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AMERICA'S SECURITY ROLE IN A CHANGING WORLD



the shape of U.S. alliances in East Asia. Meanwhile, the Middle East—arguably the most dangerous of the world's regions given that it is the convergence point of many pressing transnational threats and the locus of active conflict involving American forces—remains without any formal alliance structure around which to organize U.S. involvement.

Cooperation with other countries in the 21st century will inevitably take a variety of forms, from multilateralism at the global level down to local, ad hoc cooperation with selected coalition partners that will develop as situations demand. The global economic and financial crisis has accentuated the importance of emerging powers, underscoring the opportunity for new multilateral cooperation even while possibly adding national pressures on existing institutions and alliances. This chapter examines a spectrum of this rich set of possibilities for security cooperation.

Multilateralism

Multilateralism is becoming ever more important in organizing international cooperation on the shared problems facing the world in the 21st century. Yet its misuse over the years has eroded confidence in international organizations. The United States has a strong interest in revitalizing multilateral institutions, but if the Obama administration is going to increase U.S. effectiveness in this important aspect of foreign affairs, it will need to strengthen international law, improve interagency planning, and make significant investments in personnel.

A Globalizing Strategic Environment

After a century of championing international organizations from the Pan American Union to the United Nations, many Americans, who perhaps look for results rather than processes and relationships, have become increasingly skeptical about multilateralism. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger put it succinctly in his 1994 book *Diplomacy*: “The United Nations did provide a convenient meeting place for diplomats and a useful forum for the exchange of ideas. It also performed important technical functions. But it failed to fulfill the underlying premise of collective security—the prevention of war and collective resistance to aggression.”

U.S. leaders responded to the failures of the United Nations by avoiding it when they needed to deal with critical issues. To some extent, they focused on regional organizations and military alliances such as NATO. But primarily, U.S. leaders relied on bilateral arrangements supplemented as needed by unilateral

measures. Even in trade matters, for instance, where the United States has long used multilateral mechanisms to advance its interests—first the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and now the World Trade Organization—the trend has been to pursue regional and bilateral agreements.

As confidence in global multilateralism has declined, regional and subregional organizations have taken on new life, often explicitly building on the advantages of neighborhood. Smaller groupings dealing with narrower agendas are more capable of achieving quick consensus. Furthermore, when disagreements hamper action, it is easy to devolve to even smaller coalitions whose members can agree among themselves to take action.

Under the impact of globalization, however, most problems that affect the security and welfare of the American people no longer respond to unilateral solutions or even to the efforts of narrow ad hoc coalitions. Such coalitions may be preferable to the anarchy of unilateralism, but they lack the broad legitimacy of decisions reached multilaterally within a structured organization, the kind of legitimacy that is necessary to deal effectively with many of the issues that require cooperation beyond U.S. borders: natural disasters, terrorism, arms smuggling, trade, energy, drug trafficking, financial flows, migration, democracy and human rights, development, fragile states, and rising powers. These issues vary widely in their nature. In each case, their management starts at home unilaterally but must become multilateral to succeed.

Why Multilateralism?

Despite its cumbersome nature, multilateralism provides certain advantages that do not accrue through unilateralism or less inclusive forms of international cooperation. Most notably, it creates frameworks for long-term cooperation based on shared principles and precedents that go beyond the bilateral. True multilateralism is more than the temporary agreement of three or more countries on a specific problem; it is, as political scientist Patrick Morgan has defined it, cooperation based on “generalized principles of conduct, rather than . . . considerations linked to specific situations or particular conditions and concerns.”¹ When such broad agreement on generalized principles of conduct is turned into a treaty ratified by individual countries, the resulting framework becomes the basis of international law. Today, the UN Charter and the World Court are the cornerstones of global order based on law. Multilateral action under the umbrella of such

organizations thus enjoys a special legitimacy in the eyes of many.

