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# Newcomers Bring New Rules

*Shared Leadership in a More Multipolar World*

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Jon B. Alterman

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A Report of the Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy

CSIS

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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# Introduction

Wars reveal fault lines in international relations. They raise stakes, they bring government decisions under greater scrutiny, and they force governments to decide whom to support and whom to oppose. Wars cause governments to appeal to other governments for aid, and when that aid is not forthcoming, governments' actions—and inaction—send their own messages.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine was a clarifying moment. Over the previous three decades, economic integration had sharply increased around the world, global living standards rose dramatically, and connectivity blurred international boundaries and allowed billions of people to tap into almost limitless pools of information at almost no cost.

The rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, in some ways, was a consequence of that world. A disease that began in a provincial capital in China became a global phenomenon within weeks. National and international organizations mobilized to encourage the development and distribution of vaccines, and international financial institutions buttressed shaky economies. While the costs of the pandemic were astronomical—one estimate put its cost in the United States alone at \$16 trillion<sup>1</sup>—and supply chains were shattered, the pandemic did not force a breakdown in international ties, let alone anything resembling armed conflict. Many states felt abandoned by the international system, yet that system endured without deep scarring. China is the largest trading partner of 120 countries, and the United States is both an innovator and a norm-setter. Size insulated both. It was unthinkable not to seek ways to work with China to manage the consequences, frustration, and anger that the pandemic provoked, or to cut U.S. ties over dissatisfaction with vaccine distribution.



Yet, the Ukraine invasion was a sign that old patterns of conflict persisted. Tanks rolled and missiles flew. Soldiers died—as did tens of thousands of civilians. The United States worked to rally global support to push back on Russia, with mixed results. Much of Europe was enthusiastic about aligning with the United States on a threat to regional security, while China was circumspect about giving a boost to U.S. global hegemony. U.S. partners in Northeast Asia, such as Japan and South Korea, hewed closely to the U.S. line.

But for many governments—including many with close ties to the United States—the war in Ukraine was not their fight. Some, such as Israel and Turkey, had complicated relations with Russia that inhibited their action. But many others saw little advantage in being drawn into rising “great power” competition. These governments did not see Russia’s invasion as a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty that threatened the principle of sovereignty everywhere. Instead, many viewed it as part of a century-long shadow war between the United States and Russia, exacerbated by a reckless Ukraine. Others still saw it merely as a tiresome continuation of centuries of European warfare intended to nudge borders one way or the other. In this view, the insistence on stark national boundaries combined with the narcissism of small differences to make conflict inevitable, with states once again fighting to unite isolated minorities with their purported homeland.

While the United States proclaimed the importance of defending a rules-based order, these countries said they saw something more self-interested at stake: a U.S. effort to preserve decades-old advantages for the United States and its closest partners. They saw these advantages continuing to enrich a small number of countries at the expense of an increasingly populous, increasingly wealthy, and increasingly consequential fraction of the world’s population.

It is not merely U.S. competitors who seek to portray the global order this way. Close partners to the United States increasingly question the indispensability of U.S. leadership, as well as its wisdom and durability. Decades of long and inconclusive wars, increasingly polarized U.S. politics, and ever larger oscillations between successive U.S. administrations’ foreign policies have led many governments to be more cautious. But another element is many governments’ insistence on recovering their own agency and on advancing their own self-interest.

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The world today is at a crossroads. Rising global integration has exacerbated challenges that swiftly transcend borders. Disease, climate change, the trafficking of persons and goods, and informal migration are just a few of the issues that no government can solve in isolation. Similarly, an increasing number of economies are tied to changes in transportation, communication, and finance that elide distance and connect cosmopolitan centers to remote villages and everything in between.

Yet, despite closer ties, we also have entered a new period of national contestation. While greater connection is broadly irreversible, the terms of those connections, the boundaries of acceptable behavior, the structures of coordination, and the methods to resolve differences and enforce agreements are all increasingly in question. Great powers have given up the struggle over ideology, which consumed the middle of the twentieth century. Yet, they struggle to control norms of international behavior as much as they ever did. Equally importantly, although the world's largest economies remain dominant, rising powers have a greater share of money and influence than ever before. They are increasingly assertive in their efforts to reshape the international order and to take their own measure of what advances their interests, irrespective of the demands of great power partners—and especially of the United States.

The structures needed to handle this emerging reality will be even more complicated and cumbersome than those that emerged at the end of World War II. Rather than tightly integrated blocs of states bound by mutual treaty obligations, we are moving toward a world in which each state must coordinate a wide range of overlapping ad hoc ties. While this system produces more friction, it also holds the promise of bringing every country into a web of interlocking relationships. For the United States and its partners, the challenge is not to resist this trend, but rather to ensure that the benefits of this comprehensiveness compensate for the complexity of these networks and the efforts required to maintain them.

This report will begin with an overview of the frameworks for internationalism and international cooperation, many of which have roots that are centuries old. It will then consider the strategies that great power competitors have adopted to limit the constraints that internationalism might place on their actions. The discussion then turns to the growing salience of the Global South: not only are such countries gaining in income, population, and power, but their cooperation is necessary to address a widening array of global issues. Alternative structures for international cooperation are considered, as is the potential incorporation of nontraditional participants into multilateral cooperation (such as nongovernmental organizations and the business community). After a brief consideration of the strategic shape of the future, the paper concludes that much more robust engagement across a range of modalities would deliver better outcomes for all.



# The Origins of Internationalism

Multilateral institutions are a recent innovation. Early multilateral efforts such as the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia and the 1814 Congress of Vienna were exercises in conflict management with a narrow remit on issues of warfare, and neither did much to coordinate European powers' pursuit of common interests. Yet, sharply increased communication, travel, and trade in the nineteenth century forced new modalities. The International Telegraph Convention in 1865 and the Universal Postal Convention in 1874 helped integrate communications networks. The First International Sanitary Conference in 1851 was a European effort to standardize quarantine regulations against the spread of cholera, plague, and yellow fever, in a clear recognition of the importance of international cooperation in combating contagious disease. The latter effort took four decades, as periodic gatherings of scientists and diplomats finally led to an agreement to notify fellow member states of disease outbreaks and to comply with internationally recognized disease prevention procedures.

The innovation here was that the resultant agreements legally bound the signatories, each of which benefited from the compliance of the whole. While accession was mostly limited to Europe, the expansive global footprint of Western powers gave even intra-European sanitary efforts global impact. In addition, many of these early agreements and conventions created durable institutions for follow-up, enforcement, and further cooperation.

A trend toward “structural” multilateralism, which created legally binding obligations on participants, picked up after World War I. International conventions on topics such as narcotics, trafficking in persons, citizenship, and trade then led to binding agreements.<sup>2</sup> But it was in the

decades following World War II that structural multilateralism really took off. From the ashes of a war that was genuinely global, a flurry of treaty-based international organizations was created that aspired to be genuinely universal. The UN General Assembly was the most sweeping of them, but agreements and institutions flourished, expanding their reach in issues from public health to economics to aviation, both within UN-affiliated structures and well beyond them.

