

Great Power Competition in the Multilateral System

By Daniel F. Runde and Austin Hardman

Introduction

The landscape of great power competition within multilateral institutions has significantly evolved over the past few decades, reflecting broader shifts in global power dynamics. The United States, historically dominant in these forums, now faces increasing competition from China and other emerging powers. Absent of a challenger, China is gaining influence within the international institutions that the United States has created, funded, and legitimized. China's strategic positioning and substantial investments in multilateral bodies have allowed it to exert considerable influence, particularly within the United Nations system.

China's approach includes placing its citizens in key leadership positions, increasing staffing, and boosting unearmarked financial contributions to multilateral institutions. This strategy not only enhances China's influence over global policies but also promotes its development model and geopolitical interests in the Global South. Despite being the largest financial contributor to many international organizations, the United States has seen a relative decline in its influence, partly due to financial constraints, strategic missteps, and underrepresentation in staffing. Building on the 2021 CSIS report *[The Future of U.S. Leadership in Multilateral Development Institutions: A Playbook for the Next 10 Years](#)*, this policy brief presents recent trends regarding the Global South's growing alignment with China and suggests ways for the United States to reclaim its influence within the multilateral system.

China's Rising Influence in the Multilateral System

Multilateral institutions play a crucial role in collaborative governance and consensus building, reflecting broader shifts in global power structures. Since their inception nearly eight decades ago, the United States has maintained a preeminent norm-setting role in these institutions, leveraging its economic and political influence to shape international agendas and advocate for Western values. However, this influence has been steadily declining, coinciding with the rise of China as a formidable

player on the global stage. At the same time, developing countries have demanded a greater voice in shaping these institutions in ways that are distinct from the priorities of both the United States and China.

China was largely uninvolved in the affairs of multilateral organizations such as the United Nations until the 1990s. Apart from issues relating to Taiwan, China rarely exercised interest or made voluntary contributions to the United Nations. China's engagement increased rapidly once it started on the path toward globalizing its economy (see Box 1). China's increasing influence in the United Nations has become evident through several trends:

- 1. Competing for Leadership Positions:** Through its leadership roles in multilateral forums, China promotes efforts that support its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), influencing global standards and practices in ways that favor its economic and political values and interests. Beijing has cultivated UN leaders, such as **Secretary-General António Guterres**, to champion the BRI and align it with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Under **Chinese leadership**, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has emphasized projects that dovetail with BRI objectives, raising concerns among Western leaders about China's potential to undermine the integrity of multilateral institutions.

In 2021, Chinese nationals led **4 of the 15 major UN** specialized agencies: the FAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization. Additionally, China sought leadership of a fifth agency, the World Intellectual Property Organization, but that effort was successfully thwarted. Nevertheless, the leadership positions held by Chinese nationals in **key agencies** underscore China's strategic positioning within the UN system and its intent to influence global policies and priorities in critical areas such as international development and technological advancement.

African nations, as the largest regional bloc in the United Nations, with a **28 percent** voting share, have played a crucial role in supporting China's rise within multilateral institutions. A robust focus on Africa continues to pay dividends for China in multilateral fora, as evidenced by African support in electing Chinese nationals to the lead positions in four UN principal agencies, as well as securing deputy slots in nine others. African votes have also been pivotal in the passage of U.S.-opposed Chinese resolutions and increasing China's representation within the UN Secretariat and various UN funds and programs, further solidifying Beijing's influence.

- 2. Increasing Its Personnel Footprint:** China has strategically increased its presence within multilateral institutions by boosting staff numbers. The number of Chinese nationals employed by the United Nations nearly doubled from **2009** to 2022, reaching **1,564 personnel in 2022**. In tandem, China **sponsored** 32 UN junior professional officers (JPOs) and 590 other professional staff between 2015 and 2021, achieving rapid growth in just five years. To counterbalance China's growing personnel footprint and increase the number of U.S. nationals in international organizations, the U.S. Department of State has made efforts over the past three years to **publicize** JPO vacancies in international institutions.

