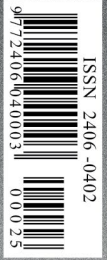


WINTER 2024 / ISSUE NO.25

\$ 12.00 | € 8.50 | 1000 RSD

HORIZONS

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



THE AGE OF MINILATERALISM



*Navigating a
Fragmented World*



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INTERNATIONAL MULTILATERALISM IN A NON-HEGEMONIC WORLD

Andrey Kortunov

THE term “multilateralism” is not one of the most developed notions in the Russian international relations theory. For a long time, this term has remained in the shadow of the much more popular term “multipolarity,” as well as “polycentrism,” which is gradually replacing “multipolarity.” Sometimes, it seems that “multilateralism” and “multipolarity” are used in Russian academic and political discourse as synonyms that reflect the long-term processes of democratization of the international system after the end of the era of the “unipolar world” of the beginning of the twenty-first century.

However, multipolarity is certainly not the same as multilateralism. While the former fixes the presence of pluralism in the distribution of power in an

international system, where there are three or more independent decision-making centers, the latter describes one of the options for the interaction of these centers with each other. Without multipolarity (polycentrism) at least in its embryonic state, there can be no meaningful multilateralism, since in a unipolar or bipolar system there are simply not enough actors for a full-fledged multilateral interaction.

But multipolarity, even if “mature,” does not necessarily include multilateralism, since relations within a multipolar system can theoretically be reduced to a set of bilateral ties between individual centers of power or, in general, to the predominantly unilateral actions of these centers. Supporters of “political realism” refer to multipolarity,

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The UN as we know it: still relevant in a polycentric world?

not multilateralism when they compare world politics to a chaotic collision of balls on a billiard table: there can be a lot of balls on that table, but they interact with each other mainly in bilateral and unilateral formats, without creating a stable multilateral system. If the coordination of the actions of individual authors does occur, then it is not horizontal, but vertical in nature—weak international actors follow foreign policy priorities of their stronger patrons. Multilateralism sets much higher standards for international behavior than multipolarity; it places more emphasis on cooperation between states than on competition.

With some reservations, it is fair to note that multipolarity reflects a certain objective balance of power between the main participants in world politics, while multilateralism fixes their subjective readiness to interact with each other in a certain regime and according to certain rules. In other words, in international relations theory, multipolarity refers to basic foundation, and multilateralism should be attributed to political superstructure. Accordingly, in international practice, multilateralism looks less stable and more flexible phenomenon than multipolarity. For example, U.S. President Joe Biden, elected in November 2020, is not able

to change the general movement of the world towards multipolarity, but he is quite capable of giving an additional impetus to international multilateralism by abandoning the unilateral actions of his predecessor.

It is conceivable that fostering multilateral negotiating practices and institutions, under certain conditions, cannot only go in line with the processes of forming a “mature” multipolarity, but also overtake these processes, reducing the risks associated with the transition of that international system to a polycentric world. Still, a significant lag in multilateral practices from the development of multipolarity will inevitably increase these risks, as well as a variety of transit costs. Consequently, the fundamentally important task of international players—at least in theory—should be to keep the development of multilateralism ahead the transition of the international system to multipolarity, but also not to allow the excessive separation of advanced multilateralism from the still unformed multipolarity.

MULTILATERALISM: OLD AND NEW

Today, the once clear horizons of international multilateralism are clouded. Many authors deny any prospects for meaningful multilateralism in

the future world order, arguing that this world order will inevitably be based on the traditionally understood balance of power of the great powers. But let’s not forget that what we are witnessing today is a crisis of one specific format of

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multilateralism, namely, the format that was historically developed in the middle of the twentieth century and served a very peculiar and unique model of international relations. More precisely, it sequentially served two models: the bipolar model until the beginning of the 1990s and the unipolar world that replaced it

and existed for nearly two decades.

Since these two models, with relatively minor modifications, existed together for three-quarters of a century, it should come as no surprise that they look somewhat outdated today. Moreover, in the conditions of a bipolar and unipolar world, multilateralism inevitably turned out to be seriously deformed and not quite full-fledged. Let us outline some of the features of the old format of multilateralism, which today appears the most archaic.

First, the old multilateralism was based on hegemony and hierarchy. The post-World War II world order was established by a very small

group of great powers and reflected primarily their interests and aspirations. The number of active subjects of world politics also remained quite small until the 1960s, and it was understandable for hierarchical relations to have developed between these subjects and the associated objects of confrontation between the great powers. The United States created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a multilateral defense alliance, but it never occurred to anyone to challenge the American leadership in this alliance, insisting on the actual, and not only formal, equality of the participants. The security interests of the United States and the security interests of its European allies were not represented equally in NATO: it was the territory of Europe, not the United States, that American strategists considered to be the main theater in the event of a military clash between the West and the Soviet Union.

