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Realist Dystopia – Hans Morgenthau and the Changing Role of the United Nations in World Politics

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Abstract: This research delves into the way in which Hans Morgenthau had studied and discussed the United Nations as an organisation, mainly during its first twenty years. Drawing on the influence of Carl Schmitt and Hans Kelsen and on his own personal disappointment with the League of Nations, Morgenthau strongly criticized the UN. The author considers that the organisation propounds lofty principles but harbours old-style diplomacy. After establishing a succinct comparison with Raymond Aron, the article highlights the reasons for Morgenthau's criticism, including some abiding features of realism, such as the focus on great powers, a limited attribution of agency to other actors and an emphasis on security to the detriment of cooperative activities. It underlines how Morgenthau rejected the UN as a basis to build a world state. It concludes by arguing that Morgenthau's realism highlights the frailties of the UN but does not explain why states still insist in the multilateral institutions.

Keywords: United Nations, international organisation, Security Council, Hans Morgenthau, General Assembly**.**

Introduction

The classical realist school is not the obvious basis for discussing and explaining the United Nations or multilateralism in general. If states are moved by interest, defined in terms of power, the multilateral institution cannot escape these forces. It is hence inevitable that multilateral organisations serve individual purposes and can be abandoned as soon as interests change. Those who claim Hans Morgenthau's realism as their intellectual framework are rarely interested in the United Nations; some refer to the international organisation just to make its supposed irrelevance explicit, as it is purported to be unable to influence events. Yet, *Politics among Nations* (Morgenthau 1948b, 1954c, 1960, 1967b,

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1973) dedicates an entire chapter to the UN, refined in each edition[1], and Morgenthau authored a surprising number of texts related to the subject from 1945 to 1965 (Morgenthau 1945a, 1945b, 1946a, 1946b, 1946c, 1948a, 1953, 1954a, 1954b, 1954d, 1957b, 1958, 1961a, 1961b, 1962, 1963, 1965a, 1965b, 1965c, 1967a). The extensive treatment of the organisation stems from the fact that the UN, despite all its limitations, transformed the manner in which states conduct international politics, even among great powers, and re-dimensioned the role played by medium and small countries. Thus, Morgenthau's criticism of the UN in its first decades creates a rare opportunity to assess the limits of realism for understanding multilateral institutions and to gain new perspectives on international organisations.

This article analyses the evolution of Morgenthau's ideas about the UN over the two decades following the Second World War. It delves into his multiple articles and books dealing with the UN to evidence how Morgenthau explained (or explained away) the historical evolution of the UN and its contribution to international politics. The five editions of *Politics among Nations* published in the author's lifetime (1948b, 1954c, 1960, 1967b and 1973) are used as conceptual and chronological landmarks. In the main part of the research, preference is given to reassess the trove of texts produced by Morgenthau that refer to the UN in the period from 1945 to 1965, instead of the secondary bibliography on the author. The temporal limits for the research are given by Morgenthau himself, who practically ceased to write about the UN after 1965, with the exception of some updates in the fifth edition of Politics among Nations (Morgenthau 1973) for reasons that will be discussed along the article.

Little has been written on Morgenthau and the UN, as it has drawn scant attention. Authors interested in Morgenthau's intellectual trajectory tend to consider his references to the UN perfunctorily (Molloy 2006: 82 and 94; Koskenniemi 2001: 461-462; Griffith 1999: 38; Söllner 1987: 171-172, for instance). Scheuerman (2009: 117-122) does a unique and fair assessment of the subject in building the argument about how Morgenthau built his idea of a world government. However, he has a certain tendency to overvalue the limited recognition Morgenthau granted to the UN. A similar proclivity is found in Behr and Rösch (2012: 5) and Rösch (2015: 139-140), who overemphasize the positive signals sent to the UN by the author in the mid-1950s. In both cases, it is not noticed that a few positive attributes were already recognized from the late 1940s and that the tendency to treat the international organization as decadent soon took over again. The authors of the present essay used the research to write a previous text on the United Nations in Politics among Nations, which shares elements with this one (Fonseca Jr. and Uziel 2018).

This text attempts to evidence three interrelated aspects of Morgenthau's reasoning on the UN. Firstly, even though his assessment of the UN remains severely critical throughout the period, it shows nuances according to conjunctural factors. Secondly, his central contention slowly evolves from the criticism of the organisation's institutional design to the misuse of the UN by the new member states. Finally, when the author conceives the possibility of a future world government, the UN is not even seen as a stepping stone in that direction. This essay is structured in three roughly chronological sections, bounded by the editions of *Politics among Nations*, followed by a discussion on the factors structuring Morgenthau's perception of the UN.

Understanding the United Nations within international politics

Morgenthau's perception of the United Nations had a long prehistory, which includes the intellectual influences of Hans Kelsen and Carl Schmitt[2], his traumatic contact with the League of Nations and his monitoring of the UN's establishment process during the Second World War (Suganami 2007; Koskenniemi, 2001; Griffiths 1999).