Multilateral institutions also have strong potential as means of mass persuasion. The United Nations has been called the “parliament of man” for its presumed ability to embody world public opinion. As Teddy Roosevelt said of the American Presidency, multilateral institutions can serve as “bully pulpits,” or as Argentine President Carlos Menem put it in speaking of the Organization of American States (OAS), as *cajas de resonancia*—“sounding boxes.” Even if agreement in these forums is not reached, when heads of state and other leaders address key issues in multilateral forums, people listen.

Multilateral forums also play a useful role as consensus-building deliberative mechanisms. The views of the strong and the weak alike can be aired, with the latter often more willing to accede to the needs of the former if they are certain their concerns have been heard. Debates can identify areas of convergence among countries with otherwise different interests. As frustrating as they sometimes are, the delays on action imposed by these debates can also gain time for more carefully considered responses, including ones that are eventually carried out below the multilateral level. Even providing cover for governments to defer problems that cannot be immediately resolved can be useful in international interactions.

Multilateral diplomacy can also lend durability to international agreements, especially in the area of dispute resolution, in ways difficult to achieve on a purely bilateral basis. The multilateral process tends to ensure that the interests of the various parties, whether conflicting or convergent, are identified and reflected in the agreement, thus increasing the likelihood of compliance. Moreover, this process, along with the moral stature generally attributed to multilateral institutions, enhances mutual confidence that all parties will abide by the agreement. It was to capture this sense of moral ratification that the Panama Canal treaties were signed at an OAS meeting in the presence of the hemisphere’s heads of state and government; all concerned believed this would discourage cheating on the treaties’ provisions.

State-building and economic assistance programs are often both more palatable and more effective when carried out on a multilateral basis. The fragile states most in need of such assistance are also highly vulnerable to charges that bilateral donors exert excessive influence on internal policymaking, further reducing their perceived legitimacy. They can thus benefit from the kind of long-term institutional

support that can be provided impartially through international organizations.

The same applies even to less inherently intrusive forms of assistance. For example, intrinsic tensions in the U.S.-Mexican *Plan Mérida*, an initiative aimed at enhancing cooperation against drug trafficking and other criminal activity, arise out of differing perceptions of whether the nature of the program is assistance or cooperation. Pursuing a similar initiative that would mix assistance and commitments to cooperation in a multilateral rather than bilateral framework might have permitted the participants to finesse or even harmonize such conflicting points of view.



Royal Marine Commandos patrol in Helmand Province, Afghanistan during operation to stabilize and increase security

International organizations have long helped to establish common standards that make possible everything from the mails and trade to the safe operation of flights across borders. The International Telecommunication Union, World Intellectual Property Organization, World Health Organization, and World Bank are all multilateral entities whose neutrality and impartiality enable them to share information and manage technical matters in ways considered relatively free of national biases. Cooperation delivered through international bodies is often better accepted and more effective than assistance through bilateral aid agencies.

On occasion, multilateral institutions are even capable of action to meet threats to the peace. Iraq’s August 2, 1990, invasion of Kuwait provided a rare

instance. The UN Security Council condemned Iraq's action the very same day as "a breach of international peace and security," and demanded the withdrawal of Iraqi troops. On November 29, 1990, the council authorized the use of "all necessary means to uphold and implement" the previous resolution. Collective security worked quickly and effectively in this case because Iraq had violated a general principle of conduct so vital that no responsible sovereign state could ignore its breach.

The Limits of Multilateralism

In the Kuwait case, as in Korea before that, multilateral authorization provided increased legitimacy at home as well as abroad for U.S.-led military action and facilitated the important contributions made by other countries. The resolutions enabled easier access to the battlefield and better intelligence. This, of course, has not always been the case. Decisive action has sometimes been obstructed by delays or approved only at the cost of giving others influence over U.S. military operations and complicating their implementation. Throughout most of the Cold War, the United Nations was paralyzed by the superpower rivalry. More recently, it has been reduced to peace-keeping missions so weak and numerous that the optimism once associated with the presence of Blue Helmets has been dissipated.

