

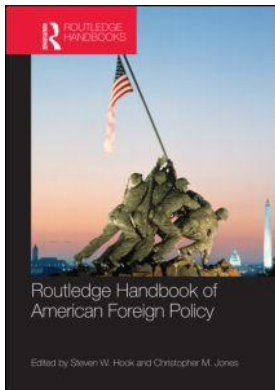
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Multilateralism

Laura Neack

The George W. Bush administration's unilateral preemption doctrine, announced in November of 2002, was the capstone to a series of unilateral actions by the administration. This aggressively toned unilateralism was welcome in some realist and hawkish circles (these not being the same), but it was greeted with dismay elsewhere as the beginning of the end of the American-built, post-World War II global architecture. This latter group saw the election of Barack Obama as an antidote, a return to American multilateralism. In contrast to these expectations, the Obama administration has promoted a practical multilateralism that may still embrace the more standoffish tones of the George W. Bush administration. And, to add a little more grey to this discussion, the Bush administration may have been more strident than its predecessor, but it was following the lead of the Clinton administration such as when President Bill Clinton announced that the United Nations (UN) would need to learn to say no to some commitments or the United States would say no to it. If there is a lesson to be learned from all this, it is not that American multilateralism is coming to an end, but that American multilateralism as it has been demonstrated since the end of the Cold War and, in fact, for the entire post-World War II period has been marked by a "particularistic" strain of internationalism that makes use of broad multilateralism as both goal and method *and* bilateralism *and* unilateralism.

Since the post-World War II embrace of multilateralism, scholars and other observers have wondered periodically about whether changes in the international system or changes in particular administrations signaled a movement away from multilateralism and the use of multilateral institutions. Some important scholarly musings come in the 1980s under the question of whether America's relative economic decline—or hegemonic decline—would result in some dismantling of multilateral institutions that might not exist much less persist without the hegemon carrying the majority of the costs. Others thought the multilateral order was by then so important to all the major Western states, at the very least, that it would be maintained beyond hegemony. Structural change defined in terms of a relatively diminished hegemonic power was the key factor prompting discussions (for discussions that include both sides but take one side or the other, see Gilpin 1981; Keohane 1984; Stein 1984; Russett 1985; Lake 1987).

Another structural change brought the discussion out of the purview of hegemonic stability theory: the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet empire. Left with a remaining superpower whose power, it turns out, was not in relative economic decline, observers started

discussing American foreign policy options in a suddenly unipolar system. This chapter makes use of some of the scholarly debate arising out of this period.

Finally, not to rely too much on systemic factors and too little on domestic ones, the George W. Bush administration was populated by advocates of an assertive unilateralism, bringing forth yet another burst of scholarship on the future of American multilateralism. This chapter makes use of this literature as well.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) still stands and operates as well as it ever has at the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century, despite older and newer predictions to the contrary (e.g., Mearsheimer 1990) and despite a mixed performance in Afghanistan. The UN, too, despite Bush declarations for it to line up with the United States or stand aside, still stands in about the same relationship to the United States as it ever did. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and international financial institutions are ever-present features of the international architecture. Indeed, the global financial crisis that began in 2008 gave impetus to greater multilateralism as the Group of 8 (G-8) gave way permanently to the Group of 20 (G-20). Multilateralism is ubiquitous and apparently not so easily undermined by major structural changes or major ideological changes in the White House.

In this chapter, the argument is made that American multilateralism is an enduring project that finds its roots and maintenance in American political identity. This multilateralism has never been across-the-board and has never been applied equally to all countries and regions. But it has been the predominant feature of American foreign policy since World War II. And, American multilateralism is tied to the promotion of U.S. national interests but also is tied, in an evangelic way, to the fortunes of the world, or at least to the part of the world with which U.S. policy makers have identified.

