

Policy Paper

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The Crisis of Multilateralism viewed from the Global South

By Abdessalam Jaldi

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After decades of globalization and integration, the world seems to be fragmenting again, epitomized best, perhaps, by the return of geopolitical crisis, protectionism, unilateral sanctions, treaty withdrawals, and even military and economic coercion. Designed to foster cooperation among states, the multilateral system put in place after the Second World War grew quickly to encompass economic development, international security, global health, human rights, and environmental issues. It found expression in multiple forums, including the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization, as well as more informal venues, such the G7 or G20. More recently, the multilateral system seems shaken both in its normative foundations and its operational capacity, while the major threats to international peace and security are radically different today from those anticipated by the framers of the UN Charter. This Policy Paper therefore explores the crisis of multilateralism and its future prospects, from a southern perspective.

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The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

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POLICY PAPER

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THINK • STIMULATE • BRIDGE

Multilateralism, as an institutional form of global policy coordination, lays the foundations for how the world should be governed. This can technically be defined as a process of organizing relations between groups of three or more states¹. It outlines the concept of global governance and suggests that the absence of a world government impedes the provisions of governances in the larger context. Otherwise, the origins of multilateral international cooperation can to a large extent be traced back to post-Renaissance Europe, when states started to regulate international relations by concluding treaties, often at the end of major conflicts. The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, ending the Thirty Years' War and redistributing power in Europe, can be seen as its origin. Following the defeat of Napoleon, the 1815 Congress of Vienna represented another landmark for multilateralism in its early forms. The foundation of the League of Nations after the First World War and of the United Nations (UN), and the Bretton Woods Agreements after the Second World War, are more recent examples of post-conflict multilateralism.

Following the war, new international bodies were created with the stated purpose of promoting peace, safeguarding human rights, and enhancing the well-being of humanity. The modern multilateral system was born, and over the past eight decades, institutions designed to coordinate action among large numbers of states have become foundational to global governance. Foremost among these is the United Nations, which comprises an array of specialized organs and agencies and has served as the standard-bearer of the multilateral system since its founding in 1945. More recently, however, the multilateral system seems to have been shaken both in its normative foundations and its operational capacity, while the major threats to international peace and security are radically different today from those anticipated by the framers of the UN Charter. In this context, many analysts and practitioners increasingly speak in concrete terms of a crisis of multilateralism, broadly defined as a decline in international cooperation, a rise in geopolitical competition, and an overall fragmenting of the international order.

In today's world marked by major geopolitical and economic power shifts, multilateralism is the most effective means to govern global relations in a way that benefits all. Growing global challenges, such as COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, conflicts and extreme poverty in many parts of the world, make all too clear the need for multilateral cooperation grounded on basic principles of international law and universal values. This Policy Paper therefore aims to take stock of the current state of the multilateral system and its future prospects, from the perspectives of the Global South. It explores both the fundamentals of the multilateralism crisis and the potential for reform. It aspires to get a better grasp of the new trends, tools, and forums that are reshaping multilateral practice on a daily basis, for a renewable multilateralism.

I. Foundations of the Multilateralism Crisis

Ups and downs in the lives of individual international institutions are not new, but the malaise that now afflicts multilateralism is unprecedented in range and depth. It transcends issue-areas, and occurs at a time when the need for sensible rules of international cooperation has greater urgency than ever before. Why multilateralism is in such a mess today boils down to three causes: the loss of legitimacy of the current institutions of governance, arising out of the reluctance of the G7-dominated multilateral governance framework to adjust to shifting economic weights in the global economy; the reluctance of emerging and developing economies (EMDEs) to give up their special privileges of 'shared but differentiated responsibilities/treatment' in both trade and climate negotiations; and in the growing irrelevance of the UN system and Bretton Woods institutions in addressing the world's challenges.

1. Vincent Pouliot. *The Politics of Multilateral Diplomacy, in International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*. Cambridge University Press. 2016.

1. The Architecture of Contemporary Multilateralism

The end of the Second World War and the establishment of United Nations (UN) have opened the way for the rise of multilateral cooperation in which the peace dividend was overlaid with a prosperity dividend based on multilateral cooperation. The architecture of multilateralism emerging from the Second World War was based on two complementary pillars:

Bretton Woods System : One of the first tasks of the Bretton Woods conference in 1944 was to repair the international monetary system after the breakdown of the gold standard during the Great Depression and the Second World War. It pegged all major currencies to the dollar, and the dollar to gold. The dollar thus replaced British sterling as the de-facto global reserve currency. It evolved a contributory quota and shareholding system, calibrated to the relative size of economies at the end of the Second World War when it was set up, to address balance of external payments problems that might arise. In 1971, the United States went off the gold standard, effectively ending the original Bretton Woods system, in what came to be known as Bretton Woods Mark II. EMDEs on the other hand mostly retained various versions of the dollar peg. Since external imbalances were not concurrently adjusted, EMDEs exposed to balance of-payments crises from sudden stops when the pegged exchange rates became highly overvalued in relation to market rates or expectations. Furthermore, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) quotas were now mostly used as an insurance mechanism for EMDEs. Since the bulk of the quotas belonged to the advanced economies, they effectively became donors who set stiff macroeconomic conditionalities to protect their interests as lenders. In the same vein, the World Bank's focus turned to addressing the huge developmental needs of EMDEs. Once again, the resources for lending were predominantly those of the advanced countries that were the major shareholders of the bank. These were made available at a spread above the cost of capital, and with sovereign guarantees from borrowing governments, to protect the interests of the donor countries, and were topped up with relatively modest amounts of International Developmental Association (IDA) outright grants. Consequently, the Bretton Woods system evolved from being agents of post-war reconstruction of ravaged developed economies, to aid-giving institutions for poor developing countries. The 'two gap' model formed the macroeconomic basis of this reorientation, as a shortage of capital and foreign exchange was considered to be a binding constraint for developing countries because their access to international capital markets was limited. The IMF addressed the foreign exchange gap, while the World Bank supplemented their limited savings.

International negotiations: International negotiations as a form of multilateralism have emerged as the foreign policy tool of choice within the broader context of complex interdependence. The expanding role of international negotiation has been magnified by changes in the international system. The importance of international negotiations in international relations has manifested in term of international trade, climate change, and the institutionalization of international society. Concerning international trade, and as a result of the disruption of international trade in the interwar period, international trade fell from 30% of global GDP on the eve of the First World War to 10% within two decades. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was reached in 1947 to reduce tariffs, quotas, and subsidies on internationally traded merchandise goods. GATT was later folded into World Trade Organization (WTO), which covered services and intellectual property rights as well. Trade / GDP ratios started rising again, recovering to 30% by the mid-1970s, and peaking at just above 60% in 2008. The growth rate of the global economy increased in tandem with the growth in international trade. Concerning climate change, Acceleration of global growth led by EMDEs led to growing concerns that human activities were generating irreversible anthropogenic global warming. These concerns led to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 where a new multilateral body, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was negotiated and signed by all countries. In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was subsequently agreed under the auspices of the UNFCCC in 1997. It came into force in 2005,

setting emissions reduction targets for advanced economies, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR). This protocol was superseded by the Paris Agreement in 2016, under which developing countries signed up to take greater responsibility for limiting the global temperature rise to within 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Finally, in term of international society's institutionalization, over time there was a proliferation in the number of functional international organizations (IOs) set up to deal with multilateral cooperation in specific areas, including the International Criminal Court (ICC) which prosecuted the gravest crimes of concern to the international community, the World Trade Organization, which attempted to get international trade back on track by breaking down tariff barriers, and the Human Rights Council, responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights.

