them on a path towards revenge. Either way, Wilson found himself in a tight spot and could not go too far in either direction. The only way for him to have been able to dictate the peace settlement was if the war had lasted longer than it did and Germany suffered a crushing defeat. The Allies would have been dependent on the United States and a bigger American contribution to the war would have enabled Wilson to set the peace terms. Nonetheless, Wilson was convinced of his own ideas and had a clear goal in mind. He was eager to share his vision and plans with all other parties at the peace conference.

Wilson was itchy to go to Paris himself and actively participate in the peace conference.\(^\text{41}\) The decision to personally lead the peace delegation was a controversial move. Wilson’s Secretary of State advised him not to go, but he would have none of it. On one occasion, Wilson’s wife told Colonel House, that: “when he (Woodrow Wilson) delegates to others he found it was not well done.”\(^\text{42}\) Wilson was unwilling to delegate to others and once he had decided to go to Paris, his ego and strong will prevented anyone from changing his decision. People would just have to deal with him not being in the country for a significant amount of time. Furthermore, Wilson was probably the only one who could effectively explain and implement his plans for a liberal, non-punitive peace and international enforcement. After all, he had never delegated important tasks to others. He kept things close to his chest. This strategy prevented him from trusting others with sensitive issues. In his mind, there was nobody else who but him could negotiate in Paris as he envisioned it.

Both the Democrats and Republicans recognized that the president had the right to autonomously appoint people to the peace delegation.\(^\text{43}\) In deciding who could accompany him to Paris, Wilson

\(^{40}\) Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson*, 452-453.

\(^{41}\) Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 32-34.

\(^{42}\) Link et al., eds. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol.49, 294.

\(^{43}\) Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 34-35.
made yet another controversial move. He chose not to include senators, figures of national stature or prominent Republicans. Cries of outrage erupted once his decision had been made public. Criticism was both directed at the people who were included and those who were excluded. Wilson’s biggest mistake was not to include at least one senator. After all, the ratifying of any future peace treaty would require a two third majority in the Senate and the Democrats had just lost theirs in the 1918 Congressional elections. What was Wilson thinking? A possible reason for not appointing senators was Henry Cabot Lodge. Lodge was about to become the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and was also the majority leader. If any senator was to join the delegation, Lodge would have been the first one to ask. The relationship between Wilson and Lodge was a hostile one and to avoid confrontations in Paris, he refrained from inviting him. As a consolation price, Wilson did include Henry White, a retired Republican diplomat. White, however, was hardly a figure of political stature, but Wilson expected him to function as a liaison with Theodore Roosevelt and Lodge. Arguably, another closely related reason for the exclusion of any opposition members was to make sure Wilson could negotiate freely. He did not leave them out of the delegation because they were Republicans, but because they might get in his way. In the end Wilson seemed to have acted as he did for situational, ideological and personal reasons. Having picked his delegation, he hastily wrapped up things on the domestic side in preparation for his journey to France.

On December 13, 1918, Wilson’s lucky number, he arrived in France. He knew the Allied leaders did not share his idealism, but travelling across France just before the start of the conference, he was welcomed as a hero. This reinforced his conviction that he embodied the hopes of humanity and could count on the support of world opinion. He was profoundly mistaken. It might have seemed like he was a hero, but the Allied peoples stood firmly behind their leaders. Having witnessed the war first-hand, they were eager to punish Germany and demanded a harsh peace.

The peace conference officially started on January 18, however, the League Commission did not meet until February 3. Wilson had his work cut out for him. For the next eleven days, the League Commission met ten times. In addition, Wilson had numerous informal talks with many different

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45 Jones, *The Limits of Liberty*, 429.
people, had to lead the behind the scenes discussions and attended the daily sessions of the Council of Ten and the Supreme War Council. Talking with Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Orlando confirmed Wilson’s beliefs. They were all trying to get as much personal gain out of the defeat of Germany as they could. Once again, their self-interest justified Wilson’s presence in Paris. If not him, who would defend the greater good? However, working fifteen hours a day was taking its toll. He was paying the price for making major foreign policy decisions on his own and not delegating tasks to others.

After almost two weeks filled with discussions, Wilson finally presented the Draft Covenant to the full conference.\textsuperscript{47} Wilson was not fully convinced of the language of the draft. It was longer, more detailed and less articulate than he would have liked it to be. However, it had retained the essential features of his own vision. Article X, concerning independence and territorial integrity, got accepted in the way Wilson had written it. It was his singular contribution to the Draft Covenant and a daring move for an American president.\textsuperscript{48} If approved at home, it would drastically alter the United States’ traditional policy of isolationism because it required active participation and a commitment to maintain peace and order throughout the world. Other articles, like Article XI, provided the League of Nations with the authority to judge over war or threat of war anywhere in the world. Articles XII through XV established procedures for mediation and arbitration. Article XVI authorized the League to impose economic boycotts and decide on whether or not to use force in case nations violated the covenant. What also remained from Wilson’s earlier drafts were disarmament, concern for labor conditions, an assembly in which each nation would have an equal vote, an executive council with the five great powers as permanent members and other countries rotating on and off. Most important of all, it would be a political body, able to enforce peace and provide stability and order.

