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MULTILATERALISM AND THE UNITED NATIONS
Seeking New Horizons

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"The skillful strategist defeats the enemy without doing battle."
Sun Tzu, The Art of War, III/8

I

As we are approaching the 70th anniversary of foundation of the United Nations two questions have to be posed:

Firstly, how do we see the results and the developments of the past?

Secondly, what are the prospects?

The answer to the first question should be left to historians and their respective analyses.

As far as the answer to second question, I would like to propose the preconditions for a shared answer?

My firm belief is: we need to seek out new horizons, whilst following the path paved in the past seventy years, one marked by global peace and security as the only alternative!

We need to build upon multilateralism as the core of international relations as one of the new horizons!

Addressing the Fifth BRICS Leaders Meeting in Durban, South Africa, **President Xi Jinping** defined promotion of democracy in international relations and advancing of peace and development of mankind as noble cause. He also stressed that China will "take an active and constructive part in the process of making the international order truly just and equitable, and thus provide institutional safeguards for world peace and stability".

Finally, President Xi pleaded for abandoning of as he said: "our outdated mindsets, break away from the old confines that fetter development and unleash all potentials for development".

Why I am quoting and stressing these thoughts of the Chinese leader? Just because I firmly believe that without affirming the role of multilateral cooperation mechanisms and instruments, above all the United Nations system, we cannot accomplish this noble goals and causes.

As far as the authority and relevance of the United Nations in today's multilateralism is concerned, it seems that there is a lot of competition 'out there'. Various authors that deal with this subject refer to such groups like the G-8 or G8+5 or G-20 or BRICS namely, seeing said groups as serious rivals of the UN, since they are generally viewed as competitors taking over for the UN when it comes to dealing with and deciding on the most relevant and crucial topics of global character, such as the global financial crisis, climate change, food shortage, sustainable development, human rights, the rise of new democracies, etc.

The principles of the UN Charter are still valid and universal. On top of that they should be regarded as valuable assets for the future of international relations. Multilateralism can be compared to water. It always finds its way even if there are stones and cliffs that need to be mastered. Look at **APEC, BRICS, MERCOSUR, ASEAN, G-20** etc. Their role is not a substitutionary to the UN, but rather complementary! In fact the world is facing an undeniable trend towards multipolarity as stated in the paper which China presented during the recent thematic debate of the Security Council on "Maintaining International Peace and Security".

Among international relations experts there is a prevailing opinion that the world is changing faster than at any given time in modern history. The rise of China, India, Brazil, and some other so-called emerging economies, in parallel with the central shift of geopolitical gravity, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, is more than a convincing reason to reconsider the scope and features of multilateralism. These **tectonic shifts of the balance of power** have an obvious impact on the ways and means the international community will employ so as to deal with global challenges, such as climate change, population growth, intensified competition for resources, and the ubiquity of communications technologies.

The global financial crisis was a definitive indicator that the world had outgrown and surpassed the multilateral institutions created during the second half of the 20th century. Apart from this fact, it is becoming increasingly apparent that there are no singular solutions or 'one size fits all type of global multilateralism'; rather, that we need to be on the lookout for new forms of multilateralism, different in form and content from what **Richard Haass** calls 'classic

multilateralism'.¹ Haass also believes that there are basically **three forms of multilateralism** occurring lately and prevailing as such in international relations.

Regionalism, as one of them, is based mainly on bilateral and regional trade mechanisms. Predominantly, it comes off as a reaction to failure to conclude a global trade accord. Functional multilateralism, another alternative, is based on coalitions between the willing and the relevant. Such was, for instance, the 'coalition of the willing', initiated by the United States and the United Kingdom, when the UN Security Council failed to reach an agreement on the legitimacy of the Iraqi War in 2003. A third alternative could be described as 'informal multilateralism', which would imply implementing a series of measures consistent with agreed-upon international unions by participating governments. Under such circumstances, Haass believes that the United Nations, especially its General Assembly, may become irrelevant, bearing in mind the fact that its [GA's] decision-making system is based on the principle one country one vote. This is a point where I must slightly disagree with Haass.

As President of the UN General Assembly for its 62nd Session, I had a slightly different experience. The UN General Assembly is the broadest coalition of countries, governments and national economies that exists in international relations. Thus, it is the only representative international body that has the full legitimacy of possessing a universal character. Together with the Security Council, it creates the backbone of the United Nations. After 70 years both august bodies are due to be reformed and adjusted to the tremendous and profound changes the world has undergone since the Second World War.