Soviet hegemony in the Warsaw Pact (as well as in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance—Comecon) would have been even more explicit and indisputable—with the WP being an even more “pseudo-multilateral” structure than NATO. The asymmetry of military, economic, and other capabilities within the Soviet bloc was even greater than within the American bloc. History has shown that in a full-fledged bipolar system, multilateralism always remains relative and incomplete; it may be more

correct to speak of the existence of quasi-multilateralism or embryonic multilateralism in this system, which has only the potential to grow over time into mature multilateralism. It is no coincidence that the first examples of mature multilateralism—like the European Community or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—arose in the economic sphere, where the post-war Soviet-American bipolarity was the first to undergo noticeable erosion.

Moreover, the old multilateralism rested on a rigid institutional framework. It assumed a large number of well-developed organizational structures with multilevel bureaucratic apparatuses, complex decisionmaking mechanisms, systems of a wide variety of explicit and implicit linkages that allow participants to balance their concessions in some areas with compensation in other areas. Such a device seemed to be an ideal solution in the conditions of a relatively static system of world politics when systemic shifts occurred slowly and had limited influence on the global balance of power as a whole. One can question the effectiveness of the Cold War-era multilateral institutions, but at least they supported the stability of the existing international political system. Periodic corrections of the global balance of power took place in the format of local wars (Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan) and did not affect the foundations of the existing system.

The old multilateralism of the second half of the twentieth century appealed to values in one way or another. In a world divided into two opposing (ideological) blocs, most of the multilateral mechanisms and procedures assumed a unity of values between the members of each of the blocs. In most cases, the picture of the world was built as a confrontation between “us” and “them,” and multilateralism within the groups of “us” (NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the European Union and Comecon) was only in very rare cases complemented by multilateralism between “us” and “them” (the system of UN bodies, multilateral arms control treaties, the Helsinki Final Act).

Even the notion of “global public goods” as such, in a divided world, was spread only to very narrow spheres of international relations. Of course, the main sources and prime guardians of values of opposing systems were the world hegemon—the Soviet Union and the United States. The formation of genuine global multilateralism was postponed for the future, it was considered possible only after the complete and final victory of one system of values over the other.

Since the two socio-economic systems developed in isolation from each other, multilateralism in the bipolar world was reduced mainly to the sphere of security, or rather to attempts to prevent nuclear war, the prolifera-

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tion of nuclear weapons, and a major military conflict using conventional weapons in Europe. To some extent, multilateralism also affected the problems of preventing regional crises outside Europe, although bilateral Soviet-American relations always played a major role here. But in the sphere of development, multilateralism was almost not manifested in any way—the countries of the so-called “Eastern

bloc” did not participate in the implementation of Western economic and financial projects. Western and Eastern programs of assistance to the developing world were not mutually complementary, but rather competitive.

In addition, the old multilateralism naturally perceived only sovereign states as full-fledged subjects of world politics. Some non-state actors (primarily Western transnational corporations) from time to time tried to challenge states as monopolists in multilateral

arrangements, but with very limited success. Nation-states remained exclusive participants in the most important multilateral institutions and regimes, while non-state actors (the private sector, civil society, educational institutions, etc.) were content with being observers and/or executors of relevant decisions of “their” state.

After the end of the Cold War, the triumphant West tried to extend “its” Cold War multilateralism to the rest of the world in order to unite humanity under the banner of political liberalism. In some areas, such as international trade, this has almost succeeded: the European Union has made particularly impressive progress under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and, more recently, within the World Trade Organization (WTO).

But already in the financial sphere, internal European multilateralism developed more difficult and contradictory. Some EU countries have not entered the “eurozone” created by Brussels, thereby significantly weakening the position of the European currency in world financial markets. The EU has also failed to take full advantage of its positions in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), as it has often failed to achieve a consolidated European position even on the most important issues

of the functioning of these institutions. The situation was even worse with external multilateralism, that is, with attempts to extend European models of multilateralism to the international system as a whole. For example, numerous attempts by Brussels to create a universal multilateral regime of foreign direct investment were unsuccessful. As a result, the EU had to sign many bilateral agreements with its partners.

During the last decade of the twentieth century, many multilateral institutions and regimes were created. Many spheres of public life that were previously under the exclusive jurisdiction of nation-states fell under multilateral control. The practice of multilateral peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN has developed greatly, the number of victims of armed conflicts has decreased, and the indicators of human development (Human Development Index) and social equality (Gini Index) have improved on average globally. However, these positive trends were not typical for all regions of the world; for example, in the post-Soviet space and the Western Balkans, the opposite trends were observed.

Moreover, it soon became clear that the multilateralism of the old format was generally ill-suited to the new reality. American hegemony demonstrated its fragility; a historically short “unipolar moment” turned into an

imperial overstrain and a subsequent geopolitical retreat of the United States. The “old” multilateral institutions of the West have discovered their geographical and functional limits. Both NATO and the EU face numerous challenges not only to their effectiveness but also to their unity. Political liberalism has not been able to transform itself into a universal system of values that all international players would like to practice. As each year went on, nation-states proved less and less capable of successfully solving global problems without active interaction with a variety of non-state actors in international relations. There was talk of a “crisis of multilateralism” and the inevitability of the international system returning to some variant of the traditional balance of power.