Table 1

Peace and Security Treaties

Instrument	Year of adoption
Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare (Geneva Protocol)	1925
Antarctic Treaty	1959
Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water	1963
Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies	1967
Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons	1968
Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof	1971
Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling Of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction	1972
Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques	1977
Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies	1980
Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects	1981
Treaty on Open Skies	1992
Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction	1993
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty	1996
Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer Of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction	1997
International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism	2005
Convention on Cluster Munitions	2008
Arms Trade Treaty	2013
Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons	2017

Table 2

Human Rights Treaties

Instrument	Year of adoption
The Geneva Conventions establishing international legal standards for humanitarian treatment in war	1949
Refugee Convention	1951
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	1965
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1966
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1966
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1980
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)	1985
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1990
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW)	1991
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2007
International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPED)	2007

Table 3

Climate Action Agreements

Instrument	Year of adoption
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	1992
Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Kyoto Protocol)	1997
Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Paris Agreement)	2016

Table 4

Public Health Agreements

Instrument	Year of adoption
Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO)	1948
International Health Regulations	1969/2005
Agreement on the establishment of the International Vaccine Institute (IVI)	1996
WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control	2003
Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products	2012

The major areas of multilateral cooperation are centered on the UN system (Security Council and General Assembly), international monetary system (IMF), development (the World Bank system), international trade (GATT and later WTO), and climate change (UNFCCC). While all countries are members of the institutions through which cooperation takes place, there remains a North-South divide on most issues, reflecting developmental imbalances. This has resulted in two quite distinct models of cooperation. The first model comprises institutions in which the shareholding pattern reflects the global order prevailing since the end of the Second World War. Decision-making in such institutions, including the World Bank and the IMF, is dominated by the United States and European countries (the G7)². For example, at the IMF, the United States holds over 16% of voting power, giving it an effective veto over any change in the articles of association or major policies. Europe is the IMF's next most powerful bloc. The four biggest BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) are responsible for over 24% of global GDP, compared with the 13% share of the four biggest European economies (Germany, France, the UK, and Italy). However, the former have a combined IMF vote share of only 10 percent, compared with the four European nations nearly 18%. The other set of institutions, comprising the second model, including the WTO and UNFCCC, are more democratic, with each country having an equal voice and weight. Decision-making is more difficult in these institutions because of differing North-South perspectives, as a result of which there are special carve outs for developing countries, including differentiated responsibilities calibrated to levels of development³. The implicit understanding underlying these differentiated responsibilities and rights is that the former imperial powers bear some responsibility for the underdevelopment of their former colonies, and that their greenhouse emissions used up the global commons, leaving developing countries little space to grow from the environmental angle⁴.

2. Multilateralism Tested by the Changing Nature of International Society

Despite multilateralism's tangible post-Cold War successes, it became quite clear that collective security cannot be defined simply as the continued lack of international armed conflict, which was the approach during the Cold War. New forms of threats against peace and international security are becoming increasingly interwoven with civil wars and failed states., pushing the UN Security Council, in the 1990s, to describe the humanitarian crises and the massive displacement of population s as threats to regional and global security. In parallel, the international dimensions of security, including health crises, arms and drug trafficking, international terrorism, and environmental disasters, have been discussed by experts and representatives of national governments, sparking a trend that has been described as a national and global challenge to peace and international security. The example of interconnexion between terrorism and contemporary conflicts is revealing. Indeed, between 2013 and 2020, 96% of all battle-related deaths occurred in countries in which UNSC-designated terrorist organizations operated. This form of violence was heavily concentrated in the Middle East, which accounted for 70% of all battle deaths during the same period.

Furthermore, renewed competition between world powers is rapidly replacing post-Cold War cooperation as the dominant framework in international security affairs, weakening multilateralism. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a relevant example. Indeed, in the wake of the SARS outbreak in 2004 and 2005, intense negotiations in the World Health Assembly (WHA) ultimately came down to a US-China showdown (perhaps the first example of a G2 interaction); a late-night agreement between the two set the stage for the adoption of the far-reaching International Health Regulations of 2005, with their expansive provisions on infectious disease monitoring by national authorities. At

2. Alox Sheel. *Multilateralism, the global economy and the rise of the G20*. Indian Council of World Affairs. 2020. Page 13

3. *Ibid.* Page 14.