Exerting Influence in Multilateral Organizations

China has a track record of using multilateral institutions to promote its interests under the guise of the UN flag and in contravention of UN rules requiring agency heads to act as neutral international civil servants rather than agents of their home country.

- Under Chinese leadership, the International Civil Aviation Organization, which decides global flight paths and which airspace belongs to what countries, has excluded Taiwan from the organization.
- A UN whistleblower, a former employee of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), has alleged China's use of intimidation of human rights defenders, bribery, and edited documents to remove mention of unflattering realities, such as facts about the origins of the Covid-19 virus and human rights abuses in China.
- In October 2022, the United Nations Human Rights Council voted on whether to hold a debate on human rights violations against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang after the OHCHR released an assessment that found evidence of serious abuses, including possible crimes against humanity. China managed to garner enough support to kill the resolution, with 19 votes against it, 17 in favor, and 11 abstentions. China successfully avoided further discussions and accountability for its human rights violations, including “mass arbitrary detention, widespread torture, sexual violence, coercive birth suppression, family separation, forced labor, and repression of religious and cultural practices in Xinjiang.”
- By placing Chinese nationals in senior positions, China aims to boost the presence of Chinese tech companies, garner support for Chinese state-backed initiatives, and push the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s authoritarian norms. After being reelected unopposed as the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) secretary general, Houlin Zhao, whose previous experience includes developing telecommunications standards for the Chinese government, insisted that allegations of Huawei's 5G equipment being used for espionage were baseless and politically motivated. Under the pretense of digital inclusion, the ITU touted its role in Huawei's rollout of digital infrastructure in nearly 80 countries, impacting 90 million people in remote areas. Huawei is the same Chinese corporation responsible for developing and implementing surveillance technology, including facial recognition and a “Uighur alert” system, to enable China's techno-authoritarian model of governance. The CCP leverages the United Nations' specialized agency for digital technologies to push for authoritarian norms and sell its mobile network equipment and surveillance systems to train its own artificial intelligence. The ITU has adopted dozens of standards proposals from Chinese companies such as Huawei. The ITU's standards are then adopted by developing countries that lack regulatory agencies of their own.

3. **Flexing Its Financial Muscle:** Over the past decade, China has more than **quadrupled** its discretionary contributions to multilateral development institutions, including significant voluntary funding directed to multilateral development bank (MDB) concessional financing

windows and specialized UN entities. China's role in the World Bank has also expanded significantly since it joined in 1980. By 2013, it had become the third-largest shareholder in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the World Bank's lending arm, with 5.03 percent of the voting power. This not only reflects China's economic growth but also deliberate policy choices aimed at enhancing its global influence. China's level of funding is still a fraction of that provided by the United States, but China has been able to mobilize this funding to advance national priorities in ways that the United States has not.

China's financial influence also includes substantial contributions to the World Bank's International Development Association and specialized UN entities such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme, and UNICEF. In addition, within the UN system, China created the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund in 2016 with a **\$200 million** contribution over 10 years, supporting peacekeeping, rapid response, and conflict prevention and mediation. It remains the only donor to this fund and has **explicitly** stated that the fund is intended to align the United Nations' Agenda 2030 with the BRI. Additionally, in 2018, due in part to African lobbying, China placed an 8,000-strong standby force at the United Nations' disposal for crisis deployment, and China is now the **largest** troop contributor among the UN Security Council's permanent members.

- 4. Leveraging New Institutions to Pursue Commercial Interests:** To challenge the current global order, or to respond to what it sees as unfair treatment, China has established new multilateral organizations and partnerships, particularly with the Global South, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank, where it is the largest or co-largest shareholder and which exclude the United States. These institutions not only enhance China's financial and strategic reach but also provide a platform for promoting its development model and policy preferences.

