

International Cooperation

The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism

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www.cambridge.org/9780521191296

3 The two sides of multilateral cooperation

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What is multilateralism? Multilateralism is the strategic propensity to rely on the actions of multiple participants rather than on the actions of a single state. Decision making is shared, presumably. Because the outcome is shaped by the decision inputs of multiple actors, the agreement may be more broadly acceptable to the international community, though the terms of the agreement are likely to be less demanding (since the terms are of a lowest common denominator sort) than for agreements resulting from more narrowly based participation.

According to John Ruggie, multilateralism consists of (i) the principle of collective security that an attack on one member of a coalition is an attack on all members (indivisibility); (ii) the principle that members are “equal before the law” and will be treated equally (nondiscrimination); and (iii) the principle that members take the long view rather than the short-term view, or that the average is more important than the marginal decision, or that they look at all the bargains on balance, not just separate bargains with each individual member (diffuse reciprocity) (Ruggie 1992). Lisa Martin observes that avoidance of large transaction costs in bargaining is an important explanation of why multilateralism is employed even by large states (Martin 1999). James Caporaso asks whether multilateralism is a means or an end (Caporaso 1993). Part of its complexity, perhaps, is that multilateralism is both a means and an end. Arthur Stein points out that when structures change, interests may change, and these can undermine regimes including multilateral regimes (Stein 1990).

The thesis here is that multilateralism and unilateralism, sometimes treated as simple strategic opposites, involve complexity. This complexity lies deep within each strategy. For example, both for the small state and the large state, multilateralism is bifurcated. On the one hand, for the small state, multilateralism is desirable because it creates a foreign policy role for that state. On the other hand, for the small state, multilateralism is a burden because it drags the small state into responsibilities, as in peace-keeping, that many small states would prefer to abjure. Likewise, for the large state, multilateralism may be looked upon as desirable because it

smoothes the way for policy agreement. But multilateralism also is a problem for the large state because of the difficulty of “getting everybody on board” in support of a particular policy.

But the argument in this chapter about complexity lies deeper. Multilateral cooperation is really a mix of multilateralism, unilateralism, and isolationism locked together in a dynamic relationship that changes over time. No state strategy is ever pure; the most that is possible is to try to shift state strategy in a particular direction such as toward multilateral cooperation.

Finally, complexity is evident in the tension between the strategy of multilateralism and unilateralism because each strategy contains a fallacy. The fallacy of small-state multilateralism is that it is not so much a technique of conjoint decision-making as it is a technique to bind the hands of the large state regarding the latter’s foreign-policy conduct. The fallacy of the large state regarding unilateralism is its belief that, after it acts alone, it will still be able to obtain the affirmation and support of the international community (or from other powerful members of that community) when such support is urgently needed. These two fallacies tend to blind the practitioners of multilateralism and unilateralism to the opportunities and challenges of multilateral cooperation.

In sum, the argument here is that, in addition to several further complications discussed below, unless multilateralism is pursued in full awareness of strategic complexity, multilateral cooperation is likely to face unusual and perilous contradiction.

Cooperation and competition

Entire books have been written about cooperation as a self-contained concept. But that is a mistake. Cooperation and competition are linked inextricably. “Pure” cooperation alone cannot exist as a behavioral concept, that is, as an interactive concept, in human terms. In international relations, cooperation is often thought of as benign. Competition is thought of as aggressive, possibly violent, and always muscular. Competition involves influence, or force. Cooperation and competition are regarded as being at opposite ends of a spectrum of increasingly specialized options, as being binary opposites by definition.

But multilateralism reveals why cooperation and competition cannot be so separated. Cooperation can be used and often is used to compete. The operation of the balance of power is an excellent example of how states cooperate to compete. Historical illustration will explicate this example.

Suppose, as in the nineteenth century, the central international system is composed of five actors. Suppose, further, that one actor uses force to attempt to dominate that system. This act of aggression will cause the

other four actors to cooperate so as to defeat the common external threat to the decentralized international system and to the security of each of the four actors. The greater the sense of threat the more likely is the cooperation among governments, governments that may be, in various ways, highly diverse and even disputatious. Indeed, it is the very act of competition with the aggressor that causes the other governments to cooperate among themselves. Moreover, according to realist thought at least, once the sense of common external threat disappears, cooperation with the other actors will also dissipate. Such cooperation, however, is interpreted differently from a liberal or a constructivist perspective.

What does history have to say about cooperating to compete?

When Napoleon was defeated for a second time, his attempt at hegemony had united Europe against him. The Congress of Vienna was an effort to build four pillars around France, never again to allow it to spill over militarily onto the system of states. Britain, by sea, and Russia, by land, were the two most powerful actors united in their determined opposition to *revanche* by France. But no less were Austria and Prussia willing to cooperate to this end. Not until the concert collapsed in 1822 was this particular, intense, interactive, and complexly overlapping form of cooperation among the great powers itself to dissipate in the face of a new emergent form of the balance of power.

Multilateral cooperation itself carries no connotation regarding war or peace, chaos or stability. Cooperation is a willing servant of any government that chooses to employ it regarding any goal that another government shares.

