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**Lessons from FDR's post-war assistance operation: suppressed discourses, constructive ambiguities and unlearned lessons.**

### **Abstract**

This chapter provides a framework for the case-focused studies that illuminate this volume. It sets UNRRA, and particularly its rehabilitation dimension, within the United Nations alliance of 1942-1945 and core academic and policy debates on post-conflict activity since that time with a focus on rehabilitation. Eclipsed by the US Marshall Plan and ignored by scholars schooled in Cold War tropes, UNRRA was a foundation of post-war global order. The chapter demonstrates the lack of attention to the organisation until recently, with both historiographical data on the literature and analysis of the significance of UNRRA and its rehabilitation effort in the post conflict, aid and development literature. And concludes with some lessons for rehabilitation and broader post-conflict work today.

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### **Introduction**

UNRRA, which delivered everything from insecticide to locomotives remains the world's largest multilateral post-conflict organisation operating from Belarus to Beijing with contributions from states as large as the United States and as small as Liberia and Haiti, all contributing 1% of their GDP. In contrast, the US alone funded the Marshall Plan to Western Europe from 1949 with 2% of its GDP. Led by FDR and his officials, UNRRA was discarded as their successors ousted his New Deal approach at home and abroad.

After seven decades, this volume is part of a fresh attempt to reassess UNRRA. What did the now obscure term 'rehabilitation' mean in the 1940s, and what overall might UNRRA's legacies be for the international community in post-conflict environments in the twenty first century? The purpose of this chapter is not to hold up UNRRA as a perfect model for today. It barely touched on issues of race, and the UNIO Women's committee critiqued the exclusion of women from UNRRA debates by "expressing regret over the fact that few women were included in the national delegations to the UNRRA Conference".<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless UNRRA enriches our understanding of the 1940s and has implications for scholarship and practice in the twenty first century.

To begin with, what was the function of the term 'rehabilitation'? Tony Judt in his acclaimed history of Europe since 1945, has a chapter entitled, *The Rehabilitation of Europe*<sup>2</sup>. But, although he gives credit to UNRRA's efforts in famine relief and disease control, he does not unpack and explore the term rehabilitation. However, in 1944, British official Richard Law had explained what 'rehabilitation' meant to the British government, and it went far beyond food and medical supplies to be a transitional foundation for 'world reconstruction':

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<sup>1</sup> See page 15 of "Minutes of the 87th Meeting of the United Nations Information Board" In folder UNIO S-0537-0003-0004. available at <https://search.archives.un.org/minutes-of-meetings-of-inter-allied-information-committee-united-nations-information-board-and-their-sub-committees-dec-1943-dec-1945>

<sup>2</sup> Judt, Tony, *Postwar, A History of Europe since 1945* pp 63-99 (Penguin 2005).

*So far as rehabilitation, that is to say the supply of spare parts, machinery and so on, is needed for that purpose, then UNRRA will assist in rehabilitation; but it is laid down clearly in Resolution 12, Paragraph 9, that UNRRA is not itself an organ of world reconstruction [...] It would clearly be impracticable for this piece of United Nations machinery, which already has this formidable task before it, to take on in addition the task of a world economic conference.<sup>3</sup>*

UNRRA was never intended to be permanent, yet many regarded its end in 1948 as premature. UNRRA's opponents in the United States considered this not a moment too soon to shut what they regarded as a profligate example of the 'globaloney' New Deal policies of the Roosevelt era.

UNRRA's effective 'one-world' internationalism is largely absent from the literature on post-conflict reconstruction and development as well as wider considerations of realist and liberal internationalisms. This chapter builds on prior research into the UN alliance of the Second World War as well as UNRRA specific studies, contributes to the discussion of rehabilitation and offers suggestions about how a fuller consideration of UNRRA can enrich policy-oriented study today.<sup>4</sup>

### **UNRRA – in its wartime diplomatic context**

When, in the spring of 1942 the U.S. State Department circulated a proposal on post-war relief; the British reaction was rooted in an understanding of the necessity of a comprehensive international policy supported by American public opinion. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Minister, wrote to his colleagues:

*It must be obvious that for the success of any post-war relief scheme the contribution of the United States will be all-important. For that reason alone we should be well advised to fall in with the American proposals. But I fancy that there is much more than post-war relief in question. The United States Administration appear to be acting on the thesis that the more international machinery that can be got into operation with their participation before the end of the war, the greater the likelihood of American public opinion being ready to continue international co-operation after the war. It would perhaps be putting it too high at this stage to say that the Administration definitely intend to try and establish under the aegis of the "United Nations" the embryo of the international organization of the future. American post-war co-operation in the international sphere being so vitally important, I submit that we must play up to any scheme of theirs tending to turn the United Nations into an operative piece of machinery.<sup>5</sup>*

Thus, from its inception, UNRRA had a forward-looking role in building a global system of liberal institutionalism that was far broader than its immediate mission. US power was such that it would have been easy for the US to make bilateral arrangements and select alliances as is often US Foreign Policy today. Instead, FDR's policy was to create a fully international agency which provided a collective forum for developing policy and sharing the burden or provision while ensuring that US power and its desires prevailed.

