

Incentive Compatibility and Global Governance: Existential Multilateralism, a Weakly Confederal World, and Hegemony

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The twentieth century was the century of international institutions. Although some international organizations can trace their origins back to the nineteenth century, and international institutions more broadly go back centuries, the number grew tremendously in the past hundred years. In 1909, a clearinghouse for information on international organizations listed 37;¹ by the end of the century, there were more than 6,400.

For some, the set of international organizations already in existence at the beginning of the twentieth century augured world government. In a work entitled *International Government* and published in 1916 in the midst of World War I, Leonard Woolf wrote, “in every department of life, the beginnings, and more than the beginnings, of International Government

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¹ See the Web site: <http://www.uia.org/statistics/organizations/ytb299.php>. The clearinghouse began as the Central Office of International Associations and later became the Union of International Associations. It has regularly published data on international organizations since 1910. For a brief history of the organization, see <http://www.uia.org/uia>.

2 | Arthur A. Stein

already exist.” In fact, Woolf noted, “the recognition of international interests, and that national interests are international interests, and *vice versa*, was the great social discovery of the last 100 years.” This view was seconded by political scientist Mary P. Follett shortly after the United States’ entry into World War I, who wrote that nations “have fought for national rights,” but these “are as obsolete as the individual rights of the last century.” Moreover, Follett argued, the United States held the key to the emergence of internationalism: “the contribution of America to the Great War will be told as America’s taking her stand squarely and responsibly on the position that national particularism was in 1917 dead” (quoted in Iriye 2002, 18, 20).

Yet, almost a century later, the growth of international organizations has not brought world government — indeed, there is great disappointment about the state of global governance. The end of the Cold War, although as momentous and consequential as the end of any protracted war between great powers, differed from its predecessors, the two World Wars, in that it brought no great efforts at building international institutions.²

The past decade and a half has been an era of great disquiet and uncertainty, one characterized simultaneously by globalization and heightened tribalism, and marked by profound concern about the continued viability and the need for reform of international institutions. Global developments are seen as challenging both the nation-state and international organizations.³ It has also been an era of unparalleled — for some, unchecked — US power.

² Ikenberry (2003a, 2003b), however, disagrees. He sees the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the launching of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) as constituting the pursuit of an institutional agenda comparable to that which followed World Wars I and II. I argue that this more recent agenda is not on a par with the earlier eras and that it constitutes adaptation of existing institutions rather than a major effort of institutional construction. I discuss the effect of extant institutions on the post-Cold War era later in this paper.

³ The implications of globalization for the size of the state system are discussed in Rosecrance and Stein (2006). In this paper, I use the terms organization, institution, and regime largely interchangeably, though they are subtly different. The literature on organizations focuses on concrete entities with buildings, addresses, and employees. Regimes and institutions refer to a broader set of...

Incentive Compatibility and Global Governance | 3

US dominance has meant that some look to the United States to lead (Mandelbaum 2005), while others fear US unilateralism. No one would argue today, as Follett did in 1917, that the United States would press the argument that “national particularism [is] dead.”

Ironically, the remarks by Woolf and Follett from nearly a century ago sound prescient today. Intervening events and current trends provide ammunition for those who would agree with their remarks, as well as for those who would find them idealistic and utopian: not only can one contest their views about the trajectory of international relations, but, in the current setting, one can also question the United States’ continued commitment to multilateralism, much less internationalism.

A great deal of dissatisfaction with global governance exists today, and many proposals for the reform of international organizations continue to be proffered. In this paper, I develop an argument about the requisites for international governance and the reform of international institutions. First, I distinguish between social engineering and governance at the global level and at the domestic level, and argue that international governance, especially, must be compatible with incentives. I then discuss the implications of incentive compatibility for the continuing import of power and interests and for the choice between going it alone and working with others through international institutions. I argue that the option of unilateralism exists for many states, not just Great Powers — that both unilateralism and multilateralism reflect power, interests, and historical legacy.

Then, I discuss the relationship between incentive compatibility and civil society, and the effect of the growth of democracies on the construction of international institutions. I argue that, increasingly, global institutions have to be compatible with societal preferences as well as with governmental ones. I then address the dissatisfaction with international institutions and demands for reform, arguing that many expressions of dissatisfaction should not be taken seriously and that some reforms are purposely illusory

Note 3 - cont’d.

...phenomena, although there is continued disagreement on their defining parameters. Here, my focus is primarily on concrete organizations, although many of my arguments apply to broader concerns. For a review of this literature, see Stein (forthcoming).

4 | Arthur A. Stein

— indeed, arguments about the inadequacy of governance and the need for reform can be exercises in posturing.

Even the United States continues to show a preference for multilateralism, and I argue that it does so for reasons of both domestic and international legitimacy. I then suggest that multilateralism is an existential reality in a world best characterized as weakly confederal. Following this is a discussion of the requisites of multilateralism, in which I argue that unilateralism is not just about a state's going it alone but about the existence of active disapproval of its actions.

In the final section, I delineate some criteria for constructing institutions, and argue that institutional design and reform should be incentive compatible and commensurate with the problems they are intended to deal with, that international institutions should allow differentiated commitments and encompass member states with shared interests. Throughout, I stress that debates about international governance mirror those about domestic governance, and that similar political dynamics are evident in both domains.

Incentive Compatibility and International Governance

The instruments available for governance and social engineering at the global level differ from those at the domestic level. Within societies, governments have an array of tools with which to coerce changes in individual behavior. Governments can socialize individuals and use the media and information flows to shape the ways in which individuals view the world. They can also induce behavioral change by manipulating the incentives that individuals face. In short, governments function at a supra level of authority in relation to the individuals whose behavior they seek to engineer.⁴

⁴ Lukes (1974) adds the shaping of individuals' preferences as another way in which governments exercise power. Foucault (1977) explores what he terms the "microphysics of power," emphasizing institutions of repressive social control. Strikingly, even with such instruments, there remains a great deal of illegal and deviant individual behavior within societies. Also striking is the absence of these instruments of control at the international level.

International institutions, in contrast, do not have at their disposal comparable bases of power. In international politics, no higher level authority has the tools to engineer the behavior of governments in ways that governments can shape the behavior of their citizens.⁵ The decisions of international organizations reflect the interests of their constituent governments, and enforcement depends on them as well. We are thus left with the reality that global governance must reflect the interests of states. The optimism of Woolf and Follett about world government depended on state interests. Woolf's argument hinged on "the recognition...that national interests are international interests," whereas, for Follett, national rights were obsolete and "national particularism was...dead."

International organizations thus arise and are fashioned to serve the interests of states. Global governance and the design of institutions depend on incentives and on constructing arrangements that are compatible with such incentives.⁶

Power, Interests, and International Institutions

That international institutions must be incentive compatible implies that the verities of international politics continue to be important. International institutions are the creations of self-interested states that are confronting a variety of problems and that prefer outcomes arrived at through joint, as opposed to individual, decision making (Stein 1982, 1990, chap. 2). A recognition of the importance of international organizations and their role thus

⁵ Persuasion exists internationally, but not in the sense in which it functions domestically. Internationally, persuasion functions through information about options and payoffs, and thus is inherently about the interests of the actors. Coercion exists internationally, but it is more successful in deterring, rather than compelling, the behavior of Great Powers; even when successful, the compulsion of behavior typically works against the weakest, least relevant states. To give but one example, trade liberalization requires agreement among major economic actors, and it would be impossible for the United States to force Japan to open its domestic markets to international forces; such coercion could occur only with respect to small and irrelevant players in the trading world (Stein 1984).

⁶ This does not mean that there are no agency issues or that international organizations do not develop some degree of independence (Haftel and Thompson 2006).

6 | Arthur A. Stein

does not require one to conclude, as Iriye (2002, 158–59) does, that power relations among major states constitute the traditional view “presented in conventional vocabulary and frameworks” and that international organizations are part of “an alternative definition of international relations [that has] been gaining strength and that a new vocabulary might be needed to note that development.”

The Option of Unilateralism

The need for incentive compatibility means that states have the choice between acting on their own and acting in conjunction with others, between working through existing international organizations and ignoring them, between following the extant strictures of international law and ignoring them. That remains as true today as it has been for centuries. What is different today, however, is the broad range of possibilities that exist for acting in conjunction with others. The choice between unilateralism and multilateralism exists not only for the United States — the context in which most discussions of this arise — but also for others. Indeed, the choice of going it alone, separate from its efficacy and advisability, is open to all.

Every one of the list of particulars adduced as evidence of US unilateralism is available as an option for other, nonhegemonic powers. For example, the Bush administration has been castigated for choosing not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol but instead introducing its own “Clean Skies” initiative. Yet, in Canada, the Conservative Party’s election triumph in January 2006 has had much the same effect on ending Canada’s adherence to the protocol. The consequences of joining or not may be different, both for the country making the choice and for all others, but the choice remains.

The point applies as well to the use of force. The United States is not the only country to use force unilaterally and without international approval. Australia, for example, has twice intervened militarily in East Timor, once at the request of the international community and once at the request of the East Timorese government — in the latter case, Australia acted according to its perceived national interests and without seeking the approval of the Security Council. The issues for any power are capability and cost. A state has the choice of acting on its own if it has the ability to

do so and is willing to bear the cost. For example, Israel chose to attack the Osirak reactor in Iraq in 1981 — it had the ability to do so and it was willing to pay the political costs of going ahead.

Unilateralism is, of course, more consequential the more powerful the state that exercises it. A middle power that pursues a unilateral course can be seen benignly as a free rider or malevolently as a system challenger, but a hegemon that pursues unilateralism is likely to be upsetting the very possibility of a co-operative solution. Moreover, to the extent that multilateral institutions constitute a mechanism by which others are able to constrain a hegemonic power, unilateral policies by such a power pose a larger set of challenges to other states in the system than merely the issue at hand. Thus, the US (and Canadian) response to Kyoto is not about the protocol itself, but a symbol of a larger problem.

Unilateralism, Multilateralism, and State Interests

Unless one is prepared to argue that states do not know, or are willing to act contrary to, their own interests, unilateral action must be seen as being in a state's interest. The choice of multilateralism over unilateralism must perforce also be in a state's interest. That both unilateralism and multilateralism reflect state interests poses an analytic problem, however, especially for those who recommend institutional reform.

Singer, Walsh, and Wilkening (2004), for example, recognize the role of state interests, then trip all over themselves in defining unilateralism and multilateralism. They note that countries cannot be convinced “to act for long in ways that are incompatible with their own interests”; rather, they act in terms of how they see their interests, “not how an outside power thinks they ought to.” The authors define multilateralism as “an approach to foreign policy that seeks durable solutions to major international security problems through cooperation based on mutual interests as prescribed by dialogue.” They contrast this approach with a characterization of unilateralism as “ad hoc cooperation based on coalitions willing to act according to the self-perceived interests of a major power as defined by its own *dictat*” (p. 8).

The authors' caveat that co-operation is “based on mutual interests as prescribed by dialogue” seems at least slightly at odds with the presumption

8 | Arthur A. Stein

that states perceive their own interests in their own terms and not in terms of what others think they should want. By suggesting that “self-perceived interests of a major power [are] defined by its own dictat,” the authors merely restate what they say is true of all states — that they see their own interests in their own terms. Thus, the discussion of the co-operation of unilateralism is contradictory. States are said to join coalitions of the willing and to act according to the interests of a major power, which violates the presumption that states do not act “in ways incompatible with their own interests.” Alternatively, that co-operative coalitions of the willing exist must mean that coalition members see it in their interest to join. Both multilateralism and unilateralism are seen as entailing co-operation and, in the end, the only coherent difference between the two definitions is that multilateralism seeks durable solutions and unilateralism is about ad hoc co-operation. But there is nothing in the nature of these terms to suggest they are about durability or ad hoc-ery.

Recognizing that foreign policy is rooted in state interests leads to the understanding that the choice between multilateralism and unilateralism is in the service of the same objective, and that the choice reflects an assessment of the costs and benefits of available opportunities and extant constraints. It is fallacious to suggest that multilateralism is in a state’s interest but unilateralism is not, because any action, especially a unilateral one, must be in a state’s interest. Thus, those who argue in favor of multilateralism must do so on the basis of a calculation of the cost effectiveness or efficiency of such action.⁷ They could argue that some policymakers have made the wrong calculation about the relative costs of unilateralism and multilateralism, but such an argument implies that the environment is ambiguous enough that people can draw contradictory assessments of net

⁷ For a discussion of competing bases for assessing self-interest, see Stein (1990).