The content and purpose of multilateralism for the small and the large state

Multilateral cooperation can follow an open diplomatic forum of contact and negotiation. Or, multilateral cooperation can be highly institutionalized in such diverse forums as the World Trade Organization, the North American Free Trade Association, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or the United Nations Security Council. The type of issue, and whether the decision is regional or global, will determine the appropriate institutional framework of multilateral decision.

Multilateralism always has two sides. For the small state, multilateralism is a good, because it offers political participation in decision making, a foreign-policy role, or “a seat at the table.” “All states are not created equal,” observes former Canadian Prime Minister Joe Clark, “and one way to help level the playing field is to have rules of the game.” (Quoted in Minden, Galant, and Irwin 1997, p. 121; Pekkanen 2005). But, for the

small state, multilateralism is also a burden, because it involves duties and it mandates an input of resources to fulfill the foreign policy role that the state has appropriated. “Free-riderism” becomes impossible for the small state that participates.

For the large state, multilateralism is a boon because it legitimizes a foreign policy which it has had a large hand in shaping (Stein and Pauly 1993; Nye 2002). Multilateralism ensures that a number of other states, besides the large state itself, will accept the foreign policy role and policy that the large state adopts. But, for the large state, multilateralism is also a burden, because it requires persuading, and in some cases cajoling, smaller states to support the main message associated with the chosen foreign policy. This is not an easy task for the larger state, since smaller states may be either genuinely skeptical of the foreign policy or opportunistically opposed. Thus multilateralism, while a good thing in the abstract for both small and large states, in practice involves trade-offs, which neither may eagerly be willing to accept.

Isolationism

Isolationism is a foreign policy role that amounts to reduced participation in the international system. Isolationism is measured against the degree of involvement in world politics that would normally be associated with a state at a given level of power. Relative to the degree of participation of most other states at a given level of power, a state that practices isolationism is operating at a degree of foreign policy participation lower than would be expected for it.

Assumed here, as in power cycle analysis, is that, everything else being equal, the higher the level of its power, the more foreign-policy roles a state is able to perform and the greater the intensity of its participation in world affairs. Given the size of the German gross domestic product (GDP), Germany can fund more aid projects, and larger projects, than Sweden and thus occupy a more visible and influential role than Sweden. Yet relative to its power, Sweden is probably more of an international activist than Germany.

As the state progresses up the cycle of its power relative to that of other states, the potential for foreign-policy role increases. Normally there is a lag between increased power and the concomitant increase in foreign-policy role, for it takes time for other states to adjust. Isolationism, the opposite of extensive role participation, becomes less likely as the state moves up its power cycle over time. But what motivates isolationism in world politics?

1. *Tiny and vulnerable*. When a state is tiny and vulnerable, a policy of isolationism is not unexpected. Monaco and Liechtenstein may be

sovereign states, but their foreign policy role is negligible. Isolationism is a way of avoiding conflict and therefore reinforcing security. Even a state such as New Zealand, of considerably greater size, exploits this policy of isolationism, bolstered by the very real existence of geographic isolation.

2. *Singular focus on commerce.* In a system where security appears to be guaranteed, some states may subdivide their foreign policies. They may deal separately in commerce and emphasize it at the expense of other dimensions of foreign policy such as diplomatic leadership or the provision of military security. Switzerland or Singapore could attempt to offer a full agenda of foreign policy involvement and activity, but they do not. They focus on making money.

3. *Inward-looking because of a focus on economic or political development.* This motivation for isolationism is subtly different from the prior motivations. Moreover, it is often expressed more as a matter of degree than type. When a state concentrates on internal matters it has less political energy to focus on external policy. Economic development is often a dominant preoccupation. China, for example, limits its foreign policy participation in order to concentrate on internal economic development. Political development is no less confining; the European Union is less participatory in world politics, especially in Asian matters, than its size would predict. Likewise, the role it plays in military security is much less than its GDP would appear to justify.

4. *Unpopularity of governing regime.* When a government realizes that its mode of governance or the identity of its regime-type is unpopular internationally, it may withdraw inside its borders in order to avoid threats to its survival. Myanmar (Burma) is a country that attempts a low international profile in part because of the response it receives from other larger actors critical of its internal politics. During the Cold War, the communist government of Albania sought to reduce its international presence vis-à-vis both Moscow and Washington. Governments that are unpopular often have a lot to be unpopular about. Unpopularity is only a short step to political paranoia which in turn can further drive isolationism.

5. *Convulsed by civil war or revolution.* Temporary isolationism is often caused by the trauma and political distraction associated with civil war or revolution. A government internally torn by civil and political upheaval can scarcely be expected to play a larger international role. Anxiety about internal discord, highlighted in George Washington's farewell address, and ultimately experienced in the American Civil War, caused the United States to play a far smaller international role in the mid-nineteenth century than otherwise might have been the case. Likewise, the Russian Revolution caused Russia to withdraw from principal participation in World War I and thus in the diplomatic outcome of that war at Versailles.

6. *Neutral or “neutralized.”* Almost by definition, a country that opts for the status of a neutral is attempting to isolate itself from fractious interaction with neighbors. Its single international legal responsibility, namely denial of its territory for use by belligerents, is often a responsibility that it cannot carry out. But through isolationism it sometimes tries to fulfill the responsibilities of a neutral. Likewise, a state that in effect becomes neutralized by the impact upon it of world politics often adopts isolationism or semi-isolationism as a strategy. During much of the Cold War, Austria assumed this posture both vis-à-vis the United States and vis-à-vis Western Europe itself.