Despite the distance between Morgenthau as a political scientist and Jewish refugee and the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt, the complex intellectual relationship between them resulted in some convergent understanding of politics. Their dynamics changed from Morgenthau's initial open admiration for Schmitt to an effort to distance himself from him, caused by Morgenthau's intellectual evolution, personal incidents and Schmitt's adherence to Nazism. They shared, however, the anti-formalism of so many lawyers disappointed with Weimar and also a considerable pessimism regarding human nature that could only be disentangled at a very deep philosophical and quasi-theological level. The recent reappraisal of early writings by Morgenthau highlighted the differences between the two, but it also made clearer the existence of mutual influences in important questions such as morality, criticism of liberalism, the friend-enemy dichotomy, and the definition of the political clearer. In the interwar period, both shared the nostalgia for a classic period of the balance of power and regretted the decadence of diplomacy. It would be barely exaggerated to suggest they projected the failures of Weimar politics onto their understanding of diplomatic interactions at international organizations. The period of European history with the balance of power steeped in shared conceptions of what war, politics and diplomacy represented for them a model, whereas the open debates of parliamentary diplomacy in the League and the UN were unproductive and even dangerous, exacerbating the decadence of diplomatic practices.[3] Diplomacy, for Morgenthau, could still be restored to its former glory if countries could foreswear the uneasy combination of old and new methods (Morgenthau 2012; Morgenthau 1973: 517-548; Morgenthau 1946c; Griffiths 1999: 37-38; Guilhot 2010: 235-239; Söllner 1987; Paipais 2016; Pichler 1998; Behr and Rösch 2012: 18-22; Koskenniemi 2001: 458-465; Kostagiannis 2018: 70-71; Molloy 2006: 95). Morgenthau and Schmitt also considered universal moral ideals, as advocated by Woodrow Wilson and embodied in the League of Nations (and later in the UN), as harmful and as an attempt to promote a "remoralization of international relations". Both believed in indivisible sovereignty, with no room for international institutions to act effectively in times of crisis. Even if Morgenthau maintained a strong moral stance and rejected Schmitt's doctrines in several aspects, this purposeful dissociation from the Nazi jurist did not nullify certain areas of influence, including the low esteem for international institutions (Scheuerman 2007: 68; Scheuerman 2009: 51-65; Koskenniemi 2001: 444-445; Morgenthau 1948a: 361; Suganami 2007: 516-518; Guilhot 2010).

Kelsen, on the other hand, was instrumental to Morgenthau's academic career and left him with a lifelong debt of gratitude (always acknowledged) and positive personal and intellectual impression from their interaction in Geneva. In his work, Morgenthau found arguments to consider the moderating influence of political power, subject to legal norms. He also adopted, to a certain extent, the idea that validity was a central property of legal

norms, although aggregating a psychological component, and the fact that international conflicts could be conceived as a clash of national systems of sanctions. But the criticism of Kelsen's doctrines regarding the structure of norms and of law itself became an essential part of Morgenthau's perception of international law and the UN. For Morgenthau, the excessive positivist legalism that tried to sharply separate international law from the harsh realities of power – a denial of the reality of politics – would end up being far more detrimental to the relations between states. In a manner of speaking, a significant part of Kelsen's influence on him was a negative one, by providing Morgenthau with a doctrine to negate. Morgenthau advocated that international relations were for statesmen, not for lawyers – although he had been trained as an international lawyer himself (Morgenthau 1944, 1946a, 1946b; Jütersonke 2010; Scheuerman 2011; Mazower 2013; Frei 2016; Koskenniemi 2001: 455-458; Guilhot 2010: 230; Behr and Rösch 2012 16-17; Suganami 2007).

Morgenthau was heavily influenced by his own personal experience in moulding his conception of international relations and the role that international organizations could play in them. The early years in late-Wilhelmine Germany put him in contact with blatant antisemitism and generated lifelong frustrations towards the protection afforded by the state. As most intellectuals of his generation, he shared the disappointment with the legal formalism prevailing in the Weimar years which helped engender the perception of life as tragedy. Compelled to leave his native country to escape persecution and search for an academic position, he spent three years in Switzerland. His years in Geneva (1932-1935) gave Morgenthau a vantage point which allowed him to see the agony of the League of Nations. It frustrated him deeply and corroborated his analysis of the institution's inability to achieve its goals – a sentiment partly shared by an entire generation later known as the "classical realists" (Lebow 2013: 60-61). For him, the history of the League was that of an increasing degradation of the idea of collective security, which ultimately failed to prevail over the balance of power – although the former modified the latter enough to make it less stable and more lethal. The diplomacy deriving from Wilson's idealism was either ineffective or insincere. After all, not even small and medium-sized states, some of them purporting to be neutral – which were supposed to benefit the most from the multilateral framework as per the liberal argument – lent their support to the Covenant's mechanisms in the moment of truth. After leaving Geneva, his misadventures teaching in Spain, and upon being unceremoniously forced to abandon the country, continued to add to a sense of a tragic existence. His ultimate departure to the US might have felt as a bitter respite, exacerbated by difficulties to adapt in the new country (Morgenthau 1939 and 1946c; Scheuerman 2011: 8-9; Koskenniemi 2001: 446-458; Griffiths 1999; Behr and Rösch 2012: 5-11; Rösch 2014: 353-354).

Morgenthau's forced migration to the US and his analysis of the international scene at the end of the war did not improve his opinion of international organisations. He was disturbed by the feverish enthusiasm for the United Nations and was purposefully tough in his assessments of the outcome of the Dumbarton Oaks conference and of the San Francisco Charter. He was already part of a group of intellectuals who would be the future nucleus of classical realism, marked, especially, by the rejection of legalistic illusions

(Craig 2007; Mazower 2013; Scheuerman 2011). He had plenty of criticisms about the United Nations Charter. Pre-eminently, he saw it as a "Machiavellian utopia": a system where lawful behaviour was preached but which would only function based on power politics and traditional diplomacy. Morgenthau identified implicit inadmissible principles and purposes in the Charter, diverging with the legalistic explicit ones, which reinforced the dominance of the great powers (Morgenthau 1945a, 1945b; Scheuerman 2009).

The early years of the UN operation seemed only to justify Morgenthau's fears. On the one hand, legalistic reasoning was unable to resolve conflicts; on the other, the paralysis generated by the growing chasm between the United States and the Soviet Union further evidenced the prevalence of power politics (Morgenthau 1946c, 1948a).