“Coalitional internationalism” grew in the same period. These more flexible modes of international engagement allow groups of countries to coordinate efforts to advance individual and collective preferences outside the constraints of treaty-based multilateral institutions. The first G-grouping, the G7 group of market democracies, was initiated in 1975, and it provided an avenue for ideologically like-minded and economically compatible countries to bring their political leaderships together. Twenty-four years later, in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis, the G20 brought together finance ministers and central bankers from the world’s 20 largest economies. In 2009, it began to gather political leaderships, too.<sup>3</sup>

Some coalitions are even more ad hoc. Indeed, the George W. Bush administration hailed its “coalition of the willing,” encompassing the countries offering either military or political support during the 2003 war in Iraq and the subsequent U.S. military presence there.<sup>4</sup> The United States has been an especially effective convener of such ad hoc groups. As Stewart Patrick has written, informal arrangements outside multilateral institutions provide the “world’s most powerful country . . . greater maneuvering room and control over outcomes” than formal multilateral institutions.<sup>5</sup>

The great strength of structural internationalism is found in its normative qualities. International organizations embody values and teach them forward to new leaders. Yet, that same structure simultaneously creates weakness, as these institutions are only as strong as the signatory states are willing to tolerate. Powerful signatory nations determine in advance what remit they will tolerate in the new institution.

These same institutions have also succumbed to a creeping brittleness over time. Treaty-based international institutions rarely reopen the founding framework to adapt to changing power dynamics in the world. For example, the UN Security Council still awards veto rights to the same five countries it did three-quarters of a century ago, representing the victorious powers in World War II. Those five countries did represent the center of mass of geopolitical power in 1946. But while the rise of new global and regional powers—Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil, just to name a few—brings a new power geometry, the Security Council remains frozen in time. In the views of one close observer, “To a growing proportion of the world’s governments and citizens, the council today is both feckless and unjust, dominated by irresponsible and unrepresentative powers inclined to abuse their position rather than safeguard the peace.”<sup>6</sup>

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## **Objections from Great Power Competitors**

Even to those who are super-empowered by the post-World War II institutions, those institutions’ arrangements can appear problematic. While one can argue that they have given primacy to both China and Russia—especially in the case of the UN Security Council—both countries remain wary of a world in which U.S. wealth and military strength, when combined with that of Europe, gives the United States hegemonic power.

After all, what many in the United States have come to refer to as the “rules-based international order” is, in practice, the postwar, U.S.-led liberal order. It was united by three things: overwhelming U.S. global power, a U.S. commitment to ensure that benefits were widely shared among its adherents, and a durable threat to that order by an ideological challenger with universal aspirations. For U.S. allies and partners, the United States and the system it advanced served as both a benefactor and protector.

Because both Moscow and Beijing appear convinced that—even after the end of the Cold War—U.S. strategy remains predicated on seeking their weakness and isolation, each has adopted a three-pronged strategy: to aggressively defend their interests in existing multilateral organizations, to invest in newer multilateral organizations that exclude the United States from membership and in which they have relative primacy, and to align more closely with what they see as a “rising Global South” and enlist those countries in an effort to challenge U.S. hegemony. The stated goal of this behavior is not so much to undermine global order writ large as it is to ensure that the order that emerges is not a unipolar, U.S.-led one.

## **ENSURING THEY ARE NOT A TARGET**

The first prong of that effort has deep roots. Cold War skirmishes colored the early days of the Security Council, and difficulties resolving the Berlin blockade in 1948-1949 were an early indicator that the council “was not likely to be an operational body.”<sup>7</sup> Division persisted through four decades, although the end of the Cold War and the global response to 9/11 created an unprecedented sense of common purpose among the great powers. That sense of optimism crashed with the Arab Spring in 2011. In the early days of the Libyan civil war, in response to the Qaddafi regime’s use of lethal force against civilian protestors, the Security Council authorized a no-fly zone over Libya, as well as “all necessary measures” to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas. It was the council’s first authorization of military force based on the responsibility to protect (RTP) doctrine. Vigorous lobbying by important regional bodies such as the Arab League and the African Union persuaded Russia and China to abstain, rather than veto the resolution in March 2011.<sup>8</sup> But Moscow and Beijing soon regretted their unexercised vetoes, given the scope of NATO’s ensuing air campaign and what they saw as a clear end goal of toppling Qaddafi’s government.<sup>9</sup> For these

capitals, U.S. enthusiasm to support citizens rebelling against an authoritarian government was both naïve and threatening: naïve because the United States did not appreciate how the crushing of governments would unleash radical forces, and threatening because they identified with the authoritarian governments that swiftly fell. They had learned their lesson and would no longer leave the United States and its partners a loophole to wage war under UN sanction.

As noted earlier, the West's focus on the Russian war in Ukraine has heightened global divisions. In March 2022, a Russian-sponsored Security Council resolution demanding civilian protection and unhindered humanitarian access in Ukraine was only able to garner Chinese support. Thirteen other Security Council members abstained and defeated the measure, arguing that the most straightforward way to relieve civilian suffering was for Russia to end its assault on Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> Russia has complained loudly of a double standard, since the United States and its allies went into Iraq in 2003 absent a UN mandate. But this complaint has aligned with a resentment throughout much of the world that Ukraine garners so much attention and resources from the West, while the rest of the world's problems—from security to economics to refugees to disease—are seemingly neglected.

China has been more circumspect in its efforts to engage in the United Nations. It has joined about half of Russian vetoes in the Security Council since 2000 (generally on Syria), and it has not cast any vetoes independently since that time. Unlike Russia, which has pursued a visible course of confrontation and disruption, China has worked assiduously to develop what some analysts call “discourse power.” That is, China seeks to have phrases that the Chinese Communist Party favors—such as “shared future” and “win-win cooperation”—incorporated into UN documents, while lining up countries to support noninterference in China's internal affairs.<sup>11</sup> As James Kynge wrote in the *Financial Times* in August 2023, “rather than seeking to create a whole new order, Beijing's aim is to repurpose the UN's authority to more squarely serve China.”<sup>12</sup>

In so doing, China's approach is to defang the United Nations and to make it a friendlier venue for Chinese power. What is notable about China's efforts, especially in contrast to Russia's, is China's seeming interest in inserting its ideas into the UN process rather than bending the organization to its will. In this way, China seeks to legitimize alternate paradigms of governance and human security that in turn legitimize China, rather than seek to delegitimize efforts that the Chinese see as seeking to delegitimize China. The value proposition, from a Chinese perspective, is that many developing countries gain legitimacy through these Chinese-supported paradigms and see them as ammunition against Western hegemony.<sup>13</sup>

Arguably, China's actions serve to resurrect patterns of relations that prevailed in East Asia for centuries. According to one account:

“Sovereignty,” when the term is applied in Asian history, was mostly divisible, layered, and relative, as were allegiance, loyalty, and subjection. So the package that comes with the modern concepts and language of sovereignty, statehood, legitimacy, and the like impedes real understanding of the past and often only serves to legitimize political agendas in the present.<sup>14</sup>

Seen through this prism, China is not seeking to displace the United States but rather to build support for an order that plays to Chinese strengths, gives China primacy in its near abroad, and allows for ambiguity in ways that increase Chinese power.

