Multilateral cooperation in an era of strategic competition

Options for influence for Finland and the European Union

Juha Jokela, Katja Creutz, Alana Saul, Niklas Helwig, Ville Sinkkonen,
Anna Kronlund, Jyrki Kallio, Ryhor Nizhnikau, Johanna Ketola

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Abstract

This report shows that ongoing transformations in multilateral cooperation and intensifying global challenges are making multilateralism vulnerable to strategic competition when it comes to its conduct, fundamental norms, and in respect of its aims. The report contends that while formal multilateral institutions are not forsaken in principle, alternative forums are often prioritised in practice. Different powers utilise both the UN system, as well as alternative institutions, broad and more narrow-based informal institutions such as the G Groups, and ad hoc formations. Regional multilateralism is gaining ground as an attractive alternative form of cooperation.

These observations have been made by examining key powers' takes on multilateral cooperation: the European Union, the United States, China, and Russia, and the role of multilateral cooperation in managing the Covid-19 pandemic.

The EU is Finland's most important reference group and its key channel for exerting influence. Making the EU a stronger and more unitary actor in multilateral cooperation is clearly in Finland's interests. Increased political attention and expertise directed towards flexible and informal forms of multilateral cooperation, and key actors in the Global South, would enhance smaller states' aspirations to remain relevant players in multilateral cooperation in an era of strategic cooperation.

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Keywords research, research activities, multilateral cooperation, multilateralism, strategic competition, international order, global order, Finland, European Union, United States, China, Russia, Global South, Covid-19

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Monenkeskinen yhteistyö strategisen kilpailun aikakaudella: Suomen ja Euroopan unionin vaikutusmahdollisuudet

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Tiivistelmä

Monenkeskisen yhteistyön murrokset ja alati kiperämmät globaalit haasteet ajavat monenkeskisyyden idean, käytännön toiminnan, normit ja päämäärät yhä haavoittuvampaan asemaan aikakaudella, jota määrittää strateginen kilpailu. Virallinen monenkeskinen yhteistyö on yhä merkittävässä roolissa. Käytännössä yhä useammin suositaan kuitenkin myös vaihtoehtoisia yhteistyön kanavia. Toimijat hyödyntävät YK-järjestelmää, mutta myös erikokoisia ja asialistaltaan kapeampia informaaleja instituutioita – kuten G-ryhmiä – sekä tapauskohtaisesti räätälöidympiä yhteistyön rakenteita toiminnassaan.

Raportti päätyy johtopäätöksiinsä tutkimalla keskeisten toimijoiden näkemyksiä monenkeskiseen yhteistyöhön. Monenkeskisyyttä tarkastellaan Euroopan unionin, Yhdysvaltain, Kiinan ja Venäjän asemoitumisen kautta. Lisäksi raportti analysoi monenkeskisen yhteistyön roolia covid-19-pandemian hallinnassa.

Euroopan unioni on Suomen ulkosuhteiden tärkein viitekehys ja vaikutuskanava. EU:n vahvistaminen ja sen yhtenäisyyden tukeminen ovat Suomen keskeinen päämäärä. Osaamista, asiantuntijuutta ja poliittista tahtoa on kohdistettava myös epävirallisten monenkeskisyyden muotojen sekä globaalin etelän toimijoiden ymmärtämiseen ja tutkimiseen. Tämä vahvistaisi pienempien valtioiden asemaa merkityksellisinä monenkeskisinä toimijoina aikana, jota määrittää kiihtyvä strateginen kilpailu.

Asiasanat

tutkimus, tutkimustoiminta, monenkeskinen yhteistyö, monenkeskisyys, multilateralismi, strateginen kilpailu, kansainvälinen järjestys, Suomi, Euroopan unioni, Yhdysvallat, Kiina, Venäjä, globaali etelä, covid-19

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Multilateralt samarbete i en tid av strategisk tävlan: Finlands och den Europeiska unionens möjligheter till inflytande

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Referat

Den här rapporten visar hur fortgående förändringar i det multilaterala samarbetet och de ökade globala utmaningarna gör multilateralismen sårbar för strategisk tävlan. Detta gäller alla aspekter av multilateralismen: hur den utövas, dess grundläggande normer och syften. Rapporten påvisar att även om formella multilaterala institutioner i princip inte är bortglömda, så prioriteras ofta alternativa forum i praktiken. Olika makter använder sig av FN-systemet likväl som alternativa institutioner, bredare och snävare informella institutioner såsom G-grupperna, och tillfälliga grupperingar. Regional multilateralism vinner terräng som en lockande samarbetsform.

Dessa observationer har gjorts genom att studera hur nyckelmakter - den Europeiska unionen, Förenta staterna, Kina och Ryssland - engagerar sig i multilateralt samarbete. Även multilateralismens roll i hanterandet av covid-19 pandemin har granskats.

EU är Finlands viktigaste referensgrupp och dess huvudsakliga påverkningskanal. Det är i Finlands intresse att göra EU starkare och till en mer sammanhållen aktör i det multilaterala samarbetet. Ökad politisk uppmärksamhet och expertis gentemot flexibla och informella former av multilateralt samarbete, samt mot nyckelaktörer i det globala södern, skulle öka små staters strävan att förbli relevanta deltagare i det multilaterala samarbetet i en tid präglad av strategisk tävlan.

Nyckelord forskning, forskningsverksamhet, multilateralt samarbete, internationell ordning, strategisk tävlan, Finland, Europeiska unionen, Förenta staterna, Kina, Ryssland, globala södern, Covid-19

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The authors gratefully acknowledge the consistent support and insights provided by the Steering Group appointed for the project, including representatives from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of the Environment, with particular gratitude for the dedication of its chairperson, Ms Sini Paukkunen-Mykkänen. Our gratitude also goes to members of a specific Reflection Group established to support the research activities undertaken in the context of this project. We are immensely thankful for Mr Richard Gowan, Ms Kristin Haugevik, Mr Andrei Kolesnikov, Mr Wulf Reiners, and Ms Louise van Schaik for their time and devotion as well as ideas and comments during important junctures of this project. The discussion with the Reflection Group provided us critical insights and motivated us to move forward with a complex topic during times when strategic competition became also manifested in the form of geopolitical rivalry and the return of a major war in Europe. We are also grateful to Ms Alana Saul for her diligent coordination and editing activities in addition to her input as a member of research team, to Lynn Nikkanen for providing language editing, and to graphic designer Otso Teperi for the help with figures.

The responsibility for the content of this study, including any factual or analytical errors, ultimately rests with the authors. The views expressed in the study do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Finland.

In Helsinki, 14 February 2023

Juha Jokela, Katja Creutz, Alana Saul (eds.)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

3G	Global Governance Group
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUKUS	Australia, United Kingdom, United States partnership
Covid-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
B20	Business 20, official G20 dialogue forum with the global business community
B3W	Build Back Better World
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CBAM	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CoE	Council of Europe
COP27	United Nations Climate Change Conference 2022
COVAX	Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access initiative
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSO	civil society organisation
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CPC	Communist Party of China
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
EDI	European Deterrence Initiative
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FOIP	Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy
G7	Group of Seven
G8	Group of Eight
G20	Group of Twenty

GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
H5N1	Influenza A virus subtype H5N1
HERA	European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HR/VP	High Representative/Vice President
HRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
IBSA	India, Brazil, and South Africa
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICC	International Criminal Court
IEP	Institute for Economics and Peace
IFI	international financial institution
IHR	International Health Regulation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	international organization
IPI	International Peace Institute
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer
MNC	multinational corporation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NSS	National Security Strategy
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P5+1	United Nations Security Council permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) plus Germany
PGII	Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment
QMW	qualified majority voting
Quad	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RG	Reflection Group

RIC	Russia-India-China trilateral grouping
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SG	Steering Group
T20	Think20, official Engagement Group of the G20
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TRIPS	Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
Unitaid	global health initiative, hosted by the World Organization
UN LGBTI	United Nations Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Core Group
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USAID	Unite States Agency for International Development
USMCA	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive summary

Can multilateral cooperation survive in the era of strategic competition? How should the EU and Finland aim to engage in it to make it stronger? This report shows that ongoing transformations in multilateral cooperation and intensifying global challenges are making multilateralism vulnerable to strategic competition when it comes to its conduct, fundamental norms, and in respect of its aims. The report contends that while formal multilateral institutions are not forsaken in principle, alternative forums are often prioritised in practice. Different powers utilise both the UN system, as well as alternative institutions, broad and more narrow-based informal institutions such as the G Groups, and ad hoc formations. Regional multilateralism is gaining ground as an attractive alternative form of cooperation.

More than a decade of crises and the rise of strategic competition have put the EU's traditional approach to multilateralism under pressure. The EU's pledge for "a more stringent and strategic approach to multilateralism" has become even more relevant with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Three adjustments to the EU's approach to multilateralism signify a more strategic approach. In a move towards more instrumental engagement, the EU is using international cooperation as an avenue for protecting its interests in the global competition. The EU is displaying more willingness than before to leverage its power bilaterally and through its work in international organisations. It is also more willing to focus on ad hoc frameworks in order to preserve the effectiveness of global cooperation and extend it to new areas of governance.

- Given the volatile US approach to multilateral forums, the EU and its member states need to work on their independent capabilities to influence global developments.
- A detailed and granular understanding of partners in the Global South and their positions in global governance is sorely needed.

The United States is increasingly engaged in flexilateralism, employing informal minilateral and ad hoc coalitions alongside established multilateral fora. This approach is in part a product of the great-power competition paradigm accepted across party lines in Washington D.C. Diverging views on the utility of international institutions, the relative importance of core liberal tenets like democracy or human rights, and the acuteness of global challenges like pandemics and climate change mean successive

Democratic and Republican administrations may pursue policies directly at odds with each other.

- US partners must be prepared to step up in situations where the US is unwilling to assume a role in meeting shared global challenges.

China perceives multilateralism as the opposite of unilateralism, and uses multilateralism as a tool for making the world more multipolar. In consequence, China supports the existing international system in some cases, and opposes elements of it in others. China pledges its support for the UN, which it considers the main forum for sovereign, equal nations. China accuses those forms of minilateralism that it does not favour, such as the G7, of politicisation, aimed at furthering the dominance of the West. At the same time, China itself promotes smaller forums that promote "alternative" voices, such as the G20, SCO, and BRICS. China is transactionally riding on the Southernisation of multilateralism.

- China is both a partner in cooperation and a systemic rival, but neither in all respects.

Rules-based multilateral cooperation holds no appeal for Russia. Its approach to multilateralism is power-based and generally aims at undermining Western hegemony in the international system. Moscow particularly favours cooperation between regional orders as the prototype of the multipolar international system. "Horizontal" cooperation between regional powers is combined with "vertical" cooperation with the countries that Russia regards as belonging to its sphere of influence.

- The West should not be under any illusions about the possibility of meaningful multilateral engagement with the current regime in Moscow, if any still remain.

The Covid-19 crisis exposed the state-centric imaginary of policymakers around the world. Domestic interests prevailed over multilateral cooperation and hindered responses to the disease outbreak. Yet a brief recap on previous epidemics reveals that international cooperation has worked when relations with global powers have been functional. The structural weaknesses in global health governance need to be addressed for the purpose of more inclusive responses.

- There are some positive elements to build on to improve health multilateralism. International organisations often benefit from crises in terms of an increase in funding and powers.

Options for influence for the EU and Finland

Strengthening the EU's institutional, material, and political capabilities for external action in general, and multilateral cooperation in particular, would enable the Union to better face the challenges related to the intensifying strategic competition also reflected in multilateral cooperation.

- An EU that can bring new multilateral ideas, solutions, and resources to the table is likely to emerge as a valuable partner for the US and enable it to work with other major powers and middle powers when their interests align and, importantly, push back when the EU's key strategic interests are challenged.

The global ramifications of, and reactions to, Russia's war of aggression have served as a serious wake-up call in the Union on increased strategic competition also in the Global South.

- Regarding the EU's strategic objectives to enhance the rules-based order and multilateral cooperation, the Union might want to launch a strategy process focusing on multilateralism and the Global South.

Given the EU's formal membership in the G20 and de facto membership in the G7, the Union is well placed to underline the relationship that these forums have with formal international organisations, and in doing so, to address the legitimacy challenges related to their exclusivity.

- The EU and its member states could pay increasing attention to the policy planning of their positions with regard to the G7 and the G20, and to the outreach activities of the G20 and the G7.

As the EU is Finland's most important reference group and its key channel for exerting influence, making the EU a stronger and more unitary actor in multilateral cooperation is clearly in Finland's interests.

- Increased political attention and expertise directed towards flexible and informal forms of multilateral cooperation, and key actors in the Global South, would enhance smaller states' aspirations to remain relevant players in multilateral cooperation in an era of strategic cooperation.

Bearing in mind that Finland is approaching security from a broad perspective – in addition to military threats, the rivalry between major powers, hybrid influencing, and the impacts of major global challenges on peace and security are also underlined – peace mediation, crisis management as well as conflict prevention should retain their traditionally high profile in Finland's foreign policy. Given that Finland is aiming to become a member of the UN Security Council for the 2029–30 term, as well as assuming the OSCE Chairpersonship in 2025, supporting and highlighting the role of formal security organisations is likely to feature high on Finland's foreign policy agenda.

- From a mid- and longer-term perspective, their role could become important in (re-)building trust and providing assurances that different forms of security cooperation (including re-armament and alliance formations) are designed for defensive purposes and to create stability and security.
- Finland's prospective NATO membership will open up new possibilities to influence security and defence cooperation within the treaty-based alliance, which is becoming increasingly central to Europe's defence and European security in general.

Considering that Finland's foreign policy is human rights-based, Finland should act both regionally and internationally to support the promotion and protection of human rights within existing normative and institutional frameworks. It should carefully consider how it balances (if at all) the existing systems with the thinking of an increasing number of states, including China and the Global South among others, some of which hold divergent views on what human rights are, and how protection is to be advanced.

- While Finland can help to mediate conflicting views by keeping an open mind and being prepared to adjust positions in its work in the UN Human Rights Council, the functions and resilience of the Council should be priorities.

Should Finland aim to highlight its interest in the G7 and G20, it could seek to engage in the outreach activities of these groups by providing expertise and civil society representation in policy fields in which it feels well placed to contribute, such as the global health agenda, green technologies, and education.

- Collaboration with other Nordic states could also open up possibilities to engage with the G7 and G20 agendas.

1 Introduction

Juha Jokela & Katja Creutz

1.1 Background

Multilateralism took major leaps forward in the aftermath of the Cold War. Intensifying globalisation led many policymakers and scholars to suggest that multilateralism had acquired heightened importance.[1] Expanding and deepening globalisation and interdependence among states (and non-state actors) underlined the importance of common action in tackling global challenges related to the economy, poverty, the environment, energy, technologies, and security, for instance. Strong and efficient regional and global multilateral organisations were seen to constitute a cornerstone of the future of the global order.[2] They are increasingly regulating the use of force and control over the instruments of force, the protection of human rights, the environment, trade, financial markets, as well as sustainable economic and social development.

Despite significant advancements, the development of multilateral cooperation has not been linear, and setbacks and crises of multilateralism have frequently been identified.[3] Many of the key regional and global organisations have faced major issues in responding to the regional and global challenges that have emerged. Despite some important successes in setting up new organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as addressing key global challenges such as climate change via the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and sustainable development via the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and Agenda 2030, reforming established organisations and consolidating new ones has proved to be a difficult task. The United States' shifting commitment to multilateralism and some US administrations' preference for unilateral action have hindered transatlantic and Western stewardship in multilateral cooperation. While the increasing multiplicity of major global players within international organisations has improved their input legitimacy, it has also made it more difficult to realise common interests and absolute gains, and has thus hampered their output legitimacy. Moreover, increasing multipolarity together with a rising tide of nationalism around the world – whether in China, India,

1 Keohane 1990, 731–764.

2 Teló 2009 & Jones et al. 2009.

3 See e.g. Jones & Malcorra 2020; Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2021.

Russia, Hungary, or Brazil (in addition to the US) – has cast a shadow over the liberal norms enshrined in multilateralism.[4]

These developments have taken place alongside the growing importance of informal forms of multilateral cooperation and different exclusive groups and clubs of the most relevant states. While some of the groups have been formed on an ad hoc basis to address a certain topical policy, others have endured over time and have become institutionalised with broader policy agendas.[5] These include the Group of Seven (G7), the Group of Twenty (G20), as well as the BRICS group, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Importantly, the rationale of the BRICS group reflects an aspiration to balance the continuing salience and influence of the G7 as the group of most developed Western economies (and democratic states).

Strategic competition and multilateral cooperation

In past years, strategic competition has been increasingly used to describe the global context in which some of the key actors, such as the EU and the US, find themselves. In the study of international relations and related policy studies, the term has largely been used in the context of heightened great-power competition between the US and China.[6] The term has also been applied in analyses of the EU's global role amid increasing US-China cooperation, as well as in the EU's official documentation, such as the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence.[7]

The scholarly literature on strategic competition remains limited and the term is often used without in-depth conceptual discussion. Several themes, however, appear repeatedly in the analyses and imply a common understanding of certain key elements of the concept. Strategic competition takes place between revisionist powers and those that want to preserve the status quo of the current global order. Indeed, the EU argues that its determined support for effective multilateralism and the preservation of the rules-based international order has come under "strong questioning through the shattering of universal values and a lopsided use of global challenges, by those promoting a strict sovereignist approach that constitutes in reality a return to power politics".[8] Moreover, strategic competitors engage in activities to gain an advantage to secure long-term

4 de Sales Marques et al. 2019.
5 Gok & Mehmetcik 2022.
6 Zhou 2019; He & Li 2020; Alison 2020; Jones 2020.
7 Garcia Herrero 2019; Odgaard 2021; European Union External Action Service 2022.
8 Council of the European Union 2022.

and broader goals rather than short-term victories in limited policy fields. Strategic competition also blurs the line between peace and war and takes place on a continuum from cooperation to competition and even conflict. Regarding the spectrum of conflict in the context of competition, strategic competition marks a departure from, and highlights the limits of, cooperation. Importantly, strategic competition draws on all types of national power such as diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. Furthermore, ambiguity is an inherent characteristic and complicates strategic competition.[9]

During the past decade, intensifying strategic competition among major powers has had a deep impact on multilateral cooperation. Decision-making and reforms of the UN system (including the UN Security Council) are facing challenges due to key powers' conflicting interests and values. The position of the ICC is increasingly questioned and the WTO's capacity to function effectively has weakened at a time when trade disputes have intensified. Moreover, consolidated agreements on European security have collapsed due to Russia's demands and war of aggression against Ukraine, which also constitute a clear violation of the UN Charter and international law. Even if the UN has retained some of its relevance in addressing global implications of the war, such as the food crisis and safety of the nuclear facilities in Ukraine, it has become increasingly evident that formal international organisations have relatively weak immunity to heightened competition and rivalry over interests and values.

Even if informal forms of multilateral cooperation have been negatively affected by the intensifying strategic competition, they have nevertheless managed to contribute to the joint management of global problems, from climate change to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The policy processes of the groups have frequently brought diplomats, ministers, and heads of state and government together to address jointly agreed agendas during times of heightened political tensions and global crises. Formal international organisations have also recognised these groups and their importance and added value in the current international environment. The hesitation towards key formats of informal multilateral cooperation has shifted towards calls to facilitate consensus, enabling joint responses and commitment to formal international organisations.[10] Accordingly, the relationship between formal organisations and informal institutions is evolving.

9 For a conceptual analysis, see e.g. Paul et al. 2022.

10 Jokela 2022.

1.2 Aims and structure of the study

Strengthening multilateral cooperation is a key long-standing objective of many smaller states such as Finland, as well as the European Union (EU). Given the EU's sui generis character as an international actor – more than an international organisation and less than a state – advancing multilateral cooperation as a means of promoting its interests and values regionally and globally has been its long-time strategic goal.[11] On the other hand, smaller states such as Finland often see multilateralism as a pathway towards more legitimate and just international politics.[12] Binding multilateral arrangements governing world politics and economy provide them with protection by regulating the actions of the most powerful states and enterprises, as well as meaningful channels for contributing to regional and global developments and carrying out related responsibilities.

Given the ongoing transformations in multilateral cooperation and worsening global challenges, this study aims to increase understanding of contemporary multilateralism(s) and accumulate knowledge on, and advance discussion of, policy options available for Finland and the EU to defend and strengthen multilateral cooperation in an era of intensifying strategic competition. It assumes that informal forms of multilateral cooperation constitute an increasingly important feature of multilateralism, which deserves to be put under closer scrutiny also by states largely excluded from its key formats.

Against this backdrop, the study aims to address three key questions: (i) How has multilateral cooperation evolved in recent years in an era of intensifying strategic competition? (ii) To what extent can informal multilateral cooperation strengthen the rules-based international system? and (iii) How could/should Finland (and the EU) aim to engage with it?

The first part of the study seeks to identify key drivers of change and analyse their implications for formal multilateral cooperation. It will also focus on informal multilateral cooperation, especially exclusive formats such as the G7, G20, and BRICS. The second part of the study will analyse the aspirations of the EU, US, China, and Russia with regard to multilateral cooperation. The analysis covering these actors' general approach to multilateralism, key interests, as well as preferred forms of cooperation is conducted with reference to examples of some notable policy developments (in the fields of security and human rights). The third part of the report discusses the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic

11 European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021.

12 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2021.

on multilateral cooperation in the context of health governance. The possibilities for, and limitations of, multilateral cooperation are analysed in the framework of existing institutions, organisations, and programmes, with particular attention paid to the role of the leading international organisation in global health governance, the World Health Organization (WHO). Finally, the report will conclude with a summary of key outcomes and an assessment of Finland's and the EU's possibility to influence multilateral cooperation through (i) membership of the EU and (ii) other actions. Special attention will be paid to the opportunities and challenges that informal multilateral forums present for countries like Finland.

Research and methods

To begin with, the general contours of the research topic were mapped by reviewing relevant research literature as well as publicly available policy documents. The research team then undertook a conceptual analysis with the aim of developing an analytical framework for research to address the actor and policy sector case study. Case study selection was based on analytical and practical observations. The focus on major powers and the EU reflects their importance for multilateral cooperation in an era of strategic competition. In addition to the analysis of these key actors, studying the management of the Covid-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for more in-depth discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of present-day multilateral cooperation in addressing a global crisis. The observations and outcomes of these analyses were then brought together, and the key conclusions guided the analysis leading to options for Finland and the EU in multilateral cooperation in an era of strategic competition.

The study employs research methods and uses research material typical of policy studies in international relations. In doing so, it largely relies on qualitative research, notably standard documentary analysis, expert analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews. Quantitative data and their analysis – including descriptive statistics, bibliometric analysis, and data-driven analytics – is used to support the qualitative analysis.

A number of FIIA researchers undertook the research reported in this study. The research team included: Programme Director **Katja Creutz**, Leading Researcher **Niklas Helwig**, Programme Director **Juha Jokela**, Senior Research Fellow **Jyrki Kallio**, Research Fellow Johanna Ketola, Senior Visiting Research Fellow **Anna Kronlund**, Senior Research Fellow **Ryhor Nizhnikau**, Specialist **Alana Saul**, and Postdoctoral Fellow **Ville Sinkkonen**.

In addition to the project Steering Group (SG), appointed by the Prime Minister's Office, a specific Reflection Group (RG) was formed to support the research activities. Its functions included brainstorming the key trends in multilateral cooperation and providing feedback

on the research design and findings. The group met twice during the project and included: UN Director **Richard Gowan** (International Crisis Group), Senior Research Fellow **Kristin Haugevik** (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs), Senior Research Fellow **Andrei Kolesnikov** (Carnegie Moscow Center), Head of Managing Global Governance Programme Wulf Reiners (German Institute of Development and Sustainability, IDOS), and Head of Unit EU & Global Affairs **Louise van Schaik** (Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations).

