



Structured Conversations I

Global realignments and foreign policy formulation:
national and regional spaces and global insertion

Organization:
Maria Regina Soares de Lima
Carlos R. S. Milani

Participants:**Ambassador Ricardo Ernesto Lagorio**

Former Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Argentine Republic to the Russian Federation. He is Professor of Foreign Policy and International Relations at Universidad Austral, Universidad Católica Argentina and Universidad de Belgrano. He is a Board Member of the Consejo Argentino de Relaciones Internacionales (CARI) and General Secretary for the 2021-2023 period.

Professor Dr. Guo Jie

Associate professor at the School of International Studies at Peking University

Professor Dr. Monica Hirst

Professor of Latin American politics at the Universidad Torquato di Tella, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and visiting professor at the Institute of Social and Political Studies of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (IESP-UERJ)

Professor Dr. Ana Covarrubias

General Academic Coordinator and professor/researcher at the Center for International Studies at El Colegio de México

Doctor Andrés Serbin

Executive President of the Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES); Co-Chairman of the Asia and Americas Section, Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and Trustee at Consejo Argentino de Relaciones Internacionales (CARI).

Professor Dr. Luis Fernandes

Director of the Institute of International Relations (IRI) at Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), and also professor at UFRJ – Rio de Janeiro Federal University

Professor Dr. Maxi Schoeman

Professor in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria, member of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), and Deputy Chair of the Board of the Institute for Global Dialogue.

Professor Dr. Ziya Onis

Professor of International Political Economy at Koç University in Istanbul

Throughout 2021, the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI), in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), is developing a project on issues related to the realignment of international politics and the global economy, and its implications for Brazil and its foreign relations. The project includes events, 'Structured Conversations' (interviews) with experts, and the production of policy papers on four broad themes:

- Global realignments and foreign policy formulation: national and regional spaces and global insertion;
- Trade and transformations in the international political economy;
- Technological innovation and the digital economy;
- Anthropocene crises, sustainability, global health, and consensus-building for multilateral policies.

These Structured Conversations refer to the first thematic axis of the project. The starting point of the discussions is the perspectives for the future of multilateralism in a scenario of crisis while emerging actors seek to strengthen the system by advocating for reforms. The specialists interviewed were selected taking into account the diversity of regional perspectives, in order to obtain contributions that encompass the vision of actors with diverse interests. In this sense, the axis "Global realignments and foreign policy formulation: national and regional spaces and global insertion", coordinated by Maria Regina Soares de Lima and Carlos R. S. Milani, seeks to analyze the contributions of the experiences of the different regionalisms for the future of multilateralism, the possibilities of arrangements between like-minded actors and the role of informal groups to promote agendas that encounter obstacles in the universal multilateral sphere.

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Question 1. *What are the current political views on the future of multilateralism? What are the main terms of the debate? Who are the main actors supporting these views? Considering the different positions, interests, and articulation capabilities, is it possible for these views to converge?*

Professor Dr. Guo Jie: The multilateral system, or the "embedded liberal" world order as John G. Ruggie's termed it, is largely a post-World War II element in the hope of promoting cooperation as well as providing for deconfliction and crisis off-ramps. Over the past two decades, it has been challenged in fundamental ways from within and without, which is manifested first in the crisis of U.S. leadership, and second in the rise of the non-Western world. The international community has two differing perspectives in general on the future of multilateralism. One view is that the existing multilateral architectures are unwieldy and ineffective, neither resolving differences to generate consensus nor satisfactorily manage and reduce real shared global problems. At a time when populism, nationalism, unilateralism and protectionism of the past are rearing their heads, it is all the more impossible to be optimistic about its prospect. The absence of a multilateral spirit facing shared crises such as Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and nuclear proliferation, and the fact that the liberal international order has failed to play a sufficiently cohesive role to mobilize concerted actions only add another worrying footnote to this standpoint. In contrast, a second looks at it with a more positive light. In the view of those who take this position, despite its many weaknesses, the multilateral system remains the only viable option for addressing the growing number of global and regional challenges. This view is held by a diverse group of actors, ranging from the dominant states of the existing multilateral mechanisms to the traditional outsiders and new players. Clearly, a multilateralism without any adjectives is unlikely to be acceptable to all, considering the incompatibility of their interests and ideas. For emerging powers including China, for instance, the mainstream multilateral paradigm has to be reshaped on the basis of a renewed conception and a break with existing hierarchical structures to reflect more appropriately the changing dynamics of an increasingly multipolar, multilayered and pluralistic world. In short, "inclusive" should be the central adjective attached to an updated version of multilateralism. Yet, for those who make the rules of the multilateral game, such as the U.S. and its European allies, the required reforms are

only possible if they pose no threat to their vested privileges and value base. This stance is more or less rooted in an ideological suspicion towards emerging non-Western actors. These two presumptions about the future of multilateralism are somehow indicative of the fact that the final outcome would highly depend on two uncertain prospects, i.e., whether the rise of emerging countries would sustain and whether the leaders of the order (U.S. in particular) would change their mindset. But then, is there any identity-attitude correspondence between emerging states and order revisionists or between dominant powers and order defenders? The answer is paradoxically in the negative. As beneficiaries of the post-war multilateral system, it is more in the interest of emerging states to preserve rather than alter or undermine the foundation of the existing institutions and norms. While, U.S. preference for going it alone during the Trump administration proved from the other side that the leading powers are not necessarily the guardians of the order, but on the contrary, can be its disruptors under certain circumstances. In a nutshell, the current crisis of multilateralism is a crisis of governance, not a crisis of the system itself. In a recent column for *World Politics Review*, Stewart Patrick, senior fellow at the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, characterizes the four distinct models of multilateralism currently vying for primacy as the charter (U.N. universalism), club (democratic solidarity), concert (great power prerogative) and coalition (variable geometry) conceptions of world order. A combination of these “4 Cs” might be a reasonable alternative for U.S. internationalism after Donald Trump, but all is not yet predictable.

Professor Dr. Monica Hirst: Looking towards the future, multilateralism is a dimension of international relations that is not going through a moment of transformation nor of redefinition, but adjustments. There are no deep reform processes, as a kind of constituent assembly like in Chile. This multilateralism will be adjusted due to the movement and new tensions in the international order itself. In terms of medium and long-term impact, the system is a reactive space to these transformations, which is related to the new correlation of power and the escalation of political tensions between, on the one hand, representatives of a liberal internationalism and, on the other, a group that contests this paradigm - mainly China and Russia.

Therefore, to think about the future is to think more about the new tensions that affect the multilateral system than in terms of a reconfigured multilateralism. At the same time, one must take into account that it is very different to think of a multilateralism focused on

the classical themes of the international agenda, such as war, peace and trade, *vis a vis* the multilateralism that is dedicated to new themes on the global agenda, where we can highlight environment and gender, for example, which are themes that have an expression in the multilateral sphere, and where it is assumed there will be changes. In these cases, these changes are a reflection of the evolution of the agenda itself and the influence of the players that push for specific regulations.

That being said, the big issue in the debate is the capacity of liberal internationalism to reimpose itself. In this case, the United States and the European Union are very active in regaining their capacity to control, press and influence multilateralism. This great effort, which arose from Biden's victory in the US and the EU's struggle to become a political voice with more capacity to reverberate, is not necessarily positive. There is a nostalgic sense of bringing back a normative authority, a higher political power, that is, it is not a creative effort to accept a reconfiguration of the rules of the game or a new type of multilateralism. Thus, it does not necessarily represent a transformation, but a *déjà vu*, in the sense of the authority of the West reclaiming its historical role in multilateral spheres. The fact that this effort is not transformative is an element of tension because it is based on elements from the past. The risk of anachronism is, therefore, significant.

For the US, it may be transformative to seek to recover the vitality of American capitalism by bringing back the Rooseveltian model, but wanting to bring to the multilateral sphere a revitalization of a Wilsonian ideology in the 21st century is anachronistic. The opposing view to this, headed by China, Russia, and some other emerging powers, suffers from the polarization imposed by the liberal side. Thus, we have another problem: all Russian and Chinese endeavors become hostage to the polarization arising from liberal internationalism, which generates a paralysis, making it less creative and less transformative. In this scenario, it is the multilateralism who suffers, and the nations and agendas that need it to achieve collective goals and consolidate global public issues. An example is the 2030 Agenda, which in addition to being on the losing side in terms of impacts of the pandemic, it also loses due to the recent tensions in high international politics.