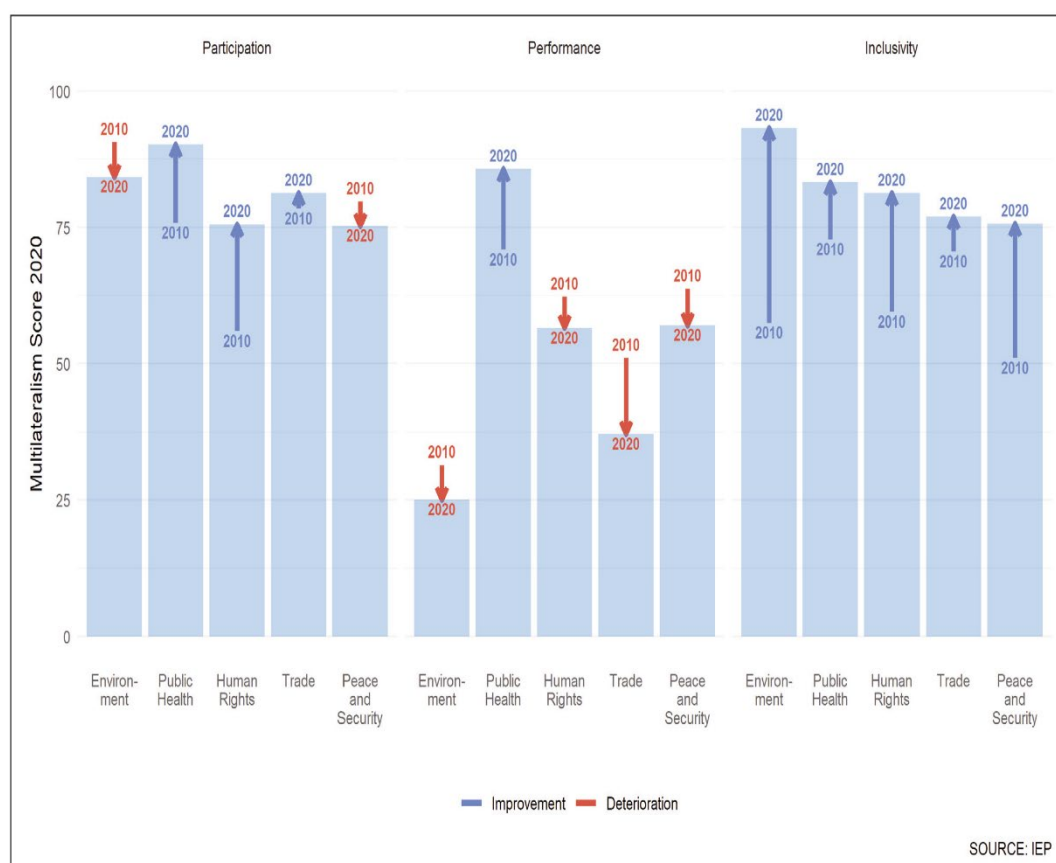
4. *Ibid.*

the World Health Organization, the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network was deepened and further resourced. But then, having lost a lot of ground in the WHA in 2005, China moved to regain its influence by successfully putting Margaret Chen forward for the Director-General role. Inside the WHO, Chen refocused the organization on basic public health and away from infectious diseases, systematically weakening the infectious-disease monitoring capacity. When West Africa was hit with a major outbreak of Ebola in 2014, a weakened WHO was unable to mount an adequate response or mobilize collective efforts to counter the outbreak.

Figure 1

Results of the Multilateralism Index

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.



While global peace held despite the failure of multilateralism on the security front, economic cooperation has dominated the world since the Second World War. Global growth and trade have both accelerated in the post-Cold War period. However, this acceleration has become increasingly skewed in favor of EDMs, as Advanced Economies (AEs) have aged and slowed down. Overall, growth in OECD countries was higher than or at the global average up to 1995, except in the 1970s. Since 1995, non-OECD countries have grown faster. The trend peaked during the global boom of 2002-07 preceding the financial crisis of 2008, when EMDEs grew almost three times faster than AEs. Indeed, by the time of the crisis in 2008, AEs and EMDEs had equal shares of the global economy

when measured at purchasing power parity. AEs currently account for about 40% of the global economy, only slightly higher than Emerging and Developing Asia (EDA) at one third. Almost all the gains within EMDEs have accrued to EDA, especially in the wake of China's entry into the WTO in 2001. On the other hand, the disproportionate gains from globalization and income convergence in the period after the collapse of Bretton Woods System 1 gradually led to disenchantment in AEs with neoliberal globalization⁵. There was a feeling that EMDEs unfairly used the discretionary exchange rate mechanism to enhance their competitiveness under Bretton Woods II to capture western markets, leading to large-scale deindustrialization and loss of blue-collar jobs⁶. This made AEs less willing to accept the special carve-outs for the more-developed EMDEs in both trade and climate change negotiations, and also hampered the ability and willingness of AEs to increase the resources of the Bretton Woods Institutions, and the concessional windows within them⁷. Financial support for the poorest, with aid administered through various subsidiary organizations like UN Development Program, WHO, UN Food and Agriculture Organization, etc., also declined. This in turn led to stalemates in both the WTO under the Doha Round of trade negotiations, and in the UNFCCC over emission targets and the funding for climate-change mitigation and adaptation.

3. The Ineffectiveness of Multilateral Institutions in Addressing Global Challenges

The multilateral frameworks established after the Second World War opened a new chapter for strengthening global governance and international cooperation. These structures comprised formal institutions with independent bureaucracies, in which a large number of countries would come together to negotiate and devise norms to address global challenges. However, the ideal vision of global cooperation has slowly dissipated. Today, multilateralism has entered a state of crisis or decline, and reforms remain elusive, while vested interests and institutional inertia continue to hamper decision-making. Furthermore, the asymmetry between this continued weakening of multilateralism and the rise of systemic crises in a globalized world—the geopolitical crisis of 2001, economic crisis of 2008, migration crisis of 2015, democratic crisis of 2016, health crisis of 2020, and the climate crisis—has made global governance broadly powerless to address the immediate and longer-term challenges facing the international community. In this challenging context, the multilateral system is confronted by four paradoxes:

3.1 Representativeness and efficiency of Multilateral Organizations

The multilateral system has never been as in demand as it is today. Nor has it faced so much criticism. Concerns about the lack of representativeness and efficiency of multilateral organizations have also fueled mistrust. For instance, the Doha Round of trade talks has been all but abandoned, while the expansion of permanent seats at the UN Security Council appears unattainable. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief the weaknesses of multilateralism, as countries have questioned the value of these organizations. At the COP26 UN Climate Conference in Glasgow in 2021, the weak commitments by nations led one observer to note that *“as regards all the most important pledges to phase out coal, reduce subsidies, and protect forests, Glasgow failed”*⁸. Consequently, during the recent UN General Assembly in September 2022, the IMF-World Bank Group Annual Meetings in October 2022, and the COP27, several leaders of developed and developing countries called for a revamped multilateral system to better serve the interests of the

5. Alox Sheel. Multilateralism, the global economy and the rise of the G20. Indian Council of World Affairs. 2020. Page Page 19.

6. Ibid. Page 19.

7. Alox Sheel. Multilateralism, the global economy and the rise of the G20. Indian Council of World Affairs. 2020. Page 20.

8. Rafiq Dossani. Is There a Future for Multilateralism? Rand Corporation. 2022. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2022/04/is-there-a-future-for-multilateralism.html>

most vulnerable in the face of challenges such as climate change. The most prominent of those calls has been the Bridgetown Initiative, launched by the Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley. Failure to acknowledge and confront shortcomings could trigger a crisis of legitimacy, putting at risk the system's resilience. On the other hand, the rising geopolitical tensions complicate every facet of the multilateral order. The U.S.-China rivalry that shapes contemporary international relations also plays out in multilateral forums, and in some cases brings international cooperation to a standstill. The most recent example of this was the impasse in the UN Security Council on the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a binding resolution being deadlocked for several months. The U.S. withdrawal from the allegedly China-centric WHO during the administration of former President Donald Trump is another example of how multilateral institutions are being weakened by rivalries between the great powers.

3.2 Financing International Institutions

Despite the growing share of official development assistance channeled through multilateral organizations, their resources fall short, by a long stretch, in relation to meeting the ever-growing expectations placed on the system. The trend of Official Development Assistance is also downward. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and in responding to the health crisis, multilateral development organizations provided a record \$185.1 billion in financing to developing countries in 2020, 31% more than the previous year. Although that proved their ability to assist developing countries in times of crises, it was far from enough to prevent a sharp rise in inequalities, let alone invest meaningfully in preventing future crises. In 2022, for example, the UN registered a record funding shortfall for humanitarian assistance of \$31.4 billion, corresponding to a 55% financing gap. Similarly, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports ever larger funding gaps each year⁹. The UNHCR's programs for refugees from Yemen are only 12% funded for 2022 this year, leading to the closure of several aid programs. Afghanistan's refugee programs are only 30% cent funded for 2023 the year. As the UNHCR has shrunk, no viable alternatives have appeared. In light of such realities there is now an increased call from aid institutions for emerging economies, referred to as 'new donors', to do more to help fill the humanitarian funding gap¹⁰. Following the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting in June 2021, the annual gathering to assess an agenda of aid reform launched at the World Humanitarian Summit, the leader of the summit leader Jan Egeland said he wanted to explore whether emerging economies could increase aid spending¹¹. In the same vein, and in the European Parliament, one former German minister cited emerging economies' "economic capacity" as a reason to increase their aid contributions through the UN¹².

