

Analysing the
challenges facing
multilateral
organisations today
politics essay



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War is often the result of non negotiable problems/disputes. Since the end of the Second World War, liberal international theory advanced the establishment of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and its sub bodies, in the belief that such international forums were where state members have a chance to discuss and air their common issues and grievances and could prevent war and, widen the corporations between nation states. However, since its creation, the legitimacy as well as the effectiveness of these multilateral institutions has always been questioned. The end of the Cold War marked a new era of world politics where the United States (US) became the predominant power in the international system. In addition, the Iraq war of 2003, led by the US, but was not authorised by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the issue raised a question about the hegemonic position of the US over the United Nations. This is just one of the many challenges multilateral organizations like the UN are facing today. The terrorist attack on 9th November on the US and similar attacks elsewhere in the world, as well as the increasing threat of weapon of mass destruction (being used by either a rogue state such as Iran or a terrorist group) in the 21st Century is another major challenge for the United Nations and its administrative departments. Moreover, with the increasing involvement of non state actors and non governmental organizations nowadays, the value of formal institutions like the UN is clearly affected in adverse ways. To clarify if multilateralism is in crisis or not, it is essential to firstly look at the difficulties posed by these new dimensions to multilateralism, then evaluate its reaction and effectiveness at tackling them. In this essay, the focus will be on UN as this is often seen as the vanguard of multilateralism. Firstly, the essay will examine what <https://assignbuster.com/analysing-the-challenges-facing-multilateral-organisations-today-politics-essay/>

multilateralism can be defined as and will name the current challenges which Multilateralism faces, it will then go on to give analysis of the sources of those troubles. Finally, it concludes that such multilateral institutions like the United Nations are under real challenge to the effectiveness of their multilateralism; however, it is not yet in a crisis situation. The leaders of these organizations can no longer presume their exchanges to be “business as usual” but need to take into account these growing troubles and think more about “reform” if multilateralism is to continue to function in a stable way.

Before discussing whether multilateralism is effective one needs to consider what exactly multilateralism is. For Paul Nielsson, UN Commissioner, multilateralism is about ‘all parties’ carrying out ‘concerted efforts’ to strengthen the international regulatory framework’ (Jorgensen, 2007, p. 2) and involves states ‘pooling’ both resources and sovereignty. The problem for many participants in multilateral processes is that the processes themselves are ‘often slow and difficult, and rarely do their results satisfy every participant’ (ibid). Thus, multilateralism is by definition a process where participants cannot expect a zero-sum outcome, where they can clearly identify their gains or losses and say it was a success or failure. Multilateralism is a compromise between states where its greatest success is that everyone is a winner and everyone is a loser, because nobody gets everything they want.

However, the UN has become the focus of most people’s idea of what a true multilateral organisation is and should be. Therefore the success of the UN in resolving modern international problems is also used as the guideline to whether or not multilateralism is effective or ineffective. The recent invasion

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of Iraq led by the Bush administration was preceded by concerted attempts to make it a UN operation. The fact that it did not led to US claims that the UN was ineffective and prior to the invasion of Afghanistan the US president Bush said the UN was so ineffective that “ don’t call us, we’ll call you” (ibid). However, the debate between whether unilateralism or multilateralism is the most effective method of international relations is one fought as much within America as it is internationally and as Nye observed ‘ This battle between multilateralism and unilateralism is often played out between the president and Congress’ and has led to a ‘ schizophrenic’ America (Nye, 2000, 156).

A final problem is that the UN always focuses on promoting free trade as a vehicle for expanding multilateralism and economic power is focused still within the major developed ‘ Western’ states. Thus, developing states often see the UN as biased and ‘ ineffective’ when it comes to promoting the interests of the Third World (Jorgensen, 2007, p. 4)

However, despite the criticism for the lack of UN support for Iraq and Afghanistan invasions and thus the claims by many unilateralists that it is an international body that is largely ineffective, there remain many who still see multilateralism as the finest success of the post- war environment. The Deputy Secretary-general Asha-Rose Migiro of the UN made it clear in a speech in 2009 that the world faced more than problems of security and terrorism. These include poverty and hunger in less developed countries, the lack of protection in many areas of human rights, the global financial crisis and discrimination against women. For Migiro these problems can only be solved through, ‘ global solutions to global problems’ and the UN is the only existing ‘ global’ organisation that can deal adequately with these challenges
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(Migiro, 2009, p. 1). Other multilateral organisations exist but in Migiro's view ' Solutions must be hammered out in a process involving all States. Groups such as the G-8 and G-20 are important, but it is vital to return to the United Nations as the natural locus of action on global issues' (Migiro Asha-Rose , 2009, p. 2).

