

The Political Language of Multilateralism in the United Nations

**Anna Kronlund, Teemu Häkkinen,
and Ratih D. Adiputri**

First published 2026

ISBN: 978-1-032-76284-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-87402-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-53251-4 (ebk)

6 Political Imaginary of Multilateralism

(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003532514-6

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Kone Foundation for funding the research project on United Nations Legitimacy and Transnational Challenges, 1990–2019 (Grant No. 201904988).



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

6 Political Imaginary of Multilateralism

6.1 What Will the Future Challenges and Opportunities of Multilateralism Look Like?

As previously discussed in the volume, we have seen that multilateralism and the UN at the heart of international cooperation work better in some times and issues than others. Whether we can speak of success or failures, we should also specify what does it require for the multilateralism to be successful. The UN is effective if the member states want it to be effective and are ready to do their part in empowering the UN bodies to reach meaningful decisions and implement them. The UN is not a supranational organization per se; in essence, the UN stands for more of an open, public, and ongoing process that takes place in a specific, rules-based institutional framework that is highly inclusive in the 2020s context. The UN has 193 member states, but it is also open towards regional organizations such as the European Union, ASEAN, and the African Union, as well as towards NGOs. However, this sense of ongoing process of cooperation between states also constitutes the very problem the UN is facing: what if the member states do not abide by the common principles reached in the UN and the norms and rules the UN is trying to advocate? What can be done?

We can start with the core issues. The UN-centered system relates to a rules-based world order in which there are norms and rules that should be common, shared, and respected by all UN member states, regardless of their size and capabilities. This is a particularly important theme, especially for small states, which constitute the majority of the UN member states when smallness is defined according to certain principles. The specific criteria used to categorize a state as “small” can vary, and there is no precise definition. A small state in international relations is characterized by its limited power and capabilities compared to larger states (Malužinas 2023; Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2017; Long 2016). The definition of a small state is not always clear-cut, as the concept can be subjective and context-dependent. In the UN context, small states can, for instance, refer to the Small Island Developing States (SDIS), consisting of 39 member states and 19 associate members from the UN regional commissions. However, in comparison to P5 members because their veto and at least for some great power status, the rest of the UN countries tend to adopt very similar strategies to small states in the UN context and

therefore the whole concept of small state is not necessarily that useful. The question of smallness is, however, a useful reminder of the context the UN is reflecting because the question of smallness is more or less defined by the very notion of power, centered in the UNSC and the rights and responsibilities associated with its members, whether they are permanent or non-permanent members. Outside the UNSC and permanent members' right to veto, the UN decision-making focuses on both majority decision-making and reaching consensus, followed by decisions and resolutions the member states should follow.

From the perspective of Finland, where the authors of this book are currently working and living, upholding the rules-based order and commitment to multilateralism has been seen as a core principle and a national interest. This is then reflected on the global stage, meaning that political leadership often tends to refer to the smallness of Finland¹ and the importance of the rules-based world order to seek a balance between small and more powerful states (see Tuominen and Kronlund 2023 for Finnish UN policy in the 2000).

Besides power relations, the key issue focuses on cooperation in multilateralism as a general question: Is it more related to the structural, even pragmatic level of doing things together to achieve common goals, or is it more about institutional, or even norm and value-based visions that hold countries together? Literature on threats to multilateralism tend to highlight both external events, actors, and circumstances (including geopolitics, great power rivalry) and also how the UN system and institutions can cope with these challenges, to maintain its leadership and legitimacy (see, e.g., Scarone 2022; Woods 2023). Systematic, hegemonic, and normative sources of challenges facing multilateralism (Newman et al. 2006) also expect different strategies of how to respond.

At the moment, it seems that the institutional and even norm- and value-based visions are experiencing a phase that then affects the more structural part of multilateralism. As a result, not only the world order and politics but also its institutions are on the move, raising questions about the direction multilateralism is developing from both structural and norm-based perspectives. This leads advocates of a rules-based world order to consider what the UN-centered multilateral system should look like in the future. In this chapter, we will highlight the key findings from the previous three chapters and then focus on the political imaginary of multilateralism. We will consider the current contributions to the debate about the state and potential future orientation of UN-centered multilateralism and explore some proposals for the UN member states to follow – because they are the actors who ultimately decide the future of the UN, not the Secretary-General. Though the Secretary-Generals have been active in proposing new initiatives and reforms and can lead the efforts, as discussed in the previous chapters. UN80 initiative unveiled in spring 2025 by Secretary-General Guterres aims to improve efficiency but also “reassert the value of multilateralism” (UN News 2025).

The debate often consists of remarks that might seem separate from each other but at the same time contribute to the broader and more long-term discussion of challenging the status quo. For instance, the President of Finland, Alexander Stubb,

when addressing the United Nations General Debate 79th session in New York on September 25, 2024, proposed reforming the UN by eliminating the veto altogether within the UNSC and increasing the role of regional representation (President of the Republic of Finland 2024). The proposal was not new, as ideas for eliminating permanent seats on the Security Council, adding more members from new countries from the postcolonial era – such as from Asia, Africa, and South America, and renewing the UN Charter had been heard, especially since Kofi Annan’s period as Secretary-General (S/RES/1733, 2006). We will discuss such reform in more detail in the second section of this chapter. It is worth noticing, however, that while Finland is seeking a non-permanent seat at the UNSC (2029–2030), the idea behind the remarks was explained by President Stubb by referring to the fact that the major UN powers were not likely to limit their own powers. President Stubb ended his speech with the words “let us start working toward peace” (President of the Republic of Finland 2024). It is our assumption that most UN members are interested in preserving peace, but how multilateralism should enable maintaining peace is politically a more complicated question.

As we have been discussing in the book, multilateralism as a concept is often used in different ways. Multilateralism can be seen as a principle or norm; it can also refer to a process or outcome of international cooperation. It can be seen as an umbrella term including certain expectations and aspirations. However, it does not have any consistent use of sanctions or enforcement practices to have states commit to multilateralism and its governing principles as presented in the UNSC and UNGA resolutions, although the UNSC resolutions are the only UN ones considered being “binding.” Multilateralism can be formal or informal and take place in global or more regional organizations. Thus, when thinking about future multilateralism, it would make sense to specify what our understanding of multilateralism is in the first place. In this volume, we had a premise of multilateralism offering rhetorical topoi for utilization in political debates as a rhetorical instrument that could be linked to different political topics such as peace and security. We have identified different rhetorical topoi of multilateralism between the three pillars of the UN: maintaining international peace and security, human rights, and development. From here we will discuss concisely multilateralism based on these three pillars of the UN and continue current debates on the UN and multilateralism.

What we have learned in the empirical chapters of this book is that while international cooperation and community are extensive and established, the idea of state sovereignty still defines multilateralism and how it is utilized and applied in everyday diplomatic discourse, as represented by the speeches in the UN presented by delegations. Moments in which multilateralism is associated with particular international standards or norms of state behavior have provided opportunities to explore the context and policy areas related to discourse on multilateralism. From this perspective, the absence of multilateralism in different topics and the emergence of multilateralism in others are relevant ways to reflect the ongoing political dynamics associated with multilateralism itself.

6.2 Multilateralism in the Three Pillars of the UN

We have discussed multilateralism in the UN pillars of peace and security (Chapter 3), human rights (Chapter 4), and development, notably in the context of sustainable development and climate change (Chapter 5). We have illustrated “multi-sited language policy discourse” and “multilayeredness of past political discourses” from the different varieties of language use of multilateralism over around four decades; they were “overlapping and multi-scalar,” to use the wording of Halonen et al. (2015, 4), thus acknowledging the UN as a forum for debate on multilateralism taking place simultaneously by different actors in different UN bodies and in relation to different themes.

Chapter 3, focusing on maintaining international peace and security, shows the continuing tendency of P5 powers to dominate multilateral decision-making while preserving the prerogative for unilateral action and disrespect, or even disregard of international law and norms. For example, three of the P5 members, the US, Russia, and China, cannot really be relied on to be “the gatekeepers of multilateralism” (Asia Society 2024). However, the exploration of political discourses related to multilateralism in the context of peace and security shows its continuing and prominent role in conducting international affairs at a discursive level. Most states, while lacking the veto right of the P5 members of the UNSC, continue to express their support and perhaps even commitment to multilateral cooperation in the UN context. We describe this as a sense of everyday multilateralism taking place, and we perceive it linked to a principle that if member states talk about multilateralism in positive way, the sense of crisis is small. Indeed, there is not a crisis of multilateralism as a guiding value when it comes to maintaining international peace and security.

However, the politics of the UN enable contestation of policies on how multilateralism should be implemented, and here the P5 of the UNSC plays the dominant role, as does the sense of commitment by all UN member states. There is a crisis of imbalance in how multilateralism is being implemented, as the process leaves too much room for a handful of countries to play an unrepresentative role. If this is visible in the form of too broad language in the UNSC resolutions, member states may find there are possibilities of varying interpretations regarding the content and implementation of the resolution. That does not exclude the possibilities and benefits of broad and publicly declared support for continuing multilateralism. Nevertheless, as long as the UNSC remains in its present state, that is, its membership is divided into five permanent members with veto rights and ten non-permanent members without veto rights, the maintenance of international peace and security focuses on politics not within the UN but between the key actors of the P5 countries. As a result, the US, Russia, China, the UK, and France can employ their right to veto whenever their interests are at stake, regardless of the opinions of the other members of the global community. Thus, we can ask if the UNSC reform is even an UN-matter or a matter of great power politics to solve or where the appetite for a reform should come from.

