

FDR Wanted UN To Ensure Rule of Law

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EIR: I see that you have recently given interviews to some Italian dailies in which you raised a number of important issues related to the system of international relations. You say international relations have changed dramatically and in a dangerous manner, particularly in the past 10 to 15 years, after a long period of relative stability after World War II. Can you explain your thoughts a bit further to our readers?

de'Robertis: My concept is the following: During the so-called Cold War, in the Western world we followed a path in international relations, and in the orientation of our democratic political forces, that conceived of the international system as basically peaceful, facing the Soviet threat which was very effectively contained by the deterrence strategy put in place by NATO.

In the Western world, international relations were to follow a path coherent with the principle of democracy which was present in society. That means that relations among states, in a certain sense, had to adapt to the structure that was characteristic of the relations among citizens in democratic countries. In other words, the use of force in international relations was considered a very negative approach, and the rule of law was active, not only in domestic affairs, but also in international affairs.

War was considered the absolute last resort; the use of force was considered something to be avoided in all cases, apart from cases in which the international community, as a whole, considered the basic elements of international law to have been violated. In that case, military force could be used to contrast an action considered to be in contradiction with the rule of law. In that situation, we would not be faced with an act of war, but rather an act of military force carried out to

stop a violation of the rule of law by a single state considered to be an aggressor. That was the pattern that we followed in the Western world until the end of the Cold War.

When the Cold War ended, when Gorbachov and Bush, Sr.—even more than Reagan—came to terms on joint action, aimed at the reconstruction of the international system along what both of them used to call a new international order, at that point they used words that in a certain sense were not new at all. The new international order was the word used by Roosevelt's aides for post-war reconstruction, the so-called New Dealers, to define the characteristics the international system had to take on after the end of the war. This new international order did not come into existence, and could not become a reality because of the difficulties that arose inside the United Nations, between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. But that was in a sense the program, although its implementation was stopped.

And looking at it from the perspective of the very fruitful years of cooperation between the Administration of Bush, Sr. and Gorbachov, you almost get the impression that this program was not actually stopped, but only suspended, its implementation delayed. And looking with the eyes of history, you almost have the impression that Bush and Gorbachov had, in a sense, taken up an old path again, a path which had been initiated by the "New Dealers" and by Roosevelt, a path interrupted by the death of Roosevelt and by the Cold War. So it was finally restarted with these new Presidents, Bush and Gorbachov, who both seemed to be concerned with the common interests not only of their own countries, but of the entire international community and system. This was the line of development of international relations until a very sad moment when all these developments suddenly came apart, for a number of reasons we can talk about now.

EIR: In your published analyses, you have written that until very recently there was a rejection of what was called the "policy of power."

de'Robertis: Yes. You are referencing what I would call the theoretical basis of this Roosevelt policy aiming at the establishment of this new international order. In 1942-45, the American planners considered it necessary to establish a new world order, because in analyzing the development of international relations over the previous couple of centuries, and with the contribution of scholars with outstanding reputations in the United States as well as in the rest of the Western world, they came to the conclusion that the traditional "policy of power" waged by the great powers during the modern age was dominated by the attempt to further each great power's national interest as much as possible, following the rationale of what the French very effectively called *raison d'état*. This kind of policy had a necessary result: the great wars. World War I first, and then World War II. And before these two wars, other wars broke out because of the clash of national interests between major powers.

This policy of pursuing national interests at the expense of the interests of other nations, fatally clashing with the national interests of others, was a policy which necessarily led to war. Wars that in the 20th Century—it became clear to everyone—were too destructive, and thus it became clear that nations could no longer afford to follow this policy. People understood that it was absolutely necessary to end this practice, and to do so, a change was necessary in the basic inspiration of the policies of the great powers. Their policies had to be oriented not to the fulfillment of their national interests, but to the fulfillment of some kind of international legitimacy through the establishment of a general, global, international organization that was able to ensure the security of all countries; collective security. And in this context, each member country of the international society could also enjoy what I would call its basic interests.

