The Political Language of Multilateralism in the United Nations

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3 Multilateralism of Security and Peace

3.1 Multilaterally Maintained Peace and Security as a Norm

This main chapter focuses on the UN's effort to maintain peace and security and on the conceptual struggle of what multilateral cooperation should be in this field. The chapter will be based on selected documents produced by the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Secretary-General. The chapter focuses on key events related to the UN involvement in maintaining peace and security from the 1991 Gulf War, through the 2003 build-up to the Iraq War, until 2022 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The rationale for the selection of cases is based on their relevance to the discussion concerning the role of the United Nations in armed conflicts. As Vaughan Lowe et al. (2010, 30–31) reminded, the Security Council in particular acts as a forum for interstate bargaining. Efforts to seek consensus among the P5 easily result in the use of ambiguous language with room for interpretations, while the Secretariat often plays a role in seeking member states to comply with resolutions. This takes place in a framework in which the UN has three types of UN forces and missions with a security function: peacekeeping operations, UN institutions, missions, and forces not classified as peacekeeping operations, and UN-authorized military operations. Different types of missions may link to each other in specific cases, constituting a wide range of UN activities while maintaining international peace and security.

Indeed, between the 1990s and 2020s, there have been multiple armed conflicts – and forms of UN missions and institutions – taking place in Europe, Iraq, Afghanistan, in many parts of Africa, and also in the Caucasus (Davies et al. 2023). The intention was to select conflicts that related to broader events and to limit the number to selected cases to enable a perspective on the international handling of armed conflicts – or prospects of them – in cases that could enable debate and bargaining related to the UN's role as a primary, multilateral authority in questions of war and peace. In this logic, the Gulf War in 1991, the run-up to the Iraq War, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine all shed light on broader issues dominating the international relations of the time, and the role of other conflicts of the period can also be discussed on selective basis. The cases are analyzed in the framework of norms, processes, and outcomes when applicable – the Russian invasion of Ukraine is still ongoing at the time of writing, and its outcome for multilateralism

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is unclear. The application of the framework means that the cases are analyzed from three perspectives instead of a more chronological order.

Before starting the analysis, it is important to remember that the UN is the principal international organization for maintaining international peace and security, and the idea of collective security has been a pervasive theme throughout the history of the United Nations. Furthermore, the idea of collective security has been a centerpiece of the UN Charter since its creation and has challenged nation states to delegate key parts of national sovereignty to a multilateral committee (Krause 2004, 44) The reality, however, is that the discursive stances on multilateralism have been able to remain while states continue emphasizing maintain their freedom to act in international relations, especially when the great powers of the P5 are concerned. This has had implications for the discussion surrounding multilateralism as an international norm.

3.1.1 The Gulf Crisis 1990–1991 and the Will of the International Community

> There was a time, not long ago, when the language that prevailed at this Assembly was that of the crisis of multilateralism. All the wrongs of the world were recapitulated and, above all, stress was placed on the deficiencies of the mechanisms that existed and the weakness of the international community in righting them. . . . That was an effect of the cold war.
>
> (President of Mexico Carlos Salinas de Gortari, 1 October 1990, A/45/PV.14, 21)

International peace itself constitutes a value, an opposite to war, but as the quotation from the General Assembly in 1990 shows, the language itself can be both positive and negative. With the concept of multilateral, this is particularly true when observed in the contemporary history of the United Nations. The preamble of the UN Charter states that the UN was established "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," and the beginning of the 1990s seemed to open a new momentum for the implementation of the phrase in a way that could not have been possible during the decades of the Cold War. The first opportunity for the international community to show that the political context had changed emerged while the Cold War was rapidly closing to its end, when an event threatening regional peace emerged in the Middle East. The crisis described here as the Gulf Crisis began when the Iraqi armed forces invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The Kuwaiti army was unable to fight against much larger troops, and the defenses of the small country were overwhelmed quickly; the invasion of Kuwait took only a few days for the Iraqi troops. For some, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was evidence that deterrence created by the US clearly had its shortcomings in the period in which the Soviet Union was going through a major crisis, but on the other hand, the US's effort to utilize deterrence to maintain international peace might have had some limitations in the first place (Stein 1992). What is important from the points of view of multilateral cooperation in practice, and multilateral cooperation as a norm, is that the international community responded to Iraq's aggression swiftly, and while doing

that, member states of the UN generally showed resolve and importance of international cooperation to handle emerging military crises. The UN Security Council (UNSC) demanded an immediate Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and the ending of hostilities against the civilian population. This logic of practice would have more and more importance in the upcoming decades, with the UN as the leading platform to promote and maintain multilateral-based international peace and security.

From the procedural perspective, the UNSC acted efficiently to maintain international peace and showed what institutionalized multilateral cooperation could achieve in questions of maintaining international peace. Between August 2 and December 4, 1990, the UNSC adopted 12 resolutions related to the invasion, forming the key data for understanding the public, resolution-focused discourse of the UNSC, supplementing the records of the meetings. The resolutions and voting records draft a picture of a UNSC mostly unanimous in condemning the Iraqi behavior. In 1990, the ten non-permanent members in the UNSC were Canada, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Ethiopia, Finland, Malaysia, Romania, Yemen, and Zaire, and some of them showed more support towards Iraqi actions than others – Cuba and Yemen opposed or abstained in six resolutions, with China joining them by abstaining in November 1990 to protest against the authorization of UN member states to "use all necessary means" to implement the resolution 660 (1990) (Browne 1990, 3, 35).

Nevertheless, the UNSC was rapid in its condemnation of the invasion and demanded that Iraq withdraw its troops from Kuwait on an unconditional basis from the beginning of the invasion. The international community's task was to enforce the resolutions of the UNSC that placed major sanctions on Iraq. In its further resolutions adopted in 1990, the UNSC often called for the UN members to comply with its resolutions and highlighted the need to avoid cooperation with Iraq, apart from transferring food and humanitarian goods. For instance, Resolution 661 (1990), adopted on August 6, 1990, established a Committee of the Security Council (in accordance with rule 28 of the provisional rules of procedure) to carry out a number of tasks related to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, above all, to explore the progress of implementation of the UNSC resolutions related to the invasion. Furthermore, to empower the Committee, Resolution 661 called "upon all States to co-operate fully with the Committee in the fulfilment of its tasks, including supplying such information as may be sought by the Committee in pursuance of the present resolution" (S/RES/661(1990)). In the UNSC, the language of multilateralism was, in fact, related to the cooperation between states to fulfill their tasks in respect to the implementation of UNSC resolutions. Yemen's and Cuba's stances towards Iraq were fueled by seemingly neutral and potentially nationalist voices in which the US role was seen in a negative light (S/PV.2963, 33).

When placed in the context of previous decades and previous military conflicts, the UNSC approach to the Iraqi invasion was strong in terms of allowing the use of military force to re-establish peace in the area and to protect the sovereignty of Kuwait. Furthermore, the UNSC response to the crisis highlighted how efficiently the Council was able to act on issues related to maintaining international peace when the great power dynamics of the P5 enabled enough leeway to make

substantial decisions (for a longer perspective, see Kennedy 2006, 55–76). As the crisis continued and Iraq did not comply with the Council's resolutions, the Council was also able to authorize the deployment of international military troops in the region. However, from the point of view of conceptualization related directly to "multilateralism," such a form of discourse was absent in the resolutions of the UNSC in 1990 in the context of the Iraq-Kuwait conflict, and the meeting records give little more discussion for analysis. In fact, the UNSC and its members were hardly focusing on promoting multilateralism as a particular concept in 1990 and was more concerned that the Iraqi invasion was a direct threat to legitimate government in Kuwait – as the UNSC resolutions highlighted (Browne 1990, 33).

In the discussions taking place at the UNSC, key theme throughout the autumn of 1990 was the sense of unity and sense of having one voice, clear and loud, a form of "will of the international community" and whether Iraq was complying with this form of will or not (e.g., S/PV.2940, 26). The idea of the "will of the international community" was not restricted only to the UN policy towards the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; such discourse was also present in the case of Palestine, a topic that was also discussed throughout the autumn (S/PV.2948, 11; S/RES/672 (1990)). In their letter to the Secretary-General in October 1990, representatives of the P5 described Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as "the most serious crisis the international community" was facing at the time, demanding Iraqi compliance with the "will of the international community" and thus "restoring Kuwait's full sovereignty under the authority of its legitimate Government." Representatives also welcomed the "firm and decisive role played by the United Nations" and the Secretary-General in particular (S/21835, 2).

Indeed, the verbatim records from September 1990 reveal the public view of the Security Council members towards the sense of the international community. Their view seemed to focus on the idea of an international community having a will, even needing to have a will, as reflected by the resolutions of the Council, and that Iraq was expected to comply with the resolutions of the Council for the UN to maintain its authority in the context of the post-Cold War world. Iraqi behavior had made things easy. As described by Italy's representative Vieri Traxler, "Iraq's action constitutes an offence against the whole international community." Iraq had made things worse by not only invading Kuwait but also violating the Vienna Conventions on diplomatic relations and diplomatic communities by committing acts of aggression towards diplomatic personnel of foreign countries located in Kuwait. This was logically something the representatives of Kuwait were able to highlight, together with the fact of the violation of Kuwait's legitimate government (S/PV.2940, 12, 35–37). Iraq's behavior towards Kuwait reflected a danger of anarchy in international relations at a moment of opportunity for the UN to redeem itself from the bipolarized challenges of the Cold War period.

What is important to notice is that a sense of multilateralism as a norm was strongly present as an abstract sense of motive. Parlance about "international community" having a "will" reflects more long-term perspectives of the concept of "international community," a concept that was, according to Evgeny Roshchin (2017), accepted as a shared interstate language as a result of debates over international institutions in the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1990–1991, referring

to the "will of the international community" perhaps enabled a more flexible way to assert the role of international, institutionalized cooperation compared to referring to the concept of multilateralism, but its key conceptual meaning was to convey the sense of motive to work – and act – with a single, normative voice. Besides the notions of the "will of the international community," the topic emerged in multiple ways that dealt with the practical implementation of international cooperation and whether it reflected values member states found important or not. Advocates of a more peaceful and more political approach to the handling of the crisis were able to utilize comments questioning the value principles of the Security Council. For instance, the Cuban representative, Minister of External Relations Isidoro Malmierca Peoli, called for "real equality and justice for all," the democratization of the UN, and the abandoning of "norms and practices of privilege," implicating the lack of equality within the international community. Indeed, he argued that a different kind of resolution advocating a more peaceful approach without setting a deadline for Iraqi compliance would grant the United Nations "great moral authority" (S/PV.2963, 57–58). Iraq's representative was able to do similarly, although its power as part of a wider argument was left rather vague (e.g., S/PV.2963, 20–30). From Iraq's perspective, the US acted as a source of friction and political dominance that jeopardized the sense of equality between states. In this perspective, yes, Kuwait's sovereignty had been undermined by the Iraqi invasion, but did it lead to Iraq losing its own sovereign rights in its relations with other states? This clearly was a theme that could be exploited for political argumentation, and both the UNSC and the UNGA provided forums for such views on fundamental value principles of international cooperation.

While the Security Council, as the Charter defined it, was the key body to work with the issue, the topic was also present in the General Assembly during the autumn of 1990. As the UNSC was responsible for maintaining international peace and security, in the UNGA, the state of multilateralism in relation to the Iraq-Kuwait crisis was not a major theme. However, some indirect and direct comments emerged and shed light on the meanings attached to the situation in the context of multilateralism. These comments raised the relevance of the value principle, particularly from the perspective of sovereign states as members of the UN on an equal basis. For some, like President of Colombia Cesar Gaviria, the crisis was an opportunity to have a unified response to an act of aggression, a response that might provide a precedent for cooperation. "Civilized coexistence" was guaranteed by principles, such as the defense of human rights, legal equality of states, respect for pluralism, rejection of the use of force, non-intervention, and the self-determination of peoples. For Gaviria, these principles gave a mandate that, "as a clear expression of those convictions, determines our actions in the Security Council and in multilateral organizations" (A/45/PV.11, 6–7). This reflected the understanding of multilateralism as not only a practical way of doing international cooperation but a value-bound phenomenon that needed clear principles as its support. It was interesting that the Cuban representative, Minister of External Relations Peoli, also utilized the General Assembly to describe his country's position on peace and security and linked it to questions of equality between states. "We say 'yes' to

multilateralism and the United Nations, but we demand it for everybody, large and small, nuclear and non-nuclear Powers, developed and underdeveloped, rich and poor" (A/45/PV.11, 97). Such nuances give a view of the discourses taking place in the General Assembly.

The forum of the UNGA was also a place to echo similar ideas presented in the Security Council: the "will of the world community" to uphold the sense of collective security (e.g., Norway, A/45/PV.11, 55). A similar sense of equality – or claim of double standards – was possible to utilize in the argumentation to support or question the strict treatment of Iraq over the invasion of Kuwait, but the bottom line was clear: international cooperation to maintain international peace and security was treated as a positive value itself for the UN, and it helped to fulfill the idea of the Charter.

While the UNSC seemed to be the key actor in questions of international peace and security, the reality was much more aligned with great power politics that impacted the handling of the Gulf Crisis. In 1990, the Soviet Union/Russia was facing a major societal and ideological crisis, while the US was in the process of becoming the dominant actor in world affairs after decades of bipolarized international relations. Indeed, in the context of the Gulf Crisis and the War in 1990–1991, the UNSC's decision-making on Iraq was strongly influenced by the US approach towards the crisis (Koshy 1997, 3011–3020). However, the Soviets had their say as well and were initially reluctant to sanction the use of force against Iraqi troops in Kuwait and emphasized the role of the United Nations. The Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev was probably also aware of the domestic context in which the Soviet troop deployment in Afghanistan had just recently ended and the people were reluctant to commit to new overseas operations (Keller 1990). More important was the change in Soviet political thinking around foreign policy, as Gorbachev's "new political thinking" envisaged. There was a breaking-off from the Cold War thinking that Iraqi behavior towards Kuwait reflected, which was seen as necessary, and the Soviet Union was able to support a strong stance towards an invasion of Kuwait despite old ties to Iraq (Fradkova 2020, 286–287).

The UNSC was effective in adopting a set of resolutions designed to put pressure on Iraq, and the member states' implementation of measures, stated especially in Resolution 661, were scrutinized by the UN Secretary General (see S/21715). It is possible that some members voted for the adoption of the resolution due to economic incentives offered by the US (see Simons 1998), but it was certain that the idea of the will of the international community represented a value-related goal for international cooperation in which values associated with national sovereignty also played a role. When the Iraqi troops were forced to withdraw from Kuwait in February 1991, the political process reached its end. As Iraq was also a sovereign country, the decision by the US leadership not to utilize military means to pressure a regime change in Iraq in 1991 perhaps showed a partial commitment to the international system of sovereign states, but it also paved the way for the continued interest of the UN to keep focusing on Iraq to continue to implement the resolutions of the UNSC – with the same Iraqi leadership as before the invasion of Kuwait (Khadduri and Ghareeb 1997, 180–188).

3.1.2 1990s: Away From Politicized Multilateralism?