7. *Strategic withdrawal.* Perhaps the most important form of isolationism is that expressed as strategic withdrawal. The most spectacular recent example in statecraft of strategic withdrawal was the posture of the allies prior to World War II. US wheat farmers wanted to recover from the depression, not influence governments abroad. French industrialists regarded good business with Germany as enough of a constraint on Hitler. British socialists thought that appeasement would work. Stalin believed that a bargain between dictators would not be broken. Everyone favored isolationism. And everyone (save Churchill) was wrong.

Strategic withdrawal is an important manifestation of isolationism. It is a characteristic of times and locations and issues as much as of power per se. The United States, by reason of proclivity as much as geophysical location, buffered by oceans, and surrounded by decent neighbors, is especially subject to strategic withdrawal. Any nation that believes that it is “an exception” to the norms of world politics is likely to be so afflicted. And yet, since 1945, the United States has shown few signs of this isolationist proclivity.

Periods of history in which virtually everyone is an isolationist are very rare. More common is the situation in which multilateralism and isolationism are opposed. Very much for historical reasons, both Germany and Japan today experience this tension in their foreign policies. Most countries reflect an amalgam of multilateralism, isolationism, and unilateralism, changing with period, issue, and administration, as well as with the circumstances abroad with which the government must contend. When governments are in extreme isolationist or unilateral postures, the management of world order is difficult. Multilateralism, as a bargaining strategy or a commitment to alliance, is the predominant mode of statecraft.

Situating multilateralism in strategic and historical space

“In the United States,” according to Robert Keohane (1983, p. 153), “internationalists’ have been attracted to international agreements and international organizations as useful devices for implementing American

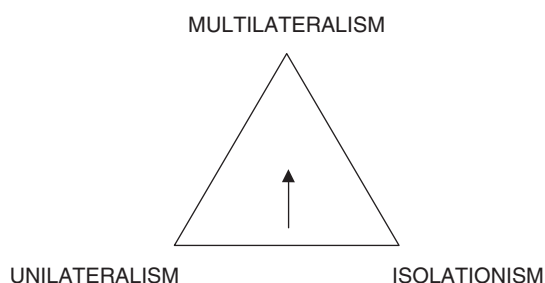


Figure 3.1. Multilateralism

policy; ‘isolationists’ and ‘nationalists’ have not.” Other writers imply that foreign policies are pure – that they are either multilateralist or isolationist or unilateralist, but that their policy preferences do not include elements of all three strategies. But in actuality all foreign policy is a mix of the three propensities. In emphasis, they may be more of one propensity than another, but they contain elements of all three dispositions.

Multilateralism can be thought of as a concept at the apex of an equilateral triangle symbolizing overall policy space, with the strategy of unilateralism at one of the remaining points and the strategy of isolationism at the other (Figure 3.1). Each of these strategies is equidistant from the other. Each type of strategy dictates a kind of policy choice for the state with respect to each issue.

Regarding a given foreign policy issue, each government can then be situated in this foreign policy space at a given location. By situating each government in this policy space, one can determine how different or how similar each government is on a particular issue relative to the three general strategic dispositions, multilateralism, unilateralism, and isolationism. For ideological reasons, as well as reasons dictated by diplomatic circumstance (e.g., George W. Bush had to deal with the advent of the new terrorism – Laqueur 1999; Lesser, Hoffman, Arquilla, Ronfeldt, and Zanini 1999; Gunaratana 2002), Bill Clinton for instance was more multilateral in his foreign policy conduct than George W. Bush. Not only because Hillary Clinton is Secretary of State and the administration is also Democrat, the administration of President Barack Obama displays strong continuity with the prior Clinton administrations. But at the same time in energy, environmental, and security matters the Obama administration has pioneered its own sense of direction and indicates awareness of both the strengths and weaknesses of multilateralism.

Moreover, foreign policy is not static. As administrations change, so they change their foreign policy postures. Thus the policy-space triangle

enables the analyst to trace the changing strategic propensities of subsequent administrations within a single country to determine each administration's strategic leanings. But what must be remembered is that these leanings will vary according to issue. The Bush administration was more unilateral regarding the environment and security considerations. But it was not more unilateral regarding multilateral economic initiative and human rights interventions. Each recent successive Mexican government has become less isolationist and more multilateral on most matters of foreign policy. On immigration issues, in contrast, Mexico has become more unilateral, especially regarding treatment of illegal aliens in the United States.

Although his main theme is the contrast between imperial Britain as the world's largest producer in the nineteenth century and "imperial America" as the world's largest consumer in the twentieth century, Charles Maier (2006) shows with vivid historical sketches what empire does politically to both colony and colonizer. John Vasquez (1993) observes that most wars do not occur in the absence of issues or grievances. He maps the steps to war in terms of the progression of those issues as they increasingly are perceived as grievances. Benjamin Miller (2007), on the other hand, argues that there must be "congruence" between state boundaries and "nations" for peace to prevail.