3.3 The Limits of Institutionalization of International Society

While the changes in international society during the twentieth century have clearly established a pattern of evolution from the traditional forms of inter-state relations to an increasingly institutionalized community of nations, the international organizations, as key actors of the multilateral system, have played a key role in this process. However, for a number of years, international organizations have not had a good press. The signs of crisis, fatigue, and even paralysis are numerous and cumulative¹³, undermining their capacity to strengthen the institutionalization process of international society. The latter is all the more complex because the institutions that are mandated to regulate international

9. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/>

10. Armida van Rij. Beyond the UN: Closing the humanitarian funding gap. Chatham House. 2021. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/07/beyond-un-closing-humanitarian-funding-gap>

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Franck Petiteville. L'institutionnalisation du monde ? Analyser les dynamiques contemporaines des organisations internationales. Sciences Po University Press - Revue française de science politique. Volume number 68. Number 2. 2018. Page

society are unable to fully assume this mission because they have insufficient resources.

The example of the World Health Organization (WHO) is very revealing. Because of its global health mandate and its role in the management of major pandemics, the WHO was the most scrutinized, discussed, and controversial multilateral institution during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past, the WHO accomplished its mission with varying degrees of success, from the eradication of smallpox in the 1970s to its paralysis when faced with the outbreak of AIDS in the 1980s, and its role as whistleblower during the 2003 SARS outbreak, in stark contrast to its erratic management of the H1N1 virus in 2009, and the Ebola virus in 2014. Since 2020, the WHO has been a reflection of the entire international system. It demonstrated its central and indispensable role in managing a global health crisis, for which it alone has a precise international mandate and consolidated expertise. However, its political vulnerability and its limited means were made more apparent than ever. Indeed, the WHO depends entirely on its 194 member states and its financial backers; it cannot sanction or coerce but only recommend, and its means are insufficient given the importance of its mandate. With an annual budget of \$5 billion¹⁴, it commands half the resources of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) alone, and 80% of these resources are provided by its donors, including large private foundations, which significantly curtails its independence. At the political level, this dependence was emphatically attacked by US President Donald Trump. He accused the organization, and more directly Tedros Ghebreyesus, who was elected as its Director-General in 2017 with China's support, of being China's excessively docile and accommodating instrument. In 2020, the World Trade Organization also bore the brunt of this U.S. strategy when the U.S. blocked the election of its new Director-General, after having weakened and then completely paralyzed its Appellate Body.

3.4 The Fragmentation of the Multilateral Architecture

While the need to reform the system has never been as pressing, the multilateral architecture is becoming more crowded, complex, and fragmented with each new crisis. This is the fourth paradox. New regional mini laterals keep appearing in response to new challenges, such as the threat of pandemics, climate change, and biodiversity loss. Indeed, mini laterals are viewed as a solution to address the inefficiencies of multilateralism and to provide a viable alternative for cooperation and global governance. They allow a group of countries with shared interests and values to bypass seemingly moribund frameworks, and resolve issues of common concern. These arrangements are ad hoc, flexible, and voluntary, and follow a bottom-up approach as opposed to a top-down one. With a smaller membership, they can expedite decision-making and facilitate policy coordination on important focus areas.

The above examples show a causal line from a failed attempt at multilateralism to a rise in the use of regional mini-laterals¹⁵, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and the AUKUS alliance, a trilateral security pact between Australia, the U.S., and the UK. There has been a proliferation in the use of regional mini-laterals to resolve disputes¹⁶. In 2009, when a dormant dispute over maritime rights in the South China Sea resurfaced, the failure of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to resolve the issue was followed by a shift in negotiations to ASEAN, which has since been negotiating a code of conduct on the matter with China. In the same vein, the WTO's failures on dispute resolution and services trade, like its failure to conclude the negotiations of the Doha Agenda of 2010, and the blocking of its dispute settlement system, have

14. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/about/accountability/budget#:~:text=The%20current%20approved%20Biennium%20Programme,is%20for%20US%24%206.72%20billion.>

15. Rafik Doussani. Is There a Future for Multilateralism? Rand Corporation. 2022. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2022/04/is-there-a-future-for-multilateralism.html#:~:text=The%20weakening%20of%20multilateralism%20began,the%20willing%20for%20the%20purpose.>

16. Ibid.

meant that it is no longer at the center of international trade coordination, with regional bodies such as the Asia-focused Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership increasingly coordinating trade. Preference for mini-laterals can also undermine the efficiency and legitimacy of international organizations. This will reduce the incentive for countries to engage with multilateral frameworks—a possibility that not only impacts their relevance, but can also hamper their work programs¹⁷. For instance, WHO and UNICEF regional offices work with governments to provide important technical and managerial support to implement domestic schemes in health, nutrition, education, and child protection.

Multilateral organizations also help build consensus in favor of legally binding treaties, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides a rules-based framework that forms the basis for mini-lateral cooperation as well¹⁸. Mini-laterals can further lead to fragmentation of global governance mechanisms and foster the creation of mutually-exclusive power blocs. There is the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank on one hand, and the Western-led G20 and G7 on the other. The formation of competing blocs can escalate great power competition and diminish the chances of great-power cooperation¹⁹. Furthermore, the relation between the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) is very revealing. Indeed, The AU and its member states tend to believe that there must be African solutions for African problems – a logic that would privilege the Peace and Security Council (PSC's) positions on African crises when they come before the Security Council. But the Security Council's permanent members, especially France, the UK and the U.S. (the P3), jealously guard the Council's role under the UN Charter as the principal protector of global peace and security. The AU often interprets the lack of deference to PSC positions as arrogance, which can undermine the perceived legitimacy of Security Council decisions. To the extent that disconnects between the councils reflect a lack of African support for decisions emanating from New York, they can also be a harbinger of failure. Without regional cooperation, it is hard – if not impossible – for UN efforts to succeed.

The question, however, remains whether the more inclusive, dynamic, and patchwork type of multilateralism that is currently emerging, with its many grades and shadings and temporary alliances, will prove sustainable in the face of a marked return to the global stage of power politics, nationalism, and trade wars²⁰. Consequently, an alternative multilateral order may thus well be in the making.

II. The rise of the Global South in International Relations

The term “Global South” has been used increasingly in the social sciences and has become a “common ground” concept for Inequality Studies, International Cooperation, Economics and International Law²¹. If the term is rooted in the idea of the Third World, an idea that belongs to the Cold War era, the concept can be observed through four different perspectives: descriptive, identitarian, analytical and epistemological. The descriptive perspective refers to the use of the term “South” in a technical and geographic sense. The use of the term with the adjective “global”

17. Aarshi Tirkey. Addressing the inefficacy of multilateralism — Are regional minilaterals the answer? Observer Research Foundation (ORF). 2020. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/addressing-inefficacy-multilateralism/>

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Dominic Eggel. Marc Galvin. Multilateralism Is in Crisis – Or Is It? Geneva Graduate Institute: Global Challenges. Issue number 7. 2020.