The UN handling of the Gulf Crisis, while influenced by great power politics and national interests, provided an opportunity to engage directly with the topic of multilateralism in the following year. In his article published in 1992 in the *Foreign Affairs* journal, the new Secretary-General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali suggested that even the multilateralism of the Cold War period had negative connotations that were the result of the politicization of otherwise positive cooperation between countries. Multilateral programs of the Cold War period, even though successful, had their origins in "ideas and ideologies that proved inadequate at best and in some cases ruinous." Furthermore, "A major intellectual requirement of our time is to rethink the question of sovereignty – not to weaken its essence, which is crucial to international security and cooperation, but to recognize that it may take more than one form and perform more than one function." This was a call for a new kind of unity in which deepening and seemingly less ideological forms of cooperation between countries could help to "solve today's problems" that cannot be solved alone. The UN, together with its "global network of information-gathering and constructive activity" as well as its sole ability to convene "global-scale meetings of ministers and heads of states," was placed at the center of such forms of cooperation (Boutros-Ghali 1992, 97, 99). What this meant was that the UN, led by the Secretary-General, wanted to shape the conceptual dimensions related to multilateralism and sovereignty and breathe new life into the UN-centered global order. What Boutros-Ghali's call also signaled was the interest to transcend partisan division into blocks in the UN context, and this is significant from the point of view of this volume.

This new era of multilateralism was expected to start with a new effort to strengthen peace and security. Boutros-Ghali developed his ideas further in his *An Agenda for Peace*, published in 1992. This document was an effort to draft ideas about how peace and security would be maintained. It was a task given to the United Nations and relied on the need for a new understanding of what sovereignty would mean. On the pages of the document, the Secretary-General stated:

> Respect for its fundamental sovereignty and integrity are crucial to any common international progress. The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty, however, has passed; its theory was never matched by reality. It is the task of leaders of States today to understand this and to find a balance between the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an ever more interdependent world.
>
> (A/47/277, 5)

Furthermore, the document paid attention to the dynamics between globalism and nationalism and challenged the prevailing view of the dominating importance of sovereignty:

> Globalism and nationalism need not be viewed as opposing trends, doomed to spur each other on to extremes of reaction. The healthy globalization of

> contemporary life requires in the first instance solid identities and fundamental freedoms. The sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of States within the established international system, and the principle of self-determination for peoples, both of great value and importance, must not be permitted to work against each other in the period ahead.
>
> (A/47/277, 5)

In political reality, the visions of Boutros-Ghali suffered from the continuing challenge of the United Nations in which not necessarily nationalism but a sense of supreme national interest over other national interests seemed to dominate the thinking. This was evident as one of the great powers and permanent members of the Security Council, the United States, was not supportive of his ideas. The US foreign policy of the 1980s had already experienced a period in which US domestic politics were divided over the UN and the diminished role of the US in that structure, and many in the UN had been critical towards the US for some time now, especially in the Global South (Byrnes 2014).

Boutros-Ghali's contribution related in particular to the question of how to build peace in a post-conflict situation when the violence had ceased but the state previously involved in violence needed to go a step further, to address the causes of conflict and to build democratic institutions perceived to help in maintaining peace and in strengthening the different levels of political community, including the international level (King and Matthews 2012). From the perspective of values, it was also about emphasizing the role of preventive diplomacy and seeking a consensus among the 181member states of the UN in a post-Cold War context over what kind of political goals the UN should seek, and it was a start (Boutros-Ghali et al. 1993), accompanied by Boutros-Ghali's readiness to utilize both means of politicization and even depoliticization, or transcending the partisan issue into blocks within the organization of the UN to seek his goals (Salton 2023). The question of depoliticization might also have had more to do with changing circumstances in which partisan division was not politically significant anymore than with intentional efforts (see Palonen 2003).

Boutros-Ghali's visions seemed to reflect broader thinking towards the UN. The UNSC did attempt to implement these visions of multilateralism to some extent during the 1990s, with more attention pointed to overall global development (Dedring 2008, 33). Certain crises in places such as Rwanda, Somalia, and former Yugoslavia illustrated weak points of multilateralism, that is, the absence of needed political will and capabilities to implement more high-end visions of multilateralism. On the other hand, the UN was also changing and paying more attention to security as a more complex issue, giving more space to human dimension through the conceptualization of human security and female empowerment (Alkire 2003; Gasper 2005). More challenging times would, however, arrive that would improve the understanding of what kind of role multilateralism could have in the conduct of international relations. In this, Iraq would continue to be in the spotlight.

3.1.3 Norms of the Great Powers? The Build-Up Against Iraq, 2002–2003

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 demonstrated how different member states strongly advocated for norm-based principles in their decision-making on peace and war, reflecting a stance in world politics that had been playing an increasingly important role since the Gulf War. Furthermore, the starting point for the international struggle over how to handle Iraq's noncompliance with UNSC resolutions was very different compared to the situation in August 1990. By this point, Iraq already had a history of noncompliance. In fact, the US and the UK bombed Iraq in December 1998 due to its noncompliance with the UNSC resolutions and Iraqi interference with United Nations Special Commission inspectors tasked with investigating the state of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program. The bombing campaign had no specific authorization from the UNSC, a state of international relations that received criticism from some national representatives in the UNSC, as the US and the UK seemed to act as the enforcers of the UNSC resolutions without authorization to do so (SC/6611). Additionally, there had been previous bombing campaigns against Iraq in 1993 and in 1998, and the situation in Iraq, especially regarding its implementation of relevant UNSC resolutions dealing with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program, received repeated attention (Malone 2006, 84–177).

The challenge was that the US showed a stance that shifted between the use of unilateral and multilateral means, whichever suited best in different situations, illustrating a broader challenge regarding the US role either as a unilateral agent or as a partner in multilateralism (Dedring 2008, 199). President George W. Bush had been pursuing "distinctly American internationalism" with a major emphasis on unilateral policies from the beginning of his tenure, highlighting the key role of strategic US national interests in world affairs and reducing US involvement in less strategic actions. The US was interested in international cooperation related to global trade but was more skeptical towards other forms of cooperation, such as environmental standards (McCormick 2004, 189–197). Furthermore, a key contextual factor was linked to the US domestic context in which the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 had changed the political atmosphere and perception of threats in a major way and had led to the war in Afghanistan in 2001 with a major focus on fighting terrorism around the world. In 2002, Bush listed Iraq as one of the "axis of evil," and the US administration launched an effort to persuade the UN to renew its focus on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, which eventually led to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Bush 2002). The operation was preceded using sanctions since the Gulf War in 1991 and air raids against Iraqi targets in the 1990s, with a rationale to force Iraq to dismantle its program related to the development of weapons of mass destruction. The suspicion that Iraq was continuing its program despite the UNSC resolutions was brewing. As one sign of this, in January 2001, a report was published by the US Department of Defense about the threat of proliferation, and Iraq was mentioned as a possible country continuing its WMD program after the UN inspectors had left the country in 1998 (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2001, 38–42).

In 2002, a renewed interest in Iraq's alleged WMDs began in a major way, associated with Bush's war on terrorism in which Saddam Hussein's Iraq was seen as a threat (Malone 2006, 187–190; Dunne 2003; see also Woodward 2004). For the United Nations, the situation was difficult. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration was more oriented towards multilateralism, albeit in a way that preserved the unilateralist option for the US. This meant that in maintaining international peace and security, the US was now focusing on combating terrorism and clearly saw value in regional and institutional institutions but wanted those institutions to support US policies. If such support did not materialize, the US could act unilaterally (McCormick 2004, 205). Therefore, the international institutions represented norms that the US could accept and support, but it simultaneously wanted something in return, creating a potential rift within the UNSC regarding questions of maintaining peace and security, a rift that could follow if different states had differing interpretations regarding what norms should be followed in the case of a potential Iraqi threat.

When the theme of enforcing Iraq to comply with the UNSC resolutions resurfaced in the UN in the autumn of 2002, the international community was aware of the US interest in acting against Iraq, and leading figures of the Bush administration had publicly called for a regime change in Iraq in the summer of 2002. The UN was also linked to this interest, as at the core lay the threats associated with weapons of mass destruction that could be utilized by terrorists. US Secretary of State Colin Powell, the leading internationalist voice of the Bush administration, had publicly called for the return of UN weapons inspectors to Iraq in early September 2002. In fact, Iraq had quickly accepted the idea of returning the UN weapons inspectors, but some figures within the Bush administration were pessimistic about the potential success of new inspections. Nevertheless, the European Union favored continuing UN-led weapons inspections instead of the swift military action the US seemed to favor (New York Times 2002a, 2002b).

Good news for the state of multilateralism was coming. In the autumn of 2002, the US seemed committed to seeing through whether the UN could act on Iraq, thus enabling a diplomatic process and the opportunity for the UN to show the ability of multilateral cooperation to provide solutions. The threat of swift and unilateral military action was noticed in the UN Secretariat, and US President Bush was expected to deliver a speech in the General Assembly at the beginning of a new session. To highlight the role of a proper framework to handle the crisis, Secretary-General Kofi Annan decided to use the opportunity. Indeed, before Bush's speech on September 12, 2002, a year and one day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Annan outlined his norm-based position on multilateralism when the General Assembly convened. Annan described himself as a "multilateralist – by precedent, by principle, by Charter and by duty" and highlighted the importance of state commitment to the rule of law to maintain international order. Annan's speech was a cautious remark to the US (A/57/PV.2, 1).

Annan argued – even appealed – that to prevent terrorism, multilateral institutions provided the path in which both trust and results could be developed, in the

context of shared norms in which "political convenience" could not act as the reason to either follow or reject a multilateral path. Annan said:

> any one State – large or small – choosing to follow or reject the multilateral path must not be a simple matter of political convenience. It has consequences far beyond the immediate context. When countries work together in multilateral institutions – developing, respecting, and when necessary enforcing international law – they also develop mutual trust and more effective cooperation on other issues. The more a country makes use of multilateral institutions – thereby respecting shared values, and accepting the obligations and restraints inherent in those values – the more others will trust and respect it, and the stronger its chance to exercise true leadership.
>
> (A/57/PV.2, 1–3)

These words would be echoed in the UN during the upcoming weeks and showed Annan's readiness to act as a norm leader in maintaining multilateralism. Furthermore, Annan reminded the UNGA of the legitimacy of the UN:

> And among multilateral institutions, this universal Organization has a special place. Any State, if attacked, retains the inherent right of self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter. But beyond that, when States decide to use force to deal with broader threats to international peace and security, there is no substitute for the unique legitimacy provided by the United Nations.
>
> (A/57/PV.2, 2)

The UN was not only an organization of multilateralism, but it was also a special one because it provided the source of legitimacy for states to deal with threats to peace and security. For Annan, the liberation of Kuwait in 1991 served as proof that the member states respected the authority of the UNSC when it came to the willingness to act to maintain international peace and security. He also highlighted the importance of the political will of the Security Council and the existence of a "grave threat to world peace." Annan also urged Iraq to comply with its obligations and threatened Iraq with consequences stemming from the UNSC holding its responsibilities (A/57/PV.2, 2–3). Annan's remarks reflected a stance in which multilateralism was above all a norm-based activity in which the role of maintaining institutions was essential for future development.

Given the context of the threat of swift military action, President Bush's remarks outlined a somewhat calmer approach to multilateralism but one in which he could point attention to the record of failures by the League of Nations and build a sense of need for the UN to do better. Bush highlighted a more positive approach to maintaining multilateral principles than some might have expected. He announced that the US was rejoining UNESCO and made a case regarding Iraq's noncompliance towards different UNSC resolutions, particularly resolutions 686 (1991), 687 (1991), 688 (1991), and 1373 (2001) and described the years of failed efforts to pressure Iraq to comply with the resolutions (A/57/PV.2, 6–8).

As Bush perceived it, this was a test placed by Iraq on the United Nations and its authority. Bush stated:

> The conduct of the Iraqi regime is a threat to the authority of the United Nations and a threat to peace. Iraq has answered a decade of United Nations demands with a decade of defiance. All the world now faces a test and the United Nations a difficult and defining moment. Are Security Council resolutions to be honoured and enforced or cast aside without consequence? Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding, or will it be irrelevant? (A/57/PV.2, 8)

Bush's rhetoric sounded dramatic, but so were the stakes involved: Bush described a world in which it was not enough to have a multilateral system as a basic norm – it also needed the strong backing of states, visible in implementing and, if necessary, enforcing the outcomes the system could produce. Bush had a clear point. In 1991, the international community had forced Iraq to comply with the UNSC resolutions with all means necessary, but should the invasion of another country require a similar mandate from the international community, that is, the UNSC? Or would the threat of possible Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, together with years-long defiance shown by the Iraqi administration, be sufficient *casus belli* in the name of maintaining the authority of the UN, and in particular the UNSC? As Bush continued, the US wanted the UN to be "respected and successful," and the resolutions "of the world's most important multilateral body to be enforced." However, Bush also declared that the US was committed to working with the UNSC "to meet our common challenge," and was aiming for new resolutions. However, he also threatened that action could be unavoidable (A/57/PV.2, 8–9). The US's perspective of Iraqi noncompliance would shape the views of those supporting the US-led tough policy on Iraq, but the message did not persuade all members in the coming months, a fact present already in the beginning of the political process.

Other remarks in response to Bush's and Annan's speeches echoed a wariness towards military action against Iraq on a unilateral basis, emphasizing the need to maintain dialogue and the UN-led multilateral system. Multilateralism was described as something that needs both leadership and dialogue – "nations united by the power of persuasion," as Brazilian representative and Minister of Foreign Affairs Celso Lafer argued (A/57/PV.2, 4). The Latvian representative applauded the US willingness to engage the international community through the UN (A/57/PV.2, 19), and Prime Minister of Denmark Anders Fogh Rasmussen expressed the stance of the European Union to support the UN and in particular the UNSC in carrying out its responsibilities over Iraqi incompliance (A/57/PV.2, 28). The topic would be continued in the coming days but mainly the theme had been left for further dialogue and negotiations. There was no rift regarding multilateralism as a goal and norm itself, but it was an occasion to explore whether multilateralism should have limitations or requirements when it came to maintaining international peace and security. This was not the first of a UN member state being noncompliant towards specific UNSC resolutions – why should the UN treatment of Iraq now be

different? (see Couzigou 2017). Nevertheless, the UN was considered to be at the center of international efforts to maintain peace and security, and that constituted a key norm for any actions taken in the case of Iraq. As mentioned by several representatives in the UNGA, Iraq had to show that it was implementing its obligations, that is, following the norms the international community had placed in Iraq (e.g., A/57/PV.5, 13, 23).

However, member states also had to consider what they were actually asking from multilateralism. As Foreign Minister of Finland, Erkki Tuomioja, reminded the UNGA on September 14, two days after Bush's speech:

> Member States must give the United Nations the wherewithal that is necessary for meaningful action in preventing crises, managing conflicts and building peace after conflicts. Action needs true commitment to multilateralism, which must exceed national interests and unilateralism. Multilateralism cannot be exercised à la carte whenever convenient. Global interests require global action.
>
> (A/57/PV.6, 25)

Indeed, especially the members of the P5 needed to show particular responsibility in the UNSC. In addition to a plethora of contemporary topics, the debates in the UNGA in September 2002 were the first step in the process of reaching a resolution in the UNSC over what to do with Iraq. Annan had warned about affecting the authority of the UN, and Bush had stated his stance on supporting the UN – but with limitations. Now it was the turn of the US to build the needed support for its policy towards Iraq.

As Kofi Annan stated in early October in relation to the annual report on the work of the organization:

> We have to keep in mind that the credibility of the United Nations is based not only on its ability to articulate political goals but also – and primarily – on its ability to mobilize the political will for their implementation.
>
> (A/57/PV.22, 3)

Annan's remark was not directly related to Iraq, but in addition to other goals of the UN, it was related to maintaining international peace and security, and it applied well to the situation with Iraq and to the nuances of how multilateralism was perceived. Annan's idea about mobilization was an important one, as it reflected the continuing dynamics the UN clearly needed, that is, having the states commit themselves to the UN decisions.