The US called a conference to create UNRRA for the autumn of 1943 with Dean Acheson a leading diplomat for the US. Acheson later remarked that UNRRA was 'the John the Baptist of the Marshall Plan'.<sup>6</sup> UNRRA

<sup>3</sup> War and Peace Aims No. 4 Page 12, Richard Law MP, Minister of State, House of Commons, January 25, 1944

<sup>4</sup> Jessica Reinisch, *The Perils of Peace: the Public Health Crisis in Occupied Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Dan Plesch and Thomas G. Weiss, "1945'S Forgotten Insight: Multilateralism as Realist Necessity," *International Studies Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (February 2016): pp. 4-16, Available at <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekv013>.

Dan Plesch and Thomas G Weiss, *Wartime Origins and the Future United Nations* (London: Routledge, 2015).

Acharya, Amitav, and Dan Plesch. "The United Nations: Managing and Reshaping a Changing World Order ." *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 26, no. 2 (2020): 221–35. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02602001>.

<sup>5</sup> Eden, Anthony, British Government Document Cab/66/24/42 W.P. (42) 212, May 20 1942

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Beisner, Robert L., *Dean Acheson* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p.18

formed a central part of the intra-war development of FDR's planning and should be considered together with the UN Information Organisation, the UN War Crimes Commission of 1943-48, the Interim UN Food and Agriculture commission of 1943-45, the UN Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods in 1944 and the UN Conference on International Organisation in San Francisco in 1945.<sup>7</sup> As Eden indicated, part of the value of the United Nations organizations and conferences was to build habits of cooperation. Acheson was joined at the UNRRA conference by future diplomatic stars, including Jean Monnet of France, Lester Pearson of Canada and Oliver Franks from Britain.<sup>8</sup>

What is often automatically described as "the US-led-post-war-liberal-order" had radically different phases. UNRRA and its 'Rehabilitation' was a term and a practice born of the prevailing political interactions that shaped the creation of the present international system in its early 'one world' phase. Elsewhere, Acharya and Plesch deconstruct the false unity of the Western liberal order, while Plesch and Weiss discuss the realist necessity of multilateralism.<sup>9</sup> The initial period of one-world socialistic, social democratic policies became, by the late twentieth century, a neo-liberal policy arena that would have been unrecognisable as 'liberal' to actors in the mid-1940s. At this time a strong state and global management to prevent mass unemployment and poverty were very widely considered to be essential to international peace and security.

That the United Nations alliance preceded the charter agreed at San Francisco and that that meeting itself was a UN Conference had vanished until twenty-first century research. And the pre-Nuremberg UN War Crimes Commission's work has been unknown to generations studying allied responses to the Holocaust and the development of International Criminal Law. The overlooking, or suppression, of UNRRA is also part of a wider amnesia of the wartime United Nations, as this formative period was set aside as somehow utopian or against US national interest.

To support this argument in the arena of UNRRA we can see how, while it was operational, the UN itself promoted UNRRA in its public information operations<sup>10</sup>, and how UNRRA's occurrence in the academic literature shows a precipitous decline from the early 1950s until indications of revival in the early twenty first century.

UN member states used the UN's public information operation to publicise UNRRA and their national view on its operation. The UN Information Organisation was the first multilateral organisation to bear the United Nations name<sup>11</sup>. It bridged the wartime UN from 1942 into the UN created by the Charter of 1945.<sup>12</sup> UNRRA features in over 1,000 instances in over 100 documents. Discussions of rehabilitation - aside from its use in the organisation's name occur more than 400 times in over 100 documents. These, and numerous public information films, amplified the broad meaning of rehabilitation across the various sectors of UNRRA's work as a phase of operations supplemental to immediate relief. Thus, the Allied nations' public information organisation was disseminating intra-allied debates on rehabilitation even prior to the creation of UNRRA.

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<sup>7</sup> Dan Plesch, *America, Hitler and the UN: How the Allies Won World War II and Forged a Peace* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Danchev, Alex, Oliver Franks: *Founding Father* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993)

<sup>9</sup> Dan Plesch and Thomas G. Weiss, "1945's Forgotten Insight: Multilateralism as Realist Necessity," *International Studies Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (February 2016): pp. 4-16, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekv013>; Amitav Acharya and Dan Plesch, "The United Nations: Managing and Reshaping a Changing World Order," *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 26, no. 2 (November 2020): pp. 221-235, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02602001>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/site-search?query=UNRRA> accessed 11 June 2022

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Archives and Records Management Section: Fonds AG-037-United Nations Information Organisation (UNIO) (1940-1945). The authors would like to thank Greg Chaffin for his work on making a digital copy of the wartime archives of the UNIO.