Professor Dr. Maxi Schoeman: It has become somewhat *passé* to talk about support for multilateralism – everyone supports it, yet we also talk about a crisis of and challenges to the future of multilateralism, with, some would argue, the future pointing to multipolarity rather than multilateral global governance. The crisis in multilateralism has to do, firstly,

with the retreat from multilateralism by the US during the Trump era, with the rise of China and with the rise of right-wing nationalism and, especially since the onset of the Covid19 pandemic, a noticeable inward turn on the part of many states. The Trump threat, though, has now largely been weathered with Biden's commitment to a US return to multilateralism, most prominent perhaps in the US' recommitment to the Paris agreement. Secondly, though, and much more serious, are the different views about what multilateralism should actually 'do' or achieve, and this is a debate about underlying values and principles.

For the Global North, a call to a return to multilateralism (think of the Alliance for Multilateralism initiated by the French and German foreign ministries), is a call for a continued commitment to liberal principles and values; a perspective that has evolved over time to include a broader range of issues, most prominent of which are those of democratization and human rights and, to some extent, a 'loosening' of a rigorous commitment to traditional state sovereignty in terms of article 2 of the UN Charter. This loosening is most obvious in the evolution of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), also supported, at least initially and, from an African perspective, before the Libyan crisis of 2011, by many countries of the Global South. But the liberal values of the Global North are also those of the post-Second World War Northern powers who laid down the rules and who still benefit from a rules-based multilateral system that serves their interests, especially when it comes to the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). One only has to look at voting rights in the IMF to see how these so-called liberal rules actually favour the US in particular: the US has 17.44% of the voting rights, whilst China, the second biggest economy in the world, holds only 6.41% of the votes: democratization may be a core North value, but it does not extend to international organizations.

China, on the other hand, is as vigorous in its call for multilateralism and universal commitment to a rules-based international system. In his address to the 2021 gathering of the WEF, Xi Jinping referred to multilateralism along the lines of it being 'the torch that will illuminate humanity's way forward', but the Chinese commitment is much more of a revisionist, if not a reactionary, position, strongly supporting a strict reading and application of art. 2 and the definition of sovereignty supported by the rule of non-intervention, thereby largely insulating China against any criticism of or action to address its human rights violations or its aggressive policies in the South China Sea. Non-interference is key for China, as is a commitment to international rules, provided these support Chinese interests: theirs very much seems to be 'multilateralism with Chinese characteristics'.

In between the liberal and Chinese approaches is that of emerging and smaller powers, with their call and support for a rules-based international system, but one that recognises the huge changes in the system since its inception more than seventy years ago. Their call is for a system that reflects contemporary realities such as intricate global interdependence and rising global inequalities, and a system that is representative in terms of contemporary global power and issues configurations. The liberals and Chinese may compete for the support of this group, but the group is not necessarily united and may go with either the liberal or Chinese approach depending on the issue, rather than as a general principle. Mostly, the aim is to change the rules and the structure of the system, but always with a commitment in principle to multilateralism.

Whether these different approaches can converge, is uncertain. At this point the only convergence seems to be between the liberals and Chinese (and Russia) as the G5 in terms of a reluctance to give up its privileged status in the Security Council. It may be, though, that the 'third' perspective, so focused on reform and with its emphasis on issues and the setting of the agenda, together with calls from global civil society for changes to the global agenda, might keep multilateralism alive and may even result in changes to the rules underlying the system. Attempts by emerging powers like the current call from India and South Africa to the WTO to temporarily suspend intellectual property rights on the production of Covid vaccines and the extent to which rich countries support the WHO's COVAX initiative in concrete terms, will be a litmus test for the future of a multilateralism that delivers on its core purpose. One can also add that, as shown by the India-South Africa initiative, the competition between the liberals and China creates opportunities for emerging and smaller powers to step up to the plate and to take up (largely issue-based) leadership roles. The question is whether these powers take up such opportunities as South Africa and India have just done. The rise of nationalism and right-wing political movements in potential leader-countries, such as Brazil, seem to have muted their formerly active roles in global affairs. Turkey might be another example, although it remains active and ambitious in its own region and seems to define its sphere of influence in increasingly broad terms, with active engagement in Africa, largely based on religious affinity and affiliation. At the same time, though, a country like India, itself increasingly pursuing Hindu-nationalism, has not allowed domestic politics to impair its global ambition and engagement. Much depends therefore on the foreign policy 'appetite' of these countries. South Africa, too, remains committed to multilateralism as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, whilst crusading for a more just, equitable and representative global governance system. Ramaphosa has invested much diplomatic

capital in his call for a WTO-TRIPS waiver, attempting to do so on behalf, also, of the African continent.

What is important, is to realise that multilateralism is not merely a means to an end, but in a way it is an end in itself, a type of status symbol, commitment to which seems to bestow a kind of international legitimacy on the 'claimant'. More than this, for the old order – the Northern states, especially the G3 - the current version of multilateral global governance shores up their power. For others, like China, it is part of a foreign policy intent on expanding its influence as a global leader who 'plays by the rules'. For the Global South, and particularly Africa, multilateralism is too important in terms of having a voice, and even slow and small changes to, for instance, the IMF's voting structure, improve the continent's position globally and could translate into domestic benefits. This is the reason why, I believe, multilateralism will not, for the foreseeable future, disintegrate: it has, as a label, become too important to be allowed to fall apart, no matter how contested the actual rules, values and principles underpinning it.

Professor Dr. Luis Fernandes: The creation of a complex system of multilateral organizations around the UN was anchored in the postwar Atlantic Alliance between the United States and the major countries of Western Europe, which also included the structuring of a collective security system with the victorious powers of the Second World War (including the Soviet Union). The foundations of this universal multilateralism were based on the fact that the protagonists of the Atlantic Alliance (US and Western Europe) accounted for about 55% of world GDP measured by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in the immediate postwar period, which supported their agenda setting power to determine the rules, norms and organizing principles of the main multilateral institutions and regimes created within or under the umbrella of the UN system.

Although criticised by the "non-aligned countries movement" after the decolonisation processes, with support of the socialist countries of the time, the concentrated power of the agenda of the central countries remained largely predominant in the system, until the United States itself consolidated a posture of retreat in relation to commitments and responsibilities assumed in its scope and of growing reluctance to bear the costs (financial and political-administrative) of exercising its global leadership through multilateral organisations and regimes. This "preferential option for unilateralism" on the part of the main global power precedes the end of the Cold War, and has as its initial

milestone the rupture of the Bretton Woods monetary agreements and the end of the dollar-gold standard in the '70s. Former President Trump's open opposition to the multilateral system and the shuddering of the Atlantic Alliance represents the culmination of this unilateralist escalation in US foreign policy.

Trump's defeat in the U.S. elections and the rise of the Biden Administration puts on display the possibility that there may be a reversal in this escalation, and a (re)valuing of universal multilateralism and the Atlantic Alliance in U.S. foreign policy, as the new President's speech seems to indicate. The problem is that world conditions today are quite different from those experienced seven decades ago. There has been a profound change in the correlation of forces in the international system, particularly in the last two decades. The U.S. and Western Europe today account for less than 29% of world GDP measured by PPP, almost half the share they held in the immediate postwar period. China alone accounts for nearly 20% of world GDP, and India accounts for 8%. All this makes any move to reinstate a monopolistic or privileged power of agenda for the United States and the major Western European countries in the multilateral organizations and regimes of the UN system unfeasible and unsustainable. There can only be an effective resumption and consolidation of multilateralism on the basis of a broad and comprehensive reform of its practices and institutions, in order to reflect the new composition of forces existing in the world in the 21st Century. This is an agenda that tends to generate convergence of positions between the rising powers and the middle powers of the international system, and may count on the support of movements and groups of global Civil Society mobilized around themes addressed by different multilateral organizations and regimes. The unknown factor is how, beyond the discourse, the central countries - and in particular the U.S. - will react to the relative loss of power in setting the agenda and loss of margin for unilateral action resulting from this necessary reform. To a large extent, the future of multilateralism depends on the answer to this question.