Furthermore, member states could try to mobilize different forms of policies, including those that would run counter to the interests of the UN, especially if those interests focused on maintaining peace. The US effort to mobilize political support for its policy against Iraq seemed to focus on the sense of threat the Iraqi administration and its potential military capabilities posed to the US, and the UN would have a hard time addressing such fears.

The return of the weapons inspections to Iraq was not a quick process, and the US was raising the pressure. On October 16, 2002, the US Congress passed the Iraq Resolution, authorizing military action against Iraq (Public Law 107–243 Oct 2002). In the context of events in the UN, the resolution placed further pressure on the UNSC to provide the US with an international mandate to act. In October 2002, the General Assembly debates raised the topic of Iraq, and some representatives voiced their support for the new resolution – "in the spirit of multilateralism," as the representative of the Republic of Macedonia formulated (A/57/PV.28, 7). From there, the attention would focus on the Security Council and the search for a new resolution on Iraq, with the content unclear and contested in October 2002.

The debates of the UNSC illustrate that it was the non-permanent members of the Security Council who occasionally touched on the state of multilateralism in relation to the situation with Iraq: Bulgaria, Cameroon, Colombia, Guinea, Ireland, Mauritius, Mexico, Norway, Singapore, and Syria. These contributions would reinforce their belief in multilateralism and highlight the role of visions for the success of multilateralism.

The UNSC debated the situation on October 16, 2002. The open debate, titled "The situation between Iraq and Kuwait," was initiated by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement as a response to the understanding that the UNSC was exploring the possibility of a new resolution on Iraq and wanted to widen this debate to the entire membership of the UN (S/2002/1132). This was taken positively by the Secretary-General, whose stance outlined that Iraq had indeed failed to fully comply with the UNSC resolutions since 1991, full compliance was still lacking, but he also saw the situation optimistically:

> If we handle this properly, we may actually strengthen international cooperation, the rule of law and the United Nations – enabling it to move forward in an purposeful way, not only in this immediate crisis but in the future as well.
> (S/PV.4625, 3)

In this sense, the following established norms to prefer a peaceful approach and trust in processes would provide solutions. The weapons inspectors were now in the process of returning to Iraq but were not yet in the country, waiting for a new UNSC resolution that had been under negotiation among the members of the P5 since September 2002 (Malone 2006, 168). In fact, in a debate in October, the Secretary-General also stated in the UNGA that the UNSC might pass a new resolution to strengthen the inspectors. Nevertheless, he urged the members of the Council to retain their unity and estimated that the lack of unity would lead to the erosion of the authority of the organization (S/PV.4625, 4). But this lack of unity was indeed the reason why the debate was held, as it opened a view on how norms were crafted within the UNSC regarding how resolutions would be made. South African representative Dumisano Kumalo pointed out that consultations over a new resolution on Iraq seemed to be focusing on the P5 of the UNSC and expressed the concern of the Non-Aligned Movement over the possible exclusion of elected members of

the UNSC. Kumalo called for protecting the rules-based system of international relations on which the idea of collective security was based and urged more consistency within the UNSC over how its decisions were being enforced (S/PV.4625, 5). Indeed, Libyan representative Abuzed Dorda was even more vocal in his criticism towards the lack of a role for the ten non-permanent members of the Security Council. He argued:

> As things stand, we are nothing but extras, mere spectators. This is unbelievable. Where is the democracy that some talk about? What democracy is evinced in the work of the Council? Is this democracy? The United Nations is not allowed to participate. The ten non-permanent members are not allowed to participate and the other three are just fighting. What work is the Council doing on behalf of the international community? They have nothing to do with this. Where is the world being led? Where to? This is what causes fanaticism.
>
> (S/PV.4625, 6)

Furthermore, as happened in 1990, the Iraqi representative to the UN, Mohammed A. Aldouri, was able to draw attention to the lack of equality concerning how the UN and, in particular, the US were implementing the UNSC and the UNGA resolutions and decisions, highlighting the lack of enforcement of dozens of UNSC resolutions related to Israel. Additionally, the US also seemed to have an appetite for war while possessing the "largest arsenal of weapons of mass destruction" and also had a history of using such weapons while hindering certain international efforts concerning the limitation of such weapons systems. In fact, Aldouri accused the US of instrumentalizing the UN for its own "aggressive" purposes, a matter also related to an effort to have a new resolution on Iraq (S/PV.4625, 9). Aldouri stated:

> The attempts being made by the United States of America to hamper and delay the return of the inspectors and to make the Security Council adopt a new resolution laying down conditions that are impossible to respect are but a pretext for aggression against Iraq.
>
> (S/PV.4625, 10)

Are such views relevant for our understanding of the discourse surrounding multilateralism? In 2002–2003, the debates in the UN on Iraq illustrate an organization in which member states support multilateralism as a key norm for international cooperation but do not see the situation as a crisis for multilateralism itself, only in a limited sense for the UN as a functioning organization to provide a sufficient alternative for the unilateralism the US may represent. For instance, in the same October debate initiated by the South African representative, different countries, especially the Arab ones, highlighted the need to keep the UN as the central framework in the context "of this common threat." As Kuwait's and Japan's representatives Mohammad Abulhasan and Koichi Haraguchi reminded, the relationship between Iraq and the United Nations should be the focus, instead of the US being the key actor here,

and avoid treating the UN framework as just a way to seek the needed justification for military intervention. Indeed, the UNSC had a key responsibility in setting precedents for future decision-making (e.g., S/PV.4625, 2–3, 10–11, 13–14, 16, 21–23, 26; S/PV.4625 (Resumption 2), 5; S/PV.4625 (Resumption 3), 23). In this linguistic context, the usage of the concepts "regime change" and "pre-emptive strike," both used in public debates about events in Iraq, were highly problematic as the representative of Iran, Mohammad Zarif, reminded, while recalling Kofi Annan's remarks about the relevance of multilateralism and multilateral institutions at the beginning of the autumn session (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 1), 2–3). Tunisia's representative Noureddine Mejdoub warned about the potential reaction an attack against Iraq might create to the multilaterally organized campaign against terrorism and called for ending war-hysteria and reconstructing multilateralism (S/PV.4625, 23–24).

Nevertheless, the UN's ability to implement the norms it was representing and creating continued to provide the key rationale for the US and its supporters. For these proponents of strong policy against Iraq's noncompliance, Iraq's noncompliance and behavior against the UNSC resolutions were considered a threat to the "basis of our system of collective security" (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 1), 9). Then there was the potential gap in knowledge regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program, another perhaps even more concrete way the exercise of multilateral policies was reflected through. In the open debate of the UNSC in October, many, especially Arab countries, held the view that Iraq posed no danger in terms of weapons of mass destruction. However, contrary claims could be made, based on the combination of Iraq's past behavior with the weapons of mass destruction and domestic intelligence activities. As stated by the representative of the UK Jeremy Greenstock, while arguing for a new resolution,

> We cannot afford to bury our heads in the sand and pretend the problem does not exist. We cannot accept the Iraqi Government's word at face value, knowing what we know. We wish to see the Security Council, which Iraq has been defying for so long, express its will and its unity in a clear, strong resolution.
>
> (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 3), 8)

Iraq needed to show its readiness to comply with the UNSC resolutions, but there were bigger issues at stake – issues that involved the state and future of multilateralism. As the representative of Thailand, Chuchai Kasemsarn, reminded:

> I should like to take this opportunity to commend all concerned parties for making use of this Organization to try to resolve in a peaceful manner the escalating crisis with regard to Iraq. In order to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and pave the way for their reduction and eventual elimination, the multilateral regime must be upheld by all of us.
>
> (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 1), 8)

Indonesian representative Mochamad Hidayat – highlighting the linkage between a peaceful approach and maintaining norms, demanding enough focus and patience on processes that uphold norms – reminded:

> We call on the Council to seize this opportunity to demonstrate that when necessary, it will go the extra mile to ensure that peace prevails and not have to explain war afterwards. This issue touches upon the mandate of the Council, and it is in the interest [of] the multilateralism of United Nations that the Council lives up to the best expectations of the membership.
>
> (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 1), 14)

To have multilateralism succeed in enabling the diplomatic process to work its way was important, as Malaysian representative Hasmy Agam reminded on October 17:

> The alternative to diplomacy and the multilateral process is recourse to the use of armed force.
>
> (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 2), 7)

The partial lack of norms thus formed a direct linkage to war. From the perspective of language on multilateralism as a norm, the debates on Iraq seemed to illustrate the potential for politicization of the UNSC in a way where multilateralism as a value was raised as a more important theme than the process of implementing decisions reached on a multilateral basis and maintaining peace, the key rationale for the existence of the United Nations. On the other hand, was the path the US promoted in the UN, that is, the enforcement of the UNSC resolutions, a result of multilateral thinking? For instance, the EU represented a viewpoint of having the "widest possible support within the Council" to get Iraq to comply with "all the relevant resolutions" of the UNSC, a path in which different political choices were possible (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 1), 14–15). The representative of New Zealand, Don Mackay, insisted that as a state committed to a multilateral system, its view was that states had to comply with the UNSC resolutions (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 1), 17). Both perspectives highlight the potential of multilateralism for political instrumentalization, although in the UN the opponents of war were more eager to invoke a call for a better form of multilateralism. The office of the Secretary-General worked in the middle. The autumn of 2002 showed that multilateralism was seen as a key norm for the international community, and that it focused on the UN. Now it was the UN's turn to provide something concrete to work on. That concrete would mean a resolution, a document that would bind the member states.

3.1.4 Is Multilateralism Dead? The Russian Invasion of Ukraine 2022

> "What role does Russia see for the United Nations? It sees a new League of Nations. We must deny Russia what it wants."
>
> (Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba of Ukraine in the General Assembly on 23 February 2024, A/76/PV.58, 4)

An opportunity to deny Russia what it wanted was approaching fast. On February 24, 2022, Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine from the north, west, and south. From the perspective of the UN and multilateralism in particular, the period in 2022 provides relevant viewpoints on how different actors in the UN context perceive multilateralism as a norm and its possibilities to provide means to maintain peace and security. It is a leap from 2003, but as the following chapters illustrate, we will later return to the period between 2003 and 2022. Nevertheless, as was the case in 2003, again a member of the P5 of the UNSC is in the key role to start a war, but unlike in 2003, the decision to utilize military means is made outside of the UN context with a rationale shifting between "de-Nazification" of Ukraine and outright annexation of Ukrainian territories to the Russian Federation. In such circumstances, from the European perspective, the title stating that multilateralism is potentially dead certainly has a tempting echo. Reality, however, reflects a dynamic political landscape of competing visions of what world order could be.

The discussion on the state of multilateralism started already some days before the invasion, when Russia recognized Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states on February 21, 2022. Originally, those had been provinces (oblasts) of Ukraine, but as a result of Russian-supported separatist activities in 2014, these had become self-declared republics in Eastern Ukraine, territories that had been in somewhat low-intensity military conflict with Ukraine between 2014 and 2022. In the General Assembly, the topic was well visible in the context of both interpreting the situation as a crisis as well as in discursively upholding a multilateral system (e.g., A/76/PV.59, 8, 14–16, 23). As cited by Olivier Maes, the representative of Luxembourg, the Russian behavior was simply against the UN Charter, Article 2, paragraph 4 (A/76/PV.59, 18).

In the UNSC, the contribution to the discussion was short but emotionally powerful when the Kenyan representative declared multilateralism lying on its deathbed:

> Multilateralism lies on its deathbed tonight. It has been assaulted today, as it has been by other powerful States in the recent past. We call on all Member States to rally behind the Secretary-General in asking him to rally us all to the standard that defends multilateralism.
>
> (S/PV.8970, 9)

Interestingly, the attention immediately focused on the expected role of the Secretary-General to handle the emerging crisis. But more major issues were on their way. Discussion on multilateralism in connection to war was rather sporadic and focused more on the sense of grievance over the state of events – like the comment from the representative of Albania Ferix Hoxha in March 2022:

> Twelve days ago, Ukraine was guilty because it exists. Now they are guilty because they do not surrender. What will tomorrow be made of for them? We call on Russia to come to its senses and stop. We call on Russia to halt its aggression and go home. The world knows what they are doing. What is

> happening is a global air-raid siren – a warning of how important multilateralism is, how much we need it to work and how essential it is to do everything possible to stop this war and make the aggressor pay for it.
>
> (S/PV.8988, 9)

From the UN perspective, the situation was interpreted as a violation of peace and the sovereignty of Ukraine, a UN member state, thus constituting a major breach of internationally recognized norms. However, as Rosemary DiCarlo, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, described, a pivotal threat towards multilateralism was possible, reflecting the state of discussion on multilateralism in the UN:

> Let me reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognized borders. As the war grinds on, there is already much reflection about its implications, beyond the tragedy it represents for Ukraine. We increasingly hear the use of terms such as "turning point", "defining moment" and "end of multilateralism". I do not believe that is an exaggeration – indeed, some consequences are already being felt, economically and politically. Perhaps most alarming are the threats that the violence poses to the global framework for peace and security.
>
> (S/PV.8991, 3)

In the UNSC and the UNGA alike, member states that typically referred to multilateralism expressed their grievance over the state of events or expressed their country's commitment to multilateral cooperation. From the Russian perspective, the situation seemed to be clear in the sense that it was not generally interested in discussing the state of multilateralism in connection to its operation in Ukraine per se. Its representatives participating in the debates in the UN needed to find rationale and justification for the use of force, but from the perspective of norms, the "special military operation," the *nom de guerre* of the entire invasion in Russian parlance, was a reflection of crisis not at the level of multilateral cooperation the UN was representing but the broader international security architecture in which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had a prominent role in Russian thinking. In December 2021, the Russian Foreign Ministry had provided draft treaties to redefine both the US and NATO relations with Russia, with a straightforward idea to redefine European security by asserting that both sides had legitimate security concerns in their neighboring areas, and that the best solution to guarantee peace would acknowledge and support these concerns. To put it bluntly, Russia wanted to have security guarantees from the US and from NATO and essentially thus to return to the era of power politics where major powers would dictate the ability of NATO to expand or even deploy troops to particular areas. From the perspective of the UN, both the draft treaty about the US-Russia relations and the draft agreement about the security of the Russian Federation and member states of NATO highlighted the authority of the UNSC in maintaining international peace and security

and a commitment to the UN Charter (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2021a, 2021b).

Historians may later be able to explore the causes and consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and perhaps even discuss to what extent the blame lies solely with Russia (e.g., Mearsheimer 2022). However, it was clear that Russia was acting unilaterally against Ukraine's sovereignty, citing its right to self-defense and referring to the Charter of the United Nations, and making comparisons with the situation in Eastern Ukraine and the context of 1941 when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union. In fact, in his speech on the morning of February 24, 2022, the day the invasion was launched, Putin highlighted the repeated behavior of the US to "distort" the resolutions of the UNSC in conflicts in Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, thus casting blame for violation of international law on the US (S/2022/154, 3). Putin had made a case in his speech that the armed forces of Ukraine should lay down their arms and not interfere with the Russian mission. The reality proved otherwise. In his speech, Putin stated, that strength and a readiness to fight are the basis of independence and sovereignty, the necessary foundation on which alone one can reliably build one's future, one's home, one's family and one's homeland (S/2022/154, 7). Probably unlike Putin had intended, the Ukrainians were fighting for their sovereignty and independence, and after Russians had gained control over many parts of Ukraine, the war started to prolong after a series of setbacks for the Russian troops. The West also started to support Ukraine with financial and material aid. In fact, one of the challenges the UN faced in the crisis was the Russian discourse of them being at war against the collective West, a state of events that challenged the normal conduct of international relations and thus weakened the ground under the multilateral system in which peace and security should be maintained (e.g., S/PV.9027, 18). Russia had tried to change the security system in Europe but had failed to receive support for its proposal from the US and was also failing to enforce the new system by arms in Ukraine. The UN clearly had its role in the eyes of both the West and Russia, but the system under the organization was experiencing major turbulence.

