The world stands at a curious moment of history on multilateralism. For three powerful reasons the case for strengthening multilateralism has never been stronger. First, the 7.5 billion plus people on planet earth now live in a small interdependent global village, with global challenges leaping effortlessly across sovereign borders, including financial crises, pandemics, terrorism, and especially global warming. All villages need strong village councils. Now, more than ever, our village needs stronger village councils, including the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO).

Second, the West, including Europe and the United States, which originally championed the 1945 rules-based order, need stronger multilateral institutions more than ever. With only 12 percent of the population of the global village and a declining share of economic and military power, the West’s long-term geopolitical interests will shift from trying to preserve Western dominance to generating safeguards to protect the West’s minority position in a new global configuration of power. The best way to protect minority rights is strengthening the rule of law and the institutions that promote it. As most organizations of global governance are designed for this purpose, the West should work to strengthen, not weaken, them.

Third, emerging powers—including China, India, Indonesia, and Brazil—have grown and prospered by participating actively in the forces of globalization that were unleashed by the 1945 rules-based order. China, for example, has become the biggest beneficiary of the open global trading system and emerged as the world’s biggest trading nation. Hence, the emerging powers should be providing leadership to strengthen multilateralism. In theory, therefore, multilateralism should be strengthening.¹

In practice, multilateralism is weakening, also for three reasons. First, the Trump administration is clearly hostile to multilateralism. Trump’s former national security advisor, John Bolton, explicitly called for weakening the UN: “If the UN secretary building in New York lost 10 stories, it wouldn’t make a bit of difference.” He has also said: “If I were redoing the Security Council, I’d have one permanent member: The United States.” Trump has leveled similar invective at the UN, once asking reporters, “when do you see the United Nations solving problems? They don’t. They cause problems.”¹² However, even the previous US administrations that paid lip service to the UN often tried to weaken it.

Second, while theoretically Europeans support stronger multilateralism (as expressed eloquently in the speeches of French President Emmanuel Macron), in practice they have shown
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no courage in defending the UN from a three-decade-long assault on the UN system by successive US administrations. As a result, Europe has effectively been complicit in a long-standing US strategy to keep the UN weak. Even during the Cold War, when Moscow and Washington disagreed on everything, both actively conspired to keep the UN feeble by, for example, selecting pliable secretaries-general, such as Kurt Waldheim, and bullying them into dismissing or sidelining competent or conscientious UN civil servants who showed any backbone, squeezing UN budgets, and planting CIA and KGB agents across the UN system. This chapter documents how Europe undermined its own long-term geopolitical interests by weakening the global multilateral system.

Third, while the emerging powers, especially China and India, support stronger multilateralism in theory, they too have been reluctant to challenge the Western domination of global multilateral institutions. In early 2009, after the global financial crisis shook the West, its governments agreed in theory that their insistence on controlling the leadership of the IMF and World Bank was unjustified. Hence, at the Group of 20 (G-20) meeting in London in April 2009, Western nations explicitly issued the following statement: “We agree that the heads and senior leadership of the international financial institutions should be appointed through an open, transparent, and merit-based selection process.” Despite this commitment, the United States and Europe retained control of both the IMF and World Bank in the following decade. Neither China nor India challenged this explicit hypocrisy. In part, this happened because short-term geopolitical rivalries between these two powers trumped their common long-term interest in having a greater say in the IMF and the World Bank.

This chapter explores this curious gap between theory and practice in multilateralism in the early twenty-first century. Firstly, it demonstrates, through two case studies of the WHO and IAEA, how the West has been unwisely weakening key multilateral institutions. Secondly, it spells out how the policy of weakening multilateral institutions is fundamentally against the long-term interests of Western societies. Thirdly, it suggests how emerging powers, especially China and India, can provide better leadership for the multilateral system.