The cases analyzed in Chapter 3 portray a worrisome trend from the optimistic discussion on multilateralism at the beginning of the post-Cold War period to a more concerning discussion in which threats to the multilateral system and the inability of the UN to act are central, upended by the behavior of the P5 and their reluctance to commit to the UN Charter. It can be argued that a new positive turn is needed to shift the discussion and bring the benefits and opportunities of multilateralism to the forefront. Nevertheless, the chapter also illustrates the continuing flexibility of the UN to respond to emerging crises. The Office of the Secretary-General, the UNSC, and the UNGA in particular will continue to have their own stances towards emerging crises related to peace and security, thus adding layers of interpretations of both international law and political dynamics to the debate. It is here where multilateralism will continue to have its possibilities in the current UN.

Multilateralism in human rights, as seen in Chapter 4, shows that multilateralism is used as a rhetorical topos that can be attached to different discussions on rights, how they could be best promoted and protected, and the role of the international community and cooperation. Sovereignty still plays a role, especially in respect to non-interference in states' domestic affairs or issues considered imposing unilateral coercive measures. This is especially evident in country-specific resolutions that the country in question has not agreed to. States tend to refer to their domestic institutions and practices when disagreeing on something or seeing something contrary to their interests. Conversely, states tend to refer to the international side of issues, arguing something is not according to international law, universally accepted, or that there should be a new treaty or agreement on specific issues.

There is also a limit to multilateralism or how states are committed to it, whether the Council or OHCHR has the competence, capability, or mandate to address some issues, whether some topics that countries bring to the Council deserve its attention or should be dealt with bilaterally instead, or whether the Council should proceed to act or not to act based on other UN entities, mainly the UNSC or UNGA. The overall picture emerging, however, is that the Human Rights Council serves as a platform for states to be both committed to international cooperation and attempting to shape it in accordance with their own interests and preferences. The role of politicization of topics and procedures is an integral part of the UN. It is used, however, more in the sense of partisanship than opening the debate. For instance, human rights-related work should be based on dialogue and mutual cooperation, and often the idea is to have consensus. Nevertheless, member countries tend to accuse other members of politicization when they disagree on the content of the resolution, without specifically highlighting that the whole assumption to promote and protect human rights involves politics and political action and thus differing views should also appear.

In the development pillar of the UN, as shown in Chapter 5, multilateralism is becoming more inclusive, involving all member states committed to development, as seen from the discussions at the UNGA. This is a significant and positive step because, since the 1990s, multilateral efforts were shadowed by distrust from low- and middle-income countries (referred to as "developing countries" in the UNGA records) towards high-income countries, or "developed" countries. There has been

a division between these two, creating a hierarchy based on economics. However, with multilateral agreements like the Paris Climate Agreement and the SDGs, targets and commitments have been decided by the countries themselves. Such a spirit of inclusive multilateralism for all members states has been positively accepted.

Multilateralism in the development pillar covers enormous aspects, from reducing poverty, illiteracy, disease, and mortality rates to women's empowerment and economic development, as stated in the Agenda for Development (A/48/935), the eight goals in the MDGs (A/RES/55/2), and the 17 goals in the SDGs (A/RES/70/1). Due to this expansive scope of development, our focus was more on tackling climate change, as presented in Chapter 5. The UN has held many conferences and events related to development and environment, from the UNGA to the annual gatherings of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the UN Climate Change Conferences. The changes in the political language of multilateralism when attempting to tackle climate crises are visible. It evolved from descriptions of multilateralism as "cooperation" and "agreement" (1990s), to "cooperation towards progress" (2000s), to "relationship," "engagement," and "ownership" (2010s onwards). This evolution also showed that multilateralism was no longer only an "adjective" word (such as multilateral-forum, -action, -framework, -commitment, -agreement, -cooperation, -initiatives, -system, -action, -funds, -agenda, -context, etc.) but also a term in need of adjectives, such as "new multilateralism" (e.g., A/64/PV.8, 11), "coordinated multilateralism" (A/61/583, 14), and "effective multilateralism" (A/71/PV.21, 24). In a 2018 meeting at the Security Council, Secretary-General António Guterres also added adjectives for multilateralism, such as, "a networked multilateralism" and "an inclusive multilateralism" (S/PV.8395, 3).

Our empirical chapters on the three pillars of the UN in the framework of multilateralism as a norm, process, and outcome illustrate different tenets of the state of multilateralism and language related to it. In the context of diplomatic language typical in the UN, different states are ready to engage with what multilateralism is and what it perhaps should be in the future, while being aware of different ongoing global challenges taking place and their national interests related to them. The findings from the pillar of peace and security (Chapter 3), with decisions continually depending on the P5, notably China, Russia, and the US, and impacted by their growing divisions towards implementing the UN Charter, are alarming. Moreover, the emphasis is on sovereignty in the human rights pillar (Chapter 4), where states refer to their own interests and preferences, while simultaneously trying to shape the international cooperation on human rights and ways it is conducted within the HRC. In the pillar of development (Chapter 5), notably in tackling climate change, inclusive multilateralism is likely to uplift the spirit of multilateralism, but as the case study of Southeast Asia and ASEAN showed, concrete examples from major countries, notably funding assistance, are desperately needed. This shows that the hierarchy and dichotomy between the Global North and Global South somewhat still exist. Furthermore, it illustrates the key challenge related to state interaction, namely, *performance*. To what extent is multilateral cooperation performative? – that is, there is no specific criterion for multilateralism and for the results such

cooperation should yield, and therefore the states themselves can define and redefine their preferences regarding the cooperation. As a result, from the perspective of multilateralism, it is enough that states work together to work with a common political agenda or a theme, but the process can remain more of a political and diplomatic performance if multilateralism as a concept cannot be supplemented with meanings related to more result-oriented approach – in norms, process, and especially in outcomes of multilateral cooperation.

6.3 Acknowledging the Potential Momentum for Reform?

We have established some of the most relevant discussions regarding multilateralism and set up a process to explore its future. To acknowledge the most recent high-level discussions regarding the need to reform the UN, we will next explore selected ideas circulating in the international community on how UN-centered multilateralism should and could be reformed. We give particular attention to two open debates held in the UNSC in 2022 and 2023 and to the Summit for the Future, a high-level meeting that convened in September 2024.

6.3.1 *The Difficulty of Change*

Suggestions for UN reform have been recommended by many scholars, conveying how multilateralism at the UN is outdated, reflecting the situation of war in the 1940s and being designed to preserve Western hegemony. Most of the literature seems to focus on the reform of the UN system (e.g., Acharya 2023; Badie 2023; Fontaine-Skronski et al. 2023; Hosli et al. 2021; Hosli and Dörfler 2019; Luck 2018; Mingst et al. 2022; Trent and Schnurr 2018; Weiss et al. 2019; Weiss 2009), often highlighting the need to reform the UNSC in particular and reflecting the broader discussion towards the state of multilateralism. This leads to a question: can there be a separate discussion of multilateralism outside the UN-centered system? What would it mean for states and international institutions, and what would multilateralism look like, if we continued the current status quo, business-as-usual approach? Or should we change our direction to address global challenges with a new perspective on the twenty-first-century form of multilateralism (Acharya 2023)?

The United Nations Security Council has long been the subject of intense scrutiny and debate, with calls for reform echoing across the global stage. As the primary body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, the Council's composition and decision-making process have been criticized as increasingly anachronistic in the face of a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, with the emergence of new economic and political heavyweights, such as India, Brazil, and Germany, challenging the traditional balance of power (Hosli and Dörfler 2019). The permanent seats of the UN Security Council held by only five states with veto rights to determine the global fate only portrayed the world situation in 1945 and are no longer relevant to represent 193 members in facing today's global challenges in the twenty-first century. Such grievances had already been remarked

by Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, in 1965, which led to Indonesia withdrawing from UN membership (see Gutierrez 2016). Indonesia resumed its UN membership in 1966 when Sukarno's presidency was replaced by the next government, presided over by Suharto.

UN reform has been proposed by four Secretary-Generals under this study, from Boutros-Ghali, Annan, Ki-moon, to Guterres, but so far, the reform has been limited. This state of affairs regarding UN reform has been visible in the study of global governance, where emerging powers can influence existing global institutions and transform them into institutions more suitable for emerging powers instead of more established ones (Stephen 2017). It is possible to see that already during the discussions at the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco in 1945, the voting methods and possible deadlock of the UNSC raised discussions about the regional representation of the Council and whether some of the members should be permanent (see UNCIO 1945 in UNIO document volume 1).

