

**PROJECT ON NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM
STRUCTURES WORKING GROUP
Multilateral Issue Team**



Structures in Current Environment Proposed Solutions

rev 3

Multilateral Structures: Solutions

The Strategic Perception of Multilateralism

Although the United States led the creation of the contemporary global multilateral system, e.g. the United Nations, it was left to policy rather than bureaucratic structure to carry the initiative forward. In recent years there has been a significant change in the character of the international environment as the original “inhabitants” – national governments – have been joined by Non-Governmental Organizations and private sector actors.¹ This, plus the increasing pace of globalization, has inevitably led to an expanding importance for multilateral activity by governments.

National governments remain the primary actors in the international system: a system without its own formal governmental structure, where nations operate on a calculus of costs, benefits, fears and ambitions. International law, international organizations, and multilateral activities and processes in general do form the basis for relations among states “on most issues or most of the time.”²

The underlying components driving the effectiveness of the U.S. national security system in the multilateral environment are matters of policy and strategy, not structure. The primary reason why the U.S. government does not perform as effectively as it might in the multilateral environment is that it has an inadequate strategic appreciation of multilateral institutions. The rapid growth of multilateral organizations in scope and sophistication has outpaced any effort to grapple with them efficiently and effectively, which in turn has created an uncertainty of the role of multilateral organizations in achieving U.S. interests. In addition the U.S. government views the UN and other

¹ Jessica T. Mathews, “Power Shift,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (January/February 1997), pp. 52–53.

² Stanley Michalak “A Primer in Power Politics”, Scholarly Resources Inc, 2001.

international organizations as marginal for U.S. interests, although the reverse is true for most governments. This cause is related to the fact that the United States is accustomed to leading missions that relate to international security. Oftentimes, the U.S. government will prefer working unilaterally or bilaterally, due to the fact that it often seems a more direct and timely way to achieve its goals.

It should be noted that multilateralism as an activity of the USG has three distinctive characteristics: it is always a policy decision, it is always a multi-agency concern, and it always involves multiple interested parties outside of the USG. Given these complexities, it is difficult if not impossible to judge most multilateral activities as clear-cut failures of structure or policy. Nevertheless the judgment of almost all observers – American and foreign – is that the USG performance in the multilateral arena is less than optimal – that the United States consistently obtains less than it might otherwise achieve by a more effective performance – given any policy.

To a large degree this is due, as noted above, to the USG's lack of a strategic perception of multilateralism. As a result, the multilateral diplomacy of the USG is essentially tactical in character, employed in pursuit of generally short-term and specific objectives, e.g. a bilateral trade agreement or condemnation of a government on human rights grounds. A long-term strategic view – which recognizes that both effective multilateral institutions must be cultivated before they are available for use, and that the existence of effective multilateral institutions is a necessary precursor for a rule-based international society – requires the fostering of multilateral institutions and processes in itself as a substantive policy objective.

In both cases – short and long-term - effective multilateral diplomacy depends on effective interagency coordination or the “Whole of Government” approach. Few if any multilateral questions fall neatly and exclusively into the area of responsibility of a single USG department or agency. In other words, effective multilateral policies and programs are a subset of effective interagency coordination, cooperation, and/or integration. Therefore any and all improvements in interagency coordination within the USG will tend to produce more effective multilateral performance.

Structural Symptoms and Problems

While policy and strategy drive the effectiveness of the U.S. national security system in the multilateral environment, structure does play a complimentary role. The U.S. government's present national security policy system requires that all policy decision be decided from the top down, which in turn requires that the President exercise a span of control far beyond his ability to adequately provide necessary guidance. This is very noticeable in the enormously variegated and diverse multilateral area. The president, various departments, Congress, and public interest groups all have a say and an authority when it comes to representing the U.S. government in international organizations. Rarely do these entities coordinate amongst themselves in any concrete way, and even more rarely in a consistent manner, and many of them often have self-serving interests and goals that benefit them, not the U.S. government at large. Cross-functional integrative structures operating on the basis of voluntary collaboration or delegated presidential

authority remain weak on all levels, as evidenced by the limited mandate of the Department of State's Bureau of International Organization Affairs (see below).

The lack of a single, coordinated voice is also exacerbated, if not caused, by weak domestic, Congressional and bureaucratic constituencies for multilateral engagement. With no strong constituency to advance the multilateral option during times when the U.S. government has a choice between acting multilaterally, bilaterally or unilaterally, the multilateral approach is often discarded without fair consideration of the pros and cons it offers.