The problem was the context and the existing set of global challenges to which war was only the latest addition. These placed a further burden on the multilateral system, as the Kenyan representative stated in the UNSC. Interestingly, he found the Secretary-General's office to represent the minimal element in preserving peace and security:

> If climate change is indeed, as the science informs us, leading to serious harm to humankind, then we can count the war and its deleterious impact on multilateralism as yet another blow to the safety and security of civilians worldwide. At this rate, the multilateral system may not survive the multiple major crises we are causing while undermining its ability to solve them. As a minimum response to protecting peace, Kenya urges Member States to place more trust in the good offices of the Secretary-General.
>
> (S/PV.9027, 14)

This reflected both wishful and realist thinking. Multilateralism had suffered a series of challenges for years prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but the key political dynamics have centered on an ongoing shift from a unipolar world to a multipolar world in which especially China and Russia also want to have a major role in world affairs. As Trine Flockhart and Elena A. Korosteleva (2022) suggest, this probably results in more conflictual relations compared to more cooperative ones, the ones multilateralism should favor. Basically, multilateralism continued to be an authoritative norm to conduct international relations, but the system based on multilateralism as a guiding norm was now undergoing a transformation, especially in the context of maintaining international peace and security. On the other hand, the UNGA was somewhat divided on the issue. Mohammad Reza Farzanegan and Hassan F. Gholipour (2023) argue that the probability of voting in favor of Russia in the emergency session related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine was significantly higher in countries that either had defense cooperation agreements with Russia, had a history of leftist governments, were major recipients of Russian aid, had political similarities with Russia, or had no history of war with the Soviet Union.

In these circumstances, the office of the Security-General seemed to have a major burden to maneuver the organization, and the multilateral system itself, in a direction that considers both the desires of small states and the more powerful ones. In the autumn of 2022, more and more discussions started to emerge concerning the future of the multilateral system the UN was representing. Next, we will engage with the same cases from the perspective of processes.

3.2 Multilateral Processes of Peace and Security

The UN organization is a security institution that impacts international patterns and processes of conflict and cooperation, as David A. Lake (2001) suggests. The UN provides means to maintain international peace and security, but it is still a process that rests heavily on the role and political will of member states, especially in the Security Council. In terms of multilateralism, the UN can be perceived as providing institutions that "reduce uncertainty and fear and offer confidence-building measures and other devices that are designed to cultivate trust," as described by Michael Barnett in 1995. However, in the context of the 1990s, the question was, as it had been some time, about imposing limits on the sovereignty of states. An alternative view for institutions to maintain peace and security would be, again as described by Barnett (1995, 90), that states would find "those states that share similar identities, values, and orientations." If a state would find other states with similar identities and personalities, this would help to reduce the sense of uncertainty involved with international relations. The sense of uncertainty constitutes a relevant aspect that goes straight to the heart of member states in the United Nations. In terms of peace and security, the theme is an especially relevant one.

From the point of view of the use of force and the international authorization involved in the decision-making processes, the UNSC acts in a nexus of such authorization due to its role stated in the UN Charter. As such, the UNSC is in the

central position to define what event moves over the limit of maintaining peace and security and leads the UNSC to either legitimize or delegitimize the use of force, and it is discussions and debates related to such forms of decision-making that reflect the state of multilateral cooperation in the field of peace and security. Voeten (2005) has claimed that such forms of decision-making, or indeed deliberation, thus act as focal points of mutually beneficial cooperation. Based on the events in 1990 and 2002–2003, this certainly is a relevant view on the politics of the UNSC. However, the process related to what multilateralism is and how it should be viewed in the context of maintaining peace and security provides a more nuanced view.

3.2.1 The Gulf Crisis in 1990–1991 and the Creation of New Order?

When speaking at the General Assembly in September 1990, Norwegian Prime Minister Jan Syse ended his speech with a remark: "The word is experiencing a welcome revival of multilateralism," and reminded the assembly that the capabilities of international organizations needed to be strengthened. In the pressure of "narrowly defined national interests," countries needed to learn to accept majority decisions when facing global challenges, to have a long-term view to achieve common good, and "learn to express our national interests in terms of form commitments" for a common purpose. Furthermore, the UN was in a pivotal role (A/45/PV.11, 64–65). This was a perspective on multilateralism as a norm, but it was also linked to the process of how there were conditions for multilateralism to work; that is, states needed to be part of the process. As one representative remarked a few days later in the General Assembly:

> the most progressive forms of international organization that have emerged in recent times have had as their point of departure the twin rights of territorial integrity and political sovereignty. That is where the ultimate legitimacy of the Organization resides, and that is what offers the possibility of achieving agreements aimed at constructive and effective international action.
>
> (President of Mexico Carlos Salinas de Gortari, A/45/PV.14, 28)

The Mexican president, who also emphasized the "strengthening of effective multilateral action" (A/45/PV.23, 13), was not alone in this view. While momentum was clearly taking place, especially from the European perspective, it needed countries to adapt, learn, express, and accept – and abide by the context of sovereign states. While the Norwegian prime minister and the Mexican president were not representing the global community, they did raise issues that would dominate the multilateral processes of peace and security, that is, the behavior needed from the countries to have a global community that was able to manage and solve various global challenges arising and the acknowledgment of the context and its key actors, the member states.

When the UNSC debated the potential to authorize the use of military means to force Iraq to comply with the Council's resolutions, the key rationale was linked to

the will of the "international community." As argued by the US Secretary of State James Baker, the President of the Council in November 1990:

> With the cold war behind us, we now have the chance to build the world which was envisioned by the founders of this Organization. . . . We have the chance to make this Security Council and this United Nations true instruments for peace and for justice across the globe.
>
> (S/PV.2963, 6–27)

Therefore, the Council needed to meet the threat posed by Iraq's aggression, and the discussion that followed Baker's opening remarks mostly echoed this view, with Iraq's representative claiming that the Council was acting according to the pressure from the US, violating the "principle of equality between the countries and peoples of the world" and trying to impose hegemony (S/PV.2963, 6–27). Yemen's representative rejected the draft resolution authorizing the use of all necessary means, describing the draft as too broad and not related to Chapter VII of the Charter, a chapter that would have made the UN the source of command of the forces. Furthermore, the UNSC had already made history by creating a tight sanctions regime that was also efficiently implemented, and Yemen's stance was that more time and patience were needed to have the sanctions work, as was done with the case of South Africa and its apartheid regime. War was too much at the forefront instead of a peaceful approach, and a military confrontation might create problems for the process of democratization in other countries (S/PV.2963, 33–36). Later, it was argued that the US did wield significant pressure on the members of the UNSC to have the resolutions strict on Iraq adopted and even manipulated the decision-making (Koshy 1997, 3011–3020; see Malone 2006, 60–68).

As Yemen's representative Abdullah Saleh al-Ashtal said according to the provisional verbatim record of the meeting of the Security Council on November 29, 1990:

> The war option would deprive humanity of a historic opportunity to make a smooth transition to a new world order, one that is not characterized by the military victory of one country or group of countries over others.
>
> (S/PV.2963, 37–38)

Then there was the problem of double standards. At this point in the history of the United Nations, the Security Council had issued dozens of resolutions concerning the situation in Palestine, particularly topics such as international assistance and the situation with the refugees.

Accusations and interpretations related both to deciding resolutions and their enforcement had a connection to the use of language to describe the situation. As the Columbian representative Bernardo Jaramillo remarked in the Security Council:

> We are firmly convinced that situations such as this are in part of a result of the ambivalent and selective language that prevailed in the Council for over

> four decades. During that time, the power of veto was used for political considerations, disregarding international law and order in situations in which world peace was breached.
>
> (S/PV.2963, 40)

The time of renewed focus and actions to maintain international peace had clearly arrived, and he was not alone in his country's view supporting the draft resolution placing a deadline for Iraqi compliance, and in the case of noncompliance, authorizing the international community to use all necessary means to force Iraq to comply. Jaramillo's comment on "ambivalent and selective language" was, however, a relevant one, noting that now the Security Council had adopted a firmer stance also in its use of language. However, in the conceptualization of multilateralism, this was not yet present, but the situation would change from here.

From the point of view of process, the Security Council's decision to authorize the use of all necessary means to confront Iraq over its invasion of Kuwait in its Resolution 678 represented a turning point. Only some years earlier, the Security Council had been reluctant to utilize Chapter VII of the Charter in the case of war between Iran and Iraq, but now it was doing otherwise with astounding rapidness, at least when it came to the history of the UN activities. The first resolution was issued as a result of an invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and on January 17, 1991, the military operation to force Iraq to comply began. This caused some criticism, as Yemen's example shows, as it was linked to the somewhat simple question: to which extent both peace and justice should be sought after, and what would their relationship come to be in the UN context? (Khadduri and Ghareeb 1997, 159–161). However, at the same time, the Security Council clearly wanted to show its renewed spirit in the context of a potentially new era of maintaining international peace. The Security Council utilized the occasion and produced a series of resolutions that gradually, albeit in a rather rapid fashion, placed considerable pressure on Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. The rapidness, or even hastiness, was perhaps partly questionable given the prior history of the UNSC sanction policy. In a meeting of foreign ministers at the UNSC in November 1990, Minister for Foreign Affairs of China Qian Qichen reminded the Council that the United Nations was responsible for international security but also to history (S/PV.2963, 62). Nevertheless, the international community was now acting with the support of the clear, even overwhelming majority, and thus had unity. The sense of unity provided an opportunity to try to engage topics swiftly, as the handling of the Gulf Crisis seemed to suggest – this was also referred to by the US Secretary of State Baker in November 1990 (S/PV.2963, 102).

Iraq responded by highlighting the need for the UNSC to focus on achieving a comprehensive solution in the Middle East region and accused the UNSC of acting beyond its jurisdiction and under US dominance – without explaining its policy of annexation towards Kuwait in any way (S/PV.2963, 20–31). This illustrated the perspective of processes: at the very meeting the UNSC was adopting a resolution issuing a final deadline for Iraq to comply and authorizing the international community to use all necessary means against Iraq, the discussion invoked ideas not

about multilateralism but about how the international community should respond in the first place, when the moment for the rapid decision-making was ongoing. The diplomatic process behind the public scenes of the UNSC entailed efforts to dissuade Iraq from complying with the UNSC resolutions, but to no avail. At the level of discursive reflection of the international cooperation, this could be referred to publicly, while outlining both the work done by the non-aligned countries in the UNSC and the national position on the UNSC authorization to use all necessary means. However, Cuba and Yemen perceived some of the UNSC resolutions regarding the situation in Kuwait somewhat hasty, and both were reluctant to accept the idea of UNSC authorizing war as the adopting of the resolution would entail (e.g., S/PV.2963, 34–35, 53–58).

Peace in the Middle East played a prominent role that also influenced the political context in which the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was being handled. The Soviet Union's stance was that the United Nations was in a leading role in establishing just and lasting peace in the region, due to its authority. Under the United Nations, there should be interstate cooperation related to peace in the region, based on "stable bilateral and multilateral machinery" (A/45/PV.62, 35–37). This effectively meant a treaty-based cooperation that would enable a somewhat bureaucratic approach to multilateralism as a practice that should also yield results. As such, outside the immediate context of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and the declaration of political will of the international community, the discourse on multilateralism of peace and security was, above all, treaty based.

From the perspective of the prestige of the United Nations, the Gulf War was a success. The UNSC resolutions highlighted the shared ground among the members of the UNSC, especially its permanent members, and most of the international community shared the view of the Security Council being in a leading position to solve various international conflicts. The international coalition consisted of 42 countries, including Arab countries, and it was able to force Iraqi troops to withdraw from Kuwait in matter of weeks in January and February 1991.

Unsurprisingly, the discourse utilized by state representatives at the General Assembly did not focus on challenging the authority of the Security Council to lead in questions of international peace and security. On the contrary, there was a broad consensus over the need to condemn the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. As such, if viewed from the point of view of the General Assembly representing all member states, the momentum of the United Nations to lead new efforts on multilateralism had different sides, all related to how the authority of the UN would be carried out in practice in relation to different international crises taking place. The relative lack of discourse explicitly utilizing the term "multilateral" in connection with breaches of international peace and security suggests that the context-bound nature of different international crises taking place in the early 1990s had little to do with treaty-based cooperation. The shared discourse invoked concerning disarmament negotiations as multilateral processes further highlighted this view. International cooperation seemed to be above all multilateral if it was related to clear procedures and specific goals, such as treaty-making processes (see for instance A/45/PV.17, 56–57). Indeed, maintaining international peace and security was a process

of dialogue between sovereign states and willing respect of the UN Charter, and the states were expected to comply with the resolutions of the UNSC if the Council could provide specific resolutions on the topic. This did occur with the case of the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait.

Furthermore, from the perspective of international law, the Gulf War was a success – the international coalition had authorization from the Security Council, and the operation showed how effective determined collective security might be. However, the operation also featured problems that related to the devastation of civilian life and the potential for further violence during the aftermath of the conflict, raising questions about the role of national interests (Schachter 1991). In addition to broader situation in the Middle East and the situation on the ground, some criticized the UN's actions being out of proportion, given that the conflict was somewhat minor in terms of Kuwait's size as a country and the size of its population. In fact, while the crisis with Iraq continued in terms of its program of weapons of mass destruction in the coming years, the UNSC become partly deadlocked with the capacity to implement its resolutions (Fassbender 2002). From the point of view of nurturing international cooperation, this reflected the realities of international relations: it did not experience a fundamental change, but a reorientation of the role national sovereignty would have in efforts to create cooperation.

If the handling of the Gulf Crisis had shown a major multilateral step forward, a retreat from that step was coming. Crises in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia were complex crises in which the UN operations failed and led to major powers stepping away from showing leadership (Security Council Report 2011a).

3.2.2 The Iraq Insights in 2002–2003 and the Challenge for the UN

In 2002–2003, the UN was at the center of the international discussion on Iraq, although the subsequent military action that began in March 2003 was not specifically mandated by the UNSC, leading to questions about whether the UN was in a position to act as a leading international authority in maintaining peace and security. Nevertheless, from the perspective of processes, the UN certainly had its role. Iraq had been a key theme for the UNSC since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and contemporaries in 2002 paid major attention to the role of UNSC resolutions that established the requirements of the international community on Iraq, especially in terms of its weapons of mass destruction. The key resolution here was UNSC Resolution 1441, adopted unanimously with votes 15–0 on November 8, 2002, and supported by the framework of the previous 15 UNSC resolutions on Iraq between August 1990 and December 1999. The set of resolutions that followed the invasion in 1990 had not only first condemned and later helped to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, but they had also highlighted the sense of threat of Iraq to international peace and security in the region.

When, in the autumn of 2002, the Iraqi noncompliance and its alleged weapons of mass destruction program resurfaced in the UNSC and the US signaled its readiness to support the UN route to speed up the implementation of the previous UNSC resolutions, the momentum for a new resolution started to emerge. The new

resolution was about defining means and aims for the international community's response towards Iraq and focused on the need to recontinue the weapons inspection process. For the US, it also provided an opportunity to try to advocate its tough policy on Iraq, resulting in a UNSC resolution. The adoption of this particular resolution, Resolution 1441, in November 2002, required a tense diplomatic process. The original US draft resolution presented to the permanent members of the UNSC had provisions that would have given major powers to P5 countries, that is, the US and the UK, essentially a right to deploy security forces to protect UN weapons inspectors, among other rights. If accepted, the resolution would have required Iraq to make major concessions, for instance, in terms of no-fly zones declared by the weapons inspectors. There were also negotiations related to the draft on whether the UN member states (such as the US) could act on their own authority against Iraq in the context of potential noncompliance. Despite the rather belligerent position of the US, the other members in the UNSC tacitly accepted that now it indeed was Iraq's final opportunity to comply, fueled by the Iraqi noncompliance of previous years, and the US point on the role of the UN if it was not implementing its decisions was acknowledged as an important one (Williams 2006, 258–259; Malone 2006, 192–201).