<sup>12</sup> The UNIO archive consists of a variety of internal communications and committee minutes (which warrant an exploration in their own right) as well as an extensive collection of external publications that inform the research in this chapter. Of particular note are the *UNIO News Bulletins* from the London office and the bimonthly *United Nations Review* out of New York. (The latter publication includes a series of supplemental issues that provide a curated collection of public speeches, radio broadcasts and talks from influential actors across all member nations. These supplements in particular are a powerful source of contemporary attitudes and discussions about UNRRA).

## Missing UNRRA

A search for UNRRA in digital academic resources shows that UNRRA was discussed extensively in the later 1940s with a precipitous drop off in the early 1950s.<sup>13</sup> Of the five thousand results over the past eighty years, more than half of those results were published at the time of UNRRA's operation and in the half decade after its closure. After that point, reference to UNRRA ceased almost entirely until the early 2000s, as illustrated in *Figure 1*.

Dan Plesch—and especially Jessica Reinisch's—contributions opened up the field of UNRRA studies. And there have been important contributions focused on refugees by Silvia Salvatici, Peter Gatrell, Laura J. Hilton and Laure Humbert<sup>14</sup> as well as those discussed in the present volume. However, this restorative archaeology in historical scholarship is not echoed in wider development studies and political science.

[Figure 1 here]

The omission of UNRRA from twentieth century scholarship is most obvious in post-conflict reconstruction and development. Known under a variety of names and descriptors, this field deals with challenges posed in the process of transitioning a society away from violent conflict to long-term peace. A shift in this literature can be observed in the last decade of the twentieth century, as the framework for 'post-conflict' responses changed from the traditionally dominant framework of 'national security' to one centred around the needs of people in evaluating the transition to peacetime.

Historical understandings of post-conflict recovery overwhelmingly revolve around responses from states. Tasks often involved deliverance of immediate humanitarian relief, rebuilding war torn infrastructure and establishing new institutions for peacetime. These activities, usually referencing the US Marshall Plan and interventions in Japan, Germany and Korea in the post-war years, are collectively referred to as 'nation-building'. The RAND Corporation's, 2008 study exemplifies this continuing discourse. Even though FDR is in the title of the study, UNRRA, his creation, has no place in RAND's pantheon of US post-war achievements<sup>15</sup>.

'Nation-building' took on a more critical connotation beginning with the Vietnam War. Interventions and policy practices previously deemed successful, specifically those undertaken by the United States, were increasingly called into question in the academic literature. A combination of internal critiques, as well as allegations of neo-colonialism by the Soviet Union and unaligned 'Third World' nations, resulted in the term losing favour in academic literature.

It was the end of the Cold War, in fact, that brought back discussions of post-conflict 'nation-building', although this time under a new name and featuring new players. In the 1990s, studies did seek to learn from the past and move beyond old notions of 'nation-building'. Two key frameworks were introduced in this time period: 'post-conflict reconstruction' and 'human security'. The latter, introduced in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, called for a change from prioritising the security of nations, as past 'nation-building'

<sup>13</sup> The authors have used JSTOR to conduct this research.

<sup>14</sup> Gatrell Peter, *The unsettling of Europe : the great migration, 1945 to the present* (Penguin Books, 2019), Salvatici, Sylvia, *A history of humanitarianism, 1755-1989 : in the name of others*, (Manchester University Press, [2019] and *Fighters without guns': humanitarianism and military action in the aftermath of the Second World War*, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*. Volume 25: Issue 6 (2018); pp 957-976, - Hilton, Laura. J. in Avinoam J. Patt A J and Michael Berkowitz M, *We Are Here": New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, (Wayne State University Press, 2010), Humbert Laure., *Reinventing French Aid: The Politics of Humanitarian Relief in French-Occupied Germany, 1945–1952*, (Cambridge University Press, 2021)

<sup>15</sup> Dobbins, James, Poole, Michele A. Long, Austin, Runkle, Benjamin, *After the War, Nation-Building from FDR to George W. Bush*, (Rand Corporation 2008).

efforts had done, to instead centre on the security of individuals<sup>16</sup>. 'Human security', as defined by the UNDP, encompassed seven dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political<sup>17</sup>.

According to the 1994 Human Development Report, the ideas underpinning human security have been recognized by the UN and the United States since 1945. The report emphasizes that the founders of the United Nations had always given equal importance to people's security and to territorial security. As far back as June 1945, the US Secretary of State reported this to his government on the results of the San Francisco Conference:

*The battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts. The first is the security front where victory spells freedom from fear. The second is the economic and social front where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace....No provisions that can be written into the Charter will enable the Security Council to make the world secure from war if men and women have no security in their homes and their jobs.*<sup>18</sup>

However, there is no hint in the UNDP report that these sentiments had already been translated into a global programme through UNRRA. UNDP as an organisation of record should not omit such an important area of work and more than that, would its work not be enhanced if it reminded its own stakeholders of UNRRA's work?