Professor Dr. Ziya Onis: Concerning the future of multilateralism, I should look at this issue from a Turkish perspective. The 2008 global financial crisis was a turning point, in the sense that it accelerated the process which was already in motion, namely the rise of China and other emerging powers like Brazil, India, South Africa, Turkey and Mexico, and the relative decline of the West, because the global financial crisis severely affected both the United States and Europe. During the period of the 1990s and early 2000s, the

West was at the peak of its influence: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war created a sense of confidence that liberal capitalism had won. In the post 2008 period, what we've seen is a growing challenge of rising powers from the global south, specifically over the past decade, with a growing competition, from China in particular.

What we see now is an environment in which the positive effect is the stimulus to a broader participation, in a no longer West-dominated order, but an order that includes several actors. We have a more pluralistic and participative governance structure, but also what I would call a fragmented multilateralism. The dominance of the G-20 has replaced the G-7, which means inclusion of emerging powers, but increasingly we see a clash of norms, specifically due to the growing competition between the United States and China, and the clash between democratic and authoritarian forms of capitalism. We have the Washington consensus, on the one hand, and the Beijing norms, on the other hand, with China becoming an important actor trying to reshape global governance.

Another point I want to emphasize is that this environment of fragmented multilateralism and clash of norms is especially important for countries like Turkey, which finds themselves in between, in a hybrid position. It has traditionally been in alliance with the west – via EU membership process, NATO membership etc. so Turkey has been embedded in the Western economic, security and institutional structures. But within a changing international order and global shifts, Turkey is trying to reposition itself. In recent years, we have been seeing a growing affinity with Russia and China. Therefore, Turkey is an interesting laboratory as a country which finds itself right in between the Western axis and the Eastern axis, represented predominantly by models of authoritarian capitalism. You can find other similar cases in European periphery, for example Poland and Hungary. Obviously, the extent of the democratic backsliding in those countries has been more limited, compared to Turkey, because the European Union is still considered to have a leverage.

In a nutshell, there's both a bright and a dark side of this new environment for countries which are in the middle. The bright side is that in the post-Western world there's more room to participate for countries like Turkey (which is now part of the G20), that does not have a voice in global affairs previously. However, the dark side is that in this changing environment and clash of norms, rise of authoritarian capitalism is increasingly impacting Turkey's political and economic future. I would say that this environment of fragmented multilateralism presents new challenges, which can affect the domestic political environment. The question to pose about the future is: will a country like Turkey be a

member of the democratic camp in the future or will it increasingly shift into the authoritarian axis?

Question 2. *How do the regions respond to the challenges imposed on multilateralism? What contributions could regionalism and its experiences outside of Europe (e.g. in Africa, Central America, South America, the Middle East, and Asia) bring to the conversation regarding the future of multilateralism? Would the regional option be a viable alternative in the face of the crisis of universal multilateralism?*

Professor Dr. Guo Jie: In some cases, inefficiency or inertia of multilateralism has indeed stimulated the development of regional initiatives. More often than not, however, the two systems have developed in a somewhat parallel fashion. The reasons for this are to a large extent related to the changing power structure. As mentioned above, the balance of U.S.-led multilateralism has been broken gradually since the 1970s. While the U.S. still has the highest overall power, the emergence of more centers of influence has fundamentally altered the world power landscape. In the meantime, the complexity of global governance has also understandably advanced coordination and cooperation on a regional scale. Issue-oriented institutional arrangements at this level are often more flexible, more focused and more likely to lead to solutions than multilateral platforms. Among the current institutional practices, multilateralism in international trade and finance has attracted the most attention. Under the existing order, the governance architecture in these two areas is characterized by conventional multilateralism, with WTO, IMF and World Bank as its core structure. However, in addition to these global economic regimes, the rise and expansion of mini-lateral arrangements has also accelerated. In the sphere of international trade, bilateral FTA negotiations and mega regional agreements (such as CPTTP and RCEP) are rapidly emerging and gradually replacing global multilateral trade regimes as the preferred way for countries to conduct goods or services transaction. In global finance area, the 2008 crisis has led to questions and challenges about the effectiveness and representativeness of IMF, leading to a further fragmentation of member participation and emergence of regional multilateral arrangements, such as CMIM, NDB, and AIIB. The Asia-Pacific is perhaps the most prominent region in terms of competitive multilateralism, and in addition to the aforementioned trade and financial areas, minimultilateralism is also developing in the area of regional security. Apart from ARF - the first regionwide platform of this type established in 1994, last two decades have seen the emergence of SLD, Xiangshan

Forum, ADMM-Plus, JIDD and MCIS, SDD, and so on and so forth. In February this year, the relaunch of the Quad between the U.S., Japan, Australia and India raised concerns about minilateral security cooperation aimed at major-power contestation in the Indo-Pacific. Regional arrangements, on the one hand, are conducive to resolving the global failure of multilateral mechanisms and alleviating crises, while on the other hand, have intensified to some extent the situation of overlapping and competing regimes in the field of governance. Nevertheless, there is no simple answer to the question of whether minilateralism in a given topic area is a complementary or alternative relationship to the global one. We know at least that the establishment of the former does not naturally aim at replacing the latter, while the relationship between them is more likely to develop in a complementary and mutually reinforcing direction if the multilateral system keeps up with the times, innovates or repairs itself in due course

Professor Dr. Monica Hirst: Regionalism has been present since the creation of multilateralism. Its importance arises, mainly, for two reasons: first, because it is an issue that has placed the inter-regional dimension on the world agenda from the very beginning; and second, because historically this theme appears on the world agenda as a function of a Latin American regional collective action - something very distant from the current reality. Chapter 8 of the United Nations Charter, which recognizes the importance of regional organizations, was historically coined as a result of Latin American pressure in relation to the US and the USSR at the time.

Later on, the regions gained their voice and their configurations through regional multilateralism. Today we see that the regions are very disparate, and there is a huge difference from the point of view of the weight and the kind of projection that the regions have. More and more, I would say that European regionalism has decoupled from this agenda. It exists today essentially as a soft power variable of the European Union wanting to teach other regions how to do regionalism — it is its civilizing mission. Other than that, the EU has decided to play a game of competition or complementarity with the United States. In other words, it is no longer a peer player with other regionalisms, as described by Barry Buzan.

Regarding the regions of the Global South, Latin America, in terms of multilateralism, is currently below sea level, which is something dramatic. Haiti is an emblematic case study

to think about how Latin America has been leaving the scene and Africa has been entering it. One of the latest chapters on the Haitian crisis is to compare Haiti to the Somali crisis, that is, in order to matter, the Latin American region would have to "Africanize" itself. Africa has been a high-level agenda item at the United Nations Security Council for more than 10 years. Currently, around 70 percent of the UNSC agenda is Africa-related, whether from the standpoint of crises, peacekeeping operations or political issues. Clearly, the relationship of the United Nations, particularly the UNSC, with the African Union follows a virtuous logic. The qualitative leaps that Africa is taking with regard to its regionalism are spectacular, especially in comparison to Latin America. In summary, it is therefore difficult to speak of regionalism as a single phenomenon: there are many regionalisms, both in the political and economic fields.

Professor Dr. Maxi Schoeman: Looking to regional responses to challenges to global/universal multilateralism, several points can be made. Within the African Union, over the past several years, work has been done on developing common positions to articulate and promote the continent's common interests in global forums. It is a difficult process, though, as it requires wide-spread political will to take ownership, and often there is a lack of technical and financial resources in the process of developing these positions. An example of a common African position that has thus far stood the test of time, is the 2005 Ezulwini consensus on reform of the Security Council, although one does have to ask whether such a rigid commitment and refusal to negotiate a 'softer' position is necessarily assisting the continent's ability to win extra-regional support.

Nevertheless, regional common positions may strengthen the negotiation power of the 'third' group referred to previously, depending on issue areas (development negotiations seem a case in point) and is one way in which to promote inclusive multilateral global governance. Another example of the promotion of global multilateralism from an African perspective, is the formalized relationship between the African Union and the UN Security Council which has seen the evolution of so-called hybrid peace operations, such as UNAMID in Darfur in 2007. Interesting, though, is that no other hybrid peace operations have developed, and it would seem that the focus is increasingly on burden-sharing, rather than hybridity. Regional-global partnerships would seem to be fraught with challenges and may not necessarily be a solution to or panacea for promoting or supporting multilateral global governance.