Given that the primary instrument for pursuing multilateral obligations and opportunities is diplomatic negotiation, the State Department has traditionally had the responsibility for leadership in formal multilateral relations. To implement this historic responsibility, the department has a formal bureaucratic entity, the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO), to manage multilateral relations and to consider the role of multilateralism in the conduct of foreign affairs. The IO Bureau is therefore the designated institutional advocate for multilateralism in the Department of State, and the Department is the designated institutional advocate in the broader U.S. Government. However the Bureau of International Organizations Affairs, as can be deduced from its title, has a limited mandate essentially focused on the United Nations and related organizations. IO's mandate is ambiguous with regard to NGOs, the private sector, international networks and non-state actors. Additionally, IO does not have an across-the-board delegated role for all multilateral activities and interests of the USG, for example, there are no 'mirror' bureaus in corresponding agencies that facilitate interagency cooperation in the multilateral arena.

In addition to this lack of a single designated bureaucratic entity with responsibility for all multilateral activities, there is no comprehensive, cohesive process for "Whole of Government" management or policy. Uncoordinated, much less integrated, practice in developing and implementing long-term leadership policies in international organizations is the most prominent symptom of the U.S. government's inability to collaborate multilaterally. Multilateral initiatives, therefore, tend to be episodic, narrowly focused, short-term and therefore sub-optimal. Thus, two alternative structural solutions exist for which it is argued that 'Whole of government' approach could be better realized in matters of multilateral policy: namely, a stronger, broader IO department; or multiple IO-like departments across government agencies to facilitate 'whole of government' cooperation.

One result of the current structure is a lack of full interagency participation in multilateral activities by all relevant departments. All relevant agencies are not always represented adequately in the multilateral process, either in the Washington process, special missions or delegations, or in the standing multilateral missions. When multiple USG agencies are represented in the process, their 'predetermined' approach can be viewed as inflexible in an international, multilateral arena. Examples of these symptoms were pointed out responses to a Project on National Security Reform questionnaire circulated to representatives of U.S. multilateral partners.

In response, some respondents felt that while the Department of State is the primary multilateral point of contact within the U.S. government, the Department does not always appear able to perform that role and that therefore collaboration with the United States sometimes reaches a standstill. Other respondents noted that if they do not get the feedback they desire from one U.S. department or agency, it pays to seek out other agencies since each agency has its own voice, priorities and prerogatives when interacting with multilateral organizations. As such, U.S. interagency collaboration difficulties invites other multilateral actors to use the different U.S. decision making chains against one another, “shopping around” for a more sympathetic response.

Another telling symptom is the lack of flexibility during U.S. government consultation with other multilateral actors. This symptom has been noted by a broad cross section of foreign representatives. For example, a representative from the European Commission noted that often the U.S. government will come to the table with a well-devised plan, position, or policy, from which it cannot deviate, while other actors come to the table in order to discuss the issue as a prelude to developing their positions. The difficulties associated with developing an interagency position in Washington reinforce the tendency not to deviate from those positions, an inflexibility that undermines multilateral collaboration.

As a result, departments and agencies are left to their own discretion to interpret a broad National Security Strategy that fits in with their department’s personal mission. U.S. government departments and agencies tend to view multilateralism as a “tactic” by which to pursue their organizational or parochial missions and views.

As the USG approach is generally tactical in character, there is sporadic attention paid to the strengthening and building of multilateral institutions. Although the United States led in the creation of many international organizations, and traditionally provided leadership, there has been little focused attention on the vision and long-term goals of these institutions. This has resulted in a lack of investment in international institutions as tools of statecraft that go beyond our short term, “tactical” goals. Cultivating multilateral institutions so that they are available tools capable of supporting U.S. long-term strategies requires the use of time, resources, and personnel, all of which are scarce amongst departments, agencies, and Congressional committees and caucuses. The fear that engagement in a long-term multilateral strategy may not stand the test of time and circumstance creates hesitancy in departments and agencies to investment their time, resources and personnel.

The tendency of the White House to centralize major multifunctional policy initiatives because interagency committees are ineffective, means that policy guidance is often provided to U.S. representatives in multilateral settings without much opportunity to provide input. In such cases, the U.S. representatives have little authority to negotiate previously decided positions despite the fact that negotiation among partners constitutes a significant portion of multilateral engagement. This helps explain the previously observed symptom of insufficient flexibility during U.S. government consultation with other multilateral actors.

Finally, the lack of a long-term perspective and a persistent advocate helps to explain another problem: U.S. government personnel are relatively unskilled in multilateral diplomacy. Since multilateral relations are not seen as a priority of the system, there has been no strategic decision to develop the skills of diplomats or ambassadors that represent the United States in international organizations. This fosters an environment that does not produce many career multilateral diplomats, who would best be able to develop and carrying out long-term strategies at the multilateral level.