Two exemplary instances of missing out UNRRA by officials and scholars in the present century are that both Robert Orr, who edited *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction* while at the influential Centre for Strategic International Studies, and Carol Lancaster, author of *Foreign Aid, Diplomacy, Aid, Domestic Politics*<sup>19</sup>, argued for stronger and more effective US engagement in world issues, both unilaterally and through the UN. Neither draws on the precedent set by the American creation of UNRRA. For Orr, the genesis of US post-conflict experience is the occupation of Japan under General MacArthur, remarking that the Japanese experience 'helped to solidify a particularly American attitude that societies coming out of war could and should be rebuilt by the United States'.<sup>20</sup> The UNRRA experience, on the other hand, was that such work should and could be done when the United States shared the burden effectively collectively through the United Nations, and UNRRA was structured so that the USSR had no veto.

Lancaster sees the genesis of US Foreign Aid in the Marshall Plan, regarding UNRRA as solely concerned with relief and a natural product of the US experience in providing relief to Belgium under the occupation of the Kaiser's Army and to famine-hit Russia in the 1920s. For Lancaster, the Marshall plan is the start of the US's more complex post-conflict assistance. With over 1,000 citations in Google Scholar, Lancaster's views continue to shape the discourse. Unfortunately, although Lancaster places aid within its domestic context the omission of UNRRA own emergence from precisely these dynamics as Eden outlined and we develop further, reduces the value of her conclusions. In particular, the use of the term 'rehabilitation' to enable activity between relief and reconstruction would enrich the analysis.

A rare mention of UNRRA, in the 2013 Overseas Development Institute working paper *A History of the Humanitarian System: Western Origins and Foundations* gives barely a column to UNRRA and as much space to the work of NGOs.<sup>21</sup> For example, the work of what became OXFAM was of importance in the 1940s, but

<sup>16</sup> Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou and Chenoy, Anuradha M. *Human Security: Concepts and Implications* (London: Routledge, 2007). Shahrbanou

<sup>17</sup> *Human Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1994). p. 24-25

<sup>18</sup> *Human Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1994). p. 24

<sup>19</sup> Lancaster Carol, author of *Foreign Aid, Diplomacy, Domestic Politics*

<sup>20</sup> Orr, Robert C., (ed.), *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2004), p.186

<sup>21</sup> Eleanor Davey, with John Borton and Matthew Foley, <https://odi.org/en/publications/a-history-of-the-humanitarian-system-western-origins-and-foundations/> 2013, Accessed May 2022

the nation states and their formal interactions were far more significant. UNRRA's rehabilitation role does not trouble the ODI report's authors.

### UNRRA and Rehabilitation

From the Atlantic City conference onwards, rehabilitation in its many facets was central to the assistance planned and implemented in the nations that had suffered Axis occupation. By 1946, UNRRA operations had gathered momentum worldwide. From the Headquarters at Dupont Circle in Washington DC, its Director Herbert Lehman organized divisions to help with Displaced Persons (survivors of camps and slave labour), Health, Welfare, Food, Clothing and Textiles, as well as Agricultural and Industrial Rehabilitation and Medical and Sanitary supplies. By mid-1945, UNRRA had some 7,500 employees in purchasing offices across Latin America, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and aid operations from China to Denmark. While the majority of the resources came from nations, financing was mobilised from a variety of other sources. At the time Eire was neutral and was outside the United Nations but nevertheless sent 285 tons of bacon and 8,000 beef cattle.<sup>22</sup> Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also made contributions to UNRRA amounting to several million dollars-worth of commodities<sup>23</sup>.

Rehabilitation had meaning across these operations. Whether psychological with refugees disorientated after years as Nazi slaves or as rehabilitating infrastructure with cranes and bulldozers imported by UNRRA.<sup>24</sup> In China, by March 1947, despite the civil war, four hundred miles of the Yellow River had been protected from flooding in a process enabled by Canadian-supplied tree trunks sunk side by side to depths of forty feet along the river bank that provided a frame for stone and concrete fencing.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, UNRRA's functions were contentious from the start, with recipients seeking a wider brief than some parts of the donor governments. Congressional approval of UNRRA - accepted by its Council included the proviso that "That it is understood that 'the task of rehabilitation must not be considered as the beginning of reconstruction — it is coterminous with relief." This Congressional view is more restrictive than that given by Law and more important given the funding that Congress provided.

Pieter Kerstens, the Netherlands Economic Minister expressed the "disappointment displayed by the delegates at Atlantic City that the concept of 'rehabilitation' had been so strictly limited both in space and time." He explained 'rehabilitation' was understood to encompass the supplies and projects necessary to establish a minimum level of economic self-sufficiency. He gave the following example in an attempt to clarify the definition whilst recognizing the nuance of the objective.