The first topic to be explored here is what is meant by multilateralism and the relationship of multilateralism to multilateral institutions. Second, multilateralism is discussed as a policy option alongside unilateralism and bilateralism. Third, multilateralism is examined as a tool of a uniquely *American* grand strategy following World War II as contrasted with what other great powers may have made use of in shaping world order. Fourth, the discussion turns to whether multilateralism serves an instrumental function for the American hegemon and whether multilateralism reflects the worldview generally referred to as American exceptionalism. In this section, emphasis is placed on the desired end-goals of American grand strategy. The fifth topic concerns the varied application of multilateralism to different world regions with multilateralism framing American foreign policy toward Europe but not toward other regions, particularly Asia. Finally, this chapter considers the future of multilateralism in American grand strategy.

The many parts of this discussion should be understood as layers of an argument; as each layer is added, a picture of a uniquely American multilateralism emerges. The discussion here also is situated in a particular historical period—from the post-World War II world to 2010. At times the discussion will move backward in time to establish the historical context but mostly multilateralism should be understood both as a strategy and tool of the United States as it embraced its superpower or hegemonic role in the second half of the twentieth century and entered the post-Cold War unipolar period that continues today. The discussion here, finally, is situated within the debate among scholars as to what, why and how American foreign policy made and makes use of multilateralism and multilateral institutions. Multilateralism as a part of post-World War II American foreign policy has within it a certain ideological orientation about how best to order the world to maintain the exceptional America at home and is not an exclusive but a particularistic (Haglund 2003: 215) means by which American planners sought to order the world among similarly minded great powers. Since the United States remains the single superpower, its continued use of multilateralism is of more than scholarly interest.

Multilateralism and Multilateral Institutions

This chapter takes the view that multilateralism is more than the use of multilateral institutions—multilateralism is as Caporaso (1992: 601) says, “a belief or ideology.” Thus this discussion follows Ruggie’s understanding of multilateralism, an understanding that Ruggie intentionally sets against the more basic, less ideological definition of multilateralism used by institutionalists, particularly Keohane.

Keohane tells us that “[m]ultilateralism can be defined as the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions” (1990: 731). Keohane’s primary interest is in formalized, persistent arrangements with rules and resulting expectations of behavior set in multilateral institutions. But since these institutions may potentially have as few as three member states, they might be understood either as minilateral or multilateral.

Multilateralism is an arrangement that generally involves many member states, if not universal membership. Kahler (1992: 681) describes multilateralism as “international governance of the ‘many.’” The “many” is an essential element of multilateralism for Kahler, as institutions structured on the principle of multilateralism are intended to allow universal membership through open admission and low barriers for participation. Multilateralism entails organizing principles that allow large-*n* institutions to solve collective action problems.

Organizing principles are crucial here and point to the ideological nature of multilateralism. As Ruggie explains, “what is distinctive about multilateralism is not merely that it coordinates national policies in groups of three or more states, which is something other organizational forms also do, but additionally that it does so on the basis of certain principles of ordering relations among those states” (1993: 7). Ruggie offers that multilateralism as an institutional form is characterized by (1) indivisibility as a social construction (“states behave as though peace were indivisible, and thereby make it so” in collective security systems), with (2) distinctive principles of conduct premised on diffuse reciprocity, and (3) may take “different specific expressions depending on the type of institutionalized relations to which it pertains” (1993: 11–12). To this list of characteristics Kahler (1992: 681) adds universality and low barriers to membership and participation, as noted above, and the principle of nondiscrimination. This latter principle is an important element of post-World War II American multilateralism as will be discussed later.

Thus multilateralism is not just an institution or coordinating arrangement between a group of states but an arrangement founded on principles that are intended to organize and order relations between those states into the indefinite future. As Caporaso so elegantly explains in endorsement of Ruggie’s definition, multilateralism is a “deep organizing principle of international life” (1992: 601). Multilateral institutions, to Caporaso, are concrete organizations (quite literally at times) with permanent locations, whereas the institution of multilateralism “cuts more deeply” in significance and pertains to the “less formal, less codified habits, practices, ideas, and norms of international society. Bilateralism, imperial hierarchy, and multilateralism are alternative conceptions of how the world might be organized; they are not just different types of concrete organizations” (Caporaso 1992, 602). Caporaso’s elaboration is worth following a little further here:

“Multilateralism,” as opposed to “multilateral,” is a belief that activities ought to be organized on a universal (or at least a many-sided) basis for a “relevant” group, such as a group of democracies. It may be a belief both in the existential sense of a claim about how the world works and in the normative sense that things should be done in a particular way. As such, multilateralism is an ideology “designed” to promote multilateral activities. It combines normative principles with advocacy and existential beliefs. (Caporaso 1992: 603)

This elucidation of multilateralism is critical to understanding the what, why, and how of the American world order built after World War II. American foreign policy planners had a vision of international society that was intimately tied to a vision of American society and this vision would form the basis of—at least—great power relations and, more specifically, American relations with restored European great powers and thus world order. The idea of “international society” is instructive here, since such is understood to be premised on a shared or collective identity. This is the final element to be added to multilateralism for the purposes of this chapter. Hemmer and Katzenstein insist that “[m]ultilateralism is a particularly demanding form of international cooperation. It requires a strong sense of collective identity in addition to shared interests” (2002: 575–576).

Multilateralism, Bilateralism, or Unilateralism?

The George W. Bush administration presented scholars with what appeared to be a more unilateralist American grand strategy. Bush administration objections—prior to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks—to multilateral instruments like the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and the Kyoto Treaty on climate change, and to international peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia and elsewhere caused commentators to worry about the undermining of the postwar architecture created and maintained by every U.S. president up until George W. Bush (Stille 2002; Moore 2003). After the 2001 terrorist attacks, the administration’s selective and restrictive use of NATO allies in Afghanistan, the cultivation of a “coalition of the willing” to oppose the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, and the unilateral preemption doctrine announced in the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) made it clear to many that unilateralism was the principle by which the administration intended to run world affairs.

What some popular observers saw as a conflict between unilateralism and multilateralism was not seen as a conflict to scholars. In a post-Cold War assessment of the same issue—would the United States become more unilateralist in a unipolar system or would it maintain its interest in multilateralism—Karns and Mingst conclude that the whole history of American foreign policy since 1945 shows a consistent mixing of approaches. At times the United States has acted unilaterally and at times bilaterally, but the use of these other methods has not meant that American policy makers were any less or more committed to multilateralism (Karns and Mingst 1990: 6). The mixing of methods was attributable more to a sense of the need to use different tools in different issue areas and regions.

This mixing of methods was claimed as the defining element of George W. Bush foreign policy. Richard Haass, a foreign policy scholar and advisor in the Bush administration, claimed the administration was a proponent of “hard-headed multilateralism” (Foot, MacFarlane, and Mastanduno 2003: 1). Multilateralism was a tool that expanded U.S. options, not constrained them. G. John Ikenberry proposes that the Bush administration’s “opposition to multilateralism represents in practical terms an attack on specific types of multilateral agreements more than it does a fundamental assault on the ‘foundational’ multilateralism of the postwar system” (Ikenberry 2003a: 534). The Bush administration was arguably more forthright in its instrumental use and sometimes aversion to the use of multilateralism but previous post-World War II administrations had not approached the choice of multilateralism as an across-the-board rejection of unilateralism or bilateralism.

Before the game-changer that was World War II, American foreign policy makers favored unilateralism. McDougall tells us that unilateralism—and not isolationism—was seen to be the best way to protect American exceptionalism, that is, what made “America the Promised Land” exceptional from the rest of the world (McDougall 1997: 135). Haglund agrees but has no problem using the term “isolationism,” proposing that an isolationist grand strategy is

one that embodies unilateral internationalism. In U.S. history, Haglund writes, isolationism “has never implied the general renunciation of political, or even military, engagements abroad.” Instead, isolationism/unilateralism meant “acting abroad without the encumbrance of potent allies.” And this, in turn, meant acting without the entanglements of Europeans. “An examination of the historical record reveals that proscriptions on political, including military, connections with other lands had consistently been applied before the Second World War to only one continent—Europe—with the important exception of 1917–1918” (2003: 218).