Along those lines, a **new paradigm of international relations** and global affairs would be impossible without the reshaping of international institutions that have held center stage since the Second World War. The United Nations are at the core of the system of international institutions. The **UN General Assembly** and the **Security Council** are the two major bodies of the UN system. On one hand, these facts are indisputable, for they oblige the UN's membership; on the other hand, what needs to transpire is more energy and enthusiasm invested so as to enable both, the GA and the SC, respectively, to provide greater efficiency, transparency and compatibility with all the challenges raised by globalization.

Without a doubt, the Security Council holds the decision-making power. However, its power derives from the legitimacy of the United Nations, undeniably embodied by the General Assembly. This is why a debate on whether or not there is any encroachment in the relations between the General Assembly and Security Council is a rather superfluous one. Therefore, mine is a mindset which believes in a more substantive interaction and cooperation between

¹ Richard Haass', "The Case for Messy Multilateralism", *Financial Times*. Jan 6, 2010.

the GA and the SC on major issues of interest for these two principal bodies of the UN. It should, however, also be understood that neither a reform of the Security Council nor a so-called revitalization of General Assembly makes sense unless simultaneous and interrelated.

The founding fathers of the organization were obviously visionaries. We have, in fact, inherited this vision of the UN so as not to embalm it for posterity, but rather to develop it further and improve on it. In order to do so, a profound discussion and well-thought of projection, on the role its principal organs should have, the balance between them, and their composition should be undertaken.

Therefore, the process of establishing the **Human Rights Council** and the **Peace-Building and Peace-Keeping Commissions**, as bodies related to the UN's General Assembly, was indeed a necessary first step, but one which, for the present-day circumstances, seems insufficient, particularly in the direction of undertaking a lasting reform of the UN's structure. Fostering a more comprehensive relationship between these three bodies and the General Assembly can in fact help achieve the goal of having the UN emerge as a more relevant factor in the overall decision-making process.

II

What are international relations in this context? What fundamental values are they based on?

A preliminary diagnosis might be: with one leg in the old world and the other in the new. That is some stretch and with the differing rates of development as well!

One important question to ask in this context is what is wrong with present-day international organisations, especially the United Nations? Are they fulfilling their originally conceived roles?

Before we come to precipitate conclusions, we should look at the foundations of the world order as they were laid down after the Second World War.

The aim was to achieve a world order which, wherever possible, would maintain, create and secure peace. A few clever people realised that you can either shoot yourself dead or not. To live in peace with one another, thus, requires considerable organisational and institutional safeguards to organise the consensus. Unfortunately, destruction is easy, construction is much more difficult.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall and the lifting of the Iron Curtain, at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, were described as being the 'The End of History' (**Fukuyama**), while others spoke of a 'New World Order' (**Kaplan**).

The '**New World Order**' is supposed to be based on a **balance of interests**, instead of a balance of power. In other words, geopolitics is to be replaced by economic policy on the global scale. That turned out to be an illusion. The world today is a long way from being in a state in which geopolitics as the basis of foreign policy and international relations is to be underestimated.

It does not require deep analysis of the events of the last 25 years, since the Fall of the Berlin Wall, to reach that conclusion and provide supporting examples. Starting with the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s, all the way through to those in the Caucasus in the first decade of the 21st century, it is easy to discern the differing viewpoints of the 'West' and the 'East', as to the roots, causes, nature and consequences of the conflicts in these regions.

The controversies and differences between 'East' and 'West' can be easily read and understood in the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

What is the situation regarding international institutes and organisations? What is the United Nations doing? Is its role adapted to the needs of today's world? Does world peace mean a state without world war? Yes, but it is not possible to stop a great number of small ongoing wars.

In a world, in which the nature of power is becoming increasingly more complex, international relations are harder to define compared with the traditional dominance of military power and the traditional terms of sovereignty. In this context, **MULTILATERALISM** is becoming more important, particularly through the United Nations as the only inclusive multilateral agency.

The role of the UN must be steered towards managing future challenges. Many of these challenges are the result of the long-standing dominance of unsustainable global growth.

In order for humanity to solve these problems effectively, the rickety international structure in which they function today would have to be considerably reformed and strengthened.

For this reason, setting the legitimacy of international leadership on a higher level is an important objective and requires three things: (1) A greater spread of democracy; (2) more equal relationships of developing countries; and (3) a readiness to experiment. Whilst achieving these basic objectives, the people of the world would have to change their relationship to the unresolved questions of the new information epoch, if they really seek

results. However, these questions cannot be solved in an inclusive way, without the creation of a **new culture of international relations**. In order to achieve said goal, we must be more courageous and grow beyond our own limits.

The United Nations must lead the creation of this new culture, by building up an interculturalism of international relations, based on greater mutual trust and cooperation and a more just economic consensus. However, that cannot be achieved if the private and non-governmental sector is not brought into the process of creating new strategies.