*For the Netherlands, under rehabilitation is meant the most rapid provision of artificial fertilizers and cattle food because these two groups contribute immediately towards relieving hunger, in the first place, in the Netherlands, and probably also in neighboring countries.*

*Self-sufficiency in this respect would in the shortest time save the necessity of bringing this overseas, hence would save shipping space, which is a most valuable factor.*

*Under the heading of rehabilitation there are no raw materials for the cosmetic industry, not even for reasons of fighting unemployment, although in borderline cases this might contribute to an affirmative decision, but the luxury trade does not fall under this.*<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 1 p.125 and Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 3 p. 502-503

<sup>23</sup> Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 3 p. 504

<sup>24</sup> Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 2, p.252

<sup>25</sup> Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 2, p.424-37

<sup>26</sup> Radio broadcast by Pieter A. Kerstens, Netherlands Minister of Economic Affairs over Radio Orange, free Netherlands station in London on Feb. 5, 1944 "The United Nations Review Vol. IV - No. 3'. 1944. New York. *The United Nations Review: A Monthly Summary of Documents on the Allied Fight for Freedom*. UNIO. Folder S-0537-0008-0007

The creation and operation of UNRRA's Industrial Rehabilitation Division further illuminates the rehabilitation debates in a sector far from the social welfare application of rehabilitation. James Colbert, a senior official in the Division wrote an analysis of its operations where he develops the argument that the use of the word Rehabilitation and the absence of the word Reconstruction was in part intended to meet the concerns of some members of the U.S. Congress who were opposed to U.S. investment in post-war reconstruction efforts around the world.<sup>27</sup> U.S. funding by Congress came in several annual budgets each accompanied by conditions. Thus, the delivery of U.S. assistance was a function not merely of demand and supply dynamics but the political interactions between UNRRA and its Divisions, the State Department and the Committees of Congress. Colbert's argument concerning industrial operations is particularly relevant as deliveries of machinery, livestock and buildings were contested as reconstruction and even development in a way in which food and medicine was not.

Colbert details the intense bureaucratic interactions as UNRRA and State Department officials sought to maximise the speed and scope of UNRRA's industrial rehabilitation work. These Instrumental political concerns may have been as relevant to the choice and use of the term 'rehabilitation', than theoretical debates on accurate social science terminology. Rehabilitation was at times a deliberate slight of hand encompassing reconstruction and even development, at times an honest tautology. Rehabilitation was not only a bridge between relief and reconstruction, but also a very broad usage across culture and education to agriculture and industry. For advocates of a maximal approach to post-war action, rehabilitation was a highly constructive ambiguity, for others its use was obstructive.

We have seen, however, that the architects of the wartime UN who designed a transitional system created in UNRRA envisaged that the international community's work through UNRRA would transition into economic development work by the International Monetary Fund and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The work of UNRRA should be used more fully in contemporary discussion of post-conflict reconstruction and international aid. The following examples cannot in the scope of this chapter be comprehensive; rather, they support the idea that UNRRA offers useful lessons for today, not least in the spectrum of activities it called rehabilitation.

### **UNRRA and lessons for twenty first century post-conflict reconstruction and development.**

UN agencies and development researchers identify the gap filled by rehabilitation but are oblivious to large body of work by and on UNRRA decades ago. In order to offer some ideas to fill the gap the discussion below discusses political psychological problems needing rehabilitation and the core issue of finance before signposting other areas for further study.

The ODI study from 2014: 'Remaking the case for linking relief, rehabilitation and development'<sup>28</sup> missed the opportunity to draw on UNRRA to help consideration of the problem it sought to address. It dates the origins of rehabilitation to the 1980s but argues that the idea has never been applied in practice.

The UN agencies themselves continue to struggle to bridge the gap between aid and development. Two reports illustrate the continuing problem as the UN Development Programme and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs seek means of interim measures.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Colbert, James, *The Industrial Rehabilitation Program of UNRRA, Doctoral Thesis*, Columbia University, 1950. pp 18-21, 42 (Congressional rider) 50-51, 158, 218-220, 227, 360-371.

<sup>28</sup> Irina Mosel and Simon Levine, "Remaking the Case for Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development" (Overseas Development Institute, April 2, 2014), available at <https://odi.org/en/publications/remaking-the-case-for-linking-relief-rehabilitation-and-development/>. Accessed 3 August 2021.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.undp.org/africa/news/undp-and-ocha-chiefs-renew-call-new-way-working>, accessed June 2022.

Strengthening demoralisation and democracy are issues that might be constructed as psychological rehabilitation and development and addresses part of the concerns identified by ODI, UNDP and UNOCHA. And might be considered as existing across the relief and development policy areas. Here might be a topic where UNRRA experience might contribute to the gaps identified.