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### **ENHANCED MULTILATERALISM**

The second prong of Beijing's and Moscow's approach is to pursue a wide range of newer multilateral groupings—BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Collective Treaty Security Organization, and a whole range of others. Generally centered in Asia, these organizations work on issues running the gamut from security to trade. While some incorporate U.S. allies and partners, none are centered around them, and they have the collective impact of creating organizations where U.S. influence is only indirect (if it exists at all). One could argue that these are both the appropriate and necessary counterparts to the sorts of U.S.-led institutions—starting with NATO and continuing to the World Bank and beyond—that the United States has created for three-quarters of a century. One could also argue that such organizations are focused on issues and countries that the United States and its closest partners neglect but that are nevertheless important to participants. Of course, their incorporation of countries that the United States and its allies sanction—not only Iran and increasingly Russia, but also several countries in Central Asia—helps reduce these countries' isolation. The steady expansion and invigoration of such organizations in recent years has the effect of diminishing U.S. global predominance even if it does not necessarily enhance Russian and Chinese influence. For both Russia and China, even that can represent a win.

### **ALIGNMENT WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

The third prong may be the most potent, and that is to seek alignment with rising powers that are deeply dissatisfied with the global status quo. Many in the Global South have come to resent what they see as the presumptiveness of wealthier nations. This attitude was well-captured by a remark the Indian minister of external affairs made in Bratislava in early June 2022: "Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's problems."<sup>15</sup> Former Indian national security adviser Shivshankar Menon argued in a recent piece in *Foreign Policy* that for many states in the Global South, "the existing order does not address their security needs, their existential concerns about food and finances, or transnational threats such as climate change."<sup>16</sup>

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Further, there is a widespread sense that Western powers have used the status quo to advance their own narrow interests. As a former Arab foreign minister remarked, “The West, with America at its lead, basically believed it has the right to American exceptionalism, and it has used force outside of its borders much more than anybody else over the years, and frequently without any legal basis.”<sup>17</sup> Resentment of a double standard has manifested itself in complaints about Western support for Israel as it sought to push Hamas from Gaza in the autumn of 2023. Many in the Global South saw the war as yet another attack on Palestinians, with scant attention to international humanitarian law or the laws of war. Seen this way, Western states emphasize these rules only when they serve Western interests and conveniently ignore them when it suits their purposes.

Sanctions policy is another area where many states in the Global South believe that Western-led efforts to enforce global rules are merely a cover for advancing narrow Western interests. As sanctions have emerged as an increasingly important part of the Western tool kit to shape international behavior, the growing instinct among a widening array of countries is to find ways to circumvent sanctions (either through explicit sanctions evasion or through efforts to develop payment methods that do not touch dollar-based institutions and are thus insulated from U.S. enforcement efforts). Chinese-Iranian trade is strong, and China is the destination for about two-thirds of Iranian oil exports. In the Ukraine case, we see not only robust Russia-China trade despite U.S.-led sanctions against Russia, but also steep increases in Russian trade with India, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>18</sup> While these countries argue that, rather than taking the Russian side, they are preserving their neutrality, the assertion of neutrality in the face of Western unanimity to advance norms and values undermines the centrality of those norms and values.

Amid sentiment that global institutions are ineffective in addressing the world’s most important challenges—and that the countries empowered by those institutions contributed to creating those problems in the first place—China and Russia invoke their own narratives of struggle against the wealthier nations of the West and sharpen their own grievances. Even if not seen as either exemplars or saviors, Russia and China can build some currency with states that share their distrust of Western intentions and their suspicion that Western prescriptions will leave them permanently lagging behind.



# The Salience of the Global South

Plainly put, the support of countries in the Global South is vital to the world's ability to address a widening array of global problems. The complexity and interrelationships of global challenges, expanding economies, rising mobility, and the sheer population of the nations making up the Global South make them vital partners. Yet, many factors conspire to undermine cooperation: the Global South's lingering historical grievances, a strong belief in the continued unfairness of the distribution of wealth and power, and a concern that the Global North's regulations will sabotage the Global South's urgent need for economic growth.

At a time of rising great power tensions, the North-South divide can serve both to exacerbate global challenges and undermine efforts at collective action to address shared priorities. Yet, while the Global North often considers the Global South an exception, for most people in the world, the Global South is the norm. It constitutes some 80 percent of the world's population and an increasing share of the global economy. Whereas in 2000 the countries constituting the Global South represented about 40 percent of world GDP, the OECD estimates that the global economy was equally divided in 2010, and the Global South will constitute almost 60 percent of world GDP in 2030.<sup>19</sup> Large populations in India and China are a driver here, and governments in both places have lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty. These countries are not wealthy, however, and wealth as it has become known in the Global North may perpetually elude them. In fact, the number of countries that have followed Western patterns of development and economic growth in the last century and achieved wealth as a consequence is small.

In the 1970s and the years since, leaders in the Global South have accused bankers from the Global North of profiting while millions of their countrymen continue to toil. As they see it, a generally impoverished Global South provides raw materials and cheap manufactured goods to the Global North, while scarce southern funds flow north for technology and services that the Global North insists are necessary to compete internationally.

China, especially, has sought to enhance its reputation as a country that brought hundreds of millions out of poverty by following its own star. Keenly conscious of the country's "century of humiliation" at the feet of many of the same global powers that retain influence in the global system today, China puts forward its remarkable growth over the last 30 years as a model and inspiration for its partners. In addition, China's emergence as a "near peer" to the United States despite very different values, political systems, and economics represents to many a crack in the purported monopoly of G7 countries.

### **BEYOND THE G7 PURVIEW**

For countries with established global leadership, many of their most vexing problems intimately link the Global North with the Global South and will require broader engagement between them. Migration is one such issue. Disease, climate change, and economic despair all drive people to leave what they know and seek better lives elsewhere. For some in the Global North, large immigrant communities from the Global South represent an incipient threat, bringing crime and extremism and threatening national cohesion. At the same time, some of those leaving the Global South are among the most highly skilled and trained of their population. They can gain entry to wealthier countries, earn higher pay and benefits, and enjoy a brighter future than in their countries of birth. As a consequence, their departure can make it harder for the Global South to develop local solutions, and it can perpetuate the Global South's dependency.