Morgenthau and the first ten years of the United Nations

In the first edition of *Politics among Nations*, the text related to the UN is located in the context of the analysis of international law and in one of the chapters on "The problem of peace in the middle of the 20th century". In it, Morgenthau reviewed several options to reach peace (disarmament, judicial solution, peaceful change) and included three chapters on an *international government*. The first two deal with the Holy Alliance and the League of Nations – in his view, forerunners of the UN, from which it had inherited several characteristics and shortcomings. Meaningful comments are also included in the section on diplomacy, at the very end of the book (Morgenthau 1948b, 236-242, 379-387 and 419-445; Scheuerman 2009: 118-119).

As the author had already posited in 1945, for him the Charter enshrines the dominion of the great powers in the Security Council and transforms the General Assembly into an ineffective body. Thus a "split personality" (Morgenthau 1948b: 380) arose in the UN, one which elicits democratic expectations but results in an autocratic performance. A strong concept of sovereignty could be realized in such scenario only by the operation of the five permanent members of the Security Council as a sort of directory. Even then, in practice, the United States and the Soviet Union would share world governance among themselves – provided they managed to find common ground. If, as proved to be the case, they ended up as rivals, one would probably try to use the UN as a "grand alliance" against the other (Morgenthau 1948b: 381; Morgenthau 1948a; Suganami 2007).

Morgenthau reiterated his previous warning (1945b) that the lack of a principle of justice – as there supposedly had been in the League (self-determination) and in the Holy Alliance (legitimacy) – hampered the formation of a consensus among the great powers. In founding the UN without a convergent worldview among the most powerful states, the drafters of the Charter had tried to build a structure for preventing war on a dubious foundation:

> The United Nations is like a building designed by two architects who have agreed upon the plans for the second floor, but not upon those for the first. Each of them builds his wing of the first floor as he sees fit, each doing his best to obstruct the efforts of the other.

> In consequence, not only does the second floor become an unlivable abode, but also the whole structure threatens to disintegrate (Morgenthau 1948b, pp. 383-4).

The result was a highly ineffective organisation, a fact visible in the legalistic treatment of the conflicts in the immediate post-war period. The situation was aggravated by the growing disagreement between the United States and the Soviet Union, which paralyzed even technical and secondary issues – such as the case of Trieste (Morgenthau 1948b: 384). The use of the organisation as an instrument to compel the rival to act differently only exacerbated tensions. The UN rested on a provisional and volatile status quo (Morgenthau 1948b: 384-387).

To the idea of international governance represented by the UN, Morgenthau contrasted that of the world state: a confluence of idealism and realism, necessary to deal with the constant threat of a nuclear cataclysm. It was no easy deed for a relatively newcomer to the US to challenge the local traditions in political science and criticize an organisation that was seen with so much hope and shrouded by Wilsonian idealism. He did not admit, however, that the UN could be an embryo of this new entity in any sense, not even in building the required global civil society. Since the first edition of *Politics among Nations*, he ended the section on the UN with the following observation: '... it is such war which today threatens the United States, the Soviet Union, and all mankind. For its prevention we must look elsewhere than to the United Nations'[4] (Morgenthau 1948b: 387; Craig 2007; Scheuerman 2007, 2011; Söllner 1987: 164-166).

After the publication of *Politics among Nations*, Morgenthau continued to deal with his growing fear that a global nuclear war would annihilate mankind and with his recrimination of the Soviets for what he saw as their imperialist policy, although not in an entirely systematic manner (Craig 2007). Morgenthau had indeed predicted that, despite the Charter's lofty ideals, the UN would be a new forum of old diplomacy (Morgenthau 1946c). The 1950s saw this perception confirmed ('The setting is new, but the plot is as old as history', Morgenthau 1954b). The Charter, designed by statesmen and not jurists (ironically, as he advocated), proved to be a conveniently flexible document, endowed with a plasticity that plied to adaptations without formal amendments (Morgenthau 1954a; Schwelb 1965).

The author also identified a confirmation of his predictions: in the absence of a consensus between the United States and the Soviet Union, the UN was given the new role of underpinning Washington and its allies in their fight to confront the Socialist bloc and the Communism that was supposedly spreading. Morgenthau did not foresee that the General Assembly – to his mind an impotent, cumbersome and wasteful body – would gain increasing importance. Through Resolution 377 (V), "Uniting for Peace", the General Assembly could act as the centre of a "new United Nations". With this improvised transfer of competences from the Security Council to the General Assembly, the organisation played an important role in mitigating the effects of the Cold War. It created a discreet environment for contacts between East and West at a time of very limited communication and it forced the United States to soften its policies in order to obtain two-third majorities

of General Assembly votes. By doing so, the UN instilled caution into international relations and power play, as had been advised by Morgenthau and other realist authors (Morgenthau 1953, 1954a: 19-20, 1954b, 1962: 280; Scheuerman 2009: 119; Koskenniemi 2001: 461).

At this juncture, it is useful to compare Morgenthau's thoughts on the UN to those of another contemporary scholar, Raymond Aron. Even though they were often at odds with each other (Morgenthau 1967c; Aron 2004: 579-586)[5], both are central to the formation of the realist school. They also commented on the UN in their *opera magna* and other writings, although far less extensively in Aron's case (Aron 2004: 544-550). Of particular interest are two articles written in the 1954 issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* dedicated to the possible revision of the Charter (Morgenthau 1954d; Aron 1954).