1.3 Conceptual clarifications: Multilateral cooperation and other relevant terms

Although the concepts of *multilateralism* and multilateral cooperation have been extensively explored in recent decades, a single all-encompassing and universally applicable definition of them is missing. In fact, these concepts are debated more than ever as great-power competition has extended to conceptual rivalry as well.[13] A common starting point for defining multilateralism is nevertheless Robert O. Keohane's definition from 1990: "Multilateralism can be defined as the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions."[14] John Gerard Ruggie added a qualitative dimension to this definition by contending that: "multilateralism is an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalised' principles of conduct."[15] Another formative element of multilateralism usually mentioned is reciprocity, which implies that the parties involved in multilateral cooperation have expectations of "a rough equivalence of benefits in the aggregate and over time".[16]

In practical terms, multilateralism is used more freely to denote "cooperative activity among many countries".[17] This study will adopt a pragmatic viewpoint, and will follow scholars and practitioners alike that tend to use the term to include cooperative formats ranging from loose formations, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), to formal international organisations, like the UN. For this study, it is noteworthy that there is a strong institutional and normative aspect to multilateral cooperation and that the multilateral system was originally founded upon the centrality of states and their

13 Creutz 2022; Wu et al. 2022, 3.
14 Keohane 1990, 731.
15 Ruggie 1992, 571.
16 Ibid.
17 Caporaso 1992, 603.

interrelations.[18] States have traditionally determined the content and implementation of multilateralism, although less and less so exclusively, usually within the confines of the UN system with international institutions such as the World Bank and Bretton Woods at the core. The UN Charter and international law constitute the normative foundation of the system, whose aim is to organise the relations between states, but also to support the attainment of global public goods.

However, the concept of multilateralism cannot be understood without placing it within the analysis of global power structures.[19] Therefore, we need to look at how power at the global level has diffused vertically and transitioned horizontally. It has become recognised that the unipolar moment[20] of the United States has been replaced with a bipolar or even multipolar world. *Multipolarity* is indeed a concept that undergirds the fate and development of multilateralism. It entails "multiple competing powers" with nearly equal "distribution of material capabilities".[21] While there seems to be agreement that a shift is occurring from unipolarity to multipolarity, the exact contours of the new order remain unsettled. Russia's great-power status has for a period of time been on the decline, China's rising power is uncontested, while the EU is seen to have the potential to wield more influence.

The concept of multilateralism also requires an understanding of where cooperation is going, what it is moving towards – if anything. This makes the concept of *international order* important for multilateral cooperation and its future, as well as for this study. At its most fundamental, 'international order' implies some level of predictability and stability in the interactions between actors.[22] In this understanding, order is more a fact than a value – two basic connotations traditionally infused into order.[23] However, international order is seen as featuring a normative side next to its more descriptive understanding. Lacking physical embodiment, it is better viewed as a set of guiding principles.[24] Hedley Bull held that international order entails "a pattern of activity between and among states that sustains the basic goals of the society of states".[25] G. John Ikenberry defines international order as "the 'governing' arrangements among a group of states,

18 van Langenhove 2011.
19 Cox 1992.
20 Krauthammer 1990.
21 McGlinchey et al. 2022.
22 Lascurettes & Poznansky 2021.
23 Hurrell 2007, 2.
24 Creutz et al. 2019, 20.
25 Bull 1977, 16–18.

including its fundamental rules, principles and institutions".[26] While the present study will follow Ikenberry's minimalist definition, it is useful to note that Christian Reus-Smit develops the concept of international order further. In his view, there are three defining components of international order: 1) "a systematic configuration of institutionalised power and authority"; 2) "an architecture of fundamental rules and practices that facilitate coexistence and cooperation between loci of authority"; and 3) "a framework of constitutional social norms that license both of these".[27]

The liberal international order, also known as the *rules-based international order*, was driven by the United States as the hegemon.[28] Its global aspirations were definitive, yet despite domination of the globe,[29] it remained fractional in scope.[30] Today, the liberal character of the international order, with hallmarks such as human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and free trade, is nevertheless contested both among its strongest proponents but also externally by autocratic states.

Besides being under siege in terms of content and relevance, the international order has also been challenged regarding agency. This is reflected in the semantic shift among an increasing number of scholars and pundits that have started to use *global order* rather than international order. This shift indicates that alongside states there are numerous other entities, non-state actors, that play an increasing role in the order. Corporations, non-governmental organisations, transnational networks, and intergovernmental organisations, to name a few, all have a real impact upon the governance of worldwide matters. Hence, the term *global governance*, which has been defined as "the totality of institutions, policies, norms, procedures and initiatives through which States and their citizens try to bring more predictability, stability and order to their responses to transnational challenges".[31] On the one hand, it signifies that the sphere of relevant actors for different policy issues varies along with the level to which they are involved; on the other hand, multilateralism is arguably an elementary part as it implies governability, structures, and rules.[32] In more concrete terms, global governance seeks to provide global public goods for people worldwide, such as peace or environmental stability.[33]

26 Ikenberry 2001, 23.
27 Reus-Smit 2013, 167.
28 Sinkkonen 2020, 38.
29 Ikenberry 2018, 7.
30 Sinkkonen 2020, 45.
31 United Nations Economic and Social Council 2014, 9.
32 Creutz et al. 2019, 21–22.
33 Kaul et al. 1999, 453.

1.4 Constitutive elements of multilateralism

Multilateral cooperation is founded on a number of inherent principles or components that characterise the way in which states structure their work amongst themselves but also in relation to other actors. Different forms of multilateral arrangements are often evaluated in light of these components, and at times, these elements may stand in tension with each other. A selected number of constitutive elements will be discussed below, as they form leading themes in the different parts of this study, as well as being crucial for the discussion on the future formation of multilateral cooperation.

One of the founding principles of multilateralism is *inclusion*. In fact, the very idea of multilateral cooperation is predicated on states having the opportunity to partake in cooperative formats that seek to manage common affairs. Inclusion can therefore be understood as a form of systemic openness, which enables all interested parties to be part of multilateral arrangements. Inclusion extends far beyond states today, however, as it has become a buzzword for allowing a broad range of stakeholders and marginalised groups entry into the agenda-setting or decision-making in international institutions. Inclusion has become particularly important for the UN as an organisation, as it pursues inclusive multilateralism seeking to involve civil society, businesses, regions, cities, and women, to name a few.

Inclusion is usually coupled with *efficiency* demands. Yet the connection is not always causal, as recent studies testify to the contrary: when participation in multilateral cooperation increases, it does not automatically lead to better or more efficient multilateral results.[34] There is also a need to acknowledge that the representation of states in international institutions fails to guarantee the input of their constituencies into global governance – a reason for demands for more people-centred multilateralism.[35]

Both inclusion and efficiency are elements intimately connected to the issue of *legitimacy*, another basic element of multilateral cooperation. Legitimacy can be understood both as a factual and as a normative matter.[36] In the former sense, it indicates that an international institution is "accepted as appropriate, and worthy of being obeyed, by relevant audiences";[37] the latter entails that "practices meet a set of standards that have been stated and defended".[38] A crucial part of the legitimacy of international institutions is

34 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022.
35 Wike 2021.
36 Keohane 2006, 2.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.

whether they achieve the goals they are supposed to reach. Today, normative legitimacy is arguably not enough for international institutions. Instead, new dimensions of legitimacy are called for, such as increased accountability to civil society.[39]

As a central element of legitimacy, the *accountability* of multilateral cooperation is widely debated, as are comparable components such as transparency and monitoring. This particularly concerns inclusive forms of multilateralism that go beyond interstate cooperation.[40] The non-hierarchical modes of governance make it important to discuss how different actors and institutions potentially answer to each other, as well as to actors that are entitled to hold them accountable. In all instances, accountability nonetheless requires access to information and the ability to monitor participation and decision-making.[41] It is against these conditions that informal multilateral arrangements, in turn, are often assessed.

39 Keohane 2006, 2.

40 Bäckstrand 2008, 75.

41 Ibid., 80.

2 Multilateral cooperation in an era of strategic competition

Katja Creutz, Juha Jokela and Alana Saul

2.1 Worsening conditions for formal multilateral cooperation

The post-Second World War UN system with global institutions and networks of international conventions regulating the interaction of states on a variety of matters has – in historical terms – been weakened on numerous occasions. Yet the transition away from a unipolar world order that characterised the post-Cold War era has put the international order under stress to an unprecedented degree. Power transitions both between states and away from them have revamped global politics along with the urgency of global challenges, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change, among other developments.[42] Further fragmentation of the international order is brought about by regionalisation, which has emerged in response to the declining global political atmosphere, especially in the field of trade and security.

The ever more demanding, or even existential, global challenges pose difficulties for formal multilateral institutions, whose work has expanded beyond their original mandate. For example, the UN now covers issues such as youth, gender equality, climate change, big data on sustainability, and HIV/AIDS – topics that have fallen within its remit only in recent decades. Although the UN is theoretically well-equipped to handle global issues due to its universal membership,[43] which also arguably contributes to increasing interstate cooperation and understanding,[44] difficulties plague its work. On the whole, global dialogue and decision-making may in itself generate outcomes that are less efficient but acceptable to all, with membership having expanded from the original 51 member states to 193. What is more, achieving consensus is increasingly difficult in today's international political landscape. Formal institutions have also been slow to adapt to changing power relations in the world, leaving emerging economies under the domination of powers that reigned in the 1940s.[45] The latter's reluctance to change international institutions to

42 Creutz et al. 2019.

43 United Nations 2022a.

44 Pouliot 2011, 18–26; Creutz 2022.

45 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022.

benefit emerging economies has become manifest, for example, in international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), but also in more indirect ways to maintain the status quo, such as, inter alia, through the staffing of international organisations.[46]

The ability of multilateral institutions to navigate the increasingly complex web of global challenges is to a large extent negatively affected by strategic competition among major powers. The hesitance of the United States towards global leadership and international institutions has paved the way for the strengthening of rising powers, most notably China. China's rise is reflected in greater activity within international institutions, but also in the creation of new institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), where the Global South is able to make its voice better heard. The developing 'no-limits' Sino-Russian relationship is also becoming apparent within old and new international institutions, the former situation manifesting in the two countries often acting as a counterpole to Western states in the UN Security Council, the latter exemplified by their cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), for instance. The economic and normative power of the European Union (EU) in the international order has, for its part, been tested by challenges to its internal unity in the form of populist parties, the so-called refugee crisis, Brexit, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Such internal challenges have also affected the Union's ability to project its liberal and democratic worldview internationally, which has spurred thinking on its strategic positioning vis-à-vis major powers, most notably the United States.

A further profound strain on multilateral cooperation is Russia's repeated and ongoing aggression upon neighbouring states – first Georgia in 2008 and later Ukraine as of 2014. The full-scale war initiated by a permanent member of the UN Security Council against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 not only violated the foundation of the current international order – the UN Charter – but also breached regional political and legal arrangements, such as the principles of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum giving Ukraine security guarantees. As a result, efforts to strengthen multilateral cooperation were wasted and Russia's actions led one UN representative to declare that "multilateralism lies on its deathbed".[47] A large number of states beyond the United States and Europe are prepared to condemn Russia's actions and some are even willing to isolate the country from institutions crucial for multilateral cooperation, although admittedly not all states or even the majority of the world's population.[48] As a result of the war of aggression, Russia has, for example, been

46 Novosad & Werker 2019.

47 Kimani 2022.

48 Kishore 2022.

excluded from the UN Human Rights Council, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and regional organisations such as the Council of Europe (CoE). The strategy of isolation is thorny as global challenges,[49] most notably climate change and environmental degradation, would require the involvement of all states. Besides global governance difficulties, the war both deepens rifts between states and strengthens emerging partnerships, such as that between China and Russia on the one hand, and Finland with NATO allies on the other.

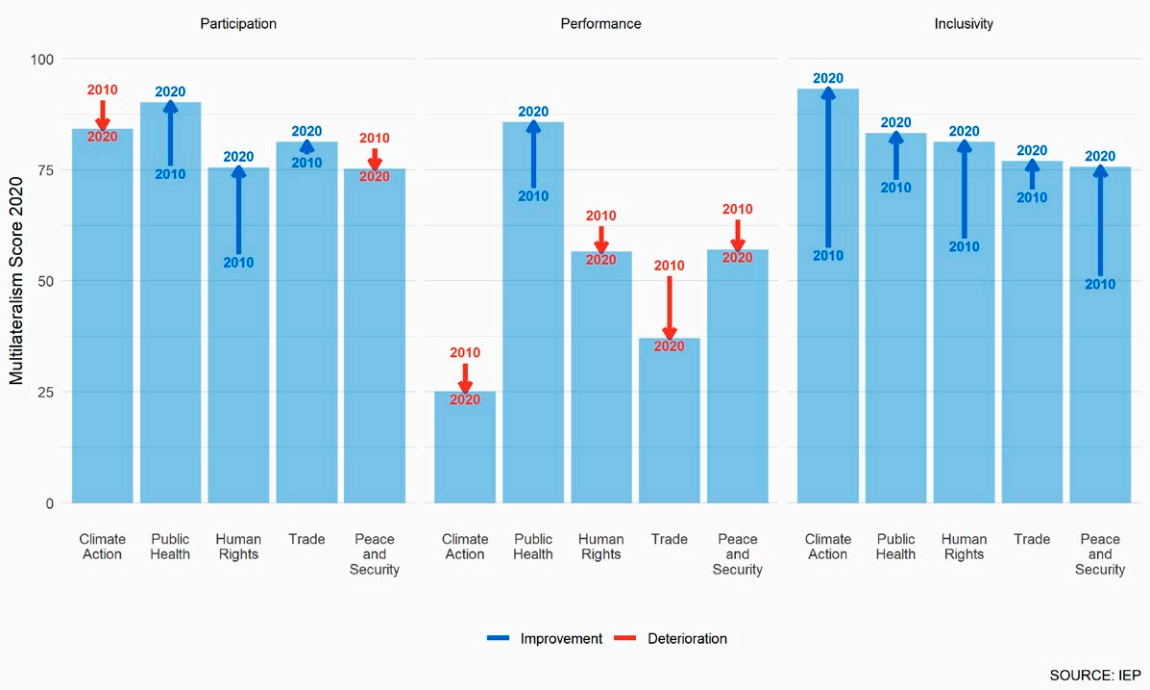
Although the downward spiral of multilateral cooperation is a generally accepted trajectory, recent studies have shown the reality to be somewhat more nuanced. Global public opinion has not shifted markedly concerning the level of trust in the multilateral system, funding for the UN system has consistently grown, and the multilateral system has become more diversified both in structure and representativeness.[50] The ability of the multilateral system to deliver results varies from issue to issue, thus testifying to both continuity and crisis. While global public health shows increased performance results in the last decade, many other fields have deteriorated, including human rights, trade, and peace and security.[51] Participation and inclusivity in several policy issues again demonstrate positive change, which reflects the increased role played by non-state actors such as corporations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or cities, to name a few.

49 Uheara 2022.

50 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 6.

51 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, executive summary.

Figure 1. Between 2010 and 2020, Participation in the multilateral system improved in three domains and deteriorated in the other two, Performance deteriorated in four domains and improved in one, and Inclusivity improved across all five domains.

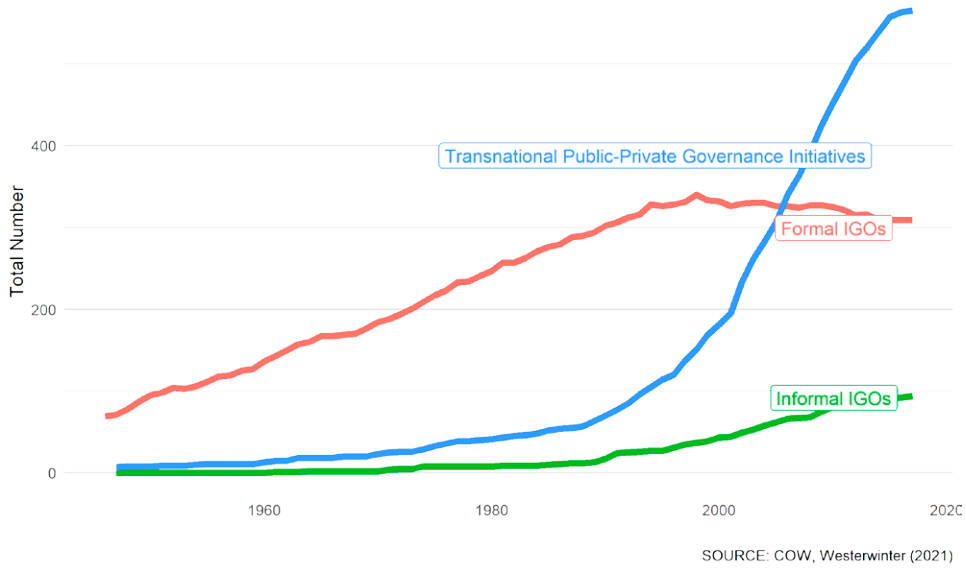


Source: IEP, in Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 2.

Indeed, formal organisations nowadays involve a large number of varied actors in their work, but specific forms of organisation have also emerged that allow private actors to take direct responsibility for global governance, namely transnational public-private governance initiatives. Although these partnerships have outnumbered formal organisations and now constitute the most common form of organising global governance,[52] they do not represent the only alternative governance format to formal intergovernmental organisations. The multilateral landscape is also affected by the rise of informal organisations, which allows for easier coordination and decision-making than within the formal, universal organisation.

52 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 8.

Figure 2. Owing to rapid growth starting in the 1990s, public-private initiatives are now by far the most common type of global governance organization.



Source: COW, Westwinter (2021), in Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 8.

2.2 The growing importance of informal forms of multilateral cooperation

Alongside the development of formal multilateral framework and transnational governance initiatives, informal forums of multilateral cooperation have advanced and consolidated as an integral part of multilateral cooperation. Informal multilateral cooperation forums are groups in which like-minded and/or relevant states meet frequently to coordinate policies and joint actions. The most important examples are the Group of Seven (G7), the Group of Twenty (G20), and the BRICS group. While the coordination and meeting procedures of these forums suggest a notable degree of institutionalisation, they remain informal in the sense that the groups are not treaty-based, and nor do they have their own secretariats or budgets. Conversely, their set-up relies on (unwritten) consensus reached through diplomacy among the states included, and their functioning and funding directly depend on the resources of the members of the group. The notion of informality also resonates with an aspiration towards direct informal interaction in smaller groups, including meetings at the ministerial level and, importantly, summits at the level of heads of state and government (leaders' level).

The G7 and G20

The G7 and the G20 represent the most broadly recognised and powerful forums of the world's leading economies in the current framework of informal multilateral cooperation. During past decades, the most highly developed and largest economies have opted to address various economic and financial crises through these informal forums. The G7 was born in the 1970s to address monetary matters after the collapse of the Bretton Woods system and economic issues related to energy crises. The G20 was founded after the Asian financial crisis at the ministerial level in 1999 to prevent new crises with global ramifications. The forum was upgraded to the leaders' level in 2008 in the midst of the global financial crisis, and designated the premier forum for G20 members' international economic cooperation. For many, this reflected the shift of economic dynamism and power away from the traditional Western economic powerhouses (of the G7) and increasingly towards the emerging economies in Asia and the 'Global South'. Furthermore, it consolidated their position in informal multilateral cooperation regarding global financial and economic matters.

Importantly, the agenda for both forums has expanded significantly. During the G7's formative years, the key agenda items included the future of the international monetary order, growth through the further liberalisation of trade, macroeconomic policy coordination, and measures to alleviate the situation of poor developing countries, as well as oil security.[53] Political issues including the end of the Cold War became increasingly salient during the 1980s, after which global issues such as democratisation, the environment, as well as illegal flows including terrorism and drugs appeared on the G7 agendas.[54] While the G20 in the early 2000s mainly dealt with the prevention of financial shocks, towards the late 2000s the agenda had broadened to include wider economic issues, development questions, and security matters, such as the financing of terrorism. The G20 also engaged in reforming the Bretton Woods institutions from early on. The G20 action announced during the London summit in 2009 – a coordinated stimulus of five trillion US dollars – was generally considered the most significant joint response to the global financial meltdown, which enabled the restoration of trust in the financial markets. Accordingly, significant expectations were aired regarding the forum's potential broader contribution to tackle global crises and challenges. Climate change, for instance, was added to its agenda in the run-up to the 2009 Copenhagen UN Climate Conference, and the group also started to focus on energy security.[55]

53 Hajnal 2007, 53.

54 Hajnal 2007, 53–55.

55 Jokela 2011.

The G7 and G20 have also addressed traditional political and security issues. The role of the G7 in addressing the Gulf War (1991) and the war in Kosovo (1999) has been recognised.[56] In the latter case, a solution to satisfy the West and Russia was brokered among the (then) G8 foreign ministers, and only afterwards was it approved by the United Nations Security Council. Importantly, Russia was expelled from the G8/G7 in 2014, after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. The G7 had met as the G8 (including Russia) at the leaders' level since 1998, yet Russia was not invited to the finance ministers' and central bank governors' meetings, which continued to convene in the form of the G7. The G20 foreign ministers met for the first time in Mexico in 2012, and a year later, during a summit in Russia, the G20 leaders discussed the use of weapons of mass destruction (chemical weapons) by the Bashar al-Assad government in the Syrian war.[57] Moreover, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine was high on the agenda of the G20 summit in Bali in 2022, from which Russia's President Vladimir Putin was absent and replaced by his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov. Even though the key issues of the Bali summit dealt with the global implications of the war in Ukraine, such as a food crisis and global economic challenges, the meeting agreed upon a Leaders' Declaration stating that most of the forum's members condemned Russia's war and that the use of nuclear weapons, or the threat thereof, was inadmissible.[58]

Importantly, the G7 and the G20 have operated in close cooperation with formal multilateral organisations. The G7 has assumed a major steering role in international financial institutions (IFIs). It has also shaped the developments regarding the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), succeeded by the WTO.[59] The G20 has also set up relations with formal multilateral institutions. Representatives of the IMF and the World Bank (WB) participate in the forum as ex-officio members. The G20 has also actively engaged with the UN, specifically with its Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as with the WTO. When the G20 was upgraded to the leaders' level in 2008, some concerns were expressed within formal multilateral organisations about the potentially enlarging steering function of the G20 in multilateral cooperation. Both forums have however insisted that even if they intend to make use of existing formal institutions, they do not aim to replace them.[60] Moreover, formal organisations, including the UN, have noted the value of the G20. With reference to the Covid-19 pandemic, the UN Secretary-General urged the world's richest economies to show leadership by stepping up support

56 Penttilä 2003.

57 Kirton 2017.

58 G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration 2022.

59 Hajnal 2007, 85.

60 Hajnal 2007, 85; Kirton 2013.

for universal vaccination. He suggested in the G20 Global Health Summit in Rome (2021) that the forum should set up a G20 task force which would deal with pharmaceutical companies and other key stakeholders to facilitate equitable vaccine distribution.

Given their important position in multilateral cooperation, the legitimacy and efficacy of the G7 and the G20 have faced some notable criticism. The enlargement beyond key Western economies (especially via the G20), and outreach to formal institutions, other states and key stakeholders have not alleviated allegations of exclusiveness and limited legitimacy. Although the G20 represents 60% of the world's population and 85% of global GDP, it officially includes only a handful of powerful states (and the EU). Small and medium-sized states have aimed to strengthen their position amid the increased importance of the G20 via the Global Governance Group (3G), for instance. The 3G has about 30 members, and it aims to provide greater representation for its member countries and collectively channel their views into the G20 process. Moreover, the challenges related to transparency and access to the proceedings of these high-level forums have rendered the participation (not to mention inclusion) of non-governmental organisations or civil society actors rather difficult. Even if business leaders and members of the policy research community often gather in the margins of the G20 summits (in the formats of B20 and T20 meetings), their inclusion is largely reliant on the courtesy of the actual G20 members and the country holding the forum's rotating presidency.

Moreover, legitimacy based on the performance and effectiveness of the forums in addressing global issues has also faced some problems recently. The G7 and the G20 have been losing internal coherence, and observers have questioned the commitment of the forum's members to cooperation in general as well as in national implementation of the agreed decisions. US foreign policy under President Donald Trump signified a departure from both formal and informal multilateral cooperation, and the UK's exit from the EU was seen as a fracture in European unity. In this context, the G7 was seen as losing some relevance. In addition, increasing strategic cooperation among great powers in general, and the US and China in particular, has had implications for the efficacy of the G20. Consequently, its visibility and impact weakened in the late 2010s.