21. Flavio Lira. The Global South – From conceptualization to action? Research Institute for Sustainability Helmholtz Center Postdam. 2021. <https://www.rifs-potsdam.de/en/blog/2021/06/global-south-conceptualization-action>

is a consequence of the end of the Cold War and the emergence of globalization discourse. It is associated with the idea of a world divided into developed and developing countries and is effectively an heir to the (at times dated) term “Third World”. In both cases, there is an association between economic development and modernity as the main standard of differentiation. The identitarian dimension opens the discussion to an analysis of the origins of the South. Prior to the rising of the term “South” in the 1980s, it had already been used as a marker of a marginalized position. It is important to observe, though, that the South is also associated with the campaigns of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism as represented in The Bandung Conference, the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement and Cuba’s Tri-continentalism. The analytical dimension sheds a broader light on the concept. The members of the Global South are not only traditional nation-states; they can be thought of as a category that does not have a central command, being thus formed by a variety of discourses and actors. Finally, the epistemological dimension refers to the vision of the Global South as a valid and original producer of knowledge. There are many contributions from the South to the academic world such as the alternatives to neoliberal globalization, the debates about academic dependency and the geopolitics of knowledge.

2. From the Old Global South

The Global South is based on different political analyses of the world situation, and closely aligns with two different political groupings that formed soon after the former colonial territories in Africa, Asia, and Latin America gained independence: the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of Seventy-Seven (G77)²². The NAM conceived of itself as a group of countries not aligned to either of the two big superpowers (the U.S. and the USSR) or their ideologies (capitalism or Stalinist communism). Instead, NAM countries sought to find their own path to development, whilst stressing anti-imperialism and non-involvement in the Cold War²³. Meanwhile, the G77 emerged during the first UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in June 1965, when developing countries voted together as a bloc for the first time, ignoring their internal differences and conflicts of interest. Perceiving themselves as countries at a structural disadvantage in the international economic order, the G77 thus sought to unite as a political bloc in order to try to change the international economic system through the then-new international organizations of global governance. In this context, and at the end of the conference, the 77 developing countries signed the Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Developing Countries, pledging mutual cooperation in the common cause of a new world order. A few years later, in October 1967, they held their first Ministerial meeting in Algiers where the G77 group was established as a permanent organization.

Throughout the 1960s, the developing countries mobilized under the auspices of the G77 and advocated reform of the laws governing international economic relations, reflecting their post-colonial demands for control over economic activity within their own borders, for participation in the governance of the globalizing economy, for fair access to technology, and for improved terms of international trade, finance, and investment²⁴. In the 1970s, as their numerical superiority in the UN grew, developing countries began a deliberate campaign to change the existing international economic structure and the law that supported it²⁵. In the early 1970s, the G77 set out for the first time its vision for a global society in its Declaration of the Establishment of a New International

22. Dena Freeman. *The Global South at the UN: using international politics to re-vision the global*. London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). ISSN 1932-8648. 2018. Page 2.

23. Akhil Gupta. *The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism*. *Cultural Anthropology*. Number 7.1. Pages 63 – 79. 1992.

24. Margot Salomon. *From NIEO to Now and the Unfinishable Story of Economic Justice*. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*. Number 62. Pages 31 – 54. 2013.

25. Mark Ellis. *The New International Economic Order and General Assembly Resolutions: The Debate over the Legal Effects of General Assembly Resolutions Revisited*. *International Law Journal*. Number 15. Pages 647 – 704. 1985.

Economic Order (NEIO)²⁶, based on a kind of neo-Keynesianism that emphasized state sovereignty and the role of the state in shaping and regulating markets. In the Declaration, they proposed an alternative global order, which in their words would be: *“based on equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and cooperation among all States, irrespective of their economic and social systems which shall correct inequalities and redress existing injustices, make it possible to eliminate the widening gap between the developed and the developing countries and ensure steadily accelerating economic and social development and peace and justice for present and future generations”*²⁷.

Although the resolution on the NEIO was passed at the UN General Assembly, the world order it proposed has not come into being. Nonetheless the G77 countries have continued to develop their ideas about “alternative globals” and have continued to try to bring them about through the institutions of global politics, first by defending equal participation in global negotiations (such as the reform of the UN Security Council and revitalization of the work of the UN General Assembly), and second by promoting financing for development²⁸. Considered as the influential and authentic voice of the Global South in international politics, the G77 has today over 130 members. On its website, the G77 describes itself as: *“the largest intergovernmental organization of developing countries in the United Nations, which provides the means for the countries of the South to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major economic issues within the United Nations system”*²⁹.

China has always supported the group and continues to act with it frequently, although it is not a member. Thus many statements are made in the name of *“the G77 and China”*. After the end of the Cold War in 1991, several G77 countries—Brazil, India, and South Africa— on the one hand, and China on the other hand, grew economically and politically and took on larger roles. Linked to this, the term ‘South’ began to be used to understand geopolitical processes and relationships between the Global North and the South, while also drawing attention to dynamics underway outside the western world. In this context, the release of the United Nations Development Program initiative of 2003, ‘Forging a Global South’, played an important role in drawing attention to the concept as an economic and geopolitical entity.

2. To the New Global South

The financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath have set the context for a long-needed discussion about the future of the global economic system and the role of the Global South. First, the crisis gave emerging market economies (EMEs), the opportunity to show their resilience against external shocks, which was particularly significant at a time when the developed world was proven to be less robust than claimed. Second, the crisis exposed the flaws of the prevailing system, and of the ideology behind it. In other words, the 2008 crisis to an extent created an inflection point for greater political participation of EMEs, which was well illustrated, first, by the replacement of the G7/8 by the G20 as a more inclusive, post-Bretton Woods structure of global economic governance, and, second, by the emergence of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in 2009, as an economic and geopolitical alliance representing 42% of the world’s population and over 25% of its GDP. In this context, the G20 was regarded as the most significant change that came in the

26. Dena Freeman. The Global South at the UN: using international politics to re-vision the global. London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). ISSN 1932-8648. 2018. Page 3.

27. 3201 (S-VI). Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly. A/RES/S-6/3201. 1974. <http://www.un-documents.net/s6r3201.htm>

28. Adil Najam. The Collective South in Multinational Environmental Politics. In Policymaking and Prosperity: A Multinational Anthology, edited by Stuart Nagel. Lanham: Lexington. 2003.

29. The Group of 77. <http://www.g77.org/doc/>

wake of the crisis, and that contributed to a better balance between global economic and political power³⁰. Following the G20 discussion at the 2009 London Summit, the Financial Stability Forum (FSF) was expanded to include all members of the G20 that were not members of the FSF, which then became the Financial Stability Board (FSB).