The international legitimacy of the old Western multilateralism has been undermined simultaneously from two sides. The mechanical expansion of the geography and functionality of Western multilateral institutions caused discontent and resistance of those players who remained outside the framework of these institutions and could not influence their decisions. For example,

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the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in the spring and summer of 1999, carried out without any authorization of the UN Security Council or at least a decision of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), caused discontent in Russia, China, and many other countries. At the same time, there were numerous examples of how Western multilateral institutions—NATO, the EU, the IMF, the IBRD, and others—were unable to effectively solve the tasks that they themselves set for failure. The institutional conservatism of many of these institutions, bureaucratic inertia, and adherence to the principle of the “lowest common denominator” have contributed to the discrediting of old multilateralism in the international community, including in western countries themselves.

On the other hand, in the three decades since the Cold War, humanity has come up with a viable, principled alternative to multilateralism. It seems highly doubtful that in the future it will be possible to reach an acceptable level of global governance, using exclusively unilateral and bilateral instruments of foreign policy. The rejection of multilateralism would make it impossible

to agree on universal rules of the game even in those spheres of global politics where the tasks of such coordination are not burdened with the challenges of geopolitical confrontation, relatively stable unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar international systems, but a general disorder characterized by a lack of agreed rules, procedures, and hierarchies (barring the unlikely prospect of a resurgence of traditional empires as essential elements of the new world order).

Such an unmanageable world in an era of resource scarcity, rapid climate change, unprecedented cross-border migration flows, and the uncontrolled development of new technologies cannot exist for long. Proponents of a multipolar world cannot fail to take into account that a mere increase in the number of active actors in world politics (multipolarity without multilateralism) does not bring the world any closer to solving common problems. Quite the contrary. Imagine, for example, that at some point in the future India, Brazil, or Japan become permanent members of the UN Security Council. In practice, this means that the task of reaching consensus in the Security Council will be even more

difficult than today. The same applies to regional organizations. For example, the entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) of India and Pakistan as full members without fundamentally changing the nature of relations between these two countries has given rise to many problems in terms of the effectiveness of this organization.

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order to avoid sliding into ungovernability and chaos, it is necessary that the expansion of the spectrum and the increase in the number of participants in world politics be accompanied by an increase in the density of the existing network of multilateral international agreements, regimes, and organizations. It is this network that ultimately creates the regulatory framework, control tools, and horizontal connections that prevent global politics from falling into archaicism. Multilateral organizations also largely form what can be conditionally designated as the “political credit

history” of individual states (as well as non-state participants in world politics)—the reputation of reliable or unreliable partners and allies. Other mechanisms are less effective at this task.

In principle, most modern politicians and experts in one way or another recognize the main advantage of multilateral diplomacy, namely, its inclusive nature. Only multilateralism makes it possible to form the broad coalitions necessary to solve complex problems affecting the interests of more than two international players. Moreover, multilateralism in many cases enhances the international legitimacy and sustainability of agreements reached.

LEGITIMACY AND MULTILATERALISM

The demonstrative rejection of multilateralism in some cases can lead to very seriously negative consequences. Recall that in the autumn of 2013, Brussels rejected the proposal of Ukrainian President V. Yanukovich to hold trilateral negotiations between the EU, Ukraine, and Russia regarding the possible consequences of the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and EU for Ukrainian-Russian economic cooperation. After a sharp aggravation of the situation in Ukraine and around it, the EU still had to go to trilateral negotiations, which ended in a deal to postpone the entry into force of the agreement on

the creation of a EU-Ukraine free trade zone until December 31st, 2015.

Of course, additional legitimacy arises in situations where the formed multilateral coalitions are sufficiently representative, that is, when the positions and interests of all significant players are represented in the work on solving the problem. In that sense, it is interesting to compare multilateral international operations under the auspices of the United States in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). In both cases, the main organizer of the military interventions was Washington. However, there was a broad international consensus on the operation in Afghanistan, which made it possible to adopt a corresponding UN Security Council resolution and ensure the legitimacy of a foreign military presence in this country. In the case of Iraq, a number of leading powers (including Russia, France, and Germany) raised serious objections, which prevented the Bush administration from using either the UN Security Council or even NATO to legitimize the operation.

On the other hand, politicians cannot fail to realize that the specific features of multilateral diplomacy are in some cases its weak point. Multilateral negotiations can be difficult to focus the agenda, as each participant has its own priorities. Multilateral negotiations tend to require more time and

resources than bilateral negotiations, let alone unilateral actions. Procedural issues in a multilateral format are also much more difficult to agree on than in a bilateral one. In cases where multilateral coalitions are formed by joining members to an unconditional leader or even to a group of leaders, such coalitions are difficult to categorize as full-fledged multilateral structures.