With the coming tenth anniversary of the Charter and the possibility of a revision, Morgenthau makes an earnest effort to present, for festive purposes, a benevolent view of the UN. He recognizes that the UN might render foreign policies more prudent (Morgenthau 1954d: 80) and even contribute to avoiding a general war by encouraging restraint and providing a rare forum for dialogue (Morgenthau 1954d: 83-84). From the title, however, he squarely denies the possibility of a change in the nature of international politics and underlies the continuous centrality of the national interest. He lambasts the paradox of having the great powers advocating universal principles to disguise selfish goals (Morgenthau 1954d: 77-80). Aron constructs a different but convergent reasoning by objecting to the operability of the system of collective security, referring to the vagueness of the Charter (Aron 1954: 20-21) – a common theme in Morgenthau too (Scheuerman 2009: 122). He denies usefulness to the organisation in most cases and assures that it changed nothing in the nature of international politics (Aron 1954: 26). Years later, in his tome about international politics, Aron confirmed this harsh judgement of the UN, arguing that it made but ancillary contributions to peace (Aron 2004: 550). This convergence evidenced a common thread in realism: the ultimate rejection of the usefulness of international organisations.

In the second edition of *Politics among Nations,* Morgenthau dealt more extensively with the UN, in spite of his own previous criticism. The section on international law made extensive comment on the Uniting for Peace resolution,[6] considered an informal constitutional innovation – and ultimately an encouraging sign that the US could wield the organisation as an instrument for its foreign policy goals. The chapter on "peaceful change" included comments on specific resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The section on the UN itself was expanded to account for the evolution of the theme since 1948 (Morgenthau 1954c: 279-86, 417-26, 447-65).

Much of the content added in the second edition was structured to confirm the propositions contained in the original work, even though Morgenthau had not actually foreseen the way in which the UN would eventuate the plasticity (or vagueness) of the Charter. For instance, despite the obvious importance attached to the Uniting for Peace resolution, its effect is minimized because it did not represent a substantive change in the

decentralized system of implementing international law (Morgenthau 1954c: 284-286). In addition, when reviewing the single case of collective security (the Korean War) and the peaceful solution exercises promoted by the General Assembly (especially on Palestine and the Italian colonies) and the Security Council (on Palestine and Indonesia), the author sought to present them as examples in which a pre-existing balance of power was simply manifested through the international organisation (Morgenthau 1954c: 395-398, 417-423).

The most meaningful addition to the text regarded the rise of the General Assembly and the impasse that paralyzed the Security Council. Morgenthau, revisiting the section on this matter, reproduced almost *ipsis verbis* the article he had published months before the second edition (1954a). His argument was that the Cold War had forced a reorganisation of the UN – the formal organisation no longer coincided with the role it actually played on the global stage. For him, the United States tried to keep an alliance that would allow it to control two thirds of the members, orbiting Washington in various concentric spheres, with few being able to flirt with Moscow. Mazower (2013: 248) sees this understanding as an exaggeration, derived from the experience at the beginning 1950s. But Morgenthau could not refrain from admiring some innovations of the UN, especially the way in which the old and the new diplomacies interpenetrated and were equally essential for the US to maintain control over its allies (Morgenthau 1954c: 447-465). In doing so, he allowed a complexity to the multilateral phenomenon — that his original model had failed to predict — to stow clandestinely in his reasoning.

At that juncture, while maintaining his critical assessments of the UN (albeit slightly mitigated), Morgenthau was increasingly convinced of the need for a world state that was capable of containing the threats inherent in the "thermonuclear revolution." He was unable to reconcile the imperative urgency of constituting a global entity with the possible means to do so, which could receive meaningful contributions at the UN. Instead, he neglected the possible contribution of the UN towards building the basis for a global civil society or public opinion. For Morgenthau, a certain level of community as existed in formed states was indispensable for enabling the construction of the world state required to avoid annihilation by nuclear war. Only if this worldwide community was to be formed could the political space stabilize and exist with the necessary degree of moderation. Yet, as his longing for the classical era of European diplomacy and a Eurocentric world suggested, the UN might be too diverse and hence unruly, incapable of creating the necessary community (Speer 1968; Craig 2007: 202-203; Scheuerman 2007: 78, 2011; Koskenniemi 2001: 437-440; Morgenthau 2012; Behr and Rösch 2012; Guilhot 2010: 240-242; Kostagiannis 2018: 74).

The changing United Nations and the role of the Secretary General

The second half of the 1950s witnessed some meaningful changes in the political reality within and around the UN, with the steep increase in the number of members after 1955 and the growing importance of the Secretary-General's role in the organisation during Dag Hammarskjöld's tenure (1954-1961).

In 1955, the US and the Soviet Union had reached an agreement to systematically unblock the UN membership application process. In subsequent years, as the result of decolonization, many newly independent countries joined the organisation, eventually forming the 'Afro-Asian bloc'. From the first inklings of a third bloc, Morgenthau (1954d) saw the new grouping as an obstructing factor for the exercise of the General Assembly's mandate, since the United States could no longer muster the two-thirds majority needed in that forum to pressure the Soviets. Multilateral intervention in Suez was one of the last hurrahs of US preponderance (Morgenthau 1957b, 1958, 1961a).

The second decade of the UN thus witnessed an increasing complexity of the international organisation. The Security Council remained paralysed, as was clear in the twin crises of Hungary and Suez in October-November 1956, and the General Assembly functioned occasionally only when the interests of the US and the Soviet Union converged (Morgenthau 1958). Morgenthau became a vitriolic critic of the new states. Displaying his ingrained longing for traditional diplomacy and for its restrictive criteria on the definition of states[7] (Scheuerman 2007; Lebow 2013: 62), he criticised post-war nationalism as a barbaric perversion, an excessive secularization that creates an ideology – in sharp contrast to his idealizing of 19th century European nationalisms. The new version of nationalism, in his opinion, only contributed to disintegration, playing the international scenario into the hands of the socialist powers. By eroding the influence of the ancient empires, it prevented states from understanding the need for unity in the face of the nuclear proliferation threat (Morgenthau 1957a). Aron, for instance, depicted the situation in more benign hues, but still denied any consequential results to the activism of the new nations (Aron 2004: 548-549; Guilhot 2010: 242-243; Kostagiannis 2018: 84-86; Kay 1970).