Most of the credit belongs to Wilson.\textsuperscript{49} His vision and ideas ultimately prevailed and were instilled into the Draft Covenant. He had achieved his aims of creating an essentially political international organization with potential broad, muscular enforcement powers. Feeling very proud of his accomplishments, he regarded this end product as the ultimate justification for his decision to

\textsuperscript{47} Cooper, \textit{Woodrow Wilson}, 473-474.
\textsuperscript{48} Cooper, \textit{Breaking the Heart of the World}, 53-54.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 53-54.
personally lead the peace delegation and participate in the negotiations. Yet, this unilateral approach came at a price. The only one who knew in advance what Wilson had planned for the peace conference was Colonel House. Wilson ignored the sympathetic Democrats who offered their help. He had also been unwilling to publicly express his views and ideas. Wilson argued he was shrouding everything in secrecy because it was the only way for his plans to succeed. This was an ironic statement from a person who wanted to achieve less secrecy in international politics. Eventually, once the Draft Covenant was presented in Paris, the veil of secrecy dropped. While his strategy had had some advantages during the negotiations, the downside was that there had been no buildup of domestic support for his plans.

For nearly seven months, Wilson stayed in Paris to attend the peace conference.\(^5^0\) He was the first president to leave the country while in office and also the one who stayed away the longest. He only once returned home for a brief interlude of ten days. During this quick trip, Wilson encountered the first signs of domestic opposition.\(^5^1\) Henry Cabot Lodge launched an attack in the Senate, calling the treaty incompatible with the sovereignty of the United States, the Monroe Doctrine and the traditional policy of non-entanglement. Wilson took the criticism into account. Once he had returned to Versailles, he negotiated three amendments: every nation would have the right to withdraw from the League if it wished; domestic issues would be exempted from the League’s jurisdiction; and the inviolability of the Monroe Doctrine would be preserved.\(^5^2\)

During his brief return home, one of Wilson’s fellow travel companions aboard the *USS George Washington* was FDR. Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was not in Europe as part of Wilson’s peace delegation, but was there to oversee the transactions of naval equipment. One day, FDR was invited to join the president for a discussion on the League of Nations and its future. After the initial exchange of ideas, many other informal conversations followed. FDR got acquainted with Wilson’s ideas and vision thanks to these talks. They granted him an inside look into Wilson’s thought process and hope and determination to design an unprecedented global structure where countries could meet. Such an organization was vital to stabilizing the world and creating a lasting peace.

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\(^{50}\) Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson*, 476.


When the peace conference in Paris ended, it was time for Wilson to present and sell his plans to the American people and politicians. At first, it seemed like Wilson would be able to get the Draft Covenant through Congress.\textsuperscript{53} There was a group of mild Republicans who were willing to vote in favor of Wilson’s plan as long as he was prepared to make some modest reservations. However, Wilson was unwilling to make even the slightest compromise. If had done so, it would have strengthened his position in the Senate. After refusing to include members from the Senate or prominent Republicans in his Paris peace delegation, this was yet another missed opportunity. Meanwhile, Wilson grew increasingly distrustful of the opposition. Continual harassment and derogation by his enemies, spurred on by Senator Lodge, aroused his temper to the point that he was no longer willing to cooperate. Wilson regarded all actions undertaken by the Republicans as a personal assault on himself and ultimately, he just ignored the Senate. Wilson decided to go on a public speaking tour to educate the public. He thought that if he could convince the American people of his cause, the Senators would have to follow suit. It did not prove to be a success.

Senator Lodge was Wilson’s main source of irritation.\textsuperscript{54} Lodge opposed Article X of the Draft Covenant.\textsuperscript{55} He believed it to be in conflict with Congress’s constitutional authority to declare war. Some other concerned senators joined Lodge and together, they worried about having to send US soldiers into combat for purposes other than defending the United States. Their concern, however, was unjustified. The United States had the right to veto any action undertaken by the League at any time. Wilson and Lodge continued to clash over Article X and in the process, Wilson’s base of support eroded.