Proposed Solutions

Improvement in implementation of USG multilateral diplomacy will first of all depend upon improvement in the overall performance of the national security/foreign policy structure. A well-designed USG agency structure and/or process could, *inter alia*, provide the means necessary to facilitate more efficient and successful multilateral engagements when the leadership chooses to pursue that policy option. Having a well-designed structure in place would also enable improved handling of *ad hoc* multilateral efforts and responses that come about less from strategic planning and policy choices than from the need to respond quickly to developing situations.

Given this analysis, we see three opportunities for structural change relating to the multilateral function:

- Modifying Congressional budget authority;
- Reorganizing and strengthening of the IO Bureau of the Department of State so that it may be a more effective advocate, system advisor, and sometime implementer of multilateral activities;
- Fostering a system-wide appreciation for and competence in multilateral activities, primarily through personnel programs.

I. Modifying Congress and Budget Authority

In the case of the first of these recommendations, we wish to note that while the primary role of Congress in this area is the provision of legal and policy guidance, it also creates and finances the bureaucratic structure. The most important structural change that Congress could make would be to provide for more flexible budget authority, making it easier for departments and agencies to cooperate in the multilateral arena, as well as in other areas. This would include the bureaucratic authority to meld and merge funds for designated programs combined with more flexible personnel rules for interagency personnel assignments. For instance, budget incentives should be created for departments and agencies that bring them together for stabilization and reconstruction at the interdepartmental level by instituting a formal planning approach, along the lines of PDD 56. This would be especially important for bringing the so-called “mission” agencies (science, energy, etc) into harness with the policy agencies and make it easier to implement some of the organizational and personnel recommendations noted below.

II Reorganizing and Strengthening the Department of State: IO

Many departments and agencies engage in multilateral diplomacy in pursuit of their specific organization mandates, e.g. the Treasury Department in its dealings with the World Bank Group. However only the Department of State has a culture and perspective interested in “multilateralism” as a generic element in international relations..

Even within State, though, the primary institutional advocate for the multilateral process as such, and for the cultivation of international multilateral institutions that serve as strategically desirable tools in achieving long-term policy objectives..

But State’s mandate in this area is not fully comprehensive or recognized across the full spectrum of the USG. Most departments and agencies as discussed previously have a much narrower and more short-term focus. If the USG is to improve its multilateral performance by more consistently considering longer-range and more strategic considerations, it will need a strong institutional advocate. The Department of State is the most obvious candidate for this role but it will have to be, in some respects, a different department.

One approach is to consolidate the majority of “soft-power” programs in a new “super-department” of foreign affairs similar to the models of the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security. As most, if not all, “soft power” programs in the international sphere involve some degree of multilateralism, such a department would inevitably play a weightier role in internal USG deliberations and would inevitably play a multilateral advocacy role. However this proposal is really within the mandate of the National Work Group and will presumably be discussed in their report.

Whether or not the “super-department” of foreign affairs is actively considered, there is room for a proposal to redesign and reorganize the formal multilateral element of the present (or future) State Department to provide a more influential multilateral advocate.

State’s present lead role in representing the USG in some but not all formal international organizations is too narrow. While State is the lead agency with respect to the United Nations, for instance, it does not have that role in the World Bank Group, where Treasury is the lead. In NATO State shares the lead with the Department of Defense. No particular pattern exists across the full range of international organizations and activities.

That role needs to be expanded to other international organizations, to multilateral networks, and to the multilateral process in general throughout the USG. State needs to be able to be an effective advocate for multilateralism, to act as the repository of multilateral lore and “best practices, and to play the role of “den mother” for a multilateral culture across the bureaucratic system.

The ability for State to perform these tasks actually revolves onto its Bureau of International Organization Affairs. The following structural changes are therefore largely targeted towards that organization.

- A. IO's mission or mandate does not extend to the whole range of multilateral activities of the USG, but is essentially limited to formal international organizations, primarily the United Nations system. That mission should be reconsidered and expanded to the whole universe of governmental multilateral activities. That expanded mission should explicitly cover relations with networks, NGOs, the private sector, and other non-state actors participating in the multilateral world.
- B. However the expanded IO mission should not authorize the Bureau (or State) to automatically be the lead, director, or manager, of all of these activities. Treasury, for instance, will always have to play a lead role in certain areas, as will Defense, USTR, the Coast Guard, etc. in their areas of responsibility. In those situations, IO should be ready to act as advisor, facilitator, team manager, and water boy as necessary.
- C. To perform these tasks, in addition to expansion of its mission, IO will need expanded resources, especially personnel. However this additional staff should not all be State Department officials or even Foreign Service Officers. IO should be reconstituted as an interagency-staffed organization, with a significant number of its staff composed of personnel from other departments and agencies assigned on a regular rotational basis into established positions. This program should be broader than the existing State-DoD exchange program, and more like the process by which departments and agencies are represented in Embassy Country Teams.
- D. Its expanded mission should specifically authorize, indeed mandate, that IO have a responsibility to serve as a supporting and service organization to other departments and agencies. (Authority for easy interagency fund transfers and receipts will be needed.)
- E. The U.S. mission to the various UN locations and other U.S. missions to international organizations should review and expand their present interagency (Country Team) structure to better fit with and support the expanded IO mission.

In addition to the recommended structural changes to the IO bureau, we recommend expanding the role of the Legal Advisor since the core of multilateral activities is international law. The Office of the Legal Advisor (L) of the State Department should create an office specifically focused on international multilateral issues with a mandate to provide legal advice on multilateral questions to all departments and agencies. "L", in other words, should become the USG's – not merely the State Department's – internal international law firm. As with IO, this will require a government-wide recruiting system, and a more formal relationship for "L" with other departments and agencies.

III Fostering System-wide Multilateral Culture

Although there are rich institutional memories and organizational histories throughout the national security system, there is little investment in the maintenance of an organizational

memory at the national-security-system level or across the system. In addition there is a shortage of national security professionals able to move through numerous interagency micro-cultures. Such professionals are likely to be “cognitively complicated” persons who can look at problems from multiple perspectives. This cognitive complexity can develop from multiple sources, including an interagency assignment and a related promotion process.

With a strong interagency character (personnel, roles and mission), IO would be in a position to act as the “den mother” or “patron” or advocate of a system-wide multilateral culture. The following personnel programs are changes recommended to enhance and foster USG interagency multilateral culture:

- A. The George Schultz Foreign Affairs Training Center (FATC) at the State Department should be mandated to provide multilateral training. The FATC multilateral training program should be overseen by IO and its mix of agency representatives. Multilateral training should include subjects such as post-conflict reconstruction, humanitarian operations, and inter-agency coordination and operation in addition to core subjects such as international organization operations.
- B. Individual departments and agencies should provide a multilateral career and promotion system for some percentage of their own agency-selected officials. Regular assignments to IO, to U.S. Missions, to delegations and to the FATC would be elements of such a system, with promotion decisions remaining with the home organization.
- C. IO should take responsibility to design and manage multilateral exercises for the inter-agency community (with appropriate budget to support it).
- D. IO should initiate and coordinate among other departments a program for inviting officials from international organizations to these cross-training sessions, and explore the possibilities for utilizing the distance-learning program of the UN University.

Conclusion

Justification for this package of recommendations is predicated on the assumption that strong multilateral institutions can be valuable tools for achieving U.S. policy objectives. We further suggest that strong multilateral institutions can only evolve with the support that comes from valuing long-term strategic multilateral goals. . Regardless of the importance ascribed by any one administration to a multilateral approach to U.S. foreign policy toward achievement of its national interests, it is a fact that globally, multilateral processes and engagements are growing, if only because the vast majority of other governments look favorably upon them. Therefore, having the capability to effectively, transparently, and efficiently manage multilateral relations is critical to U.S. interests and the U.S.’s ability to maintain its position as a global leader. As Jose Joffe, publisher-editor of Die Zeit, put it:

“So if you want to lead, you have to heed. You have to salve national egos, to give a little here so that you can take a little there. This is the essence of good multilateral diplomacy, something the United States did so well in the glory days of the postwar period. ...Serve your own interest by serving those of others.”

To do so requires a policy perspective and active political leadership, but also a culture-friendly and competent bureaucracy organized appropriately. The USG is currently structured to pursue multilateralism as tactic in specific situations, but not to pursue multilateralism as a national strategic objective. As a result, the strategic objective is generally ignored, or at best generally traded off against short-term goals.

It is the thesis of this paper that a readjustment or a recalibration of this imbalance can be obtained by building into the bureaucratic structure of the USG a more effective bureaucratic advocate for multilateralism, fostering a more sympathetic culture, and encouraging the development of better trained and more experienced government personnel. These improvements would provide for better utilization of multilateralism – by providing a more effective diplomatic instrument - in pursuit of U.S. national interest.