Interesting also is evidence that subsidiarity – dealing with problems at the level where they occur and not necessarily waiting for global institutions to go through a cumbersome and drawn-out decision-making process – is not always a viable alternative to global or universal multilateralism. This was seen recently with the inability of the African Union to solve the dispute between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan about Ethiopia's building of the massive Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. As recently as June 2021, Sudan requested the Security Council to discuss this issue, indicating a continuing need for 'universalized multilateralism'.

A last aspect on regional options to address universal multilateralism or to step into the breach in the absence of multilateral interest or support, is to point to an interesting development that, in a way, challenges the concept of 'region' and what is meant by 'regional' organizations. In December 2020, France became a formal member of the Indian Ocean Rim Organization (IORA). Here we have a clear case of an extra-regional power becoming a formal player in a region very distant from its (France's) own territory. France's membership of the organization, rather precariously, is on the basis of the island of Reunion being an 'overseas department' of France. The inclusion of France raises questions about the way in which we look at regions, their demarcation and how organization of such a region evolves in terms of extra-regional involvement on a formal basis. A question that is raised is how core members negotiate their principles and interests which may at times differ rather radically from those of the geographically-defined, external (yet major power) member of the organization.

Professor Doutor Luis Fernandes: I understand that the regions, whether through more open "regionalization" or deeper integration processes, can be both a refuge for the crisis of universal multilateralism and a lever for its development and consolidation. The varied formats of regional articulation may serve as a "field of experiments" for the reconfiguration of the multilateral bodies and regimes of the UN system, testing a range of institutional arrangements for less concentrated and more balanced decision-making processes, as well as the creation of new multilateral institutions governed by alternative norms and practices, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB). Incorporated into the reform of the UN system, these initiatives can help consolidate a more balanced and stable universal multilateral system. On the other hand, they can serve as a space to promote (regional) international cooperation in the face of the crisis and paralysis of the current (universal) multilateral

organizations and regimes. I do not believe, however, that these regional articulations can be an alternative to the universal multilateral system, because humanity is faced with an increasingly wide range of global challenges, which cannot be adequately addressed and/or equated within a strictly regional framework.

Professor Dr. Ziya Onis: I am most familiar with the regional context of European integration, and the region we are placed in has been very important in terms of its economic and political transformative effects. When you look historically, some of the major achievements of the European integration process has been in terms of transforming peripheral countries. We have seen this in Portugal and Spain in the 1980s, and in the post-communist Eastern European states in the 1990s and 2000s. Turkey has also benefited hugely as an associate member, a member of the customs union and a candidate country. In the early 2000s, we had a golden age of "Europeanization" when Turkey experienced, after its 2001 crisis, major democratization and economic reforms. However, what we've seen in recent years is the weakening of the transformative capacity of the European Union. I think the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the Eurozone crisis, and the challenges the bloc has faced internally, made its transformative capacity undermined. And we see this quite strikingly in the context of member states of Europe, like Poland and Hungary. For Turkey, the prospect of membership has declined as domestic politics has moved in a more illiberal and authoritarian direction. The leverage of Europe on Turkey has become quite minimal, and this is unfortunate since Turkey is increasingly moving on to the Russia-China axis in recent years, it is now seen more as a geopolitical rival, from the perspective of the European parliaments, rather than a partner.

I nonetheless believe that a reformed European Union is very important, both globally and regionally. There are positive developments these days in terms of economic recovery, such as the EU Green Deal and the Covid-19 recovery fund. The EU still represents, for many countries in our region, a magnet in terms of its democratic credentials. But how much leverage the EU has in countries like Turkey which are now in between positions? For us, the prospect of full membership currently appears limited, and this reduces the ability to transform countries like Turkey towards a democratic direction. It suggests that if Turkey is to re-democratize in the coming period, the main impetus will have to come from within the society and domestic political system.

Turning to the Middle Eastern context, the failure of the Arab Spring has had a very negative influence on countries like Turkey and also on Europe, because of the problems in Syria, its humanitarian crisis and flow of refugees. Part of the rise of the populist movements and the popularity of Erdoğan and similar kinds of leaders was associated with the refugee crisis. I don't see in the short term any optimism for progress in the Middle East. One of the key developments in the Middle East is that new powers become important players in the region. China, although not as active as Russia, has also been an important player in the region. In the new international context, the regional conflicts in the Middle East have been magnified. The clash of norms that we talk about in a broader global context appears in a visible form in the European periphery, where there is a clash between the Western norms and the norms project by Russia and China. They also appear in the Middle East: A country like Turkey, located at the intersection of the European periphery and the Middle East finds itself right in the middle of these clashes and conflicts.

The failure of the Arab Spring, especially the crisis in Syria and Iraq, has created major security challenges for Turkey, in the context of the Kurdish conflict, which has become an important transnational conflict. These security challenges have been used by domestic political authorities to push the regime toward a more authoritarian direction, capitalizing upon it. So, in a way, my answer to this question is that what we see in the recent context is the intersection between the global, regional and domestic. So, we need a three-level analysis to be able to make sense of some of the developments taking place in a broader regional context.

Question 3. *Which analyses can be built around informal groups that started their development around the late 70s (G5, G7, G20, IBAS forum, BRICS, etc.)? What is their role in face of the challenges imposed by universal multilateralism? Do informal groups play a role in regionalism?*

Professor Dr. Guo Jie: Is it possible that a decentralized and fragmented system with more informal groups, specific initiatives or issue-oriented networks could increasingly substitute for the open and rules-based relationships embodied by multilateral institutions? The answer is not overwhelmingly positive for the moment, but it is also not impossible. From a mechanical point of view, multilateralism is solution-oriented and not entirely limited to universal, global, intergovernmental international organizations (U.N., IMF, WTO, WHO, for example), but takes the form of a combination of countries and organizations with similar positions or interests into different systems, depending on the issue and the target audience. In recent decades, with the evolution of multipolarity and growing pressures of the global crises, informal groups (such as G7/8, G20, BRICS to name a few) have emerged and developed with high-level conferences acting as agenda setters on important topical issues and giving more weight to concerted plans of actions, thus playing a special part outside the global multilateral system. Some of them are very influential, like G20, which succeeded in presenting a plausible collective approach to deal with the great financial crisis of 2008 and has continued to serve as one of the premier platforms for global economic governance. The informal groups mentioned above are mostly trans-regional in character, diverging from the concerns and development paths of regionalism, and do not necessarily contribute to the latter. However, because of the frequent overlap in membership or participants, theoretically there could be an indirect and positive contribution to regionalism over the long term.

Professor Dr. Monica Hirst: We cannot generalize the role of these *ad hoc* groups, as they fulfill and meet very different expectations. Mostly, but not always, they are patches that seek to meet and respond to situations and create possibilities to join voices that cannot be aggregated in other instances. The G20, after the 2008 crisis, was the salvation, but it didn't create a path dependency, because no results were created that progressively strengthened it. The G7, on the other hand, is a club, and one cannot be compared with the BRICS, although politically, there is the idea that, nowadays the tensions and differences that exist in the multilateral system are being transposed to these groups. The BRICS had a great moment and nothing prevents it from having one again, but many of these groups suffer from high volatility, which is related to the instability of the internal situation of its members.

In addition, there is an instrumental and functional sense, that is, the more China is self-assured in instances such as the UN Security Council, the less importance the BRICS will have. Therefore, it is difficult to think that these groups compete with the classic and hard power instances of the multilateral system, or with regionalism, but in reality they add up, and nothing prevents others from coming into existence. For example, BASIC is gaining importance due to the growing relevance of the environmental agenda.

However, there are persistent limitations. One example is BRICS, which had no impact on the WHO during the pandemic. BRICS wasn't able to do anything, but it would make sense if it could, because, supposedly, the way of thinking and the kind of project that the WHO is trying to conduct from a normative and inclusive perspective in the distribution of vaccines and basic public goods is totally convergent with what BRICS is supposed to be. However, China has acted like China. And India and South Africa have faced their own tragedies. As far as we know, the BRICS bank has not put any money into the WHO. Perhaps this is a striking example of the limits to how far such a group can go.