Haglund’s depiction of isolationism-as-unilateralism suggests a classical realist’s aversion to long-term allies but with the twist of finding particular potential allies particularly repelling. The key to American unilateralism before World War II was to defend the American ideal at home by avoiding the political complications of European allies. This approach does not go too far afield from the Bush administration’s dismissal of “old Europe” in its prosecution of the global war on terrorism. Unilateralism, then, is a strategy by which a country avoids making political commitments to powerful states in order to claim ultimate policy autonomy. Post-World War II American policy toward Europe would stand this idea on its head, but would not reject the notion of picking and choosing the method to fit the circumstance.

To those who seek to understand the choice of multilateralism, unilateralism or bilateralism in terms of strategic choices and bargaining, the choice a powerful state makes depends upon its time horizon. As Lisa Martin explains, “The choice between unilateral action—a feasible solution—and multilateralism depends heavily on the hegemon’s discount rate. The longer the time horizon, the more attractive multilateralism” (1992: 786). After World War II, U.S. policy makers “saw themselves engaged in the construction of a world order that they wanted to last for more than a few years and were willing to bear short-term costs in pursuit of long-term goals” (Martin 1992: 785).

But, importantly, the choice of multilateralism in one significant context—building a lasting postwar order among great (Western) powers—did not preclude the interest-based calculations of using a more preferable method in less significant contexts. Thus, during the Cold War, as will be discussed shortly, multilateralism was the choice for dealing with Europeans in Europe but not for dealing with Europeans elsewhere—particularly in Asia—and not for dealing with non-Europeans—particularly Asians—elsewhere (Weber 1992; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002: 592). Multilateralism was the first choice for the primary issue area of constructing great power relations through which world order would be maintained, but other “isms” would be used as necessary and were so used from President Harry Truman through President George W. Bush. To some, this selective mixing continues to be the right and proper approach for American statecraft (Schuller and Grant 2003: 38–39).

Multilateralism as a Uniquely American Grand Strategy

As a policy choice for balancing power toward the goal of securing interests, multilateralism is one of many available to the hegemonic power and is not by itself the most “obvious institutional form for these purposes” (Weber 1992: 635). Steve Weber points out that “a priori, there is at least one alternative [to multilateralism] for an alliance system made up of one extremely powerful state and several smaller states. The alternative is for the large state to cut a series of bilateral deals with each of the subordinates” (1992: 635). Thus Weber asks us to consider the choices made by the United States and those made by the Soviet Union after the war.

The structural position of the United States vis-à-vis Western Europe was different certainly from that of the Soviet Union vis-à-vis Eastern Europe, which means that an American version of bilateralism would have looked necessarily more balanced than Stalin's version. But that structural position did not produce NATO. The United States could have interpreted bipolarity and the Soviet threat as a license to develop a more coercive and extractive subsystem for security that the West European states would have been nearly obliged to accept. (Weber 1992, 636)

Yet the United States did not choose bilateral exploitation to counter the Soviet threat.

Scholars of different varieties agree that the American hegemon's decision to use multilateralism as the overarching framework for the postwar world was a decision that was distinctly American. Ruggie explains that "to the extent it is possible to know such things, other leading powers would have pursued very different world order designs (Ruggie 1994: 562). Ruggie contends that had Germany concluded the war as the new hegemon, it would have constructed a world order of "imperial design." The Soviet Union as hegemon would have extended political control through a Comintern using "administered economic relations among its subject economies." A British hegemon would have pursued imperial preferences that would have continued colonialism and discriminatory trade practices (Ruggie 1994: 562).

Thus, for Ruggie and many others, in the postwar era, "it was less the fact of American *hegemony* that accounts for the explosion of multilateral arrangements than of *American hegemony*" (Ruggie 1993: 8). "The most that can be said about a hegemonic power is that it will seek to construct an international order in *some* form, presumably along lines that are compatible with its own international objectives and domestic structures. But in the end, that really is not saying much" (Ruggie 1993: 25).