The strategic engagement of Chinese firms in multilateral institutions further underscores China's expanding influence. China's ability to integrate its commercial interests with its strategic objectives has led to the prominence of Chinese firms in MDB contracts. In 2019 alone, Chinese firms won contracts worth **\$7.4 billion** from major MDBs, representing 14 percent of total contracts by value. In recent years, Chinese firms have continued to rise to be the top or near-top recipients of contracts from MDBs. Between fiscal years 2013 and 2022, Chinese businesses were awarded around **20 percent** of all contracts from the World Bank, positioning them as its top contract recipients. This dominance in procurement reflects institutional rules favoring the lowest bids and the substantial presence of Chinese firms in infrastructure sectors. China's commercial benefits from these contracts align with its broader strategy of leveraging economic tools to gain political and strategic advantages within multilateral frameworks.

China's Strategic Engagement with the Global South

China's strategy extends beyond merely filling top positions and personnel in the multilateral system; it actively shapes the norms and policies of these institutions to align with its broader geopolitical goals. More importantly, China presents itself as a developing country and **leading advocate** for the Global South.

Beijing has articulated a **doctrine** that places development and multilateralism at the forefront of Chinese foreign policy: “Big powers are the key, China’s periphery the priority, developing countries the foundation, and multilateral platforms the stage.” Through platforms such as the AIIB and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Global South nations gain access to substantial economic aid, infrastructure development, and investment—critical for their development goals. China has had a **long-standing relationship** with the IsDB and, in recent years, established a partnership to assist bank members in constructing **anti-pandemic** infrastructure. China’s involvement provides these countries alternatives to Western-led financial institutions, often with more favorable terms and less-stringent conditions regarding governance and human rights standards.

Additionally, China’s diplomatic strategy includes steering nations toward its commercial sector. In recent years, China has significantly increased its presence in countries such as **Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Djibouti, Venezuela, Laos**, and others through strategic and significant foreign direct investment and foreign aid. Many of these countries now align themselves more closely with China’s geopolitical interests, resulting in diminished reliance on traditional Western partners, including the United States. Nations that engage in deals with China do not face consequences from the United States, even when the United States is a major donor or trading partner.

China is actively using personal engagement to strengthen ties and leverage its position, often filling the vacuum left by U.S. neglect in various regions. In Africa, for example, where U.S. influence has been **waning** in recent years, China has maintained **leading engagement** among the continent’s central, eastern, and southern countries. In these regions, China fosters visits and **interactions** with senior security leaders across various sectors, including the army, air force, navy, and police, supporting Beijing’s strategic goals and agenda on the continent. China has also established **53 embassies in Africa—three more** than the United States.

Moreover, **high-level visits** have not been a regular feature of U.S.-Africa relations. However, the Biden administration has recently increased its focus on China, leading to more high-level engagements with African nations. In 2023, 17 cabinet members and leaders of U.S. government departments and agencies **visited** 26 African countries. Despite this uptick, these efforts pale in comparison to China’s sustained attention to Africa. **For 33 years**, Chinese foreign ministers have consistently made Africa their first stop in annual overseas travel, a standard practice so routine it garners no special media attention. Xi Jinping personally made **10 visits** to Africa between 2014 and 2020.

As a result of these trends, China’s influence within multilateral institutions has profoundly shaped the positions and voting behaviors of Global South countries on key global issues. This influence became particularly evident through their voting patterns on critical matters such as the war in Ukraine, human rights violations, and the status of Taiwan.

RUSSIA’S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, many African, Asian, and Latin American countries have abstained from voting on resolutions condemning Russia’s **actions**. During the March 2022 emergency voting session on the “**Aggression against Ukraine**” resolution in the UN General Assembly, **17 African countries** abstained from voting and an additional eight declined participation. This abstention reflects a diplomatic balancing act, influenced by economic and political ties with the

West, China, and Russia. It demonstrates the nuanced positions these countries adopt to maintain favorable relations and avoid jeopardizing economic partnerships.