Here, normative arguments on behalf of multilateralism face a problem. Ikenberry (2003b, 55) argues that the United States has created and supported only those multilateral institutions it could dominate or in which it found that the gains from “locking other states into enduring policy positions” was worth more than the costs of reduced policy autonomy. But it is hard to square this positive view of multilateralism with normative arguments that encourage US multilateralism and arguments that US policy has been hijacked by various factions of the Bush administration.

benefits and that the matter should be self-correcting as political leaders periodically learn anew the lesson of unilateralism's higher costs.

Alternatively, proponents of multilateralism could argue that, although unilateralism might be in a country's interest, there are negative spillovers, in the form of unintended costs borne in other areas, as well as positive spillovers, benefits that accrue in other areas by foregoing unilateralism in one domain. This would imply that, while unilateralism might indeed be better on some issues, its negative externalities must be paid in other settings.⁸ Proponents of multilateralism could also frame their argument around calculations of enlightened self-interest — that longer-term benefits accrue from short-term self-abnegation.

The point I develop below is that, by and large, states do see multilateralism as a preferable way to achieve their objectives if that option can lead to success. But multilateralism must also be in their interest.⁹ Moreover, if states perceive international organizations to be in need of reform, their interest in multilateralism must be sufficiently great as to exceed the expected costs of reform; otherwise, unilateralism or ad hoc multilateralism will be the result.

The Balance of Power and International Institutions

Earlier epochs of institutional formation, characterized by a multiplicity of Great Powers, were either multipolar or bipolar. Since 1990, however,

⁸ Ironically, one could make this argument concerning the Iraq war. The United States was able to topple Saddam's regime, and at minimal international cost. The problem arose with the negative spillovers, which first and foremost included the unwillingness of others to take part in postwar reconstruction and governance. The costs of the war have come from the occupation, which might well have been avoided if those who opposed to the war had taken part in postwar peacekeeping and stabilization.

⁹ I thus disagree with Kagan (2002a, 2002b), who argues that the United States is instrumentally multilateralist whereas Europeans are principled multilateralists. He cites French president Jacques Chirac as an example of the European approach, but France has not sought Security Council approval to intervene militarily in its former African colonies. On the other hand, Kagan does recognize that most US officials are at least pragmatic multilateralists and that, even in the United States, there are no true unilateralists to be found.

10 | Arthur A. Stein

the global distribution of power has changed fundamentally. The world has become unipolar or hegemonic, which, in turn, has affected the creation and evolution of international institutions.¹⁰

Multilateralism reflects a basic reality of international politics: the distribution of power. Modern multilateralism, consisting largely of the international institutions that have developed over the course of the past 150 years, has emerged in quite different settings. In the first wave, which emerged during a multipolar age, the ability to fashion arrangements for a multilateral setting was critical. The standard criticism that the League of Nations failed, in part, because the United States did not join is a critique that the institution's design was not compatible with the interests of all the parties needed to make it work. In contrast, the United Nations was designed for a multipolar age, but largely functioned in a bipolar one. Any new multilateralism thus has to deal with the core reality of the changed distribution of power. Whether one regards the world today as unipolar or hegemonic, or the United States as a hyperpower, this changed reality affects all states. It also changes their incentives for, and expectations from, multilateral arrangements. Any new institutions will perforce be built on the foundations of this new reality.

Although the United States is far and away the world's dominant power, domain-specific distributions of power also matter. In economic terms, indeed, the world is arguably multipolar, rather than unipolar, and the United States cannot act as unilaterally on economic and financial issues as it can on military ones. In addition, the continuing existence of a balance of nuclear terror imposes constraints even on the United States' exercise of unilateral military power.

If the nature of global governance merely reflects the distribution of power, then unilateralism reflects unipolarity, multilateralism reflects multipolarity, and bipolarity occupies some middle ground that one imagines is closer to unipolarity. In a world of one Great Power, one would expect that power to act unilaterally if power considerations were all that mattered. In a world of a number of Great Powers, power considerations

¹⁰In Stein (1984), I noted the irony of scholars of international political economy who talk of "hegemonic stability theory" in an era that security scholars characterize as bipolar or multipolar.

would imply some degree of multilateralism if the powers were to cooperate on international issues. In a bipolar world, one would expect little multilateralism to the extent that each power did not really need allies, absent a joint condominium between the two Great Powers. The question, then, is: how did we get multilateral institutions in an age of bipolarity? There are two answers.

One answer is that liberalism trumped bipolarity — that the United States as a liberal power created liberal institutions (Ikenberry 2001) — and that liberalism is somehow linked with multilateralism. My own argument (Stein 1984) is that, although the United States took a more active role in pressing liberalization following World War II, it also accepted and fostered illiberal practices. US liberalism was confined to US allies and clients, while adversaries experienced the brunt of US intolerance. The United States was willing to provide access to its markets and to accept an asymmetric bargain that tolerated others' illiberal practices, in part for political reasons. Those on the outside of that system paid the prohibitively high tariffs that remained as a legacy of Smoot-Hawley and, in the case of adversaries, were subject to detailed lists of items prohibited for export. The United States has been similarly illiberal on the movement of people, prepared to deny visas for visiting scholars and authors because of their political views and to deny Americans the freedom to travel to countries it sanctions. Comparable arguments can be made about US treatment of capital movements and its practice of supporting illiberal governments if they were anti-communist and undercutting democratic regimes and free elections out of a fear of communism. In short, any argument about US policy as driven by a general ideology of liberalism is problematic.

An alternative answer is that the bipolar reality of the Cold War meant that there were few global institutions, and they functioned only when the two superpowers agreed — for example, at the UN Security Council. What we think of as successful multilateral institutions were subsystemic, not global, and consisted of the members of one bloc. In effect, the multilateral order, especially institutions dealing with security, trade, and finance, was essentially an anti-communist rather than a global order. Ironically, then, many subsystemic organizations only became truly global with the end of the Cold War.

There is today a debate in the United States about the implications of unipolarity. For some, this era represents an opportunity for the United States to play an imperial role, to provide the global benefits of empire (Ferguson 2004; Lal 2004). For others, unipolarity is inherently short lived and will generate countervailing coalitions, which eventually will restore a balance of power.¹¹ Within the latter group are those arguing that US unipolarity can be extended and balancing avoided and limited through a self-conscious self-abnegation on the part of the United States through an emphasis on multilateralism. In my view, however, US unipolarity is occurring in a setting of existential multipolarity, in which the options of both unilateralism and balancing are few, constrained, and, at the extreme, ultimately self-defeating.

The overwhelming power of the United States has meant that both its disinterestedness and its concerns overwhelm multilateral efforts and that, if necessary, other countries, though unable to challenge the United States militarily, can stymie efforts by the United States to have international institutions rubber-stamp its preferences and actions. The result is both a desire for US leadership in the construction of multilateral governance and a fear of US domination of the resulting constructions.

Multilateralism and the Historical Moment

Changes in the distribution of power do not occur in an institutional vacuum. Typically, a set of enduring international institutions continues to function in their respective regions, functional areas, and domains. In contrast to earlier eras, the international institutional structure changed only somewhat as a direct result of the end of the Cold War.

Then there is the matter of history. The effects of the two World Wars were so profound, and the existing international organizational infrastructure so relatively weak, that, in effect, the design of international organizations had to start from scratch following each war — the League of

¹¹There is already an extensive literature on whether or not others have begun to balance US power; if they have not, why not; and if they have, whether this constitutes a new and different kind of soft balancing. See the discussion in the summer 2005 issue of *International Security*.

Nations, for example, did not survive World War II and a completely different organization was created after the war. That is not the case today.

At the end of the Cold War, there was a deep and rich array of existing international organizations. Thus, we are witnessing, perhaps for the first time in world history, the adaptation of international organizations to new circumstances and the adaptation of Great Powers to international organizations, not their creation anew. The organizational developments of the post-Cold War world consisted largely of adaptations of existing institutions. On the one hand, changing conditions and needs did not lead to the construction of new security institutions; instead, NATO was expanded to include new members and new out-of-area missions. On the other hand, the end of the economic Cold War was met not with the creation of new institutions but with the decision of major powers, such as China, to join an existing organization, the WTO. China had little choice but to accept the rules of the world trading order. The situation, and the negotiated outcome, might have been different had China been there at the time the organization was being designed. If the organization did not exist and were being negotiated now, the rules might well be more accommodating of China's expressed preferences for entry.

The nature of existing organizations affects not only new entrants but also extant members. The United States belongs to many organizations, is party to many agreements, and has many commitments. It must decide whether the change in relative power internationally should be the basis for exercising exit and voice or whether loyalty remains the order of the day. One implication is that the problem of US unilateralism antedates the current administration.¹² The phrase "coalition of the willing," so often used by and attributed to the Bush administration, originated in the Clinton administration. The following quotation from a 1998 op-ed piece makes the point clearly:

The United States has a penchant these days for joining international negotiations that spin out of control. We went to Kyoto to talk about climate change and discovered we couldn't sign the treaty. We went to Ottawa to talk about landmines and found our military problems ignored

¹²For a discussion of US ambivalence regarding international organizations, see Luck (1999, 2003), among others.

14 | Arthur A. Stein

by other states. We may be the “indispensable country,” as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright likes to say. But we often set ourselves up as Alamo holdouts, criticized as the indispensable country with indefensible positions. (Wedgwood 1998)

Table 1 was originally compiled to demonstrate US recalcitrance with respect to international treaties. Reordering the list by date, however, shows that US reluctance to join particular treaties predates the George W. Bush administration.¹³ In fact, since 1990, US administrations have had to accommodate themselves simultaneously to the existential reality of a rich environment of multilateral institutions and to the heightened possibility of unilateralism in a unipolar world. The issue of accommodating new power realities is also a problem that middle powers — especially former Great Powers — have to face. In effect, the distribution of marbles has changed, but the players are less willing to allow the one who is accumulating the marbles to have more of a say.

This, then, is what is new about the new multilateralism: historical organizations are dealing with a quite different distribution of power, and any new institutional arrangement will be constructed in the shadow of hegemony.¹⁴ The challenge of today is how to adapt existing organizations so that they remain compatible with the incentives of the United States, and how to fashion new multilateral arrangements in a unipolar age.¹⁵

¹³To re-emphasize the point regarding Kyoto, see Ward, Grundig, and Zorick (2001), who note that “analysis of climate change negotiations typically links states’ bargaining positions” to various factors that, for the United States, can include “heavy dependence on fossil-fuel use; the influence of its domestic fossil fuel lobby, articulated especially through the possibility of a Senate veto of ratification of the treaty; and concerns about loss of competitiveness if China was to be exempted from obligations under the climate-change regime” (439). Their work antedates the George W. Bush administration, however, and even de-emphasizes the US position in the global balance of power.

¹⁴I use this formulation to make the point that it is not simply the current distribution of power, but also expectations about the future distribution of power, that matters for institutional design today.

¹⁵As Weiss describes it, the real challenge is “to identify those [cases] where Washington’s tactical multilateralism kicks in” (2004, 137). See also Boulden and Weiss (2004).

Table 1: US Contrarianism and International Treaties

Treaty	US Action	Description
<i>Pre-George W. Bush administration</i>		
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights	Signed Oct. 5, 1977, never ratified	US maintains that such rights are “aspirational,” not inalienable or enforceable. 142 countries have ratified.
Convention on Discrimination against Women	Signed July 17, 1980, never ratified	US remains one of handful of countries, including Iran and Sudan, not to ratify
Convention on the Rights of the Child	Signed Feb. 16, 1995, never ratified	At the UN, only the US and Somalia have not ratified
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty	Signed Sep. 24, 1996, never ratified	US Senate voted in 1999 to reject ratification. Nuclear Posture Review of 2002 hints of a return to testing.
Chemical Weapons Convention	Signed Jan. 13, 1993, ratified Apr. 25, 1997	US set extensive limitations including which facilities can be tested, and providing for a “national security” basis for refusing inspection.
UN Framework Convention on Climate Control (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol	Ratified UNFCCC Oct. 15, 1992; signed Kyoto Protocol Nov. 12, 1998, never ratified	Of industrialized states, only the US, Australia, and Israel have not ratified the protocol. The US did ratify the UNFCCC, but has not complied.
Mine Ban Treaty	Opened for signature Dec. 3–4, 1997, entered into force March 1, 1999, US never signed	Turkey only other NATO nonsignatory, Cuba only other Western Hemisphere nonsignatory.
<i>George W. Bush administration</i>		
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and Draft Proposal	Signed Apr. 10, 1972, ratified Mar. 23, 1975, rejected draft proposal June 2001	US rejected negotiated draft proposals to strengthen enforcement mechanisms thought of as inadequate, and refused to return to negotiations.
Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty	Signed and ratified summer 1972, US unilateral withdrawal Dec. 13, 2001	US is first major power unilaterally to withdraw from a nuclear arms control treaty. The Bush administration wants to pursue missile defense to deal with “terror threats.”
Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court	Signed Dec. 31, 2000, unsigned June 6, 2002	Unprecedented “unsigned.” US pressing countries for bilateral agreements to exempt US military and government personnel from court’s jurisdiction.

Source: Quenemoen 2003.

16 | Arthur A. Stein

Incentive Compatibility, Civil Society, and the New Multilateralism

Increasingly, international institutions have to be incentive compatible with societal as well as governmental interests. The world is experiencing a third wave of democratization. The international system today includes a larger number of states, a larger proportion of which is democratically governed. The mobilization of civil societies and the spread of democratic governance have tremendous implications for the future development of international institutions. Once, international institutions reflected the interests of governments in their interactions with one another. Democratization often brings with it a heightened sense of nationalism (Snyder 2000) and a preference for unilateralism; increasingly, however, reform proposals reflect societal pressures (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The critical issue then becomes that of the alignment of state and society.

There is the prospect of a disconnect between domestic politics and the foreign policy of democratic governments, between the executive and legislatures, between governments and their citizens on the desirability and acceptability of the fetters of multilateralism. One possibility is that citizens might have a greater preference for multilateralism than does their government. More typically, governments recognize the benefits of, and the need for, multilateral institutions but have a difficult time selling them at home. This is one aspect of US unilateralism. In Table 1, for example, half the cases of US contrariness (and five of the seven cases prior to the George W. Bush administration) consist of international agreements and protocols that the US government signed but that the US Senate did not ratify.¹⁶

Indeed, one can argue that the key constraint to multilateralism on the part of the United States is not the executive branch's pursuit of hegemony in a unipolar world but a legislature and a society unwilling to accept as much multilateral internationalism as successive presidents have desired. Table 2 makes clear that, although both Republican presidents (Reagan and Nixon) and Democrat presidents (Truman and Clinton) pushed through significant numbers of international treaties, only a small proportion of

¹⁶Indeed, this problem of the lack of congressional approval has led to an increased use of executive agreements on the part of US administrations (Martin 2000).

Table 2: Treaty Actions of US Administrations from Grover Cleveland to George W. Bush

President	Treaty Actions during Presidency	Of Treaties Signed, Number Ratified during Presidency
George W. Bush	6 signed; 10 ratified 1 signature nullified 1 ratification withdrawn	0
Bill Clinton	32 signed; 30 ratified	10
George H.W. Bush	13 signed; 10 ratified	2
Ronald Reagan	14 signed; 19 ratified	5
Jimmy Carter	14 signed; 8 ratified	3
Gerald Ford	2 signed; 10 ratified	1
Richard Nixon	17 signed; 19 ratified	7
Lyndon Johnson	7 signed; 16 ratified	4
John Kennedy	6 signed; 4 ratified	0
Dwight Eisenhower	13 signed; 8 ratified	6
Harry Truman	16 signed; 14 ratified	9
Franklin Roosevelt	0 signed; 6 ratified	0
Herbert Hoover	1 signed; 4 ratified	0
Calvin Coolidge	1 signed; 0 ratified	0
Woodrow Wilson	0 signed; 1 ratified	0
William Taft	1 signed; 1 ratified	0
Grover Cleveland	0 signed; 1 ratified	0

Note: No treaties were signed or ratified after Roosevelt's second term in office. Presidents did not all serve the same length of time, and some faced Senates controlled by their opposition.

Source: Jurewicz and Dawkins 2005, 21.

these agreements were ratified. Indeed, every president since Eisenhower has seen the ratification of more treaties signed by a predecessor than of those he has signed. Moreover, President George W. Bush's record does not seem out of line with that of many modern presidents, especially Republicans (see Table 3).

An analysis of international treaties (Jurewicz and Dawkins 2005) finds that the United States has ratified only 160 (or 29 percent) of 550

18 | Arthur A. Stein

Table 3: Treaty Actions per Year in Office, US Administrations from Harry Truman to George W. Bush

President	Treaties Signed per Year	Treaties Ratified per Year	Signed and Ratified during Presidency per Year
George W. Bush	1.5	2.4	0.0
Bill Clinton	4.0	3.8	1.3
George H.W. Bush	3.3	2.5	0.5
Ronald Reagan	1.8	2.4	0.6
Jimmy Carter	3.5	2.0	0.8
Gerald Ford	0.8	4.0	0.4
Richard Nixon	3.1	3.5	1.3
Lyndon Johnson	1.4	3.1	0.8
John Kennedy	2.1	1.4	0.0
Dwight Eisenhower	1.6	1.0	0.8
Harry Truman	2.0	1.8	1.1

Note: At the time the source was published, George W. Bush had served one month of his second term. Ford served two years and six months. Nixon served a full first term and one year and six months of his second term. Johnson served one year and two months of his first term and a full second term. Kennedy served two years and ten months. Truman served three years and eleven months of his first term and a full second term. Some presidents faced Senates controlled by their opposition for some or all of their terms in office.

Source: Jurewicz and Dawkins 2005, 21.

active treaties. Yet this aggregate statistic masks interesting trends by issue and type of agreement: many more treaties that deal with national security or that facilitate trade and resource usage are ratified than treaties on human rights, labor rights, and the environment.

It might be that the United States is less willing than other countries to constrain its sovereignty in some areas. But the issue of a disconnect between governmental and societal preferences is not confined to the United States. Many elected governments discovered that their support of the United States in the war in Iraq ran counter to the preferences of a majority of their citizens. In addition, we often hear of Arab governments

that privately support various Western positions but do not do so publicly because of fear of opposition from the “Arab street.”¹⁷

Alternatively, it might be that the United States takes the signing of international agreements more seriously than do other countries, and thus is less likely to sign agreements merely for show without the intention of adopting them. This might especially be the case given the standing of international law in domestic law and the access available to US courts and the remedies they can dispense.¹⁸ In contrast, the multilateralism of autocracies can entail merely illusory commitment, in which public co-operation with other nations is matched by covert defection and internal violations of international commitments.¹⁹ There is no small irony to be found in assessing the correlation between treaty ratification and actual performance for democracies and autocracies. Although castigated for its failure to sign various international treaties, the United States has a better record in some areas than many signatories.

In the past, multilateralism was the product of a smaller set of states, fewer of whom were liberal democracies. Multilateralism in the modern world must be consistent with the levels of domestic political mobilization in prospective members.

Dissatisfaction and the Demand for Reform

That international organizations reflect the interests of states suggests that we should approach reform proposals with some degree of skepticism. There seems to be a continuous level of dissatisfaction with international

¹⁷One way to read the disjuncture between state and society in the United States and the Middle East is captured in the following quotation: “In Washington, officials lie in public and tell the truth off the record. In the Mideast, officials say what they really believe in public and tell you what you want to hear in private” (Friedman 2006).

¹⁸This is still an additional reason for the presidential use of executive agreements rather than treaties. Compliance with such agreements remains an executive prerogative and not subject to societal intervention via the judicial process.

¹⁹Striking examples include the lack of compliance with commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and those regarding human rights and women’s rights.

20 | Arthur A. Stein

institutions and a perpetual industry that proposes reform.²⁰ Commissions and reports pour forth recommending one international reform after another, but, like their domestic counterparts, they gather dust. Yet dissatisfaction does not necessarily equal failure that requires reform. Dissatisfaction often accompanies the best that can be done.

Prospective social engineers must assess the realities of international politics before contemplating reform or institutional construction. World politics reflects an equilibrium between power and interests, and might not be amenable to change. If both the absence and existence of international institutions reflect the interests of states, then the workings of international politics at any point in time constitute an equilibrium outcome. Demands for new institutions and for the reform of extant ones might then simply reflect dissatisfaction with an extant equilibrium.

That the world reflects an equilibrium and is unlikely to change explains why reform proposals often come from former officials. In the military context, it is retired generals who recommend reforms to do away with interservice rivalry — proposals they would never have championed when they were on active duty because such reforms do not reflect the interests of active duty officers. Blue ribbon commissions of former government leaders that recommend the strengthening of international institutions are of a similar character. When it is former leaders who are making reform recommendations, it is a good indication that reform is not in the interests of those currently in power.

Political outcomes, in both the domestic and international arenas, often reflect compromise among conflicting interests. The result might be an equilibrium outcome that is no one actor's ideal. Every actor can then complain about the outcome and proffer various alternatives, while remaining fully aware that nothing will change. Even if one actor obtains its ideal, others will surely not. Dissatisfaction by some or all is thus a political reality of governance, domestic or global, and not an indication of any prospect of reform.

²⁰Weiss and Young (2005) note that the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations was remarkably like the fiftieth in the calls for reform. Winkelmann (1997) traces Security Council reform proposals, while Archibugi (1993) discusses reform proposals floated in the wake of the end of the Cold War.

Intended Institutional Failure

The failure of institutions is often interpreted as a failure for them to work as intended. But there are times when institutions work exactly as intended, leaving many actors frustrated. For example, the US political system is often decried as slow, cumbersome, and imperfectly responsive, yet it functions as intended by the Founding Fathers, who wanted an institution to calm and mediate popular passions — thus, the frustrations experienced with the institution reflect its functioning as intended.²¹

The United Nations has worked exactly as intended and constructed, and this is the reason for the disaffection with it. During the Cold War, the institution did relatively little, as the conflict between the two superpowers precluded the Great Power co-operation necessary for it to do much. Following the end of the Cold War, the UN briefly became a more central actor in international politics, as the Great Powers could agree on some policies and were interested in an institutional rubric for their joint efforts. Much of the recent disaffection with the UN has to do with the heightened expectations generated during the early 1990s.

Feigned Dissatisfaction, Scapegoats, and Political Cover

Some expressed dissatisfaction with international institutions is feigned. State officials often criticize institutions that they prefer to have as scapegoats and providers of political cover. Their criticism is entirely for show, as are their proposals for reform.

Within national governments and international institutions, one sees feigned dissatisfaction repeatedly. Members of the US Congress happily criticize the Federal Reserve Board and use it as a scapegoat for inflation or deflation, but prefer to keep the Fed independent. They prefer to have the Fed pursue policies that it and most members of Congress find appropriate

²¹Ironically, many of the same people who express frustration with the workings of the US political system are also appalled at any effort to change it. A good example is provided by Democrats' reactions to President Franklin Roosevelt's 1938 plan to pack the Supreme Court with appointees more sympathetic to his political agenda.

22 | Arthur A. Stein

while retaining the ability to criticize the institution. In this way, they can demonstrate to their constituents that they feel their pain while signaling that they are not at fault.

International institutions play a similar role. National politicians are often happy to castigate international institutions while adopting the policies they recommend, knowing that such policies are best for their countries. The international equivalent of politicians' feigned criticism of central banks, for example, is the criticism of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by politicians for imposing conditions the politicians themselves want to adopt; in this way, government officials can offload the blame for necessary but unpopular economic reforms onto the IMF (Vreeland 2003).²² Indeed, blaming the institution is in the tradition of politicians who look to avoid blame (Weaver 1986). Thus, expressed dissatisfaction and proposals for reform are not necessarily consonant with a true preference for reform.

Institutions as Process and the Bicycle Metaphor

Dissatisfaction can also spring from success, rather than failure. This occurs when institutions are perceived as part of an ongoing process and stems from concerns that the process needs to be maintained or failure will result.

Some international objectives — Middle East peace and free trade, for example — are recognized as difficult things that can be achieved only in incremental steps. Middle East peace is seen as a process requiring many steps that cannot be taken without some degree of trust and gradual reconciliation. The metaphor used for the Middle East peace process is that of riding a bicycle: one must continue to pedal or fall off (Ross 2004, 350).

²²The argument has even been made that national politicians look to international organizations as a way of gaining autonomy from domestic pressures (Wolf 1999; Koenig-Archibugi 2004). Rather than losing autonomy from joining international organizations, national governments gain autonomy from more overbearing domestic pressures. In this way, international institutions undercut democratic governance. One study finds that political leaders choose legal dispute resolution as a means of obtaining political cover (Allee and Huth 2006).

This leads to an emphasis on maintaining the process and a sense that, if forward movement stops, disaster is at hand. The successes achieved are ignored, and the focus is on maintaining the process.

Something similar exists on the issue of world trade. Achieving liberalization is a long and extended process: complete openness to international markets cannot be achieved in one fell policy swoop; rather, it requires slow adjustment and the development of constituencies interested in continued and sustained openness. Thus, trade liberalization has proceeded in stages, with one trading round following another, and each tackling issues untouched by earlier rounds. Indeed, the very success in dealing with one set of issues brings new issues to the fore (Stein 1993). And at each round, there is concern that failure to proceed spells disaster, as if what has already been accomplished by way of liberalization would be undone.

It is such a progressive vision of process and movement that is at the heart of some of the expressed dissatisfaction with international institutions. But in such cases, it is the very success of the institutions that is in a sense responsible for the pressure to do more. In these matters, the least difficult issues are resolved first and the most difficult ones confronted at later stages. Agreements on easier matters provide no guarantee of continued progress. Dissatisfaction with the pace and with stumbling blocks is a price of the slow process that constitutes success, and not necessarily an indication of failure.

Institutional Failure, Complainants, and Stakeholders

Institutions also generate dissatisfaction by complainants who are not direct stakeholders capable of undertaking reform. This is true whenever the actions of stakeholders generate externalities for those who are not members of the institution. Outsiders who bear the costs complain and want reform of the institution, but it is the inside stakeholders who control the possibility of reform — and unless they are dissatisfied, nothing will happen.

The US Congress provides a simple example. Members of Congress like a system of campaign finance that allows them to outspend their challengers vastly, if it does not dissuade challenge entirely, and in which incumbency is virtually a guarantee of re-election. Voters might not like that

24 | Arthur A. Stein

outcome, but politicians do. The disaffected reformers are voters, but it is politicians who must approve any reform proposal. When voter disaffection is great enough, politicians have every incentive to undertake reforms that make only a cosmetic difference, not real change.

Does reform of international institutions have the same characteristics? Many activists in civil society find international institutions inadequate, yet that is not the same as when states find them inadequate. Too often, reform recommendations come from the ranks of global civil servants who staff international institutions but have minimal real authority, or from academics, international lawyers, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) who want institutions and their member governments to do things they do not want to do. Reform proposals also come from states that are excluded from one form of global governance or another.²³

Reform results from the interests of stakeholders. Nonstakeholders can effectuate reform when they can affect the incentives of stakeholders — or they can create alternative institutions.

The Kabuki Dance of Demand and Supply

The political dynamics I have described lead to charades of politics, in which reform is demanded but not really desired and in which proffered reform is illusory. States and the politicians who direct them complain at times and argue for reform, but prefer things to remain unchanged. And when the pressures for reform become unstoppable, states and the politicians who direct them supply reform without change, dealing with political pressures in a wholly illusory fashion.

Politicians often face pressure, for example, for protectionism from particularistic interests who have been hurt by increased trade openness. Yet, they are also aware that continued free trade is optimal for the society as a whole. In such a case, politicians need to appear to be responsive to protectionist demands while not actually offering serious protection — a stand that characterizes many US trade policies (Goldstein 1993). Similarly,

²³An example of this is the proposed reform for increasing the number of permanent members on the UN Security Council.

politicians face pressures to deal with immigration flows. Domestic residents concerned about national identity as well as their jobs press for tight immigration controls. On the other hand, immigration flows reflect demands for labor. Clever politicians respond by promoting policies that appear responsive to demands for immigration control while simultaneously allowing flows to continue (Rudolph 2006).

In many cases, instead of adopting illusory policies to deal with demands for reform, politicians propose changes in the process that either have no hope of adoption or would not deliver change even if adopted. Rather than propose or pass balanced budgets, for example, politicians argue for a line item veto or a budget committee or a constitutional amendment. Weaker still, they propose commissions to study the problem.

Similarly, politicians around the world are feeling the pressure to democratize, and have every incentive to generate the appearance of democratization that does not threaten their hold on power (Sweet 2001). We thus witness liberal reforms with continued one-party rule.

There is, in short, a stylized dance of institutional reform that has to be separated from the real thing. There are complainants who have no power and powerholders whose complaints constitute scapegoating and blame avoidance. There are reform proposals that are not real reforms. There are demands for reform that do not reflect a true desire for reform, and there are proffered reforms that are intended to be illusory.

Palliative, Corrective, and Transformative Reforms

Reform efforts and recommendations come in different forms and for different reasons. It is possible to distinguish among palliative, corrective, and transformative reform recommendations for international institutions.

Palliative institutions and reforms are intended to deal with the fallout of extant problems without really solving them. Institutions for dealing with refugees, for example, do not address in any fashion the underlying source of the problem; rather, they deal with the pain. Similarly, palliative reforms for extant organizations are intended to deal with the problems generated by international institutions. Recommendations intended to spruce up the image of the UN are palliative.

26 | Arthur A. Stein

Corrective reforms are ones intended to fix extant problems — to restore institutions to their past healthy status. Examples of corrective reforms are recommendations for transparency intended to deal with the rise of corruption.

Transformative reforms are intended to chart new institutional territory — to get extant institutions to function differently, to tackle new issues, or to create new international institutions and expand the scope of global governance.

Transformative reforms are the hardest to achieve because they require the states that are the constituents of international institutions to defer some aspect of their sovereignty and expand the extent of governance above the nation-state. Ironically, without careful empirical assessment, I would venture to say that most reform efforts are of this type, and intended to push the agenda of global governance. Such reforms often originate among idealists in civil society and in NGOs, and are about universalizing a set of values and practices that exist in some societies but that are hardly universal; they are also portrayed as progressive.²⁴ Such reforms move beyond the small but active reform industry when they are intended to deal with widely perceived problems and reflect the interests of major states and their governments.

Understanding the prospects for reform requires a sense not only of the nature of the reform but also of the complaints expressed about current practices. As in other areas of politics, there is much shadow play and posturing in the politics of institutional reform.

International Institutions as Cargo Cults

Finally, there are those who want international co-operation but who mistake international institutions for international co-operation — they seem to believe that, if one creates institutions, international co-operation will follow. The problem is that institutions are vehicles for achieving

²⁴This has led one scholar to characterize such efforts as “the new cultural imperialism” (Lal 2004). More broadly, Lal argues that there is a fundamental difference between spreading materialist values and spreading Western moral values. The former are accepted, the latter generate a backlash.

co-operation that are designed by states with an interest in joint, rather than individual, decision making.

Absent states that are interested in achieving outcomes other than those that can be achieved through individual decision making, the argument for institutions resembles that of a cargo cult. Nobel physicist Richard Feynman (1985) gives the following example of people who see the form but do not understand the process. He tells the story of South Sea islanders who experienced prosperity when US military aircraft used their islands during World War II. They remembered how it had been when the planes flew and they wanted those days, and the planes, to return. So they cleared the runways, rebuilt the towers, and put men with earphones in the towers. They had the form exactly right, but the planes of the US military did not return. The islanders did not understand the causal process. In a sense, those who design institutions, hoping co-operation will follow, also miss the causal sequence.

Institutions might engender co-operation, but they first require co-operation. This core reality bedevils many liberal arguments. Many see trade as the route to international co-operation, yet trade requires trade agreements and thus itself requires co-operation as a prerequisite.²⁵

The Roller Coaster of Heightened and Dashed Expectations

The post-Cold War era has been one of great hope for, and great frustration with, global governance. During the Cold War, the reality of bipolar conflict and competition meant that truly global governance depended on the rare prospect of an alignment of superpower interest or disinterest. Governance efforts, therefore, were more typically less than global. But the end of the Cold War meant the end of the old mechanisms of control and brought new problems to the fore.

At first, there were depictions of a period of a new concert of powers (Rosecrance 1992) and a flurry of UN activity. During the early 1990s,

²⁵This point underlies the problem of selection bias in the empirical assessment of the effect of institutions. Scholars have attempted to demonstrate that institutions are effective in generating state compliance, but the problem is that states join institutions with which they intend to comply.

28 | Arthur A. Stein

there was a series of peacekeeping missions and a sense that the Security Council could act truly as an institution of collective security. There were hopes for expanded prospects for global governance and a renewed focus on reforms that would be required to make extant institutions function in a new age.

Such hopes were only somewhat dashed by the slaughter in Rwanda, which generated an outpouring on the need for humanitarian intervention. Now, in the wake of the Iraq War, there is further disillusionment. Ironically, then, much of the concern about international institutions stems not just from the Bush administration's style or policies but also from the elevated expectations generated during the 1990s.

This roller coaster of heightened expectations and the disappointments of reform and expanded governance have masked the reality of the continuing growth in, and demand for, multilateral institutions.

Summary on Reform

Demands for reform provide no necessary indication that reform is either desired or desirable. At the same time, reforms themselves do not necessarily imply that anything will change. Nor do they imply that change will necessarily constitute an improvement. Citizens within societies have discovered that, even when there are market failures, the construction of governmental regulatory regimes to deal with them can generate government failures that are far worse than the market failures they were intended to address. This is precisely the nature of one of the lines of criticism of the major international financial institutions. In such cases, transformative reforms, although pitched as progressive, may turn out to be regressive.

Reforms embody different objectives and have different implications. Some merely deal with fallout, some try to correct problems that have arisen with time, others try to push forward an agenda for global governance.

International reforms, whether serious or illusory, merely palliative or truly progressive, typically depend on more, not less, international co-operation. They are intended to reduce the scope of state autonomy, not to increase it. As such, reforms depend on and serve to increase multilateralism, and unilateralism is seen as their foil.

The Continuing Preference for Multilateralism

Despite changes in the global distribution of power, despite the difficulty of meeting the requisites of incentive compatibility for state and society, and despite the illusory character of many discussions of global governance, there is a continuing demand for international institutions and multilateralism, even on the part of the United States.

A General US Interest in Multilateralism

When people talk of multilateralism or the lack of it, they really have in mind the United States and whether it is going it alone or in concert with others. Since the United States is the lone remaining superpower, other countries have a heightened interest in having it act in concert with them, rather than going it alone. For the United States to act in concert with others, however, it must have an interest in doing so; thus, any call today for multilateralism has perforce to take into account US interests.

At the same time, the United States actually prefers multilateral solutions, for the following reasons. First, it is the lone remaining superpower only in the military, not the financial, sense. As a superpower, it is unique in being a net debtor and in having much of its debt held by another state of some power: China. Although the situation constitutes a balance of financial terror in that China could exercise its weapon only at great cost, it remains the case that the United States is financially constrained.

Second, the United States has repeatedly sought financial support. During the Cold War, it regularly pressed its allies to increase their payments in support of US military installations. Since the end of the Cold War, it has asked or pressed for financial contributions for expensive endeavors.

Third, the United States necessarily restrains itself militarily, as it has throughout the nuclear age, because unbridled use of its military power has enormous political consequences for itself.

In a post-imperial age, in which populations are mobilized and mobilizable, Great Powers need the support of others to demonstrate that their actions are not solely self-interested. The United States has repeatedly justified its actions, not as a matter of self-interest, but in universalistic terms, and such justifications ring hollow if other nations do not support

30 | Arthur A. Stein

US objectives or actions. As a result, even during the Cold War, the United States pressed for allied assistance for its extensive military operations in Korea and Vietnam; it has continued to seek such support for its post-Cold War operations.

Peculiarly, the United States is so powerful militarily that it needs the help of others to deal with the challenges it faces. In conventional military engagements, it cannot be challenged, much less defeated. Instead, the United States confronts unconventional warfare in extraterritorial engagements and terrorist attacks both at home and abroad. Dealing with terrorist attacks or with unconventional warfare more broadly necessarily requires the support of other countries, because such conflicts entail political, not solely military, solutions.

In short, the United States has had, and continues to have, an interest in multilateralism.

The US Interest in Multilateralism and the War in Iraq

Although castigated for acting unilaterally, in fact the United States put together a substantial “coalition of the willing” — the Bush administration claimed initially that 49 countries had “publicly committed to the Coalition” (United States 2003) — to wage war in Iraq. The coalition was derided because some of the countries were small and insignificant, yet the list also included the United Kingdom, Japan, Italy, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia — ranked second, fourth, seventh, tenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth in the world in terms of defense spending in 2004 (SIPRI 2005).²⁶

The United States has carried the bulk of the military effort in Iraq, and easily could have undertaken the entire operation without any support (setting aside the issue of access provided by neighboring countries). The assistance provided by most of the coalition is so marginal that it is largely symbolic. Nevertheless, in waging the effort, the White House trumpeted the coalition. The press release announcing the list of coalition partners emphasized four features of the coalition. The first two were standard

²⁶These rankings are based on market exchange rates, rather than on purchasing power parity.

measures of power: the combined population and combined gross domestic product of coalition countries. The other two features, however, were unrelated to issues of power: “Every major race, religion, ethnicity in the world is represented” and “The Coalition includes nations from every continent on the globe” (United States 2003). Thus, the coalition was presented, first, as an agglomeration of resources and capabilities and, second, as broadly representative by race, religion, ethnicity, and region. Given how little the other nations provided by way of capability, however, it seems that what the United States sought was their representativeness.