Support for human rights, the security of people, responsible sustainable development - all represent the fundamental values of this new cultural paradigm. Achieving this will require a continuing redistribution of sovereignty, and its transfer, particularly to the individual and international level.

Some people see globalisation as a limitation on national sovereignty. I take a different view. Globalisation gives people the strength to exert free will in the creation of a new global network beyond national politics.

In this context the debate on national sovereignty should not be focused on the 'End of Sovereignty', but on economic and cultural evaluation. Globalisation makes this inevitable, or it will be postponed for some time; ultimately, a new global politics is not possible without a new global culture.

Here, I would like to quote **Jan Eliasson**, President of the 60th GA of the UN and Deputy Secretary General: "From peace and security to development, from human right to the rule of law, every country in today's world needs to project not only its national and regional identity, it also needs to pay attention to its global identity."

Globalisation as a world community responsible to itself cannot solve the intractable problems of the modern global world: wars, economic backwardness, the devastation of the planet, exploitation and the new dominance, power and mythology of the market.

It is about changing the way we live, the ideas of community and society, at the centre of which the civil concept of progress should be understood as a compensatory solution, without which there can be neither economic growth nor a developed economy – but also no developed humanities or cultural studies.

III

Advances in science, especially information and communication technologies (ICTs), have influenced the dynamics of international relations. According to **Charles Weiss**, the impact of ICTs “may be classified as operation through one of the four main mechanisms:

1. Changing the architecture of the international system: its structure, its key organizing concepts, and the relations among its actors;
2. Changing the processes by which the international system operates, including diplomacy, war, administration, policy formation, commerce, trade, finance, communications, and the gathering of intelligence;
3. Creating new issue areas, new constraints and trade-offs in the operational environment of foreign policy, a term which includes not only political constraints on international action, but also constraints imposed by the laws of natural and social science; and
4. Providing a source of changed perceptions, of information and transparency for the operation of the international system, and of new concepts and ideas for international relations theory.”²

Emerging economies that foster and support new sources of growth through innovation are greatly influencing the global innovation landscape. There is a direct correlation between a country’s place in the global hierarchy and science and science and technology capabilities. Modern technology is central to the pursuit of national goals for all nations, big or small.

Patent filings, for instance, are viewed as a proxy for the strength of innovation, thus competitiveness. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), patent filings reached 2.6 million, in 2013, on a global level. One third of these were filed by China, followed by the US at 22%. The European Patent Office’s share of the world total fell to 5.8%, the lowest on record.

But this should come as no surprise, bearing in mind that China is the second biggest R&D spender, with companies on the cutting edge of technology, where innovation is one of the highest priorities. The scale of Huawei’s success, as a global telecom equipment provider, is evident. The fact that the group has expressed ambition to become a 5G networks’ leader,

² Charles Weiss, “Science, technology and International Relations”, *Technology in Society*, 27 no.3 (2005): 295-313.

i.e., the next generation of mobile technology still in development, is not surprising. According to UNESCO, China now employs more people in the science and technology sector than any other country in the world.

The revolutionary power of technology – to change reality – forces us to re-examine our understanding of international relations. The influence of new technologies on society is more than evident. Even residents of remote villages have cellular phones (or even smart phones), connecting them to the rest of the world with the touch of a button.

International politics must reorganize the institutions so that they harness technology to suit society's values, including the development of new diplomacy tools. In recent years, diplomats are more engaged in negotiating and conducting trade agreements than mitigating military conflicts. Technology has brought the world closer together, not just electronically, but also culturally, and to an extent, physically. Despite these changes, the world has the same diplomatic need for communication and negotiation, but through profoundly new means.

35 years ago, Shenzhen was a tiny fishing village, across the river from British Hong Kong. Its inhabitants, like most Chinese, lived in poverty. In 1978, the average US income was about 21 times that of China. But in 1979, China's leader – Deng Xiaoping – chose Shenzhen as the country's first special economic zone, free to experiment with market activity and trade with the outside world. Shenzhen quickly found itself as the leader of China's economic development, using the same model as Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong had done in the earlier stages.

In the late 1970s, China was bursting with cheap, unskilled labor. It opened its doors (a crack, in lucky places like Shenzhen) to foreign manufactures waiting to take advantage of these low labor costs. Even though wages were at a rock bottom, both productivity and pay in the urban factories were dramatically higher than in agriculture, so China's fledgling industrialization attracted a steady influx of migrants from the countryside. Over time, the local population became more sophisticated and wages went up. Industrial cities served as catalysts for development, linking the Chinese economy with global markets, allowing incomes to rise steadily. The fruits of this process are clearly visible.

The change in technology's role in the process of development began in the 1980s. **Richard Baldwin**, an economist at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, explains that for much of modern economic history the driving force behind globalization was the falling cost of transport. Powered shipping in the 19th century, and containerization in the 20th, brought down freight charges, in effect shrinking the world.

Yet since the 1980s, Baldwin writes that affordable and powerful ICTs have played a larger role, allowing companies to coordinate production across great distances and national borders. Manufacturing “unbundled” as supply chains scattered across the world. According to Baldwin, this meant a profound change in what it means to be industrialized. The development of an industrial base in Japan and South Korea was a long and arduous process, in which each economy needed to build capabilities along the whole supply chain for manufacturing finished goods.

That meant few economies managed the trick, but those that did were rewarded with a rich and diverse economy. In the era of the supply-chain trade, by contrast, industrialization means little more than opening labor markets to global manufacturers. Countries that can grab pieces of global supply chains are quickly rewarded with lots of manufacturing employment. But development that is easy-come may also be easy-go. Unless the economies concerned quickly build up their workers’ skills and their infrastructure, wage increases will soon lead manufactures to look for cheaper locations.

E-entrepreneurship received a boost in 2008 when Apple launched its app store, through which third-party software designers could market their own iPhone applications. The “app economy” has since grown by leaps and bounds. According to an estimate by the **Progressive Policy Institute**, a think-tank, in 2013 it provided work for more than 750,000 people in the US alone.

The first two industrial revolutions fundamentally changed the relationship between the individual and the state. The ongoing digital revolution will inevitably bring about yet another such change. Governments may need to develop new economic approaches, giving technology freer rein to transform production, while providing workers with more of a cushion against the painful effects of that creative destruction. Some might instead tolerate the emergence of a growing underclass that is hard to escape while continuing to search for a technological solution to underemployment. Governments themselves might be transformed by new political movements, emerging in response to the dissatisfaction generated by technological change: in benign ways, through political reform and realignment, or in uglier fashion.

IV

The idea of the United Nations is a good one. Would anyone dispute that? But in practice it is unsatisfactory – and nobody disputes that.

Nothing would be improved by not having the UN – and many things would be worse. Even disillusioned pragmatist must allow themselves to lapse into ‘cheerful resignation’. One must desire the impossible in order to achieve the possible.

It is therefore essential that a better world order, with influential and creatively designed organization, should be on the agendas of political institutions. At present, too many people are of the opinion that they have enough to do with their own problems. But the great problems of our time do not stop at national borders.

The taming of financial markets, climate change, secure energy supplies, the civilizing of the internet, the struggle against terrorism, coping with epidemics and new diseases, the fight against cross-border crime, migration flows and many more can only be dealt with collectively and cooperatively.

The key rhetorical question which arises within this context is: is it at all possible “to run the world”? In **Parag Khanna’s** viewpoint, there is a way to do it: through “diplomacy.”³ To further his claim, we need to consider a multilateral diplomacy based on a coalition between governments, businesses and organizations, as the only key that could unlock the door of today’s world, a world, in Khanna’s words, that remains fractured, fragmented, ungovernable, multi-power or non-polar. The implication is simply that there is no single institution that can ‘run the world’, including the United Nations.

Only a combination of institutions and international forums can govern and negotiate in a legitimate way a world that has been globalized to the extent no single nation or power can control. This implies a different approach of conducting international relations, including the United Nations, based on the win-win principle rather than the zero-sum game one, as it was pointed out in MFA Wang Yi's intervention during the Security Council debate in New York in February this year on "Maintaining Peace and Security".

³ Parag Khanna’s, *How to run the world: Charting a Course to the Next Renaissance*. New York: Random House, 2011, p.3.

On that note, strengthening global structures, such as the G-20, and regional and interregional institutions, such as the Organization of the Asian Pacific Cooperation or the BRICS, is not aimed at weakening the United Nations. Quite the contrary, it is a part of an effort to build a new global architecture of cooperation that includes not only the East and the West, but all the North and the South. This is actually what the UN is all about.

Thus – Why complementarity? Since: Whoever argues that the UN Security Council is obsolete must also acknowledge that the G-8 no longer includes all the world’s most important economies.⁴ Instead of competing with other international forums for attaining the more prestigious positions and status of authority in the contemporary multilateral world, the UN should strive to create conditions where complementarity would prevail over competition.

To accomplish this noble goal means to create an effective multilateralism that would serve the causes of nations, peoples as well as individuals, since above all else, this planet is composed of human beings regardless of their color, race, gender or social background.

Thank you!

⁴Jorge G. Castañeda, “Not Ready for Prime Time”. *Foreign Affairs*. September/October 2010, p.113.