Let us add to this that often the decisions taken as a result of multilateral negotiations turn out to be half-hearted, fuzzy and declarative, since the negotiators have to focus on the search for the lowest common denominator that allows maintaining the support of the maximum number of contracting parties. Sometimes multilateral negotiations can be blocked by any of the participants under any, even the most far-fetched pretext. A textbook example is the September 2020 discussion in the European Union on sanctions against Belarus, when the decision was blocked by the representatives of Cyprus, who linked sanctions against Minsk with sanctions against Ankara and made their agreement on the “Belarusian issue” dependent on measures that would force Turkey to stop exploration and production of gas in the Mediterranean Sea.

As a general rule, it can be assumed that multilateral and representative formats have no alternative when it comes to fundamental systemic problems of world politics or economics.

In most cases, there is an inversely proportional relationship between legitimacy and efficiency—high legitimacy is achieved through low efficiency and vice versa. The same relationship can usually be traced between the timing of reaching agreements and the sustainability of the latter: agreements concluded in a fire order tend to be less stable and reliable compared to agreements that have resulted from lengthy negotiations.

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multilateral and representative formats have no alternative when it comes to fundamental systemic problems of world politics or economics. However, when it comes to the need to respond quickly to a sudden problem, the actions of small groups of players who are more interested in solving the problem may be more effective. For example, the achievement of an agreement on the cessation of hostilities in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh in November 2020 was reached in a trilateral Russian-Armenian-Azerbaijani format, bypassing the effectively paralyzed OSCE Minsk Group. Of course, there is a part of legitimacy to pay for efficiency and efficacy. The speed and efficiency of closed formats for solving specific problems can turn into difficulties at a time when

longer-term or more complex, strategic issues come to replace these tasks.

Multilateralism is associated with many other problems and difficulties. For example, it is not entirely clear how it is “fair” to divide between all participants in multilateral negotiations the areas of responsibility and burden associated with the implementation of the agreements reached—especially when the agreements involve significant costs, and their participants are not comparable in their resource capabilities. How fair are the current levels of states’ contributions to the UN budget or the extent of their participation in international peacekeeping? How sufficient or insufficient was the contribution of the developed North to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in the developing South? To what extent are the commitments of individual states to reduce carbon dioxide emissions under the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement justified? There are no definitive answers to any of these and similar questions; any answer will in one way or another be subjective to criticism.

Nor is it easy to decide what measures should be taken against those

who approach multilateral agreements selectively or even sabotage their implementation. Multilateralism à la carte is becoming a serious problem of world politics and economics, contributing to the growth of instability and the decline in the quality of global governance. Thus, in cases where their serious economic interests are threatened, states that advocate freedom of global trade often switch to positions of outright protectionism, accusing their competitors of dumping, manipulation of exchange rates, etc.

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In multilateral negotiations, the problem of trust among the participants is more acute than in bilateral negotiations, since in the first case there is always a fear of behind-the-scenes coordination of negotiating positions by separate groups of participants in order for all other participants to face a united front of opponents who consistently promote their group interests. This problem is particularly acute when a new actor is included in an already established multilateral structure that differs significantly from its other members in one way or another.

Such a problem has arisen, for example, in the work of the NATO-Russia Council, established in May 2002 at the

Rome Summit between the member States of the North Atlantic Alliance and Russia. The Russian side proceeded from the premise that the Council would become a full-fledged multilateral organization, where each participant would act in its individual capacity. Western countries have turned the Council into a mechanism for bilateral cooperation between NATO and Russia, de facto abandoning the principle of multilateralism. This feature of the Western approach has played a significant role in reducing Russian interest in this structure.

Approximately the same situation eventually arose within the framework of the “Group of Eight” after Russia’s entry. On many fundamentally important issues, Moscow was forced to confront the united coalition of the other seven members of the G8. The transformation of a formally multilateral format into a bilateral one has significantly reduced the effectiveness of this negotiation platform both for Russia and, ultimately, for its Western partners. Later, the Group of Seven faced a similar issue, when its meetings began to be reduced to the confrontation of the United States under Donald Trump with all other participants.

The list of weaknesses of multilateral formats can be continued. However, in our view, none of them is fatal to the future of these formats. In any case, any

proposed alternatives (unilateral and bilateral formats) are burdened with no smaller number of vulnerabilities and imperfections. The question is about the conditions and criteria for effective multilateralism, about those models of multilateralism that could maximize its comparative advantages and minimize its organic shortcomings.

Taking into account the above problems, several preconditions can be formulated, the fulfillment of which allows us to count on the success of multilateral negotiating and institutional formats. These conditions relate mainly to the approaches and expectations of negotiators and relevant multilateral regimes and institutions. Of course, they are of a very general nature and need to be specified in relation to individual dimensions of international life.