The analyst may believe that the choice of foreign-policy posture will dictate the strategy for dealing with an issue. But very often it is the issue that dictates the foreign policy posture, not the other way around. For example, regarding the response to the attack on the twin towers, the United States was prepared to act immediately and to act alone. This was understood by its allies. Yet in the end the United States was not obliged to act alone, for NATO – universally across its membership – regarded the attack on the United States as a clear act of aggression. NATO supported the decision to strike Al Qaeda and to intervene in Afghanistan.

In contrast, the decision to form both the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was quite different. The United States was aware in each case that unilateralism would not work. Multilateralism is the anchor for all of this analysis. Every other strategic interaction with states involves a degree of multilateralism, including bilateral interaction. If the United States expressed its preference for an economic agreement with either of its smaller trading partners, the press in Canada and Mexico would play up the argument as though it were a diktat to states that were often characterized in the press as though they were in a dependency relationship to the United States. This would force the governments of Canada or Mexico to reject the US overture.

Instead, Canada had to take the lead in the Canada–US free trade agreement and be seen to take the lead by the press and public. With respect to NAFTA, Mexico did the unthinkable. For the very first time in history, a Third World country would declare that two of the richest countries in the world should follow *its* lead in forming a free trade area. Hence multilateralism worked for the United States, where unilateralism could not possibly have succeeded.

Of course, the form of unilateralism or multilateralism is less important, or should be less important, than the nature of the motivation for action. But this somewhat subtle point is frequently lost on observers. They think that the form of engagement is itself sufficient to determine whose interest is served by what form of strategic posture. Hence they argue that small states will almost always favor multilateralism, while big states will almost always favor unilateralism. In support of this argument, proponents may use the analogy of international trade as illustration.

International economic theory can quite easily show that international trade is more important, in relative terms, to small states than to big states. Why? Small economies cannot offer as much specialization, either in terms of production or in terms of consumption, as the large economies; therefore the small economies use the larger international marketplace, outside the economy of the state itself, to specialize through international trade, hence the relatively greater importance of international trade to the smaller economies as indicated in empirical terms by the ratio of the state's foreign trade to GDP. An inverse relationship exists between the size of the state and the importance of trade as a percentage of GDP. Small states exhibit a high percentage, as high as 40 percent or more. Large-economy states like the United States or Japan exhibit a much smaller percentage of exports to GDP, generally in the range of 10 to 20 percent. A small-economy state that is rapidly becoming a large-economy state, like China, will exhibit a decreasing ratio of foreign trade to GDP over time.

But what is true for international trade is almost certainly *not* true for multilateralism in international politics. An example may help show the argument. If both NATO and the UN Security Council approved of the decision to put down the threat to the Tutsi created by the Hutu in Rwanda, would the outcome have been any better for Rwanda and other African countries than if France alone had sent its paratroopers into Rwanda early in the violence? Involved here are complexities of agency, bias, and timing.

Critics have suggested that agency matters here, that is, collective involvement by a multilateral institution would have been fairer and preferable to unilateral intervention. Likewise some have regarded

France as too pro-Tutsi. But, in the end, did any of this matter? France, or any other interventionist agency, would have been obligated to confront Hutu extremists. For the slain Tutsi schoolchild, whether France, NATO, or the United Nations intervened mattered very little. What was necessary was for *somebody* to intervene before the killing started, and that did not happen.

There is no evidence whatsoever that Rwanda or the principle of human rights would have been advantaged by waiting for a larger multilateral effort. By delaying the response, and by debating military action endlessly in parliaments and in the United Nations, the opportunity to save hundreds of thousands of Africans from murder by rivals and by crazed militias was lost. As it turns out, neither unilateral action nor multilateralism occurred in time to save Rwanda. Surely the hesitancy caused by the felt need to pursue a multilateral course (to his credit the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, tried desperately to persuade governments to intervene to stop the slaughter, but without success) undoubtedly failed to serve this small state well.

Dual fallacies of multilateralism and unilateralism

From the small state perspective, the fallacy of multilateralism is that the small state will be able to use multilateralism to “tie the hands” of the large state. The claim here is that multilateral cooperation really means that the purpose of multilateral strategy is not to find mutually acceptable policies, but rather to “handcuff” the larger state or group of states by merely opposing whatever policies that state or group of states advocates (Fearon 1995).

Sometimes the view is that the small state has greater wisdom than the larger state about a foreign-policy issue, especially an issue involving the use of force. Multilateralism is seen as a true reflection of the knowledge and preferences of the larger community of (smaller) states, and on this moral basis ought to be able to define the policy direction that the multilateral initiative adopts. Thus the small state seeks influence by counterposing its own moral virtue to the material capability of the larger state. The fallacy here is that the larger state will agree to this unusual bargain. The small state ignores the assumption of the large state that, although it may see an issue differently from the small state, it believes that it, too, possesses moral virtue.