Despite these challenges, the G7 and G20 have endured. Given the worsening conditions of multilateralism in general, and related challenges of formal multilateral organisations, informal forums and initiatives have been able to produce joint action to address crises, and generate consensus to tackle joint global challenges. While the future contribution of these informal forums will largely depend on the impact of the increasing strategic competition among the key powers in the global economy and politics, they have thus far been able to consolidate their position in the broader multilateral system.

BRICS: A Southern turn for multilateralism?

For many, the BRICS group – comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – holds conceptual promise for capturing a global order in the making. Coined in 2001 by a Goldman Sachs investment banker as BRICs[61] – excluding South Africa – the concept strove to capture the rise of emerging economies of unparalleled investment opportunity and economic prowess.

In 2009, the BRIC leaders met to affirm their commitment to enhance cooperation among promising emerging economies and to emphasise coordinating financial policy through the Group of Twenty (G20).[62] The birth of the BRIC(S) group was enmeshed with the financial crisis of 2008, and resentment over the perceived inability of Western-led institutions to respond to it. Dour observations were made about the division of power within IFIs, viewed to equip developed nations with considerable weight in the voting and quota shares of such organisations.[63] To some, the BRICS countries reflect the potential to function as a counterpole to perceived "Western cliques", such as the G7.[64] Thus, from the beginning, the BRIC(S) rhetoric was rooted in the will to enhance South-South cooperation, but also in the desire to reform institutions and establish a more just multipolar world order.[65] In 2011, with the inclusion of South Africa, BRICs matured into BRICS, eventually leading the group to account for more than 25% of the global GDP and 40% of the global population.[66]

> In the first fifteen years since its inception, the BRICS group had gone on to hold thirteen annual summits and nine informal summits, produce 933 collective decisions, establish nearly sixty intra-group institutions, and create a vast network with business, think tank, academia, trade union, parliamentary, as well as youth and civil society groups. The BRICS agenda had expanded to thirty-four topics, ranging from cyber security and terrorism to global health and development, among others.[67] The member countries have come together to reject the condition of unipolarity and, more specifically, to oppose US use of military power outside its borders, such as the war in Iraq, as well as the 2011 military intervention in Libya.[68]

61 O'Neill 2001.
62 Ayres 2017.
63 Ibid.
64 Lemaître 2022.
65 Kirton & Larionova 2022.
66 Iqbal 2022.
67 Kirton & Larionova 2022.
68 see e.g. Degaut & Meacham 2015, 9; Scrutton & Buckley 2011.

Yet the BRICS countries have been deemed unfit to come together as a viable geopolitical bloc due to the fact that they have relatively little in common with each other, share different geopolitical realities, and have struggled to formulate a shared strategy since the acronym's inception.[69] Tensions between BRICS – territorial disputes between India and China, but also competition between Russia, China, and India to acquire influence in Central Asia[70] – complicate outlooks for any truly amicable intra-BRICS coherence. The BRICS countries are neither wholly authoritarian nor democratic, although a tilt towards authoritarian and populist politics has taken shape also in the BRICS realm.[71] Not all BRICS countries are in the Global South, nor are they all "emerging" in the manner insinuated at the dawn of the 21st century. The BRICS countries – apart from China – have fallen short when it comes to turn-of-the-millennium predictions of explosive growth.[72] China, given its economic lead and development towards consumption-led growth, has in many ways more in common with the developed West than its companions within BRICS.[73]

In joint declarations, the BRICS group emphasises values such as respect for sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, national unity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of its members, while also asserting its commitment to promoting peace, enhancing the global economic governance system, creating a more just international order, and advancing the tenets of sustainable development and inclusive growth.[74] Their commitment to many of these values has been put under scrutiny due to the countries' meek reactions to Russia's war in Ukraine. Brazil was the only country to support the resolution condemning Russia's actions, while the rest of the group abstained.[75] The discourse is interwoven with opposition towards sanctions – seen as a worrying precedent of "weaponising" the US dollar – as well as a general hesitance to fully side with a West viewed as "hypocritical" and tilted to uphold a status quo unfair towards the BRICS countries. Russia's blatant breach of many of the group's core values, however, further gnaws at the rickety coherence of the constellation.

Generally, the BRICS countries oppose Western policies that they view as "interventionist". A case in point is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework – although the BRICS countries have proposed alternatives to R2P, for example in the form of Brazil's

69 Duggan et. al 2022, 472.
70 Ibid.
71 Chatterjee & Naka 2022.
72 Bishop 2022.
73 Duggan et al. 2022.
74 McLean & Mpungose 2022.
75 United Nations 2022b.

"Responsibility while Protecting" and China's "Responsible Protection".[76] Their positions on multilateralism and even individual issues, such as R2P, adopt a rhetoric that the BRICS mission is, in a variety of policy sectors, to *readjust* rather than *fully overhaul* the norms underpinning current-day multilateral cooperation.

In fact, an open and rules-based order has been a major factor contributing to the economic ascent of the BRICS countries. They do not oppose multilateralism as a concept, nor do they seek to overturn the current order in totality. Rather, they remain sceptical of the operationalisation of liberal values, seeing them as utilised for constructing hierarchies that funnel power to those who consider themselves the stewards of the system – mainly the developed West.[77] Notably, BRICS see multipolarity as an inescapable condition for future multilateralism, rather than as a threat to cooperation. As argued by Stuenkel, this departure point compels BRICS to:

> *— maintain constructive ties with all "poles of power." It is precisely this dynamic that explains their continued, entirely pragmatic interest in the BRICS grouping, despite its being frequently criticized by Western observers.*[78]

To some, the BRICS grouping, and particularly initiatives such as the New Development Bank, reflect the emergence of parallel structures challenging the authority of Western-led multilateralism. Furthermore, such non-Western structures are often associated with China's clout, strategised to advance Chinese interests, and merely masquerading as a developing country approach.[79] Such structures tend to elude normative conditionalities, and hence they are feared to prove attractive to some actors in the global arena, as well as to erode norms such as human rights within the sphere of multilateral cooperation. Such institutions have also been feared to open up an avenue for "competitive multilateralism", or "forum-shopping",[80] where the structures for undertaking shared action are selected on an increasingly case-by-case basis.[81]

While the BRICS grouping has at times been deemed a fable,[82] an irrelevant buzzword, or outdated, the group continues to reflect the positions of a vast segment of the world which considers itself excluded from having an active hand in the design of multilateral cooperation.

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76 Bratersky 2020.
77 Ibid.
78 Stuenkel 2016a, 45.
79 For context, see Stuenkel 2016b.
80 Stuenkel 2016a.
81 van Ham 2015.
82 Wallerstein 2016.

An open question remains as to whether the BRICS countries – given their varied strategies, domestic realities, foreign policy stances, and styles of negotiation – will be able to sync their positions into what could be considered a comprehensive view on the future of multilateral cooperation.[83] The Covid-19 pandemic as well as an inability to fully bounce back from the financial crisis have rendered the futures of the BRICS countries erratic,[84] while internal differences within the bloc continue to make sustained unity fickle at best.

2.3 Setting the scene: Tensions and developments amid flexilateralism

Multilateral cooperation has witnessed a process of de-Westernisation, or Southernisation, if you will. The term Southernisation has commonly been used to describe the influence of countries belonging to the Global South in relation to development issues, but it has now taken on a wider meaning in which it implies the attempts by these countries to increase their participation, achieve reform within international institutions and project their own global agenda. To that effect, countries of the Global South have collaborated both within formal and informal institutions on topics such as trade and sustainable development, notably within the WTO, the G20, BRICS, and the IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) grouping [85]. An additional aspect of de-Westernisation, and Southernisation as well, is highlighted by claims of the Easternisation of international relations in general, and in the global economy in particular, due to the economic rise of Asia.[86] Both Southernisation and Easternisation share the idea, in contrast to Westernisation, that there is not a 'single' East or South alternative to the West, with the rise of China challenging both India and Japan, for example.[87]

The G20 is often hailed as a forum where countries of the Global South can exert influence, although steering the group towards consensus is admittedly a daunting task. For example, the consecutive G20 presidency of Indonesia, India, Brazil and South Africa will allow the countries to further the international agenda of developing countries for years to come. They usually hold views that differ from those of the West, for example on climate change, education, and the use of natural resources, and have urged efforts for a new kind

83 Degaut & Meacham 2015.
84 Duggan et al. 2022.
85 Nahón 2018.
86 Rachman 2017.
87 Gordon 2017.

of multilateralism that "directly serves people and national interests".[88] Wealth distribution, infrastructure investment and financial inclusion are emphasised over liberalisation and fiscal policies.[89]

While the G20 is seen as a bridge between the North and the South,[90] domestic policies have come to affect that forum just as they have other multilateral institutions. Moreover, domestic policies have increasingly expressed populist and anti-globalist views, thereby affecting both participation in multilateral cooperation to begin with, as well as the kind of policies that have been pursued. It is not uncommon for populist parties to reject multilateral institutions and international law as such,[91] a phenomenon that has occurred in industrial and developing states alike.[92] National foreign policy leaders, such as former US President Donald Trump, former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, and sitting President Viktor Orbán represent policies where neither "like-mindedness" nor "a cooperative attitude" can be presumed.[93] Indeed, such foreign policy leadership tends to undermine international engagement and global governance, particularly its inclusionary nature.[94] Foreign policy has arguably become more state-centred but less foreseeable and coherent,[95] and informal institutions remain exceptionally exposed to populist foreign policy.[96] On the other hand, populists resist the transfer of sovereignty to international organisations,[97] which would make informal cooperation formats at least prima facie more attractive.

One factor that seems to be relevant for multilateral cooperation from the perspective of populism, but also more broadly, is opportunistic foreign policy that treats multilateral cooperation ambiguously, sometimes stressing the value of multilateralism, but at other times not. China's stance in favour of multilateral cooperation has been described as opportunistic or strategic,[98] meaning that in issues relating to climate change, for example, multilateral cooperation has been advanced, but in other policy sectors it has not. However, strategicness vis-à-vis choosing different forms of cooperation is not limited to

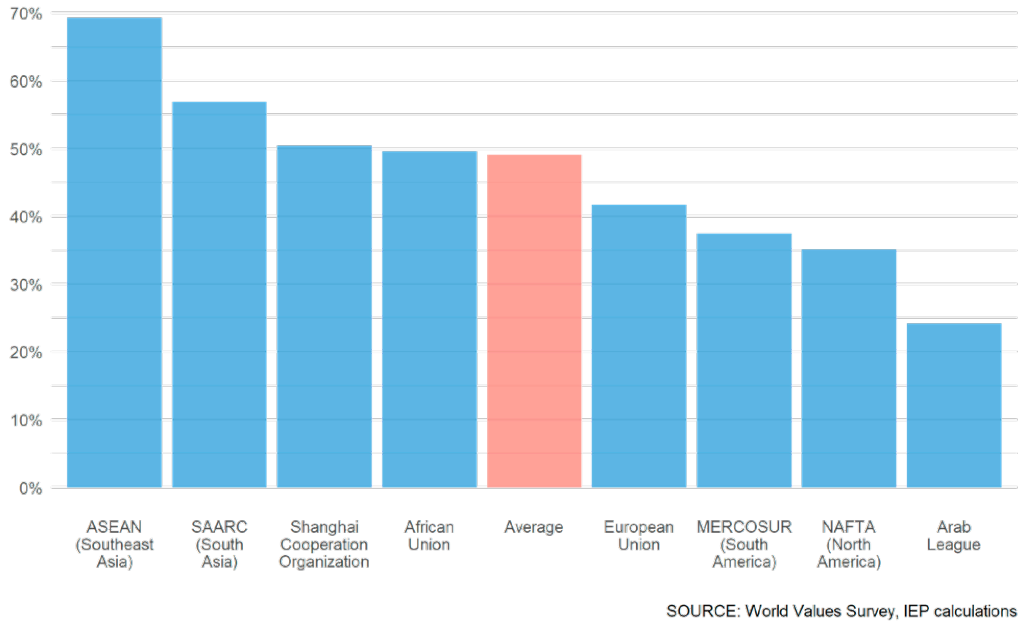
88 Nahón 2018, 50.
89 Nahón 2018, 50; Turkey G20 2015.
90 Lissovolik 2022.
91 Lopes 2020, 179.
92 Frieden 2021.
93 Andrione-Moylan & Wouters 2020, 5.
94 Andrione-Moylane & Wouters 2020, 8; Pevehouse 2020, E194.
95 Lopes 2020.
96 Andrione-Moylan & Wouters 2020, 13.
97 Pevehouse 2020, E199.
98 Kastner et al. 2018; Kastner et al. 2020.

China, as the United States, and increasingly the European Union, have utilised precisely the same tactics. It has recently been argued that states take strategicness or opportunism one step further by varying the international forms of cooperation also within one specific policy issue. The concept of 'flexilateralism' specifically aims to highlight states' appetite for various cooperative formats within one policy issue.[99]

The conduct of multilateral cooperation along different directional lines – whether we talk about the North/South or the West/East divide – reflects the growing importance of regionalisation, especially in the field of international trade and economic governance,[100] but also with respect to security. While regional cooperation often entails "a second best or fall-back scenario" in comparison to multilateralism,[101] it provides a means through which states can avoid the dangers and pitfalls of great-power competition.[102] Thus, for small states, regional solutions may form a bulwark against "falling under the domain of one great power" or being left in "strategic uncertainty".[103] While regional cooperation entails less ambitious solutions, it appears more tangible than global solutions, and allows small states more room for manoeuvre.[104] But regionalism also serves major and rising powers as they can manifest their leverage regionally while better managing diverging interests. Regionalisation is nevertheless a double-edged sword: while it may complement global governance, it may simultaneously increase global fragmentation.[105]

99 Faure 2019.
100 Nakagawa 2011.
101 Cooper et al. 2008.
102 Sadr 2022.
103 Ibid.
104 Cooper et al. 2008.
105 Creutz et al. 2019, 49.

Figure 3. Trust in major regional multilateral bodies and trade blocs (2022). ASEAN has by far the highest levels of trust among people in its member states, while the Arab League has the lowest.



Source: World Values Survey, IEP calculations in Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) (2022), 9.

3 The EU, US, China, and Russia in multilateral cooperation: Strategic partners or rivals?

3.1 The European Union: Towards strategic multilateralism?

Niklas Helwig

- The crises of previous years and the rise of strategic competition have put the EU's traditional approach to multilateralism under pressure. The EU's pledge for "a more stringent and strategic approach to multilateralism" has become even more relevant with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
- Three adjustments to the EU's approach to multilateralism signify a more strategic approach. In a move towards a more instrumental engagement, the EU is using international cooperation as an avenue to protect its interests in the global competition. The EU is displaying more willingness than before to leverage its power bilaterally and through its work in international organisations. It is also more willing to focus on ad hoc frameworks in order to preserve the effectiveness of global cooperation and extend it to new areas of governance.
- The EU needs to weigh the benefits of a more strategic approach to multilateralism against the risks of global fragmentation and the weakening of the UN-led system. A detailed and granular understanding of partners in the Global South and their positions in global governance is sorely needed. Given the volatile US approach to multilateral fora, the EU and its member states need to work on their independent capabilities to influence global developments.

The 2003 European Security Strategy defined "effective multilateralism" as one of the top priorities of the EU and its external action, intended to "promote multilateral solutions to common problems, in particular in the framework of the United Nations". Whether promoting human rights, ensuring rules-based international trade, fighting climate change, or securing the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the EU's first course of action was to work with partners and through multilateral cooperation. The

utilisation of multilateralism reflected the normative underpinnings of the EU as a regional integration and peace project. Yet it was also linked to the EU's interests. As a novel type of international actor – more than an international organisation but less than a state – the EU largely lacked political, institutional, and military capabilities to secure its interests with harder tools (i.e. through power politics). Accordingly, the EU saw its interests as being best served in a rules-based order based on multilateral cooperation.

Almost twenty years later, the recently published Strategic Compass of the EU admits that this approach to multilateralism "has come under strong questioning".[106] Strategic competition among major powers and an emphasis on national sovereignty and interests are on the rise. International norms and principles, such as the territorial integrity of states or respect of human rights, are under pressure, as the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the suffering of the local population shows. At the same time, the multilateral system is struggling to stay effective in the face of a power balance shift towards Asia and the Global South. In and outside the EU, Western governments also increasingly highlight national sovereignty and interests, and build up defences against the "weaponisation" of (inter)dependencies.

Faced with these challenges, the EU is adjusting its approach to multilateralism. In a joint communication in 2021, the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy laid out a strategy for the EU's multilateral engagement by calling for a "more stringent and strategic approach".[107] This chapter analyses the central elements of this emerging strategic multilateralism. Under the weight of global competition and the contestation of international norms, the EU is adopting a multilateralism that is less apologetic in the promotion of its interests, is increasingly ready to put its economic and diplomatic resources to use, and is more problem-solving-oriented when choosing frameworks for cooperation. However, the risks of this strategic approach to multilateralism also highlight the need for the EU to keep pressing for reforms of the formal multilateral system, as led by the UN, for example.

106 Council of the European Union 2022.

107 European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2021).

Key challenges for effective multilateralism

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine signifies a historical juncture for the EU in multilateralism. The invasion marks the second time after the annexation of Crimea that Russia has violated the principle of territorial integrity enshrined in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and in the OSCE founding principles of the Helsinki Accords. The aggression puts the credibility of the rules-based European security order under pressure. The war also reveals the ineffectiveness of the UN Security Council, in which Russia can veto any resolution condemning its actions. While the UN General Assembly's vote on the resolution condemning the Russian invasion passed with 141 votes in favour, the more neutral stance of some countries is a sign that the Global South looks at the war in Ukraine from a different perspective and is particularly concerned about the looming food crisis and economic ripple effects. Since 24 February 2022, the EU has thus been faced with a new set of challenges in multilateralism to sustain rules-based cooperation and in seeking partners for its agenda.

The new situation comes at a time when the outlook for the EU in multilateralism has been in decline for years. First, the increasing importance of the emerging powers and a turn towards a more multipolar international order have led to increasing strategic competition among major powers. The projections suggesting that multipolarity could strengthen multilateral cooperation due to greater participation and legitimacy have largely been replaced with more sober observations suggesting a crisis of multilateralism due to cooperation and conflicting interests. Relatedly, the EU's aspiration to build strategic partnerships with major and midsized powers – often including an objective to promote multilateralism – has produced weak or at best mixed results.[108] Second, the EU's (only) truly strategic partnership – EU-US relations – encountered severe problems during President Trump's administration. The America First doctrine and related policies were highly disruptive for multilateral cooperation and institutions. Even if the current Biden administration has aimed to re-build the transatlantic and global partnerships, some challenges and a more competitive outlook remain (as discussed in the previous/next chapter). Third, the EU has struggled with several and severe internal crises since the late 2000s, which has arguably made it more inward-looking. The departure of the EU's third largest member state in the late 2010s constituted a historic setback for European integration and the EU's international credibility. While cooperation with the UK and EU member states has continued in foreign policy matters (also in a multilateral setting), competition increasingly frames the EU-UK economic ties. Finally, the significantly enlarged Union has had to accommodate increasing variation in values and interests in its policymaking. This has been reflected in the EU's level of ambition in multilateral institutions and forums, especially in human rights matters related to gender and LGBTIQ

108 See Blanco 2016.

rights. At the same time, rule of law challenges in some member states, the re-emergence of far-right and extreme-right political parties across the Union, and tougher migration policies have hampered the credibility of the EU in promoting human rights and have led to accusations of double standards being adopted.

Fourth, the sui generis nature of the EU presents its own set of challenges for the Union when it comes to being an effective multilateral actor. The EU is a special case in the multilateral system, as it is represented not only by its individual member states, but also as a collective actor. The 2009 Lisbon Treaty introduced the biggest upgrade to the EU's multilateral representation. For the first time, the EU gained legal personality, which paved the way for an "enhanced observer status" in the UN. The EU delegations – another Lisbon Treaty novelty – are generally seen to have made a big improvement to the EU's multilateral representation. Looking beyond the UN to the wider multilateral landscape, the representation of the EU remains murky.[109] Frequently, one will find both EU representatives and national delegates in the room working in parallel, for example in the Food and Agricultural Organisation. Other organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund, exclude the EU, and member states speak on its behalf. Questions on how to best coordinate joint positions and whether, for instance, to push for a common EU seat on the UN Security Council reappear frequently.

Towards strategic multilateralism

In light of external and internal developments, the EU has announced a more strategic approach to multilateralism. Moreover, the need for a more stringent effort to ensure global solutions and rules-based cooperation has only increased with Russia's repeated violation of international law. To this end, it is possible to discern three recent adjustments to the EU's handling of multilateral cooperation.

A more functional and interest-based approach

The EU and its member states have in recent years developed a more functional approach to global cooperation that sees multilateralism not as a goal in itself, but as a tool to reach objectives. In particular, France and Germany have been active in pushing for new formats that could be instrumental in achieving results on specific challenges ranging from international taxation and climate change to coping with pandemics.[110] Examples include the German-led 'Alliance for Multilateralism' (later co-sponsored by France) that brings

109 Gatti 2021.

110 Helwig 2023.

together midsize countries from around the world to work on issues of common interest, such as cyber security and freedom of information, or the Paris Peace Forum, instituted by French President Emmanuel Macron in order to foster bottom-up initiatives and solutions to global challenges. The German Government's white paper on multilateralism (2021) and the EU's recent communication on multilateralism both reflect this goal-oriented approach and highlight international cooperation as a means of tackling the most important issues, which include new challenges in the health, digital, and environmental spheres.

At first sight, the newfound focus on results seems to be a continuation of the EU's "effective multilateralism" from the early 2000s. However, back then the EU conceived effective multilateralism as an alternative to the more interest-based approach of the US after the George W. Bush administration had used false evidence in an attempt to secure support from the UN Security Council for its invasion of Iraq. While not as brazen, US presidents representing the Democratic Party also had a more instrumental take on global cooperation. In contrast, the EU's effective multilateralism had a stronger emphasis on values and even hoped to foster an "international society" through multilateral engagement, as expressed in the 2003 European Security Strategy.

The EU's normative ambitions have now been dialled down, as the Union has developed a more hard-nosed approach to global cooperation in general. In multilateral cooperation, the recent Global Gateway initiative is a case in point. With the help of public and private infrastructure investments and technical assistance, the EU seeks to rival the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and deepen its partnerships with countries in Africa and Asia. This geopolitical reinterpretation of EU assistance is part of a larger overhaul of the EU's development cooperation policy. The current EU multi-year budget already incorporated the distinct budget for development cooperation into one financial instrument for all third countries. While experts welcome the more coherent and strategic engagement with partner countries, they are concerned that a repurposing of financial assistance for political objectives might undercut the sustainable development goals and the EU's values and principles.[111] There are signs that the EU sees international cooperation increasingly as a tool to respond to competition with China and Russia, rather than as a benevolent vehicle for value promotion.

