

Asymmetric governance: How can Multilateralism work with Multipolarity

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Abstract

‘Asymmetric governance: how can multilateralism work with multipolarity’ explores the challenges and opportunities the multipolar world presents for multilateral organisations. This paper highlights the shift of the world order from a unipolar world to a multipolar world and the need for effective governance for managing the diverse interests and needs of the multiple countries of the world with different power shares. This paper highlights the methods that can be adapted to increase the multilateral organisations’ effectiveness in a multipolar world. It has also focused on the aspect of asymmetric governance. This paper suggests the states’ strategic engagement in maintaining global stability and solving global issues effectively.

Overall this paper highlights the need for the changes in the multilateral organisations in the multipolar world for peaceful and cooperative global governance with the help of asymmetric governance.

Keywords: Multilateralism, multipolarity, asymmetric governance, state-centric approach, human-centric approach

Introduction

The political nature kept on changing since the introduction of the term ‘International relations’. There has been a pattern of conflicts and cooperation among territory-based units which has shaped international politics. The era of Globalisation is known to be the revolutionary phase in the working and relations of countries. The world has shifted from being unipolar or one-power hegemony to a multipolar world. International organisations have played a key role in enhancing the process of globalisation. Earlier decisions taken by powerful countries were binding on the rest and in the favour of powerful countries, with the onset of globalisation, the world is shifting towards multilateralism and a multipolar world.

Multilateralism is a form of joint action between two or more countries that adhere to a common political project based on respect for a shared system of norms and values. Multilateralism is based on the principles of consultation, inclusion and solidarity. It promotes sustainable and effective Cooperation. According to James Scott, ‘ Multilateralism is a process of organising relations between groups of three or more states and having certain qualitative elements or principles that shape the character of arrangement or institution.’

Multipolarity is used to elucidate the structural existence of several institutions with equal distribution of power among member states in the international system. The process leading to

Multipolarity is Multi Polarisation and policies designed to facilitate such processes are multipolarism.

With the changing nature of world politics, the concept of asymmetric governance came into light in the plurinational state. Asymmetric governance provides the platform for diverse social groups and their interests that help to ensure the unique identities and needs of different regions that should be respected and preserved to promote unity among nations. Asymmetric governance provides representation to weak or developing countries ensuring their voices are heard and their interests are represented. Asymmetric governance protects social justice, reducing dissatisfaction, better representation in democracy, secure rights, cooperative federalism and reducing radicalisation.

Multipolarity and Global Governance

The concept of polarity in international relations is used to describe the presence of one or more great powers dominating the global system. According to *Goedele De Keersmaker*, 'Polarity is about the number of great powers'. There are three types of polarity, unipolarity, bipolarity and multipolarity. The international system has changed from a unipolar world to a bipolar world and then to a multipolar world. There are some criteria to be fulfilled by the countries to be classified into different types of polarity. The nature of polarity can be judged from the six indicators: total population, urban population, military expenditures, military personnel, energy consumption, and iron and/or steel production to be a great power. These indicators help us to get an insight into the number of powerful countries of that particular period. These indicators play a key role in bringing a shift in the emergence of great powers in the international system from a unipolar to a multipolar world.

The term multipolarity began to appear in the 1960s and the early 1970s in *The New York Times*. That term was introduced by *Nixon and Kissinger* and was related to their foreign policy. They stated "the world remained militarily bipolar for the time being, but was quickly moving to that multipolarity **"In economic and other fields"**". Furthermore, Aron also defined multipolarity as a system with several rival states with more or less similar resources. It is seen that multipolarity occurs when several great powers have similar capabilities dominating the international system. Multipolarity is a structural-descriptive measurement word for the existence of several centres of power in the international system. It is the distribution of strength analysis. Multipolarity describes the distribution of power among countries at the international level.

