

United Nations Oral History Project

**Alger Hiss
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YUN INTERVIEW
ALGER HISS
HISS RESIDENCE, NEW YORK CITY
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INTERVIEWER SUTTERLIN

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The Founding of the United Nations

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YUN TAPE # 1
Alger Hiss Interview
Hiss Residence, New York City
February 13 and October 11, 1990
INTERVIEWER: JAMES S. SUTTERLIN

JSS Mr. Hiss, if I could ask you first of all just for the record of this tape to state what position you did hold in the State Department relative to the establishment of the United Nations.

Hiss Before I joined the office called the Office of Special Political Affairs I was working as assistant to Dr. Hornbeck who was advisor for far eastern political matters, and in that position I sat frequently for him on a post-war round table group and that of course included plans not only for peace treaties but the UN and Pasvolsky was a member of that, too. I was asked not too long before the Dumbarton Oaks conversations to move from that post to the Office of Special Political Affairs.

It seems to me worth mentioning that that vague title was because of the US fear of domestic criticism in participating in anything like the League of Nations. I assume you are aware of this. That's why it was called the Office of Special Political Affairs. The work that had been done up until then by a group largely of academics including Ralph Bunche and Grayson Kirk and a

number of other people had largely been of a research nature. A man named Wilson who was a former ambassador was the first head of the Office of Special Political Affairs and I was brought in as assistant, as someone who'd served in the Department for some time, who knew the works, and had been on this other group that was also planning for the future.

What was done by that research group up until at least the Dumbarton Oaks talks makes it proper to say that the United States really was the architect of the UN. That phrase has been prated about. But it's accurate -- the Russians had too many distractions, the British didn't have the manpower, and we did -- we had an extraordinary group of academic talent to work on all manner of things to indicate how much dedication was involved: when Ralph Bunche was invited to join, it was unusual at that time to have any black officer in a position of importance. Cordell Hull was then Secretary of State and was as interested in the UN as any, although the real father of the UN -- almost an obsession -- was Franklin D. Roosevelt. When those in charge of gathering staff, the research staff, wanted Ralph Bunche particularly because of his knowledge of Africa, Hull said OK (remember he was from Tennessee). He called Tom Connally, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and a Senator from Texas first to clear with

him and said "Tom, I want to ask you -- I'm not really asking you, I'm informing you before I inform others -- we want to employ for the future colonial problems of this international organization the best qualified man, who happens to be a Negro. Yes, Tom, he is the best qualified. But that was the kind of care with which all bases were covered.

Hull's interest was manifest from the very beginning. Pasvolsky had come from the Brookings Institution as special assistant to Hull. He wrote a number of his speeches and prepared a good many papers. He was the first head of the research group so that when the Office of Special Political Affairs was formed the staff was transferred over there, but Pasvolsky remained a special assistant taking a great interest in it. He and I worked closely together, harmoniously, I admired him a great deal.

At Dumbarton Oaks, where as you know, we, the British and the Russians met on the subject for the first time the Chinese did not participate at that time because the Russians were neutral in the war in the Far East. We repeated the performance after the Russians withdrew with the Chinese negotiating team. It was largely pro forma, we went over much the same ground. The Chinese were not major participants in the development of the draft that we got. At Dumbarton Oaks we prepared a real outline of

the Charter. We did not have time nor did we have full agreement among the powers to settle all the issues. Trusteeship was not taken up at all. The Economic and Social Council was only barely sketched. We did not settle the voting of the Security Council -- the issue of the veto. But most of the rest was pretty well hammered out in draft form. It was that draft which we worked further on at Yalta.

JSS I'd like to go just back a minute because you mentioned the concern with the League of Nations and I was wondering, among the academicians and the others in the State Department, how great was the concern about the League of Nations, how much was the League of Nations' history taken into account in trying to develop the outline of the new organization?

Hiss The League was regarded as definitely our forerunner. There was no hostility toward it. There was a feeling that it had to be improved on, that it had failed, and that we could learn from its failure. It was not universal enough, it was too Euro-centered, and it didn't seem to us to have the necessary powers that an international organization should have. And also we knew we would in a literal sense succeed the League and take over its properties and its functions. But the UN in no sense was hostile. The League was considered a brave experiment and there was much we could learn from its few

successes and its failures.

JSS I suppose particularly the question of enforcement must have been a major question.

Hiss That's true, and that's why we gave greater powers to the Security Council and even set up a military staff Committee to carry out military enforcement if that became necessary.

JSS Was the idea already in the State Department for the Military Staff Committee?

Hiss Oh yes.

JSS Let me ask another question. You mentioned that Franklin D. Roosevelt was really the guiding spirit. How direct was his influence in the deliberations in the State Department?

Hiss Reports were constantly made to him, including oral reports by Hull to bring him up to date. I was too new and too junior to attend meetings in the White House, but naturally I knew about them. The President's major interest was constantly reported back to us, his questions, his approval of this, his questioning of that. It suited him to a T on the whole to be working together on this because, as you know, Roosevelt and Hull had both been strong proponents of the League before. Roosevelt had been a strong supporter while he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

JSS It has been said that President Roosevelt did not give

Secretary Hull very much leeway in foreign affairs but that in the case of the United Nations Hull had a great deal of authority. Was that your experience?

Hiss I'm not too sure about the negative aspect of that. It's true that there was rivalry and some tension between Sumner Welles and Cordell Hull, and Hull was -- timid is the wrong word -- he was a careful, thorough man. He did not jump to conclusions. Welles was much more the man of action, ready for quick decision. That was one thing. The other was the fact that Welles had a personal youthful friendship with the President and could slip across to the White House. As one old Grotonian to another, Hull was formal and operated on a different basis. But as far as the UN was concerned, there was no question that Hull had wide scope, except that he reported regularly and, I'm sure willingly, to the President.

JSS Now the President occasionally had ideas that were never carried out -- for example, that the Security Council should be located on islands?

Hiss In fact he proposed that the whole UN should be in Hawaii. And you remember that Churchill thought it ought to be in Morocco. They had to be talked out of that.

JSS I was going to say -- these ideas were not taken very seriously at the State Department?

Hiss Only to the extent that we knew we had to persuade the

President that this was not the way to have a viable world organization.