111 Teevan et al. 2022.

Leveraging the EU's power

It is an often-repeated notion that the EU's influence in the multilateral system is minor considering its economic, regulatory, financial, and diplomatic resources. The EU's influence at the UN is a case in point. The EU delegation to the UN has about 60 staff members in addition to hundreds of member states' diplomats in national representations. However, despite its sizeable diplomatic presence, the EU has often struggled to translate this power into votes. After all, EU member states make up only 14% of the UN membership, making them dependent on winning over partners for their initiatives globally.[112]

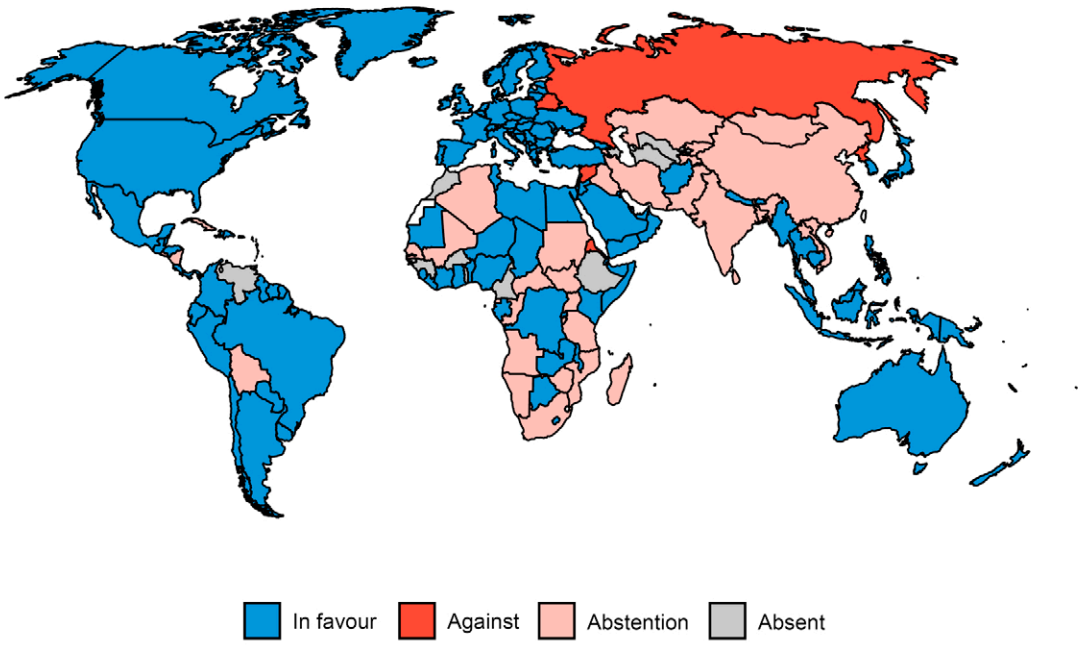
Previous announcements of a more concerted approach are now starting to bear fruit. A concrete example of how forces can be joined more effectively was the French-German shared presidency of the UN Security Council in early 2019. Instead of chairing the highest body of the UN for one month each, the largest EU member states presented a joint working programme.

It was also thanks to a concentrated effort of EU diplomacy that the UN General Assembly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 2 March 2022 with an overwhelming majority of 141 votes with 5 against and 35 abstentions. In close cooperation with the US, EU diplomats put in extra hours to collect the votes, also using the bilateral embassies around the world to increase pressure on holdouts.[113] While one cannot confirm that serious 'arm twisting' was part of the EU's efforts, it is safe to say that governments on the fence about how to vote also had to consider the implications that an abstention or vote against the motion would have for their financial and diplomatic relations with the EU. The breakdown of the vote shows that some of the countries that walked a fine line with regard to the conflict and were in general more cautious about openly criticising Russia, such as Indonesia or Israel, voted for the resolution. However, reservations about the resolution proved strong in Asian and African countries with many abstaining – including South Africa and India, which had previously been courted in the Alliance for Multilateralism (see map). Despite the large majority, the votes condemning the Russian invasion only represented 41% of the world's population.

112 Borchmeyer & Mir 2021.

113 See recording of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs seminar 'Multilateralism and the state of the international order after Russia's invasion of Ukraine', 2022.

Figure 4. Map of UN General Assembly vote on Resolution ES-11/1 (Ukraine), 2 March 2022.



Source: Author's compilation based on UNGA Resolution ES-11/1.

Another way for the EU to leverage its power is with a more coordinated approach to fill high-level positions in multilateral organisations with European candidates. The idea is to present joint candidates instead of sparking intra-European competition between several member state candidates who see their individual chances diminished. Indeed, EU member states have increased this cooperation. Other efforts include coordinating and supporting member states' bids for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, with Slovenia having put in the 2024 candidacy. The EU also uses more direct ways to leverage its economic clout internationally, with the most obvious example being its sanctions policy. Other examples of coercive norm promotion include the idea of a Carbon Border Adjustments Mechanism (CBAM) to promote the greening of the global economy, or due diligence legislation that aims to protect human rights throughout global value chains.

Ad hoc and issue-based multilateralism

Much of the EU's focus in its international diplomacy has been on formal multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organization. As the reaction to the Russian invasion shows, these institutionalised forms of global cooperation are still

the most important avenues for the EU. However, adjacent to these major multilateral structures, the EU and its member states have long engaged in issue-specific formats. Some of these, such as the P5+1 negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme, have been closely tied to the United Nations, while others, such as the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) that the EU supports, are built around public-private partnerships. In the EU's quest to extend multilateral governance to new issue areas, ad hoc formats play a key role.[114]

Ad hoc or issue-based formats are seen as more efficient in addressing specific challenges when a multilateral route is either too slow or blocked by national interests. With regard to defence and security issues, "coalitions of the willing" (e.g. interventions in Iraq or Syria), or exclusive alliances (e.g. the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Australia, India, Japan, and the US, or more recently the AUKUS pact between Australia, the UK, and the US) are tools frequently used by the US and others to ensure interventions and project global power. However, ad hoc formats are also increasingly becoming a tool of choice for the EU in tackling the growing complexity of international crises and the increase in global economic and technological competition.

New and informal constellations often emerge when the EU and other players attempt to expand multilateralism to as yet ungoverned areas.[115] The EU was, for example, the driving force behind the Global Compact for Migration that was set on track by the UN in 2016. However, after the US Trump administration and some EU member states, including Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic, withdrew their support from the process, the compact was redesigned as a non-binding, intergovernmental agreement. The Global Compact for Migration is an example of how the EU may fail as a multilateral actor because of the sovereignty concerns of its own member states. At the same time, it represents a first step in governing a crucial and transnational challenge.

A more successful example in recent years is the EU's support for the COVAX programme, which supports global Covid-19 vaccination efforts in low- and middle-income countries. The EU played a pivotal role in setting up a multilateral framework for vaccine donations after the Trump administration became embroiled in a blame game with China and did not show particular signs of leadership on the issue. Bilateral and uncoordinated donations risked being impractical. The EU and its member states eventually provided a third of the vaccine funding for the initiative.

114 Expert interview by author, Brussels, 20 June 2022.

115 Schuette & Dijkstra 2023.

In its 2021 multilateralism paper, the EU vowed to promote multilateral cooperation on other as yet ungoverned issues, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cyber security. A host of initiatives to regulate the ethical, sustainable and security aspects of AI have been put forward in the form of bilateral proposals as part of the informal G7 and within the formal OECD framework.[116] The nascent and fragmented governance illustrates the downsides of ad hoc multilateralism and the lack of an inclusive and encompassing UN process.

The expansion of multilateralism into new policy areas often takes place in the G7 or G20 frameworks. The format is attractive in allowing its members to take quick and coordinated action on pertinent issues. The latest G7 summit in June 2022 in Germany serves as a good example, as the leaders put forward a Global Alliance for Food Security together with the World Bank. While these kinds of coordinated responses can be efficient in addressing the crisis of the moment and can spur further multilateral engagement, they are not necessarily intended to provide sustainable solutions for long-term challenges. Another issue with regard to the Gx system concerns representation. While smaller EU member states are represented through the EU as a full member of the G20 and as a non-enumerated member of the G7, the spotlight still remains on the big member states in the room that they have to consider their own interests. However, the recent G7 summit in Germany showed that following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the issue of representation of the Global South has been recognised. The German government had invited five guest countries – India, South Africa, Senegal, Indonesia, and Argentina – to join three out of the seven working sessions.

Risks of strategic multilateralism

The EU's shift towards strategic multilateralism comes with potential downsides and risks attached. Critics warn of an emerging "multilateralism à la carte"[117] in which the blockage of reforms of international governance institutions leads to a fragmentation of global cooperation. By engaging in strategic competition, the EU risks contributing to the splintering of global governance and the negative effects it produces. One of the biggest risks is that the legitimacy of the formal multilateral frameworks will be further undermined. The Chinese and American sovereignty-focused and interest-based approach towards the UN and the WTO has already damaged the formal multilateral system. The EU has focused on keeping the multilateral status quo afloat, for example through its 2020 initiative to institute an alternative to the paralysed Appellate Body of the WTO, or

116 Garcia 2022.

117 Patrick 2015.

by lobbying for a powerful UN General Assembly resolution to trump the dysfunctional UN Security Council. However, when it comes to reforming or deepening multilateral organisations, its efforts have focused more often than not on informal formats.

A second risk is that ad hoc constellations are less efficient in the management of challenges related to the global commons, such as the climate, natural resources and biodiversity, which benefit from binding and widely-shared commitments. This is connected to the third risk, which is that strategic multilateralism might promote solutions that lack accountability and global representation. The recent experiences in relation to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and its economic fallout have shown that a broad representation of the Global South in multilateral affairs is important for the EU to stay relevant. It is vital for the EU and its member states to better understand the interests and positions of its partners in the Global South without falling into the trap of perceiving them as a monolithic bloc.

Fourth, connecting multilateral initiatives with the institutional framework of the UN also guarantees that principles of human rights, the rule of law, transparency and sustainability are monitored in the implementation. Strategic multilateralism thus requires a constant check that it does not undermine the main objectives of the EU's foreign policy that put universal values and formal multilateralism at the centre of action. Towards that end, strategic multilateralism can only work when combined with the EU's engagement in the formal multilateral arena. In practice, this means that even if multilateral cooperation is pursued outside the UN framework, for example as part of the G7 or G20, the EU and its member states should seek ways of cooperation with UN actors and processes. The recent Secretary-General's report 'Our Common Agenda' (2021) shows that the UN is also opening up to new ways of international cooperation and, for example, engages in the COVAX framework and G7 infrastructure initiatives.

The EU and its member states have to be prepared for setbacks in multilateral governance. The growing tensions between the US and China might make formal multilateral cooperation even more difficult in the future, which will force the EU to stay nimble and come up with quick-fix solutions to ensure the status quo of multilateral cooperation. The 2024 US presidential election looms large in this regard and might (re)install a more unilateralist leader in the White House. But even with a more moderate US administration, recent years have shown a certain reluctance in the US to get fully behind multilateral solutions, and a divergence of interests across the Atlantic on how to deal with China.[118] The EU has often adopted a reactive stance towards US policies and tended to opt for 'damage control' if the US adminstration's commitment to the rules of the international

118 See the following section on the US in this report.

order was weak. The EU and its member states need to work on their independent capabilities to influence global developments through multilateral institutions.

At the same time, EU governments need to be prepared for the fact that the Global South might not share its priorities and values and will be increasingly difficult to bring on board when it comes to joint initiatives. A detailed and granular understanding of partners in the Global South and their positions in global governance is sorely needed and could provide the basis for a more strategic engagement with them.

Given the declining share of Europe's population and economic power in the world, multilateral cooperation is of immense value for EU member states and can in no way be disregarded even by the largest members. The competitive international environment makes a more strategic EU approach to multilateralism necessary to leverage the EU's powers and interests. Yet it cannot come at the expense of the formal multilateral system.

3.2 The United States' multilateral engagement in perspective

Ville Sinkkonen and Anna Kronlund

- The United States is increasingly engaged in flexilateralism, employing informal minilateral and ad hoc coalitions alongside established multilateral fora. This approach is in part a product of the great-power competition paradigm accepted across party lines in Washington D.C., and inevitably drives US multilateralism in a more exclusionary direction in spheres like democracy and security. In order to gain admission to the chosen fora, other states must accept the preferred values and interests of the US, or risk being left on the outside.
- Polarised domestic politics render the US approach to multilateral fora volatile, especially in the realm of climate governance, but potentially also in other domains like global health and human rights. Diverging views on the utility of international institutions, the relative importance of core liberal tenets like democracy or human rights, and the acuteness of global challenges like pandemics and climate change mean successive Democratic and Republican administrations may pursue policies directly at odds with each other. US partners must be prepared to step up in situations where the US is unwilling to assume a role in meeting shared global challenges.

Introduction[119]

The United States has had a complicated relationship with multilateralism throughout the post-Second World War era. On the one hand, the role of the US in setting up core components of the current multilateral constellation, especially the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions but also NATO and GATT/WTO, is beyond doubt. Binding itself and others to such institutions effectively restricted the ability of the US to engage in "the arbitrary and indiscriminate exercise of power",[120] which made American primacy bearable for other states in the international system. These institutions of a (liberal) rules-based order could then be drawn upon for sustained interstate cooperation.[121]

119 The authors would like to thank three US-based experts for background interviews for the project. The interviews took place on 31 May 2022 and 13 June 2022 via Zoom and in Washington, D.C.

120 Ikenberry 2012, 71.

121 Ikenberry 2012, 71–75; Nye 2019, 71–73.

But what incentives did the US as the preponderant state in the system have to exercise such "strategic restraint"? On the one hand, the creation of institutions allowed the US to reap the benefits of lowered enforcement and transaction costs. In return for sacrificing some policy autonomy, the US created an environment wherein cooperation between states based on absolute gains became easier, which, in turn, produced significant economic boons for the leading state.[122] On the other hand, institutional binding served to legitimise the role of the US as the order's custodian, and allowed it to extend influence into the future by embedding its preferred norms, rules and values into the multilateral institutional fabric.[123]

However, despite being instrumental in the birth of post-war multilateralism, the US has often been unable to resist the temptation to disregard institutions and their constituent rules when it has suited America's short-term interests or pandered to important domestic constituencies. In a seminal article, Bruce Cronin has termed this recurring balancing between a desire for long-term stability of the rules-based order and parochial self-interest "the paradox of hegemony".[124] As Cold War bipolarity gave way to the "unipolar moment" of the 1990s and early 2000s,[125] this tension between multilateral cooperation and unilateral action – *not* the centuries-old battle between "isolationism" and internationalism – animated debates over how the US should conduct itself in the post-Cold War world.[126] The US was grappling with the perennial dilemmas of sovereignty: between international commitments, on the one hand, and domestic (legal) authority and freedom of action, on the other.[127]

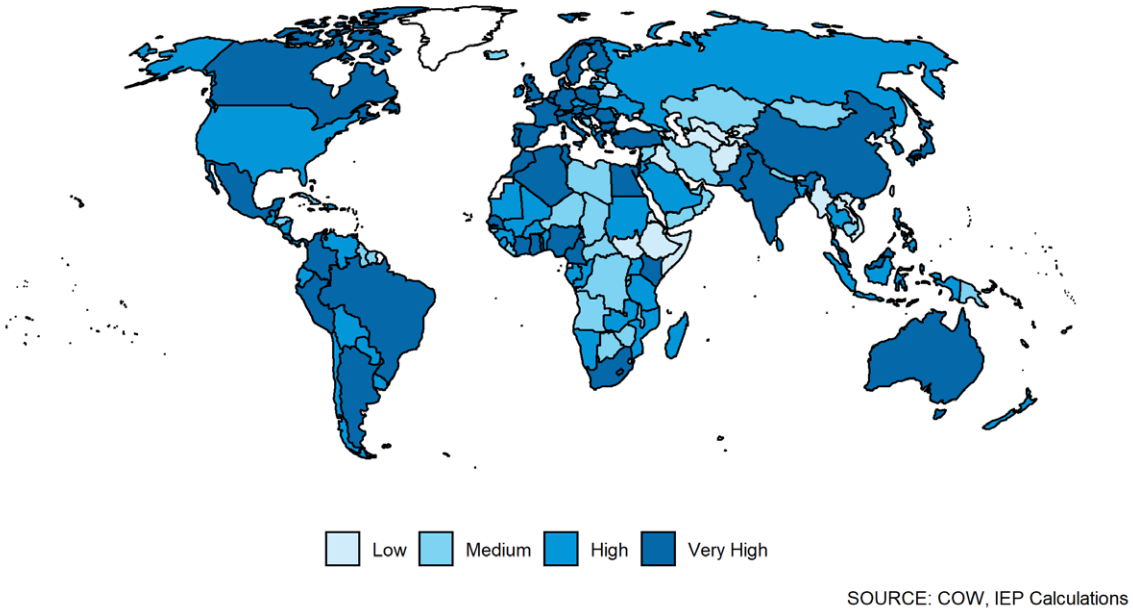
Yet the unilateral/multilateral dichotomy hides complexity when it comes to qualitative questions around the US approach to multilateralism. Generally, there are different drivers present for the creation of and participation in formal as opposed to informal multilateral institutions for powerful states. In the former case, the US trades policy autonomy and institutional efficiency for enhanced legitimacy and inclusiveness. In the latter case, more leeway and less cumbersome decision-making come at the cost of broader international legitimacy and wider membership.[128] Moreover, informal institutions, with their less constraining nature,[129] may also be more acceptable to domestic audiences within the United States.

122 Ikenberry 2012, 102–104; Brands 2016, 2–3.
123 Ikenberry 2012, 104–109; Krisch 2005, 373–375; see also Cox 1996, 138.
124 Cronin 2001; see also Nye 2002.
125 Krauthammer 1990/91.
126 Daalder & Lindsay 2003, 11–15; Nye 2002, 154–163.
127 Patrick 2017, 7–8.
128 Krisch 2005, 376–380, 392; Reus-Smit 2004, 40–41.
129 Prantl 2014, 454.

Historically, the US has also been an outlier regarding many multilateral efforts, including environmental and human rights treaties. Examples include UNCLOS, which the US has neither signed nor ratified, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which the US has signed but the Senate has not ratified. There are currently 37 treaties pending in the Senate.[130]

The US has, however, been willing to advance specific issues through multilateral frameworks. In 2000, the UN Security Council passed its landmark resolution 1325, followed by a set of "Women and Peace and Security" resolutions. The concomitant United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security was first released in 2011 during Barack Obama's administration. The US Congress also passed a Women, Peace, and Security Act, which was signed into law by President Trump in 2017. In the International Peace Institute (IPI) Multilateralism Index from 2022, the United States' level of integration into the multilateral system has been ranked as "high", while much of Europe and Latin America is ranked "very high".[131]

Figure 5. Level of integration into the multilateral system: Europe and Latin America are the regions most integrated into the multilateral system.



Source: COW, IEP Calculations in Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 8.

130 These include the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), as well as the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (1996).

131 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 8.

The two tensions in the US approach to global institutions – between unilateralism and multilateralism as well as formal and informal cooperation – have ebbed and flowed in recent decades. Changes in the international environment have naturally impacted how the US perceives its national interests. The focus on the terrorist threat of the early 2000s has given way to great-power competition against China and Russia. The US has also come to acknowledge the acute imperative of meeting key global threats, most notably pandemics and the climate crisis.[132]

Concurrently, domestic polarisation and hyper-partisanship have deepened, ensuring that American partisan politics no longer stop "at the water's edge". The United States' global role, foreign policy and stance on multilateral institutions have become bitterly contested issues in domestic politics, perhaps more so than at any time in the post-World War II era.[133] This is visible in terms of the two parties' attitudes towards how and to what extent the US should be active in world affairs.

In general, Republicans tend to favour less internationally coordinated solutions to global problems than Democrats, but the number of Democrats who think that supporting international cooperation with regard to global challenges should be at the core of US foreign policy has also decreased. Partisan attitudes are even clearer when the comparison is focused on foreign policy goals. Republicans tend to support US physical security and the use of military force to respond to threats and uncertainties, whereas Democrats tend to think of security in broader terms and espouse a more multilateral approach.[134] Democrats have also been more supportive in Congress when it comes to US global engagement.[135] Republican publics and leaders are, essentially, more sceptical of free trade and more suspicious of immigration than their Democrat counterparts.[136]

The US public has also become less favourably disposed towards specific institutions, including the UN, in recent years. According to Gallup, in February 2022, only 37% of respondents thought that the UN was doing a good job dealing with the problems that it faced. It should be mentioned, however, that the number has never risen much above 50% since Gallup started measuring it in 1953.[137] The US foreign policy community, too, has voiced its mistrust towards the UN since the 1970s. Efforts to withdraw the US from

132 Biden 2022.

133 Kupchan 2020; Schweller 2018; Schultz 2017; Ashford 2021; Smeltz et al. 2022.

134 Smeltz et al. 2022.

135 See e.g. Restoring U.S. Leadership in International Organizations Act of 2021, introduced in the House by Representative Joaquin Castro.

136 Shapiro 2018; Busby & Monten 2018.

137 Gallup 2022.

the UN have appeared both in state legislatures and in Congress.[138] The shifting majorities in Congress are likewise relevant in terms of funding multilateral efforts, including the UN, given that the legislative branch holds "the power of the purse" in the US political system.

Given the political ebb and flow, both conservative and liberal values have thus shaped US foreign policy, as well as the rhetoric and use of concepts during recent administrations. One example concerns the way in which the Trump administration framed Western values in a particularistic rather than a universal manner, emphasizing notions like sovereignty,[139] as well as civilisational affinity[140] – ideas that resonate with his domestic constituencies.

In light of these historical, ideational, structural and domestic-political drivers and inhibitors of US global engagement, the following sections explore the approaches of the two most recent presidential administrations towards multilateralism as a phenomenon, focusing in particular on formal and informal multilateral fora.

US multilateralism in the Trump era: implementing "America First"

The Trump administration's approach to the (liberal) rules-based order and multilateralism has been a hot topic of debate in the US. Some view the President's transactionalist and unilateralist America First approach to the world as a stark aberration from the post-World War II tradition of "deeply engaged" international security, and economic and institutional leadership.[141] Others point to links between Trump and traditions of American foreign policy thought such as realism and nationalism,[142] George W. Bush-era neoconservatism,[143] or Ronald Reagan's "peace through strength".[144]

Granted, there are similarities between earlier Republican administrations and Trump, particularly when it comes to the former President's approach towards certain formal multilateral institutions and treaties. Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Agreement, not to mention sanctions against officials of the International Criminal Court (ICC), track George W. Bush's policies in the early 2000s,[145] as well as general

138 Lyon 2016, 2.
139 Pennanen & Kronlund 2020, 210.
140 Sinkkonen & Vogt 2019.
141 Ikenberry 2017; Nye 2019; Wright 2020; Brooks & Wohlforth 2016.
142 Nau 2021; Dueck 2021.
143 Sinkkonen 2018.
144 Carafano 2021.
145 Dunn 2009, 17–18.

Republican scepticism vis-à-vis climate governance and international criminal law.[146] Trump's approach thus entailed assuming some leadership and shaping of rules and agreements, but only in institutions deemed relevant by the administration. Cooperation was carried out in light of the administration's peculiar principles, and some international organisations were regarded as altogether irrelevant.[147]

Trump's address to the UNGA in September 2018 is a striking illustration of this approach, placing US sovereignty and freedom of action centre stage in an unforeseen manner: "We will never surrender America's sovereignty to an unelected, unaccountable, global bureaucracy [...] We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism."[148] The administration also pushed for notable cuts to voluntary US contributions to the organisation.[149] The Trump National Security Strategy (NSS) also made it clear that "a disproportionate level of support" for the UN provided by the US should lead to "a commensurate degree of influence over the direction and efforts" of the institution.[150]

As Trump's term progressed, the UN Security Council became even more deadlocked than usual, due, in no small part, to the intensifying great-power competition between the US and China. This culminated in the inability of the UNSC to swiftly pass a resolution calling for a global ceasefire in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic – the deadlock was a result of American and Chinese wrangling over language.[151] The administration also stopped funding the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and withdrew the US from UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council, although at times advocating mechanisms created by the HRC, including the Syria Commission of Inquiry.[152] Trump's well-documented alignment with authoritarian leaders,[153] and his administration's unprecedented efforts to frame human rights through 18th-century natural law ideas,[154] also coincided with the deterioration of human rights globally.

Outside the UN framework, Trump's decision to pull out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, aka "the Iran nuclear deal"), and use of secondary sanctions to force others to follow the US lead in pressuring Iran, caused consternation, especially amongst

146 Busby & Monten 2012.
147 Pennanen & Kronlund 2020, 220.
148 Trump 2018.
149 Council on Foreign Relations 2022.
150 Trump 2017, 40.
151 Gowan 2020.
152 Carafano 2021, 119; U.S. Department of State 2020.
153 See Margon 2018.
154 U.S. Department of State 2019a.