Professor Dr. Maxi Schoeman: Turning to the 'informals', i.e. exclusive and inclusive informal groups promoting multilateralism, one characteristic stands out: most of these groups are established in the wake of a global crisis, specifically a financial crisis and, one could add, tend to develop a lifespan beyond the specific crisis. One can point to the origins of the G7 in the 1973 oil crisis, or of the G20, originally a meeting place for finance

ministers after the massive debt problems that faced emerging markets in the late 1990s, being turned into a high-level summit grouping in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Whereas the G7 represents only the powerful Global North, the G20 is more representative and includes amongst its members some emerging powers such as Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa. However, it is often criticised for its exclusivity – Norway and Singapore, for instance, have in the past complained of the choice of members. An interesting point about all exclusive international groupings, whether formal or informal, is that those on the inside tend to defend the exclusivity of their membership and do not seem keen to either give up their positions, nor are they keen on enlargement.

Another point to raise here is that the current Covid19 pandemic has not resulted in the formation of a new grouping, despite its global devastation and the clear need for enormous international commitment in order to provide economic support to poor/less developed countries or to ensure a more equitable distribution of (and production of) vaccines. Rather, it would seem, there is some kind of tacit agreement that existing groupings and organizations can and should weather this particular storm (the COVAX initiative is directed through Gavi within the World Health Organization). It might be of interest to study the response of the various multi- and plurilateral groupings and organizations from the perspective of their approaches to dealing with specific global issues and crises: to what extent, for instance, does a broader membership (as in the G20) really work towards finding solutions to problems that extend beyond their own narrow domestic agendas and national interests? Also: what kinds of foreign policies and diplomacy push multilateralism towards addressing the concerns of the vast majority of states in a time of crisis?

The informals of course go beyond the G7 and G20, to also include groupings in the Global South. BRICS is perhaps the most obvious example here, though, interestingly, when one looks at the current global health crisis, there is very little, if anything, forthcoming from this grouping. It would seem that, to the extent that the three biggest members, viz. China, India and Russia, are involved in helping to resolve the global crisis, they do so bilaterally – India, a global manufacturer of vaccines, does not channel negotiations through or in consultation with its BRICS allies, nor do China and Russia, both of whom have developed their own vaccines: they sell and/or distribute these bilaterally, and not multi/plurilaterally.

Turning to other aspects of the grouping's agenda, it is clear that the grouping seldom articulates a joint position in international forums; rather, their foreign policies, vis-à-vis their BRICS membership, remain 'open' with little evidence of genuine attempts at harmonization. BRICS is, however, an example of an attempt at building parallel global institutions, having established the New Development Bank, but despite the argument that the Bank will provide an alternative to Global North-controlled financing through, e.g., the World Bank, it is not aimed as an institution replacing a current regime, as BRICS members remain members of the Bretton Woods institutions. It is, though, perceived as an important example of counter-North institution-building, at least by its own members. Overall, though, it would seem as if China, Russia and India prefer to have direct relations with Global South countries, at least when it comes to Africa, and all three have regular summits or other high-level meetings with African states, with China having formalized this approach through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The kind of relationship between, on the one hand, one major (emerging) power, such as China, Russia and India, with a whole group of countries, is a relatively new development in diplomacy and needs more attention. FOCAC gives China access to 54 states 'in one go'. To whose benefit is this kind of engagement? And to what extent does the 'group' versus 'single power' or bilateral approach allow for or promote common positions on the part of the group?

Turning for a moment to IBSA – the association between India, Brazil and South Africa that caught much attention internationally because it was an association between three important emerging democracies – one cannot but note how this association largely disintegrated in the face of a lack of political will amongst the state leaders who succeeded the original leadership (Singh, Lula and Mbeki), viz. Modi, Bolsonaro and, until recently, Zuma. The latter's successor, Ramaphosa, has not shown much, if any, interest in reviving the association and it would seem that overall, its demise might be attributed to a lack of leadership, though one could also ask whether domestic challenges, and in the case of India and Brazil, the rise of right-wing nationalism, have undermined commitment to external associations of the, perhaps no longer, such like-minded. In other words, under what conditions do such 'informals' flourish? And does their existence per se strengthen multilateralism?

Finally, a word on the inclusion/exclusion aspect of 'informals'. Recently, the concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' has gained renewed attention and importance, following, largely, in the wake of China's Belt and Road Initiative which has an oceans perspective as well (often

referred to as the Indian Ocean 'string of pearls' initiative) and, of course, China's policy in the South China Sea. China's growing geopolitical power posture and posturing has brought together the 'Quad' – an informal including the US, India, Japan and Australia – an association aimed at ensuring a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'. What is interesting here, is that the Quad has no representation from the Western Indo-Pacific, i.e. Africa, despite the continent being a focus of Chinese influence and, along its Eastern seaboard, playing a big role in maritime issues: one only has to think about the entrance to the Suez Canal as a chokepoint, or Djibouti serving as a host to several major and regional powers' military/naval bases, or the importance of the Cape sea route for super tankers, as well as the growth of Islamic radicalism along this seaboard.

A question raised by this rather limited membership of the Quad is at what point an 'informal', aimed at pursuing objectives in a specific region, has a membership sufficient for its success. It also raises questions around the relationship between such an 'informal' and formal regional organisations, e.g. between the Quad and IORA with a membership that includes countries firmly situated in both regions spanning the Indian and Pacific oceans. Such questions would invariably lead one to consider new forms of international governance and multi/plurilateralism, including inter-regionalism.

Professor Dr. Luis Fernandes: In any formal institutional structure (whether national or multilateral) informal articulations play a key role for good institutional functioning. The risk is that these informal groups crystallize as closed decision-making instances, at the margin or in defiance of the norms that govern (or should govern) the institutions to which these groups refer. The same is true for regionalism, whether in the form of "open regionalization" or the more formalized regional integration processes.

Professor Dr. Ziya Onis: The rise of the G20 is a positive phenomenon in the sense that it gives voice to important emerging powers in terms of reshaping the international environment and voicing the demands of the Global South, not only the large emerging countries, but least developed and middle countries as well.

From a Turkish perspective, we try to project ourselves as an important actor. I think this is an important development of the new international environment, because it gave

Turkey the ability to play a more active role in voicing the concerns of the Global South. A concrete example is that Turkey is trying to push for humanitarian aid. The country has been actively involved in African countries like Sudan and Somalia.

Could a country like Turkey become a member of BRICS in the future? In 2018, Turkey was invited for the first time to the BRICS Summit as the representative of the Organization of Islamic Conference. This idea that Turkey could become a key leader of the Global South as part of BRICS is also entertained by the current president Erdoğan, who in terms of its ideology is quite anti-West. He positions Turkey as part of the Global South, closer to Russia and China.

In terms of coherence, moving away from Turkey, one important development that I noticed is an increasing challenge within BRICS, which were never a coherent community, besides the common goals of creating new regional and international institutions, and having more voice. However, there were important differences in terms of democratic systems, the pace of economic growth, and size. One element which I think is becoming important in the context of BRICS is the phenomenon of the rise of China. During the Xi Jinping period, China is now becoming increasingly confident, assertive, and seeing itself as a hegemonic contender. China is obviously using BRICS, but also acting unilaterally due to its size and pace of economic growth. The rise of China has also created tensions among the BRICS. The most visible one is between the Indo-China rivalry, increasingly concerned about security issues in the Kashmir region. India, until the Covid-19 crisis, has been growing rapidly, and it's a very large continental-size country. Similarly, as far as I can see from a distance, Brazil, being a regional power and leader in the Southern cone, is also concerned about the growing presence of China in Latin America. So, the point I want to raise for this discussion is how coherent the BRICS is likely to remain? From my perspective, we will see an increasingly China-dominated BRICS in the future, which will create tensions and conflicts. I also see the possibility of BRICS enlargement. It does not mean that the new countries will be in a core position, but that could include countries like Turkey.

The broader question I want to raise is that BRICS are important, but the nature of BRICS is changing in a way that the authoritarian BRICS (Russia and China axis) appear to be a key driving force in the BRICS themselves, which may undermine the coherence. The key issue here is to what extent BRICS will act coherently in the future, and also recognize that Western actors will be fragmenting BRICS in order to put democratic

countries on their side in a broader democratic coalition. This is the Biden strategy in relation to India, Brazil, and other Asian democracies. In sum, I think it is an important entity, but I do not assume it will necessarily be a stable entity in the next decades.