Multilateralism and International Legitimacy

A set of questions arises from a White House emphasis that a coalition was waging the war and the marginal character of that contribution. Why did the United States seek others’ support, and why did the others offer it? Since their contributions were not coerced, what was being exchanged?

States that undertake collective efforts need both capability and legitimacy. The United States sought a coalition to wage the Iraq War not for its capability but for the legitimacy it would extend to the US-dominated operation. The coalition was not an old-fashioned alliance of capability aggregation. As even the White House press release noted, “[c]ontributions from Coalition member nations range from: direct military participation, logistical and intelligence support, specialized chemical/biological response teams, over-flight rights, humanitarian and reconstruction aid, to political support” (United States 2003). In short, political support was as important as any military capability.²⁷

Similarly, opposition to the US military effort by France, Germany, and Russia was significant not because of any military opposition they might have offered or any capability they might have extended to Iraq, but because their political opposition undercut the legitimacy of US actions.

²⁷On the issue of legitimacy, begin with Franck (1988); Hurd (1999); and Clark (2003). Note that my characterization of legitimacy as the affirmation of non-particularistic interests differs from that of Hurd (1999) and is quite close to Thompson’s (2006) argument that international organizations provide strategic information transmission. My point is that the information transmitted about the broad support for a course of action is precisely what legitimacy is about.

32 | Arthur A. Stein

When people talk about multilateralism, then, they mean more than a set of states that combine their capabilities to achieve some objective. They also have in mind the legitimacy that comes from states' acting in concert because their objectives are not particularistic national interests but common interests.

Multilateralism and Domestic Legitimacy

Multilateralism is about obtaining not only international legitimacy, but also domestic legitimacy. In a world in which international institutions need to be compatible with societal incentives as well as governmental ones, multilateralism also provides domestic legitimacy to governments that need the support of citizens to sustain their foreign policies.

The relationship between multilateralism and domestic legitimacy can be assessed by asking simple questions. Are political leaders punished or rewarded for flouting the norms of the international community, or even for ignoring the outside world? Do leaders find it important to obtain international support for their foreign policy positions?

Arguments have been made for two diametrically opposed logics characterizing the relationship between the outside world and internal politics. On the one hand, the outside world is a source of legitimacy for both domestic and foreign policy. States want the recognition of others. Individual leaders go to summits with others as a way of establishing their political legitimacy. The acceptance of a government as an interlocutor by the outside world enhances its internal legitimacy. Membership conditionality is an effective instrument in eliciting contested domestic change (Kelley 2004). Unilateral policies risk, or ensure, the hostility of the outside world, and a regime that practices them runs the risk of losing domestic support and legitimacy. Governments thus prefer multilateralism as a way not only to reduce costs but also to bolster the internal acceptability and legitimacy of foreign policy — and even of domestic policy, as Solingen (1998) and Snyder (2000) have argued in different settings.

On the other hand, the argument has also been made that pressure from the outside world can reinforce domestic political legitimacy — that political elites can use outside pressure to heighten domestic support and generate nationalistic fervor in conflicts with the outside world. External

pressure can delegitimize internal domestic opposition and make possible the expansion of state power. Indeed, Nincic (2005) argues that this is the major consequence of sanctions — collective sanctions have rarely generated foreign policy shifts, but in many cases have strengthened the sanctioned regime. Pushed to the extreme, this view suggests that unilateral policies can go down well domestically, and also that regimes can purposely instigate conflict with the outside world as a way of bolstering their position at home — an argument that constitutes the heart of diversionary theories of war.

Ironically, one can see both arguments at work in US policy toward Iraq across the two Bush administrations. In 1990, the first Bush administration was readily able to mobilize world support to oppose Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. It had a more difficult time mobilizing domestic support, however, and indeed required a UN resolution in order to obtain a congressional resolution — and that just barely. In contrast, in 2002 and 2003, in the wake of 9/11, the George W. Bush administration easily garnered domestic support for the war in Iraq even in the face of the opposition of key allies.

This discussion implies — its theoretical incompleteness notwithstanding — that multilateralism can result from either a strong, confident government or a weak one in need of external legitimacy. Conversely, unilateralism can also result from a strong regime unconcerned with external affirmation or a weak one needing external conflict to generate defensive patriotism.

This suggests that an important component of unilateralism is not merely the international strength of the regime in having the capability that unilateralism requires, but also its internal strength or weakness. Unilateralism might also reflect a societal preference, not merely a governmental one. Yet, multilateralism too emerges as a product of multiple forces, sometimes reflecting regime strength, binding and linking its society to others, sometimes reflecting regime weakness and the need for external legitimacy.

Existential Multilateralism in a Weakly Confederal World

Although unilateralism remains an ever-present possibility and although international organizations reflect the power and interests of their members,

34 | Arthur A. Stein

the growing number of such organizations, as well as international laws and agreements, over the past century makes multilateralism an existential reality. The world consists of overlapping clubs in every region and every functional domain. Indeed, the number of intergovernmental organizations well exceeds the number of states in the system, and there are so many international treaties and agreements that it is impossible to compile a complete list.²⁸ Thus, although the option of unilateralism is available, the existence of such a large array of international institutions and agreements sustains a multilateralist reality.

A debate is ongoing in the security literature about deterrence and the options confronting states armed with nuclear weapons. There have always been those who have argued that deterrence is a policy choice: states could eschew deterrence and choose to procure nuclear weapons and develop doctrines of war fighting, and with sufficient nuclear superiority could engage in nuclear war. The competing view, however, is that deterrence is an existential reality once nuclear-armed states face each other (Bundy 1984). Relative numbers and military doctrines do not matter. Rather, the reality that both have weapons, that no defense is perfect, that no pre-emptive strike can assure that every weapon is destroyed, and that even one such weapon can cause so much damage as to exceed any potential political benefit imagined in its use, all combine to create deterrence as an existential reality, not a doctrinal choice. However much governments procure weapons and espouse doctrines to the contrary, deterrence is simply a fact of life, one which constrains nuclear states.

The same point can be made about multilateralism: it is an existential reality. Much as governments try to deny the reality, much as they try to go it alone, in the end they are constrained by the reality that they can do little of any consequence without acting in conjunction with important others. One can say that even the Bush administration is aware of this. Blowing things up is something the United States can accomplish on its own —

²⁸One reason it is so difficult to determine the number is that the UN's central database of treaties is incomplete because only some international treaties are deposited with the secretary-general. Others are deposited in specific countries, international organizations that are not part of the UN, and with specialized agencies of the UN (Jurewicz and Dawkins 2005).

although even there, it needs others' approval for the use of overseas bases and for overflight permissions — but it can do little else. In one domain after another, the United States is looking for the support of others and discovering this hard reality of international politics.

Virtually any concern of the US government requires a multilateral response (Nye 2002). Typically, international co-operation is most limited in the area of security, but whether the issue is the war on terror or combating the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the United States cannot achieve its objectives alone. It can take specific steps on its own, but achieving its objectives at an acceptable cost requires the assistance of others, or at least their forbearance and acquiescence. Even Bush Republicans make this point: Richard N. Haass, the initial director of policy planning at the State Department during the Bush presidency, said (2003),

The United States is the most powerful country in the world by almost any measure of power. That said, however, what is noteworthy about this world is how, for all of our power, we can't meet most of the challenges we face on our own. And we certainly can't meet any of the challenges we face better on our own than [we can by] cooperating with others.

He went on to add that “the most interesting debates are not the debates between unilateralism and multilateralism, but what kind of multilateralism,” by which he meant the choice between a universal and a regional forum, between an extant formal one and an ad hoc coalition of the willing, and how to give the latter “a dimension of legitimacy” and acceptability. “Those are the real foreign policy questions,” he said, “not whether there is a unilateral option, because, quite honestly, there isn't one.”

Indeed, the entire critique of the Bush administration implies that multilateralism is an existential reality. Were that not the case, the United States would not be castigated for acting unilaterally. The benchmark expectation is that states act multilaterally, and it becomes a matter of comment when they choose not to. We would not bother to characterize any state as unilateralist if the benchmark expectation was that states act on their own — in such a case, we would note multilateralism as the unusual behavior. The refrain of the United States as unilateralist makes clear that the benchmark expectations are now multilateral.

36 | Arthur A. Stein

Existential multilateralism, however, limits the range of state calculations, including that of the United States. The view of the Clinton administration, whose rhetorical commitments to international institutions vastly exceeded its actual practice, was characterized as “multilateralism if we can, unilateralism if we must.”²⁹ In contrast, the view of the George W. Bush administration, whose verbal contempt for international institutions has vastly exceeded its actual practice, has been characterized as “unilateralism if we can, multilateralism if we must.”³⁰ These two characterizations, in effect, narrow the scope of state decisions and bound them by a realization that there are cases in which there is no choice but to engage in multilateralism and that the ability to fulfill state objectives is such that the recourse to unilateralism is smaller than it once was for states.

A Weakly Confederal World

In fact, one could argue not only that multilateralism is an existential reality but that weak confederalism is the nature of modern reality. There are many intergovernmental organizations and many rules for state conduct. Yet, the confederal system is weak: it lacks fiscal authority and depends on the voluntary contributions of states, it has no standing army and depends on the willingness of member states to provide forces, and it is powerless to resolve conflicts among its constituent members.³¹ As with past confederations, the structure of co-operation reflects the power and interests of members, their need for some co-operation, and their desire for autonomy. And as with past confederations, there are frustrations with the limitations of weak confederalism.

²⁹There are slight variations on the phrase. Something like it appears in the national security strategy document of 1995, and another version is attributed to then secretary of state Madeleine Albright. The phrase quoted here is from Senator John Kerry’s 2004 presidential campaign (Schwenninger 2004).

³⁰This point was made by former Republican senator and Clinton defense secretary William Cohen and by Pascal Boniface of the Paris-based Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques (see United States 2005).

³¹I deliberately characterize the system as confederal, rather than as a confederation, for it is not just one confederation but a system of confederations.

This confederation differs from others, however, in that efforts to strengthen confederal authority have proceeded along multiple tracks. Some have focused on one central locus of governance, such as the United Nations, but in many cases, states have proceeded to construct a federal world along functional lines. Rather than transfer increasing authority over time from one issue area to another to a central confederal authority, member states have created strong institutions but only in discrete functional domains.³²

The General Problem of Unintended Institutional Failure

In this weakly confederal system, there is the same spirited debate about the proper role of institutional solutions to problems. The same quandary exists at the international level as at the national level: do governmental responses to market failures always improve the situation? Increasingly, people realize that there is also a problem of government failure, in which government policies generate worse outcomes than the market failures they were intended to alleviate. Within domestic society, this has led to some governmental deregulation and privatization and generated ongoing debates between those recommending market-based solutions and those promoting governmental regulatory ones. At the international level, it consists of a challenge to the presumption that the construction of more international institutions is always a good thing.

In some cases, both a market response to an international problem and a regulatory one entail the creation of an institution. The development of an international emissions trading regime constitutes the application at the global level of a domestic market solution for dealing with pollution. It required a treaty and constitutes an institution. It contrasts with the regulatory alternative that simply mandates reductions by locale and firm, but

³²This view of a weak confederal world puts me at odds with those who make a number of different arguments. I disagree with the view that “world political institutions cannot be created by the governments of existing states” (Murphy 1999) as well as with those who view second-order representation as constituting a democratic deficit.

38 | Arthur A. Stein

which also would have been an institution — though likely a more bureaucratic one.

In other cases, market solutions allow states to maintain autonomy, and are institutions in only the broadest sense of their being rules of behavior. An example is that of floating exchange rates, where markets, rather than some international agreement and monitoring institution, determine the value of traded currencies.³³

There are those who argue that the development of international organizations has not always constituted an improvement in world affairs (Gallarotti 1991). Indeed, one development economist, a former research administrator at the World Bank, argues that the major international economic organizations have become “the major purveyors of global illiberalism” (Lal 2005, 503; see also Easterly 2006). Or, as another assessment describes the results of efforts at international economic policy co-ordination, “it only grafts government failure onto the international system” (Sally 2001, 55). Not surprisingly, in some areas, recommendations for global governance reform run the gamut from expansion to abolition. In the case of international financial institutions, there may be as many academics who recommend the complete abolition of the IMF as recommend an expansion of its activities and reform of its governing rules.