It is in this scenario that Morgenthau identified an unsuspected and unexpected transfer of responsibilities from the intergovernmental organs to the Secretary General: 'not action delegated, but inaction concealed' (Morgenthau 1958: 379). Mandates were given to the Secretariat because interstate bodies were no longer able to act. Morgenthau had deep personal admiration for Hammarskjöld who, for his qualities of 'wisdom, skill, and courage' (Morgenthau 1963), proved able to wield the power of persuasion and use the UN as a moral force (Morgenthau 1957b, 1958).

Morgenthau picked up those new elements in the third edition of *Politics among Nations* (Morgenthau 1960) to reorganize the text in order to restate his interpretation of the UN. The sections relating to the UN in the parts on international law and peaceful change were factually edited. In balance, multilateral action continued to be a disappointment; successes were seen as minor or derived from fortuitous circumstances (Morgenthau 1960: 307-311, 444-455).

In the chapter dedicated to the UN itself, Morgenthau systematized the reasoning advanced in his previously published articles about the increasingly complex history of the organisation: the paralysis of the Security Council had led to the rise of the General Assembly, but the entry of new members and the formation of the Afro-Asian bloc made the Assembly unwieldy and less effective, resulting in the assignment of new tasks to the Secretary General. The position of the latter went from the 'chief administrative officer'

provided for in article 97 of the Charter to that of 'chief political agent', responsible for conveying 'the political voice of mankind' (or at least the Western part of humanity). Morgenthau made it clear, however, that it was Hammarskjöld's spirit, his personal characteristics, which allowed this meaningful exercise of the function of Secretary General. In inserting two long quotes from the notable annual reports of 1955 and 1957 in the third edition of *Politics Among Nations*, he actually highlighted, based on realist concepts, the weaknesses and limits of the Secretary General (Morgenthau 1960: 478-498, 1965a; Lebow 2013: 70).

The author still refused to even consider that the UN could be an embryo of his idealized world state, but admitted that '(...) the little that has been achieved by the United Nations is better than nothing' (Morgenthau 1960: 496; Scheuerman 2009: 117-120). At the same time, Morgenthau was unable to foresee either the continued expansion of the membership[8] or the constitutional-financial crisis that would plague the organisation in the first half of the 1960s (Frei 2016; Kay 1970; Claude 1963).

The United Nations in crisis and the limits of realist explanation

In the 1960s, Morgenthau wrote much less about the UN than in previous years. The war in Vietnam, the rise of China and other political events, such as the students protests of 1968, took front stage in his work – his vocation as a public intellectual led him to issue stringent warnings to the US about the South-East Asian quagmire and distanced him even further from having his advice sought by the government, at least until Kissinger came to prominence (Lebow 2013: 66; Söllner 1987: 168-169; Behr and Rösch 2012: 13-14; Griffiths 1999: 40). In addition, the UN did not seem to offer any more interpretative opportunities such as those generated by the improvised constitutional innovations in the first fifteen years after the war.

Morgenthau had noticed early on the exhaustion of the United States' ability to manipulate two-third majorities in order to use the UN to condemn the Soviets, which, in turn had created the momentum for Hammarskjöld to take meaningful action through the office of the Secretary General. With the continued influx of new members and the arrival of U-Thant (1961-1971), the organisation was no longer, in his opinion, able to produce solutions to circumvent the usual power game. Instead, it ended up advocating reckless bargains with the Soviets – Morgenthau goes as far as equating U-Thant's suggestions of dealings with Khrushchev to the despised 1938 Munich agreement (Morgenthau 1963; 1961a; 1961b). His willingness to admit the possibility of a settlement between the superpowers should not mean *any* settlement and certainly not one based on the flawed machinery of the UN (Cesa 2009: 180-181; Lebow 2013: 64).

Truth be told, Morgenthau exercised his right as a public intellectual to equivocate on what specific actions he expected from the UN, although he insisted that the strategies of the Afro-Asian bloc were circumscribed to passing purely declaratory resolutions (Morgenthau 1967a). This leaves a strong impression that only those agendas that converged with that of the United States could be seen as productive, while the preferences

of the new states for decolonization were considered as mere whims of countries barely qualified for membership in the organisation (Morgenthau 1965c: 122; 1957a; Söllner 1987: 171).

While preparing the fourth edition of *Politics among Nations*, Morgenthau dealt with the UN constitutional crisis that culminated in 1964-1965. In those years, the organisation was threatened with a serious rupture with the threat of the Soviet Union and France losing voting rights for arrears concerning their contributions to the peacekeeping missions in the Congo and the Suez. In the end, voting was altogether avoided through obscure procedural manoeuvres, time during which a compromise was reached. In Morgenthau's interpretation – remarkably close to that of Claude (1963) –, a cycle had been completed: the paralysed Security Council had given power in 1948/1950 to the General Assembly, which after 1955 was no longer capable of making consequent decisions and had assigned responsibilities to the Secretary General. This constitutional crisis was returning that primacy to the Security Council – which was, however, still paralyzed. The author condescendingly admitted that the UN could still play an ancillary role in preventing a new global conflict – and all help was welcome in that area (Morgenthau 1965a; 1965b; 1965c; Scheuerman 2009: 119).

The last two editions of *Politics among Nations* during the author's lifetime (Morgenthau 1967b and 1973) brought, in terms of the UN, mostly factual updates – although Morgenthau announced that other parts of the book had been greatly modified in face of major changes in the early 1970s, such as the recognition of communist China by the US and the inception of the détente. In this context, the United Nations was presented as being in 'constant decline' (Morgenthau 1973: VII-IX).