Democracy in the administration of relief and rehabilitation was a key part of the success of the process which enabled people freed from Nazi rule to regain control over their lives. Here rehabilitation is psychological, a meaning closer to twenty-first century usage. UNRRA-administered DP camps operated under a system of self-government. Such policy is not a core function of the twenty-first century UNHCR. Part of UNRRA's work was assistance to the millions of displaced persons across Europe at the end of the war. UNRRA's official history claims that UNRRA had been successful in ensuring that its camps were self-governing with elected councils, courts and fire services that would not 'have been possible if UNRRA had pursued a policy of efficient command'<sup>30</sup>. Building on contemporary field reports, Woodbridge notes; 'although many leaders had been appointed at the beginning of the operation by UNRRA or military officials, by the summer of 1946 almost all had been elected by the camp residents.'<sup>31</sup>

According to Woodbridge, the official historian of UNRRA, it was, 'no exaggeration to say that [self-governance] was the goal toward which all activities were pointed.'<sup>32</sup> The policy came from both the US Army and UNRRA. General Dwight D. Eisenhower's Headquarters' 'Guide to the Care of Displaced Persons in Germany' stated that 'displaced persons should be encouraged to organize themselves as much as is administratively possible'<sup>33</sup>. As Woodbridge points out:

*In each camp there was usually a camp committee elected by the entire population, either at large, by nationality (if in a mixed camp), by area or block within the camp, or by some other means. This committee usually selected the camp a chairman or camp leader, although in some cases he was directly elected. This committee supervised all activities and represented the population in all dealings with outside authorities.'*<sup>34</sup>

This was the ideal, but practice was slow and imperfect. Later, in 1946 and afterwards, the political character of the camps became part of both the emerging Cold War and the attempt of Jews to immigrate to Israel. It should not be considered radical that the principle of fundamental democratic empowerment was part of the practice of international assistance to refugees. This democratic policy formed part of a broader recognition of the psychological tasks epitomized in the UNRRA slogan of 'Helping People Help Themselves'. There was clear recognition of the need to prevent a welfare dependency. A Czech minister in exile in London spoke of the need for post-war assistance to recognize the 'moral humiliation' inflicted by the Nazis and avoid assistance being presented as charity rather than good neighbourliness. And indeed, his country was donating sugar to UNRRA by 1947.<sup>35</sup>

If democracy is at the heart of the values that underpin international post-conflict activity, then funding drives the amount of activity that can be undertaken. Low levels of funding continue to hamper relief and

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[https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ocha\\_undp\\_doco\\_joint\\_lessons\\_learned\\_and\\_good\\_practice\\_tool\\_adapting\\_coordination\\_mechanisms\\_oct\\_2012.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ocha_undp_doco_joint_lessons_learned_and_good_practice_tool_adapting_coordination_mechanisms_oct_2012.pdf), accessed June 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Woodbridge,; The History of UNRRA, Vol. 2, p. 523-4

<sup>31</sup> 'U.S. Zone History Report, Camp Self-Government,' Appendix A, R.Taylor, 'Camp Self-Government, District I'; and Appendix B, Virgil Payne, 'Camp Self-Government, District III'; cited in Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 2, pp.523-4

<sup>32</sup> Woodbridge,; The History of UNRRA, Vol. 2, page 523

<sup>33</sup> Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, Headquarters 'Guide to the Care of Displaced Persons in Germany', May 1945 revision, Part 1, Section 1; cited in Woodbridge,; The History of UNRRA, Vol. 2, page 522

<sup>34</sup> Woodbridge,; The History of UNRRA, Vol. 2, page 523

<sup>35</sup> Article from the New York Times (September 17, 1944) by the Czech Reconstruction Minister Frantisek Nemeč, quoted in "War And Peace Aims: Special Supplement No. 5 to the United Nations Review". 1945. New York. War and Peace Aims.UNIO . Folder S-0537-0010-0005 Page 8. Section CZECHOSLOVAKIA. Nemeč refers to UNRRA under the name of the Allied relief organisation.



development and by extension any attempt to fill the rehabilitation gap. It is well known today that the UN has a target for developed states to contribute 0.7% of GDP to international development. This particular metric was put forth in the seminal 1969 World Bank report, *Partners in Development*, the product of a commission headed by the former Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson<sup>36</sup>. Pearson's report credits the inspiration of the 0.7% recommendation to a 1958 proposal from the World Council of Churches that recommends nations contribute assistance equalling 1% of GDP<sup>37</sup>. This citation appears to inform the orthodox history of the 0.7% recommendation as reported by the UN, World Bank and OECD.<sup>38</sup>