The first step towards ending the League fight came on November 19, 1919. After a ten hours lasting discussion, the Senate was ready to vote. The first vote was on a treaty with reservations from Senator Lodge. It failed to pass: thirty-nine senators were in favor, fifty-five were against. Not wasting any time, the Senate then voted on Wilson’s treaty, without any reservations. Once again, it failed: thirty-eight in favor vs. fifty-three against. Finally, four months later, after another

\textsuperscript{53} Schlesinger, \textit{Act of Creation}, 22-24.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 24-25.
\textsuperscript{55} Article X of the Covenant of the League of Nations is the section calling for assistance to be given to a member that experiences external aggression. It was signed by the Allied Forces following the First World War, most notably by Britain and France. Wilson was unable to ratify his obligation to join the League of Nations as a result of strong domestic political objections.
round of heated discussions and the addition of new reservations, the Senate was ready to vote one last time.\textsuperscript{56} This time, however, the Senate would only vote on the treaty with the Lodge reservations. In the end, it fell seven votes short of a two-third majority. The game had been played and the League fight was over. A thoroughly disappointed Wilson reacted: “I can predict with absolute certainty that within another generation there will be another world war.”\textsuperscript{57}

Although Roosevelt believed in Wilson’s ideas, he nonetheless tried to be as uncontroversial as he could be during his presidency. He did not immediately become an overt supporter of Wilson’s idealism. However, this did not mean that Roosevelt was inattentive to Wilson’s actions. Roosevelt’s position and political understanding allowed him to observe Wilson’s every move. Convinced that Wilson had been trying to do the right thing after World War One, he wanted to achieve a similar, but more durable settlement. Armed with knowledge, Roosevelt was determined not to repeat Wilson’s mistakes.

Two decades after Wilson’s defeat, the signing of the Atlantic Charter signified the beginning of Roosevelt’s endeavor. Based on the same ideas as Wilson’s Fourteen Points, the charter was a significant document because it outlined the American postwar policy.\textsuperscript{58} For Great Britain, the charter would lead to the creation of a permanent system of security, an organization similar to the League. For the United States, the charter could mean as much or as little as it wanted it to mean. Churchill and Roosevelt refrained from formulating precise commitments because they both knew they needed domestic support for the plan. Nonetheless, it provided a focus. It enabled the U.S. to plan its role for the postwar world. One point of criticism could be the non-inclusion of the Soviet Union in the Atlantic Charter. This might have been due to the poor diplomatic relations with the regime or the fear that Germany would overcome Soviet resistance before the winter. The United States in particular was also weary of its period of friendship with Nazi Germany and its territorial ambitions.

\textsuperscript{56} Cooper, \textit{Woodrow Wilson}, 558-559.
\textsuperscript{57} Link et al., eds. \textit{The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson}, vol. 1, 38-39.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 39-43.
In his third term as president, Roosevelt was consumed by the war in Europe, his relations with Churchill, Lend-lease, aid to Russia and the struggle in the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{59} American relations with Japan had been worsening ever since the Grant administration, but this did not seem to concern the government. The first shock came when Japan joined the Berlin-Rome axis. On December 7, 1941, the impossible happened: a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, a place that was considered to be impregnable.\textsuperscript{60} The war that Wilson and the League advocates feared and had sought to prevent had arrived. The world was in for another global conflict, something Wilson had striven to keep away from America.\textsuperscript{61}

The next day, Roosevelt, accompanied by his wife Eleanor and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, addressed Congress.\textsuperscript{62} In a powerful speech, he asked to declare war. The vote in the Senate was unanimous. In the House of Representatives, there was one sole dissenter: a Congresswomen who had also voted against the war in 1917. The cowardly attack on Pearl Harbor united all Americans.\textsuperscript{63} From that point on, the United States was at war. The whole world was at war. A Japanese attack on any other nation would have divided the American reaction, but Pearl Harbor was so devastating and unexpected that the whole country rallied behind the president.

Before American involvement in the world war, other nations had already proven to be willing to support the principles of the Atlantic Charter.\textsuperscript{64} These included the British Dominions, the European governments-in-exile and even the Soviet Union. On New Year’s Day, 1942, a group of 26 nations, led by the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and China, signed a document that was initially drafted by FDR and based on the Atlantic Charter.\textsuperscript{65} It was titled the ‘Declaration by United Nations’ and pledged cooperation between the countries in order to defeat the Axis-powers. The “Big Four” were purposely put on a superior level. This move set a precedent for the further development of the Atlantic Charter. It were the little things that made this document work.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Smith, \textit{FDR}, 506-510.
\item Ibid., 534-537.
\item Wilson’s reputation soared after the attacks on Pearl Harbor. People were talking about a Wilsonian revival. Books were being published, articles written and most impressive of all, a movie was made. “Wilson” was shown for the first time to the public in 1944 and at the time, it was Hollywood’s most expensive production yet.
\item Smith, \textit{FDR}, 538-539.
\item Ibid., 540.
\item Russell, \textit{A History of The United Nations Charter}, 44.
\item Ibid., 50-53.
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Although Roosevelt considered it to be important that as many small countries as possible signed the Declaration, he also reckoned that the U.S.S.R. would not be happy with alphabetically ranking the signatories. He thought they would not be pleased to follow some country which made only minor contributions. That is why he decided to put the ‘Big Four’ on top of the list. This is where Roosevelt acted differently from Wilson. He was willing to make some concessions in favor of the greater good. The Declaration by United Nations provided a framework within which plans could be made for a peaceful future.