JSS At that time, was there already any thought given as to where the UN would be located?

Hiss We were quite sure from the beginning that that was an issue of major concern, that it could not be in Europe because of the devastation of the war, so that we pretty much felt it would be in the United States. I would say that was less than expressed. I don't remember any memorandum being written at the time. But in our general conversation, because of the League's failures, to situate the new United Nations in Geneva did not seem wise. So negative decisions were arrived at pretty early.

JSS As far as the working group that was established to develop the plans for the UN, was this considered a major responsibility in the State Department at that time? I ask the question because in later years the Department for International Organization, has sometimes seemed to be rather out of the mainstream. But in these years, was this in the mainstream of postwar planning?

Hiss I think a fair answer is, no. Because in the State Department the action operations, as you as a former Foreign Service officer know, were the predominant ones. Decisions had to be made; but because of Secretary Hull's interest and the President's interest and Pasvolsky's

dynamic influence and influential status, the work went forward with real diligence. No question about that.

JSS And this is an instance where the academic community was brought in and could be utilized with the advantage of past history?

Hiss That's right.

JSS I'd like to go on now to Dumbarton Oaks, if we may. You were there as the Secretary of the US delegation.

Hiss I also served as Secretary of the Conference in general. My minutes were approved as the official minutes. That was not true at Yalta. There each delegation kept its own minutes.

JSS But at Dumbarton Oaks you kept the minutes.

Hiss My minutes were the official minutes.

JSS Could you give your impressions of the three delegations?

Hiss Stettinius headed the American delegation, Alexander Cadogan the British delegation and Gromyko (he was the ambassador to Washington at the time) headed the Soviet delegation. I think it was largely our show, and we had prepared the material to be submitted. The British showed a great deal of interest. Here let me mention their interest in trusteeship because of their colonial possessions. We had the impression that Churchill's interest in the UN as a whole was however active. Churchill knew very little about this. We had no reason to know exactly what Stalin's interest was although when

he came to Yalta it was clear that all three of the chief participants cared a great deal about the details.

At Dumbarton Oaks there was no agreement on just what the membership of the organization should be. At one point Gromyko said, under instruction, that his government wanted all 16 Soviet republics in it, and Roosevelt said "Tell him the whole thing is off if they insist on that. That's impossible." So that was clear, this was an impasse, although we didn't take this position as more than a bargaining position. But there was something that had to be fought out, voting in the SC. The initial attitude of Churchill, we understood to our surprise, was against the veto. We insisted on the veto and so did the Russians. Now all during this period (from Dumbarton Oaks on, I don't think before Dumbarton Oaks) contact was maintained with Vandenberg and Tom Connally. Also with Sol Bloom and Representatives Eaton, the Democratic and Republican heads in the House. This was something that Roosevelt laid great emphasis on. He kept reminding the people that conferred with him that the League had failed because Congress had not been involved, and that this was bipartisan, and he wanted to be absolutely sure that no such failure would occur again.

We knew from our talks with Vandenberg, Connally, Bloom and Eaton that the US would insist on the veto

partly because the Military Staff were committed that we were setting up an organization that would have military power. They said that Congress would never agree, and they wouldn't agree, I and don't think Roosevelt would have wanted to propose that an international organization could call up American troops without our going through the full constitutional procedures that a declaration of war requires. We knew from the beginning that the Russians also wouldn't.

Now our surprise was that Churchill, who we would have thought a conservative, would have taken the same view, for some reason he didn't. I think it's because he didn't fully understand the issue. We were told -- I guess in December or perhaps just before we went, it must have been December -- that Marshal Smuts had persuaded Churchill to accept and to insist upon, to be in favor of the veto for the Great Powers. Of course we had decided early on that the structure of the UN would depend on the Great Powers. It was Roosevelt who insisted on China being included.

JSS Now at that point Mr. Gromyko was still quite a young man. I have read that Secretary Hull was very impressed with his performance and even called him in to congratulate him on what an excellent job he had done representing his country. Was that the impression throughout the conference?

Hiss Yes. He was easy, Gromyko was always slightly stiff in manner. But this we took to be his personality. He was very cooperative. He understood clearly what our position was and, for example, on the 16-membership proposal we felt sure he would argue against it in Moscow -- that he would be sympathetic with the realities of the situation. Yes, I think that Stettinius and Cadogan (but particularly Stettinius) found Gromyko quite compatible to work with, that's true.

JSS Now I'd like to go back if I could just a minute to the State Department. Human Rights became a rather important part of the Charter and has since been a very important part of the UN's history. Was that foreseen in the studies in the State Department?

Hiss I can't say that in my knowledge it was. No.

JSS And what about self-determination? Was that an issue in the State Department?

JSS Well of course we had the big issue of regional agreements. That was in one sense consistent with the Monroe Doctrine and our attitude towards Latin America so that self-determination in that sense was important. But it was not until Yalta when we proposed the declaration for liberated Europe -- and that was proposed independently of the UN proposals -- so that the idea of self-determination was a political demand in the peace proposals but it was not a major part of the UN planning

except the insistence on regional organizations.

JSS And the regional organization insistence was partly because of the US interest in Latin America.

Hiss Exclusively.

JSS I assume that the British when self-determination became a more prominent issue, were rather suspicious of it because of the colonies?

Hiss Their suspicion was primarily of Trusteeship, and that came up at Yalta. Now in my book I go into the trusteeship issue at Yalta, do you remember, and there's no reason I should repeat myself, what you've got in the book...

JSS I just want to confirm though that on the US side there was a reluctance to talk about specific trusteeship geographic areas. They were only prepared to talk about the principle because of reluctance on the part of the US military to discuss particular geographic areas. Is that correct in your recollection?

Hiss In the sense that we didn't discuss specific areas, that's correct. But I didn't think it was a reluctance, I thought it was because it was hardly necessary until we knew what was to be detached because, remember, the three elements in trusteeship were the former mandates. This was clear, so we certainly discussed areas in that sense. The former mandates were to be transferred to trusteeship where the mandates didn't become independent before that,

and some of them did. Territories to be detached from the Axis powers so that obviously included all the Pacific areas that we later put under special trusteeship. And anything detached from German or Italian African possessions. So I'm not aware of any reluctance to discuss because it was implied what the areas would be. The third category was any territory which Member States might voluntarily wish to transfer to trusteeship. So I'm not aware of any reluctance for security reasons.