First, multilateral negotiators should be interested in achieving sustainable results (in solving the problem), and not in a diplomatic “victory” over partners in the form of securing certain tactical or strategic advantages. A diplomatic “victory” of this kind can at some stage undermine the agreement and result in a final defeat. Naturally, the benefits of one or another option of “solving the problem” can be distributed differently among the parties to the agreement, but the fundamental interest in the solution should be the main incentive for all participants

in multilateral formats. If in bilateral formats negotiations on the principle of a “zero-sum game” are in principle possible, albeit undesirable, then in multilateral formats it is impossible to identify a “zero amount” due to the very fact of the presence of a number of participants exceeding two. The binary negotiating system in a multilateral context does not work, if only the negotiators are not grouped into two opposing coalitions.

Second, the participants should be focused on finding a compromise, including their own concessions. Practice shows that the violation of a reasonable balance between the concessions of the participants inevitably undermines the stability of the agreement, even when such a violation is tactically justified. A certain asymmetry in the scale of concessions between participants is not only possible, but also almost inevitable. The more participants, the greater the asymmetry. But such an asymmetry should be conscious and not perceived as a defeat by those who at the moment gave more than they received. We emphasize that, unlike the classical postulates of “political realism”, multilateralism involves achieving not only a stable balance of power, but a balance of interests

of participants belonging to different weight categories in world politics.

Third, negotiators should proceed from the principle of “diffuse reciprocity,” that is, be ready in difficult situations to demonstrate solidarity with partners, if necessary, sacrificing their immediate interests for the sake of a longer-term gain. “Diffusion” (uncertainty) in this case means that, in the exercise of its goodwill, a multilateral negotiator is unable to determine exactly when and in what form it will receive adequate “compensation” from its negotiating partners.

Nevertheless, he can be sure that such a “compensation” will follow one way or another. Accordingly, multilateral arrangements should be long-term and stable so that the prospects for “compensation” in the future are perceived as sufficiently realistic.

Fourth, negotiators must have “internal legitimacy”—that is, be able to commit themselves on behalf of those they represent. Accordingly, only strong leaders with broad political support in their own countries are able to act as successful negotiators. In both Western liberal and Eastern authoritarian political systems, problems can arise with

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“internal legitimacy.” In the first case, any shift in the internal political balance of power calls into question the consistency of foreign policy, in the second, the multilateral agreements reached look like those imposed on society by autocrat leaders. However, “internal legitimacy” is equally necessary for bilateral negotiation formats.

Fifth, from the outset, mechanisms for the enforcement of the agreements reached should be defined. If these mechanisms are not in place, multilateral negotiations will be useless at best and even harmful at worst, serving as a smokescreen masking the unilateral actions of certain players. The problem of enforcement remains one of the most difficult in multilateral agreements. As a rule, the problems of verifying the implementation of concluded agreements in multilateral formats are more difficult to solve than in bilateral ones. In the first case, it is necessary to create special international organizations that have a significant degree of autonomy in relation to individual parties to the agreements; in the second case, such a need does not arise.

Suffice it to compare, for example, the multilateral Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the U.S.-Russian New START. To control the activities related to the destruction of chemical weapons, it was necessary to create a special Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), to monitor the implementation of START-3, bilateral mechanisms and procedures were enough. Once established and operational, the OPCW found itself at the center of a bitter political conflict, especially after it was launched in June 2018. At a special session of the Conference of the Participating Countries, a British project was adopted to expand the mandate of the Organization, giving it the right to identify those responsible for chemical attacks.

It is worth noting that the success of multilateral diplomacy paradoxically depends on the willingness of the participants to commit unilateral and bilateral actions. Practice shows that behind any success of multilateral efforts there is always a leader or a group of leaders who take the initiative in determining the agenda and priority of the issues

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under consideration, in maintaining the schedules of the negotiation process, acting as a mediator in reaching compromises. The multilateral format does not cancel and does not replace the bilateral format but is a necessary addition or prerequisite of the latter. An example of this combination is the bilateral German-French negotiations on the alliance for multilateralism.

MULTILATERALISM AND GLOBALIZATION

The current crisis of multilateralism is largely a reflection of the broader crisis of globalization. At the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, humanity is going through a painful period of deglobalization, affecting all participants in world politics together, and each of them individually. And this is not limited to the immediate social or economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Alarming failures in the work of the usual mechanisms for the growth of interconnectedness and interdependence of countries and peoples did not begin yesterday, and they will not end tomorrow. We are witnessing a global response to the multiple costs of the

model of globalization that took shape in the world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Accordingly, multilateralism as one of the formats in which global processes are implemented is also under attack.

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Theoretically, globalization does not necessarily have to be implemented in a multi-sided format: an increase in the level of connectivity and interdependence of states and societies can go through an increase in the density of the network of bilateral agreements of various kinds. On the other hand, the multilateralism format does not exist only at the global level. In the context of deglobalization, regional multilateralism is of particular impor-

tance. As an illustration of the success of regional multilateralism, we can refer to the agreement signed at the end of 2020 to establish a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in Asia. On the European continent, multilateralism remains the fundamental principle of EU institutions.