The challenge of multilateralism in the UN might have a lot to do with the UN working as a stage for more or less performative interaction between states, that is, political performance of communicating and meaning-making in an institutional context (Rai 2014). In this perspective, representatives of states express views concerning multilateralism and their commitment to multilateralism. While such parlance is often performative and therefore acts as a form of communication that is in many ways expected in the UN settings, these views have also undergone a partial change from a visionary consensus on prospects of multilateralism to a situation in which states are more open to discussing the essence of multilateralism, that is, what the UN as a multilateral organization should be, especially in the future, and how multilateralism should be applied in different circumstances and issues. As identified in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this change of discourse has connections to great power interests and represents a highly contested theme, but the discussion is there and will be defined by the great power positions and already established norms – and the ability to change them. From the perspectives of IR theories, realism confronts liberalism and constructivism, and vice versa.

It is important to remember that the struggles over decision-making procedures, representation, and institutional norms at the UN are linked to all three UN pillars but might be more relevant in the fields of maintaining international peace and security and human rights because of the question of accessibility, when the seating is limited and members are elected apart from the P5 in the UNSC. The difficulties in solving the war in Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East are the latest signs of competition in questions of power that affect multilateralism and show the politics within the UNSC, highlighting once again the conundrum of the UN to act in particular emerging and often global crises while member states may in pivotal positions to affect the crises negatively from the perspective of rules-based, UN-centered international order. Furthermore, the global effort to stop and mitigate the impacts of climate change highlights the difficulties in reaching a consensus on issues also outside the traditional power relations between states and the use of

military force, and the continuing and often dominating significance of national interests and the sense of maintaining national sovereignty, regardless of the outcome of some particular crisis to the global community.

Lisa L. Martin (1992) argued at the beginning of the 1990s that multilateralism characterizes patterns of interaction among states and formal organizations. Conditions affect the existence of constraints and influence the ways states, if powerful enough, perceive institutions. Therefore, multilateral institutions should remain stable regardless of changing distributions of power between states and enable the institutions to help influence the conditions better. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has become clear that the sense of distribution of power has been in a dynamic phase, showing more assertive members of the P5 in the UNSC. Nevertheless, the UN and Secretary-General Guterres have recently worked to strengthen the UN by adding new institutional layers that could help the UN-led governance to work – and provide stability (Dijkstra 2024). This has meant a renewed debate to reform the UN.

6.3.2 *The Renewed Debate to Reform the UN to Be More Effective, 2021–2024*

The renewed debate to reform the UN has taken place in a context of ongoing polycrises, such as mitigating the impacts of climate change and witnessing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, crises in which the international community has once again experienced difficulties in coming up with efficient political solutions. This debate has included contributions that have expressed ideas regarding reforming the structures, norms, and rules of behavior of individual states.

Secretary-General Guterres called for “reinvigorating multilateralism” in the Secretary-General’s report *Our Common Agenda*, presented to the General Assembly in 2021, paving the way for a broader debate on how the continuing inability of UN-centered multilateralism could be engaged and strengthened (A/75/982, 1). Many discussions and meetings that have followed since have continued the discussion on multilateralism that received a new push from the Secretary-General’s report. Therefore, it is useful to explore how the perceptions of multilateralism have illustrated the sense of politics. The report stated:

Multilateralism has evolved considerably since the United Nations was founded, and we have shown that we can come together to forge collective solutions. However, this does not happen often, effectively or inclusively enough.

(A/75/982, 11)

The experience of evolving related to expanded membership of the UN since 1945 and the increase in topics the UN has been dealing with, such as the focus on decolonization. However, as a result of new emerging crises, the current mechanisms and practices on which the UN has been based since 1945 are no longer efficient in helping the international community create suitable and effective responses.

Therefore, a change is needed, a change that would confront what multilateralism would consist of. The report continued:

now is the time for a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the United Nations. Effective multilateralism depends on an effective United Nations, one able to adapt to global challenges while living up to the purposes and principles of its Charter.

(A/75/982, 3)

The report focused on calling for a change through a renewed social contract, focusing on a “deeper commitment to solidarity at the national level, between generations and in the multilateral system.” The report also stated that this form of social contract was based on human rights in different member states and focused on strengthening global governance related to goods defined as global public goods, that is, essential for the survival of humankind. The approach in the call was threat-focused, emphasizing a need for an adaptive approach for the UN and the multilateral system as a whole. This approach was then reflected as a resilient approach, capable of withstanding changing circumstances such as sudden war or economic collapse (A/75/982, 11–14). The report therefore highlighted the sense of urgency of engaging in what multilateralism should provide now and in the future, and which kinds of basic elements it should entail. The report listed three founding elements: trust; inclusion, protection, and participation; and measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet (A/75/982, 14). It further emphasized that the international community had already created a consensus on these elements through the UN and its activities.

From the perspective of multilateralism, the report focused on strengthening the voice of future generations in decision-making (A/75/982, 31, 38–39), but it also discussed the state of multilateral architecture to maintain international peace and security in the context of potential threats and emerging risks, such as protracted conflicts involving transnational networks and new actors, evolving weapons technology, and the strengthening direct role of regional actors. While the understanding of how multilateralism takes place has been evolving since 1945, at present more member states and more non-state actors are participating in global affairs, highlighting the need for more “open, participatory, peer-driven and transparent systems,” a form of more networked, more inclusive, and more effective multilateralism that would be able to adapt and deliver its promises – even by holding all actors, both states and non-states, accountable for the commitments they were making (A/75/982, 43, 49). Secretary-Generals have tended to bring their proposals forward and help shape and lead the global agenda. This report was not an exception in this sense, but it highlighted the need to engage with the multilateral system and would act as a basis for more recent debates on the direction both multilateralism and the UN itself should proceed. In 2022, Secretary-General Guterres remarked that a majority of member states were supporting the reform of the Security Council and declared the readiness of the UN to support the process of reform when the regional groups and member states could be able to achieve a consensus (S/PV.9220, 3).

To this end, various reform ideas have been put forward, ranging from the expansion of permanent and non-permanent membership to the introduction of new decision-making mechanisms, such as the curtailment or abolition of veto power (Fassbender 2020; Blum 2005). However, none of these proposals have gained the necessary global support to be implemented. The political and institutional hurdles to reform remain significant, with the permanent members reluctant to cede any of their power and influence. The debate on December 14, 2022, in the UNSC initiated by India about the new orientation for reforming multilateralism highlighted the need for reform but also a sense of commitment to multilateralism as a general guiding value and norm. The rationale for reform was simple: the UN is the leading organization, and for it to succeed in the future, it needs to be able to adapt to changing circumstances. This includes, for instance, the need for stronger representation from the Global South and the ability to tackle various pressing and global challenges the UN is facing (e.g., S/PV.9220, 6, 9–12, 20–21, 24).

In the debate, the members of the P5 presented relevant remarks regarding what principles the potential reform of the UN should entail. The US representative Linda Thomas-Greenfield referred to six principles of responsible behavior for Security Council Members she had proposed while visiting San Francisco earlier in 2022. These principles included: *firstly*, acting in strict accordance with the UN Charter; *secondly*, pragmatic engagement with all UNSC members to address threats to international peace and security; *thirdly*, refraining from the use of veto except in rare, extraordinary situations. Moreover, *fourthly*, Thomas-Greenfield wanted the UNSC members to demonstrate leadership in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. *Fifthly*, the UNSC members needed to enhance cooperation, inclusivity, and transparency. *Sixthly*, the UNSC members needed to advance reform of the UNSC. The Council simply needed to better reflect global realities (Thomas-Greenfield 2022). In the UNSC, Thomas-Greenfield continued the same theme but was less interested in discussing directly the state of multilateralism. The UK's representative Barbara Woodward expressed the UK's commitment to multilateralism and the strengthening of rules-based international system and expressed support for the Secretary-General's efforts to advance wider UN reform (S/PV.9220, 13). The French representative Nicolas de Rivi re also expressed France's commitment to multilateralism "based on international law in all its dimensions" and supported revitalization of the General Assembly. Furthermore, he listed that France was supporting the candidacy of Germany, France, India, and Japan for seats as permanent members in the UNSC (S/PV.9220, 14).

China's representative Zhang Jun described what "true multilateralism" should mean, including the inclusive formulation of international law, a sense of the world as one family with humankind having a shared destiny, highlighting the need for unity, and acting together to achieve win-win cooperation. The representative highlighted China's upholding and practice of multilateralism. China also supported the reform of the UNSC but saw the situation differently. China supported "reasonable and necessary reforms of the Council, with priority given to increasing the membership of developing and independent countries, including small and medium-sized countries, thereby correcting the imbalance of its

composition” (S/PV.9220, 15–16). The idea of China for the future of multilateralism, as presented here, resembles China’s foreign policy interest of “shared future” (see Rasilla and Hao 2024). This highlighted a rather broad and even extremely inclusive approach to reform. Russian representative Vasily Nebenzya, on the other hand, emphasized the existence of a multipolar world and criticized the current state of the West-originated rules-based system “which has nothing to do with international law,” circumventing universal structures and convention mechanisms. Russia also supported the expansion of the Security Council membership (S/PV.9220, 22). Furthermore, he argued:

We must clearly understand that the emergence of a genuinely inclusive multilateralism, the establishment of a polycentric world order and the reform of the United Nations are interrelated processes. It is necessary simply to do away with phobias, stereotypes and all geopolitical games to listen to and respect the one another’s interests and red lines – and not just when things have already gotten to the point of conflict, but when the warning bells are ringing.

