HOW TO ACHIEVE THE INEVITABLE

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The most tragic single fact in the United States today is that growing confidence in victory is negatived by gnawing doubt that we will translate victory into peace.

Evidences of ultimate triumph multiply. The initiative has shifted from the Axis to the Allies. Africa, a whole continent, is redeemed. Supply lines grow shorter and safer. Russia draws closer to its western allies; the plaint that it bears the burden unsupported is replaced by appreciative comment and significant political gestures. England has turned from defense against invasion to plans for invading Europe. Australia, hitherto a defense bastion, becomes a springboard for attack. The Luftwaffe wanes while Allied air power waxes. All these belong on the victory side of the ledger.

The debit side is moral and spiritual. The country is yearning for some interpretation of this war which will have the clarity, the emotional intensity, and the spiritual exaltation of Lincoln's Second Inaugural. While hope mounts that the slaughter will cease, there
is no corresponding lift of spirit. The promises of a better world consist too largely of plastics and gadgets, of a world-wide “full dinner pail” and political hand-outs at each crisis in the seven ages of man. Planning is described in terms more and more materialistic, freedom is made to seem less and less vital. Policy does not achieve clarity in the public mind; the confusions of expediency bring fresh anxieties.

Characteristic of public bewilderment is current thought about an association of nations. There are blueprints in profusion, but no dynamic mobilization of opinion. Attention has been concentrated upon designing mechanisms without rousing the will to operate them; that is going at the problem backward.

It would be comic, if it were not tragic, that we share sovereignty freely in great matters, but in small we cling tenaciously even to its anachronistic symbols. Victory was won in North Africa under an American general as commander-in-chief; a British admiral controlled sea operations; another Briton, in command of land forces, gave orders to Frenchmen, Colonials, Indians, Australians, New Zealanders, and Americans, as well as Englishmen. In the ultimate and absolute decisions of life and death British accepted orders from Americans, French obeyed British, and so on around the circle. Sovereignty yielded to necessity.
Yet, though the world knows as inevitable fact that there must be an association of nations and that such a federation can have no reality without curbing national sovereignty, we stand confused about how to approach in the lesser spheres of action what we have already achieved in the most vital.

It has been assumed that a federation of the world must be established at one of two times: either at the peace conference as part of a general settlement, or after a world "return to normalcy" through a cooling-off period. Those who advocate postponement exploit the failure of the League and attribute it to Woodrow Wilson's insistence that the Covenant form part of the peace treaty. They argue that the giant problems of liquidating the war cannot be entrusted to an immature institution; complicated and critical issues must be managed by seasoned agencies. Later, in some moment of calm, they hope the new idea may be born—a political illustration of planned parenthood. The infant world state would then be reared in an atmosphere of serenity, and given burdens only as it gained strength to bear them.

There is a fatal defect in this reasoning. The predicted moment of calm never comes; any appearance of international serenity is merely a manifestation of lassitude. Such an atmosphere stifles the adventurous
spirit by which alone a great political innovation can be launched. Necessity is the mother of invention—an old saw, but none truer. No one ever developed the intricate machines of mass production in the lush tropics where food may be had for the plucking. Nor do men create great concepts, achieve spiritual triumphs, or display heroism when there are no strains. The propitious moment of calm will never come.

Must we, then, resort again to Woodrow Wilson’s method, though it failed? Must we again attempt to establish a league of nations as part of the grand settlement of the war? Perhaps if we analyze the background of his failure, another possibility will appear.

His mistake did not consist in setting up the League too soon. Quite the contrary; it was done too late. The time to innovate is not at the end of an exhausting war, or during the reaction that seeks an unreal normalcy. The appropriate moment is in the midst of national peril, when the gains as well as the sacrifices are most sharply defined.

Wilson wanted separatism during the war, but union at its close; in that way he obstructed the realization of his own cherished aim. In the course of the war the United States should have made firm common commitments with our Allies. Unfortunately we did not do so. We freely gave the lives of our citizens,
but loaned our money. We poured out our blood, but hoarded evidences of debt. Surely it was a strange political economy which gave away life but regarded property as a loan. There was proof, not then realized and never adequately appreciated, that we had not, in truth, made common cause. There was a rift, deep and real, and no less deep or real for being unobserved; perhaps it was both more tragic and more fatal for being unconscious. We were not at one with those with whom we had to remain united in order to reap the fruits of victory. The mistake lost not only the League, but peace itself. The palms of triumph were turned to ashes. Victory left a bitter after-taste.

Another proof of that essential error lies plain upon the record. We never allowed ourselves to be called, or to become, an Allied Power; always we employed the term “Associated Power.” Reviewing human experience, we should not reasonably have expected more intimacy to develop in time of peace than existed during the perils of war. Unfortunately, to the American mind Jefferson’s description had become so closely associated with the concept of an alliance that it seemed part of the word; every alliance was “entangling.” His phrase had wholly obscured Washington’s more explicit statement: “We may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.”
That distinction between Allies upon the one hand and an Associated Power upon the other was a portent of the retreat from international responsibility which wrecked the League and helped bring the present horror upon the world. The lack of essential unity was accentuated when, during the voyage to the peace conference, President Wilson told the American delegation that they "would be the only disinterested people," and that the men whom they "were about to deal with did not represent their own people." When the Pharisee, standing apart, thanked God he was not as other men, he laid no foundation for cooperation. We came to the task of exploiting victory for peace without fellowship with nations whose sacrifices in life and treasure, in ruined land and devastated homes, vastly exceeded our own. An emotional atmosphere of moral snobbery offered no hope that the language of a covenant would cement what lack of faith had sundered.