In short, the same hard-nosed questions must be addressed at the global level as at the domestic one. What tasks are appropriate for government? What problems are preferably resolved by market solutions? What issues require intergovernmental organizations and which are better dealt with by NGOs, the international equivalent of domestic philanthropic and civic organizations?³⁴ And when is the proposed international organization likely to result in an international government failure that is worse than the problem that led to its creation?

³³Ironically, the switch in international monetary regimes did not do away with the IMF; rather, it led to a transformation in the nature of the fund’s role (Stein 2001).

³⁴Governments have begun to outsource many international activities, including humanitarian, developmental, and security assistance. This creates new agency problems and perverse incentives for NGOs (Cooley and Ron 2002).

The Requisites of Multilateralism

The world abounds with international institutions. Regional ones are purposely subsystemic, but even most functional ones are less than universal. That institutions are not universal but constitute coalitions of the willing and the agreeable raises the question of the requisites of multilateralism.

How Many Are Needed?

Even though the United States put together a substantial coalition in support of its war in Iraq, the exercise was not seen as multilateral. Was it because critical countries did not take part? Was it because the participation of most, except for the United Kingdom, was rather minimal? Was it because major countries not in the coalition actively opposed its efforts? Is the difference between Gulf I and Gulf II not in the number of coalition members nor in the extent of their contribution but that no major country opposed Gulf I? Is it simply that Gulf II lacked a UN Security Council resolution — the difference thus being an announced French intention to veto versus a Chinese abstention?³⁵ Or is it that, in Gulf I, the United States appeared to be more constrained by the needs, concerns, and interests of its coalition partners?

This raises important questions about the requisites of multilateralism: how many countries must take part? what level of participation by others must there be? what level of restraint on particularistic self-interest must exist for a policy to be called multilateral? Conversely, how much opposition and by how many and whom undercuts the legitimacy of multilateral efforts? Moreover, does multilateralism require more than merely a signal of commitment? These questions about multilateralism can be put in

³⁵Criticism of the United States often conflates unilateralism and ad hoc multilateralism. US actions have been characterized at times as unilateral not because the United States acted alone but because it ignored extant international institutions (such as the Security Council) in favor of an ad hoc coalition of the willing. But this raises the question of what institutional imprimatur is required. Is the circumvention of the UN acceptable as long as an alternative is obtained? In the case of Kosovo, the United States and others circumvented the Security Council but obtained NATO agreement.

40 | Arthur A. Stein

terms of the United States, specifically: what must it do, or what level of support must it obtain, or in what ways must it allow its freedom of action to be curtailed, for its actions to be seen as multilateral?

The issue of requisite numbers is not merely one of appearance but import. Trade liberalization did not historically require that all countries reduce their barriers but that the largest trading states do so. Controlling missile proliferation requires agreement and adherence among the states capable of building and selling such weapons. Significant reductions in greenhouse gases might not require the adherence of all nations but only that of significant polluters. In such cases, the requisites of multilateralism are determined by the nature of the domain and the distribution of power or activity among countries.

Multilateralism Requires More than Common Values

In discussing an upcoming summit with German chancellor Angela Merkel, President George W. Bush said, “Listen, the first thing that has to happen diplomatically for anything to be effective is that we all agree on the goal. And we’ve agreed on the goal, and...now that we’ve got the goal in mind, we’re working on the tactics” (2006). In his own inimitable way, the president put his finger on a core issue of multilateralism: the necessity for agreement on both tactics and goals, means and ends. The existence of common interests or values is but the first step toward the kinds of policy alignment that multilateralism need perforce entail.³⁶

In a recent book entitled *Renegade Regimes*, Miroslav Nincic (2005) argues that there are four important currently accepted and widely shared norms, and that their violation — through the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, the support of or engagement in acts of terrorism, a large-scale assault on human rights, and territorial aggression — makes states into renegades.

³⁶This discussion finesses what I believe to be an important and underappreciated distinction between common values and common interests. For a start, see Frieden’s (1999) distinction between changeable policy preferences and abiding values.

Yet, we have recently observed repeatedly that multilateralism breaks down not because of an absence of agreement on objectives, but because of a disagreement on tactics. The disagreements on dealing with Iran provide just one example. No country has publicly stated its support of a nuclear Iran. China and Russia have said “they don’t want a nuclear-armed Iran” (Reuters 2006, quoting Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns) and have even voted with the United States in the UN against the government of Iran. But they have also expressed their opposition to sanctions and military attacks. Does the agreement on the basic objective of a non-nuclear Iran constitute multilateralism or does the disagreement about how to deal with Iran constitute a failure of multilateralism?

Much the same can be said about the war in Iraq as a quintessential case of a failure of multilateralism. The broad support that the United States had in opposing Saddam Hussein’s regime became whittled away dramatically when it pressed for military action. The disagreement was over tactics, not overriding objectives or views of the regime.

Moreover, what is seen as a failure of multilateralism occurs only after the failure of attempts to obtain agreement on tactics when there is an agreement on goals. The United States tried to obtain a broad consensus to oppose Saddam Hussein. It obtained a unanimous Security Council resolution, but one that reflected agreement on ends and only the most minimal agreement on means. It was the failure to agree on the use of force and the US decision to go ahead notwithstanding that is seen as the rupturing of multilateralism.

This discussion implies that criticisms of the Bush administration as having failed to provide international leadership are semantically miscast. The Bush administration tried to lead, but found important countries unwilling to follow. One could criticize these other countries for a lack of followership, but the inability to get others to follow becomes characterized as a failure of leadership. Ironically, the unipolarity implicated in making US unilateralism possible did not simultaneously generate a willingness by others to follow US hegemony. The collapse of Soviet power simultaneously increased the United States’ freedom of action while reducing US leverage on prospective supporters, including its allies.

The public nature of position taking and its constraints in open societies also implies tremendous difficulty in pursuing co-ordinated but discordant

42 | Arthur A. Stein

policies. Take the classic case of good cop/bad cop strategies. The United States is in many ways the bad cop in recent world affairs, always threatening the use of force and not appearing at all pliable on the possibility of negotiated solutions. Many US allies end up playing the role of the good cop, decrying the use of force, pressing for international agreement, and encouraging miscreants about the prospects for accommodation and their reintegration into the community of nations. Although the role of the bad cop may be helpful, as some allies admitted was the case when the United States threatened military action to force Iraq to allow UN inspectors back into the country, it nonetheless complicates the international relationships of democratic governments.

All this implies that multilateralism, if it is to mean joint action in dealing with problematic global issues, must entail agreement not only on core values but also on the means of achieving desired outcomes in world affairs. But does it also imply that the price of multilateralism is the broad acceptance of the least common denominator when there is disagreement among a core group of states (however that core is defined) about tactics? Is the price of multilateralism that it is subject to a unit veto?

I have argued that multilateral action requires agreement on both objectives and tactics. Yet, there are tactical differences among states engaged in concerted action, which raises the question of the differences that are compatible with sustained multilateralism. Is it possible to sustain multilateralism on the basis of agreement on principles, values, and objectives, while still recognizing divergent tactical approaches? Several points can be made.

First, the line between strategic and tactical can be blurry, as can the line between ultimate and instrumental objectives.

Second, there can be a division of labor when both goals and strategies are agreed on. Countries can fight in concert but still provide different forms of military capability. Similarly, countries can provide debt relief in different forms. My point is simply that there must be broad agreement on goals and on the nature of policy.

Third, views of governments are rarely going to be so aligned that there will not be some disagreement among them. Any assessment of national politics clearly demonstrates that there is always the prospect of disagreement. Politicians, even when operating within a narrow spectrum

of difference, can always parse in order to distinguish themselves and thus signal disagreement. The ability to play Goldilocks is ever present, if only to argue about too little or too much, too soon or too late.

Fourth, given possibilities for differentiation, what constitute departures from collective action can be contested. Imagine that a group of countries agrees on an objective and a strategy — for example, the agreement to provide collective defense under NATO — but one country chooses to act as a free rider, to shirk on its contribution. This would still constitute concerted action with substantial agreement — the shirking does not vitiate the multilateral character of the enterprise.

On the other hand, there are cases in which a free rider can be seen as destroying the ability to achieve an objective and, thus, as undercutting multilateralism. Take the case of debt relief. Developed countries might agree that the poorest countries need some debt relief, but if a country extends little if any relief, it is, in effect, insisting that the relief provided by others be used to compensate it (by having its loans repaid on terms much closer to those originally extended). In such a case, those that extend real debt relief might well argue that the attempt to be a free rider is essentially destroying the possibility of multilateral debt relief. This is why collective debt relief exercises can be quite complicated to work out and require the agreement of all large lenders. Not extending relief on terms acceptable to the others can indeed be seen as renegeing on any agreement to extend relief. In effect, the degree of acceptable differentiation has itself to be agreed on.

Ironically, then, multilateralism can be sustained by acquiescence, not just agreement. An abstention in the UN Security Council on a sanctions resolution constitutes acquiescence that, in effect, sustains a legitimated multilateral response. It constitutes both a willingness to let a joint measure pass and a commitment to abide by it. Indeed, this has been the norm in Great Power co-operation in recent years: multilateralism has been sustained through the venue of the Security Council by a willingness to eschew the veto. Here, the West has rarely obtained China's affirmative agreement; rather, it has more typically obtained China's acquiescence.

All this makes the assessment of multilateralism and an understanding of its requisites somewhat complicated. Some things, however, are clear: when one observes joint operations, one clearly sees multilateralism, and

44 | Arthur A. Stein

when one observes public disagreement and opposition, one clearly sees the absence of multilateralism.

My point is that the perceived collapse of multilateralism in recent years has occurred at times over disagreements on policy, not overall objectives. No country has stood up for the sovereign right of ethnic cleansing, and all oppose nuclear weapons proliferation except for those that threaten it — and even Iran claims that its actions are justified within the bounds of peaceful use and extant international agreements. The disagreements are over how to achieve those objectives: through diplomacy, engagements, and inducements, or through the threat, and use, of force. This means that even the existence of an international community and a set of agreed-on norms of conduct are insufficient to assure multilateral responses to miscreants.

Multilateralism and the Absence of Disapproval

Multilateralism and unilateralism constitute two attitudes toward the external world. It is interesting to contrast this distinction with a different typology of state behavior. Jeff Legro (2006) distinguishes three types of states: trustees, hermits, and rebels. Rebels are states interested in upending the established order (the revolutionary Soviet Union was one example). Hermits are isolationists interested in separating themselves from the world (Tokugawa Japan, for example). Trustees are states that are neither hermits nor rebels, but are integrated into the international community and upholders of the existing order.

How does Legro's typology fit the multilateralism/unilateralism dichotomy? Hermits are certainly not multilateralists, but isolationism would not qualify as unilateralism if the latter presumes some degree of involvement with the outside world. Rebels have activist foreign policies, and although one can imagine a group of rebel countries acting in tandem, they would constitute a distinct minority of the states in the system and would act in opposition to others; historically, however, rebels have tended to act on their own.

But even if all rebels are unilateralists, not all unilateralists are rebels. Indeed, not all unilateralists are merely pursuing particularistic national interests. One of the striking aspects of US unilateralism has been the

assertion by US administrations to be vouchsafing universal interests and values. Indeed, arguments such as hegemonic stability theory portray a unilateralist Great Power as providing collective goods without much support.

Overlay these alternative typologies of state behavior makes it clear, I believe, that unilateralism captures a wide range of policies, from those intended to upset the international order to those that constitute go-it-alone efforts to sustain the order. To make the point clearer, imagine a community of states bound by most-favored-nation free trade agreements. Then, suppose a group of countries creates, in tandem, a regional customs union that violates their larger obligations and constitutes their defection from the liberal regime. Finally, imagine there is one Great Power that continues to maintain open markets, in keeping with the established order. We would hardly characterize the actions of the power that maintains its commitments, but now being the only one to do so, as unilateralist. I am less certain, but I believe we also would not call the group defection multilateralism.

I am certain that there are those who would argue that the United States' intervention in Iraq was a Great Power's unilateral maintenance of an established order in the face of others' defection from their obligations. Imagine, for example, if the United States were prepared to intervene in, say, Darfur to put a stop to ethnic cleansing and genocide, but was the only one willing to do so — would other countries describe such an intervention as unilateralist?