For instance, one of the first steps we can find in this direction is the so-called Atlantic Declaration of August 1941, made by Roosevelt and Churchill. In a way, its contents foreshadowed the Declaration of the United Nations, which came later. The ideology, the basic principles of the international system as agreed upon in terms of principle by the great powers, had already been set out in 1941-45, from the Atlantic Charter to the approval of the charter of the United Nations. This was the result of the wisdom developed by the politicians involved in international relations, who recognized the madness of great wars in modern times, and the need to find a way to regulate international affairs without war being the means of solution of international disputes.

EIR: In this sense, the strategy of preventive wars in the context of a Clash of Civilizations promoted by neo-con forces around Dick Cheney and company in the United States, and internationally, is operationally—

de'Robertis: These people prove to have a very short memory, because the conclusions reached regarding the international situation, by those who started this concept of collective security in the 1940s, were laudable, because they realized that great wars had become too destructive in the modern age. It is wise to note that these conclusions were reached even before the development of nuclear weapons. With the present availability of nuclear weapons, wars have become even more unacceptable, and there is an even greater need to find a system for managing international relations and conflicts without resorting to war, the classic notion of war.

My evaluation of these people today is this: There is a very well-known saying not only in Italy but around the world, which says, those who do not know their history are condemned to repeat it. That is the most worrying observation I can make, faced with this kind of approach that forgets the price paid in the past, and is based on the illusion of avoiding paying the same price in the future—which for me is absolutely inescapable, based on the repetition of the mistakes of the past. This will involve the tragic repetition of the dangers

and consequences deriving from those mistakes in the past.

EIR: For many years, you were a scholar of the teachings and contributions of President F.D. Roosevelt and his program to reorganize national institutions, the economy, and international relations as well. Tell us some of the ideas you developed in your studies, and what you think Roosevelt's most significant contributions were.

de'Robertis: The principle that the basic interests of each country must be respected by everyone else in all other countries. We have the first important statement in the eight-point declaration later called the Atlantic Charter of 1941, where Roosevelt and Churchill agreed on the basic rights of countries with democratic institutions to have the possibility of developing their economies, with free access to energy and raw materials. This declaration already indicated the essence of what would become the system inspired by what I would call international democracy, on the issue of rights.

Then we have the formulation of the institutions that would have to be in charge of implementing the respect for these rights. At the beginning, there were discussions between the British and the Americans about the form of these new international organizations, whose statute was discussed at length among Roosevelt and his aides, who took the responsibility of comparing their views with those of their British allies, as well as the views of the Russians and Chinese. There were consultations among these four countries before the call for the conference of San Francisco in June 1945, when the United Nations Organization (UNO) was formally established. What is very important is to focus more attention on the very first article of this statute, where clearly stated is this vision of an international peaceful order, in which the use of force is excluded as a means for solving international disputes, and where all countries have the right to reach a just level of development, and are guaranteed freedom of access to sources of energy and raw materials etc.

With the simple fact of being members of the UNO, all the countries had in a sense accepted these principles, and it is very hard for me to understand how the change of attitude can be justified in the international system as a result of certain events of the past 30 years. I am not thinking so much of the terrible, tragic events of Sept. 11. I am thinking of the difficulties that U.S. administrations encountered in some of their peace-keeping activities. I follow developments in inter-



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Winston Churchill resisted, and tried to slow down Franklin Roosevelt's efforts to promote the end of colonialism, says de'Robertis. At the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, FDR bluntly told Churchill that the U.S. did not get into World War II to defend the British colonial empire. In this photo, FDR (left), obviously in good spirits, and Churchill are giving a press conference after the Casablanca Conference.

national affairs rather closely; I try to keep acquainted with the attitudes adopted by different governments, etc., but for a very long time I never had to mention this concept of national interest in international relations. Even when we had some difficult negotiations in Brussels over European Community policies, it was very obvious that certain countries were taking steps aimed at protecting their national interests.