When Roosevelt thought about postwar security, he started from the assumption that small countries are incapable of defending themselves against powerful opponents. Consequently, there was no need for these countries to arm themselves once the war was over. This would save them from a heavy economic burden. Before Pearl Harbor, he reckoned that the United States, together with Great Britain, would be able to provide security for the small countries and police the world. Later, he added the Soviet Union and China to this list. He maintained the idea that a small but powerful group of countries should exercise the police power. Heavy armaments should only be maintained in order to protect others and police the world. Protecting the peace in unity would also lead to more economic and political understanding, which in turn would be necessary to establish a just and durable world future.

Especially after Pearl Harbor, FDR realized there was a need for a more comprehensive international organization. Pearl Harbor had shown that not even the greatest powers were immune to an attack of a determined aggressor. Next to the security aspect, a more general organization was needed with a focus on non-security issues. He thought the League had performed well. However, he did not advocate for the revival of the League of Nations. Over the years, it had been associated with failure and the new organization should not be overshadowed by this burden. He did want to further develop some of its features. On September 7, 1942, bipartisan support for the proposal was cemented when a conference of Republican leaders unanimously decided it would support “responsible participation by the United States in postwar co-operative organization among

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67 Ibid., 97-102.
sovereign nations to prevent military aggression and to attain permanent peace with organized justice in a free world.”

Once the United States entered the war, there were a series of meetings and conferences to discuss and plan the postwar settlement. The first time that the three biggest actors, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, met in person, was at the Tehran Conference in 1943. Military issues were the number one priority at this conference. Only when those were settled did the discussion turn to the political issues. Most of these discussions were informal and took place during meal times and private talks between the Big Three. They proved to be highly informative as to the Soviet attitudes. They were willing to cooperate as long as Germany was being controlled and no longer threatened the security of the Soviet Union. Other important issues were the war in the Far East, the future of Poland and of other eastern European countries. As long as Roosevelt was prepared to safeguard these Soviet interests, the Soviet Union in turn was prepared to participate in the new international organization and work together to ensure collective security. They did, however, regard it to be of secondary importance. Roosevelt’s apparent success to win Soviet cooperation persuaded him, and most of the American people, that a new era of international relations was beginning.

In an informal talk with Stalin, Roosevelt brought up his ideas of a postwar international organization with its Four Policemen. Stalin asked Roosevelt whether this organization would be able to make any binding decisions. Roosevelt assured him it would only make recommendations, like for example for the peaceful settlements of disputes. However, it was expected that the nations involved let themselves be guided by these recommendations. By the end of the conference, Stalin agreed with Roosevelt’s ideas for the establishment of a worldwide international organization. Tehran was significant because of the military decisions that had been made and for the public display of goodwill and promises for future co-operation. The Soviet’s willingness to cooperate, both military and in a new international organization, were hopeful signs. In the final sentence of the communiqué at the end of the conference, Roosevelt wrote: “We came here with hope and determination. We leave here, friends in fact, in spirit, and in purpose.”

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69 Ibid., 154.
70 Ibid., 154-156.
71 Ibid., 163-164.
home, congressional leaders asked him to address Congress in person. FDR declined politely and said he preferred to report to the nation. On Christmas Eve, he talked on the radio about an organization that would ensure world peace, entirely in tune with the Christmas spirit.

The following months were filled with studies and research to come up with a framework and more defined idea of what the new peace organization should look like. Eventually, once the plans became more concrete, it was time for another round of negotiations. This time, however, there would not be a joint meeting of the Big Four. Instead, the discussions would take place in phases at Dumbarton Oaks. By keeping the conversations informal and exploratory, there was much more freedom, flexibility and room for discussion. In August 1944, the first delegates of the United States, United Kingdom and the Soviet Union assembled in Washington. Since the Soviets were not as yet at war with Japan and so did not regard themselves as an ally of the Republic of China, a second phase of the talks was arranged which the Chinese would attend and the Soviets would not. By this time, the State Department had worked out detailed proposals for the structure of the United Nations. There was to be a General Assembly; an Executive Council of eleven states, of which seven were to be annually elected with the four Great Powers as permanent members; an International Court of Justice; and a permanent Secretariat. Procedures were laid down for the peaceful settlement of disputes, with possible enforcement action, and for general economic cooperation. The American proposals formed the working documents for the conference, and the bulk of them were accepted with remarkable speed and amity. The Soviets made trouble over only two issues: their demand that all sixteen republics of the Soviet Union should enjoy full membership in the organization, and that the Great Powers should exercise an effective veto over questions affecting their own interests. These issues were later resolved at the Yalta summit.