Answers in text format

Ambassador Ricardo Ernesto Lagorio:

We are facing one of those historic moments - the *kairos* - when the system is in question: we are facing a crisis of governance. Our global system largely responds to that of 1945, an international system with 51 states, where sovereignty was much stronger, where conflicts were international rather than national, and problems were related to hard power, not soft power.

The greatest lesson of 2020, coinciding with the celebration of the UN's 75th anniversary, is the emergence of *We the Peoples*, the opening words of the UN Charter, as a more visible and central actor in world politics.

Moreover, a tension resurfaces between the vision of great power competition and the need to build - because it is a convention - a multilateralism of deliverance, in line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

This tension is understandable, from my realistic point of view, since the great powers have a historical memory conditioning their foreign policies on their conception of national security. However, this is no longer functional, even for their national interests. In this new 21st century, what happens beyond our national borders is increasingly important, and this is what legitimizes the strengthening of the multilateral scaffolding.

To this end, it is also essential not only to define international peace and security - the cornerstone of the functioning and role of the Security Council and the veto power for the P5 - in classical military hard power terms, but also to evolve to a paradigm that incorporates the notion of human security coined in the UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report, *New Dimensions of Human Security*.

The principle of *great power competition* - with its corollary of strategic stability - can no longer be the ordering element of the international system, like it was during the Cold War period.

We are facing a systemic problem: how will globalization be ordered, and what direction it will take in face of the greatest challenges facing humanity as a whole: ecological degradation and the constant irruption of science and technology.

These two trends inevitably require cooperation and collaboration rather than confrontation.

This option is more easily acceptable to the vast majority of countries that favor multilateral responses to our global soft power problems. For those that do not approach governance in this way, however, there is a problem, which I would call psychological: overcoming the hubris complex of great power competition and accepting the limitations of national hard power.

Therefore, we must work for a multilateralism that also allows us to move from the concept of great power competition - a zero-sum game - to great power cooperation, encouraging cooperation between great powers, including on climate change, pandemics and conflict-driven mass migrations.

However, this will not happen unless there is greater activism on the part of what I would call a coalition of multilateralists, state and non-state actors committed to and convinced of this option.

Thus, multilateralism must also be defined in qualitative terms and, in this sense, the normative dimension - the sharing of rules and principles of conduct - becomes the most relevant. Hence, multilateralism aims fundamentally at helping design a global framework that facilitates the harmonious coexistence of the largest possible number of countries.

This is why the big challenge lies in how to ensure the interests and sensitivities of countries that have historically been left on the sidelines, due to the *Great Power Politics* scheme, and/or because they lack systemic relevance despite having a voice and a vote in international mechanisms.

It would not be highly advisable to adopt the unilateral cooperation option in the 21st century. Such *ad hoc* approaches offer certain advantages, including speed, flexibility, modularity, and possibilities for experimentation, but at the same time they present dangers, including encouraging unbridled forum-seeking, undermining existing international organizations, and reducing accountability in global governance.

Multilateralism is not only about institutions, it is also about culture. A sustainable multilateralism will not be sustainable unless it has solid bases and is perceived as effective and efficient by its main constituency: We, the Peoples. Therefore, the design and construction of a new multilateralism requires, as its foundation, a multilateral culture. A new culture that includes and addresses the issues that affect us - We the Peoples -, and not only those pertaining to States.

In particular, I would like to focus on two dimensions: Latin America and the Think Tanks.

Regarding the first dimension, the most relevant fact is that, of the 51 original UN members, 20 were from Latin America, that is, almost 40% of the original members. This important Latin American presence translated into multilateral activism, essential in the decolonization process that made possible the configuration of a true United Nations. Today, however, it is difficult to find that much needed vision and commitment to actively contribute to the solution of global problems and to the fulfillment of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

They [the Latin American countries] could also promote:

- The pursuit to organize and generate greater synergy among Latin American regional organizations in order to expand their impact and contribution to multilateral global governance.
- The transformation of GRULAC (Group of Latin America and the Caribbean) in International Organizations into a substantive group that seeks to coordinate positions on key issues.
- The renewal of the rules of effective multilateralism, based on the concrete delivery of global public goods.
- The strengthening of all agencies of the United Nations system.

Regarding Think Tanks:

- Greater dialogue and interaction among Think Tanks in the region to address this issue.
- Create special Multilateral Culture programs and establish grants.
- Prepare reports - like this one - and present them to the respective states in order to strengthen multilateralism.

Professor Dr. Ana Covarrubias

Multilateralisms in the post-Trump and post-pandemic era: reactivating the “spider web”.

Multilateralism, in general, tends to suffer recurrent crises, as witnessed in the 20th century. However, the latest blow was very visible, and perhaps widespread, because it was undertaken by the United States, under the Trump administration, while other instances, such as the European Union (EU), were going through critical moments, such as Britain's exit from the bloc. In several regions of the world, nationalism was present in its most orthodox version, questioning one of the pillars of multilateral action: international cooperation. Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic brought to the surface the importance of borders and the selfish interests of nations. Thus, an already weakened multilateralism was magnified by a health emergency that challenged it even more, and that makes us reflect on the future. How can we think about multilateralism in a post-Trump, post-pandemic world?

The first issue to recognize, in my view, is that although the essence of multilateralism is cooperation and policy coordination among states, there is no single multilateralism, but many. In other words, its manifestations and processes vary: the UN Security Council, where five countries hold the veto power, is not the same as the Organization of American States (OAS), characterized by the asymmetry of power between one of its members and all the others, or the EU, which is an exceptional experiment. Not to mention the more functional multilateralism, which is that of experts, scientists, technicians, etc., or that of efforts that are not institutionalized, such as the very diverse groups. In short, we have a “web of multilateralisms” (including regionalisms, of course), which makes generalizations and universal prescriptions difficult. Thus, our thinking needs to be comprehensive and flexible, creative and imaginative.

The elements for re-examining the web of multilateralism with a view to the future are many. I highlight four that are the most obvious but also necessary: first, the need for leadership. In this sense, there is some hope in having at least a positive narrative from the Biden administration, but regional leadership will also be needed, and this is why emerging powers become relevant. The big issue, therefore, is China, which has demonstrated a willingness and ability to engage in multilateral initiatives. This raises many questions: is there a Western and a non-Western multilateralism? What to call non-liberal multilateralism, if it exists at all? What about the multilateralisms charged of

security? The answers to these questions are fluid, as reality is changing. For now, it is enough to keep them in mind when looking at the development of the U.S.-China relationship. What can be stated is that without political will and leadership it is impossible to envision a viable multilateralism. Second, one must consider the forms of collective action: the organizations, institutions, *ad hoc* groups, and so on. In other words, one must ask how institutionalized multilateralism must be in order to be effective? Part of the criticism that has been made on this point refers to the, often unnecessary, multiplication of multilateral bodies, which results in overlapping agendas or their ephemeral existence, and to the lack of supranational institutions that in some cases may ensure the continuity and success of multilateralism. This criticism leads us back to an examination of the causes of multilateralism: why do states resort to collective action? And the answer to this question presents us with a mosaic of reasons. I examine the case of Latin America, where multilateralism has occurred in waves. In the region we have the OAS (Organization of American States), as the oldest and most institutionalized multilateral body, but with such particular characteristics that it has not yet become the regional organization par excellence. Moreover, there are numerous organizations, institutions and groups: SELA (Latin American and Caribbean Economic System), ALADI (Latin American Integration Association), SICA (Central American Integration System), CARICOM (Caribbean Community), MERCOSUR, AP (Pacific Alliance), CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), among others. What the analysis of Latin American regionalism suggests is that many of these efforts were created at very specific conjunctures and with immediate objectives, which disappeared as soon as the conjuncture faded away. It is also explained in part by the presidential system that tends to predominate in Latin American countries, the political and ideological ups and downs, and the recurrent economic crises. Thus, the lesson that emerges from this case is that in order to have a permanent and effective multilateralism, what is mostly needed are not supranational institutions, but solid internal institutions that avoid the political-ideological oscillations that constantly destroy and build. In other words, weak internal institutions in Latin America do not favor multilateralism, nor its permanence or its deepening.