This was largely the strategy of those governments that wanted the United States, Britain, Spain, and the other supporters of intervention to go back to the UN Security Council before seeking a regime change in Iraq, in order to obtain a resolution that would reimpose inspections. The

strategy of France, Russia, and Canada was to tie up the United States in procedural disputation inside the Security Council, where the threat of a Security Council veto would hang over the discussions. The focus was not on whether Iraq had observed the prior UN resolutions regarding inspections or had primarily given up the attempt to acquire chemical and biological weapons. Nor was the debate about the morality of intervention, since France had frequently intervened in Africa, Russia continued to pursue what it regarded as its interests in Georgia and Azerbaijan, and Canada had just encouraged the members of the Organization of American States (OAS) to intervene in the affairs of Peru, all without formal UN mandate. The purpose of the multilateral initiative was to obtain a resolution that would delay, and if possible prevent, Anglo-US military intervention in Iraq; it was not to ensure that through regime change Saddam Hussein would be prevented (preempted) from obtaining weapons of mass destruction.

From the small-state perspective, the fallacy of multilateralism occurs when it is used by one group of states to frustrate and oppose the initiative of another group of states, rather than for some positive, new joint enterprise that would appeal to all parties to an agreement, including the large states involved. When the sole effort becomes that of the restraint of a large state and its allies, rather than conjoint diplomatic initiative for some more encompassing common goal, the fallacy of multilateralism becomes apparent. In such instances, multilateralism becomes virtually indistinguishable from an attempted use of the balance of power.

From the large-state perspective, the fallacy of unilateralism is that the state can act alone (because it has the military or economic power to do so) and still obtain the respect and support of the community of states for its actions (Krauthammer 2002; Kane 2006; Chua 2007). The large state forgets that its own capability and the legitimacy it seeks from the larger community of states are not identical. It mistakenly believes that “success” for a venture in terms of initial action is the same as success in terms of eventual political implementation of necessary policies or reforms. It neglects to take into account that resistance to an action from the smaller states occurs either because they do not interpret a threat as so imposing, or because they are deeply skeptical about whether there will be sufficient follow-through to make the initiative truly worthwhile.

The decision of two of the larger states in the western hemisphere, the United States and Canada, to encourage intervention in Haiti for the purpose of promoting democracy and bolstering the Aristide forces in the government is illustrative of the unilateralist fallacy. Other governments in the hemisphere were opposed to the intervention, not because of a lack of esteem for democracy, but because they thought that intervention

would transgress the OAS norms against such intervention once more, and once again reinforce abridgments of small-state sovereignty by large states. But, despite commendable efforts by Canada in particular to try to clean up the lack of professionalism in the Haitian police force and the court system, these other states were skeptical of the “staying power” of the initiative in terms of willingness to invest resources and time such that the government would be fundamentally reformed. They were worried that military intervention was just a short-term fix that would do damage to the principle of state sovereignty in the hemisphere without producing any long-term benefits to Haitian society.

Hence the unilateralist fallacy of the larger state is that its wisdom is greater than that of smaller states, or other states in the system, and that military force is a reflection of this wisdom rather than an instrument shaped by practical exigency. Moreover, the unilateralist fallacy is to exaggerate short-term decision criteria, and to minimize the long-term consequences of an action, especially if these consequences are negative or lacking in credibility regarding whether the action should ever have taken place.

The “anchoring” of multilateralism

Either a single state can move away from the issue status quo and from the structural status quo of the many states, or the many states can move away from the issue and structural status quo of the single state. Just as the new position adopted by the many states may be called multilateralism, so the new position adopted by the individual state may be called unilateralism. But in reality the true answer to whether unilateralism or multilateralism is the more valid strategy is determined by who has moved away from the issue status quo, the single state or the many (and whether this movement is regarded as normatively acceptable by the community of states) (Hoffmann 1998, pp. 102–03).

Whether multilateralism is anchored in the issue status quo or in change is thus a very important strategic matter. The unilateralist state can be accused of “revisionism” if the multilateral majority wants to remain with the status quo. An example is that of Charles de Gaulle in 1966, when he attempted to alter the institutional nature of NATO, ultimately withdrawing France from the Organization but not from the Alliance. His actions were regarded by the other members as revisionist because he wanted to change NATO into something it currently was not.

Or the unilateralist state may be accused of “reactionary-ism” if the rest of the states in the system want to move forward and the unilateralist state stubbornly does not. An example here is the establishment of an

international criminal court, preferred by many states in the system, but rejected by the United States as too subject to politicization. Another example where the United States is regarded as the “reactionary state” concerns the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, where perhaps a majority of states favor involuntary reductions of emissions but where the United States appears recalcitrant because it is skeptical, not about the fact of global warming but about the reliability and validity of the scientific explanation for the bulk of the variance in the independent variable – that is, that which causes the increase in global temperature. It is even more skeptical about the reliability of the mechanism to guarantee compliance and about the likely inclusion of states such as China and India which are soon to become among the largest polluters in the system but remain free riders with respect to the Kyoto process. How multilateralism is anchored in the issue dynamic of history thus determines much about how unilateralism and multilateralism will be characterized and about how they will be applied as descriptors of state behavior.

Of course, extreme “unilateralist” states are sometimes territorial aggressors, challenging world order at the regional or global levels (Schweller 1998; Newman 2007). In reality, most states, large or small, do not want to adopt a unilateralist position of any sort. In reality, most states cannot adopt such a position or strategy because they cannot withstand the pressure from the international community to conform.