Despite the special moral status that popular opinion in most countries grants to multilateral action, states often give only lip service to the ideal of multilateralism when it comes to practical action. Big countries often worry that working to get broad agreement will delay and interfere with what they believe must be done. Working multilaterally is inconvenient and bureaucratic. The same public opinion that values multilateral consensus tends to dismiss the debates necessary to build that consensus as utopian-chasing talk shops rather than real problem-solving forums.

The numerical prevalence of smaller countries in multilateral forums opens the door to claims that multilateralism is nothing more than the trade unionism of the weak and otherwise irrelevant. The United Nations, when not being characterized as inefficient, corrupt, and anti-American, is particularly vulnerable to this charge. As Eric Shawn put it, the United Nations "opposes and criticizes the U.S. at every opportunity." Roger Cohen of *The New York Times* said much the same thing: "Too often the UN can be no more than the weak lowest common denominator of our collective will, an umbrella that packs up when the storm rises."²

Criticism of the United Nations for being too weak on the one hand and for being too strong and overbearing on the other stems from the error of thinking



Session of the Organization of American States Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

of it and similar organizations as having an existence independent of their member states. It is true that multilateral organizations can sometimes articulate common principles in ways that make them the voice of an international community larger than those of its individual member states. But operationally, the UN or the OAS can reflect only what its members are actually willing to do. Sovereign states are still the key units of world politics and thus retain the right to say no. The sovereignty that ensures consideration of the rights and interests of all countries is the same sovereignty that ultimately permits states to opt out or, in the case of the five permanent members of the Security Council, to block action by others. Thus, the suggestion that the solution to the UN's weaknesses lies in giving it the capacity to act independently of its members—such as by acquiring its own independent intelligence-gathering capability—is both unrealistic and inconsistent with the real nature of multilateralism. In that sense, the deficiencies manifested by the United Nations may reflect a need to revise its members' policies more than a need to reform the institution itself.

Making Multilateralism Work

Despite multilateralism's admitted shortcomings, it is increasingly obvious that more and more problems have dimensions that can only be addressed effectively through multilateral diplomacy. Most countries, however, still do not habitually think much, if at all, beyond the bilateral. The United States is among the most culpable in this regard. For much of the recent past, U.S. opinion leaders assumed that they knew what needed to be done and how to do it better than anyone else. That assumption no longer holds true, if it ever did. More than ever before, we must understand and respect the perspectives and interests of those with whom we must cooperate; going it alone cannot suffice for the common effort made possible through multilateral cooperation.

Rule of Law. To some degree, the ineffectiveness of multilateral institutions is the self-fulfilling result of the prevalent U.S. belief that multilateral institutions are inherently ineffective. As the most powerful country in the world, U.S. support for international institutions is essential for them to function effectively, and particularly for them to restrain through international legal norms the behaviors that are most destructive of the peace and stability necessary for the fulfillment of U.S. objectives. Unfortunately, for more than a decade, the United States has shunned or opposed key international agreements, including

the Kyoto Protocol, Ottawa Treaty, Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and Law of the Sea Convention. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor commented insightfully that "the decision not to sign on to legal frameworks the rest of the world supports is central to the decline in American influence in the world." Ironically, this lack of U.S. support for international legal agreements not only weakens the capacity of international organizations, but also, by undermining the perceived moral legitimacy of American actions, has the effect of limiting American operational flexibility in interactions with other countries, even in a bilateral setting.

To help restore its credibility, the United States is working to close the Guantanamo Bay prison by the end of 2009, but it could also consider ending sanctions against countries that join the International Criminal Court and ratifying the American Convention on Human Rights and the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. It has already signed both; the Senate should ratify them, with reservations if necessary, because the impact of unimplemented resolutions and unenforced laws is not neutral, but actually negative. Even so, multilateral agreements are not self-enforcing; their implementation depends on the actions of sovereign states. Harmonization of national practices with international law takes time, not merely because of different legal systems and traditions, but because national needs and sovereignty concerns must be satisfied.

Institutional Capacity for Multilateralism.