What I am getting at is that, when we characterize state behavior as unilateral, we mean more than a state's acting on its own; we have in mind a state that acts on its own without the approval or acquiescence of other countries. In the trade case above, the states that defect from liberal commitments still approve of — and actually desire — the Great Power's maintenance of open markets.³⁷ I would assume the same to be true of the hypothetical Darfur intervention — that it would be approved by others who would be happy to sit on the sidelines.³⁸

³⁷Decoupling unilateralism/multilateralism from the substance of policy and its progressive/regressive character is discussed by Robinson (2000), who provides criteria for determining what constitutes progressive unilateralism.

³⁸An interesting example is provided by the recent agreement on nuclear technology between the United States and India. Critics of the arrangement argue...

46 | Arthur A. Stein

All this suggests that the multilateral/unilateral disjuncture is more about the approval of others than about how many states act jointly and how much each contributes. More pointedly, multilateralism is about the absence of others' disapproval, while unilateralism is behavior in the face of others' disapproval. Thus, what distinguishes the 1991 Gulf War from the 2003 Iraq War is the absence of disapproval in the former case, not how many countries joined in or how much they contributed. It is also why a Security Council abstention — that is, acquiescence rather than approval — still sustains multilateralism. It is the presence or absence of disapproval that is key. It is also why there can be regimes that have mechanisms for excused cheating, where the fact of being excused keeps departures from being seen as unilateralist and as cheating (Stein 2000, 244–49).

All this raises the question of whose disapproval matters. Clearly, the disapproval of immediate target states does not. Iraqi objections in 1991 and 2003 did not count in this sense; Sudanese objections to intervention in Darfur surely would not matter. The objection must come from states that are not immediate parties.

Constructing Institutions

The foregoing discussion of incentive compatibility, the requisites of multilateralism, and the nature of the world today generates core criteria for institutional design and construction. These criteria are key to successful social engineering. They must reflect the international distribution of power and contain the requisite set of countries for objectives to be accomplished. They must be compatible with the self-interest of states that must comply with their strictures. Institutions must be commensurate with the problems they are intended to solve and the challenges they face.

Note 38 - cont'd.

...that it fundamentally undercuts the NPT and simply encourages would-be proliferators. Supporters argue, rather, that it deals with a core problem of the treaty and brings into the regime a state that had been kept outside it. Thus, this action on the part of the United States is portrayed as unilateralism in the service of multilateralism. In the short term, the reaction of other major powers will be key to how the action is seen. In the long term, how it is viewed will also depend on how well it works out.

Incentive Compatibility

The most successful social engineers have been economists. Their success derives from their recognition that voluntary behavioral change requires that the self-interested incentives of individual actors be compatible with the behavioral change that policy intends to make. This requirement follows from the requirement that change reflect voluntarism rather than coercion.³⁹

Intergovernmental organizations are products of states' choices and, although they are affected by NGOs and civil society, change operates through the decisions of governments and reform efforts have to be compatible with the constellation of governments' interests and concerns and reflect their assessment of the problem, their relative bargaining power, and so on. As with recommendations for campaign finance reform that must run the gauntlet of the very politicians who would be subject to the reforms, so recommendations for international institutional reform must pass muster with the nation-states that would be subject to the strictures of new institutional arrangements.

But international institutions must be incentive compatible not only with national governments but, increasingly, with their domestic societies. That an increasing number of states are run by representative, elected governments means that international agreements have to be compatible with societal incentives. They must not only reflect the national interests, as seen by the governments that negotiate and sign, but also meet the requisites of domestic ratification as well as domestically sanctioned compliance. Global governance increasingly will require not merely a mutuality of state interests but a convergence of societal preferences as well.

The prospects for global governance will be held hostage to a variety of state-society interactions, sometimes in the form of executive-legislative relations. The relative support for multilateralism by elites and publics

³⁹One indication of the idealist roots of modern social constructivists in international relations is their failure to recognize that the social constructions of the twentieth century include Nazi aryanization, Soviet collectivization, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Cambodian killing fields, and ethnic cleansing, and whose costs total in the hundreds of millions of human lives, vastly exceeding the war casualties of the century.

48 | Arthur A. Stein

and different political parties, as well as the propensity of officials to lead or follow their publics and the rules will determine the prospects for supranational arrangements.⁴⁰ Outcomes will vary between unified and divided governments. Governments that face re-election will act differently than lame ducks. Outgoing governments might sign multilateral agreements in the hope of locking in their successors, or of freeing their successors from a politically difficult decision, or in the knowledge that their successors will not ratify the agreements and thus be embarrassed. But durable multilateralism has to survive changes in governing parties and coalitions in democratic signatories.

Finally, it should be noted that incentive compatibility is not the same as normative compatibility. There are international reform efforts that are compatible with the norms held by many but not with their incentives. Perhaps the most poignant example is provided by the effort to enshrine a “duty to protect.” The very phrase associated with the argument reveals all: there is a sense of a duty, not necessarily a desire or a willingness, to protect. In everyday language, we talk of states and individuals as pursuing their interests, but not their duties — duties are more typically shirked than pursued.

Task Expansion and Mission Creep

Solving or dealing with any problem brings the choice of using old institutions or creating new ones. The existence of a problem suggests that existing institutions allowed it to occur, so they require some reform, if only that of task expansion — or what is derogatorily characterized as “mission creep.” Whether to recast or to build also entails the choice of ad hoc-ery or permanence.

⁴⁰Note that trade liberalization in the United States required major institutional transformations to the rules of the political game. First, rather than have the executive negotiate trade treaties that would then be subject to congressional approval, a system developed of advance authorization for percentage tariff reductions. Second, Congress bound itself through fast-track authority to vote on trade agreements without amendment. Prior to this change, the workings of US politics precluded sustained liberalization despite widespread recognition that it was in the country’s interest (Hody 1996).

When a problem arises, the initial reaction is to look for existing institutions whose task can be expanded to include dealing with it. This is especially the case where the institution is seen as already successful in its domain and not as the source of the problem. Thus, following the toppling of its government in 2001, Afghanistan was made a NATO operation — a vibrant, functioning organization whose tasks had already been extended to include out-of-area operations in the Balkans now moved into southern Asia.

Conditions are ripe for a new institution when a problem arises that is not associated with an existing institution whose tasks cannot be expanded or whose members are unwilling to expand its tasks. For example, the perceived weaknesses of the NPT meant the need for a new institution to control the spread of missile technology, while disagreement among its members meant that NATO did not go into Iraq as it had Afghanistan.

One implication of commensurability is that it is easier to create new institutions to deal with new problems or new crises generated by old problems than to propose reforms, simply because of frustration with the workings of extant institutions. This is especially the case when the problem is seen as reflecting an institution's failure. Extant institutions already reflect past negotiations and compromises, and constrain the direction of organizational development. In short, there is a path dependence to global governance.

Forum Shopping

The net result of the past history of institutional construction and reconstruction is that there exist many arrangements with overlapping functional and geographic domains. That leaves states with a choice of the institutions they want to use to deal with the problem. For example, the United States and others opted to take the problem of the Balkans to NATO rather than to the UN. And this leads to the problem of forum shopping.

Within countries, actors can choose between some combination of lobbying, capturing, and litigating in dealing with their interests.⁴¹ They can try to obtain favorable laws from the legislature, favorable regulations

⁴¹For a model that deals with two of the three, see Rubin, Curran, and Curran (2001).

50 | Arthur A. Stein

from bureaucracies, and favorable rulings and judgments from courts. In federal systems, they can work at different levels of governance. Within the legal system, they can choose between different courts and jurisdictions.⁴²

Since the world now has clubs that overlap in both their memberships and functional domains, forum shopping is now an international possibility.⁴³ Forum shopping expands the possibilities of strategic contestation, and it creates one more way in which the powerful can assure themselves of favorable outcomes.⁴⁴ Yet forum shopping has not created domestic chaos, and one might as readily expect international equivalents to domestic mechanisms for dealing with the problems of venue selection and choice of law.

Commensurability

To be successful, a solution must be commensurate with the problem it is intended to solve. If the proposed solution is inadequate, it might make reform more palatable but it ensures that the problem continues — in effect, it becomes an example of illusory reform.⁴⁵ Yet, a proposed solution that overreaches is also a recipe for failure.

Despite the need for commensurability, there remain benefits from overreaching. Would-be reformers need to ask whether they should strive for the achievable or for the desirable. To strive for the former is to compromise but to accomplish, to strive for the latter is to trade the

⁴²They can also choose between competing certifiers (Lerner and Tirole 2006).

⁴³The possibility of ad hoc international coalitions of the willing makes the international context even more complicated.

⁴⁴Alter and Meunier (2006) cite an example of the resolution of a trade dispute that might have been complicated by forum shopping. Elsewhere in this volume, Drezner even argues that forum shopping reintroduces the very anarchy that institutions were meant to ameliorate. Note, however, that the strategy of forum shopping, and even “regime shifting” (Helfer 2004), is open not just to the powerful: as economic integration proceeds, private actors as well as governments will exercise forum shopping (Koch 2006).

⁴⁵US gun laws are a case in point. Another example is European levels of acceptable pollution that are set so high that there is less demand for pollution credits than there are credits for sale in the market.

benefits of setting an ideal standard but at the cost of failure. Let us call the former *pragmatic reformers*, the latter *utopian idealists*. Pressing for unachievable ideals is to accept the failure to achieve an objective in the hope of setting a marker and a tone for a conversation. In the United States, those who have pressed for an equal rights amendment or gay marriage present clear examples of failed objectives whose success is measured by the extent to which they have changed the conversation and made possible other pragmatic, achievable changes. An international example is provided by the lawyers who achieved only “marginal tangible successes at The Hague” in the late nineteenth century but who “achieved greater accomplishments by advancing discourse on disarmament and arms control” by providing the “terminology” which “allowed more focused debate in the twentieth century” (Keefer 2006, 1).

Clubs, or the Community of States

Many of the items discussed above translate directly into core issues of institutional design. The discussion of the requisites of multilateralism, for example, implicates the criterion of membership. Some institutions are global, whereas others consist of a subset of countries. This choice between inclusivity and exclusivity is central to the design of institutions.

One way to proceed is to involve the community of all nations — to create institutions for the purpose of global governance. Here, nothing short of universality is deemed acceptable: even if not all join, the institutions are nevertheless deemed to apply to all.⁴⁶

The alternative is to take a developmental approach — to construct more limited and focused institutions and allow them to develop. One striking feature of international organizations is that they have grown more intrusive over time, encroaching on sovereignty in ways their founders could scarcely have imagined. The IMF, for example, has over time expanded the scope of its conditionality and oversight. Originally prescribing only a macroeconomic policy mix and an end to subsidies, the Fund now prescribes judicial independence and a host of good governance requirements (Stein 2001).

⁴⁶This is one way international law is created.

52 | Arthur A. Stein

Progressive reformers thus confront a choice. They can include more nations (or draft an agreement that obtains more signatories) and accomplish less initially, but in the hope for growth over time in the constraints on sovereignty. Alternatively, they can create institutions that include fewer nations but that tackle a wider range of issues and/or entail more initial intrusiveness and constraint.

Either choice has a progressive logic associated with it. The former relies on development and accretion to expand the scope of the regime, as has happened, for example, with the NPT, which, in the past decade and a half, has imposed heightened scrutiny because of the discovery of Iraq's clandestine nuclear program. But an expansion of scope is not always assured. The Bush administration, for example, withdrew from negotiations on — and thus brought to a halt efforts to deal with — the perceived inadequacy of enforcement under the Convention on Biological and Toxin Weapons. The agreement remains in force, but the effort to strengthen the regime has faltered.

A different set of developmental possibilities exists in which deeper co-operation among a smaller set of countries constructs an “institution of the willing,” but one with agglomerative properties. An institution that offers collective benefits only for members becomes a magnet for new adherents. Trade arrangements that include most-favored-nation clauses or that create common markets or free trade areas have that property. Such “regime creation by accretion” is characteristic of international institutions that are “clubs of agglomeration” (Rosecrance and Stein 2001, 225–26) that change the incentives for future prospective entrants.⁴⁷ Moreover, as Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom (1998) show, the sequential admission of members based on a preference for co-operation results in an institution that exhibits more co-operation than could have been achieved by an initial strategy of complete inclusion. Those on the outside might prefer not to have to choose between joining and staying out; they might even have

⁴⁷In a comparison of European integration in different policy areas, Kölliker (2001) finds that those with excludable network effects are those in which initial differentiation eventually results in long-run convergence. For a discussion of the link between the nature of the good and the inclusiveness of governance arrangements, see Kölliker (2006).

preferred to join initially when they could have had a larger role in writing the rules.⁴⁸

Implied in this debate is the issue of how much to link reforms across domains and how much to depend on historical development. For instance, organizations intended to promote trade liberalization have been pressed to expand their tasks by taking on a set of tangential issues, including environmentalism, workers' rights, and human rights. As another example, the successful reduction of classical barriers to trade shifted the trade liberalization agenda to include nontariff barriers, which are really discordant domestic public policies and practices (Stein 1993). There are also calls for political liberalization to be placed on the agenda as a component of trade liberalization, leading to a debate between those who want to rely on historical development for economic liberalization to generate political reform and those who want to press political liberalization as part of the development of an international community.