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Yet, a much larger fraction of the displaced never make it out of their own country, or out of neighboring states. The United Nations estimates that, at the end of 2015, more than 85 percent of the world's 16 million refugees, and more than 90 percent of the 64 million people forced from their homes around the world, remained in their regions of origin.<sup>20</sup> Overwhelmingly, those areas of war and displacement are located in the Global South. And while states in the Global South are legally bound by international norms on refugee treatment—including but not limited to the principle of non-refoulement, which bars the forcible return of refugees—they have no leverage to elicit support from northern states to abide by their respective normative obligations.<sup>21</sup> Put quite simply, the "stronger actor has little direct interest in cooperating, and the weaker actor has so little bargaining power that it can either accept what is offered or disengage entirely," in this case taking "what is offered or simply harm[ing] themselves by refusing all assistance for the refugees they host."<sup>22</sup> Their option is to appeal

to other interests of the Global North. The most obvious is allowing an increase in irregular migration, which has its own political impacts in destination countries. Appealing to destination countries' security interests that the origin countries can hold at risk is also in play. What is clear is that this is an area of tension that needs to be managed—between wealthier states that wish to keep the bulk of the challenge at arm's length and poorer states that feel they bear the brunt of the burden.

## ADAPTATION, LOSS, AND DAMAGE

For many middle- and low-income countries, the unfolding of the global energy transition is a manifestation of their disenfranchisement. Resentful that wealthy countries became wealthy without any constraints on their emissions (and oftentimes while exploiting raw materials in the developing world), some complain that they, too, should be allowed to pursue industrialization and urbanization at the lowest possible cost, irrespective of emissions. As they look at the increased costs of electrifying their economies, reducing agricultural burning, cleaning up industries, and moving away from domestic coal and toward either imported fuels or renewable infrastructure with imported components, they feel entitled to financial support for their economies to transition to a low-carbon future. In addition, many seek external support for adaptation—that is to say, making their countries survivable through a period of greater weather extremes, which they see as brought on by centuries of rampant emissions growth from the world's wealthiest economies. A 2009 UN commitment to “mobilize” \$100 billion per year for developing countries, set to expire in 2025, fell well short of its goal, but also well short of projected needs. According to a recent UN analysis,



*Activists call on the world's biggest CO<sub>2</sub> emitters to fill the “loss and damage” fund supporting the adaptation and development of countries most vulnerable to climate change, at the COP28 climate talks in Dubai on December 4, 2023.*

Photo: Karim Sahib/AFP via Getty Images

“developing countries require at least \$6 trillion by 2030 to meet less than half of their existing Nationally Determined Contributions.”<sup>23</sup>

Large as these numbers are, another issue is liability for losses and damages suffered as a consequence of climate change. For example, 2022 floods in Pakistan alone may have inflicted \$40 billion in losses, destroyed more than two million houses, and damaged 13,000 km of roads.<sup>24</sup> Every study suggests that the worst is yet to come. One estimate calculates that loss and damage from climate change in the developing world will total between a half-trillion and one trillion dollars by 2040, and between \$1.1 and \$1.7 trillion by 2050; an even more expansive study puts the toll at \$4 trillion by 2030.<sup>25</sup> And those are just the fiscal costs. A growing body of work seeks to assess the non-economic sources of loss and damage, including loss of territory, cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge, biodiversity, and a host of other factors.<sup>26</sup>

For affected states, the math is compelling. Pakistan contributes less than 1 percent of global carbon emissions, yet it is at profound risk for catastrophic loss due to climate change. Similarly, Africa contributes less greenhouse emissions than other continents, but 1.2 billion Africans are among the people most susceptible in the world to climate change.<sup>27</sup>

At issue, then, is not merely what countries will do to restrict their carbon emissions. There are a whole host of questions of who will pay the cost of adopting new energy systems, who will pay for adaptation to reduce vulnerability to natural disasters, who will pay the costs of natural disasters (and who will determine which of those have human causes, and how much of a role human activity played), and how countries will be compensated for other forms of loss that they suffer. Many wealthier countries argue that they not only have their own impressive climate-related costs to pay but have also already put billions of dollars into developing countries. At least some argue that “one reason people living in poor countries remain especially vulnerable to climate change is because government thievery and incompetence have held back the economic growth,” and that even if there were a large financial commitment by wealthier states, “very little of the money would likely reach the citizens who are suffering the brunt of weather disasters.”<sup>28</sup>

No formula can resolve the host of issues that have disproportionate impact in the Global South, and there will continue to be significant disagreement over the terms of their resolution. As the Global South gains in income, population, and power, however, its voice in the handling of those issues will rise. Up to now, Russia and China have put significant efforts into cultivating support in those states, arguing that what they need is a departure from the status quo that the United States and its allies and partners have imposed. The resultant solidarity gives some benefit to the affected states, while also providing benefit to Russia and China.

# Other Forms of Cooperation

Important and populous though the rest of the world is, the world's largest economies—and its largest military powers—retain outsized influence in global affairs, and they have a unique ability to genuinely threaten each other's security. In recent years, many have proposed that major powers—including but certainly not limited to the United States and China—create an ongoing process of dialogue and consensus building. The Concert of Europe inspired one suggestion, put forward by then-Council on Foreign Relations president Richard Haass, that “concert members recognized their competing interests, especially when it came to Europe's periphery, but sought to manage their differences and prevent them from jeopardizing group solidarity.”<sup>29</sup> Haass and coauthor Charles Kupchan envisioned a permanent headquarters with representatives from China, Russia, the United States, India, Japan and the European Union, along with observers from four regional organizations: the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Organization of American States. Their goal was creating a system that provided both “political inclusivity and procedural informality,” eschewing both the democracy-promoting inclusivity of the G7 and the sometimes-excruciating diplomatic exactitude of the G20, to create “major power consensus on the international norms that guide statecraft.”<sup>30</sup>

Harvard professors Dani Rodrik and Stephen Walt put forward another proposal, in which major powers would agree to place issues in one of four buckets: prohibited actions, actions in which states agree to alter their behavior in exchange for others' altered behavior, actions which states can take unilaterally, and actions whose efficacy requires broad multilateral compliance.<sup>31</sup>

Both proposals seek to build some guardrails around areas of mutual cooperation, ensuring that competition among major powers—let alone antagonism—does not undermine actions that advance mutual benefit. Yet, in periods of sustained conflict and low trust, countries tend to ascribe malign intent to even benign initiatives of their adversaries. This is in part because countries tend to see themselves as the central focus of adversaries’ foreign policies, and thus see adversaries’ efforts to thwart them as the central motivation of their actions. But it is also because, in low-trust environments, agreements are presumed to contain loopholes and trapdoors that advantage adversaries at their expense. While a focus on advancing shared interests is constructive—and, frankly, at the core of every diplomat’s tool kit—it is unrealistic to think that any single organization or dialogue structure can make significant headway between major powers when they are at loggerheads. Similarly, when there is general comity between major powers, the utility of a single structure amid myriad engagements is also diminished.