Many observers see the BRICS alliance as a counterweight to Western-dominated organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund³¹. At their 2014 summit, the BRICS announced the creation of the New Development Bank (NDB). This Shanghai-based bank was established to help finance future infrastructure and sustainable development projects in each member country, as well as in other emerging economies. The five nations agreed to put up an initial \$2 billion each in financing, with a further \$1 billion in guarantees, eventually rising to \$100 billion. The NDB has the potential to become a significant challenger to the World Bank, thereby increasing the international power of the BRICS economies³². Recently, Bangladesh, Egypt, and the UAE have all joined the BRICS NDB³³, with numerous other countries, including Nicaragua, Nigeria, Senegal, and Thailand, poised to do the same³⁴. The current BRICS five now contribute 31.5% of global GDP, while the G7 share has fallen to 30%. The BRICS is expected to contribute over 50% of global GDP by 2030, with the proposed enlargement almost certainly bringing that forward.³⁵

3. The Global South as an Actor of International Society

The rise of EMEs and the emerging of the BRICS has contributed to greater consistency between the international financial architecture and a more multipolar global economy, in which economic and political power has begun to be less concentrated in a few countries—notably the U.S. and Western Europe—than in previous times. This is significant in that the EMEs and BRICS have the potential to project the perspectives and beliefs of the Global South in key policy areas, including economic development, reform of international institutions, and the future of multilateralism. At the same time, the emergence of new international financial institutions (IFI) from the EMEs and the BRICS, such as the NDB, the Contingent Reserve Agreement (CRA), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), can potentially strengthen the international financial architecture by complementing and by competing with the traditional Bretton Woods Institutions.

Therefore, it seems beneficial for global governance as a whole to count on the rise of the Global South as a development in international relations. The BRICS and EMEs boost the debate about global leadership and key policy areas, bringing the perspective of Global South and hence ending the one-sided view on those subjects. Meanwhile, the new IFIs emerging from the EMEs will complement and compete with the traditional Bretton Woods Institutions, and will tend to favor particularly small and medium-sized countries. Thus, when IMF resources were strengthened through New Arrangements to Borrow (NAB) and bilateral agreements following the GFC, almost 25% of the former, and 50% of the latter, was contributed by EMDEs³⁶. China was the third biggest

30. Ibid.

31. Peter Law. The rise of the BRICS in the global economy. Geographical Association. Volume 41. Number 2. 2016. Page 51.

32. Ibid.

33. Egypt Becomes A Member Of The BRICS New Development Bank. Silk Road Briefing. 2023. <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/03/23/egypt-becomes-a-member-of-the-brics-new-development-bank/>

34. The New Candidate Countries For BRICS Expansion. Silk Road Briefing. 2022. <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2022/11/09/the-new-candidate-countries-for-brics-expansion/>

35. Chris Devonshire-Ellis. The BRICS Has Overtaken The G7 In Global GDP. Silk Road Briefing. 2023. <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/03/27/the-brics-has-overtaken-the-g7-in-global-gdp/>

36. Alois Sheel. Multilateralism, the global economy and the rise of the G20. Indian Council of World Affairs. 2020. Page 21

contributor to NAB (after the U.S. and Japan) and was the biggest lender under the bilateral arrangements³⁷. The share of BRICS in total contributions to the United Nations system have also risen, from 5.6% to 18.4% between 2008 and 2020, even as those of the G7 have fallen from 69% to 52%³⁸. Since 2020, China is the second largest contributor to the UN, after the United States³⁹. Nevertheless, three observations must be made about the role of the BRICS and EMDEs. First, even if the power of the IMF and the World Bank are to be reduced with the emergence of new IFIs, the influence over the system of the U.S. and the U.S. dollar will remain substantial for the foreseeable future. Second, while new IFIs are generally regarded as an initiative of EMEs, China's key protagonist status cannot be disregarded. Finally, as a geopolitical actor, the Global South remains fragmented and the likelihood of the BRICS making up a strong, powerful grouping is not a foregone conclusion. In this context, the example of the BRICS is striking. Indeed, the strength of this alliance could easily be diminished by the diverse individual ambitions of parties. They are potentially fierce competitors in global trade, and their investment ambitions in new markets risk creating renewed rivalry between them.

III. The Reform of Multilateralism: What the Global South Can Do?

Calls for reformed multilateralism at the UN's 75th anniversary session in September 2020 stressed the need for the equal participation of member states in UN decision-making. Five years earlier, when adopting Agenda 2030, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) acknowledged the inter-linkage between peace, security, and development. With its universal scope, Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development has become the central focus of the UN for the foreseeable future.

Agenda 2030 requires a paradigm shift in the approach of UN member states to global issues, and underscores the imperative for an inclusive human-centric approach through the participation of multiple stakeholders in UN activities. This would enable the UN to pool resources through partnerships to meet the major challenges in all its four pillars: political, human rights, socio-economic development, and reforming the multilateral institutions.

1. The Political Pillar

World leaders gave a unanimous mandate fifteen years ago to "*early reform*" of the UNSC "*to make it more broadly representative, efficient and transparent and thus to further enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and implementation of its decisions*"⁴⁰. This rationale for UNSC reform is even more valid in 2023, as the P5 use their veto privilege to prevent the UNSC from resolving major crises confronting the world. The inadequacy of the UNSC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already claimed over 6.5 million lives worldwide, illustrates the problem starkly.

In this context, the great powers have a declared interest in reforming the UNSC to adapt to the new realities of the twenty-first century in the pursuit of its national interests, particularly the new threats against international peace and security. However, the five countries elected to serve on UN Security Council have remained inactive in the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) launched by

37. Ibid. Page 21.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. United Nations, UNGA Resolution A/RES/60/1 (paragraph 153), dated 16 September 2005. Accessed 10/01/2021 at https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_60_1.pdf

the UNGA in 2007. During 2014-15, the Chair of the IGN succeeded in getting 120 UNGA member states (including France and the UK, but not the United States, Russia, or China) to contribute to a working document for text-based negotiations on UNSC reform⁴¹.

The document, which includes the five areas⁴² identified by the UNGA for UNSC reform, was tabled by the African President of the General Assembly (PGA) and adopted by consensus on September 14, 2015⁴³. Subsequent attempts at text-based negotiations in the IGN have been systematically opposed by China, backed by a group of 12 countries called 'Uniting for Consensus'⁴⁴. Since 2016, successive PGAs have been persuaded to fragment the integrity of the IGN⁴⁵.

To reform the UNSC, the great powers must join with the pro-reform member states in the UNGA to overcome China's obstructionist tactics. This would mean negotiating an UNGA resolution in the IGN to be adopted by a two-thirds majority vote, rejecting China's untenable pre-condition of 'widest political consensus'. On the other hand, there have been regular calls to rethink the composition of the permanent members to reflect contemporary geopolitics, but those efforts have made little progress. Meanwhile, as gridlock in the Security Council hampers many diplomatic efforts, the UN General Assembly has taken on added significance as a sounding board for multilateral initiatives that lack great-power sponsors.