When the UNSC had its open debate on the situation in Iraq and different states represented their views regarding the ongoing negotiation process between the members of the P5 to create a new resolution, the US representative John D. Negroponte reminded the audience of the consequences of a lack of results from the UNSC:

> We hope and expect that the Council will act and play its proper role as a safeguard of our common security. If it fails to do so, then we and other States will be forced to act.
>
> (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 3), 12)

From the perspective of promoting multilateral practices in the context of the potential use of military force, Resolution 1441 was an important step. Against the criticism and warnings related to the US acting unilaterally on Iraq, Resolution 1441 enabled a more multilateral approach based on UN authority, in which Iraqi noncompliance towards the UNSC resolutions was in the spotlight. The new resolution explicitly mentioned that the UNSC "[d]ecides that Iraq has been and remains in material breach of its obligations under relevant resolutions." The use of the term *material breach* was significant, as it clearly highlighted the lack of Iraqi compliance regarding previous relevant UNSC resolutions. Nevertheless, the resolution also talked about Iraq having "a final opportunity to comply," thus retaining a sense of both urgency and restraint while directing attention to the work and subsequent report of UNMOVIC, the weapons inspectors. It was a resolution focused on making sure that Iraq would be disarmed (S/RES/1441 (2002), 3–5). The language of "material breach" was important, especially for the UK and the US, since it effectively provided the case for the military action against Iraq in February 2002 through the use of the term to describe Iraqi behavior, indicating a sense of further

material breach and thus yet another failure of Iraq to comply with the demands of the international community (S/PV.4701, 7, 19).

UNSC Resolution 1441 gave the mandate for the UN weapons inspectors to return to Iraq and helped to ease the mood within the P5 of the UNSC. However, as a resolution it was challenging because the language of the resolution was interpreted differently according to the perspective of the interpreter. Ambiguous text helped to secure the agreement between the US and those countries opposed to war and, probably from the perspective of some, helped to postpone the war in the first place and support the UN-centered legal framework attempting to regulate international relations (Byers 2004). Indeed, Resolution 1441 was claimed by the US and the UK representatives not to include any function automatically triggering the use of military force (S/PV.4644, 3–5). For contemporaries, the idea of multilateralism being strengthened was also a tempting one, as indicated by the Mexican, Irish, and Bulgarian representatives on November 8, 2002, when Resolution 1441 was adopted. The rationale for the idea was clear, as the adoption of a resolution in such circumstances of international pressure was proof of the international system based on norms and principles in action in a manner in which the different bodies of the UN represented multilateralism as an organized effort (S/PV.4644, 6–7, 9).

Indeed, in December 2002, when the UNSC was having its wrap-up discussion on the work of the UNSC for the current month, Irish representative Gerard Corr reminded the Council of its importance in safeguarding the international peace and security in a way that reflects the state of multilateral thinking of many during the discussions related to the situation in Iraq:

> If the Security Council is just a talking shop, its role has ended. There is always a balance there between multilateralism and the individual role of States, between national interests and the global public good. This tension meets often in this Chamber. But the Security Council is also about law. In a world where bipolar deterrence or balanced equilibrium are gone and where market forces shape much of the world in a rather Darwinian fashion at times, this is a place that says, on behalf of the international community, "It is so; let it be done". Even though the Council is intensely political, it needs to always value this special and austere role in international law. The Security Council must also value its legitimacy; this is a political test. People around the world, as we have seen in recent months, look to the Council as a test of the legitimacy of major actions affecting international peace and security.
>
> (S/PV.4677, 5)

In 2002, it seemed that this test had been preliminary passed. The resolution was a compromise from the earlier version developed by the US and the UK that had, according to France and Russia, simply placed a too low threshold for military action against Iraq. According to the UN bodies linked to weapons inspections, the head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission Hans Blix and Director General of the IAEA Mohamed ElBaradei, the new

resolution did give a stronger mandate for weapons inspectors to continue their work and highlighted that it was the Iraqi behavior indeed that had led to the end of the inspections in 1998 (Blix and ElBaradei 2002). From the perspective of the other members of the UNSC, the resolution helped to keep the UN at the center of events while enabling leeway for the belligerent US policy towards Iraq (Williams 2006, 260).

Furthermore, when the situation with Iraq was on the agenda, so were attempts to frame the issue to affect broader regional issues, especially the question of Israel and its policies in Palestine. The topic was constantly raised in the UNSC, highlighting the need for parity in how resolutions would be enforced, reflecting a discussion on implementing multilateralism – although the term was not usually utilized – in the form of all UNSC resolutions. The focus on the situation in Iraq posed a problem from a broader perspective of peace in the Middle East, as Israel was criticized for not complying with UNSC resolutions related to Israeli actions both in Palestine and in Lebanon (e.g., A/45/PV.17, 32–38). This was important, as in the case about respecting the sovereignty of Kuwait, the discussion should encompass respecting the recognized sovereignty of Palestine – before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, 88 UN member states had recognized the state of Palestine (A/78/846-S/2024/283).

The lack of parity between the treatment of Iraq and Israel in terms of the implementation of UNSC resolutions has also been noted outside the UN. As *The Economist* wrote on October 12, 2002, "'No war against Iraq, Free Palestine' has become the slogan of anti-war demonstrators in Europe and America" (2002, 24), a writing that was referred to during the debate in the UNSC by the representative of Lebanon (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 2), 10). No wonder that especially the Iraqi representative was able to draw attention to the lack of enforcement of the UNSC resolutions related to Israel, while gaining significant support, especially from other Arab states in the Security Council (e.g., S/PV.2963, 56–57). Indeed, open debates utilized by the UNSC enabled chances to invoke arguments from countries not members of the UNSC. Israel was able to defend its stance by highlighting the difference between Chapters VI and VII, especially the role of binding decisions taken under Chapter VII and recommendations or statements of principles adopted under Chapter VI (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 3), 2–3). This was also the key issue in the case of Iraq, where the UNSC had been making decisions under Chapter VII, which further emphasized the need to understand the level of multilateral commitments different state representatives were discussing. However, the Charter's Article 25 also stated a clearer statement: "The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter" (UN n.d., Charter, article 25).

The discussion regarding the binding nature of different UNSC decisions is also taking place in the scholarly field, where it connects to the broader field of activity of the UNSC in different international issues (see Wallensteen and Johansson 2016; Allen and Yuen 2020). From the perspective of the politics of the UN, this theme provided arguments for those countries both interested in helping to avoid another war in Iraq and interested in highlighting the behavior of Israel. Such instances

do yield further understanding of the political ideas shaping the UNSC decision-making and the political forum itself.

Nevertheless, when the UNMOVIC report was discussed in the UNSC in February 2003, the US, the UK, Poland, Italy, Australia, Denmark, Japan, and Spain supported a stance of military action because of apparent Iraqi continuing non-compliance with the UNSC resolutions. However, the UNSC was divided on the matter, and a new draft resolution authorizing the use of military force against Iraq was withdrawn in the face of a probable veto from opponents of military action. The discourse in the UNSC highlighted the rather clear-cut dichotomy between maintaining the credibility of the UN with a new resolution authorizing the use of force and, on the other hand, patience to exhaust all potential paths before war. The latter provided elements for ideas that a multilateral approach would mean peace and even acted as a counter to an approach favoring more rapid use of arms – maintaining patience did not exclude the military option (e.g., S/PV.4701, 26, 29, 32). The adoption of Resolution 1441 had not only shown the ability of the UNSC to provide a coherent response to the current crisis, but the process also showed the potential viability of continued multilateral effort to find a commonly accepted path to solve the crisis, a theme to which Chile's representative referred while linking the promotion of "mechanisms of cooperation and multilateral consultation" to the responsibilities of the UNSC (S/PV.4701, 30). In fact, as Kofi Annan stated in his remarks presented at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, on February 8, 2003,

> This resolution was negotiated with patience and persistence, and as a result was adopted unanimously. That gives it even greater authority – an authority based on law, collective effort, and the unique legitimacy of the United Nations. This was multilateral diplomacy at its best, serving the cause of peace and security.
>
> (SG/SM/8600 (2003))

Annan was not alone in this view in which Resolution 1441 reflected the abilities of the multilateral process to achieve concrete results (e.g., S/PV.4709 (Resumption 1), 16). Annan also pointed out a message to the UNSC, highlighting the public nature of any exchange of discourse related to multilateralism, and linked the work of the UNSC to its full political context, that is, the interaction between not only the states but the states of the public at large:

> The Council should proceed in a determined, reflective and deliberate manner. Its measures must be seen as firm, effective, credible and reasonable not only by the Council members, but by the public at large.
>
> (SG/SM/8600 (2003))

The process continued publicly, with evidence raised and political interpretations made. Later in February, when Hans Blix and Mohammed ElBaradei presented

their reports on behalf of UNMOVIC and IAEA to the UNSC, they reported finding no evidence concerning the alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction program and noted improving Iraqi cooperation. However, due to the limited time available for inspections, they had no knowledge of the status of some unaccounted materials related to weapons of mass destruction, and additional data was needed to verify certain issues. Simply put, the work was just beginning and needed to be expanded and continued (S/PV.4707, 2–9).

Nevertheless, a coalition primarily composed of US troops was building up near Iraq, and war seemed inevitable at this point. In the UNSC, some representatives were highly critical of the situation, where the UNSC was at the center of events but in a partially negative way. Countries opposed to the use of military force at this stage expressed their support for continuing weapons inspections in Iraq while acknowledging Iraq's history of noncompliance. Multilateralism reflected a sense of patience and avoidance of rapidity and decisions made without complete information. As the representative of Angola, Ismael Gaspar Martins, reminded:

> We need to allow sufficient time for the inspectors to gather the necessary information for us to make informed decisions at the appropriate time. Such time is a very valuable investment in peace and multilateralism, and in the validity of the Charter of our universal Organization.
>
> (S/PV.4707, 28)

From the perspective of individual states, the continuation of a peaceful process was prioritized over the use of force. France's representative highlighted the legitimacy of the UNSC when he reminded the Council:

> The authority of our action rests today on the unity of the international community. Premature military intervention would call that unity into question, and that would remove its legitimacy and, in the long run, its effectiveness.
>
> (S/PV.4707, 13)

However, regarding the sense of authority, a competing claim was made by the UK's representative, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who argued:

> The issue before us is of the authority of the United Nations and of the defiance of United Nations resolutions. On 8 November, we said unanimously that Saddam was to have a final opportunity. . . . But this [a peaceful solution] will require a dramatic and immediate change by Saddam, and that will be achieved only if we, the Security Council, hold our nerve in the face of this tyrant, give meaning to our words and to the decisions that we have already collectively taken, and make ourselves ready to ensure that Iraq will face the serious consequences that we all decided would have to happen if Iraq's defiance did not end.
>
> (S/PV.4707, 18)

Straw's position, as well as the position of the US, Australia, and Spain in the UNSC, emphasized Iraq's continued non-compliance and behavior considered contrary to the UNSC Resolution 1441, which outlined Iraq's final opportunity to comply. US Secretary of State Powell highlighted the moment as a watershed, where Iraq could continue its alleged efforts to delay the weapons inspectors and ultimately shift the UNSC's attention to other topics, or the UNSC could be determined to address the Iraqi threat (S/PV.4707, 20–21). The representative of Nigeria, Eduardo Sevilla Somoza, linked the tough approach to Iraq's disarmament with a direct conceptualization of multilateralism, stating that the multilateral system itself required justification for its existence if a full decade had passed without notable effects. Sevilla Somoza said:

> We cannot allow resolutions to continue to accumulate for another decade without any real effect. The multilateral system must justify its existence and demonstrate the firm and unswerving commitment of the peoples of the United Nations to peace and security.
>
> (S/PV.4709 (Resumption 1), 20)

As the UN started to seem unlikely to avoid the conflict, this resulted in criticism of the UN's abilities and its future. The unilateral military action was therefore seen as the opposite of a working multilateral system represented by the UN. The Syrian representative declared:

> Security Council is in itself proof both of the Council's failure to carry out its task and of the failure of the entire international order. In these circumstances, we believe that there is no alternative to respecting the Charter of the United Nations and using its institutions to safeguard world peace, security and prosperity, instead of poising the world on the edge of a volcano for many long months.
>
> (S/PV.4707, 11)

The statement of the 14 members of the Caribbean Community, given on February 18, 2003, linked a similar interpretation to multilateralism: any unilateral action taken without a UNSC mandate would "considerably weaken the multilateral system" (S/PV.4709, 33).

As the crisis progressed and military action seemed inevitable, the UNSC became somewhat irrelevant in stopping the war from erupting. On March 11, Iraq highlighted its cooperation with the weapons inspections and the results of the inspections that echoed the latest findings presented by Hans Blix and Mohammed ElBaradei. Iraq emphasized the lack of evidence supporting the US position and questioned whether there was a material breach of previous UNSC resolutions, particularly Resolution 1441 (S/PV.4717, 3–5). At this point, the ideas about multilateralism had little role, as the focus was on the political authority of the UN. The US tried to build enough support to have another resolution accepted by the UNSC but to no avail. The French position was that

the inspections seemed to be working, and there was no reason to utilize military means against Iraq, at least at this point. On March 10, 2003, French President Jacques Chirac announced in a television interview that France would vote against a new resolution authorizing the use of force, essentially indicating that France would thus veto the draft resolution (Howorth 2006, 55; see Bozo 2017). This paved the way for hostilities against Iraq on a unilateral basis, with the coalition led by the US drawing its authority nominally from the UNSC but with a highly unilateral spirit. As President George W. Bush announced on March 17, 2003, in an Address to the Nation speech in the US:

> Today, no nation can possibly claim that Iraq has disarmed. And it will not disarm so long as Saddam Hussein holds power. For the last four-and-a-half months, the United States and our allies have worked within the Security Council to enforce that Council's long-standing demands. Yet, some permanent members of the Security Council have publicly announced they will veto any resolution that compels the disarmament of Iraq. These governments share our assessment of the danger, but not our resolve to meet it. . . . The United Nations Security Council has not lived up to its responsibilities, so we will rise to ours. . . . All the decades of deceit and cruelty have now reached an end. Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing.
>
> (Bush 2003)

The challenge from the perspective of the UNSC was the apparent lack of real US interest in obtaining explicit authorization from the UNSC to use military force. The US approach utilized the set of existing UNSC resolutions related to the theme, but at the same time, US foreign policy had little incentive to link its approach solely to a multilateral approach. Washington wanted to maintain its alleged right to unilateral action (Williams 2006, 263). Indeed, on March 11, a Bush administration spokesperson equated the UNSC to a coalition of willing, thus downplaying the importance of the UNSC as the leading international body to provide authority for policies related to international relations (New York Times 2003).

