



International Politics

Origins of the United Nations

Name: _____
Section: _____
Score: _____/5

Directions: Read the description of the beginnings of the UN and answer the questions at the back of the page.

The United Nations began life as a result of a secret meeting on board the warship "Prince of Wales" which was moored off the coast of Newfoundland in August 1941. The United Nations came from a meeting between F D Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. At this time America was not in World War Two though she was giving help to the Allies as a result of Lend-Lease. Roosevelt and Churchill met to discuss what shape the world might take once the war ended.

They came up with the so-called Atlantic Charter. This charter outlined the hopes of Roosevelt and Churchill for a better world. The main points to it were:

- All countries should have a democratic government.
- All countries would engage in trade freely with one another.
- All countries would share in world prosperity.
- All countries would seek to reduce their weaponry

To achieve such laudable aims, Roosevelt and Churchill wanted to create "a wider and permanent system of general security". This was to become the United Nations.

After America joined the war in December 1941, the title "United Nations" was adopted – at the instigation of Roosevelt – by the Allies fighting the Axis forces. The title United Nations was adopted on January 1st 1942 and was used by all those nations who were at war with the Axis. This so-called United Nations Declaration stated that all signatories agreed with the principles of the Atlantic Charter. Twenty-six nations signed it in January 1942, including Britain, America, Soviet Russia and China. These four nations were essentially a 'Big Four'.

During the rest of the war, the 'Big Four' held a number of meetings to discuss how the Atlantic Charter could be put into place. In 1943, after meeting in Moscow, the so-called "Moscow Declaration" was issued which declared that a "general international organization" would be established as quickly as possible and its task would be to maintain peace and security. All nations deemed 'peace loving' could become members.

The most important war meeting regarding the United Nations took place at Dumbarton Oaks, near Washington DC. The 'Big Four' drew up a detailed plan for the 'general international organization' and the chief proposals that came from that meeting were:

- The title of the new international body would be United Nations
- Its purpose would be to maintain international security and peace
- It would seek to develop friendly relations amongst all nations
- It would try to tackle international economic, social and humanitarian problems
- It would act as a hub for all nations to act together so that all their actions could be directed towards achieving good for the whole of the world.

In 1945, at the Yalta Conference, Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt agreed on the voting arrangements that would be used in the United Nations. At a general level, any nation in the United Nations would have one vote on issues. However, the USSR would have three votes as she represented three different republics – Russia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia – and each would have its own seat in the United Nations. Self-governing dominions in the British Empire – such as Canada and after 1947 India – also had one vote each. However, the 'Big Four' (USA, USSR, GB and China) could veto decision made by what was to be called the General Assembly. This meant that any one of the Big Four could stop the introduction of a decision by the General Assembly if that one country did not agree to it.

As the war drew to an end, 50 nations met in San Francisco in April 1945. It was in this Californian city that the United Nations' Charter was decided upon. At the start of the conference, the American president, Harry Truman, addressed it. He opened his speech with:

"At no time in history has there been a more necessary meeting than this one.....you members of this conference are to be architects of the better world. In your hands rests our future."

On June 25th 1945, the representatives of the 50 nations in San Francisco met in the city's opera house. Here they signed the charter and it is this date that the United Nations is considered to have come into existence.

Questions:

1. What was the Atlantic Charter? What were its main point?
2. What was the United Nation's role in World War II? Who was part of it?
3. What types of things did the Moscow Declaration call for?
4. What goals were set up for the UN at the conference at Dumbarton Oaks?
5. What did the Yalta conference establish?
6. Why is June 25th, 1945 important? In which city did this important event happen?