The first change in this policy came when the United States had serious problems in peace-keeping operations in Somalia. President Clinton said that in the future, American involvement in peace-keeping operations would only take place in order to defend American national interests. This was the first time the United States had adopted this policy since 1945.

EIR: As early as 1974, Henry Kissinger had produced National Security Study Memorandum 200, in which he identified access to raw materials as a question of national interest, and stated that the growth of population in several developing countries, such as Brazil, which would have led to a growth in the consumption of resources by these countries, represented a threat to the national security of the United States.

de'Robertis: Well, first of all, Kissinger is a very peculiar thinker. All his analyses can be seen from different standpoints. But the analysis made by a scholar is one thing, and the

declaration of the President, the head of an Administration, is another. It is something different—a statement of a policy of a country. Even if scholars did not mention the question of national interest for a certain period of time, they never forgot it. But when an Administration mentions it in a form of policy, it is something totally different.

EIR: Roosevelt had fundamental differences with Churchill. These are reported in the book written by Roosevelt's son: FDR had a totally different concept on how the post-war world had to be organized, in particular the rights, and the role to be played by the so-called developing countries, that at that time were still colonies of various European empires and nations. Colonialism and everything that goes with it had to disappear. Churchill did not like this idea at all, did not like independent, sovereign states emerging from the colonial system.

de'Robertis: It is interesting to know that Roosevelt, in a conversation with a very well-known American journalist who worked in China and in the Far East, in talking about his experiences in diplomatic negotiations with Churchill and others, agreed with this journalist that after the Atlantic Charter, it was necessary to prepare a Pacific Charter, in order to more clearly state the intention of the United States to end the practice of colonialism in the Pacific. On the contrary, the U.K., France, and others still supported the interests of colonialism. Roosevelt felt that the problem of colonialism was perhaps even stronger in the Pacific than in the Atlantic.

That is the basic difference between Roosevelt and Churchill. I would say that in their negotiations on the question of ending colonialism, which also included Stalin, Roosevelt acted as the promoter, Churchill resisted and tried to slow the process down, and Stalin had a very crafty attitude, listening, supporting, and making things easier for Roosevelt, instead of being the promoter of such ideas himself.

EIR: Then there is the Roosevelt who laid the framework for what became the Bretton Woods system. There is a lot of discussion on this question today. The Bretton Woods system created the preconditions for the period of economic reconstruction after World War II, a period of development and stability. After 1971, and in particular in the last decade, there was a process of complete deregulation and destruction of any system based on rational rules. What can you say about these events from an historical standpoint, and today?

de'Robertis: The problem of the first post-war period was the lack of liquidity. The Bretton Woods system was established in 1944, before the acute problems of the immediate post-war period became evident, and was able to provide a means of payments—the dollar—anchored to a gold reserve which functioned as a sort of guarantee for this means of payment. This anchoring was very necessary in that period, because international trade always relied on a very solid value as a reference value for exchange.

It is a fact that at present, traders accept the solidity of the

economic system of the counterpart as a guarantee. The fact that the connection between the dollar and gold was cut has not been so destructive for trade relations in the world. As for the future, I think we are faced with the development of multiple means of payment; multiple currencies, I mean. The euro, even if there is no state behind it, has so far proven to be rather successful as a means of payment, and the Chinese yuan also looks to be on its way to becoming something like this. I think that we must be able to balance the relations among currencies and allow each one of them to play a role in its national society which corresponds to the one played in international relations. It would be crazy to have a currency which has one value in international exchange and another value in the domestic economy. This is my worry.

EIR: One of the main characteristics which succeeded in guaranteeing stability in the first Bretton Woods period was the system of fixed parities among currencies. Since 1971, we have had a system of complete flexibility, of floating exchange rates, which has taken power away from national authorities and institutions, and given complete freedom of activity and speculation to the so-called financial markets.

de'Robertis: This is what I meant. The role played in the international arena by a single national currency must correspond to the role and value it has in the domestic economy. The abandonment of the idea of establishing some kind of coordination between currencies is tied to certain changes in the international economic system, where we have some large economic powers that have to establish their role and their position. I think we still need to wait a number of years before making any kind of reassessment of this situation.