Now war was increasingly imminent. In the UNSC on March 19, 2003, only a few hours before the war would start, the attention was on the role of the United Nations in the context of an emerging military conflict it had proved unable to evade. Representatives from Germany, France, and Russia argued for the need to maintain the UN at the center of either peace or at least in handling the crisis in Iraq (S/PV.4721, 4, 6, 8). As Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov remarked, the UN Charter and international law should form the political framework in which the "Iraq problem" should be handled. Ivanov also resorted to a direct reference to multilateralism when he continued: "Only in that way will we be able to ensure conditions for the continued, effective and multilateral cooperation needed to combat global threats and challenges, while retaining the central role of the United Nations Security Council" (S/PV.4721, 8).

The effort of the US to seek support from the UNSC in 2002–2003 can be seen in the context of the more long-term US policy, where the UN Charter is not seen as essentially limiting the behavior of the great powers that were pivotal in negotiating the Charter and the functions and role of the United Nations in the first place. The US certainly had a history of pursuing power outside the UNSC framework and its multilateral authorizations to maintain international peace and security. The events in 2002–2003 offered a context in which the US commitment to the UNSC as the leading international authority could be publicly demonstrated. Here, the UNSC Resolution 1441 provided the instrument for the US and, especially, the UK to act on Iraq, particularly when connected to previous UNSC resolutions, especially Resolution 678, which authorized the use of all necessary means.

Furthermore, the member states who, in the final weeks prior to the invasion of Iraq, debated the policy towards Iraq's disarmament in the UNSC often highlighted their commitment to the UNSC resolutions. This involved requiring Iraq to implement such resolutions without setting up a specified schedule for Iraqi compliance. This was more a reflection of the language of commitment taking place at the UNSC. Nevertheless, the UNSC was broadly seen to uphold the international system of international law and multilateral mechanisms in matters of peace and stability (e.g., S/PV.4709 (Resumption 1), 5). In this context, where a search in 2002–2003 for a new UNSC resolution with specific authorization to use all necessary means to force Iraq to comply with the previous UNSC resolutions would likely have ended in failure, the previous resolutions on Iraq created a set of preceding decisions. This created a form of UNSC policy on Iraq that the US was able to utilize for its benefit at a discursive level (Dunne 2003, 270–276). Regional actors, that is, the Arab countries and the European Union, were encouraging a peaceful route, albeit with the implementation of the UNSC resolutions by Iraq. As was the case with the EU, they highlighted the importance of unity within the international community and its commitment as a regional actor to work with different partners to maintain peace and stability (S/PV.4709, 30–31).

The Iraq War ended from the British perspective in 2009 when it withdrew its troops from the country, and from the US perspective in 2011, although the US returned its troops to the country again 2014, due to renewed violence that extended beyond Iraqi borders. From the perspective of broader US interests, moving away from pursuing multilateral solutions posed a challenge for future policies. Due to the continuing US presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and the significant resources both countries had drawn from the previously mighty superpower, the US had little capability left to pursue unilateral policies, outlining a path of increasing cooperation between states. However, the US would continue to pursue its own interests in the multilateral context, a form of "selective cooperation" as Richard N. Haass (2008) suggested. There was also a challenge related to various multilateral structures under the UN umbrella and outside of it, where organizations tended to specialize in specific areas, such as economic questions like those addressed by the World Trade Organization. Unlike in the twentieth century and the so-called "move to institutions," many global challenges in the twenty-first century were complex and beyond the scope of any single intergovernmental organization. This required

attention from multiple organizations, states, and non-state actors simultaneously. There was also a need for a shared sense of rules to conduct foreign affairs (Kennedy 1987; Karns 2008). This paved the way for solutions that mixed different actors together, often on an ad-hoc basis. It was the role of the UN to remain at the center of such a fabric of complex solutions to complex problems.

3.2.3 War Is Not Fading Away: Multilateral Processes and Emerging Crises, 2000–2022

As can be learned from the previous chapter, multilateralism as a norm was not a problem at the beginning of the 2000s, but rather how it should be implemented to maintain international peace and security. The multilateralism discussion related to events in Ukraine in 2022 was preceded by a longer trend of exploring the limits and possibilities of multilateralism, a discussion that featured ideas on processes and perspectives regarding multilateralism in the context of maintaining international peace and security. Expert commentary on multilateralism at the turn of the century and in relation to the Iraq War illustrated a diverse approach to multilateralism, indicating a conceptual variety in which there was no one specific form of how multilateral cooperation should be conducted in the context of maintaining peace and security, and how multilateralism could, above all, be effective (e.g., Dunne 2003; Biscop and Drieskens 2006; Forman and Segaar 2006). Expert views were not only theoretical; concrete models were developed. A key example was the new institutional focus on crisis management, where different ad-hoc solutions offered more informal arrangements under the umbrella of the UNSC. The selective approach to multilateralism became a new reality. This process started in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War and gradually paved the way for more minilateral solutions, instead of multilateralism associated with formal institutional structures.

When did the concept of minilateralism emerge? In his writing in the journal *Foreign Policy*, coining the concept for use in international politics in the spirit of realism, Moisés Naím (2009) describes minilateralism in terms of its efficiency: "smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem." Good examples of this were the creation of various international contact groups to handle issues related to crisis management since the 1990s. For instance, the UNSC adopted a resolution (S/RES/1851 (2008)) in 2008 calling for the establishment of a coordinating group to handle the situation in the Gulf of Aden, where Somalia-based maritime piracy had become a major threat to maritime trade and transport. As a result, an entity called The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia was established by a group of countries, with membership open to all stakeholders. This policy saw the group's membership quickly expand. In fact, in 2013, the group's membership consisted of over 60 states and 20 international organizations. The group was successful in coordinating a response to piracy, providing a case of a successful approach to responding to a major challenge on an ad-hoc basis (McCabe 2017). Positively, the relations between the contact group and the UN lacked tensions. Indeed, the UNSC expressed satisfaction with the coordinating role of the contact group, and the UN proved

useful in actually implementing issues decided by the contact group (Singhal 2014; S/RES/1897 (2009)).

As Stewart Patrick (2015) describes, the twenty-first-century multilateralism was defined by "growing reliance on informal, non-binding, purpose-built partnerships and coalitions of the interested, willing, and capable," that is, solutions described as minilateral instead of multilateral, with its binding normative approaches to different events and challenges. As a result, it paved the way for threats to both existing international organizations and to the ways states pursued their goals, perhaps selecting forums based on their suitability for national goals. One way of describing the situation is the attention given to whether multilateralism should be based on more long-term or short-term solutions. Multilateralism tends to offer normative ideas that help legitimize policies on a long-term basis, while minilateralism is more focused on the interests of stakeholders in particular issues and result-bound thinking, where solving challenges is the primary focus (De Alwis 2016). On the other hand, minilateralism may be tempting for great powers, as more informal structures may offer more avenues for all kinds of powers to assert their influence. Multilateral solutions in the fields of maintaining international peace and security tend to require capabilities, such as peacekeeping or crisis management, and great powers with more resources and capabilities available are in pivotal positions (Attina and Irrera 2010). Nevertheless, contact groups have clearly been useful in contexts where the UN has not necessarily lacked general will but rather resources and capabilities to act. As Jochen Prantl (2005) argues, contact groups proved useful in producing security in ways the UNSC has been unable to do, while still maintaining its legitimacy to act as a primary international authority in maintaining international peace and security. This has resulted in an increased popularity of coordinating responses in different crises. Since the establishment of the contact group to handle maritime piracy off the coast of Somalia, between that and 2020, 11 more contact groups were established to handle various crises. Contact groups represent an informal approach to multilateralism and take place outside the UN organization, except for the UNSC's role in legitimatization. Thus, contact groups also represent a dynamic phase in multilateralism, forms of organizing that potentially render the UN as one international actor among others (Henneberg 2020). Among the member states of the UN, minilateralism is clearly a tempting solution, and in their foreign policy, many countries view the use of informal, ad-hoc solutions as a potential tool to solve global problems (Häkkinen 2022).

Nevertheless, more challenges were underway in the UN after the crisis of multilateralism resulting from the US-led attack against the Iraqi regime in 2003. The Arab Spring in 2011, which started in Libya, led to a series of conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East and resulted in the rise of new regimes and civil wars. The UNSC authorized the implementation of a no-fly zone in Libya with all means necessary on March 17, 2011, based on protecting civilians from the violence exercised by the Libyan regime – and again as a symbol of "international community" coming together, as representatives from France, Germany, Portugal, and Nigeria described (S/PV.6498). Despite the adopted resolution

co-authored by France and Libya being one of the most important decisions in relation to maintaining international peace and security in several years, divisions erupted within the UNSC in the coming months. This showed a lack of consensus over how the international community should respond to violence against civilians based on national stances on the idea of national sovereignty (Security Council Report 2011b), influencing how the UNSC would react to a new crisis in the following years.

The Syrian Civil War, which started in 2011, proved to be more challenging than the Libyan Civil War, partly due to the events in Libya. The UNSC was deadlocked due to the Russian and Chinese support for President Bashar al-Assad's regime. As of autumn 2024, vetoes have been cast on 16 draft resolutions related to the Syrian Civil War. These included draft resolutions dealing with humanitarian issues, sanctions against the Assad regime in Syria, the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, and draft resolutions concerned with chemical weapons proliferation – essentially showing the deep failure of the UN to act in Syria (Nadin 2017). Initially, the Human Rights Council created the Commission of Inquiry on Syria to monitor gross violations of human rights. Illustrative of the inability of the UNSC, Carla del Ponte, a prosecutor and one of the three members of the Commission, resigned due to the lack of support from the UNSC to empower the Commission to achieve tangible results (Sengupta 2017).

According to *Multilateralism Index Report* of 2024, between 2013 and 2023, changes in international cooperation related to peace and security indicated decreases in several fields, especially related to the performance of international cooperation. Members of the P5 were more ready to utilize vetoes, and the number and lethality of conflicts had increased, while lasting peace agreements had decreased. In fields related to participation, countries were increasingly supporting peacekeeping operations, and the state of disarmament treaties had improved. The Arria-Formula Meetings had increased, showing improved inclusiveness in actual discussions related to peace and security (International Peace Institute and Institute for Economics and Peace 2024, 9).

The key challenges focused on the UNSC. The UNSC was, once again, considering Cold War history, unable to act in crises where the interests of the P5 members were at stake, highlighting the continuing conundrum of the body to carry out its responsibilities stated in the UN Charter. This also highlighted the fact that the US was no longer in a dominant position, as both Russia and China had become more assertive in the UNSC to maintain their interests, increasing the discussion regarding the transition from a unipolar world to a multipolar world. Despite the emergence of the elected ten members of the UNSC as a more coherent coalition to shape the agenda and work of the UNSC, and the continued ability of the UNSC to act as a site for diplomacy despite the role of P5 dynamics (Dayal and Dunton 2023), more and more attention was pointed at the lack of efficiency of the UNSC to respond to emerging crises. This naturally led to new questions regarding the future of the whole multilateral system. No wonder that in 2017, Secretary-General Guterres warned the UNSC to maintain the multilateral framework that supports

upholding international peace and security when he stated in the context of activities in Europe among the regional organizations:

> European leaders have developed a sophisticated collective peace-and-security apparatus and have striven to promote human rights – civil and political rights, as well as social, economic and cultural rights. . . . we should not take peace and prosperity in Europe for granted. The transition to a multipolar world has increased uncertainties and risks. We need multilateral institutions and sound regional organizations to maintain peace and stability as we address today's new and dangerous challenges. At a time when serious conflicts persist in Europe, new issues and threats have emerged.
>
> (S/PV.7886, 6)

Institutions were simply needed to fulfill the norms of multilateralism. Hence, from time to time, the UNSC reinforced its commitment towards UN-centered multilateralism to maintain international peace and security. In a presidential statement adopted by the UNSC on January 9, 2020, the commitment was again reinforced, and the role of Charter in maintaining international peace and security was stated. From the perspective of the statement, the UN, and in particular the UNSC, provided the multilateral framework and primary authority under which international peace and security should be maintained, but with the help of the member states who needed to fully comply with the Charter – and practically the resolutions of the UNSC which were based on the Charter (S/PRST/2020/1). Therefore, the problem was not in commitment to multilateralism as a norm or in commitment to the UN as an organization, despite issues related to minilateralism, but the problem was located in how the UN as an organization could act and implement norms of multilateralism. In this sense, yet another blow came in the form of a major event in 2022 that would lead to steps taken backwards in terms of multilateralism: the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the outright attempt to both invade and annex parts of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.

3.2.4 Deathbed or a Turning Point? Russian Invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and Multilateralism in Crisis

This chapter and the following one focus on events in 2022 that both summarized the state of multilateralism and opened new avenues to contest the current organization of the UN. We will focus later on the discussion of the reform of the UNSC, but this section will outline the key points of discussion related to multilateralism in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Our approach focuses on 2022 as that period illustrates well the nuances of the discussion and the gradual expansion of the discussion on multilateralism to concern the future and structure of the UN as an organization.

Russia had already played a role in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine since 2014 and had even annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. On February 21, 2022, Russia first recognized the self-declared republics located in Donetsk and Luhansk

(President of Russia 2022) and then launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, with a pretext of "denazification" of Ukraine.

In the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the process perspective on multilateralism cannot focus on UNSC resolutions due to the absence of such documents. Russia was both an aggressor against Ukraine and a member of the P5 in the UNSC, highlighting the lack of unity in the UNSC decision-making and the continuous threat of a Russian veto, a topic that had existed in UNSC decision-making on events in Ukraine since 2014 (Peters 2023).

Still, the UN was able to act. Secretary-General Guterres immediately issued a statement after the start of hostilities in which he condemned the invasion:

> The use of force by one country against another is the repudiation of the principles that every country has committed to uphold. This applies to the present military offensive. It is wrong. It is against the Charter. It is unacceptable.
>
> (Guterres 2022a)

Furthermore, while the UNSC was unable to produce a resolution due to Russia's veto, the General Assembly was able to adopt a resolution on March 2, 2022, condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Behind the move was the understanding that the Security Council was, due to the lack of unanimity and the existence of Russia's right to veto, unable to exercise its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The General Assembly had an earlier record of acting in similar situations, such as the UNGA Resolution 337 A (V) adopted on November 3, 1950, in relation to events in Korea. Now the "Uniting for Peace" process was activated when the Security Council adopted on February 27, 2022, Resolution 2623 with 11 votes in favor, 1 against (Russia), and 3 abstentions (China, India, and the UAE). Resolution 2623 enabled the convening of an 11th emergency special session of the General Assembly to consider the events in Ukraine, thus highlighting the UN's ability to move forward in the case of a deadlocked UNSC (S/RES/2623 (2022)). Under the emergency special session, the UNGA convened on multiple occasions between February 28, 2022, and February 23, 2023, and adopted six resolutions. They dealt with aggression against Ukraine (A/RES/ES-11/1), humanitarian consequences following the Russian aggression against Ukraine (A/RES/ES-11/2), suspension of Russia's membership rights in the Human Rights Council (A/RES/ES-11/3), maintaining the territorial integrity of Ukraine, especially in connection to the former self-declared republic in Eastern Ukraine and to the newly occupied areas in Kherson and Zaporizhia (A/RES/ES-11/4), reparation for aggression against Ukraine (A/RES/ES-11/5), and principles regarding just peace in Ukraine (A/RES/ES-11/6).