The abstentions and opposition to the resolutions against Russian aggression may reveal a growing assertiveness among countries of the Global South in shaping their foreign policies independently of traditional power blocs. Alternatively, the abstentions could be a reaction against what is seen as “the West” prioritizing a war in Europe over deadly conflicts in the Global South. The abstentions may also reflect countries’ unwillingness to involve themselves in a conflict that does not concern them. Regardless, this trend is indicative of a broader shift toward a multipolar world where Global South countries seek to assert their independence and protect their interests on the global stage.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

In addition, China’s influence extends to human rights issues, where many Global South countries align with China’s positions on sensitive topics such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong. During the 2022 vote on holding a Human Rights Council debate on **human rights violations in Xinjiang**, most African countries abstained or voted **against** the resolution in a show of support for China. This alignment stems from China’s extensive economic engagements and development assistance, which create an implicit expectation of political backing in international forums. China’s strategic investment and aid allow it to build a network of allies that support its positions in multilateral organizations.

STATUS OF TAIWAN

China’s influence also plays a critical role in issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly concerning Taiwan. Most Global South countries, influenced by their economic and diplomatic ties with China, not only profess adherence to the One China policy but go further by adopting Beijing’s preferred language of the “One China principle.” For example, Eswatini is the **only African nation** to recognize Taiwan. This diplomatic stance is crucial for China as it seeks to isolate Taiwan internationally. Support from these countries in international forums ensures that resolutions or statements potentially supportive of Taiwan rarely pass, consolidating China’s position and preventing any diplomatic recognition of Taiwan.

The alignment of Global South countries with China often results in the dilution of Western-led efforts to address issues such as human rights abuses, democratic governance, and territorial disputes. This shift complicates the balance of power within multilateral institutions, making it more challenging for Western nations to garner support for their initiatives. Consequently, this dynamic can lead to a fragmented international order where achieving consensus on critical global issues becomes increasingly difficult, impacting the effectiveness of global governance.

Recommendations

The change in landscape discussed above may have initially caused some challenges, but it is time to reflect inward, assessing U.S. shortcomings in strategy and execution more than focusing on what others have done. An urgent mission objective for the United States and its allies should be to restore primacy in the multilateral system. Many of the actionable steps the United States can take toward reclaiming power ceded to China are connected and more complicated than they may appear, but they are critical to achieving foreign policy objectives through the multilateral system.

- **Establish priorities, align resources, and coordinate across U.S. missions.**

To regain leadership in international organizations and counter China's growing influence, the United States should establish regular communication channels between U.S. representatives at international organizations, relevant home bureaus at the State Department, and U.S. country missions worldwide. This will help the United States better understand the domestic environments and specific needs of Global South countries, enabling it to build support in capitals for its preferences, address reasons for their alignment with China, and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships.

Improving interagency cooperation within the U.S. government is another crucial step for achieving foreign policy goals and enhancing overall diplomatic effectiveness. Utilizing integrated digital platforms for communication and management of policy implementation, which allow for real-time sharing of data and insights, can significantly improve interagency workflow and efficiency.

However, enhanced communication and coordination are meaningless without established priorities. The United States should develop a priority list of top multilateral issues for missions to focus on. This prioritization will help guide missions in addressing the most pressing global challenges and ensure that U.S. efforts are concentrated where they will have the greatest impact. This approach will enable the United States to effectively mobilize resources, advocate for key initiatives, and foster partnerships that align with its values and interests, countering the influence of other major players such as China in the Global South. Matching resources and communication channels to prioritizations will prevent wasted political capital and maximize the weight of influence wielded in multilateral organizations.

- **Invest in the diplomatic corps.**

The United States should prioritize developing personal relationships with political leaders and decisionmakers to enhance its soft power in international diplomacy. This means prioritizing a personal, on-the-ground presence to build relationships and understand the interests and needs of other nations. These relationships are crucial, as they often influence decisions and ensure diplomats remain well informed through regular information sharing. The United States is already moving in this direction by opening new embassies in **Pacific Island nations** such as **Tonga and Kiribati**, demonstrating a commitment to foster closer ties. However, more needs to be done on this front.

