

Redefining Multilateralism in a New Geopolitical Era

PIN Conference

**Speech by
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Geneva, 05 December 2024



Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

Good morning!

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all, both in person at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and online, to our conference entitled “Redefining Multilateralism in a New Geopolitical Era.”

Today’s event is a joint endeavor, bringing together the expertise and vision of the Anwar Gargash Diplomacy Academy, the Processes of International Negotiation (PIN) Network and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). This collaboration underscores our shared commitment to fostering a meaningful conversation on an important topic—how to adapt multilateralism to the rapidly evolving geopolitical realities.

Together, we aim to provide a platform for in-depth reflection and vibrant debate. Over the course of three panels, we want to explore key dimensions of this issue:

1. When it comes to shifts in Geopolitical Dynamics, we aim at examining how the changing balance of power and emerging coalitions impact the international system.
2. When it comes to overcoming Deadlocks in Multilateral Negotiations, we want to address ways to navigate stalemates and strengthen productive dialogue.
3. When it comes to inclusivity in Multilateral Negotiations, we want to explore how to build processes that reflect a broader range of voices and perspectives in decision-making.

Now let me say a few words about why I think this conversation is so important.

Over the past decade, the challenges facing multilateralism have grown increasingly complex. Scholars, policymakers and diplomats alike have raised concerns about the viability of global institutions, the erosion of productive international cooperation, and the future of multilateral diplomacy in general.

Major initiatives such as the United Nations Summit of the Future highlight the urgency of these issues. Calls for reforming and strengthening the international system are becoming louder and louder, as the frameworks that underpin multilateralism are increasingly weakened in today’s volatile and fragmented geopolitical environment.

This topic is becoming more critical by the day. We are navigating a world defined by renewed and largely unregulated great-power competition, intensifying political polarization, identity politics, rising nationalism, and protectionism, violations of fundamental norms of international law, and open hot and protracted conflicts. Each of these challenges poses a specific threat to multilateralism, creating constraints to international cooperation and straining the institutions that have, for decades, upheld the international order.

This shifting reality has profound implications for the nature and course of international negotiations. The move toward a multipolar world has reshaped the balance of power and driving the formation of new coalitions and alliances. As traditional power structures evolve, multilateral diplomacy must adapt to reflect and respond to these changing dynamics.



Let me talk about some of the current challenges:

First,

The competition between major powers has become increasingly pronounced. This rivalry is reflected in military posturing, economic policies like trade wars and sanctions, and efforts to expand spheres of influence in regions such as the Indo-Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Africa. These tensions disrupt the functioning of multilateral institutions, as they are often used as tools to advance unilateral agendas rather than instruments fostering cooperation.

Moreover, in today's fragmented geopolitical landscape, coalitions, both formal and informal, have become increasingly important actors in the multilateral system. As traditional institutions struggle to adapt, coalitions are emerging as flexible mechanisms for addressing specific global or regional challenges, creating opportunities but also introducing new complexities. These past years saw the emergence of several coalitions, such as the G7, the G20, BRICS or the SCO representing a diversification of global leadership and challenging the traditional dominance of a few global powers.

At the same time, minilateralism which consists of smaller, more flexible coalitions focused on specific issues, is emerging as an appealing alternative to traditional inclusive multilateral frameworks. These clubs, often purely interest-driven with hardly any common value-base, often include small and middle powers but can provide innovative ways to tackle global or regional challenges in effective ways. However, their proliferation also risks further fragmenting the international system, raising important questions about inclusivity and coherence.

In Summary, coalitions represent both a challenge and an opportunity for multilateralism and international negotiations. They offer new ways to foster cooperation and tackle global or regional issues but can cause further fragmentation and put inclusivity at risk.

Second,

Political polarization, coupled with the rise of nationalism and identity politics, has created significant obstacles to international negotiations, often leading to deadlocks. Leaders advocating "nation first" agendas prioritize domestic interests over global commitments, leading to the weakening of alliances, the withdrawal from multilateral agreements, and resistance to international norms. Nationalism and transactionalism are global trends that put into question the very nature of multilateral institutions and diplomacy.