US allies in Europe,[155] but also in Moscow and Beijing. Trump's decision to halt US funding and his subsequent announcement about exiting the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the middle of a global pandemic were further symptomatic of a President whose inclination was to forgo international cooperation, even in the face of manifestly shared global challenges.[156]

Yet it was in the realm of trade where Trump made the most spectacular departure from Republican orthodoxy, shunning free trade and pandering to the protectionist views of key domestic constituencies, especially in the Midwestern "rustbelt".[157] This approach had profound effects that went beyond the administration's trade war with China, and steel and aluminium tariffs against allies in Europe and Asia. On his third day in office, Trump withdrew the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral trade deal encompassing twelve Pacific Rim economies and designed to set the trading rules of the region for decades to come. At the WTO, the administration blocked appointments to the organisation's Appellate Body, effectively stymieing the dispute settlement process.[158] Trump did, however, conclude and ultimately secure congressional support for a revamped trade deal with Canada and Mexico (USMCA, United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement), which replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) from the early 1990s.

In the security realm, departing from bipartisan policies of the past, Trump openly questioned the value of America's alliance network, going rhetorically further than his predecessors in demanding equitable burden-sharing. Trump was famously critical of NATO and US alliances in Asia, blasting allies for free-riding on America's security guarantees. Reports suggest that he even threatened to leave NATO in a meeting with other alliance leaders.[159] The US did, however, continue its substantial financial commitment to the defence of Europe with the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), but this entailed enhanced investment directed at a subset of NATO frontline states that the administration felt particular affinity towards, not the entire alliance.[160]

When it comes to informal institutions, the Trump administration's record is more mixed, as one would expect, given the leeway that informal institutions grant to powerful states. On the one hand, Trump proved to be a disruptor. At the Taormina G7 Summit in

155 Geranmayeh & Lafont Rapnouil 2019.
156 Kahl & Wright 2021.
157 Dueck 2021, 375.
158 Bown & Keynes 2020.
159 Herszenhorn & Bayer 2018.
160 Desmaele 2022, 188–189.

2017, the US did not sign up to the commitment to combat climate change in the final communiqué.[161] The following year, Trump withdrew US endorsement of the Charlevoix summit communiqué via Twitter.[162] At the G20, similarly, climate change remained a sticking point throughout Trump's tenure, and there was a famous scuffle over including the term "rules-based international order" in the final communiqué at the 2018 Buenos Aires summit – only resolved through the inclusion of language critical to the global trading system.[163] The virtually held 2020 Summit saw Trump deliver brief remarks, but the President was notably absent from a pandemic preparedness session.[164] Trump seemed to relish these fora merely as a site of bilateral meetings with other world leaders.

However, as part of its "great-power competition" paradigm,[165] the Trump administration upgraded the moribund Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) into a regular foreign-minister-level meeting between the United States, Australia, India and Japan. The thinly veiled rationale of the forum is to function as a check on China, with an emphasis on the (originally Japanese) construct Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), a notion premised on "respect for sovereignty", "peaceful resolution of disputes", "free, fair and reciprocal trade based on open investment, transparent agreements and connectivity", as well as "adherence to international law".[166] Nevertheless, Trump's penchant for personalised diplomatic spectacles – such as those with Xi Jinping at Mar-a-Lago, Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, and Kim Jong-un in Singapore and Hanoi – and deals-based bilateral transactionalism were the true hallmarks of his presidency.[167] This ultimately militated against predictable and consistent US engagement in multilateral fora.

US multilateralism in the Biden era: regaining leadership in an era of great-power competition?

President Joe Biden came to office seeking to restore US global leadership and support for the international rules-based order, both of which had taken a hit during Trump's tenure. However, the administration also carried the torch for great-power competition as both a *defining feature* of the international order and a *guiding premise* for US global

161 Herszenhorn & Palmeri 2017.
162 Cochrane 2018.
163 Borger 2018.
164 Aratani 2020.
165 Trump 2017.
166 U.S. Department of State 2019b, 6; see also Tellis 2020.
167 Desmaele 2022; Sinkkonen 2018.

engagement.[168] This remains the case even though the new National Security Strategy (NSS), unveiled on 12 October 2022, prefers the concept "strategic competition".[169]

At the start of his term, Biden quickly announced US re-entry into the Paris Climate Agreement and halted the exit from WHO. The Biden NSS stresses the centrality of the UN Charter, but also calls for the body to be "modernised and strengthened to better address global challenges".[170] Such a positive reform agenda is a class apart from the blatant transactionalism of the Trump era. Unlike its predecessor, the Biden administration has also kept human rights at the centre of US foreign policy. The US was elected to the UN Human Rights Council with an uncontested ballot in October 2021 and organised side events as a part of the 77th UNGA highlighting its priorities. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, for instance, had a high-level meeting with the UN LGBTI core group, and a USAID flagship event "Democracy Delivers" was hosted by the agency's Administrator, Samantha Power.

Russia's war in Ukraine has become a formative moment for the Biden administration in terms of its pledge to place alliances at the core of US global engagement. Forgotten is the pointed criticism levelled at the US by European allies for botching the withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, as the Biden team has been able to raise massive sums in military and economic assistance for Ukraine – the tally appropriated by Congress so far is some $113 billion in economic and military aid.[171] Just as impressive is the part played by the US in managing coherence of the Western coalition centred around NATO. The administration has likewise been extremely supportive of the Finnish and Swedish applications to join the alliance.

In the realm of trade, however, Biden has made no appreciable efforts to resolve the deadlock at the WTO Appellate Body or to push for US membership in multilateral free trade pacts, particularly the TPP's successor, the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership). The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the administration's headline trade initiative so far, focuses on establishing "connected", "resilient", "clean" and "fair" economies, but is better viewed as a political project rather than a free trade agreement in the traditional sense.[172] This recalcitrance

168 It is notable that this meeting of minds over great-power competition in the United States transcends the political elites into US society more broadly, including large sections of the business community, perhaps barring Wall Street (Authors' interviews with US-based expert 31.5.2022; 13.6.2022a).

169 Biden 2022.

170 Biden 2022, 12.

171 McCabe 2023.

172 White House 2022a; Ward 2022; Authors' interview with US-based expert 13.6.2022b.

is a notable continuity across the Biden and Trump administrations, and illustrates a deeper intellectual shift towards protectionism, one shared across party lines and also encapsulated in Biden's catchphrase "foreign policy for the middle class".[173]

Building on the Trump years, the Biden administration has sought to strengthen US alliances in the Indo-Pacific, doubling down on the US commitment to FOIP. This approach has largely been carried out through minilateral coalitions or informal fora. These include the trilateral AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) security agreement, which makes nuclear-propelled submarine technology available to Australia, as well as the Quad. The latter has been upgraded to the leaders' level, with four summits (two of them virtual, two in person) held since March 2021. The set of priorities for the group are broad, including coordination on the pandemic, infrastructure, climate, and technology. Key initiatives include the pledge by the Quad countries to distribute 1.2 billion vaccine doses to the Indo-Pacific by the end of 2022,[174] and an envisaged $50 billion investment in infrastructure in the region over a span of five years.[175]

At the G7, the June 2021 Summit in the UK saw agreement on the global minimum tax, democratic values, shared threats in the form of Russia and China,[176] and the Build Back Better World (B3W) infrastructure partnership to address the $40 trillion infrastructure gap in the developing world.[177] The initiative was repackaged as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) at the June 2022 summit in Germany, where maintaining Western unity on the war in Ukraine took centre stage. A $4.5 billion pledge to improve global food security as well as measures to reduce energy dependence on Russia and stabilise global energy markets illustrated the resolve to deal with the negative externalities of the war.[178] The contrast to the Trump era was most telling in climate matters: the US was on board as the 2021 communiqué committed the countries to net zero emissions by 2050,[179] and the 2022 summit launched an International Climate Club to support the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement.[180]

In the context of the global reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, Biden has likewise sought a leading role for the US. At the 2021 G7 Summit, the US pledged to donate 500 million

173 Traub 2021; Authors' interview with US-based expert 13.6.2022a.
174 White House 2021a.
175 White House 2022b.
176 White House 2021b.
177 White House 2021c.
178 G7 Germany 2022.
179 White House 2021b.
180 G7 Germany 2022.

vaccine doses, a pledge matched by the other members.[181] The 2022 Summit made a promise to build on the 1.175 billion vaccines the group had already provided, as well as work towards pandemic prevention in the future.[182] Altogether the US has pledged 1.2 billion doses in total with the aim of delivering them by the end of 2022. As of 6 February 2023, 671.5 million of these have been delivered, with 89% delivered through the multilateral COVAX initiative, making the US by far the largest contributor.[183] President Biden has also hosted two Covid Summits, in September 2021 and May 2022, with broad-based global participation. However, battles over Covid funding with Congress have complicated the ability of the administration to channel sufficient funding for the global vaccination effort. Meanwhile, in the Indo-Pacific in particular, vaccine diplomacy has become yet another additional front in US-China great-power competition.[184]

In stark contrast to Trump, Biden has also spoken at length about the 21st century being a contest between democracies and autocracies. To push this agenda forward, the US organised an inaugural Summit for Democracy in December 2021. The list of invitees included 275 participants representing multilateral institutions, journalists, business, human rights defenders, parliamentarians and activists, in addition to 100 leaders of governments of US allies and like-minded countries.[185] The agenda was built around "(1) strengthening democracy and defending against authoritarianism; (2) fighting corruption; and (3) promoting respect for human rights".[186] However, the initiative has received criticism both for inviting countries with questionable democratic credentials,[187] and for hardening divisions in an age when pragmatic cooperation amongst states regardless of their system of government is required to meet global challenges.[188]

Biden's first G20 summit in Rome was notable for the group's pledge to support the global minimum tax for multinational corporations (MNCs), yet the US, a leading proponent, has itself been a laggard in instituting the measure.[189] The 2022 summit, held in Bali from 15 to 16 November, brought to the fore stark divisions on the war in Ukraine, yet the parties managed to back the goal to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius, and the final declaration included a passage where most members voiced their

181 White House 2021d.
182 G7 Germany 2022.
183 Kaiser Family Foundation 2023.
184 Sinkkonen & Ruokamo 2022.
185 U.S. Department of State 2022a.
186 White House 2022c.
187 Walt 2021.
188 Goldgeier & Jentleson 2020; Authors' interview with US-based expert 13.6.2022b.
189 Goldstein 2022.

condemnation of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine as well as its negative impact on the global economy, energy markets and food security.[190] The bilateral portion of the meeting stole the show, however, as President Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping sought to cool tensions in the US-China relationship. The two leaders agreed to resume high-level bilateral climate talks that had been frozen after Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022 – a development welcomed at the concurrent COP27 climate summit in Egypt. Both parties also exhibited shared concerns regarding nuclear brinkmanship.[191]

Conclusion: A shifting American multilateralism?

The above exposition on US engagement with multilateral fora during the past two presidential administrations makes it possible to draw out four broad trends that will likely inform the US approach to multilateralism in the coming years.

First, the US approach outlined here bears the hallmarks of flexilateralism. The US is exhibiting an increasing penchant for utilising informal built-for-purpose coalitions alongside established formal multilateral fora like the UN system and NATO to achieve policy ends.[192] Raising the status of the Quad as a forum for dealing with multifaceted challenges in the Indo-Pacific, a process spanning both the Trump and Biden administrations, is the most obvious example. Notably, changes in the global security environment have led to the use of different minilateral constellations in the domain of hard security. The AUKUS agreement is indicative of such an attempt to strengthen America's global network of security alliances and partnerships. Such forays have also taken place within the European theatre, for instance with the signing of the trilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on security cooperation between the US, Finland, and Sweden in 2018. Concomitantly, the US is gradually assuming an "inter-theatre perspective".[193] It is engaging its NATO and Asian allies in an effort to bridge the European and Indo-Pacific alliance networks to better address the dual authoritarian challenge emanating from Moscow and Beijing.[194]

Second, and relatedly, the US has recently shown a growing preference for values-based multilateralism.[195] The Biden administration has not only launched the Summit

190 White House 2022d.
191 White House 2022e.
192 Authors' interview with US-based expert 13.6.2022a.
193 Simón 2022.
194 Wong & Erlanger 2022; Authors' interview with US-based expert 31.5.2022.
195 For discussion on the concept, see Creutz 2022.

for Democracy as a new forum for driving its values-based agenda, the recent NSS also takes pride in having "revitalised the G7 as the *steering committee of the world's advanced industrial democracies* [...] supporting our shared vision for the international order".[196] In a world of great-power competition with authoritarian adversaries, the US is thus often trading more inclusive fora (e.g. the G20 and the UN framework) for more exclusive ones (e.g. the G7 and the Summit for Democracy) with entry requirements based on states' domestic systems of government and adherence to liberal-democratic values. This ideological component of great-power competition is also colouring the US approach in established fora: at the 51st Session of the UN Human Rights Council, for instance, the US co-sponsored resolutions calling for both an "Independent Review of the Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Russia" and an "HRC Debate on Xinjiang".[197]

Third, there is growing wariness within the United States regarding certain components of the (liberal) rules-based order, especially when it comes to trade, and such scepticism is shared across party lines. This is largely a function of US domestic politics. Less internationalist ideas have gained purchase in recent years,[198] particularly in electorally crucial swing states of the Midwest, driven in no small part by disenchantment with the negative externalities of globalisation. The continuity in trade policy between the Trump and Biden administrations suggests that the US will not reassume its position as a proponent of free trade any time soon.[199]

Fourth and finally, the perennial tensions in US multilateral engagement between go-it-alone unilateralism and multilateral cooperation are clearly still present – especially when comparing and contrasting Trump's "America First" presidency with Biden's attempts to put the US "back at the table".[200] However, the risk of substantial oscillation in US approaches to multilateralism in manifold domains, whether human rights, security or climate, is now greater than in the past. In the short run, Congress's budget authority may be used to complicate a president's multilateral agenda – an issue that the Biden administration will be forced to deal with now that Republicans have assumed control of the House of Representatives. More fundamentally, a shift from a Democratic to a Republican president would inevitably drive the United States in a different direction in terms of both the kinds of values that inform its multilateral approach in established fora (e.g. advocating a conservative reading of women's right to abortion) or the fora in which it is willing to engage with others (e.g. leaving the Paris Climate Agreement). This divergence between the parties, again a function of domestic polarisation, makes it difficult for other states to count on the constancy of US engagement in multilateral institutions, formal or informal.

196 Biden 2022, 17, emphasis added.

197 U.S. Department of State 2022b.

198 Kupchan 2020.

199 Authors' interview with US-based expert 13.6.2022b.

200 Biden 2021.

3.3 Multilateralism with Chinese characteristics

Jyrki Kallio

- China perceives multilateralism as the opposite of unilateralism, and uses multilateralism as a tool for making the world more multipolar. In consequence, China supports the existing international system in some cases, and opposes elements of it in others. China is, indeed, both a partner in cooperation and a systemic rival, but neither in all respects.
- China's multilateral practices may be characterised as flexilateralism. China pledges its support for the UN, which it considers the main forum for sovereign, equal nations. China accuses those forms of minilateralism that it does not favour, such as the G7, of politicisation, aimed at furthering the dominance of the West. At the same time, China itself promotes smaller fora that promote "alternative" voices, such as the G20, SCO, and BRICS.
- China is transactionally riding on the Southernisation of multilateralism. Its positioning with the Global South serves China's own core interests first and foremost, and ultimately the leadership of the CPC, through the emphasis on non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

The rules-based order and China

When discussing China's approach to multilateralism, the underlying question is whether China is trying to undermine the current rules-based order. The common view on China's approach to global governance is summed up in a report by the US-based Council on Foreign Relations:

> *China is pursuing a multipronged strategy toward global governance. It supports international institutions and agreements aligned with its goals and norms, such as the World Bank and the Paris Agreement on climate change. Yet, on issues in which Beijing diverges from the norms of the current system, such as human rights, it seeks to undermine those values and create alternative institutions and models. In areas where norms and institutions are still being established, such as internet governance, China works with other authoritarian powers such as Russia to create standards that reflect their interests.*[201]

201 Huang & Kurlantzick 2020.

This common view, in relation to multilateral cooperation, is discussed in this chapter with reference to the seminal article by A. I. Johnston, entitled 'China in a World of Orders', as a framework. At the outset, it is important to pay attention to Johnston's observation that the "rules-based order" has become a catchphrase used carelessly like a meme, while there is considerable conceptual confusion over its meaning.[202] He suggests that instead of a single US-dominated liberal order, one should talk of multiple orders in different domains.[203] In regard to these orders, China is supportive of some and unsupportive of others, but all in all Johnston claims that "China is not challenging the so-called international liberal order as much as many people think".[204]

With regard to the order built upon sovereign states, which Johnston calls the constitutive order, China is a strong supporter of its key norms, sovereignty, and territoriality.[205] They are placed high on the list of China's core interests, as recited in the White Paper on Peaceful Development from 2011.[206] China also supports the existing military order, or polarity, in terms of being a staunch defender of the UNSC system, and having joined most of the relevant arms control institutions. At the same time, China challenges the existing unipolarity, calling for a multipolar order.[207]

Johnston points out that China's stated ambition to counter the "US hegemony" does not translate into global bipolarity in military terms, as the US remains the only superpower.[208] Although China's military budget is growing by almost 5% per year, its military spending is, according to SIPRI's estimate, less than 37% of that of the US, and accounts for 1.7% of its GDP, in comparison to 3.5% in the US.[209] China's nuclear warheads amount to only 6% of those in either the US or Russia.[210]

As Johnston notes, the emergence of political democracies after the Cold War has strengthened the liberal vision of this order, which is based on UN human rights conventions. China does not support the liberal vision, but joins hands with many former colonised states that have a strong antipathy towards being dictated to in respect of which political system suits them best. According to Johnston, China is nevertheless

202 Johnston 2019, 11.
203 Johnston 2019, 12.
204 Johnston 2019, 12.
205 Johnston 2019, 26.
206 China's Peaceful Development 2011.
207 Johnston 2019, 27, 31.
208 Johnston 2019, 31.
209 SIPRI 2022.
210 Kristensen & Korda 2022.

not actively ostracising democracies in its development aid in favour of authoritarian states, so it cannot be regarded as concretely undermining the liberal order. On the other hand, China remains an authoritarian regime guilty of severe human rights abuses, for instance against its ethnic minorities.[211] China is also marketing its political system to other countries under the phrase "whole-process people's democracy", discussed in more detail below.

Chinese rhetoric on the global order

According to the Chinese rhetoric, China is only trying to make its voice better heard in a system which has been formed and which remains dominated by the Western powers. China's actions are therefore depicted as defensive in nature, not aimed at overthrowing the existing order. According to official Chinese documents, China is opposed to hegemonism, practised by the Western nations, especially the US, which have drafted the rules of the international system and multilateral cooperation. In Chinese parlance, the system needs to be democratised.

In 2015, Chinese leader Xi Jinping called for China to advocate changing the unfair and unequitable aspects of the global governance system (quanqiu zhili tizhi), and to make the system more democratic and better based on rule by law (fazhi).[212] According to former Vice Foreign Minister of China, Ms Fu Ying, "multilateralism should not be used for the goals or interest maximisation of any single party. When major countries comply with multilateralism, they must restrain themselves from seeking only their own interests; instead, they should consider overall interests and average needs".[213]

The work report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), delivered to the 20th Party Congress in October 2022 by Xi Jinping, is an example of how China views multilateralism as the opposite of unilateralism, particularly the perceived US hegemony. According to the report, China has "advocated and practiced true multilateralism. We have taken a clear-cut stance against hegemonism and power politics in all their forms, and we have never wavered in our opposition to unilateralism, protectionism, and bullying of any kind".[214] The same standpoint is repeated in the context of China's support for globalisation:

211 Johnston 2019, 33–35, 38.
212 Renmin Ribao 2015.
213 Fu 2021.
214 Xinhua 2022.

> *China adheres to the right course of economic globalization. It strives to promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, advance bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation, and boost international macroeconomic policy coordination. It is committed to working with other countries to foster an international environment conducive to development and create new drivers for global growth. China opposes protectionism, the erection of "fences and barriers," decoupling, disruption of industrial and supply chains, unilateral sanctions, and maximum-pressure tactics.*[215]

The work report indicates that China perceives multilateralism, and its favoured venues for multilateral cooperation, as tools for promoting a "more democratic" international system. Again, this is framed as criticism against the dominance of the US and the West in setting up the rules of the international system, and aimed at winning the support of the Global South. As in many Chinese documents, the word multilateralism is preceded by the attribute "true" in the work report. In Chinese texts, the phrase "international order" is used rather than "global order".

> *China plays an active part in the reform and development of the global governance system. It pursues a vision of global governance featuring shared growth through discussion and collaboration. China upholds true multilateralism, promotes greater democracy in international relations, and works to make global governance fairer and more equitable.*

> *China is firm in safeguarding the international system with the United Nations at its core, the international order underpinned by international law, and the basic norms governing international relations based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. It opposes all forms of unilateralism and the forming of blocs and exclusive groups targeted against particular countries.*

> *China works to see that multilateral institutions such as the WTO and APEC better play their roles, cooperation mechanisms such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) exert greater influence, and emerging markets and developing countries are better represented and have a greater say in global affairs.*[216]

China's idea of multipolarity goes hand in hand with the "democratisation" of the global system. In November 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated in a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov: "China, together with Russia and likeminded (zhitong-daohe) countries, is willing to firmly advance the process of multipolarisation of the world,

215 Xinhua 2022.

216 Xinhua 2022.

support the democratisation of international relations, and safeguard the international system with the United Nations at its core."[217] Wang noted that both parties reaffirmed their willingness to strengthen cooperation in international fora and mentioned the SCO and BRICS, in particular.

As can be seen in Wang's statements, China is, on the one hand, pledging its support for the UN, as well as promoting other forms of mini- or multilateralism. According to China's last position paper for the UN General Assembly, published in September 2022, China does not support the view that there may be competing global orders, and recognises only the one built around the UN. According to the position paper, the UN-centred order practises "true multilateralism" because it recognises the equality of all countries. The paper implies that there are forms of – presumably Western – multilateralism that are bloc politics in disguise.

> *Multilateralism is a cornerstone of the existing international order and an effective path to upholding peace and promoting development. In the world, there is only one international system, i.e. the international system with the United Nations at its core. There is only one international order, i.e. the international order underpinned by international law. And there is only one set of rules, i.e. the basic norms governing international relations underpinned by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.*
>
> *— We need to practice true multilateralism, observe the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the basic norms governing international relations; respect the sovereignty of all countries and equality among them, big or small; uphold diversity in the world and respect the legitimate development rights of all countries and their own choice of development path; handle world affairs through extensive consultation and advocate greater democracy in international relations. We need to oppose the attempt to seek exclusive, bloc politics under the disguise of multilateralism, or to impose the rules made by a few countries on the wider international community under the pretext of multilateralism. We must reject the moves to use multilateralism as an ideological tool to build alliances of values targeting certain countries.*[218]

As the position paper quoted above shows, China pledges its support for the UN, which it considers the main forum for sovereign, equal nations. At the same time, it implies that there are other major nations that try to seek "bloc politics" in the guise of multilateralism. Beyond its rhetoric, however, China itself practises bloc politics of a sort.

217 Waijiaobu 2022, translation by the author.

218 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2022.

Chinese multilateralism in practice

Which forms of multilateralism does China regard as bloc politics in disguise? One of them is, without doubt, the G7, which it sees as a clique dictating global decisions.[219] China has, in contrast, actively participated in the G20 format, which brings together high-income countries of the G7 with representation from a wider group of economies, including Brazil, India, South Africa and Russia. The above-mentioned countries also form the BRICS group, which China has similarly used to counter the G7.[220] Presumably, the G20, BRICS, or the SCO are not "bloc politics" in China's view.