With the onset of multipolarity, new power emerges at the international level. Countries like China, India, Russia, and Brazil are non-Western powers. The broad range of middle powers

infuses lots of complexities into the global policy-making arena. Non-Western powers add to their ideological and cultural heterogeneity. They have different development priorities, different opinions, energy, and policies that lead to plenty of difficult discussions and decisions on trade, climate change, energy, and human rights. Non-Western powers possess 'soft' power resources and skills to play a role in the international system.

Multipolarity has made global governance more inclusive and paves the way for an increase in the legitimacy of global governance. Multipolarity leads to more constructive partners in policy design and implementation of policies. The notion of Westernisation has been challenged on an international platform. Multipolarity leads to a liberal world order with a balance of powers.

In the Multipolar world, the West tends to adopt pluralism that corresponds to the logic of '**international society**' in which state sovereignty and mutual respect among great powers prevail. Revolutionism carries forward the idea of a '**world society**' in which individuals are main entities rather than states. Revolutionism is being ignored because it promotes one ideology and considers it to be the ultimate goal of each individual.

Non-Western powers tend to represent the interest of the South being more concerned about economic growth, poverty, official development assistance etc. There has been the formation of various regional cooperation to promote regional interest at the global level. Global governance can work with multipolarity only when the rich countries fully acknowledge this inequality and take responsibility for their contribution to it. Rich countries to date exploit the South for natural resources and pollution. Multipolarity highlighted the regional issues and exploitation faced by the South in the international arena. Multipolarity paves the way for Multilateralism, where more than two countries form a sustainable and effective cooperation for the adherence to Hindu political projects based on respect for a shared system of norms and values.

The rise of China, India, Brazil, and South Africa is bringing more openness, ideational convergence, more global engagement and more institutional intertwining in global governance. These countries have challenged the notion of permanent members, and veto power in the UNSC (United Nations Security Council).

Evolution of multilateralism

The term multilateralism is considered to be a modern term but according to various scholars, multilateral democracy is an old concept that dates back to antiquity. The Westphalian Treaty 1648, is considered to be the first multilateral agreement that establishes the sovereignty of states in the international system.

The origin of Contemporary multilateralism dates to the 19th century with ‘ **The Concert of Europe**’ that emerged from the Vienna Congress in 1815. The Concert Of Europe allowed major powers to get used to a meeting before their discrepancies led to conflicts, rather than at the negotiating table after the end of hostilities. The Hague Peace Conference of 1899 and 1907 marked another step in the development of multilateralism. This was the first step to establish a mechanism to prevent war and another reason was it brought together representatives of 42 governments.

The increase in interaction and exchanges between states generated by the Industrial Revolution pushed governments to cooperate in the field of transport and communication. The Industrial Revolution gave birth to technical multilateralism that helped governments cooperate to develop rules in the common interest.

The creation of the League of Nations after the First World War led to the process of institutionalising multilateralism. The League of Nations was the first international organisation built to maintain peace and security among states. It establishes the permanent multilateral framework irrespective of its failure.

The establishment of the UN after the Second World War to solve the international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character and develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Multilateralism is part of the UN’s DNA.

The UN has a multilateral framework and follows multi-lateral processes. The most visible development in multilateral diplomacy is undoubtedly represented by the increase in the number of Member states: from 51 in 1945 to 193 today. The multilateral framework has also expanded vertically including new actors such as non-governmental organisations, private actors and international organisations. The inclusion of non-state actors has given rise to the concept of ‘new multilateralism’. The multilateral framework is not only associated with states but many other stakeholders whose interests and nature may vary.

Asymmetric governance: Understanding the Imbalance

Countries that are economically, politically, militarily, technologically advanced and developed are termed as powerful countries of the world. These countries hold legitimacy over other countries, dominate them and establish hegemony. The US established its hegemony after the disintegration of the USSR. The United States of America holds dominance over the United Nations. There is also the provision of permanent members in the UNSC. These permanent members have special

veto power and the upper hand in other matters. Powerful countries led to an imbalance in the working of the international system that affects Multilateral Cooperation.