The multilateral institutions' organization and processes also have an impact on possible deadlocks. Outdated voting procedures, lack of enforcement mechanisms, and slow bureaucratic processes can stifle innovation and prevent timely responses to crises, thus reinforcing unilateral and transactional agendas when facing multilateral failures. This is one of the reasons why reforming institutional frameworks is seen as essential, when we look for innovative solutions.

Reforming institutional framework is therefore key to overcome structural deadlocks, reforming in the sense of revising voting mechanisms, creating more flexible processes to reframe discussions, empower the chair, or incorporate more inclusivity, which leads me to my last and third point.



Before I would like to point to the obvious; reforming multilateral institutions requires the buy-in of members states and are often hindered by the very voting mechanisms that you would want to reform in the first place.

Third,

Inclusivity in multilateral negotiations is often associated with an improvement of effectiveness and legitimacy.

Inclusivity means ensuring that underrepresented voices, from the Global South, small states, and indigenous peoples, have a seat at the table and a say in the discussions. It also involves addressing power imbalances that influence decision-making and agenda-setting. A case in point is climate finance, where developing countries often bear the burden of inaction.

The power dynamics in negotiations is also associated with the inclusion of non-state actors, such as civil society, the private sector and other relevant actors in international relations. There are sometimes measures put in place, such as digital platforms and public-private partnership to enable broader participation from actors, enhancing the access for diverse voices.

Inclusivity also comes with challenges, though. Indeed, efforts to increase inclusivity can sometimes result in purely symbolic participation rather than substantive involvement. While underrepresented groups may be present at the table, their input may still be sidelined or ignored, undermining the very purpose of inclusivity. Moreover, in an already complex international landscape, a more inclusive process might add complexities in reaching agreements between diverging priorities. It may create pushback from established powers that view broader participation as a challenge to their influence and a burden on the efficiency of decision-making processes. Balancing inclusivity with efficiency in international negotiations is therefore a significant challenge.

In conclusion, we are living in a more unpredictable and unstable world, without clear leading powers and where the Western led, global rule-based order is put in question.

In the midst of all this uncertainty, essential questions are raised:

- How can multilateral negotiations align with these geopolitical shifts, balancing the interests of traditional major powers while acknowledging the growing influence of emerging actors and coalitions?
- How can we overcome deadlocks threatening consensus building and decision-making in a complex and diverse international negotiation framework?
- And how can we foster more inclusive, effective cooperation to address the needs of a diverse and interconnected world?

Our discussions today will go beyond simple institutional reforms to examine the very heart of multilateral processes—decision-making, negotiation strategies, and the power dynamics that shape outcomes. By focusing on these aspects, we hope to reply to these underlying questions by identifying actionable solutions for advancing multilateralism.

We are today gathering in the Maison de la Paix (House of Peace) in mist of International Geneva.

Geneva, a city that stands as a symbol of international cooperation and diplomacy, provides an excellent setting for this conversation.



As part of the vibrant ecosystem of international Geneva, we at the GCSP are honored to play a role in encouraging dialogue and developing solutions to contemporary security challenges. Guided by our motto, “*Building Peace Together*,” we are committed to fostering dialogue, building trust, and supporting policymakers in navigating the complexities of global security to find common solutions to shared problems.

I am deeply grateful for the collaboration between our three organizations and delighted to see that our shared vision has materialized in this important discussion.

I would like to extend my appreciation to our panelists—seasoned diplomats, negotiators, and representatives from key international organizations—whose expertise will stimulate our exchanges today.

In closing, I invite you all to engage fully in today’s discussions. Let this conference be an important contribution for redefining multilateralism and for forging new pathways for cooperation in a complex and interconnected world.

Thank you for joining us, and I wish you an enriching and inspiring day ahead!

I now have the honor of giving the floor to Dr. Mohammed Al Daheri, Deputy Director General of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy.