

Alliances and Multilateral Organizations

Background

The United States (U.S.) emerged as a global superpower after World War II. Today, newly emerging global powers threaten American global hegemony. The U.S. has traditionally taken leading roles and responsibilities within multilateral organizations and alliances such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the World Trade Organization. However, in recent years, the United States has withdrawn from this role as a result of eroding accountability within the international system and rising domestic concerns related to the perceived benefits of such organizations. Currently, the U.S. contributes an asymmetric amount of resources to many of these multilateral organizations which results in a lack of domestic support for participation. Additionally, the absence of effective and efficient enforcement standards in these systems leads to diminishing trust between international actors. To maintain U.S. support and participation in multilateral organizations and alliances, the domestic perceptions of their benefits, changing international power dynamics, and the sustainability of these organizations must be addressed.

Analysis

The misunderstanding of self-interest and identity among the nations creates a discrepancy in the effectiveness of multilateral organizations for state actors. Many Americans feel dissatisfied with their current foreign partnerships because of the unstable nature of modern-day alliances. In addition, the lack of domestic awareness on multilateral organizations has a negative impact on how such alliances are perceived. When analyzing this issue, they can observe a shift in economic, political, and military power dynamics through interactions within multilateral organizations. Unequal benefits and unequal division of responsibilities leads to a lack of consensus on the level of accountability between state actors. These factors, combined with unpredictability among state leaders, has created instability and a lack of commitment among nations.

Organizations like NATO, where there is a perception of unequal responsibilities, has served to displease Americans who do not see immediate benefits of the organization. The U.S. funds more than 60 percent of the NATO budget, causing many taxpayers to believe the benefits of their contributions are not proportional (3.6% of GDP)¹. A lack of accountability in the international community and within multilateral organizations creates a sense of distrust and makes alliances less stable and attractive to participants over time. When state actors are permitted to violate policies explicitly forbidden by organizations they are a part of, there becomes a precedent of a lack of enforcement that defeats the purpose of international norms. A lack of a credible deterrent in the enforcement of organizational policies ensues. Additionally, member-states can free ride if there are not set contribution requirements or well-communicated expectations within organizations.

China's refusal to follow the WTO's standards and guidelines has troubled the international community for years. Lack of U.S. commitment to enforce the guidelines of membership can hinder citizens' awareness and distrust in the national interest. When discussing power dynamics between nations, it is evident that there is a shift in how the United States interacts with state actors through international institutions. There have been many cases of intellectual property theft by Chinese cyberattacks. When these attacks on our country occur, the U.S. often engages in unilateral action rather than multilateral action through international organizations. In addition, unfair trading agreements between China and other countries through the WTO portrays the lack of accountability by alliances.

The domestic perception of the value of the organizations in which the United States participates ultimately drives the longevity and the bargaining power of the United States within those same institutions. Domestic partisanship as well as differences in national foreign policy further contribute to ineffectual membership within organizations without clear or stable direction of national interests and foreign policy goals. The average citizen, absent clear guidance from leadership on the direction and purpose of strategic alliances, could undervalue the importance of membership. In addition, a perceived lack of accountability for member states ultimately creates strain in international relationships. Ambiguous goals convolute the international sphere and obfuscate the value of the institutions in which the United States participates.

¹ BBC World: "Trump: What does the US do for NATO in Europe?"

Alliances and Multilateral Organizations

Recommendations

Problem Statement: *Domestic perceptions, changing power dynamics, and questions of alliance sustainability are contributing to an uncertain future in regards to the United States' involvement in alliances and multilateral organizations.*

In our approach to reducing the uncertainty in the future of U.S. affairs, we identified three areas of focus: Domestic Perceptions of Alliances and Multilateral Organizations, Changing Power Dynamics on the International Stage, and Alliance Sustainability and Commitment.

Domestic Perceptions of Alliances and Multilateral Organizations

To change domestic perceptions of United States' (U.S.) involvement in multilateral organizations that contribute to beneficial foreign policy actions, we recommend the following:

1. The U.S. should more consistently utilize internal dispute systems within multilateral organizations rather than unilateral action. This would display and affirm U.S. commitments to greater accountability and set an example for other partner nations.
2. The U.S. should more clearly identify and address threats felt by citizens of allied nations so as to facilitate domestic understanding and willingness to support.
3. U.S. foreign policy leaders should publicly support and defend the importance of alliances and multilateral organizations since they have large influence over public opinion.

Changing Power Dynamics on the International Stage

To adapt to changing economic, political, and military power dynamics on the international stage, we recommend the following strategies:

1. To counter China's economic rise, the U.S. should encourage free trade agreements in the Pacific and Africa, such as the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, to give support to developing nations and provide non-Chinese trade options. Additionally, the U.S. must renegotiate terms in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).
2. To restrict China expanding their sphere of political influence, the U.S. should support multilateral arrangements, like the Free and Open Indo-Pacific agreement, to limit its influence to Africa and the Pacific. Additionally, to restrict Russia's political manipulation and cyber campaigns, the U.S. must support NATO cyber defense operations and confront Russian aggression through organizations such as the OSCE.
3. To counter Russia's, China's, and North Korea's increasing global influence, the U.S. should consider pursuing the organization of a multilateral organization of friendly nations throughout the Pacific, especially as we already have bilateral relations with key allies in the region. Specifically for Russia and North Korea, the U.S. should continue its efforts to increase military readiness and preparedness of friendly NATO nations in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe while improving Air Defense capabilities in Korea and Japan.

Alliance Sustainability and Commitment

To make our alliances more sustainable and increase foreign commitment to multinational organizations, we recommend the following:

1. The U.S. should rely more on congressional means of making alliances instead of executive orders to increase the credibility and sustainability of our alliances. Alliances ratified through Congress are more sustainable due to their bipartisan nature. Also, they are more difficult to reverse, making our conduct in multilateral organizations more predictable and credible.
2. We should reform the process of accountability and structures to increase the effectiveness of already existing multinational organizations, such as NATO and WTO. For example, a shortening of the dispute negotiation process in the World Trade Organization would increase its responsiveness to disputes and usefulness to the international community. Additionally, renegotiated contributions into NATO that are proportional to a country's GDP will more fairly distribute the burden of the organization and increase commitment to such alliances.