In a multilateral Cooperation, powerful countries try to dictate agendas according to their profit and benefits and set up agendas that lead to suppression of the voices of other countries. This leads to unfairness and resentment. Powerful organisations have an uneven playing field by imposing their term haven on weaker countries and controlling them. Powerful countries work unilaterally to establish their hegemony which leads to the erosion of trust of weaker countries from multilateral Cooperation. Unfair working of cooperation leads to the reduction of commitments by weaker countries in the working of multilateral Cooperation. To conclude, the dominance of the Russia-Ukraineerful countries in multilateral Cooperation reduces the legitimacy and effectiveness of the cooperation and erodes the trust of weaker countries.

Asymmetric governance is the platform for equal participation of every country over a common issue irrespective of its status. It brings the weaker countries on the same platform and helps them to represent their diverse interests. Asymmetric governance protects social justice, reducing dissatisfaction, better representation in democracy, secure rights, cooperative federalism and reducing radicalisation. It helps in providing representation to weak or developing countries ensuring their voices are heard and their interests are represented. Recent examples of asymmetric governance in the international system are the UN, World Bank, IMF etc.

Asymmetric governance has both positive as well as negative impacts over multilateral pacts. Asymmetric governance in multilateral processes refers to the unequal level of influence and power displayed among the participating countries. This impacts the multilateral Cooperation deeply. Decision-making power and decisions are stalled in favour of powerful countries, potentially neglecting the concerns of less influential countries. Eg: the practice of veto power by permanent members of the UNSC.

During policy formulation or agreements, the needs of the developing countries are not adequately addressed and developed countries place their upper hand in setting terms and conditions. Eg: the withdrawal of the USA from the Paris Agreement on June 1, 2015, under the presidency of Donald Trump as this agreement was undermining the growth of the US economy. The dominant actors secure the disproportionate share of resources and influence the process of resource allocation that includes funding and technical assistance in a multilateral framework. Eg: the wealthy member countries of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank influence the finance allocation for development priorities and outcomes.

Unequal participation of countries in decision-making and lack of transparency in bilateral organisations limit the ability of bipolar institutions to achieve meaningful outcomes. This raises the question of the effectiveness and legitimacy of the multilateral institutions. Eg: the United Nations General Assembly operates on one country, one vote principle, and the effectiveness of the decision-making is influenced by the Security Council's veto power that elucidates the tensions between inclusivity and effectiveness in global governance.

Challenges to multilateralism

The changing nature of the world order and the emergence of various powerful countries have challenged the working of Multilateral organisations. The working of Multilateral organisations has been impacted by the Multipolar world. Multipolarity has led to challenges to Multilateralism which have been listed below :

1. **Nationalism:** In the international system, there are various instances when countries are obliged to put forward their national interest in international relations with other countries. During COVID-19, countries have restricted the entry of people from other countries as well as prepared vaccinations to fight COVID. Countries supplied vaccines either for economic growth or when they were capable of producing for other countries as well. Their primary motive is to protect their citizens. The Spirit of nationalism counters the spirit of multilateralism.
2. **Undemocratic:** According to G. John Ikenberry, countries will come up with more protective internationalism in the coming time. Multilateralism is considered to be undemocratic because global governance “is distant, elitist, and technocratic”. Global governance is argued to be overly bureaucratic, detached from domestic democratic institutions, lacks sufficient input from ordinary citizens, and is dominated by rich and powerful countries. Democratic accountability is undermined and the public will is thwarted in multilateral Cooperation. Multilateralism has led to the decline of many middle powers, the moderate political centre. This reflects a polarised public that, for instance, increasingly rejects free trade arrangements. The rejection of the TransAtlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the Dutch referendum on the EU, and the Ukraine Treaty are examples of this sentiment that has become mainstream in many middle powers.
3. **Populism:** Populism is considered to be bad for multilateralism. Populism offers an alternative to technocracy, one that purposefully disregards the complexity of the interdependent world. It tends to offer a simple narrative (Take Back Control, America First). Westernised notion(of establishing its hegemony, capitalism and also fighting for the

rights of the labour class) mobilises voters disappointed by the results of technocratic policies that have long prevailed in industrialised democracies. Westernisation poses one of the major challenges to multilateralism. Western interests are the top priority for many international organisations neglecting the non-Western interests.