Differentiation

Another important feature of institutional design is differentiation, the importance of which both the construction of international institutions and their reform must recognize. More states will bind themselves to multilateral governance arrangements if they have some ability to differentiate between their temporal and issue commitments.

In constructing an integrated Europe, it has long been recognized that deeper integration could be achieved by allowing states to adjust at different rates, by allowing deeper integration in some domains than others, and by allowing some states to integrate at a deeper level than others. In the first dimension, time, states can approach particular objectives at different speeds. In the second dimension, a spatial one, some members can achieve a greater level and depth of integration than others. In the third dimension, one of issues, states have some ability to choose the policy areas in which they want to participate.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Some realists (for example, Gruber 2000) have sought to portray this as coercion, but it is hardly the coercive vision of classical realism (see Rosecrance 2001).

⁴⁹Stubb (1996) provides an extensive list of English, French, and German terms for these three dimensions.

54 | Arthur A. Stein

Similar differentiation can be found in other multilateral arrangements. An example is in the contributions by members of the coalition in Iraq: had the United States insisted on each member's making a particular effort, it would obviously have had fewer coalition partners, but by accepting different contributions, the United States increased the number of countries willing to take part.⁵⁰

Differentiated commitment, then, is one way to meet the requirements of commensurability and incentive compatibility, to be both inclusive and exclusive, and to take the most that can be achieved while setting in place the possibility for development and expansion.⁵¹ Organizations with different categories of membership, different timetables for full adherence, and some conditional ability to opt out as needed make it possible to create an expansive multilateralism.

A Typology of Organizational Reform

Any exercise in institutional development begins with the question of whether an existing problem should be dealt with by an existing institution or by the creation of a new one. If the problem derives from the perceived failure of extant organizations, the focus will be on reform. If the problem is something new, typically there will be some debate as to whether to extend the prerogative and scope of an extant organization or construct a new one. As a start, this implies that a range of choices — institutional, constitutional, structural, and systemic — constitutes reform.

Institutional Reform

The simplest reform is merely to tinker with the process or procedure to improve efficiency. We might call this institutional reform. Suggested improvements in financial accountability and demands for increased trans-

⁵⁰Even then, some states were prepared to encourage and support the United States in private but not in public, a sign that US actions were consonant with their leaders' interests but not with societal preferences.

⁵¹Gilligan (2004) demonstrates that there is no broader-deeper tradeoff once states are allowed to set their policies at different levels. In the language used here, differentiated commitment makes possible more inclusive institutions.

parency are examples of such process reforms. They can be presented as good in themselves and/or as needed to generate improved outcomes. Transparency, for example, is usually presented as both. Changing the lines of reporting of subunits or adding a secretariat are also examples of process reforms.

Process reforms are the least transformative of extant arrangements. They are the reforms typically suggested by politicians who are looking for illusory responses to constituent pressures. Some of the reports done at the behest of the UN secretary-general are of this type, and are largely public relations exercises intended to generate greater support for the organization.

Another example of an illusory reform is modifying the distribution of voting rights in the IMF in the hope that this would somehow affect the perceived legitimacy of the institution or states' willingness to borrow from it. The IMF is, after all, a bank that needs to be repaid, and it attaches conditions precisely to ensure that it will be repaid. At the same time, states join the IMF because they have little choice, and would borrow from other, less-demanding sources if they were available. Thus, changing the distribution of voting rights on the IMF executive board would hardly change these two fundamental aspects of the workings of the institution.

Constitutional Reform

A higher-order form of change is constitutional reform. Although it is hard to draw a fine line between institutional and constitutional reform, I would argue that, for example, changes in decision rules — the mechanisms for aggregating diverse preferences into a collective choice — are at the heart of constitutions, as are the broad policy domains that are organizational purviews, and that such changes constitute constitutional reform. Examples would include removing the unit veto in the EU or adding members to the UN Security Council.

The difference between institutional reform and constitutional reform can be illustrated by the reforms proposed for the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). I would characterize some of these proposals — such as appointing an advisor to monitor the human rights effects of anti-terrorism measures (Nelson 2004) — as institutional reforms. The

56 | Arthur A. Stein

process change was recommended on the presumption that it would lead to policy changes, and the fight was over the process rather than the actual outcome — a common conflict in politics. By contrast, proposals to change how and which countries are selected for the UNHRC — such as those that would disqualify any country under Security Council sanctions from serving on the UNHRC or that would require selected countries to obtain a two-thirds' vote in the General Assembly — are constitutional reforms.

Structural Reform

Another kind of reform is to change the structure of an institution. Examples of such changes, which are on a par with a constitutional change in their prospective consequences, would be to add a dispute resolution mechanism to an international organization or to add a permanent military capability to European institutions. Allowing NATO to undertake out-of-area operations was a structural reform.

Some reforms are hard to categorize and assess, even by the participants debating them. For example, the UN replaced the Human Rights Commission with a Human Rights Council, a reform advertised as structural since the new council would have higher status and greater accountability. But the United States opposed the change, arguing that it was purely cosmetic — in effect, arguing that the change was an illusory one that would leave the acronym the same and outcomes essentially unchanged.

Structural reforms are about changing the operational capability of an institution. They focus directly on what the institution does, not on its administrative procedures. Procedural reforms are often proffered in the hope that they will lead to changes in outcome, not just process.

Systemic Reform

Finally, states can decide that no extant institution can deal with the problem and that a new one is needed. I label this systemic reform, because it reflects a need to change the system of international institutions. An example of systemic reform was the creation of a Missile Technology Control Regime to deal with the proliferation of missiles, rather than expanding the scope of the NPT.

A Final Comment

This mapping of the nature of reform is correlated, but not perfectly, with the characterization of the intent of reform I presented above. Transformative reforms require greater change than palliative ones and thus are less likely to be merely procedural in character. Ironically, reform proposals often focus on bureaucratic and procedural recommendations even though substantive change is desired. Addressing operational capability is ignored or deferred in favor of a focus on the administrative and procedural. Ironically, even as the United States has grown in relative power and emerged as the world's sole superpower, institutional and constitutional reforms of a variety of institutions typically have focused on increasing the number of states that are treated as players and on flattening the distribution of relative voting power.

The Role of Middle Powers

Given its hegemony, the United States' actions are inherently suspect. Other countries have reason to be concerned that the United States is pursuing its particularistic interests, and its pronouncements on behalf of universal values are greeted with suspicion and cynicism. Despite its own track good record on adhering to international agreements, the George W. Bush administration has discovered that its unmasked contempt for international organizations does not help in the pursuit of requisite multilateralism.⁵² This leaves key middle powers with the ability to act as interlocutors, intermediaries, and interceders. The Europeans are playing that role with regard to Iran, and regional powers in the western Pacific are playing it with North Korea on the issue of nuclear weapons proliferation.

The ranks of middle powers include sufficient diversity that their agreement on a set of issues cannot simply be derided as Western or European or even wealthy. Their views cannot be cast as those of the poor interested

⁵²This raises the interesting question of how much of George W. Bush's international reputation has to do with style rather than substance. Note that here, too, the Bush administration merely traveled a well-worn path: Canadian diplomat David Malone characterized "the Clinton administration's instinctive penchant for UN-bashing whenever in a tight spot from which blame might be delegated" (2003, 90).

58 | Arthur A. Stein

in redistribution or the rich interested in maintaining privilege, nor can they be cast as those of security free riders or of aspiring imperialists. The heterogeneity in their ranks, and even their measure of disinterestedness (in the sense of not having a direct stake), makes possible a set of commitments to transcendent objectives and means. In a unipolar age, their international role is in no way diminished and in many ways heightened, for they provide legitimacy through their affirmation of nonparticularistic interests.

A Community of Democracies

The requisites of incentive compatibility and commensurability suggest that a community of democracies is a categorization without much relevant content for international organizations. The Community of Democracies has met every two and a half years since 2000 and has organized itself as a caucus at the UN. Yet, about all that these democracies have been able to agree on is that they share certain values associated with their form of internal governance. The obvious question then arises: is that enough to translate into shared foreign policy interests?⁵³

There are, in fact, deep divisions among the world's democracies even as regards the promotion of democratic governance. The difficulty the EU has had in crafting a common defense and security policy should provide pause to any global effort to organize democracies. The nations of the EU, all democracies, already bound by common governance structures in some domains, and sharing geopolitical concerns, have talked about, but made little progress toward, a common defense and security policy.

In addition to doubt about a common interest for such an international institution, there is the question of whether the set of democracies is commensurate with any international governance problem. On most issues, the set of democracies simply excludes too many important countries that have to be party to viable governance arrangements in most domains. In the end, the Community of Democracies has been able to agree only in a

⁵³In fact, the first problem in creating such an institution is determining which countries are sufficiently "democratic" to join. The Community of Democracies chose to deal with this problem by including democratizing countries, and has been criticized for some of the nations included.

most general way to support the aim of promoting democratic governance and “to collaborate on democracy-related issues in existing international and regional institutions” (Council for a Community of Democracies 2000).

Conclusions

This is an age of contradiction. The world’s colossus does not, and cannot, have the imperial ambitions of past hegemons. The nature of modern reality is such that no power completely controls its own fate, and self-sufficiency is more of a mirage than ever. The requisites of daily life, and the solutions to most of the problems states face, require international co-operation. The nature of travel, communication, production, and exchange defines an age of globalization, yet tribal values preclude a political convergence to match economic integration.

We live in a world of weak confederalism precisely because states find independent decision making inadequate to their governance needs; they thus prefer forms of joint decision making and governance, yet they are unprepared to relinquish core elements of their autonomy and independence.

This state of affairs leaves many unhappy, some because they believe that a strong global confederation or federation is long overdue, others because they fear the implications of overbearing centralized political power. Technological change will continue to generate new issues and problems that require new forms of governance. The age-old questions fought out at the local and national levels will be refought at the global level: what aspects of governance can be decentralized, what require greater centralization? what governance functions are best performed by what kinds of institutions operating at what level (local, national, regional, global)? where should the dividing line between public and private reside? what issues require regulation and what should be left to the market and private actors (with governance merely entailing tinkering with property rights)? are organizations required, and should they be formalized and institutionalized?

The questions of governance remain a challenge. In a changing world in which perfection has not been attained, there is always some dissatisfaction with the state of governance and calls for reform. That is as true for domestic politics as it is for international politics.

60 | Arthur A. Stein

In this paper, I have tried both to encourage and to challenge would-be architects of global governance. Despite arguments that international institutions are weakening (Ikenberry 2005, 2006), my emphasis has been on the existential reality of multilateralism and the structural reality of weak confederalism in the midst of a unipolar age. Moreover, the demand for global governance will only increase with globalization and technological change. Yet, demands for reform are insufficient and realized reforms are often illusory, and the requisites of political constructions are many and substantial. Those who work in the vineyards of progressive reform (at whatever level of governance) need only recall Maya Angelou's (1993, 89-92) admonition that,

Of course, there is no absolute assurance that those things I plant will always fall upon arable land and will take root and grow, nor can I know if another cultivator did not leave contrary seeds before I arrived. I do know, however, that if I leave little to chance, if I am careful about the kinds of seeds I plant, about their potency and nature, I can, within reason, trust my expectations.

The existing architecture of international politics is testament both to the possibilities and limitations of global governance.

This paper is part of a recent reversal of roles. Whereas, in the past, as Weiss (2005, 367) notes, academics "made the case for dramatic reforms" only to have the "practical folks...throw cold water and call instead for incremental changes," today "we are witnessing the opposite." Now, it is the diplomats and international civil servants who use "hyperbolic rhetoric" and the academics who provide the sober assessments. This paper is a further plea for realistic global construction.

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62 | Arthur A. Stein

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66 | Arthur A. Stein

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68 | Arthur A. Stein

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