The United States should also prioritize improving training and providing incentives for diplomats to gain experience in multilateral institutions, with a focus on refining diplomacy skills. Training programs should be enhanced to include comprehensive modules on modern diplomacy, **incorporating digital literacy**, strategic communications, and crisis management.

The United States is currently undergoing a major **overhaul** in its approach to training diplomats, making more training a career requirement and developing additional courses for diplomats at all career stages. The U.S. Congress has also mandated in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2024 that training related to **multilateral** diplomacy be included and strengthened. This action recognizes that incentives, such as career advancement opportunities,

financial rewards, and recognition, should be provided to encourage diplomats to take on challenging assignments within multilateral institutions.

Establishing a multilateral “cone” for diplomats should be a part of the training overhaul. By having an entire portion of officers specializing in this niche of foreign affairs, diplomats will become knowledgeable of processes unique to these systems and will have already formed valuable personal relationships with diplomats from other countries in the same field.

Formalizing a multilateral track within the Foreign Service would produce stronger personnel in vital roles within the multilateral system.

- **Leverage technology and data.**

The United States should leverage advanced technology and data management systems to improve coordination and strategic decisionmaking in multilateral forums. As diplomacy increasingly demands data-driven insights, integrating technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics will enable the United States to process and analyze vast amounts of information swiftly and accurately, identify patterns, predict trends, and respond to emerging issues more effectively.

Incorporating these technologies can significantly enhance various diplomatic functions. For instance, AI can sift through social media data to conduct sentiment analysis, allowing diplomats to gauge public opinion and measure the impact of their diplomatic efforts. Big data analytics can also **aid in negotiations** by removing bias and developing possible scenarios, providing diplomats with a strategic edge. By ensuring continuity and efficiency, information can easily be passed from outgoing to incoming representatives, preventing years of work from being wasted.

In 2021, the State Department released its first-ever enterprise data strategy, ***Enterprise Data Strategy - Empowering Data Informed Diplomacy***, marking a significant step in the department’s shift toward a data-centric approach. This strategy aims to equip the department’s workforce with timely, data-driven insights crucial for making important mission and management decisions. Since 2021, U.S. secretary of state Antony Blinken has pressed to hire hundreds of data specialists and to build collaboration with the “policy” bureaus in what the State Department calls “**Data Informed Diplomacy**.” The State Department is now in the midst of deploying AI and considering the range of tasks where it can be of use, as Blinken **discussed** publicly in late June 2024.

By investing in data analysis initiatives, equipping diplomats with the necessary skills, and fostering a data-centric culture, the United States can enhance its strategic capabilities. This approach will not only improve coordination and information sharing among U.S. diplomatic missions and international organizations but also offer a compelling alternative to the authoritarian models promoted by China.

- **Prioritize strategic engagement with influential UN members.**

Prioritizing engagement with influential countries in the United Nations can help the United States build strategic alliances and regain leadership in international organizations. By understanding and addressing the unique interests and needs of these countries, the United

States can foster stronger bilateral and multilateral relationships, thereby enhancing its diplomatic influence.

Understanding the objectives of others helps the United States to be a better partner. For instance, Brazil seeks to lead initiatives focused on revitalizing multilateral organizations such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and the India, Brazil, South Africa Dialogue Forum. Brazil has also been advocating for UN Security Council reform to gain a permanent seat. By supporting these efforts, the United States can align with Brazil's strategic goals, promoting cooperation on regional stability, economic development, and social progress. Additionally, Brazil is a key player in environmental issues and sustainable development, particularly given its stewardship of the Amazon rainforest. Collaborating on environmental issues could strengthen U.S.-Brazil relations while contributing to global climate goals.

Similarly, involving Pakistan in dialogues about security, counterterrorism, and economic development can also open new avenues for cooperation and reinforce the United States' commitment to stability in South Asia. The International Monetary Fund recently approved a **\$7 billion** loan to Pakistan. Pakistan plays a key role in regional security, especially concerning the situation in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Pakistan is a significant participant in China's BRI, with projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. By addressing Pakistan's economic development needs and offering alternative partnerships, the United States can counterbalance China's influence and strengthen bilateral ties.

- **Increase U.S. leadership and staffing in multilateral organizations.**

As recommended in the **2021 CSIS report**, actively advocating for U.S. candidates in leadership positions within multilateral organizations is essential for advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives and fostering cooperation on shared challenges. The United States must identify and develop qualified U.S. candidates with extensive experience and a deep understanding of international affairs.

Public endorsements from high-ranking officials, such as the secretary of state, can significantly enhance the visibility and credibility of these candidates. For example, the early **endorsement** of Doreen Bogdan-Martin for the ITU secretary-general position by the State Department and USAID administrator Samantha Power highlighted a forward-looking strategy that should be emulated. Furthermore, the groundwork for Bogan-Martin was laid years prior under the Trump administration with a successful deputy secretary-general campaign, followed by strong efforts to clear the campaign field so that it was only the U.S. candidate running against Russia's Rashid Ismailov.

Such diplomatic efforts are vital in garnering support for U.S. candidates. Utilizing diplomatic channels, including embassies and international forums, to lobby for U.S. candidates is critical. Focusing on organizations where **leadership positions** are becoming vacant and where U.S. strategic interests are most significant—such as the ITU, International Maritime Organization, FAO, and World Bank—is essential. Collaborating with like-minded countries to counterbalance undemocratic competitors' influence and maintaining engagement with organizations, even if U.S. candidates are not elected, will further secure U.S. interests.

In addition, seconding staff to key UN agencies allows for the development of relationships with counterparts from other countries, fostering networks that can be leveraged to support U.S. initiatives and candidates for leadership positions. Such positions provide an opportunity to build a cadre of U.S. experts experienced in multilateral settings, improving the United States' ability to navigate and influence these organizations in the long term. These seconded positions should be targeted toward strategic UN roles that align with U.S. foreign policy objectives and areas of interest.

- **Invest in economic development to complement diplomatic efforts.**

Investing in economic development abroad is crucial for the United States to maintain its leadership role in the international arena and address global challenges effectively. By strengthening development efforts, the United States enhances its ability to shape international norms and standards. In this context, Africa emerges as a critical region where increased U.S. engagement can yield significant geopolitical and economic benefits. One critical aspect is increasing the frequency of visits by senior U.S. government officials and commercial officers to African countries, which can address mutual interests and foster stronger bilateral relationships. Enhancing trade and investment is another critical aspect. Reauthorizing initiatives such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act promotes stronger trade ties between the United States and African nations by offering African countries better access to the U.S. market and encouraging economic growth.

Maintaining strategic dialogue with key African regional organizations, such as the African Union, is also crucial for fostering collaborative relationships and understanding regional priorities and challenges. This dialogue can lead to more effective cooperation on issues such as security, development, and governance, aligning U.S. and African interests.

By committing to a more robust and consistent diplomatic presence, the United States can build long-term partnerships and counter China's influence. This approach will not only support U.S. foreign policy objectives but also contribute to the stability and prosperity of developing regions.

- **Promote modernization in the UN System.**

The United States should prioritize modernization and reform efforts within multilateral forums to ensure these institutions remain relevant and effective in addressing global challenges. As a major contributor to the UN budget, the United States has a vested interest in ensuring that funds are used appropriately. The United States should advocate for various reforms:

- **Investing in the Latest Digital Tools and AI:** Modernizing with the **latest digital tools and AI** is crucial for streamlining data sharing, analyzing global trends, and predicting crises. Such technological advancements can enhance the ability of multilateral organizations to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging issues under U.S. leadership.
- **Enhancing Transparency and Accountability:** This can be achieved through regular independent audits, public reporting of financial statements, and encouraging whistleblower protections within the United Nations.

- **Supporting Security Council Reform:** Advocating for the inclusion of new permanent seats for African and Latin American countries will help better reflect global power shifts. Reform to the UN Security Council regarding the **permanent members** is unlikely to be significant due to ongoing regional competition. Conflicts such as Brazil versus Mexico, Japan versus China, and the challenge of selecting a single African country for a permanent seat make substantial changes improbable. Instead, any changes that occur will remain at the margins, reflecting incremental adjustments rather than comprehensive reform. Additional proposals, such as expanding the G7 to include Australia, South Korea, and the European Union, have been put forward to form a “**formal Democracies 10,**” or D10, that would promote coordinated actions among democracies.
- **Reforming the Human Rights Council:** The current incentive structure allows bad actors to seek Human Rights Council membership to pursue their own immunity and protect fellow violators. There are no negative consequences for countries with low human rights standards sitting on the council. This is unacceptable. There must be increased accountability for those with poor marks on the State Department’s annual **Country Reports on Human Rights Practices**.
- **Reviewing UN Procurement Policies:** This ensures fair contract distribution, preventing a disproportionate allocation to countries such as China. Although China may not win the majority of UN contracts, its success rate appears higher compared to others, similar to its performance with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. This trend highlights the need for more transparent and equitable procurement practices within the United Nations to maintain a balanced and fair competitive environment for all participating countries.
- **Introducing Clear Performance Metrics:** Regular evaluations of UN agencies are essential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of **their operations**. The United States can support these efforts by advocating for the definition of key performance indicators, conducting regular impact assessments, and implementing feedback mechanisms involving beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- **Pay late dues and leverage funding in the future.**

The United States should address the recurring issue of late payments to the United Nations. This may require paying double in one year to rectify the situation when Congress approves the following year. The Chinese Communist Party does not have the same appropriations process as the U.S. Congress. In pursuit of enabling the secretary of state, a designee of the secretary, or the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations to do their job from a position of strength, rather than constantly playing catch-up, an effort to reconcile the currently incongruent fiscal cycles of the U.S. government and the United Nations would be a worthy endeavor.

Resolving late payments in Congress should be paired with empowering the secretary of state with clearer, more subjective control over the funds to establish greater diplomatic leverage at their disposal. To be clear, leveraging finances is a separate issue from paying dues on time, but the goal should be to have nothing potentially tainting the authority or **credibility** of the United States. As it now stands, U.S. diplomats have little to no flexibility in both authority and resource allocation to effectively administer repercussions for bad actors.

Conclusion

The United States cannot abandon its leadership role in the United Nations and other multilateral institutions despite legitimate criticisms of their performance, transparency, and oversight. The United States must “ride herd” on the multilateral system. To counterbalance China’s growing influence, the United States must enhance communication and coordination across its diplomatic missions, invest in training and incentives for its diplomats, leverage advanced technology and data, and prioritize personal diplomacy. Strengthening partnerships with influential UN members and increasing U.S. leadership in multilateral organizations are also critical. Additionally, promoting modernization and accountability within multilateral forums can ensure these institutions remain effective and aligned with democratic values.

Implementing these recommendations is crucial for the United States to regain and sustain its influence, especially in the Global South. This region is becoming an increasingly significant arena in the great power competition between the United States and China, with its large voting blocs and strategic partnerships. For the next U.S. administration, prioritizing these actions will be essential to countering China’s growing dominance and ensuring that U.S. values and interests are upheld in the international arena.

In this era of great power competition, it is imperative for the United States to adapt and reinforce its leadership within multilateral institutions. By doing so, the United States can better address global challenges, promote sustainable development, and maintain a balanced international order. Taking a proactive stance will enable the United States to effectively navigate the complexities of global diplomacy and secure a leading role in shaping the future of international relations. ■

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