JSS There's a question I'd like to ask you about Yalta. As you indicated one thing that was not agreed at Dumbarton Oaks was the question of voting and by the time you got to Yalta there was a British-American compromise proposal which the Russians eventually agreed to but my question is, the three heads of delegation, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, was it your impression they really understood the distinction between a veto on certain cases and non-applicability of the veto in others?

Hiss Oh, very definitely. And you see, demonstration of that came up in San Francisco because we had insisted that no power could veto discussion or presentation of a case Molotov, as I mentioned in my book, backtracked from what had been agreed at Yalta which might indicate he didn't understand. But Stalin immediately countermanded Molotov when Hopkins flew over to take care of that one. I think

it's more that Molotov was so angered by the decision to admit Argentina, and that was contrary to the Yalta agreement, he just wanted to refuse to agree to something -- it was sort of tit for tat. But when Hopkins stated the issue to Stalin, he understood it immediately and said "of course."

JSS Stalin agreed to the two things, didn't he, with Hopkins, that were in dispute --

Hiss Which was the other?

JSS The other was Argentina.

Hiss That I didn't know.

JSS I believe so, from the records I read. But the US had not favored Argentina's entrance, it was the Latin American countries.

Hiss As I say in my book, it was a ploy that Nelson Rockefeller pulled off and the Latin American countries obviously did want it. I don't think it was just that Nelson wanted it personally, but to solidify his standing in Latin America because of the Rockefeller interests in Latin America. I think there's no doubt he was serving personal interests. He, without informing the American delegation, including as far as I know, any member of the American delegation or the Secretary. I didn't know -- Stettinius didn't, certainly Vandenberg and Connally didn't -- and suddenly a vote was called, it had all been arranged behind the scenes.

JSS Incredible. Although it's happened since then, in other cases. Mr. Hiss I'd like to move on to San Francisco, if we could.

Hiss How about Yalta?

JSS Is there another point you want to make in regard to Yalta?

Hiss Are you interested in how the Russians got the three votes in Yalta?

JSS I am interested, yes indeed.

Hiss I don't know how often it's been written up, it's in my book.

JSS It's not in detail in your book, why don't you go ahead and speak to that

Hiss I have said that at Dumbarton Oaks the Russians suggested that they should have 16 votes. By the time we got to Yalta, as we had anticipated, Gromyko had pushed on that, and they were asking for four: Lithuania, and the three that finally did get in. They only got Byelorussia and the Ukraine...

JSS Plus the Soviet Union...

Hiss Anyway soon they were down to three. Lithuania is of interest now because of her interest in independence. It shows that Stalin was well aware of pressures at the time. It had been narrowed to those three, and the US position was absolutely negative. They were constituent parts of the Soviet Union and not sovereign states. But

each time that the point was brought up and our objections made and the British went along with us, the Russians would say ironically, "And what about India?" And it was clear that the British felt that India had to be admitted to membership whatever the dubiety of its sovereign status. It was institutionally essential. At a morning meeting -- as you know, the Foreign Ministers met in the mornings and the Heads of Government met in the afternoons -- I think at the British dacha, the same rigamorole had been gone through.

Since I was responsible for the accuracy of the minutes -- each delegation wrote up the minutes of the Foreign Minister, held in its quarters -- we did it at Livadia. In this case, the writing was the British responsibility. It was my duty to read the minutes as soon as they were completed, and to my surprise I saw that the minutes said that agreement had been reached, that votes would be given to White Russia and the Ukraine. So I rushed up to Eden and said, "Mr. Eden, it's a mistake, we didn't agree." And he, quite testily -- which wasn't his usual manner -- said "You don't know what's happened, speak to Ed." I went to Stettinius and he threw up his hands and said that after the meeting on which there was substantial agreement on many matters, he had reported to Roosevelt as he usually did and had started by saying, "Mr. President, it was a marvelous

meeting. We reached general agreement."

At that moment Bohlen brought Stalin in for a personal call on Roosevelt. Not a negotiating call, really just a courtesy call. Roosevelt in his expansive way, said "Marshal Stalin, I have just been getting a report from my Secretary of State on the morning meeting and he told me there was agreement on everything." Stettinius started to grab at Roosevelt's sleeve, but Stalin came back quickly "and the two republics too?" And Roosevelt said, "Yes." So the fat was in the fire. I think we would have agreed eventually. What difference did it make in the Assembly? It was clear the Russians wanted something to make up for the fact that we were sure that the 21 Latin American States and Canada would usually vote with us and the British and the Commonwealth with them. It was a matter of pride. But this in fact is the way it happened and it had something to do with the bad press which quite soon the UN began to get.

Ed Flynn, as you know, was on the American delegation. He participated in none of the meetings. He and Mrs. Flynn were upstairs in a suite upstairs in the Livadia Palace and were quite bored. Occasionally one of us would be sent up there to report to him on what was happening but that was just a courtesy. Flynn immediately got into the act when he heard about the Soviet votes. Byrnes, who had no real function at Yalta,

had just been brought along because he was an important political figure. He also got the wind up, and the two of them said to Roosevelt "this can interfere with the approval of the Charter by the Senate." Flynn in particular said (quite inaccurately) "This is why the League didn't get through because the British were given five votes."

This was an Irish point of view perhaps, but in any event, Roosevelt didn't like dissension and did his best to somehow minimize what they thought was a threat. At one point I think he suggested, or said words to the effect, "Oh," he said, "let us tell them it was a mistake." Bohlen said, "Oh no, this is much too serious. This will upset everything; we have told them we will do it." Then I think Roosevelt said jocularly, "we'll give them a battleship." He did at one point ask if the US could have votes for Hawaii and Alaska, and Stalin of course said "Sure" which was impossible under our constitution. But it was softened down so that it was not put in the communique, and the oral agreement was that the Russians would bring their two delegations to San Francisco, propose their admission, and we would agree. But it would not be announced in advance. We were hardly back in Washington before that leaked out and I have always thought Byrnes was the leaker just to insure his position with the press. This caused a great

uproar -- how many other secret agreements had been reached? Americans had been brought up (because of the League) to fear secret agreements anyway. Vandenberg accepted the true explanation immediately -- he was magnificent, and of course the idea that Alaska and Hawaii could be members was nonsense.