Even so, the idea of putting boundaries around national behavior is constructive. Especially promising areas to explore are those surrounding dual-use technology, autonomous weapons systems, and the weaponization of financial instruments. While competition in some of these areas is desirable and can drive innovation, unconstrained rivalry is more likely to be destabilizing. Putting limits on what governments will do, and creating confidence that those limits will be observed, reduces tensions and slows escalatory spirals. Yet, beneficial as such actions are, they need to be merely a piece of a much larger set of efforts.

## **PLURILATERAL**

Ambition can be a rare commodity in the multilateral sphere. Washington’s frequent instinct, as well as the instinct of many allies, is to make moderate reforms to existing institutions and arrangements in order to make them fit for purpose. Yet, the reform process is fraught. Meeting the aspirations of rising powers while reducing the U.S. ambit as well as that of its closest allies requires both sides of the equation to make what they consider to be significant concessions. Doing so when great power competition is the prevailing paradigm creates strong disincentives for such action. It is not a promising environment for ambitious adventures of diplomatic architecture.

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### ***It is not a promising environment for ambitious adventures of diplomatic architecture.***

More worthwhile is an effort to supplement the existing system, enveloping it in a web of complementary, sometimes overlapping, and often less-formal arrangements. In a way, this represents an effort to supplement twentieth-century agreements with additions that are more reminiscent of the nineteenth century.

There have already been efforts to invigorate what might be called “plurilateralism,” in which states set up smaller, more flexible, voluntary, and often temporary arrangements to break down complex cooperation problems and address specific governance challenges.<sup>32</sup> Coalitions vary greatly in size, function, and format, and they address discrete problem sets and issue areas in which interested



parties have a stake.<sup>33</sup> Former Indian national security adviser Shivshankar Menon has called this growing form of internationalism “coalitions of the willing and able,” reflecting the fact that coalition members often have both an interest in addressing the shared challenges at hand and a willingness to devote resources toward them.<sup>34</sup> When working well, informal arrangements enable swift cooperation on shared challenges—something in increasingly short supply within treaty-based multilateral forums.<sup>35</sup> Smaller groupings mean fewer diverging interests at the negotiating table, which arguably makes it easier (and quicker) to define agendas and set goals in discrete areas of global problem solving.<sup>36</sup> And because membership can be tailored to those with an interest in the issue at hand, states often come to the table with greater willingness to negotiate solutions.

Plurilateral coalitions have become more common across multiple domains of international problem solving, particularly as the prevalence and visibility of transnational issues has grown and geopolitical tensions and recalibrated modes of international engagement have made more formal arrangements less effective. In the environmental realm, for example, informal “climate clubs” are gaining traction as the international climate agenda expands and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—the chief multilateral body for environmental negotiations—faces gridlock.<sup>37</sup> Some groupings are designed to enable stronger international agreements. The Major Economies Forum of Energy and Climate Change (MEF), for example, was formed in 2009 to facilitate negotiations among developed and developing economies on the minimum required contributions necessary to make the 2010 UN Copenhagen climate summit successful. The MEF—which includes China, the United States, and other major polluters—has resumed meeting under the Biden administration.<sup>38</sup>

Coalitional governance in global health has also grown, especially in light of gridlock in the WHO made evident by the Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2021, for example, the “Quad” grouping of four maritime democracies across the Indo-Pacific (the United States, Australia, Japan, and India) established a vaccine partnership to assist countries in Asia with their Covid-19 pandemic responses, expand vaccine manufacturing, and administer 1.2 billion vaccinations globally. Meanwhile, under Beijing’s chairmanship in 2022, BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—launched a vaccine R&D center aimed at deepening cooperation in pandemic prevention as well as vaccine development, production, and distribution.<sup>39</sup>

In the economic domain, too, coalitional approaches are on the rise. The G20, formed in 1999 as a coordination mechanism among major global economies, held its first summit in 2008 as the world plunged into the largest financial crisis since the Great Depression. By choice, states in the former G8 began investing in the G20 as the “premier forum for . . . international economic cooperation,” recognizing that avoiding global crises (economic and otherwise) would require coordination among a wider set of states.<sup>40</sup> China has been active in coalitional arrangements in this sphere. In 2013, it launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to support infrastructure development overseas and expand and coordinate its bilateral economic partnerships, along with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to put its stamp on regional infrastructure financing.

The informal and ad hoc nature of coalitional arrangements can facilitate problem solving. For example, while China (now the largest creditor to developing nations) has refused to join the Paris

Club—an informal group of mostly Western official creditors that has met regularly since 1956 to address repayment challenges faced by debtor countries—it recently joined Paris Club members in a new initiative, the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable, to discuss coordination on sovereign debt restructuring and debt sustainability.<sup>41</sup>

Global cooperation is arguably most effective when pursued as a set of concentric circles, in which the innermost circle features deep patterns of cooperation enabled among like-minded societies.<sup>42</sup> As tensions have intensified between Beijing and Washington over the past decade, coalitional arrangements have emerged as a key vector for parties to extend and reinforce partnerships among like-minded states, expand material and normative influence, and set multilateral agendas in line with policy preferences.

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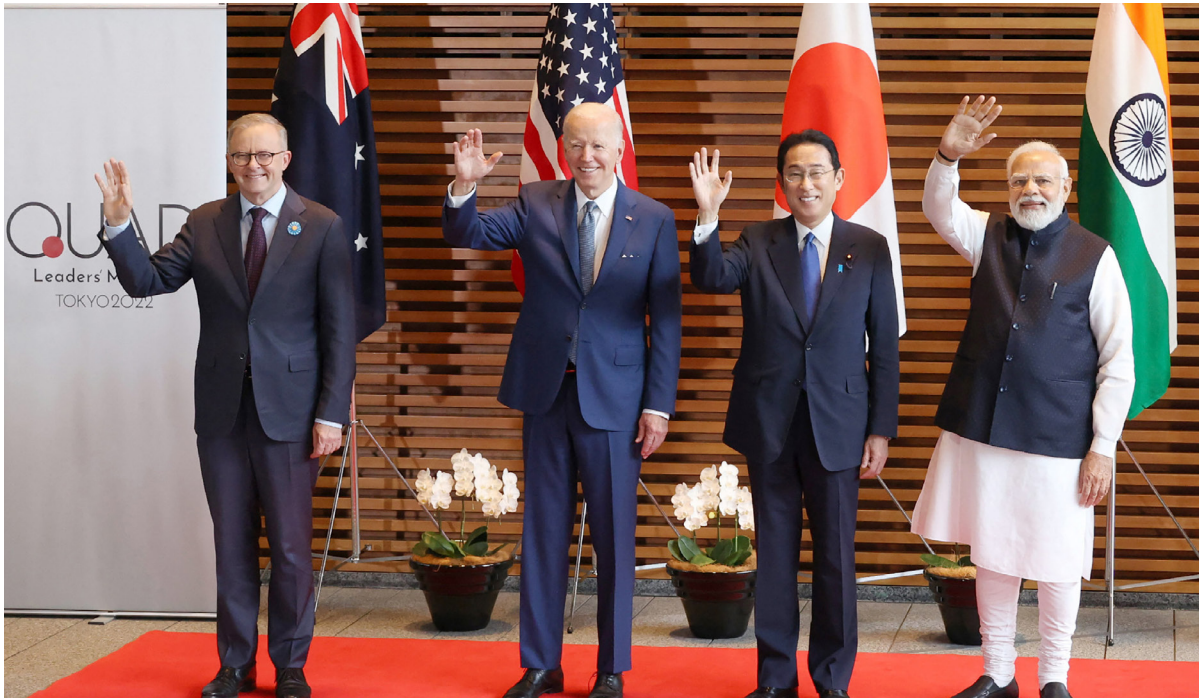
*Global cooperation is arguably most effective when pursued as a set of concentric circles, in which the innermost circle features deep patterns of cooperation enabled among like-minded societies.*