A third element, directly related to the latter, concerns values and ideology when the objective of multilateralism is their defense, as could be the case of democracy and human rights. Thus, for multilateralism or regionalism to be effective, there must be a minimum of shared values - which has not been the case in recent years, neither in the Americas nor in the world. If what is wanted is a liberal order, the United States and

Europe must be configured as leaders and the smaller powers must assimilate these values. Finally, I propose to consider the role of the state and non-state actors. If we define multilateralism as policy cooperation and coordination, we can find another "web of multilateralisms" formed by non-state actors: epistemic communities, churches, and many more. Certainly, in a world of states, their role cannot be ignored, but it is also true that the state alone cannot address all issues, so it is indispensable to incorporate non-state actors. This is how multilateralism can be improved and, moreover, acquire more legitimacy. Thus, it is necessary to rethink who these actors are - or should be - and how the state should incorporate them: should it just coordinate them, direct them, support them?

The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasized not only the nation-state, but also the need for international cooperation and policy coordination among countries. This experience, in addition to Biden coming to power, is an opportunity to revitalize the web of multilateralism, which will contribute to better global governance. Different regionalisms can help, as long as they are open regionalisms. Informal groups and *ad hoc* multilateralism can also contribute, although perhaps in a more conjunctural way. Recognizing that there is not only one multilateralism, but rather, many, today's world invites the countries of the global South to act collectively in more assertive ways. The United States, Europe, and China can take the leadership role, but that is not enough. For better global governance, the interests of the global south must be represented. In other words, let's not rely on the Biden administration alone to shake out the spider web.

Dr. Andrés Serbin

The crisis of multilateralism: narratives and multiple levels.

Over the past 75 years, since the creation of the UN, various expressions of multilateralism - as a form of common action among three or more states, understood as "persistent sets of rules that constrain activity, shape expectations, and prescribe roles for states - have served to shape a system of agreements, institutions and mechanisms to sustain global security and stability in different domains and to promote a set of norms and principles. These norms and principles have primarily responded to Western values and narratives associated with the liberal international system that was established after World War II and consolidated, under U.S. hegemony, after the end of the Cold War.

The global multilateral system is currently suffering from a crisis characterized by major deficits in terms of legitimacy, transparency, accountability and equitable representation, and is being seriously affected by the reconfiguration of global power relations and limitations in its ability to confront and respond to new global and regional risks and threats. Multilateralism is often perceived as a distant diplomatic exercise that cannot keep up with the scale, complexity and urgency of the challenges posed by a new global agenda associated with the transition to a new world order and new power relations among nations. The need for meaningful inclusion of a wider range of non-state actors and more equitable participation by states has been accentuated and deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This crisis was due both to the shortcomings and limitations of the multilateral mechanisms themselves and to a reconfiguration of global power relations with the emergence of new actors as a result of the shift in economic dynamism from the North Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific sphere, and in particular, with the economic rise and geopolitical projection of China.

In this context, multilateralism has been affected by unilateral and protectionist positions and policies of some relevant international actors and by nationalist and populist outbreaks that have occurred in different countries. In recent years, with the rise of nationalist and populist movements, and particularly under the Trump administration in the United States, multilateralism, similarly to the international liberal system, global governance, and globalization - which since the 1970s has fostered greater interdependence among states - has suffered a crisis of legitimacy and trust. The impact

of the recent pandemic, in particular, has been devastating at all levels, but has primarily affected international cooperation and the ability to deliver global public goods through multilateral agreements and mechanisms. In this sense, the collective ability to promote a health response to the global pandemic has been limited and constrained, both in terms of traditional state-to-state multilateralism and complex multilateralism that incorporates non-state actors.

In this scenario, the narrative of multilateralism as a useful tool to improve the well being of all nations and provide global or regional public goods through collective action among states, in its predominantly Western version, has also gone into crisis. Consequently, a spectrum of narratives - as expressions of the geostrategic interests of various actors and elites - has currently unfolded, which diverge in their perceptions, conceptions and proposals around multilateralism.

At the global level, two predominant narratives have developed regarding the UN and its associated agencies and instruments as the multilateral mechanisms that shape the architecture of global governance. One of them proposes the continuation and preservation of these mechanisms, despite existing debate and questioning from various sectors, because it considers that the relevance of these mechanisms and associated norms to promote global stability has neither diminished nor disappeared. The other proposes a reform and redesign of multilateral mechanisms at the global level to overcome the existing institutional deficiencies and face the challenges of a more complex, diverse and multidimensional global environment.

Both global-reaching narratives express, in a broad and nuanced way, the political visions of the main actors in the current international system as "rule makers", strongly conditioned by the configuration of a combination of a multipolar order - based on the existence and emergence of old and new international protagonists - and a bipolar order sustained by the strategic competition between China and the United States. It is paradoxical, in this context, that much of the criticism and many of the calls for changes in the multilateral system, as in the case of China, Russia or the BRICS group, highlight in their rhetoric the defense of this system, but call for a series of reforms, with an emphasis on the principles of national sovereignty and non-intervention. Similarly, the two narratives seem to establish, with intermediate nuances, a milestone between the liberal views of nations that have traditionally acted as "rule makers" and the predominantly illiberal or revisionist views of new actors that aspire to move on from their

role as "rule takers" to "rule makers". In both cases, however, a Westphalian view of the state's leadership role and the defense of its interests remain in force.

The case of China and its vision of a "multilateralism with Chinese characteristics" - as some analysts call it - in the context of its increasingly assertive participation in the international system and multilateral organizations, is illustrative of a narrative that accepts the existing multilateral system - and in particular the UN and its mechanisms and agencies - but demands reforms in line with its own values and geostrategic interests.

While conventional and binary wisdom condenses these struggles into the strategic bipolarity between the US and China as the organizing axis of the transition to a new global order, the world tends towards a geopolitical reconfiguration that includes diverse actors and is characterized not only by multipolarity and multiplication of actors - state and non-state - but also by a complex multi-level multidimensionality that Amitav Acharya describes as a multiplex world. On this diverse and fractured geopolitical basis - which in turn implies a complex multipolarity - it becomes problematic to build (or impose) consensus and develop multilateral mechanisms and agreements at the global level with common rules and stable and transparent principles.

The divergent narratives around the global multilateral system, however, find their own basis at the regional (and eventually inter-regional) level, with the development of a "multilateralism among friends" based on alliances, partnerships, and coalitions of "like-minded" states with similar values and interests.

In this context, Biden's recent European tour, which culminated in his meeting with Putin, and the aspiration to reactivate global multilateralism under U.S. leadership, collides with its own limitations and forces the development of regional or cross-cutting multilateralisms among partners and allies that share common interests and values but diverge from those of other leading actors in the international system. In the case of the U.S. strategy, the restoration of alliances and ties within the G-7, NATO or the Indo-Pacific quadrant does not lay the foundation for a global narrative of reactivating multilateralism, just as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, ASEAN or the BRICS only express a different kind of multilateralism with other interests and values - possibly illiberal - or the Silk Road a more unilateral multilateralism, but with Chinese characteristics.

Informal groups like the G-7 or the G-20, which were able to respond to previous crises, are now proving to have little impact on global governance mechanisms in general and on the necessary reforms of the UN system in particular. The rise and fall of these informal groups is associated with the development of neoliberal globalization, which was first questioned by the global South and then by emerging countries aspiring to be included in global governance mechanisms. As one analyst notes, "it seems that neither the G-7 nor the G-20 have sufficient political leadership to continue to set an increasingly less multilateral (at the global level) and more fragmented agenda" relative to which informal groups should have. In principle, they should take a more decisive role and build the consensus needed to achieve more tangible results. The recent G-7 meeting in June 2021, amid the impact of the pandemic, shows a tendency to strengthen "crony multilateralism" (in this case of democracies) in face of China's rise and projection.

On the other hand, regions are particularly prone to the development of multilateral schemes that respond to this "crony multilateralism," in addition to their validation by the UN and the frequent balance they must develop internally and externally in order not to be absorbed by bilateral disputes, as in the case of ASEAN. This experience of multilateralism that tries to maintain its neutrality and be a gravitating factor at the regional level, despite its heterogeneity, its close economic interdependence with China and its relationship with the United States as a guarantee of security - as in the case of the European Union, with its own nuances, shows the possibilities and limits of the development of a regional multilateralism that simultaneously assumes the challenges and tensions between a multipolar world - which implies greater risks and uncertainties - and a bipolar world - which may imply greater guarantees of stability at the cost of greater dependence on conditions of asymmetry with the great powers. And it shows that regional options may be, with their ups and downs, viable options in the face of the crisis of global multilateralism and broader narrative options, conditioned, however, within the scope of their "strategic autonomy" by the interdependence imposed by current global dynamics.