Multilateral approaches are often shunned because the United States believes it lacks the people with the training and expertise to make them work. It is not alone in this concern. But for multilateral solutions to work, sufficient human capital must be invested in them, not only at the high political level of plenary meetings but also, more importantly, at the operational level. Activities involving several countries are inherently complex. They function best when relationships are maintained across countries by a network of professionals who know how to work together. Such networks are the lifeblood of international secretariats: they can both provide early warning of and move to contain issues that might otherwise escalate into problems. In effect, these professional networks serve as valuable insurance policies for progress and peace.

Many studies that have examined interagency processes in the United States have identified a need

for an interagency cadre of national security professionals with experience in intelligence, diplomacy, and defense. We need to go beyond that. Every U.S. department and agency should have a corps of public servants who spend part of their careers working in the UN, the OAS, or other international organizations. Stealing a page from the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act, which requires military officers to have experience and training in joint operations as a prerequisite for promotion to flag rank, a tour working as an international public servant should be a requirement for promotion to the Senior Executive Service or the Senior Foreign Service. Not only would U.S. agencies then be staffed by individuals with international experience, but the international organizations themselves also would be strengthened by the presence of U.S. personnel.

Common standards and training for experts in drug control, terrorism, transnational crime, human rights, civil emergencies, and the mitigation of natural disasters should be greatly increased. All countries should reserve places in their diplomatic and military academies and other advanced schools of public service for counterparts from neighboring countries. In the Western Hemisphere, multilateral training could be increased by creating a new Inter-American Academy of Public Administration, with students nominated by member states. Such international professional training should not be considered foreign aid, but rather a necessary measure to build the technical capacity for effective diplomacy that yields practical, sustainable results across national borders to the benefit of all concerned.

A New Model of Multilateral Security Cooperation. Today's increasingly multipolar world has shifted the focus away from formal alliances based on automatic collective security guarantees toward cooperation in response to specific crises. The multilateral response to the 1995 conflict between Ecuador and Peru may provide a useful model for future cases. To prevent the escalation of fighting, four countries—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States—acting together as guarantors of an earlier peace treaty, each contributed soldiers to a military observer mission for which the two belligerents shared the costs. The guarantors not only ensured the preservation of the ceasefire, but also shared intelligence, listened to each party's views, and eventually, after 3 years, succeeded against most expectations in hammering out a solution all could support. Close adherence to local, regional, and international laws, respect for

military discipline, and intimate diplomatic-military coordination were the keys to success.

Participation: The Key to Maximizing Power and Stability

The Obama administration must make an urgent start on rebuilding multilateral capacity if the United States is to expand its options for dealing effectively with the era of globalization. The world needs a "diplomatic surge" to revalidate legal frameworks, and a "consultation surge" to forge standards and relationships that will enable the United States to calibrate the application of its power with and toward others. Effectiveness will require participation: without U.S. political participation in the building of consensus and the implementation of decisions, multilateralism cannot live up to its potential.

Enhancing Cooperation among the Atlantic Allies

The post-Cold War transatlantic goal of integrating a Europe that is "whole and free" has been largely accomplished, though with serious ongoing challenges in the Balkans and former Soviet states. Indeed, aggressive Russian behavior in Georgia in summer 2008 elevated NATO concerns about the need to bolster its core function of collective defense. Nevertheless, operating in multinational military coalitions with allies and partners, as in the Balkans and Afghanistan, remains an American security priority. A central challenge is whether NATO will take the lead in organizing these coalitions, or will be limited to laying the political and planning foundations for "coalitions of the willing." Evolving concepts of how coalition operations should look will present both a challenge and an opportunity for President Obama as he seeks to enhance alliance relationships.

The Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan Experiences

While the militaries of NATO's 28 members remain under national control, the Alliance's integrated military command has provided doctrine and planning for collective military operations for nearly 60 years. During the Cold War, operational guidance concentrated on territorial defense; since 1991, operations have focused on force projection in the Balkans and Afghanistan. While member states make operational decisions via consultation and consensus that reflect shared transatlantic interests, the expansion of NATO's political objectives, membership, and operational mandates has made agreement on the