4. **Sovereignty:** Sovereignism is emerging as the most anti-m multilateralism notion. Sovereignism is based on zero-sum nationalism and stresses the importance of preserving the political independence of a nation or a region. This ideology opposes federalism, supranational institutions and multilateral trade agreements. It prefers bilateral trade agreements and protectionism. Sovereignty is at the heart of populism, which is centred around people and criticises the corrupt elite.

i) Sovereignism understands the differences between countries and respects them. The prosperity, security and identity of each country are under threat and need to be protected. According to *Robert Inglehart and Pippa Norris* since the 1970s, advanced industrial economies have increased the inequality among people, creating a sense of declining existential security that concurs with large immigration and refugee problems. Populism puts the nation first and offers protection from a hostile outside world. President Trump's attempt to decouple the USA & Chinese economies is a prominent example of sovereignism.

Anti-multilateralism and sovereignism are not against international cooperation per se. Instead, sovereignist thinkers oppose forms of multilateralism that weaken national sovereignty. The proponents of multilateralism counter the above-mentioned claims by understanding delegation and pooling of sovereignty that allows states to achieve policy goals they could not achieve on their own. Multilateralism serves the public interest and officials who represent the countries in question are elected by national constituencies if practised correctly. It creates benefits in terms of prosperity, security, and political influence. One potential result of conflicting visions between sovereignty and multilateralism could be a hybrid form of multilateralism, wherein the process of integration comes to a halt but international coordination, without interference in domestic affairs, continues.

Multilateralism has been on the verge of conflicts in the multipolar world during different periods. American withdrawal from Multilateral organisations, discord among major powers and global crises have led to the emergence of an anti Multilateralism spirit. The COVID pandemic brought to the forefront the lack of accountability of WTO, IMF and UN. This is the main reason for the decline of support for Multilateral organisations in today's world. The UN was formed after WWII to maintain peace and order but has proved to be unsuccessful amidst the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Palestine war and increased terrorist attacks. The unsuccessful behaviour of the Multilateral

organisation has been the major reason for the development of multilateralism spirits. Countries are now more concerned with sovereignty amidst political fragmentation and tensions in international politics. Countries too came forward with national interest priority during COVID 19 when the vaccination were given to citizens and international movement was refrained for a while to protect citizens. Though anti-Multilateralism and sovereignism has been on rise during this time, there were many Multilateral organisations like G8, G20 who came forward with help and support. Other Multilateral organisations need to adapt with the changing nature and demand of the time.

Multilateralism in a multipolar world

Multilateralism in a multipolar world helps in addressing global challenges. In a world with many powerful countries, multilateral agreements help in maintaining cooperation among them. It allows countries to come up with solutions to complex issues, share responsibility and pool resources for complex issues.

Multilateral institutions like the UN, WTO, BRICS, and ASEAN play important roles in bringing together every country irrespective of the power status of countries. It facilitates dialogue and consensus-building among diverse stakeholders. These institutions provide a platform for conflict resolution, problem-solving, diplomacy, formulation of norms and rules, protection of human rights and guidelines for international behaviour.

Multilateralism faces many challenges in a Multipolar world. Each country has differing national interests, power rivalries and values than powerful countries which leads to conflicting decisions and causes complications while decision-making and implementation of multilateral agreements. Some strategies need to be followed to have effective multilateral institutions in a multipolar world and to counter the challenges.

Multilateral organisations in the multipolar world

There are many multilateral organisations which are successfully working in the Multipolar world. With the changing nature of geopolitics, geoeconomics and geostrategy the international relations and international organisations nature changes. Regional organisations are successfully working in uniting the regional issues and seeking solutions by collective means.