One of the most striking things about the Dumbarton Oaks conversations was the lack of argument over the basic question of whether there should be an international organization of some kind to

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help keep the peace after the war.\textsuperscript{74} It is particularly remarkable when set against the background of the debates that accompanied the establishment of the League of Nations. The bitterness and divisiveness of those debates made them something to be avoided. Memories of what had happened in the past hung heavily over the proceedings at Dumbarton Oaks. In general, this approach, with detail for the sensitivities between the parties, illustrates the delicacy of the negotiations under Roosevelt. This was a very different approach to Wilson's. Roosevelt, mindful of the sensitivities of others, was willing to discuss and compromise when needed. At Dumbarton Oaks, the past was seen as a set of mistakes that must not be repeated. The public had to be prepared to support the establishment of an international organization, something Wilson had neglected to do until the very end of his struggle when he went on a desperate last-minute speaking tour. Furthermore, the United States and the Soviet Union had to be full and active members from the start. The Great Powers had to act together in the new international organization to resist aggression and this organization also needed more effective enforcement mechanisms than the League ever had. When the meetings at Dumbarton Oaks were over, the Great Powers circulated the proposals to the rest of the allied nations for comments and recommendations.\textsuperscript{75} However, they were careful to note that nothing was final and that these were only suggestions. As expected, the smaller powers did not oppose these suggestions. In reality, even if they opposed the propositions, it would have made little difference. They did not have the power to back up their claims. The Great Powers held all the high cards, but they also took most of the high-stake risks.

Next on the agenda were the conferences in Malta and Yalta.\textsuperscript{76} The Malta Conference was proposed by Churchill to recall what had been agreed during the Moscow Conference. It was attended by delegations of the Big Three and mostly concentrated on military questions. On February 4, 1945, Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt met again. It was already apparent that the war in Europe was coming to an end. This made the talks about the postwar situation even more pressing. At the Yalta Conference, Roosevelt was particularly interested in the establishment of the United Nations organization.\textsuperscript{77} In the end, an agreement was made to invite countries from all over the world to


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{76} Russell, \textit{A History of The United Nations Charter}, 515.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 542-544.
gather in the United States for the United Nations Conference on April 25. As host country, Roosevelt agreed that it was to be held in San Francisco. At the end of the Yalta conference, an official concluding communiqué was issued. In the final paragraphs, it hopefully stated that: “Only with continuing and growing cooperation and understanding among our three countries and among all the peace-loving nations can the highest aspiration of humanity be realized – a secure and lasting peace which will, in the words of the Atlantic Charter, ‘ afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want. Victory in this war and establishment of the proposed international organization will provide the greatest opportunity in all history to create in the years to come the essential conditions of such a peace.”

For all their differences, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin had one thing in common: the belief that postwar peace depended upon cooperation among their countries. When the conference was over, both the public and the press were optimistic. It seemed like they all accepted the general rules and supported the creation of the new peace organization. The Big Three were working together, the Soviets no longer objected to the presence of the Chinese and were finally prepared to talk with them. When discussing the United Nations organization, Stalin proved unexpectedly accommodating, perhaps because he attached little importance to it. He accepted the American voting formula for voting in the Security Council and also withdrew his earlier claims that each of the sixteen Soviet republics should have a seat in the General Assembly. Furthermore, a hand was also extended to the French Government, and they were offered a permanent seat on the Security Council. The recognition of France as the fifth big power was due partly to Churchill’s persistent pleading and partly to necessity, both of which prevailed over Stalin’s scorn for France and Roosevelt’s resentment of General Charles de Gaulle. Everything was going well. It was also at the Yalta Conference that an iconic photograph was taken of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin. Roosevelt had everything under control. He understood the parties he was dealing with and did everything he could to keep all sides happy and engaged. This celebratory feeling raised hopes that the wartime cooperation between the United States, Great Britain and especially the Soviet Union

78 United States Department of State, *The Yalta Conference* (1945), 975.
would carry over to the postwar period. It was considered to be a good omen for the new peace organization.