Ruggie goes so far as to assert that the very breadth and diversity of multilateral arrangements in international politics after 1945 are associated with the fact of the American postwar position. He maintains that the only logical explanation for this different world order must be found within American domestic politics and political identity. This theme will be taken up extensively in the next section. Even among the Western allies, there was a different foreign policy orientation toward structuring world order. Anne-Marie Burley notes that U.S. postwar policy planners were relatively inexperienced in foreign policy and argued about world order from a domestic analogy. The European allies, conversely, had "centuries of diplomatic interaction [that] impelled leaders to view the international world as distinct and separate from the domestic one." The Europeans remained skeptical of applying liberal ideas beyond their national borders, the very thing that American planners were building into the world order (Burley 1993: 145).

A Strategy of Instrumental or Exceptional Purpose, or Both?

Was—is—the use of multilateralism instrumental for the purposes of securing and enhancing American interests? The short answer must be yes, but the understanding of those interests and the implications for the world must be understood in terms of the world view termed American exceptionalism. We can understand much of the American use of multilateralism in terms of instrumentalism but this understanding is enhanced by a uniquely American vision of how to secure those interests.

Karns and Mingst devote their edited volume to explicating and understanding the American instrumental use of multilateralism in intergovernmental organizations. Such organizations are useful in different ways to different member states, but since the postwar period, intergovernmental organizations have been used primarily by the United States for the "collective legitimation of its own actions, particularly in crisis situations such as the Cuban

missile crisis, and for delegitimizing the actions of others it opposed, such as the British, French, and Israeli occupation of Suez and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan” (Karns and Mingst 1990: 7). More broadly, American use of multilateral institutions since 1945 has been aimed at preventing the “emergence of new geopolitical rivals” (Layne 1997: 89). Power management in an increasingly interdependent world meant a sustained American interest in using multilateralism (Ikenberry 2003a: 540).

The needs of power management in uncertain times, such as after major power hot wars and cold wars, made multilateralism an especially attractive tool for U.S. policy makers in 1945 and 1989. Foot, MacFarlane, and Mastanduno contend that U.S. policy makers demonstrated the utility of multilateral organizations in managing the fundamental structural change that was post-World War II reality (2003: 3). In the uncertainty of the aftermath of the old order having been swept away by major power war, Ikenberry explains, the lead state can more readily “lock-in” weaker states into the leader’s preferred new order (Ikenberry 2003b: 55–56). Part of the attractiveness of being locked-in for weaker states was the reassurance that multilateralism provided them about the general direction of American foreign policy behavior in the new order. Ikenberry notes that the lead state “will make use of its ability—to the extent the ability exists—to limit its capacity to exercise power in indiscriminate and arbitrary ways as a ‘currency’ to buy the institutional cooperation of other states” (2003b: 53). Thus, weaker states appreciated the currency of power held by the United States and appreciated that multilateral institutions would make America use of that currency in more restrained and patterned ways.

Yet, even as the United States locked-in other states into the multilateral order and generally held itself to the “self-exemption taboo” or the “injunction to play by rules which apply equally to all” (Burley 1993: 144), it did not agree to fully limit its own policy autonomy. Ikenberry offers that this approach follows the basic logic of state power and institutions (2003b, 53). In this, American policy makers adhered to what George Kennan called the “particularistic” variant of multilateralism/internationalism over a more “universalistic” variant (as quoted in Haglund 2003: 215). Ikenberry calls this the “institutional bargain,” which is determined by “the ability of the leading state to potentially dominate or injure the interests of weaker states and its ability to credibly restrain itself from doing so” (2003b: 53). In order to build a new world order that promoted its long-term power and security interests, the United States was willing to demonstrate its willingness to restrain itself with key others—the European states—while maintaining its “right” to pursue what could potentially be unrestrained power pursuits outside Europe.

The institutional bargain of multilateralism was attractive to the United States because multilateralism served the goal of restoring world politics to a multipolar condition. American policy makers believed that long-term stability in international politics—a stability that served U.S. interests to be sure—required restoring the European states to great power status, thus “multilateralism was a means for promoting evolution toward multipolarity” (Weber 1992: 634). This multipolar vision did not seem to extend to other regions of the world; instead American planners conceived of an order that embraced the traditional European great powers in a world managed by a community of like-minded democratic, capitalist, Western states. The shape of that world would be one that reflected the fundamental political values of Americans as well as those that would be encouraged in a restored Europe.