(S/PV.9220, 24)

Russia wanted to start from more or less blank paper to remove the sense of confrontation from the UNSC but expressed little idea about the role of small states in such a multilateral system. These various positions from the members of the P5 present positions towards the reform of the UN, but they also show that the P5 was committed to multilateral cooperation, partly from the perspective of their own national interests in which the creation of international norms needed to be inclusive, and from perspective of some, based on realist thought: the might of a single state should in some cases bring more power to create international norms and sense of equality between peers of the international system. Nevertheless, Secretary-General Guterres noted in the debate that there was an ongoing convergence that the reform of multilateralism was an urgent matter, an issue that could not be delayed anymore in order to maintain the credibility of the UN, and the issue focused on UN’s “effective response to the key challenges of our times – pandemics, climate change and the conflicts of terrorism” (S/PV.9220, 30).

When holding the presidency of the UNSC, Russia initiated another debate on multilateralism on April 24, 2023, titled “Effective Multilateralism through the Defense of the Principles of the UN Charter.” This debate echoed similar ideas that were presented in December. Russia’s representative called for seeking a consensus that would balance the interests of different states and thus offer an alternative to the Western approach of the neoliberal order. The Russian perspective also highlighted the importance of geopolitics behind such a balance (S/PV.9308, 8). Other members of the P5 did not participate in the debate, but some other states such as Syria, Venezuela, and Belarus also emphasized seeking a consensus between different powers (S/PV.9308, 29; S/PV.9308 (Resumption 1), 8, 26). Discourse on consensus among states offers a relevant perspective on the state of multilateralism in the UN. Russia was not rejecting multilateralism as a whole or the related procedures but the Western values and rules-setting that were attached to it.

Furthermore, the theme is partly linked to the work of the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB), established by the Secretary-General in 2022. Recently, the Board, consisting of representatives from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America, had circulated a proposal in which consensus was approached critically, highlighting a way forward in a different direction from what Russia was advocating in the UN. The proposal listed ten constituent principles of effective multilateralism: people-centered, representative, transparent, equitable, networked, resourced, mission-focused, flexible, accountable, and future-oriented, ideally integrated into six transformative shifts (HLAB 2023, 14). In recent decades, the importance of consensus-building has often been associated with the UN as a result of emerging and often complex challenges of the post-Cold War international system (Smith 1999). However, in the context of continuing challenges for the UN to act multilaterally, this same sense of consensus has been increasingly placed under scrutiny as a reflection of the state of mechanisms in the UN. In the report of the HLAB, the perspective was indeed critical towards the consensus-seeking habit of the UN bodies. The HLAB indicated that the principle of consensus enabled a small number of states to dominate the decision-making and essentially stop different multilateral efforts to handle challenges from advancing, thus seriously limiting the UN's ability to carry out impactful, majority-based decisions. The report stated in its recommendation no. 4:

A frequent obstacle to more effective multilateralism is the overreliance on decisions by consensus, which has been interpreted in many settings to mean unanimity without objection. . . . This does not mean there is no place for consensus; in some settings, it is an important mechanism to protect against excesses of power and prevent impunity. But where consensus prevents equitable and effective decision-making on issues of global concern, alternatives must be found.

(HLAB 2023, 19)

As a solution, the report offered different forms of majority decision-making or “non-unanimous definitions of consensus voting systems” (HLAB 2023, 20). This reflects a perspective in which the solution to strengthen the UN-based multilateral would be based on the principle of political contestation. Both the UNSC and the UNGA provide opportunities for majority decision-making, but the principle of consensus, or rather non-opposition, focuses on the UNSC decision-making by the members of the P5. As such, the HLAB's ideas focused on the UNSC decision-making as an epitome of multilateral decision-making but had a different take on what politics should perhaps be in the UN context – without directly referring to politics.

6.3.3 End of Consensus and Risk of Losing Momentum With Continuing Conundrum

At this point in the book, it has become clear that multilateralism in the UN framework is a broadly supported way to perceive the preferred interaction between

states. It is an international norm of its own that can be contested from the perspective of how national interests should be considered and how international, multilateral institutions, such as the UN, as its crown jewel, can provide means and forums for states to conduct multilateral cooperation. Indeed, as Scarone (2022, 30) reminds us, the key source of threat for multilateralism – what could be described as classic – comes from multilateralism itself, as various actors within the international system have opinions regarding what direction multilateralism should take and how the international institutions should operate. Multilateralism is a broadly accepted norm, an idea that countries should work together and that there are certain international organizations that should work at the center of multilateralism, thus highlighting at least partially institution-bound political projects as a reflection of multilateralism. However, the reality has proved to be too difficult to achieve successful, effective multilateral cooperation, especially in maintaining international peace and security, highlighting the performance aspect of multilateralism as “means to an end” (e.g., Pouliot 2011). Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a blatant violation of the UN Charter, once again proves that the UN is dominated by the behavior of the P5, and if that behavior is throwing the entire international system the UN represents into disarray, it is becoming increasingly obvious that changes need to be done. In addition to the remarks presented in the UNSC debates about the reform of the UN and multilateral system, the HLAB’s recommendations are yet another call for change.

However, a distinction needs to be made between the actors calling for a change. The increasing significance of democratic erosion in the post-Cold War world has led to non-democratic regimes shaping domestic democratic practices. Similar attempts are taking place on an international level, especially from within the organization by its members, with the UN being a prime example (Kentikelenis and Voeten 2021). Indeed, it is logical to expect that non-democratic actors, while shaping the rules of the game to govern domestically, would attempt to change the rules also on the international level for their benefit (Kneuer 2023). Furthermore, even though the calls to reform the UN often feature attention on the lack of permanent representation in the UNSC from regions of South America and Africa, with Asia being represented only by China, regionalism can also be seen as an instrument to challenge the neoliberal world order. In this perspective, regional organizations can provide regime-boosting opportunities for states (Kneuer 2023, 100–101). Therefore, the reform of the UNSC in particular to enable better democratic representation from different regions of the world could also provide new instruments for politicization within the UNSC, if the right to veto for the permanent members is maintained. In addition to current members of the P5 advocating their interests with the use of veto rights, similar policies might be utilized for increasingly regional purposes if the right to veto is expanded by adding new permanent members to the UNSC without reforming the rules regarding the right to veto. This would certainly add new layers to the politics of multilateralism within the UN.

The bigger challenge seems to be the lack of commitment from the member states. As we have seen in this volume, the comments about states committing to multilateralism have been part of the debates in the UN for ages, but the topic is increasingly

linked to the planetary dimension and to existential questions for humans. For example, during the Summit of the Future in September 2024, the UN declared a pledge for “multilateralism, conducting by the UN and other key multilateral institutions deliver for a better future for people and planet” (A/RES/79/1, 2) and that “three pillars of the United Nations – sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights – are equally important interlinked and mutually reinforcing” (A/RES/79/1, 2).

Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the crisis of international politics that followed, besides diplomatic comments, some scholars have argued that stances with clear commitments to multilateralism have been exceptional on the national level (Fontaine-Skronski et al. 2023, 2). In this context, the role of renewed commitment of the member states to strengthen multilateralism played a major role in the Summit for the Future, in which the need for renewal of the commitment was a key theme in the final document. In his opening statement on September 22, 2024, Secretary-General Guterres stated: “We are here to bring multilateralism back from the brink.” Guterres described a world in which “multilateral tools and instruments” were unable to respond effectively to contemporary political, economic, environmental, and technological challenges, meaning that the UN-centered system needed to evolve. This applied in particular to the UNSC, which Guterres described as “outdated” and with eroding authority. Both its composition and working methods needed reform, or the body would face the loss of all of its credibility. The dysfunction of the UNSC was, however, only one theme in the Summit. The rationale for the Summit was to strengthen effective and networked multilateralism (United Nations Secretary-General 2024). The UNSC reform was one of the most difficult parts to resolve, and the working document prepared by Namibia and Germany was blank for this part before the meeting (UN 2024). In the end, the language addresses reform, but it is more of a suggestion rather than a concrete proposal, and it is thus for the member states to take the process further.

The Summit produced three international agreements: firstly, the idea of the *Pact for the Future* was to help speedily implement the Paris Agreement and foster cooperation with different partners. Furthermore, the Pact also gave attention to empowering youth participation in decision-making. Secondly, the Global Digital Compact related to standards in the digital environment, and it included the first agreement on the governance of artificial intelligence. Thirdly, the Declaration on Future Generations wanted governments to commit to future-oriented thinking, in particular, that would consider a sense of intergenerational solidarity that affected, for example, thinking towards the environment and development (A/RES/79/1).