2. Peace Operations

In the absence of UNSC reform, the humanitarian toll exacted by violent conflicts and terrorism will continue to rise. Indeed, it is a priority for the UN to protect civilians, especially women and children, caught up in these conflicts. In West Asia and Africa, where the UNSC has made protection of civilians the core objective of its peacekeeping operations (PKOs), this represents a major challenge. For example, UN PKOs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), South Sudan (UNMISS), Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and Mali (MINUSMA), account for as much as \$4.5 billion of the UN's total annual peacekeeping budget of \$6.5 billion (to which the United States contributes 27.89%). More than 56,000 of the 80,000 UN peacekeepers worldwide deployed by the UNSC are in these four PKOs⁴⁶.

To make PKOs effective, the UNSC must become more inclusive in its decision-making. Elected UNSC members, as well as troop-contributing member states not represented in the Council, must be allowed equal participation in decisions on PKOs. India from the Global South, which has contributed more than 200,000 troops to 49 of the 71 UN PKOs since 1948, has the experience

41. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. "A Security Council for the 21st Century: Challenges and Prospects" by E. Courtenay Rattray, 20 July 2016. Accessed 10/01/2021 at https://idsa.in/issuebrief/a-security-council-for-the-21st-century_ecrattray_200716

42. UN General Assembly Decision 62/557 dated 15 September 2008. Accessed 10/01/2021 at p.106 of <https://daccess-ods.un.org/tmp/1048634.35029984.html>

43. United Nations, UN General Assembly, President of the 69th Session. Letter on "Intergovernmental Negotiation on Security Council Reform" (31 July 2015) and Annexes. Accessed 10/01/2021 at <https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2013/11/Security-Council-reform-IGN-31-July-2015.pdf>

44. United Nations, "'Uniting for Consensus' Group of States introduces text on Security Council reform to the General Assembly", GA/10371, 26 July 2005. Accessed 10/01/2021 at <https://press.un.org/en/2005/ga10371.doc.htm>

45. United Nations General Assembly, President of the 71st Session, Letter on "Security Council Reform plenary and Co-Chairs appointment", 26 October 2016. Accessed 10/01/2021 at <https://www.un.org/pga/71/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2015/08/Security-Council-Reform-plenary-and-Co-Chairs-Appointment-26-October-2016.pdf>

46. United Nations Peacekeeping, November 2021. at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/peacekeeping_missions_factsheet_246_nov2021_fr.pdf

to help the UNSC respond to this challenge⁴⁷. India's pioneering use of women UN peacekeepers in Liberia between 2007-2016⁴⁸, and subsequently in South Sudan to protect civilians and help rebuild national governance institutions, has demonstrated the value of a ground-up approach in implementing PKO mandates to protect civilians caught up in conflicts.

3. The Human Rights Pillar

In its human rights pillar, the UN's biggest challenge comes from the impact of rising inequality between and within its member states. This has been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war. If not addressed in an inclusive manner, this could jeopardize the incremental success of the UN in constructing a rule-of-law-based global framework to uphold human rights. Its successes include the removal of discrimination based on color between 1946-1994, outlawing mass-atrocity crimes like genocide, and asserting gender equality in 1948. As the rights of the first generation (civil and political rights) remain unfulfilled, the time has come to reform and empower the elected 47-member UN Human Rights Council (HRC) to respond effectively to this challenge and to bring in human-rights perspectives from the Global South. The work of the Council during the past fifteen years, especially through the Universal Periodic Review of all 193 UN member states, provides the basis for investing the HRC with primary responsibility for the UN's human rights pillar.

On the other hand, the challenges facing the UNSC and the HRC impact on the UN's pillar of socio-economic development, which constitutes the rights of the second generation. The UN's activities in this area are dominated by the process of implementation of Agenda 2030, with the eradication of poverty as its overarching goal. UN Specialized Agencies including WHO, FAO, ILO, UNESCO, and UNICEF, play major roles in the effort to implement Agenda 2030. Three aspects make Agenda 2030 transformational. First, it puts the onus on each UN member state to prioritize and implement the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) laid out in 2015. Second, it encourages multiple stakeholder participation in the resourcing and implementing of the SDGs. Third, it focuses on multilateral financial flows and technology transfers as the means to implement the SDGs.

In the longer term, implementing Agenda 2030 will require leadership in the UN system to keep the focus on the twin priorities of climate change, with reference to the environmental rights that constitute the rights of the third generation, and socio-economic progress. The international community must not only establish an International Climate Court to monitor nations' progress in accomplishing their climate goals, and to enforce the provisions of the Paris Climate Agreement and any agreement to come after it, but must also lead a holistic reform of the three multilateral institutions (the IMF, World Bank, and WTO) that have sustained the peace since the Second World War.

The UN needs to be ahead of the curve in responding to new as well as traditional challenges. This is especially true of the digital domain, or the rights of the fourth generation, which has been thrust into the UN's mainstream activities by the COVID-19 pandemic. A roadmap for a human-centric multiple stakeholder approach to securing and applying digital technologies drawn up by the UN Secretary-General must be integrated as a priority into the UNGA's agenda to bridge digital divides⁴⁹.

47. United Nations, "India: a long and deep tradition of contributing to UN peacekeeping". Accessed 10/01/2021 at. <https://news.un.org/en/gallery/541602>

48. UN News, "Hailed as 'role-models', all-female Indian police unit departs UN mission in Liberia". Accessed 10/01/2021 at. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/hailed-%E2%80%99role-models%E2%80%9999-all-female-indian-police-unit-departs-un-mission-liberia>

49. United Nations, Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, June 2020. Accessed 10/01/2021 at. <https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/>

4. Reforming the multilateral institutions

Democratization of multilateral organizations and institutions would pave the path to a renewed sense of ownership of multilateralism amongst the middle and rising powers. Unlike the superpowers, middle and rising powers have significantly more to gain from multilateralism, both in the spheres of global public goods and security. These powers need to be incentivized through a greater voice and responsibility on the global front. The current multilateral institutions and organizations were created against the backdrop of the Second World War, and still consist of structures and the division of powers that gives privileged powers to the Western states. This structure and Western dominance do not represent the strategic or economic realities of today, when middle powers including India, Japan, Brazil, Germany, and representatives of Africa such as Nigeria or South Africa, and the continent as a whole, are rapidly gaining a foothold in the global economy and security infrastructure. Multilateral organizations, financial institutions, and development banks need to resonate with these new realities and adapt accordingly.

The biggest and most influential middle powers—India, Japan, Brazil, and Germany, also the G4—have been leading this effort to bring about reforms, starting from the United Nations. The G4 with the support of various groups such as L-69 and others, are pushing for the expansion of the UN Security Council, including both permanent and non-permanent members. These countries believe that a top-down approach and parallel efforts across multiple global organizations and institutions is vital for a more inclusive and real composition of these organizations. But efforts to move beyond talk of Security Council reform seems to fall on deaf ears, as negotiations move extremely slowly through the UN bureaucracy. Aside from the expansion of the UNSC, several other reforms must be brought in, to make the belief of countries in this organization stronger.