JSS But you think this did originate some of the impressions that there were secret agreements at Yalta?

Hiss Definitely.

JSS Mr. Hiss, are there other things about Yalta that you think might be worth mentioning.....

Hiss I do think it's important to state, particularly at this time of the thawing of the cold war that, as I've said in my book, the spirit of Yalta was extraordinarily congenial, and I tried to spell out why I thought so. Partly it was military necessity. But partly it was genuine agreement on the principles of the UN. I believed that it was possible, despite the real policy differences between the US and the British on the one side and the Russians on the other, to have a cooperative arrangement. Stalin and Churchill were continually referring to that, and that was not just rhetoric. Everything I have learned in the last few years confirms that it wasn't until the atom bomb gave Truman and Byrnes a feeling of invincibility (and Truman was always quite strongly anti-Soviet) that the cold war set in. You are

aware of the fact that on June 22, the day after the German invasion of Russia, the New York Times carried a front-page article quoting Truman as saying that we should help whichever side was losing. Were you aware of that?

JSS No.

Hiss A front-page article. Obviously it didn't take any Russian espionage to discover where Truman stood. He was then a Senator. And then, as President, had the terrible set-to with Molotov...

JSS But it was your impression at Yalta that the three leaders really did believe that this new organization could contribute to peace among them and....

Hiss And that they could get along together. I think the atom bomb, among other things it did in the world, destroyed that possibility. We are only belatedly coming back to such a potential.

JSS I'd like to move on now to San Francisco if we can.

Hiss Stettinius used to refer to himself and Gromyko and Cadogan as the spirit of Dumbarton Oaks. That shows that the cooperative spirit that I'm speaking of began well before Yalta, the summer before. So there was a reason for that feeling. A time sequence of some duration which justified that feeling.

JSS I wanted to get to San Francisco, but before I do that I want to ask you one question. You had mentioned

earlier Field Marshal Smuts as having perhaps had some influence on Churchill. Smuts was in San Francisco and he seems to have had considerable influence. Can you give me any of the background, why was Field Marshal Smuts so involved in the new international organization? What was his particular interest?

Hiss I assumed at the time that everyone was. But trying to isolate his particular interest, his age was such that he must have believed in the League, and like Roosevelt, must have believed it might succeed, and like Roosevelt he must have thought of the UN as a successor to the League. He must have thought that what had not worked out in the League could succeed with the new organization. This is hypothesis.

JSS I have heard it said that he brought with him a draft of the Charter and that this draft was an important element in the final form that the Charter took.

Hiss I'm not familiar with that.

JSS I think you would have been as Secretary General...

Hiss I think I would be bound to have known of it. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the draft that had been agreed upon at Yalta hadn't been sent to him by the British earlier because of their close relations with him. But the invitation to San Francisco also included a draft of the Charter and that was...

JSS That was the basis, and that stemmed from the State

Department...

Hiss Well, it was worked on at Dumbarton Oaks, and at Yalta, too. Now trusteeship was agreed to at Yalta and you're aware again how Churchill had first opposed it because his staff had never cleared trusteeship with him which shows that he was too busy with other matters to pay the kind of attention to the UN proposal that Stettinius, and before him, Hull had. Are you interested in having me repeat the trusteeship...

JSS Let's have the trusteeship story again, yes.

Hiss When at one of the plenary meetings Stettinius, at Roosevelt's suggestion, read out our proposal for a trusteeship council, Churchill literally blew up and made a speech very much like his famous speech about how he had not been elected the King's first minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. The British were often suspicious of us (all the Great Powers are suspicious of other Great Powers) in spite of our close coordination of policy with them. As you know they met at Malta before we went on to Yalta, which was pretty evident collaboration between us and the Russians knew it was usually two against one. But here he simply exploded, and Roosevelt who presided over all the plenary meetings had to call a recess and Churchill was just fuming.

At that point Harry Hopkins said to me, "Alger,

can't we forget about trusteeship: the whole conference is being jeopardized." Since the UN was my responsibility -- that's why he consulted me -- I said "this is an essential part of the total, and we can't, and I don't think the Prime Minister really understands it." I knew that we had asked Eden at Malta if he had cleared it with him, that his approval was important, and Eden said, no they hadn't had time to. They hadn't yet.

At that point Byrnes came up to me -- the only time Byrnes functioned effectively -- and said "Will you write down in plain language what the trusteeship stands for, instead of the general narrative account that Stettinius had been giving?" So I wrote down that the territories in trusteeship shall be territories mandated under the League, territories detached from the Axis powers and such other territories as any member may wish to place in trusteeship. I wrote it in longhand on a piece of foolscap. I then went with Byrnes up to Churchill who was sitting at the table, still fuming. Byrnes then asked him to read it. Churchill said "What's this got to do with it?" Byrnes said "that's what we're talking about." Churchill then read what I had written and said, "Why, that is all right." And so the crisis was passed. We then agreed on that text and as I've said many times, I might have been able to improve on it if I had had time but that language I think was never changed and went into

the final Charter. Now at San Francisco -- one thing that I do want to emphasize -- has anyone that you've interviewed so far talked of the collaboration between Sobolev and Pasvolsky?

JSS No.

Hiss This to me is one of the fascinating aspects of the San Francisco story. Sobolev was an able member of the Soviet delegation, his English was very good, and he had served in their courts. Pasvolsky was a White Russian who retained his fluency in Russian. Somehow those two -- you would think there would have been such suspicion between them that would be difficult for them to work together -- established a relationship of trust and they were the draftsmen of the Charter in San Francisco. Now, the outline had been written before; I'm talking about the specific language which is a very important part of any treaty, and I think it was Pasvolsky and Sobolev who were really responsible for the form the Charter took.

JSS On that subject let me ask you another question. Virginia Gildersleeve, a member of the US delegation, has claimed that she was responsible for the preamble to the Charter, that she wrote it one night because she wasn't happy with the way the Charter sounded. Was that your impression, were you aware of that at the conference?