How the West weakens multilateralism

One undeniable fact underpins the case for multilateralism: we live in a small interdependent global village. Curiously, the most eloquent expressions of this reality often have emanated from such previous Western leaders as Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Tony Blair.4

Future historians will be puzzled that even though such Western political leaders as well as thought leaders among journalists and in Western universities have taken the lead in developing a strong global intellectual consensus that we now live in one world, Western governments have taken the lead in weakening the multilateral institutions that our interdependent world needs. To add some nuance to this claim, it is important to emphasize that the United States and European countries are motivated by different considerations. The United States, as the world’s dominant great power, finds that multilateral institutions constrain its unilateral tendencies. Hence, Washington has consistently pushed for the selection of weak UN secretaries-general and reductions in budgets to keep the entire UN system weak. The Europeans do not share the same desire to weaken that system but nonetheless resent their large share in the budget. Hence, they have joined the United States in working hard to keep UN budgets down. In so doing, the Europeans have failed to ask the obvious strategic question: would Europe’s own long-term strategic interests be better served by a stronger or weaker global multilateral system? This chapter therefore documents how Europe has undermined its own long-term interests by conspiring with Washington to restrain the growth of the budgets of key UN institutions.
This section illustrates this point by looking carefully at two case studies, the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). They demonstrate more clearly than other cases how the West, especially Europe, is undermining its own long-term interests by squeezing their budgets. Both Europe and North America are vulnerable to global pandemics. Similarly, the West has feared the illegal proliferation of nuclear weapons. To control these two threats, the West should have strengthened both the WHO and the IAEA in recent decades, but instead, in an act of strategic folly, the West has steadily weakened them.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, the danger of global pandemics was obvious from the SARS virus in 2002–2003, the H1N1 bird flu virus in 2009, and the Ebola outbreaks in 2014 and 2019. As we move inexorably toward living in a more and more compact global village, one common threat is the rapid spread of pandemics. Distances have disappeared. Viruses move rapidly across continents. Hence, it is in the planet’s interest to strengthen the global health institutions, especially the WHO. Yet, as Kelley Lee points out, we have done the opposite.5 Lee dissects many flawed policies affecting the WHO, in particular three strategic errors.

The first allows short-term and often sectional special interests to override enlightened long-term interests in stronger institutions. As the fastest-shrinking and most affluent members of the global village, Western countries have a clear interest in strengthening the WHO to improve global health conditions and to develop its capability and legitimacy to fight major global epidemics. SARS began in a small village in China. From there it went to Hong Kong, and from there it leapt to two cities on opposite sides of the global village, Singapore and Toronto. The WHO helped ameliorate this crisis and gets high marks from respondents worldwide in a poll. Rather than strengthen the WHO and provide more resources, however, the major contributors have starved it.

In 1970–1971, the WHO received 62 percent of its budget from core (or regular) budgetary funds (RBFs) and 18 percent from non-core (or extra-budgetary) funds. By 2006–2007, the ratio had reversed to only 28 percent from core and 72 percent from non-core resources. The WHO can make long-term plans only from its core budget because non-core resources can disappear overnight. Why have Western countries reduced their contributions to core budgets? The simple answer is that all member states make decisions about the allocation of such funds. So even though the Western countries, especially European ones, contribute the largest amount to the WHO’s “income,” they are outvoted when it comes to the “expenditures.” Europeans thus prefer non-core contributions, because they control expenditures. However, in seeking short-term control, the Europeans did not ask the larger and long-term strategic question about whether they were thereby undermining their own long-term interests by keeping a key global institution, the WHO, weak.

One key point should be emphasized. The total US and European finance for the UN system is paltry. In pursuing this penny-wise and pound-foolish strategy, the West has weakened a key global institution like the WHO that could play a key role in protecting both the United States and Europe global pandemics. To date, no major Western leader has urged the reconsideration of this short-sighted policy.

To make matters worse, the “Geneva Group” of 14 major Western donors introduced zero real growth to the RBFs of all UN organizations, including the WHO. This policy continued under both the more internationally minded Clinton-Gore administration and the less enlightened Bush-Cheney administration. In short, in Washington and elsewhere, the Western decision to starve UN organizations seemed driven by a myopic desire to control the global agenda and against its own interests.
The second strategic error was to allow the traditional Western interest in biomedicine, with its focus on individual behavior and biology, to trump growing global interest in social medicine, with its emphasis on understanding and transforming social conditions underlying health and disease. Policies toward the WHO are heavily influenced by the big pharmaceutical corporations, whose bottom lines reflect individual health spending, not collective well-being. Lee adds that “the rise of neoliberal-based fiscal policies brought even greater restrictions on public spending on health.” The *New York Times* reported that at the 2018 World Health Assembly in Geneva, the US delegation sought, unsuccessfully, to thwart a WHO effort aimed at helping poor countries obtain access to lifesaving medicines. Washington, supporting the pharmaceutical industry, has long resisted calls to modify patent laws as a way of increasing drug availability in the developing world, but health advocates say the Trump administration has ratcheted up its opposition to such efforts.

The third strategic error has been to dilute the role of the WHO as the leading global health agency and to augment the resources of the World Bank for health. The latter’s lending on health went from roughly half of the WHO budget in 1984 to more than two and a half times larger in 1996. The West prefers to lend money through the World Bank which is controlled by it, rather than the WHO. Moreover, the creation of large private foundations, especially the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, also undermined the central role of the WHO. As Anne-Emanuelle Birn says, “In part-funding selected initiatives, the [Gates] Foundation has influenced the decisions of other donor agencies, and thus global health priorities in general.” As a result, Lee concludes, “for the WHO, it has meant a substantial bypassing of its role as the lead UN health agency.”

As the most prosperous occupants of an ever-shrinking global village, Western populations have a clear interest in preventing the emergence of epidemics. No Western state has the moral or political authority to investigate the internal health conditions of other states. The WHO does. Similarly, neither the World Bank nor the Gates Foundation has the authority or legitimacy to galvanize instant global cooperation to deal with an epidemic. The vast majority of developing countries often hesitate to welcome the World Bank or the Gates Foundation, which are perceived as keen to investigate the responsibility for generating any new global epidemic. But they normally open their doors to WHO representatives whom they perceive to be defending global, not narrower, interests.

The mistakes in dealing with global health are replicated in the security arena for nuclear proliferation. The logical consequence of a fear about such proliferation should be to strengthen the global institution that deals with this problem. The Commission of Eminent Persons who reviewed the future of the IAEA in 2008 found that despite the Western rhetoric after 9/11, the IAEA had also been subjected to the same zero-budget-growth policies applied to all UN organizations.

One of the IAEA’s key roles is the inspection of nuclear power plants to ensure compliance with international standards and verify the absence of diversion of fuel for weapons. The IAEA needs to keep on its regular payroll a strong and large team of dedicated nuclear inspectors, who...
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will stay with the IAEA only if they have guaranteed competitive salaries and career prospects. The IAEA can provide these good terms and conditions only from reliable and predictable assessed, not voluntary, contributions. However, exactly the opposite has occurred. Europe’s myopia in weakening the inspection capacity of the IAEA is difficult to understand in the light of both the dangers of faulty nuclear power plants (in Chernobyl) and illegal nuclear proliferation on its doorstep (in Libya). Hence, Europe is once again undermining its own long-term interests in weakening the IAEA.

These brief case studies are not aberrations but rather common bill-of-fare for all UN organizations, whether they are technical or more political. The UNDS has suffered generally from the increase in tied funds and circumscribed autonomy.

Migration: why weaken multilateralism now?

The West is weakening the very institutions that it needs to strengthen its long-term security. It should undertake cold and dispassionate analyses of its future threats.11 No major inter-state wars are poised to break out in Europe because of the stable military balance of power. Instead, the main threats range from illegal immigrants to dangerous viruses (like SARS and Ebola), and from lone terrorists carrying Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) to cyber-attacks.