But the crisis of multilateralism at the global level inevitably has a significant negative impact on many regional

multilateral projects, limiting the number of their participants and the depth of cooperation between them. India refused to participate in the RCEP at the last moment, and within the EU, the principles of multilateralism are disputed by nationalist-minded populist leaders. The aggravation of the geopolitical confrontation between the great powers leads, among other things, to attempts on their part to prevent the success of the integration projects of their competitors—the United States is actively opposing the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, the EU is not ready to help the formation and development of the Eurasian Economic Union, etc.

Assuming that multilateralism in today's world is closely linked to globalization, its future too will depend largely on the future of globalization. One can debate at length about the extent to which deglobalization was inevitable and, if not, who exactly is responsible for it. In any case, the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and the post-crisis period of 2010-2013 have shown that the linear, especially the exponential development of globalization, can still be forgotten. In today's world, centrifugal processes have already accumulated enormous inertia, and it

would be naïve to expect that one, even very important event—like Joe Biden taking the presidency—can stop them, and even more so reverse them. The ongoing deglobalization is serious and long-lasting.

Accordingly, multilateralism will also face great challenges and serious opposition in the coming years. One can

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reasonably assume that in the context of deglobalization, multilateral regimes and formats will very often lose out to available unilateral or bilateral alternatives. The increased volatility of world politics and the economy is also in the same direction, hinder-

ing long-term investment in multilateral structures and regimes. Figuratively speaking, unilateral steps in the face of increased volatility often look like successful speculation, while multilateral efforts are presented as long-term investments with not always clear prospects. The increase in the level of international tension, the aggravation of the geopolitical confrontation between the great powers makes it extremely difficult to implement the principle of “diffuse reciprocity” both at the global and regional levels, encouraging transactional, situational approaches. The Biden administration's attempts to revive multilateralism against American

allies often boil down to restoring the transatlantic pseudo-multilateralism that characterized the Cold War period.

However, once the current crisis of globalization is overcome, the demand

for multilateralism is likely to increase again. Albeit slowly stumbling, with stops and even retreats, humanity is moving forward along the thorny path to future unity. If we proceed from the experience of the already distant crisis of 2008-2009 and assume that we are ap-

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proaching the lowest point of the new “deglobalization stage” of the globalization cycle, then we can relatively confidently predict the next change in the vector of world development by the middle of this decade. If we make an additional adjustment for the more complex nature of the global cataclysms that occurred in 2020 and 2021, then the moment the vector changes will have to be shifted at least for another two to three years into the future, towards the end of the third decade of the twenty-first century.

In this direction, the world is pushed by two powerful factors, which over the years are only becoming stronger, no matter what the current triumphant anti-globalists claim. First, the pressure

of common problems is growing on everyone in the world—from climate change to the threats of new pandemics, which urgently require joining global efforts in the interest of common survival. Some global challenges—ranging from environmental disaster and the uncontrolled development of new technologies to the threat of global nuclear war—call into question the continued existence of humanity. The instinct of self-preservation of the human population must manifest itself one way or another.

Many of these challenges place extremely high demands on the quality of global governance, including not only cooperation between states, but also the involvement of non-state actors—private business, international organizations, and civil society. Constructive interaction between even such large states as China and the United States will not in itself be sufficient to solve problems. Within the framework of the current predominantly Westphalian international system, it is not possible to ensure a new quality of global governance. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the existence of broad public demand for reforms not only of global health, but also of global models of socio-economic development.

Secondly, technological progress is accelerating, creating new opportunities for remote communications of various kinds from year to year. The physical space and resource potential of the planet are shrinking, the possibilities for geographically distributed models of work, study and socialization are expanding, and Napoleon’s old aphorism about geography as destiny is increasingly losing its former axiomativity. Paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic has become an additional catalyst for the unification of humankind by accelerating the develop-

Once the current crisis of globalization is overcome, the demand for multilateralism is likely to increase again. Albeit slowly stumbling, with stops and even retreats, humanity is moving forward along the thorny path to future unity.

ment and, especially, the diffusion of new information and communication technologies, which in turn helped accelerate the movement towards global markets for labor, education, science, and entertainment. Recalling Thomas Friedman’s famous turn-of-the-century bestseller *The World is Flat* (2005), the world is emerging from the pandemic as a whole lot flatter than it was before it.

The processes of deglobalization taking place in the world today cannot be stopped. And in some ways, they have even accelerated the tendency towards the diffusion of power in world politics, which will inevitably continue. Consolidating peace based on a revitalization of

the unipolar or even rigid bipolar system seems unlikely. Nation-states will remain the main players in world politics, and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity preserved—at least formally. At the same time, the number and international activity of non-state actors will continue to grow, undermining the hierarchy in world politics and the economy. With traditional formats of international cooperation increasingly demonstrating low efficiency, the need for new complex multilateral and multi-level formats will increase. In international relations, many variants

of multilateral constructions arise, which even theoretically did not exist throughout the previous history of mankind.

It can be assumed that humanity has about five to six years, not only to prepare a new historical cycle of globalization, but also to establish new algorithms for multilateral interaction that could underlie the coming globalization cycle. This will require, in particular, a radical renewal of political elites in most countries of the world, learning how to successfully resist the right, and indeed left-wing populists, and prevent a world war, a worldwide environmental catastrophe, a new catastrophic pandemic, or other unfortunate delays

in transition to these algorithms.