Each of the latter resolutions reconfirmed the key idea of the first resolution. The UNGA's meeting on February 28, 2022, resulted in resolution ES-11/1, in which the UNGA reaffirmed its commitment "to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders" and deplored "in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the Charter" and demanded

immediate unconditional Russian withdrawal from Ukraine (A/RES/ES-11/1, 2–4). The resolution was passed with 141 votes in favor, 5 against, and 35 abstentions. This point of Russian aggression against Ukraine being unlawful in terms of the Charter was reconfirmed in the following resolutions. As is the case with the UNGA's resolutions and recommendations, they did not bind the member states, and unsurprisingly, Russia did not withdraw from Ukraine. However, the adoption of resolutions, particularly the first one with a clear majority, represented a message from the international community against Russian behavior. The UNGA could have taken further measures from authorizing military troops to support Ukraine to recommending member states to adopt sanctions against Russia, and the UNGA could have tried to establish a tribunal to investigate Russian activities in Ukraine. However, it failed to carry out these options, and the attention focused on discourses on the events in Ukraine and about the state and future of multilateral efforts to maintain international peace and security. Nevertheless, Russia was isolated from other UN organizations, such as the Human Rights Council, but Putin emphasized in 2023 that Russia had no need to leave the organization and emphasized the role of Russia as one of the founding members of the organization (Klomegah 2023).

Speaking in the UN was a process itself, and the speaking tended to be based on interpretations of representatives towards particular issues. Interpretations on issues often focused on evidence that representatives found relevant for their cause, and the events taking place in the UN as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine were no different. However, a new word had arrived at the forums of the UN, a word associated with the value of information itself: disinformation. In fact, several countries, both members of the P5 and non-permanent members in the UNSC, utilized arguments claiming that some other state, that is, Russia or in some cases China, was employing disinformation to manipulate the decision-making in the UNSC. This was a threat on its own, but particularly the Western countries in the UNSC claimed that it was also affecting the multilateral system itself since the UNSC was utilized as a forum to spread disinformation (e.g., the US, France, the UK, and Ireland, S/PV.8991, 8, 10, 12). This was an important point, as it highlighted the new circumstances in which debates took place in the UNSC: Russia was trying to guide the discussion on the events in Ukraine in a direction it favored, that is, that Russian troops were fighting only radicals in Ukraine, Russians were not harming civilians, and that it was only protecting people living in Donbas by demilitarizing Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia's representative utilized the UNSC forums to question Ukraine's narrative and show division among the West (e.g., S/PV.8983, 14; S/PV.9080, 12–13).

Russian efforts to utilize the processes of the UNSC were not solely focused on rhetoric, and the same implied to opponents of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For instance, in March 2022, Russia advocated a draft resolution signed by Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the Syrian Arab Republic (S/2022/231) calling for the protection of civilians. The draft resolution's wording suggested a neutral stance on events, simply focusing on the plight of civilians. However, in the UNSC, 13 countries abstained, leading to the resolution not being adopted. As the US representative Linda Thomas-Greenfield

stated, Russia had first created a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and now was asking the international community to solve it. "It was simply a cynical abuse of the multilateral system by the aggressor in this war," as Ireland's representative Martin Gallagher commented (S/PV.9002, 2).

Similar sentiment reflects the broader period of Russia invading Ukraine: accusations of disinformation when competing claims concerning the events in Ukraine were presented and efforts to divide the situation as Ukraine as a victim and Russia as an aggressor. From the perspective of multilateral cooperation to maintain international peace and security, the Russian invasion has been a difficult stroke against the functionality of the UN. The fact that Russia was a member of the P5 continued to stir controversy, reflecting the UNSC as a body either empowered or weakened by its permanent members. In the summer of 2022, Ukraine tried to make a case for holding Russia accountable for its violation of international law and the UN's principles, and whether it should be deprived of its powers in the UNSC, with Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskyy speaking on the topic in the UNSC meeting (S/PV.9080, 4). Zelenskyy argued:

> The Charter gives us all the tools to influence any violator of the rules of the Organization, any aggressor, any terrorist State. I urge the Council to take advantages of those tools. It is imperative to deprive the Russian delegation of the opportunity to manipulate the United Nations. It is imperative to make it impossible for Russia to stay on the Security Council as long as its terror continues. . . . It is imperative to determine a legal definition of the term "State terrorism" at the United Nations level. All of Russia's actions must receive a legal assessment and global sanctions for their destruction of the international legal order.
>
> (S/PV.9080, 5)

Zelenskyy's point about the definition of state terrorism was a relevant one and related to broader scholarly discussion on whether particular state behavior is defined as terrorism (see Westra 2012). From the UNSC, the discussion of how to label Russian behavior expanded. In the US Senate (2022), a resolution was adopted in July 2022 describing Russia's government as a sponsor of terrorism and called for the Secretary of State to designate the Russian Federation as a state sponsor of terrorism. Furthermore, in November 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution recognizing the Russian Federation as a state sponsor of terrorism (European Parliament 2022). From the UN's perspective, such sentiment and national or regional political moves questioning Russia's ability to act as a state partly responsible for maintaining international peace and security did probably little, although Russia was able to continue its role in the UN.

In fact, the process point of view had little to offer in the UN, albeit repeating discourse to interpret the events in Ukraine according to one's favor. From the perspective of history, this was hardly new: in cases explored so far in this book, the Gulf War in 1990–1991 and the run-up to the Iraq War reflect a world in which the forums of the UN are utilized for purposes to promote particular goals. However,

when new crises emerged and the UN, due to its rules, was left unable to act, more and more attention was given to a simple question: should the UN be reformed, especially in terms of its ability to maintain international peace and security?

As stated by the representative of the United Arab Emirates, Lana Nusseibeh, in August 2022 in the UNSC:

> As we grow ever-more reliant on each other, our first and only truly global multilateral system is still our last best hope. However, it cannot remain frozen in time. It must adapt to a world with more countries, an increasingly diverse set of influential actors, a shifting balance of power, an expanding role for regional institutions and the growing risk of tensions among major Powers.
>
> (S/PV.9112, 5)

The speech related to a debate themed "Promote common security through dialogue and cooperation," initiated by China and supplemented with questions such as what kind of international security the member states wanted in the context of a plethora of security challenges. Nusseibeh's comment on the diverse set of actors and expanding role of regional institutions illustrated the new complex security environment in which multilateral system represented the viable path forward, but with what kind of content? At the beginning of the debate, Secretary-General Guterres talked about the need to renew commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and called for dialogue and diplomacy to prevent war (S/PV.9112, 3).

The issue related to a theme prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In 2021, Guterres had published the Report of the Secretary-General, titled *Our Common Agenda*, which included ideas about the multilateral system, including ideas about more networked, inclusive, and effective multilateralism. In practice, this would entail, for instance, more flexibility among existing institutional capacities and more coordination between regional and global levels. These principles also apply to maintaining international peace and security, where multilateralism originally meant cooperation among a small number of states, but now involves a broad range of both state and non-state actors, making the system more open and participatory. Furthermore, the report described that the key value the UN could provide in a networked world was reliable data and evidence (A/75/982, 3, 48–53).

Unlike Guterres, some representatives in the debate were more ready to cast the blame. The US representative Thomas-Greenfield explicitly accused Russia, a member of the P5, of violating the UN Charter. She continued:

> Russia is fond of saying that the security of one State cannot come at the expense of others. But Russia's tortured full-throated messaging on the supposed threats it faces from it its neighbours omit the fact that all nations have the right to choose their security alliances. Russia's interpretation of indivisible security does not justify one country's attempted annexation of another. That goes against not only the principles, but the explicit words of the United Nations Charter and its allowances for mutual self-defence arrangements.
>
> (S/PV.9112, 11)

Thomas-Greenfield's comment summarizes the key viewpoints Russia had been advocating in relation to its invasion of Ukraine, especially the interpretation of how Russia's claimed right to security should be viewed. Russia, in fact, advocated similar positions in the same debate and accused NATO of expanding and creating a "genuine threat to our country's national security," while the Russian representative raised concerns about US behavior particularly creating a more unsafe world. The Russian stance did not outline any ideas about the security of smaller states and focused on the claim that "[s]tates should not strengthen their own security at the expense of others," supplemented by a direct reference to Russia's proposal from December 2021. Furthermore, Russian representative Vasily Nebenzya accused Western countries of enforcing and dictating their models for living and working (S/PV.9112, 16).

Nebenzya reminded the UNSC:

> Reducing tensions in the world and overcoming threats and risks in the political and military arena will be possible only by strengthening the multipolar system, based on international law, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the sovereign equality of States. That is the only real and effective alternative to hegemony and might-is-right. We are ready to participate actively in collaborating with like-minded partners to build a truly democratic world, in which the rights of all nations and their security interests and cultural and civilizational diversity will be guaranteed.
>
> (S/PV.9112, 18)

The Russian representative's argument claimed that Russia was promoting multilateralism that would not be based on hegemony and might, but at the same time, Russia was pursuing a hegemonic position in relation to Ukraine and wielding its military might against a smaller opponent. Such a form of parlance was not unique to the Russian representative, nor was it unique in the UN forums in the first place, highlighting the broader perspective on the language of diplomacy where the spoken language constitutes only a part of the whole context (see Neumann 2009).

The same idea of varying standards was implied when Russia officially annexed the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia to the Russian Federation on September 30, 2022. Guterres condemned the annexation a day before as illegal and reminded Russia of its responsibilities to respect the Charter of the UN (Guterres 2022b). In the UNSC, the US and the UK rejected the annexation as unlawful based on the Charter, and the US, together with Albania, presented a draft resolution (S/2022/720) to condemn the illegal referendums held on Ukrainian territory. However, Russia logically voted against the draft resolution and vetoed it. In his comment during the debate, Russia's representative responded to criticism by criticizing Guterres's comments regarding the annexation and highlighting the will of the residents of the annexed areas, claiming that the referendums had the approval of over 100 international observers (S/PV.9143, 3–4). The process well symbolized the conundrum in the UNSC. From the perspective of the Charter of the UN, the annexation of occupied territories to Russia was clearly

wrong, but Russia could stop any resolution related to the matter from proceeding and was simultaneously able to promote its own viewpoint and interpretation of events achieved with the use of military force against another country. In the General Assembly, the debate was broader, with dozens of countries condemning the annexation and Russia, supported by a handful of countries. The General Assembly adopted Resolution ES-11/4 condemning the annexation, but before that, Russia's representative was able to deliver Russia's stance on the events and highlighted its readiness in the UNSC "to agree on a balanced and constructive draft that included a proposal appealing for a diplomatic resolution of the crisis" (A/ES-11/PV.12, 7). This highlighted the situation in the UNSC: only vaguely termed language on a diplomatic solution to the crisis would suit the Russians, among their intentional escalation of the crisis by annexing new territories from a neighboring country, with the help of the use of force. That summed up the end of the road for the UN-led route out of the crisis in Ukraine and the true crisis of multilateralism through the UN to maintain international peace and security.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, diplomatic boiling was starting to take place in the UN that influenced the political dynamics related to member states' ideas about the future of multilateralism. It happened in a context where the UN was essentially in such a state of crisis over its ability to maintain international peace and security that there were hardly any roads left out of the crisis. In addition to tension between the US and Russia, other powers had opinions that started to show the expansion of the discussion on the state of multilateralism. Especially India was active in calling for "reform multilateralism," centered on the reform of the UNSC and the participation of the Global South in the context of new challenges (S/PV.9112, 19–20). If the UNSC reform failed to materialize, there was a danger that other multilateral forums would supersede the UN. India's representative Ruchira Kamboj warned the audience:

> A truly representative Security Council is the most pressing need of the hour. Without that, there is a real danger that the United Nations could be superseded by other plurilateral and multilateral groupings that are more representative, transparent and democratic and therefore more effective.
>
> (S/PV.9112, 20)

We will return to the renewed debate on the reform of the UNSC in Chapter 6. From the perspective of processes related to multilateral efforts to maintain international peace and security, the Russian invasion of Ukraine potentially affected a broader array of UN activities, including the state of disarmament and non-proliferation processes due to the suspension of disarmament talks with Russia. This was also noted by various member states in the UN (e.g., A/77/113, 9, 20) and affected the discussions outside the UN context (Adamopoulos 2024). The future, however, would focus on ongoing violence in Ukraine.

Indeed, later in 2022, events in Ukraine continued to occupy the agenda of the UNSC. However, in the absence of real political will or capabilities to force either (or both) Russia and Ukraine to end hostilities, the war would continue to drag on.

The discussion on multilateralism, however, would continue in circumstances that opened new possibilities to discuss whether the system, and the UNSC in particular, should be reformed in some way.

3.3 Results and Ends: The UN and Peace and Security in the World

Was the world more peaceful because of the role the United Nations had been able to play since the 1990s? Both yes and no. This section explores the impact of the UN's activities on peace and security, this time in the context of the Gulf Crisis of 1990–1991 and the run-up to the Iraq War in 2002–2003. The rationale for this approach comes from the idea that multilateralism is supported if it is effective, thus moving beyond ideas about multilateralism representing a norm or a set of norms for the UN member states, and experiences about the UN and its processes as a reflection of the state of multilateralism.

3.3.1 Implications of the Gulf War 1990–1991

The perspective on the need for the UN to be effective certainly had proponents. In the immediate aftermath, Iraq's incompliance had placed the Security Council in a difficult position in which its authority at least partly rested on its ability to implement its resolutions. In the context of the end of the Cold War, the UN simply needed to succeed in making the multilateral system effective. As described by Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations Philippe Kirsche, on February 15, 1991:

> For Canada and countries like Canada, which have based their diplomacy on the construction of a credible, effective multilateral system, the failure of the United Nations to respond effectively to Iraq's direct challenge to its authority would have once again condemned the United Nations to impotence, rendering it incapable of protecting any country's security, including our own. A discredited United Nations would make the world an even more dangerous and unpredictable place that it already is. . . .
>
> (S/PV.2977 (Part II) (Closed-resumption 1), 137)

Strong words, illustrating the emotions attached to the crisis of 1990 and 1991. The 1990s did start well from the perspective of change and new dynamics of the United Nations. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 was faced with a unified response from the Security Council that authorized the forced removal of Iraqi troops from the Kuwaiti territory. The resulting Gulf War of 1991 was a relatively quick military operation that showed the ability of the United Nations to maintain peace and order and the new unified spirit of the Security Council – unified in the sense that not one of the permanent members vetoed the mandate for a UN-led military operation. Other, more difficult crises were on the horizon, but the atmosphere was optimistic, perhaps even illustrating a change in the state of international order

as well as the role of states and their activities to pursue national interest-oriented policies on the international stage.

When seen in the context of the UN's work on disarmament, the international response to the Kuwaiti occupation was also a success. The Security Council Resolution 687 (1991) paid attention to Iraq's stance on weapons of mass destruction and decided that all of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons posed a danger to other countries, leading to the first UNSC resolution demanding the removal of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (S/RES/687(1991)). This started a process that would reach its end in 2003 when the international coalition implemented a regime change in Iraq, mainly on the basis of Iraq's incompliance with implementing the UNSC's resolutions over its alleged weapons of mass destruction program, and it would feature a series of new resolutions on Iraq (see Malone 2006).