#### **UNITED STATES, ALLIES, AND PARTNERS**

Many plurilateral groupings pursued in the global West have begun to emphasize “like-mindedness” or ideological solidarity as an organizing principle. Deputy Prime Minister of Canada Chrystia Freeland has argued that democracies need to deepen mutual ties and drop “the pretense, or the self-delusion, that most of our relationships with authoritarian regimes can have a win-win outcome.”<sup>43</sup> This idea is made explicit in the Biden administration’s U.S. National Security Strategy: while recognizing the importance of building coalitions that are “as inclusive as possible” to address global challenges, the strategy repeatedly emphasizes that “democratic nations who share our interests and values” will be “at the core of our inclusive coalition.”<sup>44</sup> Such ideas are echoed in the national security strategies of key U.S. allies and partners, including Japan and Germany.<sup>45</sup>

The United States and like-minded partners are indeed leveraging coalitions to address perceived threats from China’s more assertive international behavior. Consensus about challenges to regional stability and prosperity served to resuscitate the Quad; the group was established first in 2007 but was reestablished in 2017 and meaningfully reinvigorated during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to strategic adjustments from India arguably tied to the Ladakh border crisis with China.<sup>46</sup> Shared values are a core ingredient of the Quad. As Indian foreign minister S. Jaishankar put it, “the Quad nations are all democratic polities, market economies and pluralistic societies,” a fact which generates “natural understanding” between coalition members.<sup>47</sup>

The revitalized Quad joins a growing set of partnerships and groupings forming what the Biden administration describes as a “latticework of strong, resilient, and mutually reinforcing relationships that prove democracies can deliver for their people and the world.”<sup>48</sup> AUKUS, a trilateral partnership designed to enhance strategic coordination and technological integration



*Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese, U.S. president Joe Biden, Japanese prime minister Kishida Fumio, and Indian prime minister Narendra Modi wave to the media prior to the Quad leaders' meeting in Tokyo on May 24, 2022.*

Photo: STR/AFP via Getty Images

between the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, is another example. AUKUS leaders are united by a desire to “protect . . . shared values and promote security and prosperity,” including a stable, free, and open Indo-Pacific.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the U.S. and EU trade and technology consultation mechanism, launched in June 2021, aims to coordinate economic and technology policy based on shared democratic values.<sup>50</sup>

Not all U.S. coalitions are anchored around a shared set of values. Some help the United States solidify new partnerships. The I2U2 grouping established in 2021, for example, links the United States with the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and India—states of different sizes, regime types, and development levels—centered on a broad agenda spanning from infrastructure development to food security to waste treatment.<sup>51</sup>

## **LAYERING**

It is important to note that none of these approaches to multilateral cooperation need be exclusive. For example, states may simultaneously seek to create legally binding agreements between themselves (requiring both treaty commitments as well as domestic legislation for implementation), summit meetings of political leaderships, a permanent secretariat to sustain activity between summit meetings, and dedicated multiyear funding for shared projects. An example of the latter is the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which has spent over \$100 billion worldwide in the last 20 years.<sup>52</sup> While such layered efforts can be made among like-minded states,

one could also argue that the approach approximates many elements of U.S.-Soviet (and later, U.S.-Russian) arms control agreements. Because comprehensive agreements often require domestic support, and because legislative processes may be drawn out and have uncertain outcomes, governments may favor pursuing multiple pathways simultaneously. Doing so can both build momentum for domestic legislation and lock in agreements when the requisite domestic support is not assured.

At the same time, it is important to note that congeniality and effectiveness do not always go hand in hand. As a former Asian foreign minister observed, “The inclination is to have like-minded groupings of countries that exclude [other countries] . . . but I think that type of . . . comfortable, cozy, like-minded setup, while effective in decision-making. . . doesn’t allow for difficult conversations to be had.”<sup>53</sup>

# Non-state Actors

One way to invigorate a world with plurilateral arrangements is to supplement them further with a broader variety of actors. More and more, global problem solving demands the participation and resources not only of governments and intergovernmental organizations but also of corporate, civic, and philanthropic actors. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted this new dynamic: while some governments pushed politically driven narratives and restricted information flow, public health experts, universities, and foundations shared data and remedies across borders.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, growing attention is being paid to the question of how to optimize integration of intergovernmental, national, sub-national, and non-state efforts in what UN secretary-general António Guterres has called more “inclusive multilateralism.”<sup>55</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter argues, “humanity cannot afford to go back to a world in which only states matter,” and Charles Powell draws attention to three “unconventional constituencies”—cities, citizens, and corporations—whose leadership will be required to meet the climate challenge, including by encouraging and facilitating policymaking.<sup>56</sup>

Non-state and sub-state actors have emerged both as problem-makers and problem-solvers in the twenty-first century. An early indication of this trend arose from the actions of al Qaeda at the turn of the century: according to Henry Kissinger, the 9/11 attacks immediately prompted questions of “how to establish international order when the principal adversaries are non-state organizations that defend no specific territory and reject established principles of legitimacy.”<sup>57</sup> The leveling power of technology has increasingly enabled non-conventional actors to inflict disruption or lethal harm on states, such as through cyberterrorism and election interference. A hacker in one country can shut down a pipeline on another continent.<sup>58</sup>