The Pact for the Future presents the set of commitments the participants at the Summit made. It was adopted by the General Assembly on September 22, 2024, and included the other two agreements as annexes, shedding light on thinking about multilateralism. The need to strengthen multilateralism as a norm and as an institution was strongly present, but the language focused on the governments making pledges: first to have “a new beginning in multilateralism,” as the Pact described, and second to reaffirm the pledge on reinvigorating global action to ensure the future and to respond effectively to global challenges. The Declaration on Future Generations listed a set of new commitments but referred to multilateralism directly

only in the form of using appropriate multilateral mechanisms when it came to honoring, promoting, and preserving cultural diversity and cultural heritage. With the vow to act as “a booster shot for the SDGs,” the Pact did not specify how to proceed (Beisheim and Weinlich 2023). However, the spirit of the Declaration and other documents was highly multilateral based, in which the UN and the rest of the multilateral system were called to be “equipped” to support states to implement the Declaration in particular (A/RES/79/1, 2–3, 54, 56).

This reflected well the challenges the UN faces in fostering multilateralism: the Summit acted as a forum for the states to present their pledges and commitments for a common cause to respond to global challenges, but it was the states that needed to reform the system and empower the institutions, such as the UN, so that they could, on their behalf, continue to support the states. As discussed earlier, Guterres’ vision had emphasized the need for a social contract between states, but the Summit for the Future was unable to deliver such a milestone (Dijkstra 2024). The reason was simple. There were no mechanisms that could easily help to remedy the system, placing major pressure on the states to reach a consensus, make decisions, and implement them, not only at the national level but also on the global level. The Pact could have tried to change this, but with limited concrete suggestions – even then, it was a positive sign, given the state of relations between Russia and the West. According to journalist Maziar Motamedi, the Pact continued the UN’s habit of making lofty goals and commitments but had little to show regarding actual, realistic steps, especially regarding what the UN could do. To put it simply, the Pact lacked a real action plan. It is also worth noting that there were seven nations that opposed the Pact for the Future, Russia being one of them. The opponents fielded a last-minute amendment focusing on highlighting national sovereignty, but it lost the vote. As a result, the view published in *Al-Jazeera* was that the Pact’s most significant result seemed to be the very fact that it was adopted (Motamedi 2024).

Furthermore, as a symbol of great power dynamics related to perceptions over multilateralism and the UN, in 2025 the second administration of President Donald J. Trump decided that the US membership in all multilateral organizations, conventions, and treaties will be reviewed on the basis of whether they serve the US interests, with the abrogation of the US commitment on the table – and singled out particular UN bodies as especially relevant to review (The White House 2025).

Multilateral cooperation may have only partial abilities to create binding decisions, but it enables the mobilization of political will first to set a global consensus on pressing issues and then commit the member states to strive for the fulfillment of their commitments. This chapter has discussed the reform ideas related to the UN and multilateralism, showing that the Secretary-General has indicated the UN’s readiness to support the member states in implementing the reform whenever they reach a consensus on the matter. The future of multilateralism, and the UN at the center of the multilateral system, is simply based on the stances of the member states and whether they can come up with a commonly shared position or prefer to retain more conservative approaches to multilateralism and the UN. The reform itself, however, can both succeed and fail – leading again to performance: that is,

would member states be satisfied with the performance of the UN in responding to various crises and challenges after potential reform or not? Different member states have distinct visions regarding the expanding representation of the UNSC, and the future of the right to veto in particular remains in doubt. However, if the states want to create effective responses to global challenges such as the climate crisis, it is up to them to show it. Some of the reform ideas, however, might be more valuable than others. Furthermore, the discussion on the reform ideas and positions of different actors also relates to the question of whether there is political momentum for the reform right now, or if it is a discursive interpretation and a strategy to promote a particular political choice of engaging the current situation. We respond to the question of momentum by highlighting that the sense of momentum is based on the state of collective decision-making in the UN. Momentum is about recognizing the right, specific time for change, and different member states have their own visions of what that change could entail. If there is no consensus over what the change should consist of, the sense of momentum is dictated by the institutional framework and the positions of the P5. We will discuss the future in the following section, with a reminder quote of the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB), that

[i]f we continue on our current path, the 100-year anniversary of the United Nations in 2045 might be more of a funeral for multilateralism than a celebration of its success.

(HLAB 2023, 61)

The quote illustrates the mindset associated with the current state of the UN, in connection with its future prospects. However, a question remains: what is the root of the difficulty in reforming the UN? Although we can trace the complexity of reform within the UN to the member states' resistance, the UN's procedures, or the UN's capabilities to lead the efforts, our proposal in the following chapter raises ideas more associated with doing politics in the UN as a procedural event and enhancing the political performance of the UN.

6.4 Crisis of Multilateralism and Responses From Selected International Relations Theories

The origins of the UN stem from a major crisis on the world stage, the Second World War, and the subsequent development of the UN. The increase in UN membership has been linked to the crisis in the colonial use of power and the emergence of a crisis related to the traditional use of power and the role of individual people in the state. More recently, the crises of our times have focused on traditional questions of peace and security and the power of individual great powers, but also on the erosion of our living conditions in biodiversity loss, climate crisis, and a new communication environment in which dissemination of malign information constitutes risks for communities and individuals. At the same time, the human population continues to grow in size and continues to challenge the potential limits

of the planet, all of them constituting drivers for change (Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom 2024).

Therefore, first, the key question to start with is what is the crisis – or changes – that the UN exists for, and what can we expect from the UN and from the member states in the future? We can take it as a premise that there are multiple crises taking place at the same time, but in which tenets of multilateralism are these crises located? In norms or processes of international cooperation? In the platforms of human interaction, that is, forums or institutions? In the expectations of the members of the UN, that is, the individual states? In the views of the other stakeholders? Or should we take it as a premise that crises should always connect to crises we can describe as actual, real crises taking place in the real world, such as negative changes in living conditions at the local, regional, or even global level?

The study of international relations draws especially from three main schools of thought: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. If we think about multilateralism from these selected international relations theories, in the realist school of thought the perception focuses on competition between the states and the importance of state power. In particular, the realistic (e.g., Morgenthau 1949; Carr 1946) or the neorealistic approach (e.g., Waltz 2010) could argue that the UN provides one avenue to assert state power, highlighting the importance of preserving structures that promote and support particular states' opportunities to maintain and gain power. In the liberal school of thought (e.g., Moravcsik 1997; Ikenberry 2011), the attention focuses on a more positive approach to states as entities that have other interests besides the traditional questions of power and are interested in finding and setting values and norms that tie different countries together and help to limit the sense of competition between states. In this view, the UN provides an avenue for values and norms setting up such structures that help states to do things together. In the third school of thought, the constructivist thinking (e.g., Wendt 1999, or Bull 1977 for the world society in the English school of thinking), the UN is a result of decades or centuries of development in the ways states interact with each other, a form of institutionalized and treaty-based cooperation that has resulted in permanent structures that should be maintained and supported.

Each of these schools of thought brings different sides of the same question to the table to engage with and provide different views regarding the potential, or perhaps the preferred, future development of multilateral cooperation as a general idea and the UN in particular. Member states are at the center to decide what the UN is and should be about. In the current-day context, if the members of the P5 perceive international relations from the perspective of the realist school of international relations, it would be highly beneficial for them to maintain the UN – or in particular the Security Council – in the state as it is in terms of the right to veto decisions that would be against their national interests. On the other hand, an approach from the liberal school of thought to reform the UNSC in particular could lead to a full sense of inclusivity – all UN member states could join the UNSC and all members of the UNSC could have a right to veto. That could lead to a full conundrum of the UNSC in creating binding decisions regarding maintaining international peace and security and would render the UN practically toothless – unless its capabilities to

mobilize states to act according to common interests to find a consensus on pressing issues would somehow be stronger than they are now. That, however, seems unrealistic at the moment.

Possible Scenarios for the UN According to Three Schools of Thought in IR Studies

The contribution to the discussion on how to proceed with the reform of the UN needs certain premises that, in our view, could be based on the three schools of thought of IR studies. In this approach, we will list certain premises we find relevant for future features of UN-based multilateralism.

Realism

- Competition between states will prevail in the future, and this is reflected in their behavior in the international system. The sense of the international community would focus on competition between states and finding cooperation that would somehow benefit that competition or mitigate the success of other states.
- States will find and select the best forums to advance their national agendas. This would lead to a more flexilateral form of cooperation and the *à la carte* multilateralism in which international institutions would be selected on a careful and case-bound basis.
- The UN would thus be useful if it provides strong states with enough political power in international relations.
- The reform of the UN would focus on the reform of the UNSC in which members of the P5 would retain their veto power. New permanent members with veto rights might be added to the membership – if the interests of the current members of the P5 support the increase of membership and the expansion of veto rights.
- Renewed membership of the UNSC could lead to regional blocs in which members with veto rights would act as nexuses of more regional or ideological blocs, as happened during the Cold War period.

Liberalism

- International cooperation holds the value of multilateralism in this context, as there is no hegemony, and states willingly cooperate to reduce conflict and competition, notably to work together aiming for sustainability. This would mean that UN-centered multilateralism would be based on common political norms to improve the conditions and future of the international community.
- The UN would remain the center framework for global governance.
- The scenario for reforming the UNSC will likely get rid of the veto power as all states have equal stakes in multilateralism and have similar rights to others. Thus, the world challenges today could be achieved by sharing information and burdens among states.

Constructivism

- Constructivists see the interests of states as socially constructed and changeable, depending on how the states interact with each other. The UN-centered multilateralism provides a forum for interaction also in the future by establishing useful institutional frameworks for state interaction; therefore, it would not be useful to deconstruct such a framework without viable and functional alternatives.
- The future would be based on either maintaining or improving current UN-led multilateral frameworks – or simply on the continuing discussion and potential emergence of new norms, rules, and perhaps also institutions.
- With the emerging nations from developing countries asking for reform in the permanent seats of the UNSC, the reform will be additional seats of the established structure in the UNSC, with potentially two seats from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Deriving from these premises, our perspective on how the UN could potentially work is based on the following elements: (1) In the context of tradition and history of interaction between states and great powers, particularly since the nineteenth century, powerful states have vested interests in pursuing cooperation and utilizing international institutions. (2) However, international and indeed multilateral leadership is also about setting up norms, rules, and common political agendas within the existing multilateral framework that the UN represents. (3) As an institutional framework, the UNSC reform requires the majority support of the international community because the UNSC is, according to the UN Charter, the principal political organ to maintain international peace and security. Therefore, we need to define how that form of majority support is decided. Thus, the focus regarding reforming the UN structures should rather be on empowering the General Assembly to act as a global forum for majority decision-making, one state one vote, and the advancement of a political agenda in which the UNSC reform could be included later. Finally, (4), the international community needs to engage with the potential benefits and threats of increasing the parliamentary dimension for the United Nations, that is, to improve the inclusion, equality, and role of parliamentary politics within the UN as the framework of global governance. That would reflect the institutional framework of multilateralism and engage both norm and process perspectives of global governance in the context of multilateralism as a positive and needed aim for international cooperation.

6.5 The (Imaginary) Future of Multilateralism

As illustrated in the report *Shaping Our Future Together* published by the UN as part of its 75th celebrations, regional differences in the degree of importance of international cooperation are apparent. There are also differences in expectations of what the UN is anticipated to do in terms of “high or low human development” countries. For the majority of respondents, international cooperation is, however, “important for addressing global challenges” (UN 2021, 6). Overall, there are also

similar views of the global challenges we are currently facing: “UN75 survey respondents in all regions identified climate change and environmental issues as the number one, long-term global threat.” The report is, however, based on the idea of listening to citizens’ views rather than states (see UN 2021, 48).

The report also shows that the UN is expected to be more effective and inclusive. Two of the reform proposals, namely the UNSC reform to make it more representative and “agile” and the revision of the Charter so that it could better respond to the global challenges, including climate change (UN 2021), specifically stand out. Considering the theme of this chapter, the report also specifies how the dialogue participants in the report made several suggestions, including the following idea:

The UN can be further democratized through other reforms, such as establishing a UN parliamentary assembly as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly under article 22 of the Charter, or introducing a “citizen proposal initiative” to the UN General Assembly or other permanent consultation tool.
(UN 2021, 66)

The idea seems to refer to the legitimacy deficit aspect of the UN, often considered as citizens lacking their voices heard in international cooperation (see, for instance, *We the Peoples*. Campaign for a UN World Citizens’ Initiative). Another example that could be mentioned has been to increase the parliamentary or parliamentarian’s involvement in international cooperation to provide possibilities for oversight and representation (see, e.g., Kronlund 2023, 2022).

In our view, a potential solution for the UN to become a more effective center of multilateralism could indeed be found in the institutional framework familiar to many member states, that is, from the parliaments. As an imaginary approach in effort to renew the UN as a center of multilateralism, we propose a theory of *parliamentary style of multilateralism*. We treat it not as an ideology but as a set of ideas and principles to be applied in the UN system to empower it to become a more effective and legitimate international authority to address global challenges and try to tackle them and thus carry out global governance. The idea of parliamentary style of multilateralism has links to existing scholarship on the role of parliaments in foreign policy, such as in parliamentary foreign policy (Ihalainen and Matikainen 2016; Raunio and Wagner 2017; Kronlund 2013; Häkkinen 2014; Adiputri 2015), in the context of parliamentary diplomacy (Stavridis and Jančić 2017), and how parliamentarians can be part of international affairs (see, e.g., Weisglas and de Boer 2007) or by having interparliamentary institutions (see, e.g., Schimmelfennig et al. 2020).

The idea of having a third representative institution – a kind of global parliament or congress within the UN, whose members would be voted upon by the citizens of the world – has appeared at regular intervals in public debates. One example is the campaign for the UN parliamentary assembly (Global Governance Forum 2023). Many of the proposals have been vague, emphasizing “Tennysonian vision” of parliament without really explicating what it would mean in practice. One example brought up by Paul Kennedy in his book *The Parliament of Men is One World*, by

Wendell Wilkie. In Kennedy's (2006, 13) view, the book paved the way for a World Federalist movement established in 1947, emphasizing the creation of democratic global structures that would be accountable to the citizens of the world. Closer to the present day, we have seen citizens' initiatives that aim to bring IOs and decision-making at the international level closer to the people to increase both accountability and legitimacy. The idea of the UN World Citizens' Initiative (UNWCI) aims to advance citizen input in international organizations, including the UNGA and UNSC. Augusto Lopez-Claros, Arthur L. Dahl, and Maja Groff, in their book *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century* (2020), discuss World Parliamentary Assembly as part of the UN reform that would address the democracy deficit, taking the development of the European Parliament as a model. Similarly, many existing scholarly works have focused on how to enhance democratic decision-making beyond the nation-state, not only by providing ideal types of democracy, such as cosmopolitan democracy (Held 1995), but also by referring to how to make IOs and their decision-making more democratic.

In the previous literature, one suggestion for UN reform has been considered to be implemented through ECOSOC, and the UN Charter would enable that (Patomäki and Teivainen 2003). With one vote per country and the principle of simple majority voting, ECOSOC is already more democratic than some other UN bodies. It also has a tradition of involving civil society actors in its work. Further, its mandate is considerably wide to consider issues apart from maintaining peace and security. Similarly, the democratization of the UNGA could be possible by amending the Charter's Article 13 and by having authority to make binding decisions by a simple majority, with voting based on a country's share of the UN's budget and its number of inhabitants (Patomäki and Teivainen 2003).

Based on our analysis of different cases, member states generally perceive the UN in positive terms and are not discussing replacing the UN altogether, illustrating a positive diplomatic approach to UN-centered multilateralism in general. However, many states feel that the UN should be able to be more effective as an organization, and that sense focuses on the UN's responses to different pressing global concerns and threats, as the Summit for the Future showed. Furthermore, the discussion on the state of multilateralism tends to focus on multilateralism in general as a guiding norm and to the UN's abilities to be effective in the implementation of multilateralism. As a result, the UN being unable to respond effectively enough should be reformed in some way to enable better responses to global challenges while also acknowledging the changes in international relations and the relative strength of states – and in a way that would be generally accepted by the international community. Therefore, the UN should be able to mobilize and commit states to multilateralism in an enhanced way, highlighting the importance of empowering one state, one voice principle to enable more robust international decision-making.

The Case for Parliamentary Style of Multilateralism

Between different potential scenarios for the UN, we need to find a common agreement about what the UN should be, what it should do, and how member

states continue to be part of the UN system. As stated by the HLAB (2023), the UN should move towards more majority-based decision-making in order to enable more efficiency. Following the ideal type of deliberative parliament, votes could also be seen as the last stage of the debate (see Palonen 2024), instead of voting as a bloc or according to specific attitudes to specific questions. At the core of majority decision-making should therefore be the effort to renew the ways the UN discusses and decides and how different institutional processes support solution-based decision-making in a manner that would benefit both the member states and the global community with its different stakeholders as a whole in the best possible manner. Given that a full consensus among 193 member states can be difficult to reach, majority-based decision-making would ensure that decisions can be reached, even in situations where the current topics might be politically or ideologically difficult for some member states to engage with or think outside the box of nation-state interests. Majority-based decision-making acts as a logical starting point for the processes and values of the UN itself.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) currently has 181 members. It can be discussed whether all of them are parliaments par excellence. While the role of the IPU is more about promoting parliamentary diplomacy and supporting parliaments to promote democracy and peace in addition to sustainable development, it also serves as a platform for parliamentarians to meet, share best practices, and discuss topical issues related to parliaments.

The UN, however, is not a supranational institution, nor is there any major support among the member states for the UN to become one either. The further parliamentarization of the UN would require independent organizations from the member states, with the UN Secretary-General and the UN secretariat now being the closest ones to advance the UN's interests. However, the processes of the UN could enable decision-making that could be strengthened with ideas taken from what we have learned from parliamentary decision-making, that is, different processes, procedures, and ways to engage any topic and come up with a majority-based decision on how to proceed. We describe it as a *parliamentary style of multilateralism* and suggest that any effort to reform the UN should be based on acknowledging what parliamentary style of politics could bring to the UN as an organization. Following Soininen and Turkka's (2008, 11) idea, we draw on parliamentarism, which refers to an institutionalization of culture in which differing opinions and perspectives can be presented and discussed, and in the end, decisions reached. In other words, the conduct of politics is driven by speaking for and against the issues of the agenda and the agenda itself.

Thus, instead of consensus, dissensus should be embraced. Debates on motions in parliamentary style would recognize their strengths and weaknesses and enable discussion on these issues that are either supported or opposed. The parliamentary style of politics is dependent on the procedure, giving opportunities for debate in different stages of consideration of motions from the committee to the plenary. The UN, as an intergovernmental organization, relies on diplomatic conduct of negotiations, and there are no similar parliamentary elements as within the EU (see Palonen 2017 for the discussion on the "separation of powers" in the European

Union). Intergovernmentalism can be seen as a counter concept to multilateralism. In the intergovernmental setting, all is dependent on the negotiations between the governments. In multilateralism there is some kind of expectation of shared values and common goals that could be referred to by bypassing the governmental level but is not yet supranationalism. Understanding this element helps us to think about the parliamentary style of multilateralism as well.

A system based on such parliamentary features already has major resemblance to the UN of today, but the system described in the Charter does not define the parliamentary features nor does it place the General Assembly at the center of the decision-making, especially when it comes to questions of maintaining international peace and security. This has proven to be a liability for the UN to carry out its functions that continue to be relevant today and should also be open to adjustment if needs arise. Parliamentary decision-making in the form of parliamentary democracy often entails legislative, executive, and judicial branches to help divide the use of power, and the system based on parliamentary democracy often also has functions related to who keeps whom accountable for their actions. The question of accountability should be a matter left for the member states to decide: do they want to strengthen the UNGA, for instance, to become a body capable of keeping the UNSC accountable for its actions over maintaining international peace and security or not, and how the membership question of the UNSC would be decided or maintained in the first place? A similar principle should apply to the notion that there should be a government-opposition division. Already now in the UN, there are various interest-based groups consisting of differing numbers of member states that can be divided into regional and political groups. Such groups are a legitimate part of the parliamentary style of decision-making and should remain part of the UN decision-making also in the future, thus increasing the sense of inclusive participation (see Laatikainen and Smith 2020 for a discussion on how political groups in the UN resemble parties in the political system). As a result, we believe that the UNGA meetings, acting as a deliberative organ, based on a one state, one vote system should become *de facto* plenary sessions of the UN system and meant for debating potential alternative solutions to various topics and reaching majority decisions, together with the needed function to scrutinize the work of other principal organs, notably the UNSC.

Subsequent changes should be made by amending the UN Charter, if necessary, and by strengthening the procedures within the UN organization. From our perspective, the UN acts as an umbrella organization but has certain key bodies listed in the UN Charter, such as the Secretariat, the UNSC, and the UNGA. The focus of reform should be on the organs listed in the UN Charter, while different entities under the UN umbrella or regional organizations, could later be engaged with the help of new Charter-based rights and procedures, and the spirit of doing politics in the UN context in parliamentary style.

The parliamentary style of politics in the UN should also engage with the key norm or value within the multilateral system, that is, what multilateralism means and how it should be applied in different circumstances and topics. It should be a permanent feature of the UN activities to keep multilateralism at the core, to

explore the extent and meaning of multilateralism, and to seek ways to apply multilateralism to UN activities. The UN system provides the logical avenue to advance multilateralism, but it needs to be self-reflective over what multilateralism actually means and how it can represent a majority view as well as the meanings and practices associated with multilateralism in differing topics and contexts.

What would the value of the parliamentary style of multilateralism be in comparison to what the UN currently consists of? Parliamentary style would emphasize public debate instead of finding a consensus or having negotiations – or even dialogue – and would highlight the importance of debating the agenda in addition to issues on the agenda, thus raising the importance of majority vote. This would help the UN to reach decisions in a more effective and inclusive way, with an expectation that countries should commit to the implementation of those decisions in a renewed way in a system where they have contributed to the debate and voting. Furthermore, currently the agenda in the different UN bodies does not change that much, and for instance, the UNGA does not focus on questions of peace and security as extensively as the UNSC does, thus rendering the UNGA with less visibility on the topic and limiting the opportunities for the members of the international community to raise their views on the topic. Parliamentary style of multilateralism would also enhance inclusion by pointing attention to speaking in the UN not only as a performatory task of national representatives but as contributions to the debate of the approach itself, thus constituting a more meaningful exchange of views, especially within the UNGA. Thus, rhetoric would be more of a form of deliberation rather than negotiation. Additionally, in contrast to views regarding politics as somewhat undesirable, focusing on parliamentary style would mean politics in the UN should become rather more desirable; that is, we need more open and public politicization of issues and policies in order to come up with a majority view on the best potential alternative – to which all members of the international community should next commit, without a need to arrange new forms of Summit for the Future to renew the commitment of member states.

To conclude, by discussing – and engaging – parliamentary style of multilateralism in the UN context, we could move away from a somewhat deadlocked idea of institutional reforming of the UN from the perspective of the UNSC to a more novel theme and find a more workable alternative, an alternative that would render the question of adding new members to the UNSC. We would welcome further studies to address the possible alternative futures for multilateralism and the UN that would go beyond the already existing paradigms.

Note

- 1 For example, President Alexander Stubb, when addressing the UNGA in 2024, mentioned, “I come from Finland. We are a small country in the northeastern corner of Europe.”

References

- Acharya, Amitav. 2023. “A Multiplex World: The Coming World Order.” *Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy*. Accessed June 23, 2025. <https://anthologies.newlinesinstitute>.

- org/emerging-world-order-after-the-russia-ukraine-war-category/a-multiplex-world-the-coming-world-order/.
- Adiputri, Ratih. 2015. *Political Culture in the Indonesian Parliament: Analyzing Parliamentary Debates on the Regional Parliaments 1999–2009*. PhD Dissertation 528. University of Jyväskylä, Finland.
- Asia Society. 2024. “State of Asia 2024 – Europe’s Asian Future.” *Youtube Channel (Min. 16 Onwards)*, November 7. Accessed June 23, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYSQhrvxoFc>.
- Badie, Bertrand. 2023. “Post-Bipolar Challenges to Multilateralism.” In *Does the UN Model Still Work? Challenges and Prospects for the Future of Multilateralism*, edited by Kim Fontaine-Skronski, Valériane Thool, and Norbert Eschborn. Brill. 11–25.
- Beisheim, Marianne and Silke Weinlich. 2023. “Accelerating the SDGs through the 2024 Summit for the Future.” *IISD, SDG Knowledge Hub*, February 1. Accessed June 23, 2025. <https://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/accelerating-the-sdgs-through-the-2024-summit-of-the-future/>.
- Blum, Yehuda Z. 2005. “Proposals for UN Security Council Reform.” *American Journal of International Law* 99 (3): 632–649. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1602295>.
- Bull, Hedley. 1977. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Columbia University Press.
- Carr, Edward H. 1946. *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. Macmillan.
- Dijkstra, Hylke. 2024. “The UN Summit of the Future: Leadership, Layering, and the Limits of Liberal International Order.” *Global Governance* 30 (3–4): 361–370. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-03003004>.
- Fassbender, Bardo, ed. 2020. *Key Documents on the Reform of the UN Security Council 1991–2019*. Brill.
- Fontaine-Skronski, Kim, Valériane Thool, and Norbert Eschborn. 2023. “Introduction: Does the UN Model Still Work? Challenges and Prospects for the Future of Multilateralism.” In *Does the UN Model Still Work? Challenges and Prospects for the Future of Multilateralism*, edited by Kim Fontaine-Skronski, Valériane Thool, and Norbert Eschborn. Brill. 1–7.
- Global Governance Forum. 2023. “A Second Charter: Imagining a Renewed United Nations.” *GGF org*. Accessed December 10, 2024. https://globalgovernanceforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/SecondCharter_Imagining-Renewed-United-Nations.pdf.
- Gutierrez, Natashya. 2016. “What Happened When Indonesia ‘Withdraw’ from the United Nations.” *Rappler*, August 22. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://www.rappler.com/world/indonesia/143883-united-nations-withdrawal-philippines-duterte/>.
- Häkkinen, Teemu. 2014. *The Royal Prerogative Redefined: Parliamentary Debate on the Role of the British Parliament in Large-Scale Military Deployments, 1982–2003*. PhD Dissertation 224. University of Jyväskylä, Finland.
- Halonen, Miia, Pasi Ihalainen, and Taina Saarinen. 2015. “Diverse Discourses in Time and Space. Historical, Discourse Analytical and Ethnographic Approaches to Multi-Sited Language Policy Discourse.” In *Language Policies in Finland and Sweden: Interdisciplinary and Multi-sited Comparisons: Multilingual Matters*, edited by Miia Halonen, Pasi Ihalainen, and Taina Saarinen. Bristol. 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783092710-003>.
- Held, David. 1995. *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*. Polity Press.
- HLAB, High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism. 2023. *A Breakthrough for People and Planet: Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future*. United Nations University. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://highleveladvisoryboard.org/breakthrough/>.
- Hosli, Madeleine O. and Thomas Dörfler. 2019. “The United Nations Security Council: History, Current Composition, and Reform Proposals.” In *United Nations University Series on Regionalism*, edited by Madeleine O. Hosli and Thomas Dörfler. Springer Nature. 299–320.

- Hosli, Madeleine O., Taylor Garrett, Sonja Niedecken, and Nicolas Verbeek, eds. 2021. *The Future of Multilateralism: Global Cooperation and International Organizations*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ihalainen, Pasi and Satu Matikainen. 2016. "The British Parliament and Foreign Policy in the 20th Century: Towards Increasing Parliamentarisation?" *Parliamentary History* 35 (1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1750-0206.12180>.
- Ikenberry, John G. 2011. *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton University Press.
- Kennedy, Paul M. 2006. *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations*. 1st ed. Penguin Books.
- Kentikelenis, Alexander and Erik Voeten. 2021. "Legitimacy Challenges to the Liberal World Order: Evidence from United Nations Speeches, 1970–2018." *Review of International Organization* 16 (1): 721–754. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-020-09404-y>.
- Kneuer, Marianne. 2023. "Democratic Erosion and Multilateralism: When Authoritarian Leaders Challenge the Liberal International Order." In *Does the UN Model Still Work? Challenges and Prospects for the Future of Multilateralism*, edited by Kim Fontaine-Kronski, Valérie Thoole, and Norbert Eschborn. Brill. 87–110.
- Kronlund, Anna. 2013. *Parliamentary Oversight of the Exceptional Situations in a Presidential System: Debating the Reassertion of the Constitutional Powers of the US Congress*. PhD Dissertation 468. University of Jyväskylä, Finland.
- Kronlund, Anna. 2022. "YK:n legitimizeetti yleiskokouksen kautta tarkasteltuna." *Kosmopolis* 52 (3): 65–77. <https://journal.fi/kosmopolis/article/view/119998>.
- Kronlund, Anna. 2023. "Parliamentary Dimension and Multilateralism: Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations, 1995–2022." *International Journal of Parliamentary Studies* 3 (2): 253–283. <https://doi.org/10.1163/26668912-bja10068>.
- Laatikainen, Katie and Karen Smith. 2020. *Group Politics in UN Multilateralism*. Brill.
- Long, Tom. 2016. "Small States, Great Power? Gaining Influence through Intrinsic, Derivative, and Collective Power." *International Studies Review* 19 (2): 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw040>.
- Lopez-Claros, Augusto, Arthur L. Dahl, and Maja Groff. 2020. *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*. Cambridge University Press.
- Luck, Edward C. 2018. "Prospects for UN Renovations and Reform." In *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, edited by Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws. Oxford University Press. 797–822.
- Malužinas, Martinas. 2023. "The Role of Small States in Promoting International Security: Lithuania Strategy." *Przegląd Strategiczny* 16 (1): 155–166. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ps.2023.1.11>.
- Martin, Lisa L. 1992. "Interests, Power, and Multilateralism." *International Organization* 46 (4): 765–792. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300033245>.
- Mingst, Karen A., Margaret P. Karns, and Alynna J. Lyon. 2022. *The United Nations in the 21st Century*. 6th ed. Routledge.
- Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom. 2024. *Global Strategic Trends: Out to 2055*. 7th ed. Accessed February 13, 2025. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/673602412469c5b71dbc7b6f/Global_Strategic_Trends_Out_to_2055.pdf.
- Moravcsik, Andrew. 1997. "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics." *International Organization* 51 (4): 513–553. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081897550447>.
- Morgenthau, Hans J. 1949. *Politics among Nations*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Motamedi, Maziar. 2024. "What's the UN's New 'Pact for the Future', and Why Did Russia Oppose It?" *Al Jazeera*, September 24. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/24/whats-the-uns-new-pact-for-the-future-and-why-did-russia-oppose-it>.

- Newman, Edward, James Thakur, and John Tirman. 2006. "Introduction." In *Multilateralism under Challenge? Power, International Order, and Structural Change*, edited by Edward Newman, James Thakur, and John Tirman. United Nations University Press. 1–18.
- Palonen, Kari. 2017. "Concepts and Debates: Rhetorical Perspectives on Conceptual Change." In *Conceptual History in the European Space*, edited by Willibaldt Steinmetz, Michael Freeden, and Javier Fernández-Sebastián. Berghahn Books. 96–117.
- Palonen, Kari. 2024. "A Classical Study on Parliamentary Procedure. Conceptions of Parliament in Josef Redlich's *Recht und Technik des Englischen Parlamentarismus* (1905)." *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 44 (3): 270–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02606755.2024.2417137>.
- Patomäki, Heikki and Teivo Teivainen. 2003. *Globaali demokratia*. Gaudeamus.
- Pouliot, Vincent. 2011. "Multilateralism as an End Itself." *International Studies Perspective* 12 (1): 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2010.00416.x>.
- President of the Republic of Finland. 2024. *Statement by President of the Republic of Finland, Alexander Stubb, at the General Debate of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on 25 September 2024*. Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/statement-by-president-of-the-republic-of-finland-alexander-stubb-at-the-general-debate-of-the-79th-session-of-the-un-general-assembly-in-new-york-on-25-september-2024/>.
- Rai, Shirin M. 2014. "Political Performance: A Framework for Analysing Democratic Politics." *Political Studies* 63 (5): 1179–1197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12154>.
- Rasilla, Ignacio de la and Yayezi Hao. 2024. "The Community of Shared Future for Mankind and International Law." In *The Cambridge Handbook of China and International Law*, edited by Ignacio de la Rasilla and Congyan Cai. Cambridge University Press. 49–70.
- Raunio, Tapio and Wolfgang Wagner. 2017. "Towards Parliamentarisation of Foreign and Security Policy?" *West European Politics* 40 (1): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2016.1240411>.
- Scarone, Marcello. 2022. Is Classic Multilateralism Outdated? In *Does the UN Model Still Work? Challenges and Prospects for the Future of Multilateralism*, edited by Kim Fontaine-Skronski, Valeriana Thool, and Norbert Eschborn. Brill. 29–41.
- Schimmelfenning, Frank, Thomas Winzen, Tobias Lenz, Jofre Rocabert, Lorian Crasnic, Christina Gherasimov, Jana Lipps, and Densua Mumford. 2020. *The Rise of International Parliaments: Strategic Legitimation in International Organizations*. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Courtney B. 1999. "The Politics of Global Consensus Building: A Comparative Analysis." *Global Governance* 5 (2): 173–201. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-00502003>.
- Soininen, Suvi and Tapani Turkkka, eds. 2008. *Parliamentary Style of Politics*. Finnish Political Science Association.
- Stavridis, Stelios and Davor Jančić, eds. 2017. *Parliamentary Diplomacy in European and Global Governance*. Brill.
- Stephen, Matthew D. 2017. "Emerging Powers and Emerging Trends in Global Governance." *Global Governance* 23 (3): 483–502. <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02303009>.
- Thomas-Greenfield, Linda. 2022. "Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield on the Future of the United Nations." *United States Mission to the United Nations*, September 8. Accessed November 26, 2024. <https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-ambassador-linda-thomas-greenfield-on-the-future-of-the-united-nations/>.
- Thorhallsson, Baldur and Sverrir Steinsson. 2017. "Small State Foreign Policy." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.484>.
- Trent, John and Laura Schnurr. 2018. *A United Nations Renaissance: What the UN Is, and What It Could Be*. Verlag Barbara Budrich.
- Tuominen, Hanna and Anna Kronlund. 2023. "The United Nations and Nordic Identity: Reflections on Finnish UN Policy in the 2000s." *Nordic Review of International Studies* 1 (2): 5–20. <https://nris.journal.fi/article/view/131462/90210>.

- UN, United Nations. 2021. *Shaping our Future together: Listening to People's Priorities for the Future and their Ideas for Action*. Accessed February 18, 2025. <https://www.un.org/en/un75/finalreport>.
- UN, United Nations. 2024. *Summit for the Future: Pact for the Future: Rev.1*. Accessed February 18, 2025. <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact-for-the-future-rev.1.pdf>.
- UNCIO, United Nations Conference on International Organization, Coordination Committee. 1945. Accessed February 18, 2025. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1300969?v=pdf>.
- United Nations Secretary-General. 2024. *Opening Remarks to the Summit of the Future*. New York, September 22. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-plenary-united-nations-secretary-general.pdf>.
- UN News. 2025. *UN80 Initiative: What It Is – And Why It Matters to the World*. Accessed July 4, 2025. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1164836>.
- Waltz, Kenneth N. 2010. *Theory of International Politics*. Waveland Press.
- Weisglas, Frans W. and Gonnie de Boer. 2007. "Parliamentary Diplomacy." *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 2: 93–99. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187119007X180494>.
- Weiss, Thomas G. 2009. *What's Wrong with the United Nations and How to Fix It*. Polity Press.
- Weiss, Thomas G., David P. Forsythe, Roger A. Coate, and Kelly-Kate Pease. 2019. *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*. Routledge.
- Wendt, Alexander. 1999. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- The White House. 2025. *Executive Order: Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to All International Organizations*, February 4. Accessed February 20, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/>.
- Woods, Ngaire. 2023. "Multilateralism in the Twenty-First Century." *Global Perspectives* 4 (1): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2023.68310>.