When Roosevelt reported back to Congress on the Yalta Conference, he talked about the imminent defeat of Germany and the “foundations that had been laid down for an international accord that would bring order and security after the chaos of war.” The ending of his address was framed in a typical American way and with hope for the future: “The Crimean Conference was a successful effort by the three leading nations to find a common ground for peace. It spells the end of the system of unilateral action and exclusive alliances and spheres of influence and balances of power and all the other expedients which have been tried for centuries – and have failed. We propose to substitute for all these a universal organization in which all peace-loving nations will finally have a chance to join.” This address to Congress would also be his last one. His final plea turned out to be a rally around the creation of the United Nations. He greatly emphasized his personal determination to avoid the mistakes of the League of Nations battle of 1919-1920. For Roosevelt, the Yalta accords signified the ending of unilateral actions, spheres of influence, balances of power and exclusive alliances. These practices had been tried for centuries and had always failed. Roosevelt believed in the possibilities of improving international cooperation through the very practice of it. This is what he stood for, what he embodied, and what he eventually also achieved.

The Creation of the United Nations: The San Francisco Conference

Franklin D. Roosevelt died on April 12th, 1945, one month before the end of WWII. The new president, Harry S. Truman, was unprepared for the enormous responsibilities of the presidency.\textsuperscript{84} Truman was appointed as Roosevelt’s vice-president out of political expediency and necessity. He was the least controversial candidate and, coming from the border state Missouri, appealed to the South. He was chosen because he could steal votes from the Republicans and keep Roosevelt in the White House. When FDR died, Truman became the leader of one of the biggest powers in the world, something nobody had expected. He had not been briefed about the military plans or relations with the Soviets, nor had he any experience in foreign affairs. In a way, Truman was unfortunate to be Roosevelt’s vice-president. Roosevelt had had twelve years of experience at the negotiating table, Truman zero. How could he compensate for the loss of FDR?

At first, Truman followed Roosevelt’s policies. One of his earliest decisions was to proceed as planned with the United Nations Conference. Roosevelt had already assembled the American delegation. It was a demonstration of one of the lessons he had learned from Wilson’s mistakes. Roosevelt’s delegation was led by a Democrat, but the rest of it was bipartisan. Two of its most prominent members were Senator Tom Connally, a Texan Democrat who was chairman of the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee, and Arthur H. Vandenberg, a Michigan Republican who had switched from being an isolationist to supporter of American participation in the United Nations during the war.

By the time of the San Francisco Conference, the world was different from what it had been when the United Nations idea was conceived in 1941.\textsuperscript{85} All the discussions and debates between the big powers at San Francisco were a reflection of their spheres-of-influence mentality. The United States wanted to preserve its strong ties with the Latin American states, the United Kingdom was safeguarding its influence over the members of the British Commonwealth, and the Soviets were doing everything they could to protect all their republics. Another example of growing estrangement between the Soviet Union and the United States was the question of the presidency of the conference. The US, with the support of the UK and China, took it for granted that as the

\textsuperscript{84} Jones, The Limits of Liberty, 512-515.

\textsuperscript{85} Zi, Big Power Assurance of Peace Versus the Principle of Equality among All Nations, 58-59.
host country, it should chair the conference. The Soviets, however, insisted on a system of four rotating chairmen. Eventually, the dispute was settled, but it was one of the signs of the changing environment.

Back in 1918-1919, one of Wilson’s biggest mistakes was presenting his peace plan when the fighting was already over. When the bullets are still flying and the bombs are being dropped, it is easier to come to an agreement. However, Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau were no longer under threat when Wilson met them at the Paris Peace Conference. This strengthened their negotiation position. The war was already over and the hard power of the United States was no longer needed to end the conflict. This was one of the reasons for the failure of the League of Nations. FDR did not make this mistake. He started talking to the Allies long before American troops set foot on the European continent. Churchill and Stalin needed the United States to help bring an end to the war. Roosevelt found himself in a strong position and was still in control when he died. The transfer of the presidential power from Roosevelt to Truman was crucial. FDR had had a lifetime to reflect on Wilson’s visions about peace and had an in-depth understanding of his ideas. Roosevelt based his own structure and vision on the same principles that Wilson had used to form his ideas. This knowledge, together with Roosevelt’s political skill, made him a great politician, president and negotiator. Unfortunately, he passed away just before the final phase of all his hard work. Who knows what might or might not have happened if Roosevelt was still alive at the time of the San Francisco Conference?

The cooperation between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin created a bond between the three men. Accepting the need for a postwar peace structure, they learned to live with each other’s differences and made compromises when needed. This understanding was disrupted when Truman replaced FDR. Everybody was still committed to implement the postwar peace plan, but the context changed. The San Francisco Conference was held two months after the fighting had stopped in Europe. During this time, the Truman Administration became more and more concerned with the growing power and influence of the Soviet Union. Action had to be undertaken to counter the rise of the Soviets, and destroyed Europe was seen as the key to success. The United States had the Latin American countries on its side, the Soviet Union had its republics. Whoever gained control over Western Europe, would also obtain a substantial amount of power within the new international
structure. The rise of communism posed a threat and had to be brought to a halt. The construction of a series of new international organizations, alongside the United Nations, financial aid by means of the Marshall Plan and dropping the atomic bombs on Japan were all attempts of the United States to contain communism, deter the Soviets and reinforce the European-American alliance.