These organizations, and the narrative about the codification of development assistance, do not reference UNRRA's 1% objective. Pearson himself chaired an UNRRA supply committee<sup>39</sup>, yet neglected to make any mention of the 1% metric that funded UNRRA. The fault lies not only in him; the handful of explicit mentions of the UNRRA origin by his contemporaries appear to have been entirely ignored in favour of Pearson's narrative. Robert Jackson, another former-UNRRA-official-turned-UN-consultant, explicitly cites UNRRA as the origin of the 1% formula in his 1969 'Capacity Study' for the UNDP.<sup>40</sup>

This one per cent solution was put forward by Harry White<sup>41</sup>, a US Treasury official who was also involved in the financial discussions that reached fruition at the UN Monetary and Financial Conference held at Bretton Woods. The White Plan had the advantage that everyone was contributing what they could so that it was not simply a matter of US taxpayers subsidizing the world. The system had an obvious equality and a clear limit that helped prevent disagreements over who supplied how many tons of what foodstuffs, while still accommodating the realities of US wealth. The adoption of this contribution system by the UNRRA Council imposed a non-binding obligation on governments, one that placed peer pressure on member states while convincing US taxpayers that while they were paying the most, others were paying a fair share.

The US contribution was over \$2.6 billion of the \$3.6 billion global cost of the programme – \$1 billion, however, was supplied by other countries, mainly Britain and Canada who contributed \$617 million and \$138 million respectively as well as in smaller quantities by forty other members of the United Nations<sup>42</sup>. The Dominican Republic increased its export tax, transferring the revenue to UNRRA. Brazil made the fifth largest contribution, with forty million dollars, nearly double the requested one per cent of National Income.<sup>43</sup>

Lauding rather than suppressing the UNRRA 1% can reinforce efforts to implement the 0.7% today. Some states, such as those in the EU, benefited from UNRRA and such history can create increased moral pressure to live up to today's goals. Furthermore, the example of the effectiveness of the formula in the 1940s in creating concrete relief with equitable contributions has the potential to have a positive impact internationally.

UNRRA was to set the conditions for successful economic development, as Richard Law explained above<sup>44</sup>. While by the 1950s economic development largely focused on GDP, a measure of production, the overriding

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<sup>36</sup> Pearson, Lester B. *Partners in Development: Report of the Commission on International Development*. New York: Praeger, 1969. p. 152

<sup>37</sup> Pearson, Lester B. *Partners in Development: Report of the Commission on International Development*. New York: Praeger, 1969. p. 144

<sup>38</sup> "The 0.7% ODA/GNI Target - a History." OECD. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Accessed August 3, 2021. <https://www.oecd.org/development/stats/the07odagnitarget-ahistory.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> For reference, see notes of the 86th Extraordinary Meeting of the United Nations Information Board (UNIO)

<sup>40</sup> See footnote on page 4 of: Jackson, Robert. "A Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System Vol. 2." Geneva: United Nations Publications, 1969. Folder S-0290-0005-07. United Nations Archives. <https://search.archives.un.org/undp-capacity-study-sir-robert-jackson>. For more information on the roles Jackson held in UNRRA see: Appendix One: WHO'S WHO IN UNRRA in Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 3, p. 3-18

<sup>41</sup> See page 77 of *Treasury papers. Series Two*, Treasury papers of John Maynard Keynes, 1938-1949. Reel 12 Vol. 5. T247/89, additionally pages 75-76 of same document for a more detailed version of White's plan

<sup>42</sup> Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 3, p.500

<sup>43</sup> Woodbridge, *The History of UNRRA*, Vol. 3, p.500

<sup>44</sup> See quote associated with footnote 3

objective of economic development in the 1940s was to serve international security policy by ensuring that mass unemployment did not fuel extremism. The UNIO records government statements from the middle of the 1940s making this argument and connecting it to post-war relief and rehabilitation.<sup>45</sup>

At the level of bureaucratic structure UNRRA had at least two features of value identified by Karetny and Weiss.<sup>46</sup> The first is a sunset clause designed to ensure that the organisation could not last forever, a problem they consider with some UN organizations, while the second is the delivering of the 'One UN' concept introduced by Kofi Annan in 2005<sup>47</sup>. Here too then, UNRRA precedents can help UN reform today.

UN practitioners and scholars may consider that their work can be enhanced by considering whether UNRRA provides a sounding board and comparison for the global operation of a unified UN. Furthermore, UNRRA's administrative costs were low in comparison to today, as expenses were 1.18 per cent.<sup>48</sup> In comparison, the US Agency for International Development and associated economic development programmes had administrative expenses or nearly double the administrative cost of UNRRA in 2020. This provides a useful example of the historic efficiency of multilateral organisations. A deeper dive into the rationale of differing cost structures might be beneficial, but the headline difference is of a type that is often used to shape public debate.

Additional areas of interest for current policy where we offer pointers to further debate and study include UNRRA structures global economic strategy, political-psychological rehabilitation strategies, and the idea of voluntary contributions being tied to percentage of GDP.