The source of failure to achieve Wilson's purpose lay in not making the League part of the war itself. We pursued a separatist course — revealed in lack of common sacrifice of blood and treasure, want of will to make common cause with our companions in arms, and a false sense of moral superiority.

The two alternative times for setting up an asso-
cation of nations currently discussed are both hopeless. One, the dream of a peaceful birth in a quiet tomorrow, is unreal; the other, a miracle at the moment of victory, failed in 1919. But experience shows the third pathway to the goal. It lies ready, close at hand. It needs only recognition and a minimum of sacrifice to make it real. The effort should not be postponed to the end of the war; it must be made now, during the struggle.

Already we have made great strides. The fatal distinction between the status of an ally and an associated power has been abandoned. We have substituted the concept of the United Nations, magnificent in its scope, challenging in its implications. It is not a "Big Three" or a "Big Four"; it comprises all countries who would turn the tide of victory against the Axis and vindicate freedom upon the earth. The United Nations is a vehicle which can carry us beyond victory to peace.

Doctrinaire theoreticians, ardent planners, and impatient perfectionists cry to high heaven that the great idea has not been implemented. But if we consider the way things happen in the world of affairs, it becomes clear that, while the design is by no means fully realized, there has, nonetheless, been genuine progress.

We have set up lend-lease, not as a loan of dollars
which must be repaid but as a reciprocal enterprise in which we do not distinguish, save for accounting purposes, between gift and loan. It has put an end to the bitter bargain by which we contributed life but loaned money — getting neither back. If we will take advantage, full and free advantage, of Article VII of the Master Agreement, we shall escape the futility of loans, the repayment of which either in goods or services we are unwilling to accept, although we denounce those who fail to force payment upon us.

President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, by their imagination and their readiness to accept great physical hazards, have created that needful contact and conference which Woodrow Wilson denied himself, so that he came a stranger among those with whom he had suddenly to work intimately. Public opinion, which sought to restrain Wilson from adventures abroad, clamors for a meeting of the President and Prime Minister with the Marshal and the Generalissimo. The Combined Chiefs of Staff are mapping out broad strategical programs for the civilian commanders-in-chief, keeping in constant touch with the commanders in the field. They supply a control agency for planning and coordinating the military and naval and air effort. Unity of command exists in the Southwestern Pacific and in North Africa; it is estab-
lished in one theater of war after another. These gains supply a solid basis for faith, a substantial foundation for optimism, a clear directive for further effort. None of the achievements is perfect; we have not done all we should have done. While there is ground for encouragement, therefore, there is still reason for humility.

If we will look not only to the letter but to the spirit, not merely to the document but to the action, not alone to the ideal but to the reality, it is plain that we are now making sacrifices of sovereignty in behalf of victory. If we will but regard them as sound precedents, and translate them into settled habits, the limitation of sovereignty for peace will be as normal as its curtailment in order to achieve victory.

The opportunity is before us now, for peace-making does not lie in the future; it is already afoot. Substantial progress is being made. With occasional fanfares about Keynes and his plan for “bancor” or White and his proposal of “unitas,” the discussion of currency stabilization proceeds apace. The conference on refugees at Bermuda, however limited, was nonetheless a beginning. Despite fumbling errors of technique, the recent conference at Hot Springs represented a timely attack upon a problem that will be suddenly acute and for which we must be as fully prepared as,
for a military operation. Discussions fundamental to peace are shortly to be carried on by a conference upon relief and rehabilitation. Those issues must be viewed not only as a humanitarian effort, but as a great political opportunity to harvest the fruits of victory.

All these proceedings display the deficiencies inherent in human activity; yet all represent an enormous advance in method beyond that of the last war. Beneath the surface of public notice there are emerging agreements and working arrangements, instrumentalities and mechanisms by which the idea of the United Nations takes form. Not with Gallic logic, nor Teutonic thoroughness, but with Anglo-Saxon empiricism, the substance of our hope crystallizes. We have only to realize it and dramatize it and regularize it.

To this wartime growth we may graft the sound branches of the earlier League of Nations. Americans have been so convinced of the League's failure that they have overlooked its great achievements in non-political fields. Among the sections of the League which still function there is available a vast treasury of experience and skill which we may inherit. Attached to the League, like the International Labor Office, or independent of it, like the Bank for International Settlements, are literally dozens of agencies of great or little import which, drawn together and systematized,
would form the nucleus for much of the work of a world federation. Thus the new association of nations can become the instrumentality of those innumerable, continuous, often apparently insignificant, but in sum vital, adjustments by which the concept of peace is translated into living fact.

It is essential that we do not postpone an association of nations until some distant Nirvana. Even the end of the war will be too late. We should recognize federated effort as a reality now and give the United Nations our faith and loyalty. In so doing we shall again exemplify the genius of British and American institutions, which move grandly down from precedent to precedent, which expand in practice from small beginnings to massive results. Thus we shall steadily mature international institutions; they will attain their full strength as they wrestle with the tasks of the war and the post-war world.