Hiss No, no. I thought that Archie MacLeish was responsible for it.

JSS Was he there?

Hiss Yes, he was there.

JSS That's an interesting historical question that will remain open, I guess. I wanted to go on now to your position as Secretary General of the Conference, and just looking back, what were the main problems you had to deal with in organizing the conference?

Hiss It was an enormous project, as you are aware, and this little booklet which we printed at San Francisco indicates -- have you seen this particular one?

JSS No, no I have not.

Hiss We knew that we would have to have interpreters and translators, a printing establishment. The Government Printing Office moved staff out there. We picked up type wherever we could. Because San Francisco had a big Chinatown we were able to get Chinese characters for the Chinese texts that we had to print. We had great difficulty getting interpreters, particularly simultaneous, I don't mean simultaneous, I mean consecutive interpreters who were good enough to work without interrupting a speech for a long time.

There's a cute story about that. Because of the problem, we had decided as the host government that English would be the working language. This was contrary to all prior diplomatic conferences where French was always at least an equal official language. But we had

just not been able to get enough interpreters. At the first meeting, of course, we had to organize -- as the booklet shows -- how the conference would function. Different parts of the draft Charter were assigned to different commissions and committees, each of which would be working on a select part.

Hiss

Now we had to have food and drinks, living space. We had great cooperation from the city of San Francisco and Mayor Lapham, whose son now edits Harper's Magazine and who might remember (if you want to talk to him) what it was like being in San Francisco as a small boy at the time. We literally had to commandeer a number of the major hotels to put the delegates up and then find places for the guests in the hotels. San Francisco fortunately has first-class restaurants but in addition we served the best cafeteria meal I've ever seen. We got the famous chef of the Omar Khayam Restaurant to handle the food for the delegates. Nothing was spared to make this thing a success. We coopted a number of gobs and soldiers to act as guards around the buildings and also to drive cars. We had transportation for all the delegates.

Then we had to set up elaborate communications to make it possible for all to communicate with their home governments. It was an enormous job, but one of the trickiest problems was the language problem. We had announced that English was to be the working language.

The French, because France had not kept the same kind of governmental structure during the war as Britain, China, the U.S. and Russia, was not one of the inviting powers, although we'd agreed that they would be permanent members of the Security Council. America and Britain -- Roosevelt and Churchill -- had not always treated De Gaulle with respect and the French nose was therefore considerably out of joint. They definitely did not agree to our plan to simply have English as the working language.

We had established a steering committee composed of the heads of the delegations who would be the top deciding body for the conference. We tried to make the conference independent, not run by the United States, but run by itself. I was supposed to be an international civil servant pro tem and we agreed (this had been worked out beforehand) that the presidents of the conference would rotate. T.V. Sung of China -- China was an inviting member -- Eden, Stettinius and Molotov would preside over the steering committee alternately and over plenary sessions alternately.

At the first meeting of the steering committee, when Stettinius was greeting them as the host of the conference, telling them how independent he wanted the conference to be, he made an initial statement: "Ladies and gentlemen, we welcome" etc., when a voice right near

him spoke also in perfect French, repeating what he said. He stopped and then went on, and a person in the rear who spoke in perfect French, repeated it. When this happened the third time the audience began to chuckle. Stettinius turned to me and said, "What is going on?" and I said, "We've just been outsmarted!" He turned to me and said, "What shall we do?" and I said, "Let's accept gracefully, they've obviously picked up first-class interpreters whom we couldn't find." These were the lead interpreters who had been scattered by the war, and somehow the French had found them and brought them to San Francisco. Were you aware of this?

JSS No.

Hiss This is one of the not very important kind of stories that show the kind of things we had to deal with and be prepared to be flexible about.

JSS Right. And you said of course you were functioning as an international civil servant there, which is true as Secretary-General. I wondered what. . .

Hiss I also sat with the American delegation. . .

JSS You did?

Hiss . . . at their meetings because I had to know what they were proposing, and I also sat in the conferences when the great powers had their separate meetings to try to resolve differences.

JSS You did, as Secretary-General?

Hiss I sat there, simply as representative of the United States. So I wore two hats.

JSS So the distinction was not so strict there then.

Hiss That's right. But I did my best in the guise of Secretary-General to act quite objectively.

JSS Now in the Secretariat were you able then to recruit other nationalities to be part of your staff as Secretary-General?

Hiss I think they were all American.

JSS All American. . .

Hiss Yes -- except for these interpreters. And if you look at this book here which is . . . I think that gives the personnel of the Secretariat.

JSS So it was in any event largely American then. . .

Hiss Yes, I think they were all Americans. We were the hosts. But they were mostly academics. I had a staff of Foreign Service Officers for liaison but by and large they were academics. Grayson Kirk, for example, was one. People were recruited from the Army and the Navy who were also lawyers and academic people. It was a well staffed Secretariat and I remember no criticism that they were not objective and impartial.

JSS Now as the drafting of the Charter developed, was it your task as Secretary-General to put the various drafts together into a working text?

Hiss This was primarily the responsibility of Sobolev and

Pasvolsky. My job was to try to help resolve differences. There was naturally a conflict between the small powers and the great powers because this was a great power draft and in a sense the small powers had to accept what the great powers were willing to agree to. Evatt of Australia who was a dynamic, independent person, objected constantly to what he called the overriding demands by the Great Powers. And there would be meetings in the Fairmont where the American delegation had its offices in the big ballroom upstairs, of the great powers strategists trying to maintain their unanimity and work out compromises.

JSS And you did participate in that, then, in trying to help them do so?

Hiss Yes, that's right.

JSS And you mentioned Evatt of Australia -- what other small countries do you think had some influence on the drafting of the Charter?

Hiss I think King of Canada. I hope you interview Oliver Lundquist, who is in Florida at the moment. He was the OSS presentation officer who was lent to us. He tells the story of being able, because of his position on the Secretariat, to sit in the Opera House as a plenary session was gathering. One of his colleagues was seated there when MacKenzie King came in. He apparently thought everybody there was a fellow delegate, so he started out

by saying, "I'm King of Canada. . .," an indication of the lack of formality and ceremony that presided among all the participants, since Canada had no king, you see. It was the happiest throng who were celebrating a great victory because we knew the Germans were defeated. Within ten days that was official. There were people who had been under wartime rations; here we had plenty of food, drink. There were people who had been in blackouts for years; here was a city resplendent with lights. So there was a spirit of celebration. It had really been a brutal war, the losses were tremendous. It was the kind of moment that just made it impossible to believe that the great powers couldn't get along. It added to the Yalta enthusiasm, but underneath the cold war was beginning.