During the transition of power from Roosevelt to Truman, it seems like the foundation of FDR’s ideas were lost in translation. Roosevelt’s vision and plan for a new and peaceful international structure were based on idealistic principles. Consideration, understanding, debate and compromises were key to the functioning of this new structure. Truman’s political skills were not as developed as FDR’s, and together with his inexperience in international politics, he was not able to fully comprehend what FDR was trying to achieve, nor how he wanted to construct the new international organization. Adding to this was the growth of communism. When Truman and his administration finally negotiated the establishment of the United Nations at the San Francisco Conference, their principles were more realistic than idealistic. Ultimately, it was the interpretation of the Truman Administration of Roosevelt’s vision that was presented and defended at the San Francisco Conference. This interpretation became the core structure of the new international architecture. The question is, however, would Franklin Roosevelt have been happy with Truman’s interpretation of his vision? After all, not long after WOI, there was a new stand-off between the major world powers. There was no direct contact between the military forces of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but it did impair the working of the new international system. This was exactly what Roosevelt had tried to avoid, and what Truman failed to understand.

Despite the rising tensions and the discrepancy between FDR’s vision and Truman’s interpretation of the United Nations, the San Francisco Conference successfully ended with the signing of the Charter of the United Nations in June 1945. On one occasion, the spirit of FDR managed to influence a decision. At San Francisco, the time had come to name the new peace organization. Americans had always thought it would be titled the United Nations. This was also the name that FDR preferred. But at the conference, it became clear that there was no real consensus. Eventually, after an emotional plea of Dean Gildersleeve, it was decided that the new organization would bear the name the United Nations in honor of Roosevelt. The final document was a compromise of

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different national views and interests. The main driving force behind it had been the United States, but it had not dictated the content. All the big players had been involved in the process and consequently were entrusted with major responsibility. Fundamental to the United States was that it did not retreat to isolationism once the war had been fought. The same thing was expected of the Soviet Union. There was also the conviction that nobody was ready for any kind of world government. The postwar world had to be organized by the newly formed United Nations organization. Similar in structure to its predecessor, the United Nations would be better prepared to enforce peace because of the commitment of the major powers. The final hurdle to overcome was the Senate. Contrary to Wilson’s covenant, the charter was promptly ratified by a margin of 89 to 2. The easy ratification was in large part due to Roosevelt’s decision to dispatch influential Republicans to the San Francisco Conference as members of the US delegation. From now on, the United States abandoned its policy of isolationism and assumed the responsibilities of world leadership, something which had been rejected by the earlier generation. Embracing the role of world power, the United States also demonstrated its faith in the capacity of the United Nations to keep the peace.

The struggle for the creation of the United Nations came to an end on October 24, 1945. This was the day the charter entered into force. Truman called it a great wonder. In adopting the United Nations Participation Act, the United States crossed the final threshold and entered the new international organization. It was the first time it joined an organization, but the second one it had created virtually alone. The coming years would judge whether the new organization was a success or failure, but at least, the first steps had been taken. The ending of Ruth Russell’s book, A History of the United Nations Charter, summarizes the creation of the United Nations in one neat sentence: “Considering the international situation in which the Charter finally became a legal reality, it is perhaps an even greater wonder that it has served as well as it has the purposes for which it was devised.”

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88 Jones, The Limits of Liberty, 515.
89 Schlesinger, Act of Creation, 263.
91 Schlesinger, Act of Creation, 279.
Conclusion

Achieving far reaching and durable change in the international system is a true endeavor. Composed of an immense variety of interest and views, it is even a small miracle to think that such a system continues to exist. This becomes even more important when you accept that war, not peace, is the default position of our international society. How can an international community continue to function when war is always present in one way or another? This question was on the minds of the world powers after having fought two world wars. They needed to come up with a solution to keep the world functioning under the constant threat of conflict.

Tangible changes can only be made when an opportunity presents itself. The First World War was the first opportunity of its kind to make adjustments to the international system. Woodrow Wilson recognized this opportunity and tried to seize it. He came up with a highly idealized vision of world peace, based on the concepts of self-determination and collective security. Unfortunately, the world was not ready for the transformation he envisioned. The League of Nations was a unique and unprecedented experiment. Like any new experiment, it was a process of trial and error. There was no model for the newly envisioned international structure. The League of Nations explored the possibilities of what could be achieved, but also clearly indicated the boundaries and limitations.