EIR: As you know, we are promoting a big campaign for a New Bretton Woods—

de'Robertis: Yes, I know. Indeed, it is very interesting and very important. In order to establish an agreement of the dimension of a New Bretton Woods, we need to have some kind of stabilization of the role of the yuan, the Indian rupiah, and possibly the Brazilian currency. . . . There is a quickly evolving situation that needs to reach some kind of stabilization before we can really take a stand on this issue, because it is not only a matter of relations between the euro and the dollar. Now there are more players in the game.

EIR: I know that your recent book on Roosevelt was translated into Russian, and you presented it a few months ago in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Can you tell us how the Russians, Russian elites and intellectuals, look at these aspects of history?

de'Robertis: I was really satisfied, because my book was translated and published by the publishing house of the St. Petersburg State University. The book was translated by a professor, a political expert, of the Political Science Faculty of St. Petersburg. I then had the opportunity to present it and discuss it at the Faculty of International Relations in St.



UN Photo

Roosevelt envisioned the UN as an organization to guarantee the rule of law in the international arena, and thought it was necessary to have the highest concentration of power—the most important countries—to cooperate in defense of this principle. Show here is an early UN meeting at temporary UN headquarters in Lake Success.

Petersburg. Perhaps even more interesting, was the opportunity to present it at the Institute of International History of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow.

The book focussed on the problems of enforcement within the UNO system, as it was conceived and shaped by the Roosevelt Administration during the planning of the UN. In St. Petersburg I found significant support among the Faculty of International Relations. In Moscow, I presented my work in front of a packed room at the Institute of International History, with basically all the members of the Institute in attendance. The most prominent professors who study the history of America, the Cold War and World War II, were present, and, honestly, I was delighted with their comments on my analysis, as they expressed their full agreement with my presentation of the basic inspiration behind the Roosevelt policy—a policy aimed at ending any kind of long-term opposition between America and Russia, with the hope that the solution of certain disagreements could also have helped the development of a system more open to democratic attitudes in the Soviet Union.

What we—my Russian colleagues and I—agreed on at the conclusion of the discussion of the book, was that the main obstacle to eliminating all these contrasts between Russia and the United States was in fact the difference of systems, that the Soviet Union was a Communist dictatorship. The present nature of the Russian state, generally accepted as a developing democracy—perhaps not a perfect democracy, but in a sense a country that is moving towards a fully democratic system—offers the opportunity to have the two countries in reciprocally acceptable positions. This allows us now to fully implement the programs, the plans developed in 1945. They were

in full agreement that the two countries can now restart this pact I was speaking about earlier. And in limiting the national interest that we spoke of before, it is important now that both consider the basic national interests of the other. This is the starting point in their relations now.

EIR: Lyndon LaRouche is leading a campaign to bring back the teachings and programs of Roosevelt. What do you think the most important aspects of Roosevelt's thinking would be today, for the United States, and globally?

de'Robertis: The basic inspiration of Roosevelt which is still valid today is a vision of the international system as an arena where the rule of law is present. This is the basic point. His concept was that it was necessary to have a system and an organization able to guarantee these principles: respect and the rule of law in the international system. In order to reach this situation, he understood that it was necessary to first achieve a basic agreement among the most powerful countries, in order to have the growing power of all these countries behind this approach. In individual countries, the state has a monopoly on violence; in the same manner, it was necessary to line up the highest concentration of power behind the defense of the rule of law at the international level. And to succeed in doing this, the most important countries had to come to an agreement on this point: cooperation among them to defend the rule of law. In this case we would not have any more wars, because wars take place between countries that have roughly the same level of strength. (If you have a stronger power assigned to defend the rule of law, you will then simply have police actions in the event of violations.) I hope we will be able to build on this principle.