War is often the evidence of a failure of multilateralism and the UN's avoidance of actually getting involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan maybe seen as an effective decision rather than a failure, especially as the UN is still often the first organization that enters into a conflict arena during and after the conflict in order to either make peace or sustain a peace process. The Secretary-General made it clear that there was no choice available between multilateralism and unilateralism as ' We either succeed together, or we fail alone' (ibid). Obviously, the avoidance of involvement in conflict is often used by participants in the conflict as a reason why the UN and multilateralism is ineffective. However, the response to aggression in international affairs is often best tackled through multilateralism. As Kevin Hartigan argues, ' multilateralism is a demanding organisational form. It requires its participants to renounce temporary advantage and the temptation to define their interests narrowly in terms of national interests, and it also requires them to forego ad hoc coalitions and to avoid policies based on situational exigencies' (Hartigan, 1992, p. 604). The UN has proven to be the most effective forum within which this cooperation can occur, as witnessed in the first Gulf War. In defence of the UN, Shashi Tharoor, former UN Under-secretary General noted that relative peace in the second half of the last century depended on ' the idea that in order to keep the peace, in

order to help human beings to progress and so on, you needed a mechanism, as well as a system of rules that would actually be to the benefit of all' and that this role could only effectively be carried out by the UN (Tharoor, et al, 2006. P. 4). As Shashi notes, today's world is one with 'problems without passports' (such as terrorism, climate change, drug trafficking) and the UN provides a forum for states to discuss and develop solutions to these problems on an international level of cooperation. Tharoor later observes that the problems of today are often too large, too complex for one government, or bi-lateral relationship to adequately deal with and so the involvement of the UN means, 'that humanity is responsible, not one government. In that process, the universality of the United Nations gives you a mechanism to actually deliver effective results.

On the first hand, the value of those collective institutions like WTO or UN is undeniable, especially in the time of globalization when the world is becoming a 'borderless' entity where not only trade, but also problems such as drugs and climate change cross from country to country unimpeded by the sovereign idea of borders between states. The UN reduces the expense, time and effort needed by any one country to deal with threes problems. It offers a forum within which states can confidentiality work out deals and strategies, and in the process states get to know about each other freely, thus increasing the confidence in future levels of cooperation (Robert o Keohen, p2). Furthermore, as international terrorism and transnational criminals are increasing problems then it bis easier to see that " a threat to one is a threat to all". Very few states have the power to 'stand alone' and confront those difficulties (A more secure world, 2004). Although UN has

been criticised for not responding effectively to these emerging challenges, there is little in the way of alternatives being offered. As Robert argued; terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can only be addressed in concert with other countries, even the super power like US(Hutchings) does not have sufficient resources, political will or power to deal with these modern challenges.

However, the UN is aware that it needs to reform and has set out five primary areas for change. Reform may involve drastic changes to the members and size of the Security Council and to the way it makes decisions, but essentially it needs reforms that assist it in, 1. Reforming management and operation procedures, 2. Strengthen humanitarian action, 3. Bring human rights to all in the world, 4. Strengthen efforts to maintain peace and security, and, 5. Significant movement forward on meeting development challenges (UN). Thus the extent of the need to reform to meet these challenges goes beyond just altering the size and methods of working of the Security Council. It requires dealing with the financing of the organisation, strengthening aspects such as the Human Rights Council and ensuring that the popular promotion of multilateralism is always more effective and long-lasting solutions to the modern problems of the international system rather than the unilateralism so often chosen by states and directly the cause of many of the wars of today and in the past.

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Essay question : Is multilateralism under challenge? Or in crisis? Or is it " business as

Questions to define

What is multilateralism, the definition, are we talking specifically about UN or any other? IR theory, Realist, Liberalist...

Crisis? How do you value /define/ classify if M is in crisis? Or is it only about emerging challenges?(in that case, list the challenges), in 21st century

The increasing development/involvement of non-state factors not necessarily means the fail of formal institutions.

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Ad hoc coalition. Alternative arrangements. Strength and weakness.

Argument: challenges are real. Ineffectiveness is real. Neither takes it as crisis nor business as usual. Need to fix it. Need to reform.

Ref

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