An important element which appears in the fourth edition but is consolidated in the fifth is precisely the acceptance of communist China in the international community and, from 1971 onwards, in the UN. With some reluctance, the author concedes to placing Beijing almost on a par with Washington and Moscow[9]. He attributes to China the role of one of the dominant powers in the Security Council as well as the ability to muster support in the General Assembly to the point of undermining Soviet influence in both bodies (Morgenthau 1967b: 464-465; 1973: 458).

Also included in the new editions is the aforementioned explanation developed in 1964-1965 for the constitutional crisis of the organisation and the declining performance of the Secretary General's office after Hammarskjöld's demise in 1961 (Morgenthau 1965a, 1965b, 1965c) – 'a veritable counterrevolution against the United Nations' (Morgenthau 1967b: 474). However, Morgenthau still refused the idea that the Afro-Asian bloc could legitimately advance an agenda of its own and, even, a creative identity beyond sheepishly supporting one of the now three great powers (Morgenthau 1973: 466; Kay 1970).

The limits of Morgenthau's perspective on the United Nations

Although Morgenthau used the notion of national interest as a yardstick to explain international reality, in particular the UN, and had a negative perception of the system created

by the Charter, he held an important conception of morality interwoven with interests and based on the human condition in politics, and understood early that a 'multilateral reality' had come into being (Morgenthau 1954d; 1973: 5-10; Behr and Rösch 2012: 38-42). Whereas this reality could be used as an instrument for projecting the individual interests of the state (and which, for this reason, served US foreign policy well until the early 1960s), he could not deny that a differentiated space for the practice of diplomacy was being built.

This multilateral arena created new functions in the international system and provided various services: bringing together rivals which, in the early years of the Cold War encountered obstacles to have contacts even for simple purposes; serving as an instrument to deal with the threat of planetary destruction by nuclear weapons; or limiting specific conflicts by arbitration and mediation. The great solution for peace is diplomacy, the learning of limitations and accommodations, which can only be born from sharing a living space. The UN created, thus, new mechanisms for coexistence and Morgenthau recognized this:

> The contribution the United Nations can make to the preservation of peace, then, would lie in taking advantage of the opportunity that the co-existence of the two blocs in the same international organization provides for unobtrusive use of the techniques of traditional diplomacy (Morgenthau 1973: 474).

This is a remarkable quasi-acknowledgement that, in joining the multilateral organisation, even the superpowers were somehow constrained to debate with the majority of members and cope with their interests to some extent. Multilateral spaces help shaping the argument and, in part, the behaviour of states (Fonseca Jr 2008: 115-207). This is not to argue that power, as defined by the realists, had lost its relevance – as evidenced by the ability of the great powers to circumvent the UN when required. Power for Morgenthau was not a unidimensional concept. In his early European writings, the use of French or German made the distinction between *pouvoir* and *puissance* was more evident.[10] Both derived from impulses inherent to human nature, but the former indicated the propensity to dominate, whereas the latter suggested to establish ties with the other, bearing a normative and cooperative element. In his English writings after the war, the difference was obumbrated and the more empirical aspect of power, *pouvoir*, tended to be the one underlined by both critics and misguided admirers (Morgenthau 2012; Lebow 2013; Rösch 2014; Behr and Rösch 2012: 47-64; Paipais 2016: 10-14; Pichler 1998: 191-192; Kostagiannis 2018: 69-75; Molloy 2006: 85-89).

Yet, certain lasting characteristics of Morgenthau's perspective on international relations (Scheuerman 2011) pervaded his evolving interpretation of the UN throughout the two decades, morphing in accordance with the unfolding historical drama. The first aspect revolves around the notion of interest as power. Although Morgenthau recognizes that norms and procedures have a limiting effect on the behaviour of states and that morality is essential (Scheuerman 2009; Lebow 2013: 60-63), he insists that the organisation itself does not solve the problems of peace. As a result, asserting that the UN has achieved

limited success in certain cases is pointless for him, since the organisation ultimately does not have the capacity to solve problems of peace. Ultimately, he disparages the ability of the UN to create a framework of legitimacy and a diplomatic space to enhance the opportunities of finding peaceful solutions. If the ideal unity of the great powers does not exist as the political basis for Security Council action, the multilateral build-up is not sufficient to create the foundations for the UN to act consistently to prevent or overcome wars. Truth be told, even advocates of the UN such as Claude (1964) underwent a considerable crisis of faith in the late 1940s and 1950s, but later recovered. For Morgenthau, there was only that one brief moment of admiration for Hammarskjöld but no consistent change of mind.

A second characteristic, which conceptually reinforces the first, is the almost exclusive focus on matters of security, of the preservation of the polity (Lebow 2013: 64-65). It further prevents Morgenthau from pondering consequentially other positive outcomes of the system established in the Charter on issues such as human rights, social inequality, and others. Contrary to what Morgenthau advocates – i. e. that there were principles of justice operating in the Holy Alliance and the League but none in the UN (Morgenthau 1948b: 382) – one can argue that the Charter contains several possible principles, such as the respect for human rights, the peaceful settlement of disputes and even, in a retrospective interpretation, the promotion of development (Fonseca Jr 2008). Credit is given by Morgenthau to the specialized agencies' work by means of functional cooperation, in a nod to David Mitrany (Scheuerman 2009: 129-131; Rösch 2015: 139). In *Politics among Nations*, the agencies are depicted as different from the political organs, in a way heralding what would, in institutional neo-liberalism, be proven to be a convergence with classical realism (Morgenthau 1973: 496-506).