However, the attention had become something that perhaps emphasized even too much multilateral thinking – or pressure to utilize resources. During the 1990s, the US started to perceive Boutros-Ghali's period as too problematic for a second term. The reasons for dissent were derived from multiple sources that had led to the loss of US enthusiasm towards the UN's ability to maintain global peace and towards the idea of a new, changing world order. Key reasons were the crises in Somalia in 1993 and Rwanda in 1994, both of which had been failures from the perspective of global peace and had given reasons to question the credibility of the UN as a peace organization (Burgess 2001, 173–190). The stakes for the Boutros-Ghali had been high. With his *An Agenda for Peace*, Boutros-Ghali placed major emphasis on peace enforcement and the new rise of the UN as a leading authority to maintain peace and security. In 1993, the US foreign policy under President Bill Clinton adopted a policy of "assertive multilateralism" that seemed to support the idea of broadening the use of the UN in peacemaking and enforcement, but the reality was more complex. Crises in Somalia and Bosnia were complex and demanded capabilities the UN did not have. As a figure, Boutros-Ghali was described as arrogant and heavy-handed and was critical of the UN Security Council decision-making as something that was only pleasing the public opinion with rhetoric instead of trying to implement decisions and carrying out the UN's purpose decisively. When the Republican Party gained power in the US Congress in 1994, the US foreign policy started to turn away from the UN, and for the Clinton administration, the inability of Boutros-Ghali to focus on UN reform eroded its trust in the Secretary-General and led to the loss of the US support for his second term (Burgess 2001, 173–190). The US foreign policy under Secretary of State Madeline Albright and the idea of "assertive multilateralism" seemed to change as well. The US foreign policy was built on both the US showing leadership in world affairs but also on the idea of pragmatism. Multilateralism, as some saw it, had become a synonym for ineffective action that lacked leadership and threatened the US freedom of action (Kubbig et al. 2000). Nevertheless, despite wary descriptions associated with the concept of multilateralism, the sense of "international community" was seemingly emphasizing community interests and institutionalized forms of multilateral cooperation (Simma and Paulus 1998).

In maintaining international peace and security, the reality was more challenging and had more to do with resources and the nature of complex crises to which the UN was too ill-equipped to respond than with conceptualization related to multilateralism, albeit both were clearly connected to each other as the US case illustrated. Challenges in countering violence in Rwanda and Somalia, particularly the NATO operation Allied Force in Kosovo in 1999, were important turning points. Especially the latter paved the way for discursive interpretations of multilateralism in the coming decades, showing the importance of precedents. The problem was that the operation was carried out without UNSC legitimization. The UNSC authorization to use all necessary means to force Iraq out from Kuwait in 1991 underlined the role of the UN and set a recent precedent on how the UNSC could act as the leading framework to provide an international legal mandate for a multinational military operation. Now that precedent was cast away as the key Western countries, the US and the UK, felt that the UNSC was ineffective, and humanitarian concerns were too relevant. In Kosovo in 1999, the mandate of the UNSC was thus lacking, while the discussion on the international mandate to use military force focused on humanitarian, that is, moral grounds to create legitimacy (Nuñez-Mietz 2018). This shows the limits of the multilateralism the United Nations was reflecting: national sovereignty acted as a prevailing concept that impacted the discussion on what the UNSC in particular was able to do. Furthermore, the US foreign policy was evolving, and handling the conflict in Kosovo affected the decision-making in terms of using military force and illustrated negative experiences in the use of force in multilateral settings (Dunn 2009).

In the Gulf Crisis 1990–1991, the international community had seen a momentum rising, and with the help of the US promoting the rapid and efficient military response to Iraqi aggression, the reaction was efficient. The problem was that such a reaction was not carved in stone as a future principle, as the sense of national sovereignty and relevance of national interests continued to be pivotal. Therefore, in the UNSC, there was an embedded lack of lasting consensus over the moral and ethical dimension associated with multilateralism in the context of maintaining international peace and security – it would continue to be dominated by the great powers of the P5. This was present in 1999: the US did not even attempt to gain the mandate to use force from the UNSC for fear of veto by Russia and China, and within the NATO the need for freedom for the regional security organization to act was highlighted as highly important (O'Connell 2000). Operation Allied Force also showed the importance of a regional form of multilateralism in the context of defense. According to Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein (2002), multilateralism demands both shared interests and a sense of collective identity. Within NATO, such regional identity with shared interests has been possible to have – while the US felt the experience at least partly negative (Dunn 2009).

NATO has not traditionally portrayed itself as a multilateral organization, but it is definitely an institution of multilateralism, as Steve Weber reminds us. This underlines the significance of multilateralism as an organized process that also has major importance as a guiding principle, even as a value for an institution not intentionally build as a multilateral framework (Weber 1992). However, from

the perspective of the UN, multilateralism in the dawn of the twenty-first century simply needed to focus on maintaining the UN as the leading framework for multilateral cooperation in different pillars of the UN, where the maintaining – or the failure to maintain – international peace and security would have major implications in the coming years.

3.3.2 The Run-up to Iraq in 2002–2003 and the Slow Crisis of Multilateralism?

How did the run-up to the Iraq War in 2002–2003 then affect multilateral efforts to maintain peace and security, particularly in an UN-centered international framework? As Bruce Cronin and Ian Hurd described in 2008, the success of the UNSC often depends on its "ability to gain recognition as the body with the legitimate authority to take a particular action on a particular matter" (Cronin and Hurd 2008, 3). If this view illustrates the success of multilateralism centered on the UN, the run-up to the Iraq War had many features of success. First, the UN was broadly recognized by the member states as the leading legitimate authority to maintain international peace and security, as the UN Charter envisaged. As such, multilateralism was not a contested concept, but the contestation focused on how multilateralism should take place in the context of existing UNSC resolutions on Iraq, while simultaneously acknowledging the potential lack of parity between the way the international community members, or some countries within it, were treating Iraq and the treatment and enforcement of UNSC resolutions not related to Iraq. This was a contestation of unilateral and multilateral approaches in which multilateral initially succeeded, in terms of multilateralism meaning in practice the efforts to govern the world with commonly shared rules and principles. Even though UNSC Resolution 1441 did not explicitly authorize the use of force against Iraq, it did provide a framework within which the use of force against Iraq by the coalition of the willing was placed to, even though it enabled critical discussion on the principles and rules of interpretation.

Nevertheless, the reality in 2003 was different, and there was a feeling that the UN had been seriously bypassed and its authority undermined. The UN was only superficially treated as the leading international authority, since when the UNSC was unable to provide a new resolution authorizing the use of force, the coalition led by the US took considerable liberties in interpreting previous resolutions issued in different contexts. Secretary-General Kofi Annan remarked on March 19, 2003, when the war was just about to start:

> Needless to say, I fully share the regrets expressed by many members of the Council at the fact that it has not been possible to reach a common position. Whatever our differing views on this complex issue, we must all feel that this is a sad day for the United Nations and the international community.
>
> (S/PV.4721, 22)

Annan's point reflects well the state of crisis surrounding multilateralism: the crisis focused on the difficulty of finding a common path while maintaining the UN at the

center of multilateralism – and maintaining international peace and security. That effort had now failed in a major way, due to the readiness of two members of the P5, the US and the UK, to use military force without explicit UN authority – and they had support from some other UN member states as well.

Erik Voeten (2005) argues that when governments seek international authorization for the use of force, they do it not because of exploring the appropriateness of using force in the first place but to find political assurances regarding potential consequences following the use of force. In the case of the run-up to the Iraq War, unilateral use of force seemed to show little political consequences, albeit the discourse on weakening United Nations. Outside the context of the UN fora, the reality in Iraq proved to be more difficult, albeit more to troops than to diplomats in the UN. Indeed, the run-up to the Iraq War and the war itself had consequences both regionally and internationally. In Iraq, the violence would continue, eventually paving the path for the rise of the Islamic State.

The war in Iraq that started in 2003 and led to regime change had consequences that built upon this earlier regional dynamic. In Iraq, the violence would continue for many years, sectarian tensions would escalate, and the capabilities of armed groups and militias would grow, laying the groundwork for the rise of ISIS and other extremist organizations (Nore and Ghani 2009; Meiser et al. 2018). The conflict also taught the international community how difficult it was to effect meaningful political change through military intervention in the Middle East (Nelson 2018; Amin 1982; Ayoob 1984) and thus how politically and economically expensive war could be in a complex environment. Furthermore, in Iraq, the humanitarian and other causes that had encouraged especially the UK to participate in the conflict were later deemed to have been misguided, as the outcomes of the war fell far short of the initial aspirations (Lamy et al. 2005; Sigler 1986; Nelson 2018).

When there were no weapons of mass destruction to be found in Iraq, the use of force against Iraq, especially without clear UNSC authorization, was seen as simply wrong in the context of international law, as Kofi Annan described an interview with the BBC in September 2004. He referred to the situation as something that provided "[l]essons for the US, the UN and other member states. I think in the end everybody's concluded it's best to work together with our allies and through the UN" (BBC News 2004). However, the member states either in the UNGA or in the UNSC did little to move a resolution to actually condemn the invasion of Iraq as a breach of the UN Charter, due to the pressure from the US. Needless to say, the veto right of the US and the UK would have nevertheless helped to avoid such resolutions becoming accepted in the UNSC (Williams 2006, 263).

What was striking for the legitimacy of the UN was the way the start of the war revealed the core weakness of the UNSC: if one member of the P5 resorts to more or less unilateral use of force, is there any way the UN as an organization can respond to mitigate the impact on the organization itself? In 2002–2003, this was done discursively and with pressure from many member states to pressure the US to seek a multilateral approach. Discursive means here the UN bodes as arenas for public politics; that is, the US and its allies needed to explain themselves not only to the other member states within the UN but to the global audience as well. This

opened a path for a political debate that could at least in theory be based on rational decision-making, that is, informed deliberation on whether Iraq posed a threat not only to other states but also to the authority of the international community the UN was representing.

Malone (2006, 267–279) raised the highly relevant role of whether the member states' actions in the UN should be seen in the context of instrumentalism, pointing attention to competing forms of instrumentalization of the UN: firstly, the realist perspective perceives the UN only as a one "available legitimizing source," and secondly, the institutionalist perspective asserts the UN as a "long-term investment in international stability." Furthermore, all members of the P5 had their own instrumentalist visions regarding how the UN should be considered in 2002–2003. States with less political power from the perspective of realism had little chance of success. The key rationale for many countries, especially small ones, to pressure for a multilateral, UN-centered approach in 2002–2003 was the maintenance of the multilateral system and its order in which the use of force would be mandated by the UNSC, and in which unilateral approaches would be condemned and perhaps thus avoided. "We should strengthen [the multilateral system] and guard against the acceptance of any doctrine or policy which would circumvent the multilateral system," as declared by the Jamaican representative Stafford Neil in October 2002 (S/PV.4625 (Resumption 2), 23). Such comments were often heard in 2002–2003, but with little impact.

Nevertheless, different public comments regarding multilateralism gives us two key themes: firstly, the speaking on multilateralism illustrated the ongoing discursive effort of member states to maintain publicly supportive approach to multilateralism – often outside the context of the P5, highlighting the lack of political power behind the discourse other than states expressing their opinions on current-day issues. Secondly, the run-up to the Iraq War was above all a learning experience of consequences of unilateral military action in which the war would result in becoming a long-term and costly quagmire. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent occupation and reconstruction efforts led by the US and its allies faced a number of challenges. Despite the rapid collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, the post-invasion period was marked by a protracted insurgency, sectarian violence, and a breakdown in law and order. The United Nations played a complex and evolving role in the aftermath of the 2003 war against Iraq. Initially, the UN was sidelined, but a change would rapidly occur (Mills 2004; Dobbins 2004).

As the security situation deteriorated and the costs of the US-led occupation mounted, there was growing recognition that broader international involvement and legitimacy would be needed to stabilize the country. The UN Security Council passed several resolutions aimed at providing a framework for the political transition in Iraq, deploying a UN assistance mission, and legitimizing the involvement of multinational forces.

Nevertheless, the UN's role remained limited, in part due to the reluctance of many member states to become deeply involved in the conflict, given the controversies surrounding the original invasion and the growing unpopularity of the US occupation (Glen 2009). The UN's activities in Iraq were further constrained

by the security environment, with the 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad demonstrating the high risks associated with its involvement (Price and Zacher 2004).

Internationally, the question was about the future of multilateralism in a world order dominated by one major power, the US. At first glance, the continuing tension between unilateralism and multilateralism was in the position to offer benefits for US interests, but at same time, both the US and other member states of the UN still had vested interests in maintaining the UN as a functional organization (Glen 2006). The question of what interests' states had, especially vis-à-vis the UN, would become a more and more important theme, and in the process, the somewhat absent views presented by the members of the P5 in the UNSC on multilateralism during the run-up to the Iraq War would change in the coming decades, especially in the 2020s.

What is important to acknowledge is that the UN was established to act as a war organization during the Second World War, and the UN Charter does place major warfighting capabilities within the organization. However, if an organization lacks the capabilities and perhaps also the political will to carry out its tasks, only little can result. The lack of capabilities and later the diminishing will from the key political actors was one of the reasons why the UN system was in jeopardy during the 1990s. The UN Charter did not cover situations the UN was facing in places like Haiti and Somalia, where the entire social fabric was collapsing, and the countries were in internal mayhem. There was simply no government to work with, and the UN did not have prior experience of how to handle such situations. Furthermore, during the 1990s, there were an abundant number of crises all around the world that dominated the global media. Besides Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, there were humanitarian crises in Cambodia, Mozambique, Haiti, and Kosovo, all following each other and demanding attention from the United Nations. The UN Security Council did try to make decisions, but it lacked both capabilities and resolve (Kennedy 2006, 66–69).

It appeared that multilateralism had become something that was done only when states were able to agree on common policies, and these common agreements seldom were substantive policies to resolve crises (Roberts 1999). The UN needed help from other actors. With the idea of "assertive multilateralism," the US foreign policy was a combination of policy to help the UN to work but also to utilize US capabilities to handle crises. The cases studied in this main chapter illustrate some key ideas. Firstly, there is no crisis of multilateralism as a guiding value taking place. Secondly, a sense of everyday multilateralism tends to take place, crystallized in the idea that as long as member states talk about multilateralism in a positive way, the sense of crisis is small. However, thirdly, the UN is dominated by great powers that have their own vested interests that affect the abilities of the UNSC in particular to maintain international peace and security, the core task of the UN to exist in the first place. Indeed, there is a crisis concerning the mechanisms of multilateralism, taking place in the context of increasing multipolarity. The UN is a failure of multilateralism in terms of treating states equally, as the mechanisms do not allow it to happen. Fourthly, the positive side is that the UN as

a whole does support multilateralism and fair treatment of all, but the P5 does not necessarily commit to this principle for reasons related to national interests.

The stability of multipolar system seems non-existent as the situation is always evolving and states can present their competing claims and strive for better positions of power, thus fueling a continuing dynamic between unilateral and multilateral approaches in the UN. This may potentially apply also to small states, the ones often invoking their commitment to multilateral principles and institutions, since such an approach is also a way to secure an influential position in global affairs. Furthermore, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine shows, there are small states in the UN that perceive the invasion in a somewhat neutral light or may even have supported Russia.

For the future of multilateralism, the key threat lies in the context of social construction of what is information in particular contexts and how rationally based political decisions can be based on claims of information while differences of opinion exist on what is taking place. Information-based claims, especially the competing ones regarding how to interpret reality and the behavior of other members of the international community, may pose a serious threat to finding a consensus on what is taking place, forcing states to find an agreement on issues with the most minimal significance. In this context, minilateralism may be the only viable path forward, rendering the UN in maintaining international peace and security an organization that may outsource topics and processes to smaller entities and act as a symbol of authority, as it itself is incapable of wielding political will and resources.

As stated in the previous chapter, a major portion of the power the Security Council or other organs of the United Nations have – and how legitimate as political actors they are perceived – is linked to the symbolic nature of the United Nations. We also stated that in this respect, the contemporary history of the United Nations has been problematic since 2002. The 1990s had already shown that the United Nations had difficulties handling various complex crises that were ongoing simultaneously. Crises do not usually last only weeks or months; they can last years in which actual events, such as an earthquake, famine, or an armed conflict, can leave the country or area in ruins for years to come. This has underlined the continuing hunger for resources and capabilities to help various countries with fragile societies and devastated infrastructure or social systems. It helps little if the great powers have their ambitions that may lead to new crises, but they do constitute a major piece of the puzzle about the politics of multilateralism in the UN context.

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Materials

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