## Conclusion

By the end of its mandate, the political outlook had changed, only Stalin remained of the three wartime leaders, and confrontation between the Communist and Western world was escalating. In the U.S. itself, FDR's New Dealers were out of favour. In September 1947, US President Harry Truman's Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, once Roosevelt's right-hand man, explained: 'We wish to give relief as the United States, not as a member of an international organization in which a committee composed of other governments determines the allotment of the relief given by us'.<sup>49</sup> Gone was the recognition that UNRRA had been created with the US controlling the formal strategy—but through a multilateral process.

A vitriolic critic of Truman's new policies in Germany and towards UNRRA was Ira Hirschmann, an experienced UNRRA official with a record of helping Jews escape the Holocaust. In his 1949 book, 'The Embers Still Burn', Hirschmann attacks the rebuilding of Germany, the neglect of refugees, the encouragement of Nazi-associated anti-communist militia, the invitation to extreme right-wing Europeans to settle in the US, and what he called the 'killing of UNRRA'<sup>50</sup>. But it was Dean Acheson's verdict on UNRRA, in his, for many, definitive memoir of the post-war settlement that was influential, rather than Hirschmann's. Acheson wrote that the USA sought closure of UNRRA because of the Republican landslide in the 1946

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<sup>45</sup> For example, see Law's comments on debt relief (page 13) and Wallace's paragraph on full employment (page 101) in "War And Peace Aims: Special Supplement No. 4 to the United Nations Review". 1944. New York. War and Peace Aims. UNIO. Folder S-0537-0010-0004. Additionally, in "War And Peace Aims: Special Supplement No. 5 to the United Nations Review". 1945. New York. War and Peace Aims. UNIO Folder S-0537-0010-0005, pages 7 through 9 discuss the economic implications of surpluses, the potential for triggering rapid inflation and the role UNRRA could play in managing the supply of goods. For a discussion on trade, UNRRA and government regulations, see Acheson (page 41) in the same issue (War and Peace Aims No. 5).

<sup>46</sup> Eli Karetny and Thomas Weiss, "UNRRA's Operational Genius and Institutional Design," in *Wartime Origins and the Future United Nations* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> For more details see <https://www.un.org/en/ga/deliveringasone/>

<sup>48</sup> Woodbridge, The History of UNRRA, Vol. 3, page 523

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Hirschmann, *The Embers Still Burn*, p.147

<sup>50</sup> For greater detail see chapter 11 of *Hirschmann*, *The Embers Still Burn*, p. 134-154

Congressional elections, its ineffectiveness, its role in black markets, its support for communist regimes who used it 'to entrench themselves', and that its staff had been weak and its leadership weaker.<sup>51</sup>

As a U.S. unilateral initiative, the Marshall Plan committed some 2% of GDP to Western Europe over a four year period. From 1945-1947 UNRRA dispensed half of that percentage of GDP but from some 30 states and to recipients in all the previously Axis occupied countries. Its budget, geographic reach and variety of activities all justify its restoration alongside the Marshall Plan. Sadly, however in the World Bank's public briefing paper 'Lessons of the Marshall Plan' UNRRA is invisible<sup>52</sup>. Given UNRRA's rehabilitation work in much of Western Europe this leaves the false impression of the efficacy of unilateral U.S. action and the absence of the multilateral, providing a false and distorted history on which countless officials and members of civil society have founded their thinking.

The recognition of UNRRA's significance is long overdue. A restorative archaeology of knowledge<sup>53</sup> that brings UNRRA out from under the poured concrete of Cold War ideology that continues to underpin much of twenty-first century scholarship and practice. This form of internationalism should be set alongside both the Marshall Plan and early twentieth century relief efforts as a core source in any primer on post-conflict reconstruction. At a minimum UNRRA's successor organisations the UN High Commission for Refugees, UN World Health Organisation, UNICEF and OCHA should draw on the work of their ancestor.

The practical implementation practiced by UNRRA is by the remarks of Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King:

*The service of relief and rehabilitation in times of strain is the moral equivalent of military service in time of war [...] We are members one of another. The doctrine of mutual aid is the antithesis of the doctrine of force [...] it signifies brotherhood, not fratricide. It considers human need, rather than human greed. [...] Men and nations must substitute co-operation for coercion. Mutual aid must become the guiding principle of international relationship [...] The hope of the future lies in the universal recognition of our common humanity.*<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, p.201

<sup>52</sup> Barry Eichengreen, *Lessons of the Marshall Plan*, 2010  
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<sup>53</sup> Adami, Dan Plesch and Amitav Acharya, "Chapter 10: Commentary: The Restorative Archeology of Knowledge about the role of Women in the History of the UN - Theoretical implications for International Relations," in *Women and the UN: A New History of Women's International Human Rights* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021). Available at  
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<sup>54</sup> See page 9 of War and Peace Aims No. 5 Special Supplement to the United Nations Review. In folder S-0537-0010-0005.  
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