These developments, many experts argue, challenge traditional notions of sovereignty that have historically formed the basis for order-building.<sup>59</sup> As U.S. national security advisor Jake Sullivan put it in conversation with Michael Fullilove, the expanded capacity of non-state actors to inflict disruption and harm across borders has to some extent made the “Westphalian system of state-to-state diplomacy and engagement feel an increasingly distant thing.”<sup>60</sup> Ian Bremmer foresees a “technopolar moment” in which big technology companies rival nation-states in their provision of national security, their delivery of digital and analog products necessary to run a modern society, and their ability to shape interactions and behaviors of citizens.<sup>61</sup> As Dr. Kissinger frames it, “the very definition of state authority may turn ambiguous . . . [when] a laptop can produce global consequences.”<sup>62</sup>

Due partially to the resource demands of addressing growing transnational challenges, multilevel and multi-stakeholder approaches to global problem solving are on the rise. The private sector brings enormous financial resources. In 2020, the combined market capitalization of just five major U.S. technology companies exceeded the GDP of every nation but the United States and China.<sup>63</sup> Financial incentives for private sector actors to align themselves with global efforts, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, are rising as shareholders of major multinational corporations increasingly prioritize environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues.<sup>64</sup>

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***As Dr. Kissinger frames it, “the very definition of state authority may turn ambiguous . . . [when] a laptop can produce global consequences.”***

Additionally, actors at the subnational level, such as provincial and city governments, are increasingly indispensable in addressing transnational challenges. This is particularly true for issues such as pandemics and climate change, which disproportionately affect urban environments. In many countries, local authorities were on the frontlines in Covid-19 pandemic prevention and control: distributing tests, personal protective equipment, and vaccines, as well as issuing stay-at-home orders.<sup>65</sup>

In the climate arena, cities are now responsible for over 70 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>66</sup> As a result, new arrangements have emerged to leverage these stakeholders as partners in problem solving. In 2014, for example, UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon and UN special envoy for cities and climate change Michael Bloomberg announced the “Compact of Mayors” designed to support mayors and other city officials who pledged to reduce local greenhouse gas emissions, enhance local resilience to climate change, and transparently track their progress.<sup>67</sup> In 2016, the Compact for Mayors merged with an EU-focused initiative to become the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM), a partnership between the European Union and Bloomberg Philanthropies, which has brought together over 12,500 cities and local governments across six continents.<sup>68</sup>



The GCoM offers an example of an emerging form of multi-stakeholder internationalism that more formally incorporates philanthropies, civil society, mayors, governors, and the private sector as partners to address pressing challenges. State-based coalitions and treaty-based institutions such as the United Nations and International Monetary Fund alike are increasingly working alongside businesses, NGOs, and civic society organizations through what Slaughter and LaForge call “impact hubs.”<sup>69</sup> An implicit premise of such hubs is that treaty-based institutions and states bring legitimacy and convening capacities, but non-state and local governmental actors are essential partners in financing and implementing steps to address shared challenges.

Examples of this multi-stakeholder approach are proliferating across transnational issue areas such as global health, food security, and climate change. A prominent example in the realm of global health is the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI). Established in 2000, GAVI facilitates the delivery of affordable vaccines to low-income countries. GAVI was specifically designed to be a “new type of international organization, one that sought to be representative, nimble, and effective all at the same time.”<sup>70</sup> While GAVI’s objectives are aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goals, and international institutions anchor the alliance, non-state actors remain central to the enterprise: the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation contributed initial seed money in 1999 and has a permanent seat on the 28-member board, alongside civil society organizations, research and technical health institutes, donor countries, and international organizations such as the WHO and the World Bank.<sup>71</sup> GAVI worked alongside UNICEF and the Coalition for Epidemic



*Palestinian prime minister Muhammad Shtayeh watches as a healthcare worker administers the Covid-19 vaccine to a patient at a hospital in the West Bank city of Ramallah on March 21, 2021. The multi-stakeholder COVAX initiative delivered these vaccines to the West Bank.*

Photo: Abbas Momani/AFP via Getty Images

Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)—another multi-stakeholder group—on the COVAX effort during the Covid-19 pandemic, which distributed nearly 2 billion vaccines to 146 countries.<sup>72</sup>

Examples of this multi-stakeholder approach are found in a range of other realms. In food security, for example, the UN secretary-general recently launched the Food Systems Coordination Hub to better coordinate the work of UN bodies, international financial institutions, civil society, and private sector actors to support food systems transformations at the national level.<sup>73</sup> The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), which seeks to reduce corruption and regulate information disclosure in supply chains for extractive industries (oil, gas, and mineral), is another example. Funding comes from implementing countries, international development partners, and private firms, and the board is composed of civil society organizations, firms in the industry, institutional investors, and implementing and supporting countries.<sup>74</sup>

In the energy and climate space, a prominent and recent multi-stakeholder initiative is the Global Energy Alliance for People and the Planet (GEAPP), which aims to catalyze and channel major public and private investments to improve the availability of affordable clean power. GEAPP has three types of partners: anchor partners, including foundations responsible for setting the strategic vision and providing seed capital; multilateral and regional development banks, which “amplify” philanthropic and private capital; and organizations and individuals with technical and regional expertise. Just as GAVI was established with support from the Gates Foundation, GEAPP was set up by the Rockefeller Foundation, which—with partners—invested \$10 billion at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November 2021. A multi-stakeholder approach was inherent in its design: GEAPP “recognizes that to create major change, a new approach is needed. Multiple players—governments, investors, innovators, power companies, philanthropies, and more—must come together to ensure access to electricity for all people.”<sup>75</sup>

As these examples suggest, broader coalitions of diverse stakeholders share many of the same advantages and disadvantages of state-based coalitions. Their flexibility encourages participation and allows for adaptation, and their modularity offers the ability to advance specific objectives. A unique advantage of bringing non-state and sub-state actors into the equation is that greater resources are brought to bear in addressing each challenge. This makes investments more sizeable, but also more stable: even as political dynamics within countries make broader cooperation difficult, non-state actors such as NGOs and corporations may still be able to work across borders and advance progress toward shared challenges.

One implication of what Slaughter and LaForge call “opening up the order” to non-state and subnational actors involves influence over international norms and rules. Compared to the Global North, many countries in the broader Global South have relatively weak civil societies. Most sizeable philanthropies and civil society organizations, and many large corporations, are from the advanced economies of North America, Asia, and Europe.<sup>76</sup> Arguably, this means that many multi-stakeholder arrangements may actually reinforce the wherewithal of developed countries in global governance, providing them with additional avenues to impose preferred norms.<sup>77</sup>

Beyond this, multi-stakeholder arrangements come with their own set of risks. National governments are often suspicious of other types of actors working on issues they see as within their sovereign remit. And without coordination, having too many actors involved in solutions provision risks gridlock and redundancy: “In most areas of global problem solving,” Slaughter and LaForge argue, “the challenge is not too few actors but too many.”<sup>78</sup> These considerations clarify the challenges of developing multistakeholder arrangements that not only incorporate a range of stakeholders but efficiently channel their resources, know-how, and technology into global problem solving.