A third trait is the excessive focus on the great powers (Scheuerman 2011; Scheuerman 2009; Griffiths 1999: 37). This curtailed Morgenthau's ability to perceive the agency of the small and medium powers in the UN, especially of states emerging from decolonization (Kay 1970). Because he studied the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council within the framework of decisions on threats to peace taken by great powers, Morgenthau could not conceptualize the General Assembly as capable of creating an ideological circuit of its own, founded on alternative discourses of universalist inspiration. The ideals and instruments emanating from the Assembly might not circumscribe the decisions of the Council, but they do strengthen or weaken them and also go beyond, discussing topics such as development and environment. In this case, it is the Security Council that lags behind, having for the last three decades tried to purloin those themes (Peterson 2005). China, upon replacing 'the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek'[11] in 1971, out of sheer necessity perceived this realist blind spot and invested in a calculatedly strepitous but harmless delegitimization of the Council and valorisation of other fora until it could firmly assert itself in world politics (Bosco 2009).

Morgenthau formulates but fails to elaborate on the consequences of some of his own arguments. The fact that the UN creates a different locus for political encounters, even if driven by traditional diplomacy, induces states to certain behaviours. States, in the UN, when defending their particular interest, are obliged to invoke the multilateral interest,

because this is the sugarcoating necessary to advance any topic in a multilateral setting (Morgenthau 1954d: 80). As the framework is permanent and involves constant encounters, the universal argument makes up the daily life of the institution, creating a specific reality that serves not only the interests of individual states (especially the powerful ones). Embarrassment for the powerful may, in the Security Council, be prevented by the veto, but limitations, even if unable to entirely block behaviours, nonetheless exist. The reverse is also true: the more universal the interests of the great powers seem, the greater the chance of taking them forward and the more legitimacy they will muster (Morgenthau 1954d: 83).

Morgenthau's criticism of the institutional framework and, at the same time, of the principles guiding the organisation's actions certainly evidence intrinsic frailties of the UN. However, the author sets a very high moral and practical standard for assessing the UN's performance and, as a foregone conclusion, disapproves of it for not meeting his expectations (Morgenthau 1948b; Scheuerman 2009: 53-55). The reality of the bipolar confrontation showed the situation of multilateral paralysis due to obvious factors of power dispute. Yet, the issue of the development of the power of different organs within the UN is relegated to a theoretical orphanhood. Cases of convergence between the United States and the Soviet Union are explained away as eventualities. Authors working with an institutional perspective like Claude (1964) and Stoessinger (1966) managed to argue more consistently on the convergences between superpowers.

Conclusion

Morgenthau passed away before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In a manner of speaking, his analysis about increasingly smooth relations between the superpowers was overtaken by his wishful thinking for the withering away of communism (Cesa 2009: 180-181; Scheuerman 2009). He could not have foreseen how the UN would change after the end of the Socialist Bloc; what other roles the organisation would play; and that the Security Council would resurface in the 1990s and then be slowly obfuscated. Here, the paradox of Morgenthau's contribution is evident: although realism was incapable of perceiving certain tendencies of the system, its essential lesson remains on what changes little, for instance, the complex concept of power as a fundamental context of the multilateral process (Morgenthau 1973: 469; Lebow 2013). The universal value with which Morgenthau deals is peace and, in his time and today, it suffers the most from the impositions of politics. To this day, a world without powers and without disputes among them could not be engineered.

For all the subtlety of his multilayered concepts, rarely did Morgenthau spare a blow to the UN. In so doing, he provided valuable insight into the institution in a way a more lenient observer would not have looked. In particular, he suggested the importance of reflecting critically on the superposition of two different types of diplomacy, which were preaching different principles and practices and had an uneasy coexistence (Morgenthau 1948b: 431-437). In spite of the small concessions made to the UN, in his vision for a

world government capable of preventing nuclear annihilation, there was never a place for that organisation. At first, under the dark cloud of the League's experiment, it was the structure itself that was to blame. He saw the UN as a Machiavellian utopia because it presented a front of democracy with an essence of traditional diplomacy; in a manner of speaking, he identified in it the worst of Kelsen's and Schmitt's philosophies (Morgenthau 1945a; Scheuerman 2009; Suganami 2007).

The comparison with Aron serves as a baseline to assess the perceptions of Morgenthau on the UN. Even if Aron often builds his arguments in order to correct or oppose Morgenthau (Châton 2012), both authors converge significantly in their criticism of the organisation, focusing on what realists perceive as the abiding elements of international politics. Aron and Morgenthau agree that the institutional framework of the UN is flawed in its core provisions on collective security. Their attention is drawn to the great powers, and they understand security as survival of the polity.

Over the years, the structure created by the Charter proved flexible enough and far less deceiving. Multilateral politics slowly outed the power politics within itself. For Morgenthau, however, it was the actors, the new states, which were seen as inapt operators. He belittled the agency of small and medium powers within the multilateral framework, doubting their ability to develop autonomous policies and advance their own interests – even in the specialized agencies. Herein lies a divergence with Aron, whose more specific recognition of identity politics resulted in a lenient assessment of the new states' role in the system (Aron 2004; Morgenthau 1957a; Scheuerman 2011: 158).

For Morgenthau, the larger UN had become a realist dystopia, where power politics and the old diplomacy might be more explicit, but in which most of the actors were not capable of playing their part adequately. His personal experiences were extremely important. Since he had witnessed the failure of the League in the mid-1930s, he lost interest in the UN in the mid-1960s. The organization had completed a cycle, bringing back some influence to a superpower-controlled Security Council, but could still not fulfil his high expectations. As a result, he ceased to write significantly about the organisation and dedicated himself to other causes, famously to argue against the Vietnam War. After all, the US adventure in South-East Asia evidenced in his mind the harmful effect of moralistic, immoderate foreign policies and the unreality of collective security in curtailing the action of a great power (Morgenthau 1973).

At the end of the day, the question Morgenthau grapples with — but to which he does not offer a convincing answer — is why, if power is supposedly prevalent, states still relentlessly pursue multilateral solutions. His approach leaves scarce room to admit that the ideas that underpin contemporary multilateral institutions are not arbitrary. Even if ideas serve the powerful, as in the case of the Security Council, they have the mark of their times and cannot do without a tribute to democracy and to equality between states. In one way or another, these add up to constraints on the great powers[12]. There is a part of the international system that is primarily the territory of the multilateral institution; it may not always be invoked, even though it is an option. Morgenthau' inability to admit this made the UN an impossible candidate to build the world state that he so wished could exist to prevent a nuclear doomsday.

Notes

1 The insistence of the editor on constantly updating the book reflects not only its good sales (Scheuerman, 2009: 102), but also underlines how Morgenthau succeeded in formulating his ideas in a simple, direct manner, showing an enviable command of law, history, politics, capable of providing arguments to assess and criticize conjunctural policies (Lebow, 2013: 61; Pichler 1998: 185). Morgenthau, however, was resistant to republishing the book at first (Rösch 2014: 357; Behr and Rösch 2012: 57).

2 This does not deny other important influences on Morgenthau's thought, such as Freud, Nietzsche Weber and others (Koskenniemi 2010; Scheuerman 2009; Guilhot 2010; Behr and Rösch 2012; Pichler 1998; Söllner 1987; Molloy 2006; Rösch 2014), but it is necessary to recognize the limits of this article and the specificity of its subject. Unmentioned influences were deemed outside the scope of this article.

3 Curiously, the first factor to induce the decadence of diplomacy advanced by Morgenthau is progress in communication, because diplomats were deprived of their leeway and had to consult with capitals at every step (Morgenthau 1948b: 425-426). Nicolson, practitioner and analyst of diplomacy, openly scoffed at that idea by stating "No, it was not the telephone that, from 1919 onwards, brought about the transition from the old diplomacy to the new" (Nicolson 2001: 84).

4 Scheuerman (2009: 118-125) exerts himself in trying to evidence that Morgenthau was willing to recognize the qualities of the UN. Yet, his own account of how Morgenthau conceived the idea of world state makes it clear that the UN had no real role to play.

5 A non-negligible part of Aron's arguments about international relations was built in relation to Morgenthau. He accepted the state-centric system, the pervasive conflict, and the search for balance, but rejected the concept of power, certain generalizations about diplomacy and the anthropological pessimism (Gaspar, 2012: 8-9; Châton, 2012: 395-397).

6 The wheel of fortune having spun too many times on the UN since the 1950s, it is difficult to calculate how deeply were the contemporaries by the Uniting for Peace resolution impacted, also called "The Acheson Plan". At that point, arguing for and against it was essential in debating the fate of the organisation (Kelsen 2000: 953-990).

7 Morgenthau knowingly attributed a role of accommodation and moderation to diplomacy. He loathed the histrionics of parliamentary diplomacy that, at first, he blamed on the confrontation of the superpowers in the Security Council. As the posture of the USSR and the US changed to one of more collegial accommodation in the UNSC, he modified the text of *Politics among Nations* just changing the words "Security Council" for "General Assembly", but preserving the criticism, now directed at the new nations who could build the majorities in the plenary organ (Morgenthau 1948b: 427-428 and Morgenthau 1973: 526-527).

8 At the beginning of 1960, the UN counted 82 members, a number which Morgenthau already considered an exaggeration and a negative repercussion of a disruptive strand of nationalism (Morgenthau 1957a). By the end of that same year, there would be 99 countries, and 123 before the 4th edition of *Politics among Nations* could be published in 1967. The overwhelming majority were countries in Africa and Asia, with their own problems and agendas (Kay 1970).

9 Morgenthau was hardly alone on that. John Stoessinger, for instance, revised the title (and content) of his insightful book from "The United Nations and the Superpowers: United States-Soviet Interaction at the United Nations" in 1966 to "The United Nations and the Superpowers: China, Russia and America" in 1977.

10 It is notable that Raymond Aron, with only a passing and critical reference to Morgenthau (1948b), uses the same terms to propose a not altogether dissimilar distinction, suggesting that, in his case, the more important aspect, just as in Morgenthau's, is puissance (Aron 2004: 58-80).

11 Text contained in the only operative paragraph of General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI) (United Nations, 1971).

12 This argument does not exclude the fact that, based on some realist assumptions, a defense of the interest in participating in international organisations be articulated (Fonseca Jr 2008: 116-118; Abbot and Snidal 1998; Scheuerman 2011).

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Distopia realista – Hans Morgenthau e a mudança do papel das Nações Unidas na política mundial

Resumo: A pesquisa investiga a maneira através da qual Hans Morgenthau estudou e discutiu as Nações Unidas como uma organização, principalmente em seus primeiros vinte anos. Aproveitando a influência de Carl Schmitt e Hans Kelsen e seu próprio desapontamento com a Liga das Nações, ele critica fortemente a ONU. O autor considera que a organização propõe princípios grandiosos, mas abriga uma diplomacia de estilo antigo. Após estabelecer uma comparação sucinta com Raymond Aron, o artigo evidencia as razões das críticas de Morgenthau, incluindo algumas características permanentes do realismo, tais como o foco em grandes potências, a atribuição limitada de agência a outros atores e a ênfase na segurança em detrimento de atividades cooperativas. Sublinha como Morgenthau rejeitou as Nações Unidas como base para a construção de um Estado mundial. Argumenta, por fim, que o realismo de Morgenthau salienta as fragilidades das Nações Unidas, mas não consegue explicar o porquê de os Estados insistirem em atuar por mecanismos multilaterais.

Palavras-chave: Nações Unidas, organização internacional, Conselho de Segurança, Hans Morgenthau, Assembleia Geral.

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