Let us not forget that the main issues of the new agenda will be fundamentally different not only from current issues, but also from the issues of the era of “Globalization 1.0.” For example, if the victorious march of globalization at the beginning of the century was marked by the strengthening of the collective East and weakening of the collective West, then the fundamental issue of “Globalization 2.0” will be the question of large-scale redistribution of resources between the North and the South in favor of the latter.

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If the “old” globalization was associated with an acceleration of economic growth and with an increase in personal and public consumption, then in the course of the “new” globalization, most likely, the main criterion for success will be to ensure a transition to sustainable development models—both at the national and global levels.

If the global processes of the turn of the century reflected the universal public demand for freedom, then in the second quarter of the century we are likely to see a more articulated and

more persistent demand for justice.

Apparently, many of the usual algorithms of foreign policy activities will also change. The main international organizations, hopefully, by the end of the

2020s and early 2030s will still be preserved. But a significant part of international activity will be bubbling not around or within rigid bureaucratic institutions, but around specific problems. Political, social, environmental, and others. To solve these specific problems, mobile situational coalitions of participants will be formed—and not only from among the nation-

states, but also with the involvement of the private sector, civil society institutions, and other participants in international life. The old hierarchies will gradually lose their meaning, the terms “superpower” and even “great power” will increasingly be perceived as archaic and explaining little in modern life.

TOWARD A NEW WORLD ORDER

The urgent task of the present moment is not to resurrect the old format of multilateralism of the Cold War era or the period of the unipolar world, but to invent a new format by adapting its general principles to

a changing reality. First, state leaders must be prepared to promote multilateralism without counting on the leadership of a multilateralist hegemon. It would be wonderful if the United States again became an active supporter of

multilateralism. In fact, we should all welcome Washington’s decisions to return to the World Health Organization and the Paris climate accords. Nevertheless, one of the lessons of the Trump Administration is that we no longer have the right to consider unconditional American support for multilateralism as something permanent. A critical attitude toward inter-

national multilateralism remains an important part of American political culture, and will continue as such for the foreseeable future, meaning that some multilateral structures will have to be built without Washington’s active involvement.

Second, diplomats and experts must learn to use multilateral formats in the face of the relative weakness of international organizations and the erosion of international hierarchies. There is a widespread “institutional fatigue” in the world that is unlikely to disappear in the near future. Old unions lose their

former cohesion, and new ones often remain unions only on paper. Therefore, the realism of proposals in the revival of multilateralism using formats similar to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in the first half of the

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1970s is questionable. Flexible multilateral regimes have more promise than rigid multilateral organizations. Voluntary commitments by States may become more practical than traditional legally binding international agreements requiring lengthy harmonization and ratification procedures.

The selective use of multilateralism, with a focus on the least toxic dimensions of international engagement, would facilitate agreements, but at the same time create additional challenges. Given the deep interdependence of individual dimensions of world politics and economics, it is easy to predict that agreements in one area will inevitably affect the relations of the parties to such agreements in other spheres. For example, any multilateral climate-related agreements will affect global trade regimes in one way or another through the imposition of borderline carbon taxes. In turn, multilateral trade agreements will influence international information transfer regimes

through the harmonization of common digital trade standards. It is likely that any future multilateral arrangements relating to international trade will have to automatically include environmental protection, social protection of the labor force, and foreign direct investment. Otherwise, in addition to unilateral taxes, the world will face similar environmental social taxes, which will inevitably become a serious obstacle to the development of world trade.

Linking security and development issues will be even more challenging. At the moment, the two main areas of multilateralism are loosely linked, which reduces the effectiveness of work in both areas. Closer interaction between major multilateral mechanisms, such as the UN Security Council and the G20, is likely to be required to achieve synergies in conflict resolution and in ensuring regional and global stability. Considering and making sense of the mutual influences of different multilateral regimes with different sets of actors will be an extremely difficult task.

Third, a new type of multilateralism should not see common values as a *sine qua non* for reaching

agreements. A necessary and sufficient condition is only the coincidence of interests. The old mantra that multilateralism and the liberal world order as a whole are nothing more than derivatives of political liberalism as

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the dominant ideology of major international players should be rejected as irrelevant and impractical. The multilateralism of the twenty-first century can only become universal if it is suitable for a world of value pluralism. At the same time, multilateralism should become a tool for overcoming the value conflicts that exist in the modern world. In other words, common values should not be the starting point in moving towards multilateralism, but the end point to which multilateralism can eventually lead.

Since geopolitical confrontation will continue for a very long time, new formats of multilateralism should be based on the principle of “competitive cooperation” or “competitive multilateralism.” In other words, relations dominated by competition and even confrontation between powers, as well as those between non-state actors in global politics, should not prevent them from working together. Developing specific parameters and

adopting the practice of “competitive cooperation” will be one of the greatest challenges of global politics of the future.