Government decisions about foreign policy conduct are much different during critical intervals of structural change when long-held expectations about future role and security are suddenly proven wrong. Unilateral aggressive behavior is more likely, but so is alliance behavior. Empirical evidence confirms that a government tries to mitigate fears about security at a critical point by joining an alliance and forming bigger alliances (Chiu 2003), and that deterrence challenges increase while rate of deterrence success declines (James and Hebron 1997; Tessman and Chan 2004).

Only a few large states, or states backed by some monopolist advantage such as regarding oil exportation, are likely to persist with policy unilateralism over time. However, to the extent that the unilateralist position becomes that of the majority of states, in the form of a new multilateral posture and outlook, that adoption of unilateralist position by the multilateral majority is often due to the size, status, or capacity for persuasion of the large state. Not many examples in history illustrate such movement from individual state outlook to the outlook for the system of states as a whole. US preference for the establishment of a new international trade order in the post-1945 period, reflected in the establishment of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), is, however, one such example.

Normally, initiative is multiple in conception and implementation. For example, regarding the formation of NATO, two smaller states, Britain and Canada, were largely responsible for the idea of the alliance. The United States was a very important future member, but it was a somewhat laggard participant. So it is with many multilateral enterprises. The large state is not necessarily the initiator of the idea (see the discussion below on NAFTA), although often it is the critical participant, and the chief “sherpa,” in the long process of making the multilateral enterprise a reality.

Anchoring multilateralism not only in the “hierarchy” of issues, but also in the shift and movement of the issue agenda over time, is thus key to determining whether a state will be categorized as “revisionist” or “reactionary,” and thus whether it is truly a unilateralist state in the proper meaning of the term. That the “many” and the “few” or the “one” are often at odds in world politics is probably unavoidable. The key is how to interpret this issue opposition in terms of how issues change over time. This is truly a twenty-first century kind of analysis, made particularly relevant by the increasing number of democracies in the system, where “participation” is becoming the talisman for legitimacy and order.

“Inside” and “outside” strategies of multilateral actors

Multilateral actors can opt for either of two basic strategies to influence larger states, an inside and an outside strategy. The inside strategy is that of former Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom and of former President George W. Bush of the United States. It is a strategy of working from the inside to influence choices and events, even if the overall goal of military intervention and regime change for Iraq was not Blair’s first choice. By supporting the president of the United States, Britain hopes to prevent US isolation. But Blair also hopes to prevent US attempted hegemony (in that the United States would act alone and thus would feel no pressure to consider the will of other governments that are less enamored with the policy of regime change and its consequences than is the United States). Blair has enjoyed some considerable success with this strategy.

The outside strategy is that of former President Jacques Chirac of France, who, like Bush, is a political conservative. France offers its full participation only belatedly and perhaps qualifiedly. It attempts until the last moment to shift the policy orientation of the large state through criticism, procedural obfuscation within the UN Security Council, coalition formation, and attempts at inspiring counter-coalitions. The French objective is to influence decision-making from outside the circle of the principal proponents of Iraqi regime change (Britain and the United States). The tactic is to use delay and international legal recourse to

alter the direction of decision. This tactic does not mean that in the end France, Russia, or Canada will remain opposed to collective foreign-policy action regarding, for example, Iraqi stabilization and reconstruction. But France was not likely to support stabilization and reconstruction efforts unless certain of its demands were met, usually expressed in terms of UN resolutions, through which France expected to transfer greater control over Iraqi policy to itself.

While likewise rejecting US intervention in Iraq, President Nicolas Sarkozy also chose to forego Chirac's outside strategy. He replaced the outside strategy with a peculiarly inside strategy with respect both to NATO and to bilateral relations with the United States. Insofar, the Bush administration responded far more positively to the French initiative even though the substance of French foreign policy vis-à-vis a number of traditional Franco-US concerns changed very little.

Thus inside and outside strategies may have the same purpose, even though they possess different content, are pursued by different means, and may be justified by different moral imperatives. A reviewer has noted that these inside–outside strategies possess characteristics similar to balancing versus bandwagoning (Walt 1987; Pressman 2008). It is true that inside strategies and bandwagoning appear similar to outside strategies and balancing. Inside strategies involve cooperation regarding a common agenda; outside strategies involve opposition and competition. But outside strategies also involve cooperation among alliance members resisting a common external threat. In bandwagoning, the alliance leader tends to define the agenda which the other members cooperate to promote. Cooperation in the operation of the balance of power is internal to the alliance and restricted to the alliance members. Cooperation in bandwagoning among other actors is limited to support for the objectives as defined by the alliance leader.

The difference between these inside–outside strategies and bandwagoning is that bandwagoning involves coalescing behind the coalition leader regardless of the terms because the small state is weak, isolated, and unable to affect the strategy of the larger leading state or states. The small state is also vulnerable to inducements. In the case of a true inside strategy, the multiple members of the international community support the strategies of the leading state provided that an accommodation occurs. Likewise the outside strategy is different from balancing because the smaller states seek to alter the strategy of the leading state while in the end supporting that strategy. Moreover, no issue of a balance of power to promote territorial security is involved.

Notwithstanding the differences in content and implementation between the inside and outside strategies, the goal of the strategies may

still be identical. A final example will perhaps illustrate how inside and outside strategies are intertwined.