For most of the second half of the twentieth century, Europe worried mostly about a military invasion from the Soviet Union. This threat has effectively gone, although Russia will remain a strategic competitor in other dimensions. A central threat to Europe will come from illegal migration from Africa. In many areas, predictions are perilous but not in demographics. In 1950, the EU’s combined population (379 million)12 was nearly double that of Africa’s (229 million). Today, Africa’s population (1.2 billion in 2015)13 is double that of the EU (513 million in 2018).14 By 2050, Africa’s population is projected to be nearly five times larger: 2.49 billion15 versus 524 million at present.16 The Mediterranean is all that separates Europe from the populous continent of Africa. Hence, without more economic development and jobs to Africa, it will inevitably export more African migrants to Europe. Indeed, there has already been a significant increase of Africans having to enter Europe, legally and illegally. The Pew Research Center reported in 2018 that “the population of sub-Saharan migrants [in Europe] has been boosted by the influx of nearly 1 million asylum applicants (970,000) between 2010 and 2017.”17 Pew also reported that “in 2017, about 5.2 million North African immigrants lived in EU countries, Norway and Switzerland, compared with about 3 million in 1990.”18

To protect its long-term security, Europe should be working energetically to strengthen the institutions that could accelerate the social and economic development of Africa, including those of the UN development system, to help prevent boatloads of Africans from trying to cross the tiny Mediterranean. Europe has already paid a terrible political price when it experienced a small surge of illegal migrants, from Africa and the Middle East. In 2015–2016, this surge of illegal migrants fostered the rising success of populist parties, including in the governments of Hungary, Poland, and Italy in 2019 and as increasing minorities even in Germany and France.

Many European commentators have condemned these populist parties with great moral conviction. They blame the populist leaders, not the traditional centrist parties, for the emergence of populism. Yet, centrist parties from the right and the left have dominated the European political scene for decades. In their period of political domination, they have created or supported policies that have led to the surge of migrants, which has consequently led to the rise of populism. Those who vote for populist parties are not morally deficient. They communicate loud political signals about their insecure future that have been ignored by the traditional elites from centrist parties.
“We must confront a flood of people pouring out of the countries of the Middle East, and meanwhile the depth of Africa has been set in motion. Millions of people are preparing to set out” is the description by Hungary’s populist leader Viktor Orban. While often derided by the Western media, he captures the fears of ordinary Europeans in the face of a potential mass migration to Europe:

It is a modern-day global mass migration, which we cannot see the end of: economic migrants hoping for a better life, refugees and drifting masses mixed up together. This is an uncontrolled and unregulated process, and … the most precise definition of this is “invasion.”

Most centrist European leaders will be reluctant to admit that they have been responsible for the rise of populist leaders by refusing to pay heed to the fears of their own people. If European leaders want to address such fears of mass migration and also address the long-term threat to their security, they should first ask themselves whether it has been wise for Europe to weaken global multilateral institutions as well as the UNDS for short-term financial gains. Some simple strategic common sense might be the following calculation. For every dollar spent by the UNDS in Africa, Europe would probably pay the largest share of, say, 30 cents. Yet 70 cents would also be contributed by the rest of the world to develop Africa. The main beneficiaries of the development of Africa, after the residents of the continent, would be Europe. Therefore, to protect their own long-term interests, they should do the opposite of what they currently are doing—namely, increase rather than decrease their funding of the UNDS.

This is not the only area where the Europeans will need to make a strategic U-turn in their African policies. To promote economic development, Europe should welcome the efforts of other major economic powers to invest in Africa. For example, China has emerged as the largest new investor in Africa; Figure 3.1 shows how over the last two decades China has become the continent’s largest trading partner.

Instead, Europe is opposing or criticizing Chinese investment in Africa. In April 2018, 27 of the 28 EU member nations (except Hungary) signed a report stating that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) “runs counter to the EU agenda for liberalizing trade and pushes the balance of power in favor of subsidized Chinese companies.” The reasons for European opposition are complex, but one key reason is loyalty to the trans-Atlantic alliance. Yet Europe, not the United States, will suffer if Africa fails to develop. Europeans have been critical of Chinese investment practices, which should be improved. However, the best way to improve them is to work with China. When China convenes a high-level China–Africa conference, virtually all African leaders attend. A better way forward would consist of a joint African–Chinese–European partnership to develop Africa. In failing to understand and grasp these new geopolitical opportunities, Europe is undermining its own long-term geopolitical interests.