Enter exceptionalism. McDougall writes that in the first century or so of American foreign policy unilateralism could be understood as a strategy aimed at preserving “America the Promised Land” from foreign taint. The twentieth century, especially the second half, was one characterized by “America the Crusader State,” a state that sought to preserve the exceptional country by bringing “salvation to a world ravaged by revolution and war” (1997: 135). Moralism and practicality underscored both impulses: “In foreign policy, whereas America the Promised Land had held that to try to change the world was stupid (and immoral), America

the Crusader State held that to refrain from trying to change the world was immoral (and stupid)” (McDougall 1997: 138). McDougall terms this crusader impulse “global meliorism,” a tradition that “aims to make the world a better and safer place through the promotion of economic growth, human rights, and democracy.” Global meliorism was informed by the lessons learned by “Hoover’s relief agencies, the New Deal, and Keynesian economics” (McDougall 1997: 140).

Securing the exceptional country meant fixing the world. Fixing the world meant projecting the liberal polity outward. Burley explains,

Just as the New Deal government increasingly took active responsibility for the welfare of the nation, U.S. foreign policy planners took increased responsibility for the welfare of the world. It was widely believed that they had little choice. The United States was going to be a world power by default. It could not insulate itself from the world’s problems. As at home, moreover, it could not neatly pick and choose among those problems, distinguishing politics from economic, security from prosperity, defense from welfare. In the lexicon of the New Deal, taking responsibility meant government intervention on a grand scale. (1993: 131–132)

In an impressive demonstration of the confidence of McDougall’s Crusader America, a committee was tasked by President Franklin D. Roosevelt with constructing a blueprint for “every aspect of international relations, in all areas of the world” for the postwar world *two weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor* (Burley 1993: 130–131). The American planners sought to depoliticize “charged” political issues so that they could be given technocratic, process-based responses; the de-politicization would occur through multilateral arrangements such as the UN coalition that would plan and execute the conduct of the war.

The new order would not just reflect the American New Deal solution projected outward onto world politics, but it would also involve the development of good and proper democratic politics within other countries. Weber writes that President Roosevelt “believed that the process of politics—the coordinating and the compromising of interests among the great powers—would do good things over time to the *internal* characteristics of these states and that this, in turn, would make them act in more peaceable and cooperative ways” (1992: 639). The principle here was about process—the process used to construct the exceptional America could be used to construct states that honored process internally, thereby solidifying support for international processes that promised peaceful relations among diverse stakeholders. This would make the postwar order durable through a multi-layered system of checks and balances on power. As Cowhey explains, “proper checks and balances on political leaders can reduce transaction costs by making their promises believable.” Similarly, “multilateral orders are more credible if countries believe the political leadership of the major power(s) is subject to significant domestic constraints on defecting from the rules of the multilateral order. Once this credibility is established it makes sense for second-tier powers to cooperate within a multilateral framework” (Cowhey 1993: 159–160).

The desire to project the value of democratic, technocratic process onto international politics and into other states derived from the lessons learned from practical necessities in American domestic politics and, as it turns out, was conceived to be a way to preserve and forward those domestic politics in the face of the temptations that might come with being a world power (Weber 1992: 639). Cowhey proposes that the requirement of satisfying U.S. ethnic politics—which were, in the immediate postwar years, Eurocentric—drove the decision to use multilateralism abroad; multilateralism in Europe would accommodate all the homelands of key ethnic minorities being courted by both American political parties (Cowhey 1993: 169).

The accommodation of ethnic politics, in the American ideal, occurs through the creation of a civic national identity rather than an American ethnic nationalism, according to Ikenberry.

The civic national identity is supported by the enshrinement of democratic process or the rule of law. “Ethnic and religious identities and disputes are pushed downward into civil society and removed from the political arena.” The implications for American foreign policy are clear: “When the United States gets involved in political conflicts around the world, it tends to look for the establishment of agreed-upon political principles and rules to guide the rebuilding of order” (Ikenberry 2003a: 543).