# Looking Forward

While much of the foregoing analysis describes responses to the world as it is, it does not necessarily describe the world as it will be. As the United States and its partners look toward the future, it is important to anticipate that the nature of great power conflict may change, and perhaps in large ways. In the nearer term, the termination of the Ukraine war could leave Russia isolated, poorer, and some even suspect with new leadership. Some scenarios, however, would leave Russia strengthened, and a crumbling of Western support for Ukraine could change the nature of global solidarity with the United States. Either would cast a large shadow on U.S.-Russian competition. In the longer term, however, it is hard to see how the energy transition will leave Russia stronger, and Russia's demographic challenges pose a persistent threat to its global power.

China's demographic challenges are even starker. Not only has India overtaken China as the world's most populous country, but China's population will both age and shrink over the next half century in ways that will certainly affect its economic growth. It remains unclear if China's current economic slowdown is a harbinger of growing structural issues or a temporary consequence of its Covid lockdown, but assuming China's global ascent will continue uninterrupted through the twenty-first century would be a mistake. While China may indeed continue to grow in global influence, barriers to that growth are increasingly visible. Whereas it once seemed fanciful to wonder if China would grow old before it grew rich, the question is an increasingly salient one.

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***While China may indeed continue to grow in global influence, barriers to that growth are increasingly visible.***

It is possible that a decline in the prospects of great power competitors—including the United States—could provoke governments to be less risk-averse as they seek to stave off decline. Yet, it is also possible that great power competition, which is currently at the core of U.S. global strategy, may soon be joined by the need to manage a subtler competition among rising powers for a greater share of the global pie. In this analysis, Russia’s and China’s military and intelligence capabilities mean they will remain important, but their relative importance may diminish while the growing ambitions, appetites, and independence of countries such as India, Brazil, and Saudi Arabia may grow even more salient. One former Asian national security adviser suggested, “Parts of the South now have developed capabilities they didn’t have, and hard power capabilities. If you look at it geopolitically, the contentions that matter are in the South, not in Ukraine, which is not going to change the central global balance [between China and the United States] . . . I think what we’re going to see is increasing movement by the South towards strategic autonomy.”<sup>79</sup>

# Conclusion

The Ukraine war, which started in a period already marked by great power competition, has highlighted global divisions in international affairs. Great power cooperation has fallen to its lowest level since more than half a century ago, when the United States began strategically engaging China to isolate the Soviet Union. Because there is ongoing proxy warfare between the United States and Russia in Ukraine, and because Chinese and U.S. tensions over the South China Sea in general—and Taiwan in particular—are rising, efforts to put guardrails around great power conflict are fraught. Each side fears that efforts to limit escalation are merely covert efforts to convey advantage. Meanwhile, rising direct sanctions against Russia and U.S. efforts to deprive China of access to cutting-edge U.S. technology have the effect of disentangling trade and reducing incentives for cooperation. Simultaneously, even countries close to the United States have signaled a desire to distance themselves from great power competition—absent a global ideological threat, attracted by the idea of greater agency over pursuit of their individual interests, and feeling that they benefit from a diversity of relationships. Global solidarity is becoming harder to achieve.

There is no single reform or formula that can recover the shared sense of purpose that characterized much of the world in 1945. The world is more intimately connected than ever before, and the problems have multiplied even faster than the number of stakeholders. The appropriate response is to expand the instruments of consultation and cooperation, creating multiple forums for shared action. The foregoing essay has made clear some of the advantages of doing so, which date back to the nineteenth century's earliest efforts at internationalism: incentivizing cooperation,



coordinating the pursuit of shared interests, and enabling outcomes that individual countries' actions are unable to achieve.

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***There is no single reform or formula that can recover the shared sense of purpose that characterized much of the world in 1945.***

Such efforts must overcome two challenges, however. The first is that they can succumb to advancing the “least common denominator” in international forums, devoting energy to issues and partners where there is broad agreement while diverting it from important areas where there is less agreement. Such an outcome would deliver small marginal benefits, but also leave unmanaged much more important—and potentially even threatening—problems that divide important countries. A central discipline throughout this process must be to ensure that contentious issues and troubling partners continue to receive sustained attention, partly through direct engagement and partly through using broadened partnerships to help build coalitions that can push back on any single country's excesses.

The second challenge is that the whole process could become completely unwieldy, with so many simultaneous initiatives taking off in so many directions that they dissipate energies rather than collect them. With a limited number of senior policymakers and limited time, there must be prioritization of efforts and partners.

Russia's efforts to advance its agenda aggressively in every forum have not won it success but have helped stave off abject failure. The government has been able to use its position and its influence to block efforts to constrain its behavior, and it has reached a sort of understanding with China that advances common goals, or at least common defenses. China's efforts in this space have been more successful in addressing the second set of challenges than the first. Schemes such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative have drawn wide attention and broad participation, even when their parameters are unclear—and perhaps because of it. China has done an extraordinary job framing issues, supplying vocabulary, and advancing partnerships on its own terms. On the first set of issues—a watering down of collective action—China has also been largely successful, not least because it is comfortable in a world that gives wide ambit to sovereign governments and pushes collaboration mostly into the bilateral sphere. That suits China well, since in every bilateral relationship except the one with the United States, it is the dominant partner.

As the United States and its allies and partners approach this issue, they have several innate advantages. The first is that they have allies and partners, bound by treaty and by shared interests to pursue common goals. That is to say, they have a head start. Second, they are better positioned to make consequential and positive change: technology and know-how, combined with massive capital, makes a great deal possible. Third, they have organizational and institutional capacity, between governments and with civil society organizations. Seventy-five years of joint action have created institutional memory and institutional capacity.

Yet they must develop their capacity along two lines. The first is humility. The world's wealthiest countries have devoted hundreds of billions of dollars to efforts that they said were devoted to global prosperity. Yet, many of the targets of that aid remain poor, and some, like China, that received little aid prospered. As countries that have felt historically exploited—by colonial powers, by extractive industries, by multinational corporations, by global financial institutions, and by the dominant states that shape those institutions—gain power and agency, more powerful countries will need to weigh the wisdom and efficacy of coercive efforts against weaker ones. This is not to say that there will not be moments when pressure is essential; rather, countries will increasingly find alternatives to compliance.

The second element that must be developed is creativity. Because the United States and its allies and partners created the status quo, they have an instinct to preserve it. Yet, the very act of doing so reinforces the dissatisfaction of those who object to it. A strategy that searches creatively for common interests, builds common goals, and aligns common efforts both in rhetoric and action can break through that dissatisfaction and build durable patterns of cooperation.

None of this will eliminate great power competition nor resolve the growing set of issues that divide the parts of the world that are still grasping for prosperity and the parts that are trying to preserve what they have. But a robust set of institutions and initiatives that encompass a wider range of actors will help create tools to manage tensions and create opportunities for efforts that make conditions far better for all.

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