Similarly, Europe is also undermining its own interests by conspiring with the United States to retain control of the most important global economic institutions, the IMF and the World Bank. As indicated, Europe and the United States had promised at the G-20 leaders’ meeting in London in April 2009 that future leaders of these international financial institutions would be selected in a “meritocratic process.” Instead, all subsequent heads of the IMF and the World Bank again came from Europe and the US, respectively.

Future historians undoubtedly will cite Western myopia in insisting on maintaining control of these two organizations rather than fostering a global sense of ownership. In insisting on maintaining control, the West does not seem to understand how fundamentally the world has changed. A simple boat metaphor captures the profound change. In the past, when the world’s
Since 2000, China has catapulted from being a small investor in Africa to becoming its biggest economic partner.

Figure 3.1 China has become Africa’s biggest economic partner.¹

Note
population lived in 193 separate countries, it was as though they were living in 193 separate boats. Now, as a result of our world shrinking, the 7.5 billion members of the global population no longer live in 193 separate boats. They live in 193 separate cabins on the same boat. To stay with the metaphor, we also have captains and crews taking care of each cabin but none of the boat.

If the world population is aboard the same ship, it is surely in the interest of the West to give the remaining 88 percent of humanity an equal sense of ownership of the fate of the boat. Western control of these two institutions is driven by the short-term considerations of national prestige in retaining Western control, not by a rational and strategic evaluation of whether long-term Western interests are best served by ceding control of two key global institutions. Indeed, both the IMF and World Bank could be more effective globally if they were perceived as genuinely owned by the 193 countries of the world.

Equally important, the insistence of the West in retaining the control of these two key institutions is forcing other states to create parallel institutions that have the potential of deploying more capital and resources than the IMF or World Bank. For example, over 125 countries have signed up to join China’s BRI, which may mobilize up to a trillion dollars to support the BRI. Similarly, China has also set up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with the support of many other countries. The five BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) have also set up a development bank, which could prove to be a game changer in the global financial order. In November 2019, it was reported that the BRICS had proposed “creating a cryptocurrency for settling payment transactions between the countries.”

These major changes and developments suggest why the West should reconsider its decades-long policies of trying to weaken UN institutions and retain control of the IMF and the World Bank. These policies reflect a different global environment when the threats to the West, especially to Europe, were different. Thus, it would be wiser for the West to re-examine the premises on which its policies to global multilateral institutions were based.

Can the Global South, especially Asia, save multilateralism?

Since enlightened policies on multilateralism are unlikely to come from the West in the short term, can emerging economic and political powers, especially from China and India, provide the leadership not only to preserve but also to strengthen the current, however weak, institutions of global governance as well as promote the culture and practices of multilateralism more generally? Despite Asia’s diversity and a recent tradition of mutual suspicion between Beijing and New Delhi, there is hope that its return will result in strengthening multilateralism. As Asian norms and practices infect the global political chemistry, this could result in a strengthening of the global multilateral architecture.

This bold statement will come as a surprise since Asia is sometimes viewed as a troubled continent with such geopolitical flash points as India-Pakistan, the South China Sea, and the Korean peninsula. Yet, there has been no major inter-state war since the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979; by and large, the guns have been silent in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, while conflict is concentrated primarily in West Asia, mainly because of Western interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

Indeed, Asia should not have experienced peace because the biggest power shifts have taken place in Asia and will continue there. Until 1820, the two largest economies were always those of China and India, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. It is especially noteworthy how fast China and India are returning to their natural number one and two positions, as depicted in Figure 3.3.
History teaches us that such shifts of power are accompanied by armed conflicts. Scholars have long worried that Asia would emerge as a region of conflict. Richard Betts, for example, remarked that “one of the reasons for optimism about peace in Europe is the apparent satisfaction of the great powers with the status quo,” while in East Asia there is “an ample pool of festering grievances, with more potential for generating conflict than during the Cold War, when bipolarity helped stifle the escalation of parochial disputes.” Aaron L. Friedberg has remarked similarly:

![Figure 3.2 Evolution of regional and country shares of global GDP.](image1)

![Figure 3.3 Percentage share of world GDP (PPP terms), 1980–2050.](image2)

while civil war and ethnic strife will continue for some time to smoulder along Europe’s peripheries, in the long run it is Asia that seems far more likely to be the cockpit of great-power conflict. The half millennium during which Europe was the world’s primary generator of war (as well as wealth and knowledge) is coming to a close. But, for better or for worse, Europe’s past could be Asia’s future.23

Barry Buzan and Gerald Segal, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, said of East Asia that

there is little that binds its states and societies together but much that divides them. Any chance of finding unifying common ground against the West has long since disappeared … history, therefore, strongly reinforces the view that Asia is in danger of heading back to the future.24

The Western consensus that armed conflict was inevitable in Asia has proved wrong after 30 years. These dramatic failures to understand the dominant peaceful dynamic of Asia demonstrate that there is a real need for Western scholars to re-examine their understanding of Asia.

Is the United States a peaceful country and China an emerging militaristic one? Former US president Jimmy Carter, for one, has noted that the United States is “the most warlike nation in the history of the world” and been at peace for only 16 years of its over 240 years since its founding in 1776.25 As China’s economy grows, it will certainly emerge as a major military power but perhaps will follow Sun Tzu, who advocated that “to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting.”26 Of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, China is the only one that has not fought in any foreign wars outside of its borders since World War II.

The culture of peace in Asia is also reflected in ASEAN, the world’s second most successful regional organization after the European Union, despite the fact that ASEAN seemed destined to fail.27 At its founding in 1967, Southeast Asia was the most conflict-ridden region in the world, with the Vietnam war raging. With its ethnic and religious diversity, Southeast Asia was labeled as the “Balkans of Asia” because in a relatively small and densely populated space, some 240 million Muslims, 120 million Christians, 140 million Buddhists, and 7 million Hindus reside in addition to millions of Confucianists and Taoists. No region is better suited to undergo a clash of civilizations.

Does that mean that ASEAN is a perfect organization? Far from it. Yet, its strength lies in its weakness. It does not represent a threat to any great power but rather an opportunity. Hence, as the brilliant former Singaporean foreign minister, George Yeo, said, “ASEAN’s leadership is the most preferred because all others would be threatened by others’ leadership.”28

Despite Brexit, the European Union remains a far more successful organization than ASEAN. It has deeper cooperation among its members. It also has no prospect of war, which ASEAN has not achieved; but within ASEAN there have been no wars since its founding. However, it is ahead of the EU in some respects. If any objective observer of multilateral organization had been asked even five years ago which organization is likely to break up first, ASEAN or the EU, the answer would have been ASEAN. Nonetheless, with Brexit looming and growing discomfort among some Central Europeans over a borderless EU, ASEAN’s looser articles of association seemingly have made it resilient and durable.

More importantly, while the EU member states have kept peace within the EU, they have initiated it or participated in conflicts on the periphery of the EU, including in the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East (Iraq and Syria), and North Africa (Libya). By contrast, the ASEAN
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countries have not participated in external armed conflicts. Hence, there is hope that the eco-
system of peace ASEAN has developed could infect and spread elsewhere in Asia. In this way, 
Asia could develop its own multilateral security culture and norms that could later serve as a 
model. In short, the world needs to develop a deeper understanding of the new political and 
strategic culture developing in Asia.

Similarly, other Asian-generated multilateral institutions could provide exemplary models of 
governance for development. As mentioned, a good example is the Asian Infrastructure Invest-
ment Bank (AIIB) set up by China in January 2016. Washington opposed AIIB’s establishment 
and urged its allies not to join. In the end, most countries ignored the pressure, including the 
United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and India.

