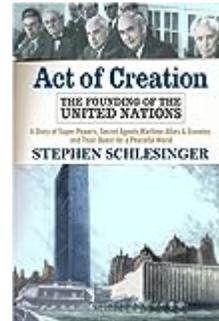


Stephen Schlesinger. *Act of Creation: The Untold Story of the Founding of the United Nations.* Boulder: Westview Press, 2003. xviii + 374 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8133-3324-3.



Reviewed by John Jefferson (Independent Scholar)

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Remaking the World

The sixteen chapters that constitute *Act of Creation* are an excellent reminder of the frailty of human beings. Schlesinger takes readers on a journey that begins with President Woodrow Wilson pushing for the creation of the League of Nations in the wake of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. Students of history will recall that Wilson ran himself ragged during this time and eventually wasted away and saw his dream unfulfilled by an oppositionist Congress. Then, readers bear witness to the frailties of President Franklin Roosevelt. Roosevelt worked as part of a triumvirate that successfully managed a complete victory in World War II. In April of 1945, however, Roosevelt succumbed to ailments and died in his office at Warm Springs, Georgia.

The similarity between legacies of both Wilson and Roosevelt end here as a result of the determination of Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman. Truman successfully managed to continue pushing for the creation of the United Nations and ensured a fitting and successful end to Roosevelt's presidency. Clearly, given the absolute minimal amount of interaction between Truman and Roosevelt, even while Roosevelt was president, it is clear

that Truman cannot lay any claim to the UN as his own.

Given the amount of books and articles published relative to Roosevelt or the United Nations, Schlesinger is faced with a typical author's dilemma: how to breathe new life into a seemingly exhausted topic. Schlesinger's delving into secret communication between the attending nations puts the events that transpired in San Francisco into new light. The work of the U.S. Army Signal Security Agency, the precursor of the National Security Agency, in providing the American delegation, headed by U.S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, with signals intelligence (SIGINT) puts the creation of the United Nations into proper historical perspective. For the first time in history, the United States was able to take advantage of significant advances in technology to further move along the establishment of the peace-making body.

Readers will also be interested to know the full extent of the involvement of suspected communist Alger Hiss in the overall UN creation. Having been appointed Acting Secretary General by Roosevelt, Hiss ran the entire conference. Schlesinger adopts a less than critical summary examination of the evidence that Hiss was a communist

and is content to explain away inconsistencies in Whitaker Chamber's accusations by mentioning that Chambers himself did not expose Hiss to any government official directly.

It cannot be discounted that Hiss, due to his position, could act as a double agent. Any work Hiss did to lessen the legitimacy of the Soviet Union, which included writing a paper that illustrated reasons why Soviet republics should not be given permanent member status, would naturally be a part of his act to distract attention. There is ample room left by Schlesinger for future scholars to explore the relationship between Hiss and the United Nations. In pursuing SIGINT, Schlesinger reveals himself to be ahead of the crowd that is more interested in a simple political study of the failings of the UN.

Schlesinger details many of the lesser-known incidents that surround the UN Charter ratification. In this

detailing, the frailties of the delegates and the charter itself is revealed. Harry Hopkins's poor health is repeatedly mentioned as Schlesinger outlines Hopkins's last ditch effort to pacify Josef Stalin's grumblings over the idea of the General Assembly having the right to discuss issues. Schlesinger is careful to point out in detail how the dispute over the right to discuss issues in the General Assembly nearly derailed the ratification of the charter.

All in all, Schlesinger's work is thought-provoking enough to generate new discussion about the United Nations, especially given the current lambasting of the ineffectiveness of UN resolutions. The wide cast of characters featured in this book is sure to draw comparisons by readers to current characters in the world of foreign relations. At the very least, readers may learn a great deal about how to move the UN forward by carefully understanding its creation.

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