Regarding Fidel Castro's Cuba, the United States has long sought a shift toward a more democratic government and toward more market-oriented policies. The strategy employed has been the US embargo of Cuba in terms of trade and the mobility of citizens. This strategy might be regarded as equivalent to the above "external" strategy. In contrast, Canada and Mexico have also sought the same ends of greater democracy and greater market reform. But they have chosen a different strategy, the equivalent of an "internal" strategy of engagement with Cuba and the attempt to use communication and interaction to modify its governing policies. The goal of each strategy is the same; the means are different. So it is with the inside and outside strategies of the attempt at multilateral influence by small states with respect to the behavior of large states within coalitions of collective action.

Origins of multilateral success: the NAFTA example

Success in multilateralism involves two stages. First, there is the successful multilateral negotiation. Then there is the demonstration that what has been negotiated is a success in terms of output or production or purpose. That these two stages are not the same, but that both are needed, may be apparent; but what is apparent is often not heeded by statespersons. After all, it is much easier to negotiate an agreement that does nothing than to negotiate an agreement that does something. The more a multilateral agreement attempts to achieve, the more difficult is the task of negotiating participation to that agreement. Ambitious terms complicate negotiation success. Moreover, the easiest thing in diplomacy is to negotiate a document to which every state's signature is attached, but which elicits not a single state's actual implementation. That is the history of many a UN resolution.

For many reasons, NAFTA stands out as the quintessential success of multilateral negotiation. First, although power was highly unequal among the three partners to NAFTA, the most powerful state did not take the lead in proposing the agreement (Doran 2001). That would have been the death knell for the negotiation. Instead, it was the weakest of the three partners, Mexico, that proposed the formal ideal of NAFTA. This overcame suggestions of "imperialism" and "manipulation" that often accompanies, sometimes with justification, such asymmetric negotiations. Because the government of President Carlos Salinas initiated the idea for NAFTA, and invited the United States to consider that idea, the Mexican press and elites were much more likely to accept the notion of a preferential North American trade area than if the United States had

been the government that tried to introduce the idea. Insofar, the United States and its coalition partners overcame the unilateralist fallacy of acting precipitously and alone. Hence, by managing the process of integrated action properly, legitimacy was retained for the NAFTA idea.

Second, NAFTA was a success because the NAFTA negotiation turned the conventional idea of First World–Third World relations on its head. For the first time in the history of modern international political economy, a Third World country negotiated head-to-head on trade matters without asking for dispensations and prior concessions from the larger, more mature economies. Admittedly, Mexico had some very fine technocrats as advisors to the Mexican president, and as negotiators, who in turn were backed by neo-classical trade theory which said that all states are very likely to benefit from trade liberalization regardless of their economic base (Noguez 2002; Cooper 1995). But translating theory into policy is scarcely easy, especially when there are centuries of fear and self-inhibiting propaganda to overcome.

Third, the NAFTA negotiations were successful because a simple rule was observed. He who commits most to the negotiation stands in the end to receive the largest benefits. He who places the most at stake reaps the largest eventual returns. This rule saw Mexico taking higher risks and obtaining the greatest relative gains. The United States, on the other hand, was required by the circumstances to assume the least risks; it thereby also received the smallest relative gains. But the very notion of disproportionate incentives drove Mexico to adopt the timing and the format of negotiations that led to a successful agreement.

Fourth, the second stage of NAFTA multilateralism was extremely rewarding. The negotiation was about “something” rather than nothing – that is, empty symbolism. That something continued to produce benefits for years to come. But such benefits required long-term planning, very intense negotiation that at various times nearly broke down, and highly creative design such as was ultimately incorporated into the trade dispute resolution mechanisms. Thus NAFTA was a multilateral success at both stage 1 and stage 2.

Fifth, NAFTA was a success because it was a transparent negotiation that was open to others in future trade arrangements, not a beggar-thy-neighbor arrangement that sought one-sided advantage. This does not mean that all of its provisions were conspicuous examples of trade liberalization. The provisions regarding textiles and automobiles employing domestic content legislation were not very forward looking. But the balance of the agreement did create and enhance trade, both globally and regionally. NAFTA was a multilateral success because other governments, not members to the agreement, could also benefit from it.

Sixth, NAFTA was a successful agreement because it contained or generated involuntary side-payments and benefits that led to greater interdependence among the members. For example, NAFTA broke economic ground in Mexico so that the country had the confidence to move toward genuine party competition and democracy. NAFTA strengthened the financial sector so that when crisis came, that crisis could be dealt with largely inside the North American context. NAFTA implicitly assisted in dealing with other problems such as illegal migration by increasing the Mexican economic growth rate, thereby offering jobs to hard-pressed peasants and others who chose to migrate to Mexico City or northern Mexico instead of attempting to cross the US border illegally. A multilateral agreement that increases interdependence among its signatories is a positive achievement.

The reader should not conclude that NAFTA was a successful multilateral negotiation because there were no losers. Inside each country certain firms, industries, and individuals were losers. Not everybody was able to increase productivity through specialization. Californian tomato growers and Mexican maize farmers both lost out to competitors across the border in the name of more efficient production elsewhere. Some of these losers were compensated from the greater economic gains made elsewhere in the economy and then transferred through taxes and incentive payments. Some individuals and firms moved to other industries where their productivity would be higher. But the overall economy in Mexico, Canada, and the United States benefited from this example of multilateral economic and political success.