In the case of Latin America, the regional option of multilateralism, characterized as intuitive or *sui generis* by several analysts, is currently in conflict with the difficulty of establishing functional and sustainable multilateral mechanisms. Ideological polarization and regional political fractures challenge the capacity to build consensus and the emergence of a common political will to advance various multilateral mechanisms at the regional level, and question the formulation and implementation of a collective regional response - in a context of heterogeneity and asymmetry among the countries of the

region - to respond both to their internal structural challenges of inequality, poverty, institutional delegitimization and political instability, and to the possibility of articulating a joint response to the transformations of the international system.

In sum, the current crisis of multilateralism is affecting the international system as a whole, whether at the global, regional, or cross-cutting level, particularly under the impact of divergent narratives associated with both long-term national strategies and immediate, short-term reactive responses.

Participants

Professor Dr. Ana Covarrubias



Ana Covarrubias holds a PhD in International Relations from Oxford University and has been a professor/researcher at the Center for International Studies at El Colegio de México since 1995. She was Director of the Center between 2012 and 2017, and is currently General Academic Coordinator of the institution. Her research interests are: Mexican Foreign Policy, especially the relationship with Cuba, the link between Human Rights and foreign policy, Latin American International Relations and Latin American integration. She has taught courses on International Relations theory, approaches and

analysis of Foreign Policy, Mexican Foreign Policy, Latin American International Relations and the foreign policy of the United States and Canada.

Dr. Andrés Serbin

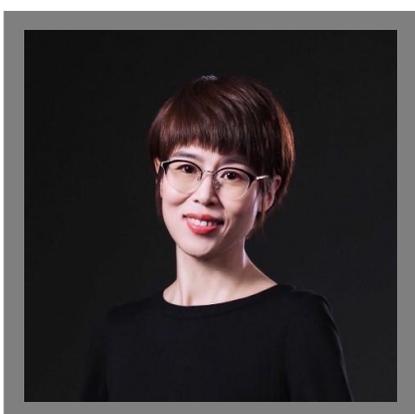


Andrés Serbin holds a degree in Social Anthropology (UNLP), a Master's degree in Social Psychology (USB), and a PhD in Political Science (UCV). Since 1998, he has been Executive President of the Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES). He is also Co-Chairman of the Asia and Americas Section, Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and Trustee at Consejo Argentino de Relaciones Internacionales (CARI).

Andrés Serbin is also an Expert Member of the Valdai Club (Russia) and a Chatham House Fellow (Great Britain). He is also a retired Professor at the Central University of Venezuela; Researcher Emeritus at CONICYT in the same country; President Emeritus and founder of the Venezuelan Institute of Social and Political Studies (INVESP), and is currently a member of the Academic Council of the Master's in IR at USAL, Argentina, of the Master's in BRICS at the University of St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, and Director of the Specialization in Eurasia and Russia at the Catholic University of Argentina.

He was Director of Caribbean Affairs of the Latin American Economic System (SELA) and consultant on several occasions to the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and various international organizations. He was President of the Asociación Venezolana de Estudios del Caribe (AVECA); the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC, The Hague) and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP; New York). He is the director of *Pensamiento Propio* magazine, co-editor of *Anuario de la Integración de América Latina y el Caribe*, columnist for the newspapers *Clarín* and *Perfil* in Argentina and *Latinoamérica 21*.

Professor Dr. Guo Jie



GUO Jie is an associate professor at the School of International Studies, Peking University. Her research focuses mainly on Latin American studies, China-Latin America relations, and comparative politics. GUO's publications include four monographs and dozens of academic articles. GUO holds a PhD in law from Peking University. From 2013 to 2016, she worked as Chinese fellow and visiting scholar with institutions such as the Kettering Foundation (US), Inter-American Dialogue (US), Universidad del Pacífico (Peru), Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil), Universidad de Buenos Aires

(Argentina), Colegio de México (México).

Professor Dr. Luis Fernandes



Luis Fernandes is the current Director of the Institute of International Relations (IRI) at PUC-Rio, and also a professor at UFRJ – Rio de Janeiro Federal University. His research activity focuses on issues of Political Economy of International Relations, with emphasis on the Challenges of Innovation and Development in the Knowledge Era and the Reconfiguration of Power Relations in the Post-Cold War International System. He is the author of several books, book chapters and articles on these themes. His most recent book is entitled *A Revolução Bipolar: a gênese e derrocada do socialismo soviético* (The

Bipolar Revolution: the genesis and collapse of Soviet socialism), published in 2017 by Editora PUC-Rio. As a public manager, he has served as Executive Secretary of the Ministry of Science and Technology (MCT), President of *Financiadora de Estudos e*

Projetos (FINEP - Funding Authority for Studies and Projects) and Scientific Director of the Research Support Foundation of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ).

Professor Dr. Maxi Schoeman



Maxi Schoeman is a professor in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria. She holds a PhD from the University of Wales (Aberystwyth). Her research and publications focus on South African foreign policy and African peace and security. She leads the Faculty of Humanities research theme on Peace and Conflict in Africa. In 2014 she was awarded the Claude Ake Visiting Chair at the University of Uppsala and in 2016 she was a visiting fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS).

She was a visiting fellow at the Institute of Social and Political Studies (IESP) at the State University of Rio de Janeiro in 2014 and 2019. Prof Schoeman is a member of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), deputy chair of the Board of the Institute for Global Dialogue, a trustee of the Institute for Security Studies and she was a member of the inaugural advisory board of the African Peace Network of the Social Sciences Research Council in the US (2013-2017) and deputy chair of the South African Council on International Relations (2014-2019).

Professor Dr. Monica Hirst



Monica Hirst holds a PhD in Strategic Studies from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, and is currently a Professor of Latin American politics at the Universidad Torquato di Tella, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and visiting professor at IESP-UERJ. Her numerous publications, among books and articles, address varied themes from Brazil-United States relations to humanitarian aid issues, South-South cooperation, Brazil's role in the peacekeeping operation in Haiti, regionalism and regional cooperation.

Ambassador Ricardo Ernesto Lagorio



Ambassador Ricardo Ernesto Lagorio was Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Argentine Republic to the Russian Federation from June 2017 to October 2020, and concurrent Ambassador to Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. In 1978 he obtained a Master's degree in Political Science with a specialization in International Relations from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Argentina. Ambassador Lagorio graduated from the Argentine Foreign Service Institute (ISEN) in 1980, receiving the Miguel Angel Carcano and Elena Holmberg

medals for the best grades in the subjects of Foreign Policy and Argentine Diplomacy, respectively. He began his career working with the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1980-82. He was posted to Argentina's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York (1982-1989) and from 1993 to 1996 was Undersecretary for Policy and Strategy at the Ministry of Defense. He was also Deputy Chief of Mission at the Argentine Embassy in the United States from 2000 to 2003.

Other important positions include, Director of Multilateral Environmental Agreements and Arrangements at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cult (1998-2000); Foreign Policy Advisor to the Vice President of Argentina (2003-2007); Director of Policy Planning at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cult (2015-2017).

Ambassador Lagorio teaches Foreign Policy and International Relations at Universidad Austral, Universidad Católica Argentina and Universidad de Belgrano. He is also an advisory member of the Argentine Council on Foreign Relations (CARI), and Secretary General of CARI for the period 2021-2023. In 2018, he received the Konex Award for the decade 2008-2018 in the Diplomacy category.

Professor Dr. Ziya Onis

Ziya Öniş is Professor of International Political Economy at Koç University in Istanbul. He is the former Director of both the Center for Research on Globalization, Peace and Democratic Governance (GLODEM) and the Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities at Koç University. His recent research focuses on rising powers and the emerging post-liberal international order, varieties of populism in a global context, democratic backsliding and authoritarian turns in the global South and the European Periphery, domestic politics-foreign policy linkages and new wave of economic crises in

emerging powers. His articles have been published in Review of International Political Economy, New Political Economy, Global Governance, Journal of Democracy, Comparative Politics, Government and Opposition, Development and Change, Mediterranean Politics, Third World Quarterly, Democratization, Political Science Quarterly, inter alia. He is the co-recipient of the Elizabeth Meehan Prize for the best article published in Government and Opposition in 2019.