JSS What about Mr. Romulo of the Philippines? He said frequently before his death that he objected very strongly to the veto provisions in the Charter.

Hiss He might have. A lot of small powers did. I think he tends to exaggerate his points and I think some of his statements were obviously made for home consumption. Evatt was against the veto, too.

JSS What were the main contentious issues with the smaller countries -- the veto being one, what were the others?

Hiss Membership on the Security Council, especially how many of the smaller powers should be on it; membership on the

World Court; membership on the Economic and Social Council; membership being a very important point; the provisions about amendments of the Charter. All of those were contentious issues.

JSS And speaking of that, there's no provision in the Charter for withdrawal. Was that an issue then?

Hiss I don't remember that coming up.

JSS Again, the question of self-determination which, as you said, did come up at Yalta -- was this understood at San Francisco as a major question for the future, as an important word in the Charter, so to speak?

Hiss The emphasis in the Charter, which was a change from the League, was that the UN should be universal. So what it meant was that as new nations appeared from trusteeship they should be expected to be admitted to the UN. So, in that sense, self-determination was implicit in the Charter. After all, there are some 150 member nations now and I doubt whether there could be more than 160 so-called States wanting to get into the UN. Switzerland didn't want to come in because of its age-old neutrality. But this, of course, was one reason why the Argentine question was probably acceptable to Stalin. After all, we accepted it once it was a fait accompli because of universality. We knew that eventually Germany, Italy and Japan should be brought in. Self-determination in the Versailles sense was not really an issue.

JSS I want to ask you another question -- the last one, right now, which may go back all the way to the State Department, and that is the question of the economic and social development as interpreted really for the first time as important in terms of maintaining peace. Was that concept developed in the State Department?

Hiss Yes. It was felt that it was very important and we would have thought that the Charter was truncated -- was thoroughly inadequate -- if that was left out.

JSS At Dumbarton Oaks the Soviet Union was a little reluctant on that at first, is that correct?

Hiss I'm afraid my memory is not able to recall that specifically.

JSS You're not able to recall any of the differences ... And at San Francisco...

Hiss They were leery of any expansion. They just thought of the Security Council. They knew we were proposing trusteeship eventually but I do have a feeling that at first they were saying, "Why do we need anything more?" but I don't recall any real opposition.

JSS And at San Francisco then, some of the smaller countries were very enthusiastic about the idea of the economic and social cooperation, is that correct?

Hiss That's right.

JSS Which ones in particular, do you remember....

Hiss Well, certainly Australia. They thought this was a

wonderful thing and it pacified them.



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(Second Interview October 11, 1990)

JSS So, Mr. Hiss, if we could continue now after several months' break with a few more questions to you with regard to the establishment of the United Nations and if I might I would like to go back to the period in the State Department before Dumbarton Oaks, even, to ask you about how the concept of enforcement developed. This was something which had been a weak point in the League of Nations and I assume that there was much attention given to how the new organization could be stronger. But did one consider from the beginning the need to have provision for military force?

Hiss Yes, my recollection is that they did but I think we were much too optimistic about collaboration. One reason why I feel confident that military force was foreseen from the beginning is that this was one of the strong reasons why the veto was insisted upon. Because otherwise, it would mean that American forces could be called out by non-American officials and this just wouldn't go down with the American Congress. So I think we oversimplified the idea of a military contingent that would be readily available. This is why the Military Staff Committee seemed so important and of course when the Cold War began it fell into complete disuse, as we were assuming a unanimity of the Permanent Member on enforcement.

JSS I wanted to ask about the Military Staff Committee. Did the idea of the Military Staff Committee originate on the American side?

Hiss My recollection is yes, though we are not a militaristic power. Remember our Joint Chiefs of Military Staff were very effective during the war and we had the Combined Chiefs so we had worked with the British. And there was a model that seemed to us immediately available. That's why I'm quite sure we were the ones that instigated it.

JSS And in fact it was to consist of the Chiefs of Staff..

Hiss That's right, of the five Permanent Members.

JSS Another question in this regard. President Roosevelt said, publicly at the time I believe, that he did not favor a world police force, that the military forces should not be seen as some kind of a world police force.

How was it seen then in your recollection, what was it to be?

Hiss Well, since the enforcement was only to be a Security Council decision, that didn't make the Military Staff Committee policemen, they were enforcers of a political body and to us that seemed very different.

JSS So that in fact the police force concept would have been more directed toward internal affairs, if you will.

Hiss Yes, that's quite true, and also a more paramount position for the military who here were simply an enforcement body for the political organ.

JSS Now Mr. Lundquist showed me some of the charts that he had prepared at the time of Dumbarton Oaks which showed the Military Staff Committee very prominently, almost on the same status as ECOSOC, for example. So I judge from that that a great deal of importance was attributed to this.

Hiss That is true, and he, of course, based his illustrations simply on his conversations with those of us who were working on the plans. So I think they'd be pretty authoritative, pretty significant indications of the importance ascribed. And my recollection is exactly the same. As I say, I think we oversimplified the problem.

JSS Now at Dumbarton Oaks, itself, did this question of enforcement receive much attention? It doesn't seem to appear in the records very much.

Hiss No, I don't recall that it did. But remember we did not deal with the veto, we left that open.

JSS Right, that was not solved there.

Hiss Was not solved.

JSS Later, but I think this was after the United Nations was established, there were clear differences between the Soviet and American sides as to how this military force should be constituted - whether it should be spread around the world in different installations, or it should be centralized. These questions did not come up to your recollection ...

Hiss No, no,....

JSS That came up later?

Hiss My recollection is not that there were to be permanent forces assigned but that they would be recruited as needed.

JSS But it's in the Charter, of course, that they would be designated in the national forces, that there would be units designated.

Hiss That's right.

JSS So that was certainly the American concept, then?

Hiss That's right, but not that they would be - let's say, training together or stationed together. They were simply designated and subject to call.

JSS Now going on to San Francisco, this provision for enforcement within the concept of collective security is surely one of the less democratic aspects of the United Nations organization since all countries that become members are committed to comply with the decision of the SC, whereas the five Permanent Members of course can veto. So my question really is: was this controversial in San Francisco, was this ...

Hiss Oh frightfully, I should say. It was the single most controversial issue and of course it was the issue that Evatt as the champion of the smaller powers, made the most of. I think I told you that I had a talk, I guess just after San Francisco, with Walter Lippman who lived

across the street from me in Washington and who originally opposed the veto power, as did John Dickey who had been in the State Department. And I convinced Lippman that for practical political reasons, the Military Staff Committee negated any possibility of so-called world government; that the United Nations was not world government but was a club of member nations and if the chief nations didn't choose to use it then it would fall into disuse as any club would; but that it would never be powerful enough to compel one of the great powers to do something. Its so-called military forces would never be that strong, never were thought of as that. Smaller powers were supposed to be overawed by the concept. We didn't expect you were going to have military confrontation. It would be most unusual because a smaller power would realize it had no chance.

JSS

In effect then the smaller powers were conscious of the fact that they were, in theory at least, giving away part of their sovereignty whereas the major powers were not.

Hiss

It never came up that they were giving up sovereignty and we weren't - it came up that it wasn't democratic, that it wasn't fair, that the "big boys" had more power than the smaller ones. But you're quite right, in legal terms, you could say sovereignty was infringed upon. And the whole issue of the relationship between the veto and international law can be looked at as a very cynical

disregard for international law. In other words, if a great power violates international law, it can prevent enforcement against itself by a veto. But I think we were looking at it from what we thought were the practical aspects of the only way the world could peaceably exist. This would be by collaboration of the great powers. Therefore the smaller powers had much to gain from this, and they did accept it finally.

JSS I was going to ask, you as Secretary General, what did you identify as the most difficult issue at San Francisco, was it this issue?

Hiss I would say the veto power of the five Permanent Members..

JSS And as directly related to the question of enforcement...

Hiss Well, as related to unfairness, that even a more general proposition could be vetoed by a great power, but couldn't by a smaller power. So it was the issue of the big having their powers added to, instead of within an international organization having them reduced.

JSS Now going back to the early days in the State Department when the planning was being done, the United Nations's capacity to maintain international peace and security really is based on the concept of collective security, which is included in the Charter. Was one thinking of the League of Nations in this connection?

Hiss Expressly, oh definitely. It was considered one of the

reasons the League failed was that it had no enforcement, no powers of enforcement.

JSS But it did have a concept of collective security...

Hiss In theory - and since it wasn't enforceable that became phraseology rather than reality. And that was something we wished to avoid.

JSS So this did in a sense constitute a kind of continuation of the League and its problems.

Hiss Oh no, an improvement on the League. As I've said before, it's not that we thought that the League was wicked. I think I've told you that the former Irish Secretary-General of the League believed that he had been discouraged from coming to San Francisco..

JSS No you didn't mention that..

Hiss Recently, I got a letter asserting this from an Irish Journalist who was writing a biography of the former Secretary-General, and I said to him, "there must be some misunderstanding, that we considered ourselves a successor to the League and an improvement on the League." Now it is true that in the early days of the League and up until World War II broke out, the State Department was so afraid of the being identified with the League since the Senate had rejected the league, that we did not have a regular observer. We had Prentiss Gilbert in Geneva report unofficially; the League was hushhush, but only for that reason; no real hostility to

it and in the studies for the United Nations we not only drew on the League's experiences but considered ourselves a successor to it - well in fact, we were a successor. We took over the buildings, and took over a subordinate body, the ILO.

JSS

Now, going on to San Francisco, at the end of the San Francisco conference Mr. Stettinius wrote a very - well I don't know whether he wrote it, but in any event, he sent a very glowing report to President Truman in which he actually returned to what I think of as the thinking of Kant on peace. He reported that now there would be under the Charter free peoples, with free communication, that there would not be war because people who were free would in fact oppose involvement in war. My question is, how broad was that thinking in San Francisco?

Hiss

I think that was somewhat peculiar to Stettinius who was a special enthusiast; who, as you know, was full of idealism. He had been as a student at the U. of Virginia head of the YMCA and he was an idealist. There was, however, in San Francisco a feeling not only of jubilation at the end of the war but a real elation. The war then seemed so terrible in retrospect, and so clear to those who were there that there was a temptation, a tendency, to assume that this could not happen again. But looking back historically, one realizes that somewhat the same euphoria came after World War I - look at the

people who wrote all the pacifist material and the attitude of the young men at Oxford and the Oxford Oath. So, at San Francisco, with the devastation of the war there was almost a physical revulsion at the destructiveness of the war, at the horrors. We wanted to think that mankind just wouldn't permit this to happen again.

JSS Was there a feeling on the American side that the wording of the Charter in fact would lead to the establishment of democratic governments?

Hiss Democratic governments in the individual member nations?

JSS That's right, in the western sense.

Hiss We certainly thought- that it was, let's call it the wave of the future. I'm not sure I can say that we thought the Charter would bring that about but the Charter was clearly a union of free nations coming together freely.

JSS Now, I wanted to ask you as Secretary-General were also...

Hiss Let me interrupt once more here. There was a feeling that the Russians were being more accommodating in regard to Eastern Europe than later proved to be the case. I'm sure you've read some of the recent academic studies such as the new edition of Alperovitz's book, have you seen that?

JSS I've seen it, yes.

Hiss Well, you know he has quotations from Byrnes's diary and from Truman's diary which show hostility to the Soviet Union which he believes led the Soviets to fear either a preventive strike or something of that sort. The tendency toward freedom which we had sensed at Yalta and which there were survivals of at San Francisco were snuffed out so it's hard to see the spirit which was still part of -I called it euphoria, but that's a slightly condescending word; a spirit of elation is better. So I do think we expected something like the world of today.

JSS Did you detect the first signs of estrangement between East and West at San Francisco?

Hiss Oh, even before. I assume I told you that Stettinius was horrified when he got the report from Truman about the meeting with Molotov. He had thought the whole conference might collapse if Molotov had refused to go on to San Francisco. So we definitely realized that Truman was taking a censorious attitude.

JSS And the issue there was Poland, if I'm not mistaken.

Hiss That's right.

JSS So that in a sense Poland was the first real indication, the controversy over Poland.

Hiss But then you see it had expression in various ways - Argentina and what Nelson Rockefeller helped pull off there, which the Russians quite naturally thought was

official on our part;, they just couldn't imagine somebody running off independently and doing.....

JSS And Ambassador Roschin , the Soviet official....

Hiss Yes, I remember the name...

JSS He has indicated that Stalin originally decided that Molotov should not go to San Francisco for three reasons. One of them was a sense in Moscow that the US had backed down on the understanding reached at Yalta on membership by the Ukraine and Byelorussia in the United Nations, separate membership for them. Was this evident in San Francisco?

Hiss You know that at Yalta that had occurred by accident, and while I've always thought that if that particular action hadn't occurred, we would have come to accept it, grudgingly. It must have been plain to Stalin that this was something - you see, he thought from what he was told at that meeting, that surprise meeting with Roosevelt and Stettinius, that we had agreed to it but he must have soon realized since in the communique we didn't include anything on it. We said to the Russians that we would support the admission of the two Soviet Republics, that was kept quiet and was not put in the communique. When that leaked out there came the attacks on Yalta as having secret agreements, though this was the only secret one in the political sphere that I know of. But all of that must have made it plain to Stalin, that

this was not something the US was very pleased with. But that he thought we would renege on it, I had not heard before. But it must have, what you're saying is that it colored the Russian ...

JSS That's right, it was apparently a conversation which the Soviet ambassador in Washington had with the then Under-Secretary of State who actually was not informed and so he professed quite honestly to know nothing about such an agreement. And that was reported back to Moscow and in a sense misinterpreted because it was simply a matter of ignorance which the Russians now recognize - at least Ambassador Roschin did.

Hiss At the same time it fitted in with the fact that the US wasn't happy...

JSS Exactly, exactly. Now I wanted to ask, you've mentioned before that you were both SG but also almost a member of the US delegation in San Francisco. I wanted in that connection to ask, during the meetings of the commissions and the committees which were concerned with the substantive questions of the Charter, did you participate in these substantive discussions, and if so, in which capacity?

Hiss I never participated as a representative of the US. Anytime I took part in the Charter process it was as an international civil servant.

JSS But did that involve you in any discussion of the

substance, or was it a matter of keeping the delegates straight, so to speak, in their understanding.

Hiss I tried to restrict myself to the latter and allow the individual delegations to hammer out the agreement.

JSS Right. Very often at present the Secretariat at the United Nations of course theoretically conducts itself that way but has to really formulate paragraphs and resolutions and so forth as a matter of assistance to the delegates.

Hiss To illustrate the point we're talking about, I certainly made no secret in talking with Evatt, for example, that I thought his position was wrong, that he'd never get a Charter on that basis. And I argued with him what was really the position of all the great powers but from the point of view of someone who cared deeply for the successful formation of the United Nations. So I was still speaking, I believe, as a civil servant, an international civil servant.

JSS Right. I really just have one more question and that has to do with the Charter, itself, as a document because I was told by Mr. Lundquist that when the Charter was signed you had the responsibility of carrying it back to Washington. How did you do this - could you describe how this was done?

Hiss It was decided that there was no proper - let's call it receptacle, place of safekeeping - for the Charter. The

United Nations hadn't come into existence, and the conference Secretariat would be disbanded. And it was agreed that Truman would keep it in the safe in the White House. Since the US had been the host, this would be appropriate. I was therefore deputed to carry the Charter to the White House and deliver it to him for that kind of safekeeping. And the Army put a plane at my disposal for that purpose. The humorous aspect of this was that since the Charter was so valuable it had a parachute attached to it - and I didn't! But of course I'm sure the answer is, if I'd had to jump I'd be given a parachute. But the humor was that the Charter actually had a parachute. So when I arrived in Washington I immediately went to the White House with the Charter and told the door man that I had something I had to present personally to the President. He conferred and then came back. I was then permitted to come into the presence of the President. The President had arrived back from some trip he made, after he had left San Francisco, but Mrs. Truman was not in the White House and he and his aides were sitting around

Hiss

Since Truman's military aides had been with him at San Francisco, sat up on the stage with him when he presided, they were familiar with various developments. So we chatted about that and I think I told you that I learned then of what had seemed a potential diplomatic

contretemps between us and Brazil. At the session where Truman presided each nation was to speak in its own language, not one of the four official languages of San Francisco, and that meant that the Brazilian spoke in Portuguese. The procedure was for the speaker to come forward when it was his turn, rise to an intermediate platform below the level of the stage, bow toward the President who would return the bow (which in a sense recognized the speaker) who would then turn around and make his address. And as the Brazilian came down the aisle,- he was completely bald, the Brazilian foreign minister, a charming man. As he came down the aisle, one of the President's aides, either military or the naval aide leaned forward and whispered something; the President was convulsed. So that when the Brazilian foreign minister leaned toward him and bowed, he didn't get an immediate recognition. He thought this was a snub at first, he blushed so that his head became scarlet instead of white, I well remember, and then the President recovered, acknowledged him, and he made his speech. I never knew what had been whispered to the President to cause what might have been a diplomatic embarrassment. And at the White House one of the aides then spoke up and said, "hey, you remember that bald-headed fellow who came down the aisle?..." And the President said, "I do Do you remember what you said about him?" He said "yes, I

said..." - what's the name of the method of cleaning an automobile by polishing it?

JSS Oh, Simonize?

Hiss "Pipe the Simonizing job".....It had caught Truman's funnybone and it was typical of the relationship between Truman and these aides who, I think, had been in the military with him and were real cronies. But for the President of the United States, to think that was high humor almost distracting him from his ceremonial duties!

JSS And did you actually then hand the Charter to the President?

Hiss I handed it to him, physically.

JSS To the President, interesting - well, thank you very much. I think those are the questions.....


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