

# Multilateralism As A Domestic Policy Tool

Opinion piece

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The Global Solutions Initiative (GSI) works towards a global economic system that benefits people and planet. Rooted in research, GSI brings together policy, academia, civil society, and the private sector to generate insights for better global governance. Founded in 2017, the Berlin-based independent, non-profit organization annually convenes the Global Solutions Summit, which serves as a steppingstone to the G20 and G7 Summits. GSI is led by Dennis J. Snower, Markus Engels, and Christian Kastrop.

International governance structures are changing rapidly. Due to geopolitical and geo-economic changes since the end of the bipolar system, the post-1945 order is increasingly losing its legitimacy and assertiveness. For example, the UN Security Council, which bears the main responsibility of maintaining world peace and international security, is often blocked by the veto powers - as it was during the Cold War due to blockades by the superpowers of the time. While the year 2015, with its powerful Paris Climate Agreement and the agreements on the SDGs - both of which enjoy almost universal recognition - almost seem like a celebratory moment for multilateralism in retrospect, the international discussions on Russia's attack on Ukraine and Israel's response to the Hamas attack show increasing levels of dissent. Double standards and the unequal advantage of the international order in favor of the West are being criticized more and more openly. International law, climate morality, and global values are only ever discussed when this is to the advantage of the West, while there is too little focus on long-standing wars, health care for poorer regions, fair global governance structures, and a trade system that overcomes poverty. While the Indonesian G20 presidency in 2022 still managed to include a condemnation of Russian aggression in the Leaders' Declaration, the 2023 Delhi Declaration already contained much weaker wording (G20, n.d.; G20 India, 2023).

The years 2023/24 saw an expansion of the BRICS alliance:<sup>1</sup> in addition to Brazil, Russia, India, China South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates were included in the alliance now

known as BRICS+. The G20, which has placed a greater focus on the perspective of the Global South through the successive presidencies of Indonesia, India, Brazil, and South Africa, has also invited the African Union to become a permanent member with the aim of improving its global representation.

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Change is afoot in the global order. Central powers seem to be able to use this dynamic to better incorporate their interests and perspectives into the international discourse (Lippert & Mair, 2024). However, this raises several questions that are relevant for finding solutions on a global scale:

- What impact does the pluralization of alliances have on the expectations of the post-1945 order? The creation of the UN system was linked to attempts "to maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace"

(United Nations, 1945 art. 1 para. 1).

The aim of this order was therefore to create global governance, combined with a universal set of values and powerful international organizations.

- Does it still make sense in the twenty-first century to strive for value-based multilateralism or are the global risks now so serious and visible in everyday life that focusing on solving these problems takes priority over discussions about values? Or is it the case that things are interrelated and influence each other, for example, that combating climate change is only possible with the realization of women's rights and better education?
- Does the pluralization of multinational actors change the role of non-state actors? Do associations and clubs, parties and religious communities, trade unions and engagement groups that are well networked internationally gain more weight because they can directly influence national decision-making? Of course, this also applies to the field of culture.<sup>2</sup>

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- Are we therefore increasingly seeing attempts by external actors to influence national discourse? Such tendencies can be clearly seen not only on social media but also through fake news, the influencing of national elections,<sup>3</sup> and digital attacks on information technology.

There is no doubt that the separation of foreign and domestic policy makes less and less sense when it is also obvious that climate change, the loss of biodiversity, the spread of viruses and infections, and the advancing digitalization and artificial intelligence are invasive for the lives of all people.

However, if the pervasiveness of global effects is becoming increasingly visible at local and regional levels, we must not stop at merely using incentives, framework conditions, and voluntary commitments to avert the dangers to humanity and the planet. While global governance still has little scope for intervention, the national toolbox for enforcing the law is more fully developed. It is precisely in this sense that "global domestic policy" has been discussed for decades.

Laws and regulations are needed for community building and organization. We need compensation under civil law as well as criminal consequences for misconduct. If states and the private sector enter commitments to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, for example, or if these are legally binding, violations of the law must also have international legal consequences. The legal conditions for this can be improved, for example by expanding the mandate of the International Criminal Court, i.e., extending it to fields of human interests.

Such a demand remains meritless as long as the possibilities for enforcement are extremely limited. It is like the reform of the UN Security Council - especially around permanent members with veto rights - against which there are hardly any convincing counterarguments, but which would have to be decided by those who would lose influence due to the reform. The result: more than poor so far.

However, the current planetary risks have taken on a new dimension:

- Can parents and grandparents continue to do business as usual and thus seriously endanger the lives of their children and grandchildren?
- Can companies permanently risk their business models being impaired by, for example, climate change and the threat of drastic regulation? Should they not instead support a solution that accounts for the interests of society as a whole and stakeholders that enables a long-term course that can be modified, rather than disruptive changes with an unknown outcome?
- Must members of government expect not only to be classified in the historical record as irresponsible cynics if they implement the indisputably necessary measures but also to be held legally responsible?

In my opinion, these questions are justified, but they do not remove the need to develop instruments that are suitable for meeting the major challenges.

**»Laws and regulations are needed for community building and organization.«**

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- <sup>1</sup> A reformed UN lies at the center of a shared BRICS vision of a restructured global political, economic, and financial architecture that reflects the contemporary world and is more equitable, balanced and representative. BRICS has stated its inclusive and representative vision for reform in the Joint Statement on Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System, adopted in 2021. Other BRICS security mechanisms provide for dialogue and sharing of best practice in the areas of counterterrorism, cyber-security, transnational organized crime, anti-drug, and anti-corruption cooperation. See BRICS (2023).
- <sup>2</sup> The US Republicans' fear that singer Taylor Swift could intervene in the election campaign is one example.
- <sup>3</sup> See Vertigo Releasing (2023, May 25). Reality | Official U.K. Trailer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZKeY3Tw6SI>