Paradoxically, the AIIB has ended up having higher governance standards than the IMF and 
the World Bank, where the United States has insisted on retaining its veto power by consistently 
raising the “super majority” needed for decisions on major issues. It formerly was 75 percent 
when Washington’s voting share was around 25 percent. As the US voting share shrank to 16 
percent, it insisted that the “super majority” should be raised to 85 percent. By contrast, China 
has pledged not to raise the AIIB “super majority,” even though China will lose its veto. As a 
democratic country, the United States has been less democratic in its management of global 
multilateral institutions than China, a non-democratic country. Similarly, the size of the AIIB 
management and staff has been kept leaner than that in the IMF and World Bank, where 
resident boards in Washington, DC participate in key decision-making on a daily basis. By con-
trast, the AIIB board is non-resident, demonstrating that its standards of corporate governance 
are higher than those of the IMF and the World Bank.

As indicated, the United States and Europe should no longer insist on control over the IMF 
and World Bank. Instead, they should allow a fully meritocratic selection process and allow 
Asian and other Global South countries to exercise leadership. Fortunately, Asia has produced a 
strong number of development economists, like Manmohan Singh, the former PM of India, 
Goh Chok Tong, the former PM of Singapore, Montek Singh Ahulwalia, the former Chief 
Planner of India, and Sri Mulyani, the current finance minister of Indonesia, who could serve as 
president of the World Bank. Similarly, Asia has equally strong candidates to lead the IMF, 
including Raghuran Rajan, the former governor of the Central Bank of India, Tharman Shan-
mugatnam, the former Finance Minister of Singapore and Chairman of the International 
Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC), and Zhou Xiaochuan, the former governor of the 
People’s Bank of China. Such a change in leadership would be an important symbolic gesture 
to demonstrate that the West is willing to allow the remaining 88 percent of the world’s popu-
lation, outside the Western world, to feel a sense of ownership of these major multilateral devel-
opment institutions.

Similarly, the West could generate a greater sense of global ownership of the UN Security 
Council, the most powerful international security organization, by changing the composition of 
its members. The council’s 15 members are composed of the five permanent ones (China, 
France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and 10 elected ones. Yet the P-5 
dominate because of their veto power and continuity in office.29

The UN set up the Open-Ended Working Group on Security Council reform in 1993 with 
a view toward altering the composition and rules to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. 
No progress has been made. The Security Council cannot remain a fossil representing yester-
day’s great powers. It must integrate tomorrow’s great powers. The challenge here is to create 
a political consensus on who should be the new great powers to be included.30 The council will 
soon face a critical challenge. If it does not change its composition to include rising powers like 
Brazil and India, it will lose its credibility.31
Conclusion

Multilateral cooperation for development and for security would benefit from rethinking the nationalities of senior personnel, the operating procedures of institutions, and the composition of essential UN and other organizations. Since the UN system was created in 1945, the global population has soared and the size of the global GNP has exploded. Common sense dictates that the budget of the UN system should also be increased significantly to meet growing multilateral demands. Yet, no UN Secretary-General has felt able to propose a simple suggestion to increase the UN budget because of the negativity of the P-5 that dominates UN decision-making. Similarly, in making key UN appointments—including leadership of the UNDP, WFP, and UNICEF—the Secretary-General abides by the wishes of the P-5, not the larger geopolitical community. In short, the domination of the UN system by the P-5 is pernicious and distorting. A more representative Security Council would break this distorting stranglehold and help the entire UN system.

To bring about significant change in the current multilateral system, we need to create a global consensus that our small, interdependent global village requires strengthened, not weakened, organizations of global governance, including the UN system. Fortunately, even though many Western governments are resisting reform and rejuvenation of the UN, some of their populations are calling for the strengthening of global multilateral institutions in the face of such existential threats as climate change. Gradually, emerging powers as well as other members of the Global South will have to assume greater responsibility and enhanced leadership if we are to begin strengthening, rather than weakening, the global multilateral order.

NOTES

6 Ibid., 79.
8 Ibid., 116.
9 Ibid., 117.
11 For a discussion by the author, see Mahbubani, Has the West Lost It? A Provocation (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 44–53.
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28 Ibid.
30 For a proposal by the author on getting from here to there, see Mahbubani, The Great Convergence, 244.

ADDITIONAL READING