1. Shanghai Cooperation Operations (SCO)

It is an intergovernmental organisation composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan founded in Shanghai in 2001. It is one of the largest regional organisations in terms of geography (80% of Eurasian landmass) and population (

40% of the world's population). It has two acceding members i.e. India and Pakistan, 3 observer nations and 14 dialogue partners. SCO has a composition of diverse interest groups. There are two headquarters: a secretariat in Beijing and a regional anti-terrorist structure in Tashkent. Member states have confidence-building forums - demilitarise borders, and increase military and counter-terrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing.

SCO has regional economic initiatives for economic cooperation. 1) China led the Silk Road economic belt and 2) Russia led the Eurasian economic union. Member states cooperate in the sectors of politics, trade, economy, and culture to education, energy and transportation, security security-related issues to combat the problems of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Various initiatives have been taken to fulfil its target of cooperation.

The decision in SCO has been made based on consensus and the sovereignty of the member states is respected. These two conditions make SCO an ideal Multilateral organisation in the international arena. There are various criticisms to overcome for SCO to be recognised as a Multilateral organisation in a multipolar world instead of a regional organisation.

According to *Richard Weitz*, ' SCO is underfunded and has limited power to take decisions independently of their member government'. Mathew Crosston has highlighted that SCO works in micro agendas of their regional needs to undermine group cohesion and sow mistrust.

The Challenges for SCO are Chinese and Russian financial dominance that leads to resistance to free trade zones. The economic ties between individual SCO member states remain robust. Afghanistan plays a key role in the working of SCO as it shares its border with six member states of SCO. The instability in Afghanistan causes challenges to the working of member states. Taliban takeover in September 2021 over Afghanistan has been a critical issue as none of the member states has accepted the Taliban government in Afghanistan. SCO has often been criticised as a club of authoritarian governments serving as a forum where Russia and China can normalise their aggressive posturing including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's assertive behaviour in the South China Sea and toward Taiwan.

Shanghai cooperation holds the prospect of being a successful Multilateral organisation as it shares the balancing relationship between the UN and EU by dedicating the interplay of cooperation and competition. SCO can harmonise the interests of its member states. It counters Western political and economic dominance and brings forward the Eurasian

interests. The balance in the global power brought by SCO brings a continuous shift towards a multipolar world order. SCO and its member states are also poised to continue growing in power and influence both Eurasia and globally.

SCO can be a future Multilateral organisation by overcoming the challenges and neutralising China and Russia's dominance.

2. Five eyes

It is a multilateral intelligence sharing network between Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the US. It is both surveillance - based and signals intelligence. The documents shared are secret among members. These partner nations exchange a wide spectrum of intelligence within one of the world's most tightly-knit multilateral agreements as part of the collaboration. Following its origin, the agency later enlarged its core group to '**Nine Eyes**' and 14 Eyes alliances as well, encompassing more countries as security partners. The 'Nine Eyes' group expands to cover the Netherlands, Denmark, France and Norway, whereas the 14 Eyes bloc further includes Belgium, Italy, Germany, Spain and Sweden.

The alliance between the USA and UK evolved WWII to counter the cold war Soviet threat. This alliance was formalised in 1946 through an agreement for cooperation in signals intelligence. The agreement was called the **UKUSA agreement**. This agreement was extended to 'second party' countries - Canada (1948), Australia and New Zealand (1956). This agreement remained top secret until 1999 and the text of agreement was 1st officially released in public after over 60 years in 2010.

The alliance operates through SIGNIT Signal intelligence board and is known for its collaborative intelligence sharing practices. It functions through collaboration of its member countries' respective intelligence agencies. It focuses on collecting and sharing intelligence related to national security including counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, counter intelligence and military intelligence.

The geographical diversity of member nations allows for global intelligence collection and analysis. SIGNIT operations operate under a high level of technological capabilities and resources. The alliance of Five Eyes is based on shared democratic values which facilitates trust and collaboration but it hampers the privacy and civil liberties of other countries. Member states are caught in the loop of balancing their national interests with collective goals of the alliance. The changes in political leadership or foreign policy priorities affect the cohesion and effectiveness of the alliance.