Fourth, multilateralism should become as inclusive as possible—not so much in terms of the total number of participants, but in terms of the overall representativeness of multilateral formats. This applies primarily to the representation of States representing particular interest groups that are currently either underestimated or ignored altogether. For example, the current discussions on global governance of the Internet involve mainly countries with significant technological potential to develop new information technologies (the supply side). At the same time, countries that are becoming the main users of the Internet (the demand side)—due to global demographic shifts happening before our eyes—are almost absent from these discussions.

In many cases, multilateral agreements between States are insufficient if they do not involve the private sector, civil society, and other private and public actors.

The most important international issues—from the future of arms control

and climate change, to managing technological progress and regulating migration—require the creation of broad and flexible coalitions of a wide variety of actors to address them. It is no coincidence that Microsoft has opened a separate office in New York to interact with UN entities. It is conceivable to assume that most of the new generation of multi-

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lateral coalitions will be built on the principle of public-private partnerships (PPPs). Of critical importance in this case is the issue of ensuring procedural clarity and transparency of the process of involving various types of stakeholders in this kind of PPP.

It is clear that the expansion of the circle of active participants in multilateral agreements dramatically complicates the process of negotiation and monitoring of compliance with the agreements reached. After all, non-state actors—whether private companies, municipalities, regional authorities, or non-profit organizations—can no longer be seen as convenient tools that states can arbitrarily use to achieve their goals. These players form their own interests, priorities and values that differ from those operated by states. Simply imposing the government's will on non-state actors in multilateral formats will not be easy, especially for liberal democracies.

Thus, if multilateral practices survive in the near future, they will survive primarily in the format of multilateralism ad hoc, or project-specific multilateralism. Such project-oriented multilateralism will become as common in international relations as the project-based construction of the educational process is common today in leading universities. Examples of multilateralism of this type already exist at the regional level (such as the Arctic Council) and in individual functional areas (such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)). This format of multilateralism has many drawbacks and limitations—they are excessively mobile, unstable, selective and fragile. Nevertheless, it seems to remain the best option for the near future—given the lack of conditions for the implementation of more complex and more advanced formats.

It would be logical to assume that multilateral coalitions with a limited number of participants and a narrow mandate, which have already demonstrated their effectiveness and sustainability, could naturally develop, involving new members and expanding the range of activities. However, existing experience shows

that this logic does not always work. The founders of “closed clubs”—be it the UN Security Council, the Group of Seven, or the Group of Twenty—often fear the erosion of existing formats, the complication of the negotiation process and the partial loss of their influence when expanding this format. The expansion of the mandate is also often a matter of concern, as it can bring new contentious issues to the agenda and even undermine confidence in areas where its existence was not previously questioned.

Another important feature of what might become the new multilateralism should be the general simplification of multilateral mechanisms, overcoming bureaucratic inertia, and combating duplication of functions. Most public opinion polls show that there is still broad support for multilateralism in the world, but at the same time, there is a growing critical attitude towards specific practices of many. This is true both at the global and regional levels. These organizations are accused of bureaucracy, tardiness, duplication of functions, isolation from ordinary people, lack of transparency, and excessive administrative costs, among other things.

Since geopolitical confrontation will continue for a very long time, new formats of multilateralism should be based on the principle of “competitive cooperation” or “competitive multilateralism.”

Global multilateralism should focus on a relatively small number of problems and challenges that cannot be addressed at the regional or national levels. Everything else should be delegated to structures and mechanisms that are closer to the problems and tasks to be addressed. Otherwise, global multilateral institutions will be blamed for problems for which others should be held responsible (for example, deepening socio-economic inequalities within individual countries).

It seems unlikely that the leaders in developing a new format of multilateralism will be great powers—such as the United States, China, or Russia. All these powers are too accustomed to asymmetric relations of interdependence with their weaker partners, demonstrating the tendency to pursue the maximization of their comparative advantages in bilateral formats. Moreover, it is likely that isolationist sentiments will gain strength in these countries in the near future, limiting their involvement in multilateral structures and regimes. On the other hand, countries like EU or ASEAN member states have already accumulated a great deal of experience in various multilateral formats. It can be assumed that the role of small and medium-sized countries in promoting multilateralism will increase

not only in such relatively new areas as climate, international governance in cyberspace, or in the development of biotechnology, but also in traditional security issues, including arms control.

While in many cases multilateral structures have evolved and will continue to emerge on a regional basis, other principles for the formation of multilateral coalitions are likely to become increasingly common. As an example, we can refer to the successful experience of the international Alliance of Small Island States, which plays an active role in determining the global climate agenda. Although the members of the Alliance are scattered around the globe, and their internal political systems differ significantly from each other, common interests predetermine the effectiveness of multilateral interaction.

Even more bizarre multilateral coalitions of medium and small countries are forming around specific issues of governance. For example, the 2019 amendments to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, providing for scarcity measures on plastics (the so-called Basel Plastics Ban), were made

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