Fusing the interests of China and Russia, the SCO was created at the beginning of the 2000s as a minilateral body to address concerns about Central Asia falling into the sphere of influence of Islamists, on the one hand, and NATO, on the other. Russia has aimed to turn the SCO into an anti-Western forum, and the organisation is correspondingly viewed with great suspicion, particularly by the US. China, nevertheless, has not been eager to support this trend, and still mainly regards the SCO through its original function of keeping Islamic extremism at bay close to its borders.

Similarly, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with its supporting institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), may be considered an effort by China to turn its neighbourhood into its own backyard. It forms part of China's peripheral diplomacy, strengthening friendly relations with its neighbouring countries in the hope that integrating its neighbours into a China-led economic sphere by offering "win-win" opportunities makes confrontation more costly and less likely. It also aims to support China's economic growth by enhancing a China-centred economic integration into South and Central Asia, as well as improving logistical ties between the EU and China. It also serves China's geopolitical interests, for example by improving the country's access to the Indian Ocean through infrastructure projects in Pakistan and Myanmar.

The China-led AIIB is often regarded both as a tool for China's drive for political dominance and as a systemic challenger to the World Bank and other development banks. China is also accused of controlling smaller countries by trapping them through debt. Research suggests that the AIIB is mainly a profit-driven institution not unlike many other development banks.[221] It could also be said that it is natural that with its economic power growing, China has become a lender. Nevertheless, the SCO and the BRI are tools

219 BBC News 2021; Lemaître 2022.

220 Lemaître 2022.

221 Johnston 2019, 46–47, 49–50.

for "multilateralism with Chinese characteristics",[222] or to use a term which is gaining popularity in research literature, flexilateralism. The concept denotes that states may use different cooperation formats, sometimes in an interconnected manner, ranging from bilateralism to global processes.[223]

In the case of China, it expresses support for the UN but in practice favours fora that promote "alternative" voices, such as the G20, SCO, and BRICS. The concept of flexilateralism is useful in highlighting the complexities related to assessing the nature of China's – or for that matter any other state's – approach to multilateralism. What constitutes minilateralism and what embodies bloc politics may just be in the eye of the beholder. Instead of black and white, there may be shades of grey instead. When discussing the different global orders, Johnston mentions several arenas where China cannot be categorically labelled an opponent of the West in multilateral cooperation. Rather, it has a mixed record, and might in some fields actually be integrating with the international order.[224]

China has endorsed free trade and been relatively proactive within the WTO. At the same time, there are complaints both in the US and the EU about China's unequal trading practices, including subsidising Chinese companies, disrespecting property rights, and manipulating its currency. Furthermore, the US is concerned about Chinese efforts to acquire sensitive technology from American companies. The recent surge of protectionism in the US and some European countries has given China an opportunity to present itself as a true defender of the international trade order.[225] In late 2021, China made a show of announcing that it has fully implemented all of its WTO commitments, implying that some other states may not have done so.[226]

Cooperation in environmental affairs has become increasingly important with the climate crisis. That has also prompted China to control its own greenhouse gases, despite its principal view that the developed countries should be the first to cut their emissions. When the US withdrew from the Paris Agreement on climate change under the Trump administration, China in contrast appeared to be a supporter of what Johnston calls the

222 See Kallio 2018, 7.

223 See "1.3 Conceptual clarifications: Multilateral cooperation and other relevant terms" in this report.

224 Johnston 2019, 47.

225 Johnston 2019, 39–44, 46.

226 Gao 2022, 358.

international environmental order.[227] It may be argued, of course, that China is protecting its own interests, as it is well known how seriously climate change may affect the country.

Information, and how states manage the cross-border flows of information, is increasingly topical. Johnston's analysis shows that China and the US are on opposing sides, but the delineating line does not run between democracies and non-democracies. While China bases its positions on the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, the US position cannot be regarded as "liberal" either.[228]

Furthermore, it is important to realise that China is not alone in its critique about the hegemonic tendencies of the West. If not purposefully utilising, China is at least benefitting from the Southernisation of multilateralism. There is similar dissatisfaction in the Global South compared to what is voiced by China. China is also fishing for the support and goodwill of the South by appearing as a supporter of the poorer nations' cause. At the G20 Summit in November 2022, Xi Jinping stated that global governance is "seriously inadequate". As a remedy, all countries should "embrace the vision of a community with a shared future for humanity". Xi singled out the "Cold War mentality" as an obstacle for making global development more inclusive, and repeated his Global Development Initiative, launched in September 2021, for facilitating common progress for all.[229] As a further gesture towards the South, Xi also expressed China's support for the African Union joining the G20.

The vision of "a community with a shared future for humanity" (or translated more literally, "a community of common destiny for humanity"), Renlei mingyun gongtongti, is Xi Jinping's central foreign policy slogan, aimed at describing how China sees the future of international relations. It is based on the idea that the development of one country is closely intertwined with that of other countries. It also includes an aspect of collective security, based on the understanding that no country can single-handedly seek absolute security for itself.[230] Since 2012, it has been a stock phrase in the rhetoric concerning China's foreign relations. Demonstrating the hard work of Chinese diplomats, the language of this community with a shared future for humanity has even been inserted in several UN resolutions.[231]

227 Johnston 2019, 51–53.

228 Johnston 2019, 53–54.

229 Xinhua 2021.

230 CCTV.com 2017.

231 E.g. United Nations Human Rights Council 2019a; United Nations Human Rights Council 2019b.

Despite its universal and humanistic tinge, the community with a shared future for humanity is linked with China's core interests and non-interference in each other's internal affairs, as the revision of the Chinese Constitution Preamble in March 2018 shows. As such, it goes against the idea of universal values, and supports China's anti-hegemonic stance. The new text in the Preamble reads (emphasis added):

> *China consistently carries out an independent foreign policy, adheres to the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, peaceful coexistence, ..., and works to build a community with a shared future for humanity. China consistently opposes imperialism, hegemonism and colonialism, ..., and strives to safeguard world peace and promote the cause of human progress.*[232]

Another vision that China has set out to promote internationally is "Whole-Process People's Democracy" (in Chinese, quan guocheng renmin minzhu), mentioned above. It is a relatively new concept, used by Xi Jinping in 2019 for the first time. According to an authoritative explanation published by Xinhua News Agency, the "process" refers to a system where the people are involved in decision-making all the time, and not only during elections, which Xinhua's expert claims is the "Western" way. The "holistic" nature means that the system is at the same time based on people and represents the will of the state.[233]

While the concept is only referred to as "Whole-process democracy" sometimes, its core lies in people's democracy. In reality, the Chinese constitution undermines the concept of "democracy". According to its constitution (Article 1), the People's Republic of China (PRC) "is a socialist state under the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class". Hongqi Wengao, a Party-run theoretical magazine, published an article in October 2014 warning against replacing the people's democratic dictatorship with the rule of law, stating that this would be falling into the trap of "universal values", and would play into the hands of international capital but be detrimental to the Chinese people.[234]

These examples of the ideational underpinnings in China's approach to global order and its multilateral cooperation demonstrate that their underlying driving force is constituted by China's "core interests", especially state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the leadership of the CPC. According to the CPC's historical narrative, China must rid itself

232 This excerpt is the Xinhua translation of the CPC proposal (see Xinhua 2018). Emphasis added.

233 Xinhua 2019.

234 Liu 2014.

of all the humiliations, caused formerly by imperialists and today by advocates of the containment of China's rise, and thus secure its core interests into the future.

The phrase "community with a shared future for humanity" was initially used in connection with the launch of the BRI, and it might even be argued that China is less interested in creating a global community than a community of likeminded satellite states. China's positioning in the Global South can be seen as instrumental, serving first and foremost China's own interests, thus reflecting de facto transactionalism instead of the "win-win" approach of China's rhetoric.[235]

The challenge to multilateralism with regard to China

Together with Russia, China is often seen as leading an autocratic alliance in multilateral organisations. According to a study[236] analysing the priorities of the two countries in Geneva-based multilateral bodies, both Russia and China promote a "counter-narrative" with regard to democracy, human rights, and international law. This goes hand in hand with an emphasis on state-centric human rights dialogue as well as state sovereignty.[237] The study observes that the cooperation between China and Russia has mostly been tactical and defensive, aimed at dismissing criticism or forestalling unwanted reforms.[238] Both countries have put forward very few concrete multilateral initiatives.[239] Furthermore, their lack of financial contribution lessens the credibility of strongly worded statements.[240]

Nevertheless, China has repeatedly managed to put forward a resolution on "mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights" which, according to the study, challenges the common understanding of human rights, despite the harmless-looking phrase.[241] Joining forces, Russia and China have occasionally been successful in personnel policy, such as selecting the chairpersons of UN bodies.[242] Both countries are also increasingly cooperating in shaping standards for digital technologies in a way which may constitute a threat to privacy and freedom of speech.[243]

235 See Repnikova 2022, 51.
236 Wientzek 2022.
237 Ibid., 226.
238 Ibid., 237.
239 Ibid., 236.
240 Ibid., 237.
241 Ibid., 226–227.
242 Ibid., 233.
243 Ibid., 229, 233.

The study discussed above does not give definitive answers regarding the extent to which China may challenge the existing multilateral organisations. To return to the question related to China's challenge to global order, posed at the beginning of this chapter, A. I. Johnston has aptly stated that it needs to be studied in depth, taking into account all the necessary nuances. Johnston's own conclusion of his elaborate analysis is that China cannot be categorically labelled a revisionist challenger of the existing international order (or orders). In fact, such a binary approach does not work in a world with multiple and often inconsistent orders, and the related issues are complex.[244]

When addressing China's approach to multilateralism, it is equally important to avoid oversimplifications. There are arenas where China shares the same interests with, for example, the European Union, and also works towards the same goals. On the other hand, there are issues where China and the EU do not agree on the principles of a particular world order. This multifaceted state of affairs is captured in EU-China – A strategic outlook, which refers to China as both a "partner in cooperation" and a "systemic rival".[245]

While the Global Development Initiative and China's other development projects, most notably the Belt and Road Initiative, probably work in gaining China some goodwill and influence, it can be argued that the participants in the projects are mostly concerned only with concrete gains, and consider their participation from a pragmatic viewpoint alone. The goodwill and influence are superficial and have a short-term effect at best.[246] In other words, there are few signs that China is winning the hearts of even those who are similarly critical of the current Western or US dominance, or the "liberal vision". Chinese rhetoric is just repeating what the recipients want to hear anyway.

All in all, it is not difficult to see that China's own alternatives to the perceived Western hegemony, such as the "community with a shared future for humanity" or "whole-process people's democracy", are reflections of China's core interests veiled in agreeable rhetoric. As long as the rules-based or liberal order favoured by the West remains unwavering, China's challenge will be limited. Therefore, the real issue is the resilience of the said order. If this order becomes watered down, or if its inherent elements of hypocrisy – never more visible than during the sternly criticised but nevertheless politically and financially supported FIFA World Cup in late 2022 – are not properly addressed, there will be more and more tools for undermining them, even at China's disposal.

244 Johnston 2019, 12, 58, 60.

245 EU-China – A strategic outlook 2019.

246 See e.g. Chen 2017, Repnikova 2022, or Kallio 2022.

3.4 Russia's approach to multilateralism

Ryhor Nizhnikau

- Russia has no appeal to a rule-based multilateral cooperation. Its approach to multilateralism is power-based and generally aims at the undermining of Western hegemony in the international system.
- Moscow particularly favours cooperation between regional orders as the prototype of the multipolar international system. A "horizontal" cooperation between regional powers is combined with "vertical" cooperation with the countries that Russia considers belonging to its sphere of influence.
- The West should not bare any illusions of the possibility of meaningful multilateral engagement with the current regime in Moscow, if any still remain.

Introduction

Russia's approach to multilateralism is driven by two inherent contradictions. On the one hand, the Kremlin emphasises that multilateral cooperation and the strengthening of international institutions are key elements of Russian foreign policy. On the other hand, Russia actively strives to undermine the rules-based international order and is keen to re-structure the system of international governance according to its own vision. In this respect, Russia's support for multilateral international institutions, such as the United Nations, goes hand in hand with a direct rejection of multilateralism as a value and a concept, as it is understood in Western academic and policy circles.

This paradox is primarily rooted in a different definition of multilateralism in Moscow, which is rather seen as a mechanism of cooperation between the centres of power in a sovereign, pragmatic, and value-free manner. Russia's war against Ukraine is, in this respect, an embodiment of its main foreign policy views.

This contribution discusses key aspects of Russia's (mis-)understanding of multilateralism and its practical application in foreign policy. It begins with a self-evident statement that Moscow's contempt for the canonical concept of multilateralism is rooted in its neo-realist reading of international relations, its obsessive idea of ending Western hegemony, and the re-structuring of global order. It subsequently moves on to a discussion of how Russia's ideas and principles translate into practice at a sectoral level. It then explains the futility and detriment of the human rights sectoral cooperation with the current regime, and elaborates on how Moscow's prioritisation of security and economic policy sectors,

and different modes of engagement in regional and intra-regional cooperation with key multilateral institutions in Europe, Asia and Africa is realised.

Sovereign multilateralism: principles and challenges

Key Russian foreign policy documents point to the centrality of multilateralism in Russian foreign policy. Multilateralism is one of the keywords in the latest Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, both a central guiding principle and a primary mechanism for addressing key global threats and resolving security and economic challenges.[247] Official statements continuously stress the importance of (renewing) commitment to multilateralism.

The problem is that Moscow's understanding of multilateralism is at odds with the conventional definition.[248] It is primarily rooted in a different conceptualisation of the international order and how it is organised. First, Russia's foreign policy is embedded in (neo)realist thinking. Power-seeking sovereign entities compete in an anarchic international system, which is akin to a "food chain".[249] Balance of power brings order. Multilateralism and international institutions are tools for projecting power and also for acquiring prestige and status.

Consequently, multilateralism is about the preservation of the balance of power. Multilateral formal (such as the UN and its Security Council) and informal (such as the G20 and BRICS) organisations are institutions of "great power multilateralism".[250] Their utility lies in reducing uncertainty and maintaining global order. The basic principles of international law and the UN structures help to control assertiveness between great powers and serve to protect smaller powers. Various bodies and mechanisms such as the UN Security Council, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons or the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are a means of minimising the risks and resolving urgent issues in a compromising manner. The Iranian nuclear deal (2015) or the intervention in Libya (2011) through the UN Security Council, preceded by informal and formal dialogues between major powers, are cases in point.

Naturally, in Russia's view, multilateralism is not a normative but a pragmatic mechanism of attaining goals. The primary purpose of multilateralism is to function as a tool

247 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2016.
248 See the Introduction of this Report.
249 Bordachev 2022a.
250 Gerrits 2020.

of equal dialogue and "management by great powers",[251] which explains Moscow's transactional approach to the problem-solving of global issues. Importantly, it claims that multilateralism is value-free and built on generally recognised norms of international law, such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in domestic affairs, preservation of national identity and civilisational diversity. However, as the next section shows, their application is also highly selective.

The normative component of multilateralism is a source of Moscow's contempt. Russia believes that the current state of the international system is "unfair". The West used the 1990s to become the "unilateral centre of decision-making".[252] As a result, "real" multilateralism is substituted by "rules-based" multilateralism, which is favourable only to the "collective West". In Moscow's view, it is Western "messianism", driven by "the desire to spread values throughout the world" and supported by illegitimate means, from economic sanctions to "colour revolutions", that undermines the international order for the purpose of ensuring the dominance of the West in the world order.[253] Unilaterally promoted initiatives outside the UN framework, such as the Summit for Democracy, are discriminatory and primarily target the rising non-Western powers.[254] The assertiveness of Russia and its violations of international law are thus merely a defensive measure against the West's "neocolonial" globalisation.

Finally, in Moscow's view, Western dominance has resulted in the ongoing decay of key multilateral institutions. The global order is in transition, which creates an opportunity to re-create a new one. In October 2022, Putin largely outlined that Russia aims to re-establish a "democratic multipolar world" and "build a symphony of human civilisation".[255] In practice, the proliferation of alternative regional orders is a natural process of replacing old institutions with new ones, which the "revanchist" West actively opposes.[256]

Multilateralism at the regional level

Regional cooperation has a special place in Russian foreign policy. Theoretically, a functioning multipolar world is comprised of a set of regional orders, created by and centred around major powers. In a transitional period, regional multilateralism helps

251 Makarychev & Morozov 2011.
252 Lavrov 2021.
253 Bordachev 2022b.
254 Lavrov 2021.
255 Putin 2022a.
256 Karaganov 2022.

to manage competition between major powers and contributes to building a more just and equitable system of international relations.[257] Russia's Foreign Policy Concept prioritises an expansion of ties with new regional organisations at two levels: in the immediate neighbourhood, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and in the Global South, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ASEAN+, and the African Union. Formal and informal tracks are closely intertwined. While Moscow considers the formalisation of achieved agreements a necessity, informal dialogue and decision-making are seen as an integral part of the process.

The approaches differ substantially. In the immediate neighbourhood, the great power is a civilisational (ideational) and security core. In Moscow's view, its immediate vicinity is a zone of its special interests, which presupposes "vertical" relations between Russia and other countries. The Eurasian integration is defined as a "trench" – a security zone and a resource[258] – and regional institutions such as the CSTO and EAEU are primarily instruments of economic, military, political, and cultural dominance in the region. The second level concerns regional orders. It is seen as a pragmatic tool to counter Western hegemony, raise status,[259] and serve as a building block of the multi-layer and hierarchical international system. Cooperation between regional orders are structured horizontally on a basis of equality. Finally, Russia's attempts to complement and connect various multilateral projects, such as the BRICS-Africa partnership or the China-India-Russia trio (RIC), are seen as potential prototypes of future collective mechanisms of global governance within a multipolar world. Russia's intermediary role will guarantee its special place in the new global order.

In this respect, Russia's "multilateralism" in its own backyard sheds additional light on Russia's approach. Great powers are more sovereign, and equal to other great powers, which presupposes the existence of areas of their natural dominance, which other "great powers" have to accept.[260] Hence the smaller states are denied much of their actorness and are subject to control and domination within the hierarchical system. Regional organisations are built accordingly. Even if these organisations have in-built principles of multilateralism, such as consensus-based decision-making and a right of veto, Moscow acts as a hegemon.[261] Furthermore, values and ideology start to matter. Identifying major powers as "civilisations" rather than nation-states highlights the role of common norms

257 Ibid.
258 Bordachev 2022c.
259 Larson 2020.
260 Busygina & Fillipov 2021.
261 Busygina & Fillipov 2020.

and rules, which unite and distinguish them from others. The rise of the "Russian world" ideology, the underlying importance of the Russian language, common legacies, and history are utilised to explain the domination claims.

Flexible priorities and moving partners

In 2014, Putin noted that "Russia was luckily part of no alliances", underlying the pre-eminence of sovereignty. In this respect, priorities are flexible and partners can turn into foes if it helps Russia to advance its primary goals. As a result, in its multilateral engagements at the regional level, Russia has shown the extent of its flexibility.

EU-Russia relations are in deep crisis. For a long time, Russia's vision of itself as a dominant power in Eurasia entailed establishing cross-cutting inter-regional institutions in both Europe and Asia, with Russia at the centre. A pronounced desire to create a "common European home" and a common security space from Lisbon to Vladivostok was later superseded by another ill-born idea of establishing the EU-EAEU space as a de-politicised platform of functional cooperation, based on "common values and interests".[262] Even if this vision remains, it will first require the end of Europe as it is. Common regional institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, are viewed as instruments of confrontation.[263]

Multilateralism in the Global South is used to challenge the West or manage ties with other powers. For Putin, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an exemplary "mechanism for multilateral cooperation" between countries of "different civilisational traditions" because it is organised on "the principles of equality and mutual benefit, respect for each other's sovereignty and refusal to interfere in internal affairs".[264] Created as a mechanism for managing relations between Russia and China, it tries to balance their interests in Central Asia. The SCO's interoperability of interests and joint ambition to limit Western outreach in the region was seen by Moscow as a working model of a regional organisation functioning as a platform for the constructive interaction between mutual interests and pragmatic cooperation.[265] However, Moscow's concerns over the rise of China show the limits of cooperation and explain its desire to expand the multilateral frameworks, including the SCO. Other groupings emphasising the voice of the Global South, such as the BRICS grouping, represent a useful channel for Russia to camouflage its

262 Eurasian Economic Commission 2018.
263 Kortunov 2021.
264 Kremlin 2022.
265 People's Daily 2021.

own ongoing decline in both the economic and the strategic realms,[266] and to articulate perceived Western privilege and hypocrisy within the global order, while also functioning as a potentially protective measure against the political and economic exclusion brought about in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine.[267]

Russia's recent shift towards developing comprehensive cooperation with African states and leading sub-regional organisations is an illustration of Moscow's use of regional multilateralism as a spoiler vis-à-vis Western hegemony. The Russia-Africa Summit lacks a coherent organisational structure and suffers from a lack of resources, yet it does not shy away from geopolitical ambitions. The first summit in 2019, which drew 43 heads of state, showed Moscow's intent to use anti-colonial and sovereign narratives to counter the West and promote its own vision of multipolarity and global order. The main principle – "African solutions to African problems"[268] and cooperation based on the goals of African states – differs from the Chinese economic conditionality approach.

Three takeaways for policy cooperation

Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, and its war crimes openly perpetrated "in defence of the [human] rights of the Donbas people",[269] says all there is to say about Russia's perspective on human rights. In this respect, three points stand out. First, the Kremlin does not believe in human rights, which should dispel expectations of any genuine human rights cooperation with the current regime. This has become visible also institutionally with Russia's declared withdrawal from the Council of Europe in March 2022, which was intended to preempt the expulsion of its membership in the same organisation. As a result, Russia has ceased to be a party to the European Convention on Human Rights.

Second, security and trade matter, human rights and climate change do not, which means that Russia is ready for a trade-off to extract tangible results in areas of "real importance". In this respect, human rights are often seen as a component of its broader security agenda. Since the 1970s, the human rights track of Russia-West dialogue has merely been a necessary compromise to further Moscow's ambitions to "create a common European security architecture", which at the end of the day failed, in Moscow's view.

266 van Ham 2015.
267 Daldegan 2022.
268 Sochi Declaration 2019.
269 Putin 2022b.

Finally, human rights are viewed as a weapon in Western hands. According to Russia, the West imposes its own values and directives, which are "undefined", vague, serve only Western interests, and create a power imbalance in the international system. Consequently, Russia is ready to react and turn this against the West. On the one hand, Moscow uses it for blackmail. A quick degradation and violations of undertaken commitments show that Moscow realises that this issue is a point of pressure against the West. Russia's assault on human rights NGOs, its latest legislation, including the foreign agents law and the draconian anti-LGBT laws, are also used to exert pressure. Relatedly, Russia is happy to turn the issue of human rights against the West, for instance through open promotion of anti-colonialist narratives.

Conclusion

The Russian approach to multilateralism is non-conventional, which has several implications. First, Moscow does not believe in value-based multilateralism. Those hoping to engage Russia multilaterally should duly keep Russia's transactional approach in mind. Global challenges, such as migration, energy, or climate are leverages and/or bargaining chips. Second, in the absence of resources to compete with the West or China, Russia uses multilateralism as a more targeted intervention to influence behaviour. Finally, policymakers should bear in mind that Russian multilateralism is anti-Western in its nature and purpose. Russia is ready to use any means, unilateral or multilateral, if they contribute to its main goal – the demise of Western hegemony. To that end, it is ready to partner with anyone on flexible issues.

The widening discrepancy between Russia's own changing status and position and its perceptions of the world will create new risks in the near future, but is unlikely to induce Russia to alter its stance on multilateralism.

4 Health multilateralism and the Covid-19 pandemic

Johanna Ketola

- The Covid-19 crisis exposed the statist (or state-centric) imaginary of policymakers around the world. Domestic interests prevailed over multilateral cooperation and hindered responses to the disease outbreak. Priority was given to safeguarding the sovereignty of one's own population.
- A brief recap on previous epidemics reveals that international cooperation has also worked when relations with global powers have been functional. This notion highlights the vital role and responsibility of the key actors amidst crises, especially great powers such as the US and China.
- The structural weaknesses in global health governance need to be addressed for the purpose of more inclusive responses. The architecture is fragmented, lacking global decision-making arenas which are perceived as legitimate and unbiased by all.
- There are positive elements to build on to improve health multilateralism. International organisations often benefit from crises in terms of an increase in funding and powers. Health multilateralism has delivered better health outcomes and WHO enjoys relatively high levels of public trust.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has been the most severe global health, economic, and social crisis in almost a century. As much as the pandemic has been "a public health tragedy", it has also been a political problem[270] requiring effective multilateralism that is perceived as legitimate.

Even though "infectious disease has consistently accounted for the greatest proportion of human morbidity and mortality, surpassing war as the foremost threat to human life and prosperity",[271] health is often considered political only when the security and economic

270 Davies & Wenham 2020.

271 McNeill 1976.

dimensions become the health issue's dominant features.[272] Furthermore, health seldom remains high on the political agenda beyond the acute crisis phase, which is something that would be needed for greater investments in public health systems and effective, inclusive multilateralism.

The global nature and massive scale of today's crises, ranging from biodiversity loss to climate emergency and pandemics, call for renewed attention to systemic sources of instability.[273] The current pandemic serves as a reminder that there are few alternatives to multilateral cooperation when it comes to overcoming the existential problems facing humanity.

Multilateral cooperation is practised in multilateral institutions, which need both authority and legitimacy if they are to succeed, function, and be regarded as relevant in the global arena. Authority may be defined as the recognition that an institution has the right to make decisions and interpretations within a particular area. Legitimacy, in turn, refers to the perception that these rights are being appropriately exercised.[274] Legitimacy is needed for participation in international norm- and rule-making,[275] for practising compliance instead of coercion,[276] and for supporting the democracy of the global governance system.[277] The legitimacy of multilateral institutions can be approached and analysed through '3 Ps': purposes, procedure, and performance.[278]

This chapter discusses health multilateralism in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The possibilities for and limitations of multilateral cooperation are analysed in the framework of existing institutions, organisations and programmes, paying particular attention to the role of the leading international organisation in global health governance, the World Health Organization (WHO). The key question is: What were the main limitations and hindrances to successful health multilateralism at WHO during the pandemic?

This study argues that while multilateral health cooperation has often been a hostage of nation-states and their narrow interests, health is also a policy area within which crises have historically strengthened multilateral institutions. While the initial phases of the pandemic accelerated the retreat from global and multilateral modes of governance, the

272 See e.g. McInnes & Lee 2006.

273 Lipscy 2020, E110.

274 Buchanan & Keohane 2006, 407; Morse & Keohane 2014; see also Zürn et al. 2012, 82–88.

275 Putnam 1988; Sommerer & Agné 2018, 3.

276 Hurd 1999, 4.

277 Dahl 1999; Zürn 2000.

278 See Gok & Karadeniz 2021; Ketola & Rostedt, forthcoming.

potential for improving multilateral health efforts lay in the conclusion that crises often spur institutional change and trigger more resources to tackle particular problems. The global health architecture is fragmented and WHO as the central authority has been weak and lacking in legitimacy among state actors. This has allowed flexilateral approaches to emerge, also during the Covid-19 pandemic. Notably, however, responses to cross-border health challenges will remain ineffective if the main weaknesses in multilateral heath governance – fragmentation, insufficient resources, and the lack of legitimacy – remain unaddressed.

Health, global governance and multilateralism: Covid-19 as a negative trend accelerator

Covid-19 functioned as an accelerator of three underlying trends in health multilateralism. Firstly, it revealed how state-centric the current health governance system can still ultimately be, and how it is plagued with ideas of state sovereignty and national interest.[279] Secondly, the pandemic further challenged the rules, norms, and multilateral governance structures built after the Second World War, also triggering demands for the de-Westernisation of multilateralism. Thirdly, the crisis exposed the structural weaknesses in the health governance architecture, which is fragmented and lacking in decision-making arenas that are perceived as legitimate and unbiased.

The Covid-19 pandemic sparked a number of "rallying around the flag" phenomena, and fed into existing political enmities, allowing for consolidation of power within political communities.[280] Generally, in emergency politics, the executive authority tends to break with established norms and rules, as well as rationalise actions which are deemed necessary for addressing exceptional threats, at least temporarily.[281] The national and geopolitical calculations during the pandemic strengthened the tendency to safeguard the sovereignty of one's own population in health policies.[282] At the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, it was mainly nation-states that were the primary actors in responding to the emerging health threat. For good reason, therefore, the early stages of the pandemic were described as the "hour of the nation-state".[283] To a large extent, the nation-states' attitude and actions explain much of the ineffectiveness of the global response, given that it is the responsibility of national authorities to inform others in case a health concern of a potentially international character occurs in their territory.

279 Fraundorfer & Winn 2021, 957.

280 On historical pandemics, see Aaltola 2012, 166 & 187.

281 Kreuder-Sonnen & White 2022.

282 Fidler 2020; Heinikoski et al. 2021.

283 Afsahi et al. 2020.

Yet the pandemic emerged at a difficult moment in global governance with multilateralism anchored in the UN system.[284] Multilateralism has been in decline for more than a decade to an increasing extent due to rising nationalism, populism, and calls for the de-Westernisation of UN-led global governance. To a degree, states have begun to indicate their preference for the pursuit of domestic interests "at the expense of multilateral cooperation".[285] As Zürn points out, the reasons for weak global governance responses during the pandemic are by and large the same as those that have caused the crisis in the global governance system as a whole.[286] This includes the notion that the governance of the Covid-19 pandemic has replicated the institutionalised inequality inherent in global governance.

In addition to the liberal international order, international organisations (IOs), such as WHO as the leading international organisation in global health governance, have been subject to increasing contestation for over a decade before the pandemic.[287] The politicisation of IOs by the member states has materialised in terms of funding cuts, withdrawals from institutions and agreements, and in the establishment of alternative forums for health cooperation. Due to its lack of power, financing, and other resources, WHO has generally remained weak. Many global initiatives during the pandemic, also by WHO, have been undermined, ignored, and contested.[288]

Narrow and multi-stakeholder approaches to global health have contributed to the systemic fragmentation of health multilateralism. The focus of efforts has been on the effectiveness of individual initiatives, not on the legitimacy of the governance processes or system as a whole. Fraundorfer and Winn point out that the distinctive feature of global health governance is that it has also been shaped by transnational networks and global public-private partnerships for the past 30 years; for instance, there is the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, an international drug purchase facility (Unitaid), and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI).[289] Successful public-private collaborations have contributed to the performance legitimacy of health multilateralism, yet partially at the expense of participation legitimacy. The good news is that, according to a recent study, public health is the only domain in which the performance of

284 Global governance is defined here as a political system with three main characteristics: (i) orientation to a common good such as peace, (ii) entailing the prospect of international authorities, and (iii) offering justification for global fora. Building on previous literature, following Zürn's definition 2022, 37-38.

285 Josepha Debre & Dijkstra 2021, 443.

286 Zürn 2022.

287 See e.g. Zürn 2022.

288 Fraundorfer & Winn 2021, 55.

289 Fraundorfer & Winn 2021, 57.

multilateralism has improved in the past decade, resulting in better health outcomes, such as increases in life expectancy and improvements in infant and maternal mortality rates.[290]

Narrow and problem-specific endeavours in global health have been effective in the eradication of certain infectious diseases, resulting in good performance in terms of health multilateralism. However, issue-specific initiatives have contributed little to the integration, coherence, and legitimacy of the global health governance system as a whole.[291] Sridhar and Woods have argued that the global health governance system is characterised by the proliferation of vertical funds, aimed at fighting specific diseases, further contributing to the legitimacy crisis in health multilateralism.[292] This assessment, however, fails to consider and acknowledge that WHO partners in various ways with many of these initiatives, which also offer avenues to health flexilateralism. For example, in November 2022, the G20 launched the Pandemic Fund to strengthen the capacity of low- and middle-income countries to mitigate the risks of global health threats. Hosted by the World Bank, it is designed to support capacity-building and the implementation of pandemic preparedness, pandemic prevention, and response under the International Health Regulations (2005). WHO is taking technical charge of the project.[293]

WHO's limited authority, legitimacy, and resources

WHO was one of the first UN-specialised agencies, founded in 1948 with a mandate in public health. It has 194 member states and has been the central global authority in providing Covid-19-related advice and information for the world community.[294]

Health crises in recent decades have affected WHO in different ways. The successful handling of the SARS outbreak in 2003 was credited to WHO and, as a consequence, the organisation gained more power. But as WHO's authority to combat the outbreak of infectious diseases expanded, so did expectations. To this end, the outbreak of swine flu in 2009 delivered a different sort of outcome for the organisation: its recommendations were deemed expansive, unnecessary, and lacking in transparency, duly leading to the de-legitimation and decline of its authority.[295]

290 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 37.
291 Sridhar & Woods 2013.
292 Ibid.
293 World Bank 2022.
294 Erdelen & Richardson 2021, 158.
295 Zürn 2022.

Another challenge for WHO has been linked to insufficient core funding and the narrow donor base.[296] This relates specifically to WHO's financial mechanism, which has had persistent structural and procedural design problems, manifested in inadequate overall levels of funding, lack of direct control over 80% of the funds, and in unbalanced participation.[297] In fact, WHO has been operating on a very humble budget, amounting to around five billion euros for a period of two years, which is equivalent to a "regional hospital in a Western country" and thus clearly insufficient for a global actor.[298] Furthermore, WHO's legitimacy as well as its authority in global health matters has been undermined by the disproportional influence of a few powerful donors. Over 60% of WHO financing has originated from only nine donors representing less than 5% of the overall members (out of a total of 194).[299] The US was the most significant supporter of WHO the year before the pandemic, providing around 15% of its budget.[300] A key feature of health multilateralism is that private funding has been crucial for global health initiatives for over a decade. For example, between 2010 and 2020, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was not only the largest non-state donor to WHO but also the second largest donor overall.[301] WHO's structural defect has also allegedly led to a diminished role for the organisation's governance bodies, such as the World Health Assembly, in the programming of activities.[302]

WHO has been neglected by the West both financially and politically. In the EU and its member states, global health has not been among the pressing global concerns in the 5–6 years prior to the Covid-19 outbreak. Many major EU member states, such as Germany and Italy, were not among the key core funders of the organisation prior to Covid-19. During Covid-19, several EU countries decided not to follow WHO's advice on testing and distancing policies. In fact, the EU did not turn to WHO's regional European office for advice on health policies even prior to the pandemic.[303] The lack of financial support and neglect of WHO's recommendations by the EU and its member states detracted from WHO's credibility as a leading global authority in health in the initial phases of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, as will be explained in the next section, the EU has dramatically changed its course of action and advocated more multilateralism anchored to WHO.

296 M'ikanatha & Welliver 2021.
297 Ibid.
298 van Schaik et al. 2020, 1150.
299 M'ikanatha & Welliver 2021, 1.
300 Moulds 2020.
301 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 42.
302 van Schaik et al. 2020, 1150.
303 Ibid., 1151.

The US also fell short in its contribution to health multilateralism in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. The US's decision to leave WHO in the summer of 2020 came as a shock, undermining multilateral efforts to fight the pandemic. Given its major role in funding the organisation, the US administration's message during the Trump era was loud and clear: not to strengthen multilateral efforts, but to blame China and WHO for the inadequate response to the Covid-19 outbreak.[304] As collateral damage, WHO became a battlefield for international politics, instead of functioning as an effective forum for global cooperation. WHO, and its Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus, drew criticism from the US for a laggardly and ineffective response to the alarming news that emerged in China in late 2019.[305] Ultimately, WHO also became the key scapegoat for the failed national response by the Trump administration.

When it comes to WHO's key non-Western state actor, China, it has been estimated that with a more transparent, rapid, and collaboration-oriented reaction by the Chinese authorities to the pneumonia of unknown origin, efforts to fight the outbreak could have been started a few weeks earlier,[306] and lives could have been saved. It has often been pointed out that the novel coronavirus was less lethal than its predecessor SARS, which was contained with effective measures two decades earlier. What was different this time was that cooperation between the two major powers, China and the US, did not work, in contrast to the previous pandemic scares, such as swine flu in 2009, avian influenza in 2013, and the Ebola outbreak in 2014. In 2009, the two countries reportedly "exchanged technology and information about the spread of the swine flu virus and accelerated the development of a vaccine",[307] while in 2014, during the Ebola crisis in West Africa, the US and China worked together to "construct treatment centers and direct medical supplies that played an important role in turning the tide against Ebola".[308] Crucially, these epidemics never developed into pandemics, and hence Covid-19 has been the first real stress test for international health cooperation, duly setting a precedent.

Notably, the soft treatment of China by WHO highlighted the fact that during the Covid-19 pandemic China became another actor that was perceived to benefit from privileged treatment.[309] This is an interesting development from the perspective of the Southernisation of multilateralism since the optics are that China became a representative of the North in the South, not the other way around.

304 See discussion in Levy 2021; Vazquez 2021.
305 See discussion in e.g. Lien & Kortsch 2020; Davies & Wenham 2020.
306 See Mackenzie 2020, 29-31.
307 Huang 2021.
308 Ibid.
309 Zürn 2022.

Health multilateralism at WHO is also challenged by the perceived division between the wealthy North and the poor South. As a rule, international access and availability have ensued only after developed countries have secured their use domestically, a tendency that also adds to health disparities between the Global North and South.[310] Covid-19 was no exception to the rule, and it stands out as another unfortunate example of inequitable access to drugs and vaccines. It is not only the rich northern countries but also WHO that has been blamed for acting in the interests of pharmaceutical companies.[311] Thus, Covid-19 served to replicate and deepen the power asymmetries evident in Western dominance and the material inequalities within the global governance system.[312]

Perceptions of legitimacy within global health governance are affected by ideas that the system is unfair and biased towards the rich West.[313] An often-quoted example of the Global North-South divide is the Indonesian government's refusal to contribute to global vaccine development with H5N1 samples in 2007, simply because the Indonesian government did not trust Western pharmaceutical companies to develop an affordable vaccination for developing countries.[314]

This discussion about structural injustices favouring the wealthy over the disadvantaged has continued during the Covid-19 pandemic with the failure to agree on the TRIPS waiver.[315] Once approved, the waiver would have allowed World Trade Organization (WTO) member states to research, manufacture and supply vaccines, and hence it could have made the vaccines more affordable for and available to non-Western countries.[316] South Africa, India, as well as international human rights advocates such as Amnesty International have been proactive in insisting that the Global North was acting in a protectionist manner. For its part, WHO has been perceived as taking the side of privileged actors – rich and powerful states and the pharmaceutical companies.[317] It has even been argued that "With Covid-19, history is repeating itself" since in past decades, tensions have existed between the high-income countries and the emerging economies regarding equitable access to drugs and vaccines.[318]

310 See e.g. Aaltola 2012, 188.
311 Zürn 2022, 37.
312 See Zürn 2022, 38.
313 See e.g. Sridhar and Woods 2013.
314 See e.g. Fidler 2010; Elbe 2010.
315 See e.g. Chaudhary & Chaudhary 2021.
316 Chaudhary & Chaudhary 2021.
317 Zürn 2022.
318 Fidler 2020.

During Covid-19, pharmaceutical companies and Western countries have put forward arguments that a patent waiver would set a dangerous precedent and, if approved, that the waiver would harm their medical research and development, which is based on long-term investments, commitment and resources.[319] The most persistent opponent of the waiver has been the EU, which has offered COVAX as a solution to the global vaccine supply problem.[320] But COVAX is not going to help address the structural deficits, as it does little to help with the development of capacities, increasing investments and the manufacturing potential in the South. COVAX can easily be viewed as an instrument of charity by Western countries seeking to maintain the existing power relations in global affairs.

One can only speculate how things could have turned out during the Covid-19 pandemic had there been more trust in bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and had cooperation prevailed instead of competition. Regrettably, however, the pandemic erupted at a time of great-power competition, revealing, highlighting and reinforcing pre-existing political tensions (between the US and China, and between South and North) and exacerbating the distrust in global governance and multilateral institutions. As pointed out by Aaltola, Covid-19 contributed to the reshaping of the global order by triggering further distancing between the major actors, the US and China, and strengthening calls for both economic and political decoupling instead of interdependence between the great powers.[321] It also contributed to a similar divide between the Global South and North.

But even with the best possible spirit of cooperation and trust during the pandemic, a disaster might have loomed due to the long-term neglect of public health across the globe. International pandemic preparedness was collectively weak around the world according to the Global Health Security Index from 2019. It concluded that no country was fully prepared for epidemics or pandemics and that every country had significant gaps to address in their preparedness systems. The findings of an earlier report by WHO revealed that only one-third of WHO member states met the minimum standards to respond to public health risks and emergencies.[322] Thus, in order to improve global health governance and pandemic preparedness, the political will to invest in health multilateralism should be evoked and sustained over a long period of time.

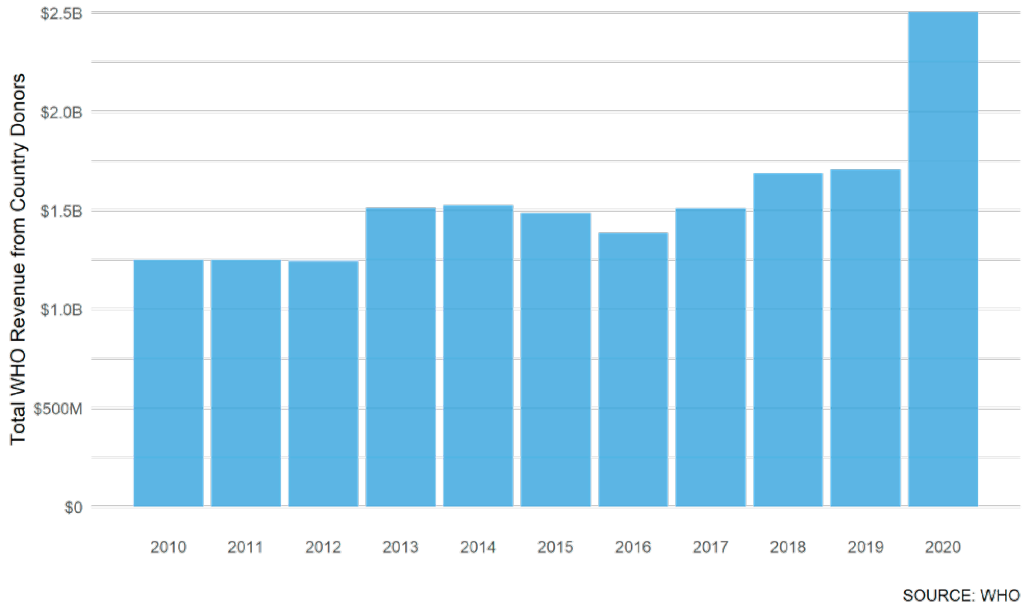
319 See Chaudhary & Chaudhary 2021, 451–2.

320 For further discussion on COVAX, see pages 47 & 61 of this report.

321 Aaltola 2020, 4.

322 Global Health Security Index 2019; van Schaik et al. 2020, 1149.

Figure 6. WHO revenue from donor countries (2010–2020). There was a sizable increase in funding received by WHO with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Source: WHO, in Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 36.

Improving health multilateralism

Albeit to a clearly insufficient extent, the Covid-19 crisis has also served as an opportunity to reform multilateral arrangements, as well as to advocate global solidarity and cooperation. Although WHO's legally binding International Health Regulations (IHRs) were undermined, ignored and contested, yet international and global collaboration was still not fully abandoned[323]. Hope for more effective and legitimate multilateralism seems grounded in the notion that crises generate positive institutional change and better resourcing.

The introduction of COVAX, the only global facility for equitable access to safe Covid-19 vaccines, is the best example of global collaboration that has worked. Strongly supported by the EU and co-led by WHO, in the first 15 months of operating, COVAX deployed over 1.3 billion vaccines to 87 developing countries, accounting for 82% of vaccine delivery to low-income countries. Yet COVAX still has a long way to go to achieve its goal of

323 Fraundorfer & Winn 2021.

helping to protect 70% of the population in 91 lower-income countries, due to delays in manufacturing, most notably including a shortage of doses, as well as a lack of resources and adequate strategies in developing countries.[324]

Although there would undoubtedly have been more death and sickness without COVAX, Covid-19 clearly illustrated that the EU and the pharmaceutical companies are not ready to alter the TRIPS regime nor to reform health multilateralism in favour of the disadvantaged. But perhaps this was too much to ask at a time of emergency.

Drawing on extensive academic literature, it would appear that IOs often benefit from crises.[325] This has clearly been true in the case of the European Union throughout its history; crises have often offered windows of opportunity, accelerated institutional change, and strengthened the Union.[326] There are numerous examples to draw on, especially in the area of health security. In the aftermath of the perceived threat of bioterrorism following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the EU introduced its health security committee. In 2013, after Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and swine flu (2009), the Committee's role was strengthened to cover a wide range of threats such as communicable and cross-border diseases, and to "provide for a coordinated wider approach to health security at the Union level".[327] The EU's health security committee has been active during the pandemic since the first meeting about the disease outbreak on 17 January 2020, providing a platform for coordination and the exchange of information and experiences in managing the pandemic.[328] Other illustrations of the EU's ability to strengthen institutional responses to disease outbreaks include the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), which was created after SARS, and the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), which was established during Covid-19 in 2021 to strengthen the EU's response to cross-border health threats.[329]

The readiness and ability of the EU to change policies during and after crises is encompassed by the EU's external action. Before the pandemic outbreak, the EU and its member states were not fully supportive of WHO. In fact, the EU member states have had diverging agendas and priorities in relation to the organisation. The Covid-19 pandemic changed the course of EU action in many ways, with the EU and the member states, including Finland and Germany, stepping up their financial and political support for WHO.

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324 World Health Organization 2022.

325 See Josepha Debre & Djikstra 2021.

326 See e.g. Schmidt 2020.

327 European Union 2013.

328 Aaltola et al. 2021, 7.

329 European Commission 2021; Ketola et al. 2023 (forthcoming).

As a result of the Covid-19 crisis, not only did the EU and the member states increase their financial support for the organisation, but the health policy cooperation at WHO was also strengthened. The most notable example of the increased initial appetite for supporting WHO's work was the German decision to pledge "an unprecedented EUR 500 million to WHO for 2020".[330]

Thus, the Covid-19 crisis has helped the EU to strengthen its global health policy coordination at WHO. Improving the coordination among the EU member states at WHO seems a rather feasible step not only to improve the EU's coherence but also to promote effective multilateralism. Moreover, as a measure to counterbalance the US's declining interest in multilateralism during the Trump presidency, the EU acted as the main supporter of WHO and multilateralism in general. The EU has also been proactive in strengthening the legally binding mechanisms for pandemic governance. In November 2020, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, put forward an idea for an international treaty on pandemics with the emphasis on moving more quickly and "in a more coordinated way, to ensure that medical equipment is available and to exchange information with each other very quickly in order to protect our citizens as best we can".[331] The upcoming EU global health strategy serves as another example of the EU's strengthened commitment to multilateral health cooperation.

WHO also has a record of authority expansion in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks as well as the SARS and Ebola outbreaks. Based on its broad mandate, the organisation has assumed responsibility for regulating the global pandemic surveillance and response system. A core component of this are the International Health Regulations (IHR), a legally binding instrument and the most crucial international mechanism for pandemic preparedness. The IHR were updated in 2005 in response to both the growth in international travel and trade and the emergence of international disease threats, particularly SARS – a precursor of Covid-19 – in the early 2000s. The IHR form the binding document for all WHO member states, elaborating on how countries should react to disease outbreaks of potentially international concern, and effectively forming the most crucial international pandemic preparedness mechanism.[332]

With the renewed regulations in 2005, attention to combatting infectious diseases shifted away from containment at the state borders to containing a possible outbreak at the source and flexibly throughout the air traffic system in particular if the contagion was rife. An important change in the overall strategy had to do with the emphasis on a tailored and

330 van Schaik et al. 2020, 1153.

331 European Council 2020.

332 Fraundorfer & Winn 2021; Habibi et al. 2020; World Health Organization 2016.

flexible approach instead of the pre-SARS response pattern, which was deemed in this case to be too inflexible and insensitive to the specific characteristics of the outbreak. [333]

Despite the changes, no scenario remained whereby WHO could operate within sovereign borders with impunity; although the IHR do include the possibility for civil society to issue an alert on disease outbreaks outside direct state control, acting on the basis of the IHR requires "careful diplomatic manoeuvring".[334]

Whereas the effectiveness of multilateralism in the early days of the pandemic was outright disappointing, transnational public-private networks contributed to the global response. Most importantly, public-private partnerships in the form of scientific collaborations delivered successes, resulting in several safe and effective vaccines in record time. It has been estimated that in Finland alone, 10,000 lives were saved in 2022 thanks to the vaccinations.[335]

In sum, it is particularly true in the case of EU health policies, but also to some extent in respect of WHO, that exogenous shocks have set institutional change in motion.[336] Although, like WHO, the EU was criticised for its laggardly and belated response to the pandemic in the very early stages, the EU did manage to utilise the crisis and expand its policy instruments even during the first pandemic wave. For WHO, it seems that strengthening its authority has produced mixed results in the past; health emergencies have led to expanded authority as well as to expectations which were not met without the necessary mandate and resources in WHO member states. Although successful in the development of vaccines, the transnational scientific cooperation has not succeeded in transcending international relations and national borders thus far. For multilateralism to flourish, all elements (politics, diplomacy, science) are needed to work towards the common goal.

Conclusion

The responsibility to safeguard the health and wellbeing of citizens lies with nation-states. It has been argued that the lack of a worldwide supranational authority in health governance has been a significant structural reason for the fragmented, chaotic, and

333 Aaltola et al. 2021.

334 Lien & Kortsch 2020, 522.

335 Yle 2022.

336 Josepha Debre & Djikstra 2021; Ketola et al. 2023 (forthcoming).

ineffective response to Covid-19.[337] The initial response to the pandemic can be described not only as "state-centric" but also "uncoordinated" and "chaotic", standing in contrast to some of the previous responses to emerging health threats.[338] But the situation was also an unprecedented stress test for global health governance and the structures built after the Second World War.

While the pandemic aggravated the retreat from multilateral modes – especially at the beginning of the crisis – it also provided some impetus to return to multilateral modes of governance, exemplified by the negotiations over a new pandemic treaty and an increase in commitments to global health initiatives. The EU rose to the occasion, improved its own institutional framework to tackle cross-border health threats, and acted with more determination in support of health multilateralism at WHO. Moving beyond the acute crisis management modes, modest space for more international and global collaboration has opened up, but in order to better understand the dynamics of health multilateralism, more research should be conducted horizontally on the involvement of non-state actors and the relationships between different initiatives. The hierarchical approach taken by this study and many others is limited in scope and provides only partial answers.

The World Health Organization was never designed to solve global problems on its own. Instead, WHO's acting powers lay firmly within the nation-states, and the organisation only has tools to help countries with their pandemic preparedness, response capacities, and information-sharing. Currently, WHO does not possess material sources of power nor coercive power that could be used to reconstruct the social basis of legitimacy.[339] While the instruments of multilateralism are imperfect by design and suffer from a crisis of legitimacy, authority and a lack of resources, the failures during the Covid-19 pandemic may provide an opportunity to reform international pandemic preparedness. Expectations need to be scaled down to reflect the negative trends in global and international affairs, including the retreat from multilateral modes of governance and the rise of populism, authoritarianism, nationalism, and de-Westernisation. Improving health multilateralism at the UN level will not happen without addressing these underlying structural issues.

Covid-19 has reminded us that we are all part of what sociologist Ulrich Beck called the "global community of threats",[340] where no country nor single discipline is able to tackle the pandemic alone. Furthermore, understanding that global problems require global solutions, and strengthening multilateral cooperation and pandemic responses requires

337 Fraundorfer & Winn 2021.

338 Huang 2021.

339 On legitimacy and IOs, see Reus-Smit 2007.

340 Beck 2009, 8.

trust and political will to engage in collaboration. As Zürn points out, the unilateral way is doomed to failure in the 21st century.[341] An important condition is also that the multilateral settings where discussions and negotiations take place are deemed legitimate. What should therefore be done is to develop measures that allow for better legitimation of the multilateral institutions at national and international level. WHO is well placed to act as a vehicle for increased trust in multilateralism since the organisation enjoys a relatively high level of public trust.[342] This is a good basis for building stronger multilateralism. Negotiations over a new, binding pandemic treaty will test the willingness of major powers to build on existing international health governance. Further fragmentation and distancing from the global fora of multilateralism is also a possible future scenario.

341 Zürn 2022.

342 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and International Peace Institute (IPI) 2022, 42.

5 Conclusions and options for influence

Katja Creutz and Juha Jokela

5.1 General findings

The international arena is currently defined by changing power constellations between states – including the European Union as a sui generis actor – coupled with deteriorating conditions for handling global challenges through multilateral cooperation. Acknowledging this state of affairs motivates the question at the heart of this report: To what extent can these circumstances be overcome, or do they represent a more permanent rupture in the global order? In other words, are we dealing with just 'bad weather' or with something more comparable to the 'climate change of multilateral cooperation'? The report also explores how a small state like Finland can position itself in the increasingly competitive environment with the aim of both securing its own interests as well as the regional aspirations of the EU, not to mention addressing global challenges that may threaten the very existence of humankind.

Multilateral cooperation is needed to maintain predictability in international relations and address global challenges that require all hands on deck. Yet this study contends that multilateralism is vulnerable to strategic rivalry when it comes to the conduct of multilateral cooperation, its fundamental norms, and with respect to its aims. Strategic competition extends nowadays even to the very concept of multilateralism itself, which has duly been politicised. Great powers increasingly use the term to advance their own interests and agendas, which may in the worst case undermine multilateral cooperation and global governance efforts. Tougher times lie ahead, where the expectations with regard to multilateralism must be attuned to the volatility ensuing from strategic rivalry, but also from the effects of domestic politics. Particular attention must be paid to the presidential election in the United States in 2024, and EU-wide challenges, such as nationalistic policies and populism.

The great powers studied in this report show increasing variation in their appetite for multilateral solutions, Russia being the least willing to engage with others constructively. Instead, the EU, China, Russia and the United States all display flexilateral tendencies. While formal institutions are not (completely) forsaken as a principled matter, alternative forums or avenues are prioritised in practice. In fact, the formal and informal forms of cooperation are increasingly interwoven. The different powers utilise both the UN system as well as various other forums, including alternative institutions created by (and for) themselves, broad and more narrow-based informal institutions such as the Gx system,

and ad hoc formations to pursue their interests within defined policy sectors. Regional multilateralism is gaining ground as an attractive alternative for managing the difficulties involved in multilateralism in an age of strategic competition, as exemplified by the SCO. 'Backyard multilateralism' is indeed gaining more traction.

Like-minded, more limited multilateral groups are also becoming more common. These efforts are often strategic in the sense that they are more outcome-oriented, rather than intent upon focusing on multilateralism as an end in itself. Effectiveness is sought by cooperating with states that share the same values or seek to achieve similar goals. Multilateral cooperation around a certain set of principles or values is gaining support over global forums and dialogue, despite the latter's potential to offer venues for continuous behind-the-scenes diplomacy. For example, cooperation around liberal democratic principles increasingly features in the repertoire of Europe and the United States with the G7, the Summit for Democracy, and the Quad being examples thereof. The Franco-German initiative 'Alliance for Multilateralism' can also be classified as a like-minded effort despite its principled openness. While China rhetorically stresses the importance of global forums, it has in practice also engaged in more limited multilateral cooperation with, for example, the BRICS group.

It follows from this that great powers can be both strategic rivals and partners, depending on the issue. By way of illustration, the United States continuously features as a traditional ally of the EU, without sharing, for example, the Union's views on global trade and efforts to strengthen the WTO. There are also significant differences in the approach towards intellectual property, for instance, indicating that while the EU and the US share some interests, they diverge on others. Moreover, while China shares the European concern for combatting climate change, its perception of human rights differs from that of the EU and Finland. Accordingly, there is room for finding common ground not only with the United States, but also with China. In contrast, at least from a European perspective, Russia has painted itself into a corner with its aggression against Ukraine and its efforts to serve as an alternative to the Western liberal international order.

The relationship with the United States is vital for Europe, whose aim should be twofold: on the one hand, it should strive to maintain its functional and value-based relationship with this leading power; on the other hand, strengthening its own capabilities in multilateral diplomacy is necessary. The latter course of action has significance as it reinforces the EU's leverage not only vis-à-vis the United States, but also ensures capacity to act even in situations where the US re-distances itself from the multilateral system. Transactionalism has also characterised the actions of great powers to some extent in recent years, making it all the more important to focus on the agency of Europe and also to reach out to middle powers.

A factor to increasingly be reckoned with in multilateral cooperation is the rise of the Global South. While the exact geography of the Global South remains undetermined, it entails the rise of economic powers such as Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa, but also a remarkable group of other developing nations – many of which have past experiences with colonialism. This diverse group of powers that occasionally balance between great powers will become increasingly important for global governance and multilateral cooperation. As a result, all great powers in this study recognise and take account of the rise of the Global South.

With the ascending agency of the Global South, the global agenda is undergoing a Southernisation, especially in the G20. The focus on economic inequality and development will likely be accentuated, while European states seek to translate the awareness of the role played by the Global South into practice – of particular relevance given Europe's geographic proximity to parts of it. This is illustrated by the Franco-German willingness to reform the UN Security Council by allocating two permanent positions to Africa. Another example is the attempt to have Global South countries join the condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, the Global South in many instances shares the values of non-interference and sovereignty advanced by China and Russia. Moreover, China and Russia arguably use the Global South to challenge the West, and China has also favoured the idea of African states joining the G20.

While multilateral cooperation with great powers can be, and should be, pursued (with the possible exception of Russia due to its aggression), it is noteworthy that Russian and Chinese multilateralism seeks to challenge the West as a starting point. Their stated goal is to create a multipolar order, or even to bring down Western hegemony as led by the United States. While both provide a counter-narrative to the West, Russia also uses multilateralism to preserve the balance of power, including utilising global challenges to enhance its clout. Yet the leverage of both China and Russia is hampered by the absence of concrete multilateral initiatives and financial contributions to the multilateral system. The so-called 'no-limit' partnership between China and Russia remains an open question, however, and its potential development in the future must be monitored. Should China continuously strengthen its status in multilateral cooperation, with or without Russia, this may generate increasing leeway for Western states.

Finland and the EU, as well as the broader Western hemisphere, need to pay attention to the resilience of the existing order. Besides affirmative measures with regard to institutions and institutional practices, this necessitates self-reflection and consistent behaviour on the international stage in order to avoid charges of double standards. Finland should also be aware of the legitimacy challenges of multilateralism in general, and specific institutions in particular, thereby seeking to bridge the gap between the North and the

South. When choosing between different policy options, Finland should consider how its policies contribute to the fragmentation (or integration) of the global governance system as a whole.

While this study has focused on states and strategic powers, a crucial aspect to consider is also the degree to which institutions are inclusive. Increasing the involvement of civil society and other pertinent stakeholders is a vital part of the legitimacy of global governance and its institutions, allowing for a real exchange of views – principles of multilateral cooperation that Finland and the EU should continue to support.

5.2 Sector-specific findings

Flexilateralism characterises *security cooperation* to an increasing degree as regional and informal formats have featured alongside formal and more global ones. Both the United States and European states, including Finland, have also resorted to ad hoc or narrow yet still multilateral formations as the constraints of formal cooperation have hampered effective responses to security, as exemplified by the inability of the UN Security Council to react to situations threatening international peace and security, where great powers have a vested interest. The aims of informal security cooperation may nonetheless differ, and it is noticeable that informal security structures are unconnected to the formal institutions unlike, for example, in the case of international economic and financial governance.

Advancing the promotion and protection of *human rights* is increasingly difficult in an environment where both Russia and China pose threats to the Western understanding of human rights as universally and legally applicable individual rights. Finland and the EU should expect no genuine cooperation with these two countries with regard to human rights in the traditional understanding (beyond possibly the rhetorical level), and must gear their efforts instead towards defending the current system together with, inter alia, the United States, but also explore possibilities to work with some countries in the Global South. While a certain policy of principled pragmatism may open the door for cooperation in regard to economic and social rights or, for example, the rights of women, it is important not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The UN system still constitutes the foremost forum for human rights promotion and protection, as informal forums lack inclusive human rights practices and monitoring mechanisms. Finland's ongoing membership in the UN Human Rights Council presents a first-hand opportunity to defend the UN-based human rights system, but also with respect to concrete situations in which human rights violations occur.

As regards multilateral cooperation in the field of *global health*, Western states should show willingness to allocate resources and potentially powers to multilateral institutions.

The shifting priorities of traditional partners, such as the United States, may nonetheless hinder the EU's possibilities to influence the global health architecture. There is very little room for diverging interests of the West as the liberal world order is in decline, and thus reviving a joint health agenda across the Atlantic should be discussed. With a good reputation in public health, its holistic approach to health and past experience in promoting the Global Health Security Agenda, Finland could take the lead in promoting a new global health agenda between the EU and the US.

5.3 Options for influence for the EU and Finland

The EU's political and institutional capabilities

Intensifying strategic competition and even rivalry among great powers constitutes a major challenge to the EU's strategic objective to promote effective multilateralism as a key organising principle of global and regional politics. The EU's recent move towards a more strategic and stringent multilateralism, entailing (i) a functional and interest-based approach, (ii) leveraging the EU's power, and (iii) utilising ad hoc, issue-based and informal forms of multilateralism, provides opportunities to set up and consolidate stable norms and standards, and to guarantee global commons and tackle global challenges. To seize these opportunities embedded in a more hard-nosed approach, the EU should pay close attention to its political and institutional capabilities to formulate common policies and external action in multilateral cooperation.

In light of the findings of this report, strengthening the EU's institutional, material, and political capabilities for external action in general, and multilateral cooperation in particular, would enable the Union to better face the challenges related to the intensifying strategic competition also reflected in multilateral cooperation.

First, it would enhance the EU's position in relation to its key (and potentially only truly strategic) partner, the US. An EU that can bring new multilateral ideas, solutions, and resources to the table is likely to emerge as a valuable partner for the current US administration, and enable it to steer the transatlantic partnership in multilateral cooperation. Crucially, it would enable the EU to better address the potential variation in European and US stances towards strategic cooperation as well as the incoming US administrations' approach to multilateralism, including envisioned recourse to unilateral action and/or more isolationist foreign policy. Second, this would enable the EU to work with other great powers as well as middle powers in multilateral cooperation when their interests align and, importantly, enable the Union to push back when the EU's key strategic interests are challenged. Finally, strengthened political and institutional

capabilities, including streamlined representation, would enhance the EU's position in formal international organisations and informal forums alike.

Qualified majority voting (QMV) is no silver bullet for an effective EU when it comes to multilateralism. At times, the strength of the EU's position lies in the unity of all 27 member states, as the Union's closed ranks on the condemnation of Russian action showed. Nevertheless, QMV in certain policy areas can be a tool for generating a consensus as the political costs of being outside the centre of the decision can be too high for one or a few member states. If a consensus is lacking, QMV might prevent the EU from not arriving at a position because of a small minority of opposing member states. In this respect, the Commission's proposal to introduce QMV for EU positions on human rights in multilateral forums can be an important step in the right direction.

Recent years have been marked by the EU's efforts to save multilateral organisations from collapsing under the pressure of strategic competition and the actions of a sometimes hostile US administration. Now, the EU has to "shift from survival mode to transformation mode".[343] This also includes revisiting the debates on the EU's own representation in international organisations and informal forums. The EU has been effective in speaking with one voice when it has a formal role and a common position. However, there is room for improvement when it comes to coordination in informal forums, in organisations where the EU has no membership, or on topics where a common position is lacking. It is already becoming increasingly common to present joint European candidates for top positions in international organisations. This should become the norm.

A more strategic approach by the EU in multilateralism not only entails the right decision-making processes and instruments for implementation. A strategy primarily starts from defining the goals that the EU wants to reach. Given the size of the EU and the sometimes diverging interests between member states, an important prerequisite is the ability of member states to agree on a compromise with regard to a set of multilateral policies, and to formulate priorities.

EU strategy on multilateral cooperation and the Global South

Another key finding of this report suggests a "Southernisation of multilateral cooperation". This means that actors representing the Global South are playing an increasingly notable role in formal international organisations and informal forums by shaping the agendas and outcomes. While some EU members, such as France and Germany, have recognised

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this trend to some extent, the global ramifications of, and reactions to, Russia's war of aggression have served as a serious wakeup call in the Union on increased strategic competition in the Global South as well as in the EU's neighbourhoods. Regarding the EU's strategic objectives to enhance the rules-based order and multilateral cooperation, the Union might want to launch a strategy process focusing on multilateralism and the Global South.

Given the mixed results produced by the heterogenous as well as process-oriented and often technical character of the EU's strategic partnerships,[344] a new strategy process could firstly analyse the operating environment in a Global South marked by strategic competition, including the role played by China or comparable powers in the construction of the Global South agenda. It could also discuss the most promising partnerships with states and actors in the Global South to solve specific joint problems and promote common interests in multilateral cooperation. The goal of such a process would be to analyse those aspects of the individual partnership which have ramifications for global cooperation, such as food security, climate change, or human rights. The strategy process could also include notable outreach activities towards the identified key actors in the Global South, including regional organisations, non-governmental and civil society organisations.

A political strategy to engage with partners in the Global South in multilateral cooperation also follows logically from the more politically steered economic engagement with partners in the EU's Global Gateway initiative. An EU Global South strategy would complement the planning of the EU's financial instruments on a strategic level, without imposing additional conditionalities on the partners, however. Member states that have recently produced policy papers and initiatives concerning multilateral cooperation could provide guidance for the reflection along with the EU institutions and EEAS.

The EU and informal forums

Given the EU's formal membership in the G20 and de facto membership in the G7, the Union is well placed to underline the relationship that these forums have with formal international organisations, and in doing so, to address the legitimacy challenges related to their exclusivity. The EU could consider engaging with (and re-invigorating) the Global Governance Group (3G), which convenes in the margins of the UN. The 3G was established in 2009 with the aim "that the G20 process should strengthen the UN and other

344 Ferreira-Pereira & Smith 2021; Grevi 2012.

international organisations, not weaken them". The group also includes many smaller European states, including EU members.

The joint representation provided by the Presidents of the European Commission and European Council at the highest summit level, and commissioners, HR/VP and rotating presidency of the Council of the EU at ministerial level, is an instrumental feature of the EU's engagement. The EU and its member states could pay increasing attention to their internal processes to formulate EU positions in the G7 and the G20. This would require member states directing resources to policy planning and policymaking. They could also draw on informal forms of differentiation, which recognises the contribution of smaller groups of member states working together in certain EU external policy fields and issues, and in doing so contribute to the common EU policies and action.[345] The EU's ability to shape the agendas of the G20 and G7 is highest when Germany, France or Italy are chairing these groups and responsible for their respective policy processes and meeting proceedings.

Finally, the EU and its member states could increase their participation in the outreach activities of the G20 and the G7. The G20, for instance, includes several "engagement groups" such as Civil Society 20, Think 20, Science 20, Labour 20, and Business 20. While the impact of these groups' activities on the G20 policy processes deserves to be studied more carefully, they might open up possibilities for EU NGOs, CSOs, business groups, think tankers, and academics to engage with the G20 discussions and debates in various policy fields. EU representatives and member states could be active in encouraging wider EU participation.

Finland

Strengthening multilateral cooperation is a key long-standing objective of Finland's foreign policy. Moreover, effective multilateral cooperation is an integral part of Finland's security and the security of its citizens, and the country sees its economic success and the wellbeing of its citizens as being built on multilateral cooperation. Given the recent crises of multilateralism, Finland has positioned itself as a defender of multilateral cooperation, the rules-based international system, and international law. Given that the EU is Finland's most important reference group and security community, as well as the key channel for Finland to exert influence, Helsinki should continue to work to make the EU a stronger actor in multilateral cooperation, and aim to provide answers in tackling challenges related to the EU's internal unity as well as institutional capabilities. Tightening strategic

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competition, also reflected in multilateral cooperation globally and regionally, makes this task ever more important, as size and power matter in multilateral cooperation along with smart diplomacy based on new ideas, expertise, and initiatives.

Given Finland's stated objectives regarding multilateral cooperation (Era of new cooperation), this report also provides research-based findings relevant for Finland's multilateral aspirations beyond the EU.

Bearing in mind that Finland is approaching security from a broad perspective – in addition to military threats, the rivalry between major powers, hybrid influencing, and the impacts of major global challenges on peace and security are also underlined – peace mediation, crisis management as well as conflict prevention should retain their traditionally high profile in Finland's foreign policy. Managing new security threats caused by climate change and unsustainable development highlights the importance of these activities, whereas risks and threats related to new technologies call for multilateral cooperation to enhance global regulation.

Finland's goal of offering good services to enhance peace and security via these tools could also include a strong aspiration to strengthen global and regional formal security bodies and organisations. One of the findings of this report suggests that the world is witnessing increasing informal security cooperation among states, which seems to be largely unconnected with the formal institutions. Given that Finland is aiming to become a member of the UN Security Council for the 2029–30 term, as well as assuming the OSCE Chairpersonship in 2025, supporting and highlighting the role of formal security organisations is likely to feature high on Finland's foreign policy agenda. Importantly, and as these formal institutions for global and European peace and security have faced significant efficacy challenges (especially in terms of Russia's war of aggression), it is crucial to maintain their functionality. From a mid- and longer-term perspective, their role could become important in (re-)building trust and providing assurances that different forms of security cooperation (including re-armament and alliance formations) are designed for defensive purposes and to create stability and security. Finland's prospective NATO membership will open up new possibilities to influence security and defence cooperation within the treaty-based alliance, which is becoming increasingly central to Europe's defence and European security in general. It is generally assumed that Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership would also enable stronger Nordic security policy and defence cooperation.

One field of cooperation that has been under increasing pressure in the era of strategic competition is human rights. This trajectory has been similar both within the framework

of the Council of Europe,[346] and in the UN Human Rights Council, where human rights protection has been questioned in favour of non-interference. Considering that Finland's foreign policy is human rights-based, Finland should act both regionally and internationally to support the promotion and protection of human rights within existing normative and institutional frameworks. It should carefully consider how it balances (if at all) the existing systems with the thinking of an increasing number of states, including China and the Global South among others, some of which hold divergent views on what human rights are, and how protection is to be advanced. While Finland can help to mediate conflicting views by keeping an open mind and being prepared to adjust positions in its work in the UN Human Rights Council, the functions and resilience of the Council should be priorities.

While Finland has strong thematic foci in its membership in the UN Human Rights Council, it has shown limited preparedness to lead on country situations despite expectations that Finland should continue in the footsteps of its Nordic neighbours. This should be considered as it is one of the foremost tasks that the Council is entrusted with. Moreover, Finland has not shied away from joining other states in issuing statements criticising China's human rights record, as well as establishing monitoring for human rights violations committed in Ukraine. Indeed, Finland's support for scrutiny and naming and shaming should continue, for which the EU provides a supportive framework in several issues, along with the United States. Furthermore, the strong support that Finland has given to civil society and its representation should continue, as legitimacy and accountability are vital aspects of inclusive multilateralism.

Finally, the report suggests that informal forums of multilateral cooperation are an important feature of the suggested turn to flexilateralism. Moreover, the major powers of the Global South are increasingly working through the G20 and the BRICS group. Even if the EU obviously constitutes the key channel for influence for Finland in the G20 and G7, making the most of the EU's membership in these forums is the best option for Finland. As suggested above, this would, however, require intensive participation in EU policy planning and policymaking regarding the G20 and G7. Should Finland aim to highlight its interest in the G7 and G20, it could seek to engage in the outreach activities of these groups by providing expertise and civil society representation in policy fields in which it feels well placed to contribute, such as the global health agenda, green technologies, and education. Collaboration with other Nordic states could also open up possibilities to engage with the G7 and G20 agendas.

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