One of the biggest threats to multilateral organizations today is the lack of trust in these organizations, and in the smaller, privileged ‘diplomatic circles’ and ‘groupings’ they consist of. This lack of transparency gives the countries a perception of ‘cloaks and daggers’, which could be easily resolved through reforms that bring transparency, accountability, and finally democracy into these structures. Countries need to be in decision-making positions in these organizations in order to trust them. Multilateral financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, which provides funding and support to multiple countries through loans and grants, severely need reforms to their voting-rights structures. Bretton Woods Institutions, such as the IMF, and closed groups such as the G7, need to overcome their Western alignments and look at the broader development and building of trust in the entire international community. While this would require Western powers to give up a share of their power, the long-term benefits will be a free and inclusive international order, which will benefit these countries.

However, successive votes on Ukraine in the UN General Assembly have shown there is a broad appetite for action, but also concern on the part of low- and middle-income countries that their problems are being ignored, and that the international system is being used, once again, to further the agenda of the wealthiest and most powerful nations. The latter need to put forward concrete plans to address other humanitarian crises, and demonstrate they are willing to give as well as take by backing efforts to make the UN and other institutions more equitable. In this context, G7 members should step up and increase their commitments to recycle the Special Drawing Rights issued by IMF in 2021 last year in ways that create fiscal space in heavily indebted countries⁵⁰. They should also support the issuance of a new tranche of SDRs. In the same vein, the G7 and G20 must work together to strengthen the Common Framework for Debt Treatment to bring transparency and meaningful debt relief from all creditors to low- and middle-income countries, such as Zambia,

50. Mark Malloch-Brown. Opinion: This is the moment to reset our multilateral institutions. Devex International Development. April 2022.

as well as lower-middle-income countries such as Ghana, which are falling deeper into distress⁵¹. Furthermore, high-income countries, including those in the G20, should contribute expeditiously to the new IMF Resilience and Sustainability Trust to help countries meet long-term structural economic challenges⁵². The World Bank should leverage its own balance sheet more effectively to borrow more, and in turn lend more to developing economies⁵³. The international financial architecture must be reformed by the inclusion of new mechanisms, such as a permanent Sovereign Debt Restructuring Mechanism, which would allow emerging economies to free up resources for development needs including health and education, as well as a broader shift away from creditor-dominated governance to a more inclusive system that prioritizes economic justice⁵⁴.

5. Towards a More Comprehensive Funding Approach

The current challenges highlight the limitations of assessing funding only through UN appeals. A more comprehensive understanding of funding provided by governments in crisis situations is needed. Ensuring coherence and avoiding further fragmentation of financing requires greater understanding of the different ways in which emerging economies already channel humanitarian support and assistance. Perhaps the system could be more effective if the focus were to shift to recognizing and legitimizing the prevailing multiple existing systems. This would involve accepting the multitude of humanitarian and development actors, and creating enabling environments in which different types of humanitarian donors and mechanisms are equally valued and used. However, it is to be measured, the current funding gap leaves affected populations lacking support. Their needs require sustained engagement and funding from humanitarian donor countries across the board, including Western countries, but also EMEs. The opportunity cost of not doing so is simply too great.

6. Multiregionalism as an alternative to the crisis of Multilateralism

Challenges facing multilateralism are increasingly becoming visible, from increasing failure to deal with security threats facing the world, to its inability to address global economic inequalities. It is this reality that has reinforced the essence of regional cooperation as a sub-arena of global multilateralism, particularly for developing nations which are grappling with developmental problems and require the cooperative advantage of multilateral platforms that are free from great power competition. Neo-functional perspectives consider the emergence of developmental regionalism as a response to the functional needs of states such as facilitating economic welfare through integration⁵⁵. Constructivists on the other hand approach developmental regionalism from a sense of shared identity, thus projecting it as, fundamentally, an ideational product that focuses on communal interests and collective security needs⁵⁶. The EU is a good example in this sense as it has developed its own Conflict Prevention and Peace Building Capacity and in the same has widened the scope of such actions extending crisis management beyond the military and security measures to development co-cooperation. In the same vein, ASEAN's ten member states form today an economic powerhouse. Indeed, if ASEAN were a single country, it would already be the

51. Malloch-Brown. Opinion: This is the moment to reset our multilateral institutions. Devex International Development. April 2022. <https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-this-is-the-moment-to-reset-our-multilateral-institutions-103120>

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Lee McGowan. Theorising European Integration: Revisiting Neo-Functionalism and Testing its Suitability for Explaining the Development of EC Competition Policy? European Integration Online Papers. Volume 11. Number 3. 2007. Pages 1 – 7.

56. Amitav Acharya. Comparative Regionalism: A Field Whose Time has Come? The International Spectator. Volume 47. Number 1, 2012. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03932729.2012.655004>

fifth-largest economy in the world, and it is projected to rank as the fourth-largest economy by 2050⁵⁷. In Africa as well, some regional organizations have gradually evolved from an economic role towards including security functions, with more or less success, as highlighted by Akin Iwilade and Johnson Uchechukwu Agbo who have explored the nexus between economic and security regionalism in West Africa, through the prism of ECOWAS regionalism and its expansion into the complex security frontier in the form of the ECOWAS Cease fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)⁵⁸.

CONCLUSION

The health crisis of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have shown the dramatic discrepancy between the scale of the current transnational challenges and the weaknesses of global governance. This gap was visible even before, but has become more evident since 2020. The global erosion of trust in the global institutions is the direct result of non-delivery on the most crucial challenges that face humanity, including inequality, poverty, and climate change. But this unprecedented crisis could provide an opportunity for a large-scale mobilization of the North and the Global South for a new multilateralism. In this context, a precondition of such a 'new multilateralism' is realistic reform of the current institutional framework and governance. As Adam Lupel said: *"The crisis of multilateralism is not about decay. It is about transformation, complexity, competition, and uncertainty. The world has changed, and the system is struggling to adapt"*⁵⁹.

The Global South, particularly through South-South cooperation and North-South cooperation, can play a vital role in reinvigorating multilateralism. Beyond its horizontal engagements, the Global South has already begun supporting and enriching processes, institutions, and norm-building at the global level. However, changing the superstructures that have discriminated against many developing countries will require a strategy that involves prioritization, coalition-building, and coordination. One of the fundamental objectives would be to amend the provisions of the UN Charter regulating the three major pillars of the UN's activities, so that the UN can be prepared better to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The danger, ultimately, is that without shared normative ground for collaboration and collective action, going beyond mere pragmatic alliances, global governance risks relapsing into a Hobbesian state of nature.

57. L'ASEAN devrait rester l'un des moteurs de la croissance mondiale en 2023. Ministère français de l'Économie, des Finances et de la souveraineté industrielle et numérique – Direction générale du Trésor. 2022. <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Articles/2023/02/24/l-asean-devrait-rester-l-un-des-moteurs-de-la-croissance-mondiale-en-2023>

58. Akin Iwilade and Johnson Uchechukwu Agbo. ECOWAS and the Regulation of Regional Peace and Security in West Africa. *Democracy and Security*. Volume 8. Number 4. 2012. Pages 358-373.

59. Adam Lupel. The Multilateralism Index: Measuring Transformation in a Time of Crisis and Uncertainty. International Peace Institute – Global Observatory. 2023. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/01/the-multilateralism-index-measuring-transformation-in-a-time-of-crisis-and-uncertainty>

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