Exemplified by the tomato industry, a further consequence occurred. The advantages of sun and low labor costs in Mexico, and of a comparatively long growing season and good soil in California, were offset in Canada by technological innovation. Hydroponic tomatoes, assisted by greenhouse nurturing and artificial light, turned out to be highly competitive to tomatoes grown naturally in Mexico and California. A new approach technologically to tomato production returned tomato production to the most unlikely of the three economies for such production, that of Canada. NAFTA competition stimulated technological innovation, already ongoing, in each of the countries.

At the heart of the multilateral success of NAFTA is that both at stage 1 and at stage 2 of the negotiated arrangement all of the governments member to the agreement saw benefits that would flow to them, not necessarily equally, but proportionate to the risks and to the political costs that they were expected to assume. NAFTA has much to teach the student of multilateralism regarding how and why multilateralism can be a success.

In conclusion

The argument. According to the thesis of this article, not only is multilateral cooperation regarding every issue a mix of multilateralism, unilateralism, and isolationism that varies for every state, and over time, but multilateral cooperation must also take into account other complexities. One of these complexities is that the large state should not pursue a policy that is largely bereft of multilateralism and then expect the international community to come to its assistance so as to make that much-disputed policy a success. A policy that is not considered legitimate at the outset is unlikely to be regarded as legitimate and worthy of material support, no matter how much that support may be needed, at a subsequent point in the implementation of the strategy.

Similarly, the complexity of multilateralism is such that the smaller state in pursuit of its own objective and seeking to “handcuff” the larger state, rather than to pursue a truly conjoint foreign policy effort, is likely to see multilateral cooperation fail. If the purpose of a multilateral strategy is only to stop a larger state from pursuing a specific policy, that form of so-called multilateral cooperation contains a troubling flaw. Multilateral cooperation must possess positive elements that are broadly and mutually attractive.

As the new unipolar system emerges, it displays elements of multilateralism, unilateralism, and isolationism. Through the disappearance of the second pole of the bipolar relationship in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, unipolarity emerged. But unipolarity is not the equivalent of hegemony, an impossible reach for the United States, or any other state, concerning politics within the central international system. Nor is unipolarity the equivalent of multipolarity, which would impose a kind of equality among the principal states of the system that does not at present exist. Yet regardless of the degree of polarity in the international system, multilateral cooperation may or may not exist within that system depending upon actor, issue area, and time point.

Multilateralism is evident in such US projects as the Central American market initiative (CAFTA), the six-power talks on North Korea, and the G8 summit (Tepperman 2004; Pauly 2005). Although governments other than the United State were involved as well, unilateralism was reflected in US policy towards Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Tinges of isolationism color the foreign policies of Germany, Canada, and Australia, as they downsize their militaries, reduce the relative size of their aid budgets, and begin to neglect large areas of the world in all but rhetorical policy. Sometimes such foreign policy tendency is expressed as “free-riderism.”

for that is its ultimate result. Claims to hegemony at the top of the system of course abet the proponents of free-riderism elsewhere in the system.

Countries like Germany stress regionalism within the European context rather than globalism on a worldwide scale. Iran is part of this ambient extension, for example, but North Korea may not be. Unable to exercise a global reach, some of these rich states tend to withdraw into the region within which they reside, often veiling such policies for domestic political consumption with expressions of global moral preference.

Thus behind the disparity between multilateralism and unilateralism lies the specter of isolationism. The contrast between a US foreign-policy budget that is overstretched and German or Canadian budgets that have been sharply downsized is reflected in the disparity in the capacity actually to sustain multilateralism with troops, material, or emergency aid. While absolute disparities in power will always exist, the percentage of GDP devoted to these individual endeavors (a partial index of relative power) is a rough measure of global involvement for a number of individual states at the top of the central system.

Hence multilateralism is not merely a matter of whether the United States is inclined to act in multilateral fashion (Newman, Thakur, and Tirman 2006). The answer here is indisputable; certainly the Obama administration is willing to act conjointly with other governments. Zbigniew Brzezinski argues that Americans favor multilateralism as a strategy over the unilateralism that is implied in hegemony. Opinion poll data backup Brzezinski's claim. In an elite opinion poll, 75 percent of the respondents supported multilateralism, while just 12 percent favored isolationism, and only 10 percent favored unilateralism (Brzezinski 2004, p. 199; Chicago Council on Foreign Relations 2006). The real question for President Obama is whether other governments feel confident enough politically and economically to take on multilateral responsibilities.

Inside the G20 all kinds of gaps have emerged. The European role in the IMF exceeds its contributions. US international responsibilities exceed its financial capabilities. The Chinese aspirations for foreign policy role exceed China's contributions and capabilities. Despite its absolute decline in size, Russia is dissatisfied with its diminished role. In terms of disruption to world order, however, these gaps are not felt so immediately because of the global security deployment of the United States, a deployment that is thus sometimes rather strained, and is often likely to be misunderstood. But the reality remains that the only truly global international security presence today, on the part of any single country, is that of the United States.