The Five Eyes is a successful Multilateral intelligence organisation but faces the allegation of hampering privacy, technological advancement, sovereignty and cooperation among countries. The historical background strengthens the objectives of the alliance and motivates the member states to work under the norms. It plays a significant role in enhancing the security and advancement of the world. It has to overcome its challenges by establishing the faith in its working nature among other countries and overcoming the privacy, sovereignty and cooperation challenges.

Recommendations

Below are the steps to enhance effective multilateralism in a multipolar world

1. **Regional organisations:** with the emergence of various non-Western powers the importance of global south and regional organisations has increased. Multilateral organisations with Western dominance are unable to inculcate the needs, interests and ideas of other countries. To have an inclusive approach the regional organisation should be formed according to regions and all regional organisations should meet twice a year to discuss their ideas and interests which will promote the diverse needs and equal participation and representation to the countries and backward regions. For eg: SCO inculcates the interests of the Eurasian region and can represent its ideas and interests during the meeting with other regional organisations. Its measures or ideas for counter-terrorism can be discussed and used by other regional organisations. Working together with regional Multilateral organisations will bring transparency and strengthen the ties between them.
2. **Human-centric approach:** Multilateral organisations are mostly based on a state-centric approach focusing on building strong relations with other countries in terms of military, politics and economics but it ignores the human needs. Multilateral organisations should have a human-centric approach which includes human rights, environment, education, health and education . COVID 19 has brought forward the very need for the multilateral organisations to be efficient in medical services, food, and financial funds for helping countries at the times of pandemics.
3. **Democratisation:** There should be reform in the voting right structure and rotation of leadership and the title of powerful countries. Every country should be given a chance once to lead a multilateral organisation without putting forward their selfish moto. The decisions should be taken on a consensus basis rather than relying on the permanent members or financially powerful countries (veto power). The decisions in the Multilateral organisations should have the same weightage irrespective of their financial investment in that particular organisation. This will help in bringing equality among countries without

any partiality. UNSC has provisions for permanent and non-permanent members. This provision should be replaced by 'enduring members'. In this provision, the countries that are selected as enduring members of UNSC will have to bear the responsibility of leading it for a particular time period and will be handed over to other countries timely. This will help in inculcating the ideas and interests of every country

4. **Financial support:** High-income countries should contribute expeditiously to the new IMF resilience and sustainability trust to help developing countries meet their long-term structural economic challenges. International financial architecture must be reformed by the inclusion of new mechanisms such as permanent sovereign debt restructuring mechanisms to free up resources for development needs including health and education. There should be a shift from creditor-dominated governance to a more inclusive system that prioritises economic justice by setting up separate Multilateral organisations particularly for ensuring it with the membership of different financial status . Other tasks will be to verify the loans and debt of the countries and to provide financial assistance.

Conclusion

The evolution of the world has brought into play many powerful countries that try to establish dominance over other countries. This can lead to disturbance in the world order and would set the way for World War 3. The changing nature of the multipolar world has made traditional multilateral organisations ineffective. To bring about balance between the diverse powerful countries a successful Multilateral organisation is needed in this international system. With the changing nature of the world, changes should be made in existing Multilateral organisations to meet the need.

The synergy between Multilateralism and multipolarity helps in establishing a stable and cooperative international system. Multilateralism helps in encouraging collaboration and negotiations among powerful countries of the multipolar world. The powerful countries of the multipolar world are brought on the same platform as other weak countries which helps in balancing the power dynamics and prevents any country from holding dominance over other countries. Multilateral organisations encourage dialogues, present the opportunity for decision making and incorporate the views and ideas of each country irrespective of power helps in enhancing global governance. Diverse countries hold diverse perspectives and solutions to global challenges like climate change, terrorism, nuclear war etc. The working of Multilateral organisations in the Multipolar world helps in the growth of a peaceful international system for the coming time. All that is required is changes to be made with the changing nature of the multipolar world.

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