Ruggie endorses Cowhey’s and Ikenberry’s conclusions in his discussion of America as a “willful community.” “America views itself as a willful community ... formed by an act of choice and premised on a universal organizing principle” (Ruggie 1994: 564). A multilateral world order, then, is a reflection of America’s “sense of the nature of its own community” (Ruggie 1994: 565).

Practical Implications: Distinguishing the Community of Shared Values Abroad

The civic national identity recognized by Ikenberry as part of the exceptional America gets projected outward as a way to govern a warring multi-ethnic and multi-religious world, but that projection was uneven since U.S. postwar planners identified with some parts of the world more closely than with others. If U.S. policy makers avoided connections to all things European in the nineteenth century, identification with Europeans became the overwhelming motivation for the new world order after World War II. In part this derived from the dominant ethnic identities in the American polity at the end of the war and in part this derived from a sense that the Western states shared a commitment to civic nationalism (Ikenberry 2003a: 543). This shared commitment could be a source of cohesion, cooperation, and community, facilitating the creation of the new civic international order thereby reducing the costs of building that order for the United States.

The implications of this shared identity were that the institutional arrangements and goals in Europe would be premised on multilateral action among equals. Institutional arrangements outside of Europe would make more use of bilateralism. The sense of being part of a community of states with the European countries meant that American policy makers and citizens would not register as too high costs incurred in the European multilateral institutional bargain as they might regard the costs incurred in similar multilateral institutional bargains with others. Cowhey even goes so far as to equate multilateralism with the Eurocentric order in the minds of Americans (1993: 169).

And so, practically speaking, there would be nothing like NATO outside the shared community. Because “multilateralism is a particularly demanding form of international community,” according to Hemmer and Katzenstein, it will not exist except in conditions in which countries share a “strong sense of collective identity in addition to shared interests” (2002: 575–576). In answering the question of why is there no NATO in Asia, Hemmer and Katzenstein put primary emphasis on the role of perceptions of collective identity. “Shaped by racial, historical, political, and cultural factors, U.S. policy makers saw their potential European allies as relatively equal members of a shared community. America’s potential Asian allies, in contrast, were seen as part of an alien and, in important ways, inferior community” (2002, 575). Weber agrees that identification with Europe led American policy makers to go much deeper building multilateral relations with Europeans than Americans ever wanted with Asians. President Eisenhower’s appreciation of European states as great powers deserving of equal treatment even led him to conclude that the European states should possess nuclear weapons and such an endpoint might be forwarded through NATO cooperation (Weber 1992: 653).

The United States did have interests in Asia, but the lack of social identification with Asians led policy makers to choose the more short-term interest-driven policy option of bilateralism. Given a sense of collective identity shared with Europeans, American policy makers thought Europeans deserved and could be trusted with the power that multilateral institutions gave them—power over U.S. policy autonomy. Since there was no sense of collective identity with Asia, Asian states could not be trusted with the power that comes from multilateral institutions (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002: 588).

Since the end of the Cold War, Cossa (2003: 193) suggests that the United States has been a strong advocate of multilateral security and economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific but that such arrangements are still conceived as complementary or supplemental to U.S. bilateral arrangements. Cossa notes that the two most developed multilateral organizations in the Asia-Pacific—the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum—are not “made in the USA,” thus suggesting less American investment, although these institutions are influenced by U.S. preferences (Cossa 2003: 194, 214). One might well conclude, following the identity-driven arguments of Cowhey, Ruggie, Weber, and Hemmer and Katzenstein that lack of identification with Asians still makes Asian-Pacific institutional arrangements of only secondary importance to the United States, and thus U.S. policy makers prefer to stand a bit removed.