Wilson’s attempt to prevent future global conflict had failed because of three reasons. Firstly, his ideas were ahead of his time. A less bold and visionary leader would probably not have attempted to push so hard for his ideals. Without the strong conviction of Wilson, the League fight would have probably ended in a compromise. His unwillingness to do so prevented a halfway solution between accepting and rejecting membership. Secondly, the Americans were not ready after World War One to fully commit to collective security. Thirdly, World War Two was necessary to make people realize just how important Wilson’s ideas were. They had to slowly sink in before society recognized the importance of a functioning international political system. Combined, these three reasons prove that the fight for the League of Nations was not in vain, nor that it was a complete failure. History has shown us that Wilson’s opponents were wrong and that for all his flaws and missteps, Wilson was right. World War Two presented a new opportunity to rebuild the international system.
Roosevelt picked up the legacy that Wilson left behind and was essential to the establishment of the United Nations. At the same time, Wilson’s vision and subsequent Fourteen Points were crucial for the formation of Roosevelt’s postwar policy. It is clear that Roosevelt based his ideas on Wilson’s ideas. Perhaps the ultimate argument that these two presidents were the true architects of the United Nations can be found in the documents that led to its creation. The League of Nations was founded on the principles of Wilson’s Fourteen Points. The essence of these principles were revived by Roosevelt in his Atlantic Charter. Both documents expressed idealistic objectives for a postwar world, but also contained provisions that would greatly benefit the American economy: self-determination, freedom of the seas and equal market access.

Both these documents were heavily influenced by their makers. It was Woodrow Wilson who made the final adjustments and decided on the final form of the Fourteen Points. Similarly, it was largely thanks to Roosevelt that the Atlantic Charter became reality. The charter, however, was written in more general terms than the Fourteen Points, and thus allowed more flexibility. These two documents in term led to the creation of the League of Nations and the United Nations. Wilson’s League fight cannot be fully separated from Roosevelt’s effort to establish the United Nations. Wilson’s vision, conduct and mistakes molded Roosevelt’s approach. Therefore, I conclude that both men were vital to the creation of the United Nations. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt were the true architects. Wilson was the one who launched the idea but time and space did not favor him. Roosevelt picked up Wilson’s vision and was lucky to find himself at the right place, at the right time and used the right approach. Wilson built the foundations for a new international structure, but his construction that follow proved to be faulty. When the League of Nations collapsed, Roosevelt salvaged Wilson’s foundations and constructed his own international organization on top. It is true, though, that at the end, Truman had the final responsibility of finishing the construction of the United Nations. Interpreting FDR’s vision and ideas as he did, he nonetheless succeeded in establishing the United Nations. Roosevelt might have taken a different approach, had he still been alive. However, his Atlantic Charter, based on Wilson’s vision, continued to be at the center of the negotiations. Today, the essence of these ideas are still being upheld.
Seventy years after its establishment, the influence of the United Nations on our international political system is clear. There was the extraordinary decolonization of the world. This trend was accompanied by an unprecedented spread of democracy and mixed economies around the globe. Furthermore, apart from a few incidents, there have been almost no attempts at annexation by one state or another during the UN’s existence. The United Nations has permanently changed the concept of global relations and continues to provide a forum for states to talk to each other, and has helped to assist the spread of international law through ratification of norms of behavior by all nations. Besides these positive influences, the limitations of the United Nations has also become clear over the last seven decades. Its authority is clearly limited by its total dependence on members for budgets and assignments. If the UN decides to involve itself in a crisis, it can only do as much as the participating states are willing to offer. It stood on the sidelines during one of the greatest crises in the postwar era, the slaughter of 800,000 people in Rwanda in 1994, because of one veto: that of the United States. At some point, the United Nations will have to deal with these sensitive issues. How can it advocated the ideal of equality among all nations when in reality, there is a difference in influence and responsibility between large and small nations in world affairs? Does the Security Council need a new group of big powers to reflect the new reality? Will the reassertion of nationalism and the conflicting trends of globalization impact the functioning of the United Nations? These are the difficult questions confronting all United Nations members today. Reflecting on where and how it all began might be a good place to start looking for an answer.

Wilson and Roosevelt were essential to the creation of the United Nations and dedicated their lives to explaining and realizing their vision. They did everything they could to secure a safer world for the generations to come. Their dedication cannot be forgotten and the current world leaders have to do everything within their power to continue building on their legacy. As long as humans rule the world, war will always be a part of it. Nobody will ever be able to change this. It is a part of the human condition. A Kantian peace is not realistic. The only thing that can be done is to regulate conflict and not let it derail the system. That is why the United Nations is vital. It might not be able to prevent conflicts, but it does carry out its task of keeping the international dialogue alive. Hopefully, it will continue to function like this for the years to come.

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93 Schlesinger, Act of Creation, 286-287.
94 Zi, Big Power Assurance of Peace Versus the Principle of Equality among All Nations, 59-60.
Bibliography