The Future of American Multilateralism

The future of American multilateralism, at least as a guiding strategy and tool, depends on how well the U.S. economy can right itself after the world financial crisis, which started in the United States. Enlarging the G-8 to the G-20 to create a forum for joint-problem solving on this crisis suggests that U.S. policy makers still see the utility of multilateral institutions. But this forum is consultative, not authoritative, and it does not appear yet that the member states wish to make the G-20 more institutionalized.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are also critical independent variables in calculating the future of American multilateralism as their impact is measured in absolute financial costs, significant trade-offs with other American values, and reputational costs. These wars have created tensions between two different American presidents and the European allies. During the George W. Bush administration, the Europeans were criticized for not joining the Iraq effort. The Obama administration seems dismayed by the lack of significant European response-in-kind to the U.S. surge strategy begun in 2009 in Afghanistan.

Haglund (2003) proposed that the United States would take a more instrumentalist view of NATO specifically, and multilateralism more generally (228). In the years since this prediction, this view seems well supported by facts and, as pointed out above, this continues into the Obama administration. Haglund suggested that this instrumentalist approach was the result of Europe's slipping importance to the United States. These same sentiments were expressed in February of 2010 when President Obama decided not to attend a United States-European Union summit scheduled for May. European Union (EU) officials claimed they had learned of Obama's decision in the press. As one member of the press reported, “In addition to the palpable sense of insult among European officials, there is a growing concern that Europe is being taken for granted and losing importance in American eyes compared with the rise of a newly truculent China” (Erlanger 2010).

If there has been a refocusing of U.S. grand strategy away from Europe and toward Asia, particularly China, then we should expect a shift in the use of multilateralism as well. American ties with Asia have been framed in bilateralism and promoted through bilateral institutions. The shifting of world economic power from West to East has occurred in tandem with a shift

in relative economic power held by the United States vis-à-vis China. Ikenberry predicted that as American hegemonic power declines in Asia the United States will recur to more lock-in goals with Asian states resulting in a greater use of multilateral institutions (Ikenberry 2003b: 59). In his words, “The basic difference between Asia and Europe is that the United States was both more dominant in Asia and wanted less out of Asia” (Ikenberry 2003b: 58). Now that the United States is less dominant in Asia and wants more out of Asia, we should expect a shift of American multilateralism from West to East. But this shift has not been apparent in the seven years since Ikenberry’s prediction. Ikenberry’s prediction also ignores the identity and domestic politics factors that seemed to ease the shift from unilateralism to multilateralism in relations with Europe.

Is there a take-away lesson, then, about the future of American multilateralism and use of multilateral institutions? American multilateralism since World War II has been uneven in the world with a heavy tilt towards Europe. But even with Europeans, the United States has maintained a unilateralist, instrumentalist preference at times. Shifting U.S. demographics may help ease a transition from Eurocentric-multilateralism to a broader multilateralism. For Ruggie, this is the key to a continued American multilateralist foreign policy in the future. Writing in 1994 but with clear resonance in 2011, Ruggie proposes four reasons for continued U.S. multilateralism: institutional inertia, the continued desire of states to join American-made institutions, the desire of U.S. policy makers to shift the military burden to allies which is better facilitated through multilateralism, and the following consideration.

The final factor favoring variants of multilateralism as a key element of U.S. foreign policy ... is the most intangible, but ultimately it may prove the most decisive: the evolving American sense of community itself. The American body politic is very different from what it was fifty years ago. Congress is more decentralized and also more actively involved in the foreign policy process. The role of “wise men” in foreign policy making has declined, and grassroots involvement in innumerable foreign policy issues has become the norm. American society has become ethnically even more diverse than in the past, increasingly tugging in the direction of Latin American and Asia, not only Europe. (568–569)

If the nature of the “willed community” is changing, then there is no reason to argue against a changing U.S. approach to the world outside Europe. The interest-based reasons for a changed approach clearly reinforce the political identity and domestic politics-based reasons. But these factors, too, point to the ultimate take-away lesson: U.S. policy makers made particularistic use of multilateralism, bilateralism, or unilateralism before the United States became a hegemon, as it embraced hegemony, when its hegemony was thought to be in decline, and then as the unipolar power. Into whatever era of international politics we may be entering, U.S. policy makers will no doubt retain this menu approach to American foreign policy.

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