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Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution

John Gerard Ruggie

In 1989, peaceful change, which a leading realist theorist had declared a very low-probability event in international politics less than a decade before,¹ accommodated the most fundamental geopolitical shift of the postwar era and perhaps of the entire twentieth century: the collapse of the Soviet East European empire and the attendant end of the cold war. Many factors were responsible for that shift. But there seems little doubt that multilateral norms and institutions have helped stabilize their international consequences. Indeed, such norms and institutions appear to be playing a significant role in the management of a broad array of regional and global changes in the world system today.

In Europe, by one count at least fifteen multilateral groupings are involved in shaping the continent's collective destiny.² The European Community (EC) is the undisputed anchor of economic relations and increasingly of a common political vision in the West. And the former East European countries want nothing so much as to tie their economic fate to the EC, a goal that the EC

This article was prepared as the background discussion paper for the Ford Foundation West Coast Workshop on Multilateralism. Several other papers prepared for that workshop are being published in this and other issues of *International Organization*, and the entire set will be presented in John Gerard Ruggie, ed., *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming). I thank the Ford Foundation for making the project possible and the University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation for orchestrating it. I am also very grateful to the other participants in the workshop for proving that multilateral cooperation under anarchy is not only feasible but can also be mutually profitable and fun; to Robert O. Keohane for his extensive and helpful critiques of an earlier draft of this article, which forced me to rethink and clarify several key issues; to Ernst B. Haas for his constructive comments; and to David Auerswald for research assistance.

1. See Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 15: "Although . . . peaceful adjustment of the systemic disequilibrium is possible, the principal mechanism of change throughout history has been war, or what we shall call hegemonic war (i.e., a war that determines which state or states will be dominant and will govern the system)."

2. See William M. Clarke, "The Midwives of the New Europe," *Central Banker* 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 49-51; and Bruce Stokes, "Continental Shift," *National Journal*, nos. 33 and 34, August 1990, pp. 1996-2001.

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members have facilitated through the creation of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and, in some cases, through the prospect of association agreements. Yet the author of another influential realist treatise published a decade ago gave the EC only a few fleeting references—and then only to argue that it would never amount to much in the international “structure” unless it took on the form of a unified state, which it shows no signs of doing even now.³

In the realm of European security relations, the central policy issue of the day concerns the adaptation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the new European geopolitical realities and the question of whether supplementary indigenous West European or all European multilateral security mechanisms should be fashioned.⁴ The Soviet Union, contrary to most predictions, posed no obstacles to German reunification, betting that a united Germany firmly embedded in a broader Western institutional matrix would pose far less of a security threat than a neutral Germany tugged in different directions in the center of Europe.⁵ But perhaps the most telling indicator of institutional bite in Europe today is the proverbial dog that has not barked: no one in any position of authority anywhere is advocating, or quietly preparing for, a return to a system of competitive bilateral alliances—which surely is the first time that this has happened at any comparable historical juncture since the Congress of Vienna in 1815.⁶

3. See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), especially the references to a united Europe on p. 180 and the discussion on pp. 201–2.

4. Moreover, Hungary and Czechoslovakia have already joined the Council of Europe, and both have raised the issue of forging some type of affiliation with NATO. See “Prague Courts NATO,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 March 1991, p. M1.

5. Mearsheimer and others who discount the efficacy of institutions have drawn dire inferences from the end of the cold war for the future of European stability. In contrast, Snyder, Van Evera, and others who take institutions seriously have been much more prone to see an adaptive political order ahead. See John J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War,” *International Security* 15 (Summer 1990), pp. 5–56; Jack Snyder, “Averting Anarchy in the New Europe,” *International Security* 14 (Spring 1990), pp. 5–41; and Stephen Van Evera, “Primer for Peace: Europe After the Cold War,” *International Security* 15 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 7–57.

6. In 1989, according to Weber, “some foreign policy thinkers in Paris reverted to old ideas, suggesting a new alliance with Poland, the emerging Eastern European states, and perhaps the Soviet Union as well in opposition to Germany. These flirtations with bilateral treaties and a new balance of power have been mostly left by the wayside.” See Steve Weber, “Security After 1989: The Future with Nuclear Weapons,” in Patrick Garrity, ed., *The Future of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Plenum Press, forthcoming). By comparable historical junctures, I mean 1848, 1919, and 1945. After 1848, what was left of the Concert of Europe system rapidly degenerated into a system of competitive alliances; after World War I, France in particular sought the protection of bilateral alliances against Germany; and after World War II, several West European countries sought bilateral alliances with the United States and with one another. Among the useful sources for the two earlier periods are the following: Rene Albrecht-Carrie, *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958); E. H. Carr, *International Relations Between the Two World Wars* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1961); Henry W. Degenhardt, *Treaties and Alliances of the World*, 3d ed. (Essex: Longmans, 1981); and A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery of Europe, 1848–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Security relations in the Asia-Pacific region make the same points in the negative. In the immediate postwar period, it was not possible to construct multilateral institutional frameworks in this region. Today, the absence of such arrangements inhibits progressive adaptation to fundamental global shifts. The United States and Japan are loath to raise serious questions about their anachronistic bilateral defense treaty, for example, out of fear of unraveling a fragile stability and thereby triggering arms races throughout the region. In Asia-Pacific, there is no EC and no NATO to have transformed the multitude of regional security dilemmas, as has been done in Europe with Franco-German relations, for example. Indeed no Helsinki-like process through which to begin the minimal task of mutual confidence building exists in the region.⁷ Thus, whereas today the potential to move beyond balance-of-power politics in its traditional form exists in Europe, a reasonably stable balance is the best that one can hope to achieve in the Asia-Pacific region.⁸

At the level of the global economy, despite sometimes near-hysterical predictions for twenty years now of imminent monetary breakup and trade wars that could become real wars, “just like in the 1930s,”⁹ the rate of growth in world trade continues to exceed the rate of growth in world output; international capital flows dwarf both; and the eighth periodic round of trade negotiations, which had been prematurely pronounced dead, is moving toward completion—this time involving difficult domestic and new transnational issues that the originators of the regime never dreamed would become subject to international rules. And despite considerable tension between them, the United States and Japan continue, in Churchill’s phrase, to “jaw-jaw” rather than “war-war” over their fundamental trade differences.¹⁰

Limited multilateral successes can be found even in the global security realm. One is in the area of nuclear nonproliferation. Many responsible officials and policy analysts in the 1960s predicted that by the 1980s there would

7. Some proposals along these lines are offered by Stuart Harris in “‘Architecture for a New Era’ in Asia/Pacific,” *Pacific Research* 3 (May 1990), pp. 8–9.

8. Latin America seems to fall somewhere in between. According to one recent assessment, “While the United States was ignoring and undermining multilateralism in the Western hemisphere, the Latin American nations themselves were moving towards greater co-operation, or *concertacion*, as they call it, to some degree as a response to United States policy.” See Richard J. Bloomfield and Abraham F. Lowenthal, “Inter-American Institutions in a Time of Change,” *International Journal* 45 (Autumn 1990), p. 868.

9. This refrain was begun by C. Fred Bergsten in “The New Economics and U. S. Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 50 (January 1972), pp. 199–222. For a recent rendition, see “Echoes of the 1930s,” *The Economist*, 5 January 1991, pp. 15, 16, and 18.

10. On recent developments in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), see Gilbert R. Winham, “GATT and the International Trade Regime,” *International Journal* 45 (Autumn 1990), pp. 796–882. One real problem is that the variety of extant trade arrangements today is well beyond the scope of the traditional GATT terminology and that no new consensus exists about what types of unilateral, bilateral, and other measures are compatible or incompatible with the underlying multilateral character of GATT. This gives added relevance to the type of conceptual clarification I am proposing here.

exist some two dozen nuclear weapons states.¹¹ As it has turned out, however, the total set of actual *and potential* problem states today consists of only half that number. According to a former official of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and an analyst at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, this is at least in part due to the nonproliferation treaty (NPT) regime: "Virtually every nonproliferation initiative has turned out to be much more effective than expected when it was proposed or designed, and nonproliferation success has been cheaper than expected. The fact that the nuclear proliferation problem has been 'bounded' by the NPT regime means that policy initiatives can be focused on a handful of states."¹²

Moreover, after years of being riveted by the cold war, the United Nations (UN) has been rediscovered to have utility in international conflict management: its figleaf role proved useful in Afghanistan, and its decolonization function aided Namibia. It serves as one means by which to try to disentangle regional morasses from Cambodia to the Western Sahara. And perhaps of greatest importance for the new, post-cold war era, the posture adopted by the UN Security Council to sanction Iraq for its invasion and annexation of Kuwait constituted the organization's most comprehensive, firm, and united response ever to an act of international aggression.¹³

Seen through the lenses of conventional theories of international relations, which attribute outcomes to the underlying distribution of political or economic power, the roles played by normative constraints and institutions in the current international transformation must seem paradoxical. Norms and institutions do not matter much in that literature to begin with; they are viewed as by-products of, if not epiphenomenal adjuncts to, the relations of force or the relations of production. What is more, insofar as the conventional literature has any explanation at all of extensive institutionalization in the international system, the so-called theory of hegemonic stability is it. But in addition to all the other historical and logical problems from which that theory suffers,¹⁴

11. Regarding these predictions, see Mitchell Reiss, *Without the Bomb: The Politics of Nuclear Nonproliferation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 3–36.

12. See Thomas W. Graham and A. F. Mullins, "Arms Control, Military Strategy, and Nuclear Proliferation," paper presented at a conference entitled "Nuclear Deterrence and Global Security in Transition," Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California, La Jolla, 21–23 February 1991, p. 3. As Graham and Mullins point out, states have left the "problem" list more rapidly than they have joined it in recent years. See also Joseph F. Pilat and Robert E. Pendley, eds., *Beyond 1995: The Future of the NPT Regime* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990).

13. As Heisbourg has suggested, it is also quite possible, though difficult to prove, that "without the decisions of the U. N. Security Council, there would have been no [international] coalition capable of weathering close to seven months of crisis and war [and] the U. S. Congress would not have approved offensive military operations in the absence of the Security Council's Resolution 678, which authorized the use of force." See Francois Heisbourg, "An Eagle Amid Less Powerful Fowl," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 1991, p. M5.

14. See Robert O. Keohane, "The Theory of Hegemonic Stability and Changes in International Economic Regimes, 1967–1977," in Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alexander L. George, eds., *Change in the International System* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980), pp.

merely finding the hegemony to which the current array of regional and global institutional roles could be ascribed is a daunting, if not insurmountable, challenge.

The fact that norms and institutions matter comes as no surprise to the “new institutionalists” in international relations; after all, that has long been their message.¹⁵ But, curiously, they have paid little explicit and detailed analytic attention to a core feature of current international institutional arrangements: their multilateral form. A literature search keyed on the concept of multilateralism turns up relatively few entries, and only a tiny number of these are of any interest to the international relations theorist. The focus of the new institutionalists has been on “cooperation” and “institutions” in a generic sense, with international regimes and formal organizations sometimes conceived as specific institutional subsets.¹⁶ For example, no scholar has contributed more to the new institutionalism in international relations than Robert Keohane. Yet the concept of multilateralism is used sparingly in his work, even in a literature survey on that subject. And the definition of multilateralism that he employs is purely nominal: “the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states.”¹⁷

The nominal definition of multilateralism may be useful for some purposes. But it poses the problem of subsuming institutional forms that traditionally have been viewed as being expressions of bilateralism, not multilateralism—instances of the Bismarckian alliance system, for example, such as the League

131–62; Arthur A. Stein, “The Hegemon’s Dilemma: Great Britain, the United States, and the International Economic Order,” *International Organization* 38 (Spring 1984), pp. 355–86; Duncan Snidal, “The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory,” *International Organization* 39 (Autumn 1985), pp. 579–614; and John A. C. Conybeare, *Trade Wars: The Theory and Practice of International Commercial Rivalry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

15. I mean to include here both strands of theorizing identified by Keohane: the rationalist and the reflectivist. See Robert O. Keohane, “International Institutions: Two Approaches,” *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (December 1988), pp. 379–96.

16. See Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); Kenneth A. Oye, ed., *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

17. See Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research,” *International Journal* 45 (Autumn 1990), p. 731. After introducing the concept of multilateralism and defining it in this manner, Keohane essentially goes on to discuss international institutions in the generic sense. See also Keohane, *After Hegemony*, in which there are but two fleeting references to multilateralism, both to specific agreements in trade; and Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), which contains no entry under multilateralism in its index. I must admit that these criticisms apply as well to my own writings on the subject of institutions. Keohane has kindly referred to a 1975 paper of mine as having “foreshadowed much of the conceptual work of the next decade.” Alas, it also foreshadowed this blind spot, having been concerned primarily with differentiating the study of international organization from the study of formal international organizations—hence, the introduction of the concept of “regimes.” See Keohane, “Multilateralism,” p. 755, fn. 44, referring to Ruggie, “International Responses to Technology: Concepts and Trends,” *International Organization* 29 (Summer 1975), pp. 557–83.

of the *Three Emperors*. In short, the nominal definition of multilateralism misses the *qualitative* dimension of the phenomenon that makes it distinct.¹⁸

In a superb discussion of this issue, attempting to sort out the enormous variety of trade relations in the world today, William Diebold insists for starters on the need to distinguish between “formal” and “substantive” multilateralism, by which he means roughly what I mean by nominal versus qualitative. “But that is far from the end of the matter. The bilateral agreements of Cordell Hull were basically different from those of Hjalmar Schacht.”¹⁹ That is to say, the issue is not the number of parties so much, Diebold suggests, as it is the kind of relations that are instituted among them. It is this substantive or qualitative characteristic of multilateralism that concerns me in the present essay, not only for trade but also for the institutional dimension of international relations in general.

Nor is the missing qualitative dimension captured entirely by the concepts of international regimes or intergovernmental organizations. There are instances of international regimes that were not multilateral in form, such as the Nazi trade and monetary regimes, to which we will return momentarily. As for multilateral formal organizations, although they entail no analytic mystery, all practitioners of the new institutionalism agree that these organizations constitute only one small part of a broader universe of international institutional forms that interest them.

The missing qualitative dimension of multilateralism immediately comes into focus, however, if we return to an older institutionalist discourse, one informed by the postwar aims of the United States to restructure the international order. When we speak here of multilateralism in international trade, we know immediately that it refers to trade organized on the basis of certain principles of state conduct—above all, nondiscrimination.²⁰ Similarly, when we speak here of multilateralism in security relations, we know that it refers to some expression or other of collective security or collective self-defense.²¹ And when President George Bush today enunciates a “new world order” for the Middle

18. In the UN context, what Keohane defines as multilateral is called *multinational*—for example, the multinational (non-UN) observer team in the Sinai. In the UN, only that is considered multilateral which is duly authorized by a multilateral forum. But if Keohane’s definition is analytically too loose, the UN conception is too limiting, as I discuss later in my article.

19. See William Diebold, Jr., “The History and the Issues,” in William Diebold, Jr., ed., *Bilateralism, Multilateralism and Canada in U. S. Trade Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1988), p. 1. Diebold seeks to formulate some principled basis for distinguishing what kind of recent trade measures—unilateral, bilateral, and what he calls plurilateral—are consistent with, and what kind undermine, the principles of multilateralism on which the GATT regime is based.

20. See *ibid.*; Richard N. Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy in Current Perspective*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Jacob Viner, “Conflicts of Principle in Drafting a Trade Charter,” *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947), pp. 612–28; Herbert Feis, “The Conflict over Trade Ideologies,” *Foreign Affairs* 25 (January 1947), pp. 217–28; and Robert Pollard, *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

21. See Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 3–47; and Pollard, *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War*.

East and elsewhere—universal aspirations, cooperative deterrence, and joint action against aggression²²—whether it constitutes vision or rhetoric, the notion evokes and is entirely consistent with the American postwar multilateralist agenda, as I argue below. In sum, what is distinctive about multilateralism is not merely that it coordinates national policies in groups of three or more states, which is something that other organizational forms also do, but that it does so on the basis of certain principles of ordering relations among those states.

Thus, there exists a compound anomaly in the world of international relations theory today. An institutional phenomenon of which conventional theories barely take note is both widespread and significant; but at the same time, the particular features that make it so are glossed over by most students of international institutions themselves. This article is intended to help resolve both parts of the anomaly.

The premise of the present article is that we can better understand the role of multilateral norms and institutions in the current international transformation by recovering the principled meanings of multilateralism from actual historical practice; by showing how and why those principled meanings have come to be institutionalized throughout the history of the modern interstate system; and by exploring how and why they may perpetuate themselves today, even as the conditions that initially gave rise to them have changed.

This “grounded” analysis of the concept suggests a series of working hypotheses, which require more extensive testing before strong validity claims can be made for them. Nevertheless, I and my fellow contributors to this symposium on multilateralism believe that the hypotheses are sufficiently interesting and that the case we make for them is sufficiently plausible to warrant such further study, and we present them here in that spirit.²³ The argument, in brief, goes something like this: Multilateralism is a generic institutional form of modern international life, and as such it has been present from the start. The generic institutional form of multilateralism must not be confused with formal multilateral organizations, a relatively recent arrival and still of only relatively modest importance. Historically, the generic form of multilateralism can be found in institutional arrangements to define and stabilize the international property rights of states, to manage coordination problems, and to resolve collaboration problems. The last of these uses of the multilateral form is historically the least frequent. In the literature, this fact traditionally has been explained by the rise and fall of hegemonies and, more recently, by various functional considerations. Our analysis suggests that a

22. George Bush, cited in “President Bush’s Address to Congress on End of the Gulf War,” *The New York Times*, 7 March 1991, p. A8.

23. See the following articles in this issue of *IO*: James A. Caporaso, “International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations”; Miles Kahler, “Multilateralism with Small and Large Numbers”; and Steve Weber, “Shaping the Postwar Balance of Power: Multilateralism in NATO.” See also the contributions to Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters*.

permissive domestic environment in the leading powers of the day is at least as important and, in some cases, more important. When we look more closely at the post–World War II situation, for example, we find that it was less the fact of American *hegemony* that accounts for the explosion of multilateral arrangements than it was the fact of *American* hegemony. Finally, we suggest that institutional arrangements of the multilateral form have adaptive and even reproductive capacities which other institutional forms may lack and which, therefore, may help explain the roles that multilateral arrangements play in stabilizing the current international transformation.

The meanings of multilateralism

At its core, multilateralism refers to coordinating relations among three or more states in accordance with certain principles. But what, precisely, are those principles? And to what, precisely, do those principles pertain? To facilitate the construction of a more formal definition, let us begin by examining an historical instance of something that everyone agrees multilateralism is not: bilateralism.

Earlier in this century, Nazi Germany succeeded in finely honing a pure form of bilateralism into a systemic organizing principle. Now, as Diebold notes, the everyday term “bilateral” is entirely neutral with regard to the qualitative relationship that is instituted among countries.²⁴ So as to give expression to its qualitative nature, the Nazi system therefore typically has been referred to as *bilateralist* in character or as embodying *bilateralism* as its organizing principle. In any case, once the New Plan of the Nazi government took effect in 1934, Hjalmar Schacht devised a scheme of bilateralist trade agreements and clearing arrangements.²⁵ The essence of the German international trade regime was that the state negotiated “reciprocal” agreements with its foreign trading partners. These negotiations determined which goods and services were to be exchanged, their quantities, and their price. Often, Germany deliberately imported more from its partners than it exported to them. But it required that its trading partners liquidate their claims on Germany by reinvesting there or by purchasing deliberately overpriced German goods. Thus, its trading partners were doubly dependent on Germany.

This trade regime in turn was linked to bilateralist monetary clearing arrangements. Under these arrangements, a German importer would, for example, pay marks to the German Reichsbank for its imports rather than to the foreign source of the goods or services, while the foreign counterpart of the

24. Diebold, “The History and the Issues.”

25. The classic and appropriately titled study of the Nazi system is Albert O. Hirschman’s *National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade* (1945; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). See also Leland B. Yeager, *International Monetary Relations: Theory, History, and Policy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 357–76.

transaction would receive payment in home country currency from its central bank—and vice versa for German exports. No foreign exchange changed hands; the foreign exchange markets were bypassed; and artificial exchange rates prevailed. The permissible total amounts to be cleared in this manner were negotiated by the two states.

German bilateralism typically but not exclusively focused on smaller and weaker states in East Central Europe, the Balkans, and Latin America, exchanging primary commodity imports for manufactured exports. But the scheme had no inherent limit; it could have been geographically universalized to cover the entire globe, with an enormous spiderweb of bilateralist agreements radiating out from Germany.²⁶

The nominal definition of multilateralism would not exclude the Schachtian bilateralist device: it coordinated economic relations among more than three states. Nor is the fact decisive that negotiations took place bilaterally: after all, many tariff reductions in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) are also negotiated bilaterally. The difference is, of course, that within GATT bilaterally negotiated tariff reductions are extended to all other parties on the basis of most-favored-nation (MFN) treatment, whereas the Schachtian scheme was inherently and fundamentally discriminatory, so that bilateral deals held only on a case-by-case and product-by-product basis, even if they covered the entire globe in doing so.

Let us examine next an institutional arrangement that is generally acknowledged to embody multilateralist principles: a collective security system. None has ever existed in pure form, but in principle the scheme is quite simple. It rests on the premise that peace is indivisible, so that a war against one state is, ipso facto, considered a war against all. The community of states therefore is obliged to respond to threatened or actual aggression, first by diplomatic means, then through economic sanctions, and finally by the collective use of force if necessary. Facing the prospect of such a community-wide response, any rational potential aggressor would be deterred and would desist. Thus, the incidence of war gradually would decline.

A collective security scheme certainly coordinates security relations among three or more states. But so, too, as noted above, did the League of the Three Emperors, which was nothing more than a set of traditional alliances.²⁷ What is distinct about a collective security scheme is that it comprises, as Sir Arthur Salter put it a half-century ago, a permanent potential alliance “against the *unknown* enemy”²⁸—and, he should have added, in behalf of the *unknown* victim. The institutional difference between an alliance and a collective security

26. Several major states, including Great Britain and the United States, had limited agreements with Germany involving *Sondermarks*—marks which foreigners could earn through the sale of specified products to Germany but which Germany in turn restricted to particular purchases from Germany.

27. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery of Europe*, chap. 12.

28. Arthur Salter, *Security* (London: Macmillan, 1939), p. 155; emphasis in original.

scheme can be simply put: in both instances, state A is pledged to come to the aid of B if B is attacked by C. In a collective security scheme, however, A is also pledged to come to the aid of C if C is attacked by B. Consequently, as G. F. Hudson points out, "A cannot regard itself as the ally of B more than of C, because theoretically it is an open question whether, if an act of war should occur, B or C would be the aggressor. In the same way B has indeterminate obligations towards A and C, and C towards A and B, and so on with a vast number of variants as the system is extended to more and more states."²⁹ It was precisely this difference between a collective security system and an alliance that ultimately doomed the fate of the League of Nations in the U. S. Senate.³⁰

The United States frequently invoked the collective security model in leading the anti-Iraq coalition in the Persian Gulf crisis and then in war, though what if any permanent institutional consequences will follow from that effort remains to be seen.³¹ NATO reflects a truncated version of the model, in which a subset of states organized a collective self-defense scheme of indefinite duration, *de jure* against any potential aggressor though *de facto* against one. Nevertheless, internally the scheme was predicated on two multilateralist principles. The first was the indivisibility of threats to the collectivity—that is, it did not matter whether it was Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, or Norway that was attacked, nor in theory by whom—and the second was the requirement of an unconditional collective response.³²

We are now in a position to be more precise about the core meaning of multilateralism. Keohane has defined institutions, generically, as "persistent and connected sets of rules, formal and informal, that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations."³³ Very simply, the term "multilateral" is an adjective that modifies the noun "institution." Thus,

29. See G. F. Hudson, "Collective Security and Military Alliances," in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 176–77. See also Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe," *International Security* 16 (Summer 1991), pp. 114–61.

30. Contrary to folklore, Woodrow Wilson was not prepared to commit the United States to specific and automatic military obligations under the League of Nations; his collective security scheme would have relied on public opinion, arms limitations, and arbitration more than on enforcement mechanisms. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge's fundamental objection to the League of Nations was that its permanence and universalism would entail limitless entanglements for the United States. Lodge in turn favored stronger and more specific security guarantees to France and against Germany. See Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 51–106.

31. The key shortcoming of collective security UN style is, of course, that the UN has no means of its own to implement a military response to aggression, since no state has ever negotiated an Article 43 agreement making standby forces available. After the war in the Persian Gulf, the U. S. ambassador to the UN, Thomas Pickering, proposed the reconsideration of Article 43 provisions in speeches before the Veterans of Foreign Wars on 4 March 1991 and before the American Bar Association on 26 April 1991 in Washington, D. C.

32. French absence from the unified command and U. S. control over nuclear weapons complicate matters further.

33. Keohane, "Multilateralism," p. 732.

multilateralism depicts a *generic institutional form* in international relations. How does multilateral modify institution? Our illustrations suggest that multilateralism is an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of “generalized” principles of conduct—that is, principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence. MFN treatment is a classic example in the economic realm: it forbids discrimination among countries producing the same product. Its counterpart in security relations is the requirement that states respond to aggression whenever and wherever it occurs—whether or not any specific instance suits their individual likes and dislikes. In contrast, the bilateralist form, such as the Schachtian device and traditional alliances, differentiates relations case-by-case based precisely on a priori particularistic grounds or situational exigencies.

Bilateralism and multilateralism do not exhaust the institutional repertoire of states. Imperialism can be considered a third generic institutional form. Imperialism also is an institution that coordinates relations among three or more states though, unlike bilateralism and multilateralism, it does so by denying the sovereignty of the subject states.³⁴

Two corollaries follow from our definition of multilateralism. First, generalized organizing principles logically entail an indivisibility among the members of a collectivity with respect to the range of behavior in question. Depending on circumstances, that indivisibility can take markedly different forms, ranging from the physical ties of railway lines that the collectivity chooses to standardize across frontiers, all the way to the adoption by states of the premise that peace is indivisible. But note that indivisibility here is a *social construction*, not a technical condition: in a collective security scheme, states behave as if peace were indivisible and thereby make it so. Similarly, in the case of trade, it is the GATT members’ adherence to the MFN norm which makes the system of trade an indivisible whole, not some inherent attribute of trade itself.³⁵ Bilateralism, in contrast, segments relations into multiples of dyads and compartmentalizes them. Second, as discussed in further detail below, successful cases of multilateralism in practice appear to generate among their members what Keohane has called expectations of “diffuse reciprocity.”³⁶ That is to say, the arrangement is expected by its members to yield a rough equivalence of benefits in the aggregate and over time. Bilateralism, in contrast, is premised

34. See Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 19–47. Some of the more predatory expressions of the Nazi arrangements came very close to if they did not actually constitute the imperial form.

35. Obviously, the existence of nuclear weapons, economic interdependence, externalities, or other technical factors can and probably does affect the social constructions that states choose. I am not imputing causality here, simply clarifying a concept.

36. Robert O. Keohane, “Reciprocity in International Relations,” *International Organization* 40 (Winter 1986), pp. 1–27.

on specific reciprocity, the simultaneous balancing of specific quids-pro-quos by each party with every other at all times.³⁷

It follows from this definition and its corollaries that multilateralism is a highly demanding institutional form. Its historical incidence, therefore, is likely to be less frequent than that of its alternatives; and if its relative incidence at any time were to be high, that fact would pose an interesting puzzle to be explained.

The obvious next issue to address is the fact that, as Keohane points out, the generic concept of international institution applies in practice to many different types of institutionalized relations among states.³⁸ So too, therefore, does the adjective multilateral: the generic attribute of multilateralism, that it coordinates relations among three or more states in accordance with generalized principles of conduct, will have different specific expressions depending on the type of institutionalized relations to which it pertains. Let us examine some instances. Common usage in the literature distinguishes among three institutional domains of interstate relations: international orders, international regimes, and international organizations. Each type can be, but need not be, multilateral in form.

The literature frequently refers to international economic orders, international security orders, international maritime orders, and so on. An “open” or “liberal” international economic order is multilateral in form, as is a maritime order based on the principle of *mare liberum*. The New Economic Order of the Nazis was not multilateral in form, for reasons that have already been suggested, and neither was the European security order crafted by Bismarck. The concept of multilateralism here refers to the constitutive rules that order relations in given domains of international life—their architectural dimension, so to speak. Thus, the quality of “openness” in an international economic order refers to such characteristics as the prohibition of exclusive blocs, spheres, or similar barriers to the conduct of international economic relations. The corresponding quality in an international security order—the quality that would cause it to be described as “collective”—is the condition of equal access to a common security umbrella. To the extent that the characteristic condition or conditions are met, the order in question may be said to be multilateral in form. In short, multilateralism here depicts the character of an overall order of relations among states; definitionally it says nothing about *how* that order is achieved.

A regime is more concrete than an order. Typically, the term “regime” refers to a functional or sectoral component of an order. Moreover, the concept of

37. Bilateral balancing need not imply equality; it simply means establishing a mutually acceptable balance between the parties, however that is determined in practice. For an extended discussion of this difference, see Karl Polanyi, “The Economy as Instituted Process,” in Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Pearson, eds., *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957), pp. 243–70.

38. Keohane, “International Institutions.”

regime encompasses more of the “how” question than does the concept of order in that, broadly speaking, the term “regime” is used to refer to common, deliberative, though often highly asymmetrical means of conducting interstate relations. That much is clear from common usage. But while there is a widespread assumption in the literature that all regimes are, ipso facto, multilateral in character, this assumption is egregiously erroneous. For example, there is no reason not to call the Schachtian schemes for organizing monetary and trade relations international regimes; they fully meet the standard criteria specified by Stephen Krasner and his colleagues.³⁹ Moreover, it is entirely possible to imagine the emergence of regimes between *two* states—superpower security regimes, for example, were a topic of some discussion in the 1980s⁴⁰—but such regimes by definition would not be multilateral either. In sum, what makes a regime a *regime* is that it satisfies the definitional criteria of encompassing principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge. But in and of themselves, those terms are empty of substance. What makes a regime *multilateral* in form, beyond involving three or more states, is that the substantive meanings of those terms roughly reflect the appropriate generalized principles of conduct. By way of illustration, in the case of a multilateral trade regime, these would include the norm of MFN treatment, corresponding rules about reciprocal tariff reductions and the application of safeguards, and collectively sanctioned procedures for implementing the rules. In the case of a collective security regime, they would include the norm of nonaggression, uniform rules for use of sanctions to deter or punish aggression, and, again, collectively sanctioned procedures for implementing them.

Finally, formal international organizations are palpable entities with headquarters and letterheads, voting procedures, and generous pension plans. They require no conceptual elaboration. But, again, their relationship to the concept of multilateralism is less self-evident than is sometimes assumed. Two issues deserve brief mention. The first issue, though it may be moot at the moment, is that there have been international organizations that were not multilateral in form. The Comintern and the Cominform come to mind; they were based explicitly on Leninist principles of organization, which were quite different from their multilateral counterparts.⁴¹ Along the same lines, the recently collapsed Soviet–East European system of organizations differed from multilateral forms in ways that students of international organization never fully came

39. Krasner, *International Regimes*.

40. Steve Weber predicted the emergence of a superpower security regime in “Realism, Detente, and Nuclear Weapons,” *International Organization* 44 (Winter 1990), pp. 55–82. Robert Jervis discussed the possibility in two of his works: “Security Regimes,” in Krasner, *International Regimes*, pp. 173–94; and “From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation,” *World Politics* 38 (October 1985), pp. 58–79.

41. See Franz Borkenau, *World Communism: A History of the Communist International*, with an introduction by Raymond Aron (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962).

to grips with.⁴² The second issue is more problematic even today. There is a common tendency in the world of actual international organizations, and sometimes in the academic community, to equate the very phenomenon of multilateralism with the universe of multilateral organizations or diplomacy. The preceding discussion makes it clear why that view is in error. It may be the case empirically that decisions concerning aspects of international orders or, more likely, international regimes in fact are made in multilateral forums. The EC exhibits this empirical pattern most extensively; the failed quest by developing countries for a New International Economic Order in the 1970s exhibits the desire to achieve it; and decisions on most international trade and monetary matters fall somewhere in between. But definitionally, “multilateral organization” is a separate and distinct type of institutionalized behavior, defined by such generalized decision-making rules as voting or consensus procedures.

In sum, the term “multilateral” is an adjective that modifies the noun institution. What distinguishes the multilateral form from other forms is that it coordinates behavior among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct. Accordingly, any theory of international institutions that does not include this qualitative dimension of multilateralism is bound to be a fairly abstract theory and one that is silent about a crucial distinction within the repertoire of international institutional forms. Moreover, for analytic purposes, it is important not to (con)fuse the very meaning of multilateralism with any one particular institutional expression of it, be it an international order, regime, or organization. Each can be, but need not be, multilateral in form. In addition, the multilateral form should not be equated with universal geographical scope; the attributes of multilateralism characterize relations within specific collectivities that may and often do fall short of the whole universe of nations. Finally, it should be kept in mind that these are formal definitions, not empirical descriptions of actual cases, and we would not expect actual cases to conform fully to the formal definitions. But let us turn now to some actual historical cases exhibiting the multilateral form.

Multilateralism in history

The institutional form of multilateralism has now been defined. What can we say about its specific expressions over time, their frequency distribution, and some possible correlates? A brief historical survey will situate the phenomenon better and help us begin to answer these questions. To organize the discussion,

42. See Gerard Holden, “The End of an Alliance: Soviet Policy and the Warsaw Pact, 1989–90,” *PRIF Reports* (Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt), no. 16, December 1990.

I adapt a standard typology of institutional roles from the literature: defining and stabilizing international property rights, solving coordination problems, and resolving collaboration problems.⁴³

Property rights

Not surprisingly, the earliest multilateral arrangements instituted in the modern era were designed to cope with the international consequences of the novel principle of state sovereignty. The newly emerged territorial states conceived their essence, their very being, by the possession of territory and the exclusion of others from it. But how does one possess something one does not own? And, still more problematic, how does one exclude others from it?

The world's oceans posed this problem. Contiguous waterways could be shared, administered jointly, or, more than likely, split down the middle; the international property rights of states thereby were established bilaterally. The oceans were another matter. States attempted to project exclusive unilateral jurisdiction, but they failed. Spain and Portugal tried a bilateral solution, whereby Spain claimed a monopoly of the western trade routes to the Far East and Portugal claimed the eastern routes. But they, too, failed. All such efforts failed for the simple reason that it is exceedingly difficult if not impossible in the long run to vindicate a property right that is not recognized as being valid by the relevant others in a given community, especially when exclusion is as difficult as it was in the oceans. Attempts to do so lead to permanent challenge and recurrent conflict. A multilateral solution to the governance of the oceans, therefore, was inescapable. The principle which was first enunciated by Hugo Grotius at the beginning of the seventeenth century and which states slowly came to adopt was one that defined an international maritime order in two parts: a territorial sea under exclusive state control, which custom eventually set at three miles because that was the range of land-based cannons at the time; and the high seas beyond, available for common use but owned by none.⁴⁴ Under this arrangement, all states were free to utilize the high seas, provided

43. The distinction between coordination and collaboration was proposed by Arthur Stein in "Coordination and Collaboration: Regimes in an Anarchic World," in Krasner, *International Regimes*, pp. 115–40. See also Duncan Snidal, "IGO's, Regimes, and Cooperation: Challenges for International Relations Theory," in Margaret P. Karns and Karen A. Mingst, eds., *The United States and Multilateral Institutions* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 321–50; and Lisa Martin, "Interests, Power, and Multilateralism," *International Organization*, forthcoming. The international property rights of states invariably are taken for granted, however, even though their stable definition is logically and temporally prior to the other two collective action problems. I have therefore added this dimension.

44. For a brief review of this subject and an interesting discussion of how global warming and rising sea levels may affect these practices, see David D. Caron, "When Law Makes Climate Change Worse: Rethinking the Law of Baselines in Light of a Rising Sea Level," *Ecology Law Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1990, pp. 621–53.

only that they did not thereby damage the legitimate interests of others.⁴⁵ And each state had the same rules for all states, not one rule for some and other rules for others.

An even more profound instance of delimiting the property rights of states—more profound because it concerned internal, as opposed to external, space—was the invention of the principle of extraterritoriality as the basis for organizing permanent diplomatic representation. As Garrett Mattingly put it in his magisterial study of the subject: “By arrogating to themselves supreme power over men’s consciences, the new states had achieved absolute sovereignty. Having done so, they found they could only communicate with one another by tolerating within themselves little islands of alien sovereignty.”⁴⁶ Instituting those little islands of alien sovereignty in the end required a multilateral solution, though differential arrangements based on the religious preferences and social status of rulers were tried first. And their maintenance came to be seen as being necessary to the very existence of a viable political order among states.⁴⁷ As a result, grave breaches of the principle of extraterritoriality are, ipso facto, deemed to be a violation against the entire community of states.⁴⁸

Until quite recently, neither regimes nor formal organizations played significant roles in the definition and stabilization of international property rights. Conventional practice and episodic treaty negotiations sufficed to establish multilateral orders of relations.

Coordination problems

States have strong and conflicting preferences about international property rights. In the case of the oceans, for example, coastal states were favored over landlocked states by the allocation of *any* territorial sea; different coastal states ended up with differentially sized territorial seas by virtue of the length of their coastlines; coastal states nevertheless would have preferred no limit at all to the territorial sea; and so on. There also exists a class of problems in international relations wherein states are more or less indifferent in principle to the actual

45. It took until the early eighteenth century before piracy, frequently state-sponsored, came to be generally defined as being inherently damaging to the legitimate interests of states. See Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

46. Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 244.

47. On the emergence of the perception that extraterritoriality played a systemic role, see Adda B. Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), especially pp. 479–80.

48. Note in this connection that UN Security Council Resolution 667 “strongly condemns” Iraq for “aggressive acts perpetrated. . . against diplomatic premises and personnel in Kuwait,” whereas Resolution 660, passed in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, merely “condemns” the invasion, without embellishment. The full texts are contained in UN Security Council, S/RES/667, 16 September 1990, and S/RES/660, 2 August 1990; emphasis added.

outcome, provided only that all accept the same outcome. These are typically referred to as coordination problems.⁴⁹

A paradigmatic case of a coordination problem in the mid-nineteenth century was posed by electronic telegraphy and concerned what would happen to a message as it came, for instance, to the border between France and the Grand Duchy of Baden. The following procedure was instituted: "A common station was established at Strasbourg with two employees, one from the French Telegraph Administration, the other from Baden. The French employee received, for example, a telegram from Paris, which the electric wires had transmitted to him with the speed of light. This message he wrote out by hand onto a special form and handed it across the table to his German colleague. He translated it into German, and then sent it again on its way."⁵⁰ However, with the intensification of trade, the desire for the latest stock market information from London, Paris, and Berlin, and important diplomatic messages that governments wished to send to one another, this arrangement became untenable. Its costs in profits lost, opportunities foregone, and administrative resources expended mounted rapidly. The initial response was to negotiate a series of bilateral treaties. But in the dense communications complex of the European continent, bilateral solutions soon also proved inadequate. Several multilateral arrangements were therefore constructed and were subsequently combined in 1865, when the International Telegraph Union was established.

The multilateral arrangement for telegraphy consisted of three parts. First, the parties devised rules concerning the network of telegraph lines that were to connect countries within Europe (and, later, in other parts of the world), the codes to be used, the agreed priorities of transmission, the languages that were permissible, the schedule of tariffs to be levied, the manner in which proceeds would be divided, and so on. Second, they established a permanent secretariat to administer the day-to-day implementation of these rules and to coordinate the technical operations of the system. And, third, they convened periodic conferences to make any such revisions in the basic system as became necessary over time.

Much the same kind of arrangement had already been anticipated in the domain of European river transport, as on the Rhine and the Danube, typically consisting of commissions, secretariats, and judicial bodies—and, in some instances, even uniforms for officials.⁵¹ Later in the nineteenth century, similar multilateral arrangements were instituted in the field of public health.⁵²

In situations exhibiting coordination problems, the incentives are high for

49. Stein, "Coordination and Collaboration."

50. International Telecommunications Union (ITU), *From Semaphore to Satellite* (Geneva: ITU, 1965), p. 45.

51. J. P. Chamberlain, *The Regime of International Rivers* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1923).

52. Ernst B. Haas, *Beyond the Nation State* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 14–17.

states to order their relations on the basis of generalized principles of conduct. At least in the long run, therefore, the desire to reduce transaction costs tends to become a driving factor. Not surprisingly, historically the highest incidence of multilateral regimes and organizations is found in this domain.

Collaboration problems

Where the definition and stabilization of at least some international property rights is concerned, there appears to exist an ultimate inevitability to multilateral solutions, although “ultimate” may mean after all possible alternatives, including war, have been exhausted. In cases of coordination problems, there appears to exist an ultimate indifference as to which one of several outcomes is selected, although “ultimate” here may mask such concrete problems as sunk investments that individual states may have in the “equally acceptable” outcome that did not get adopted.

Between the two extremes of inevitability and indifference lies the domain of mixed-motive, conflict of interest situations. Even in this domain, however, cooperation occurs. And sometimes it occurs on a multilateral basis. Before 1945, however, it did not do so very often.

In the security realm, the most celebrated case is the Concert of Europe, a case in which students of international relations have paid far more attention to the issue of whether or not it constituted a security regime than to the fact that it exhibited elements of the multilateral form. Charles and Clifford Kupchan have recently provided us with a useful continuum of collective security arrangements, with the “ideal” form at one end and concerts at the other. We have already examined the formal attributes of the “ideal” model. According to the Kupchans, the concert version is characterized by the dominance of the great powers, decisions taken by informal negotiations and consensus, and no explicit specification of the mechanisms for implementing collective action. But—and this is what puts it in the class of collective security mechanisms—a concert nevertheless is “predicated on the notion of all against one.”⁵³ That is, a concert is predicated on the indivisibility of peace among its members and on their nondiscretionary obligation to respond to acts of aggression.

Between the Napoleonic and the Crimean wars, from 1815 to 1854, peace in Europe was maintained, in Henry Kissinger’s words, by an institutional “framework” that was regarded by participants as being “legitimate,” so that

53. See Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe,” p. 120. Note also the following analysis of the Treaty of Paris (1815) offered by historian Richard Langhorne in “Reflections on the Significance of the Congress of Vienna,” *Review of International Studies* 12 (October 1986), p. 317: “There appeared at clause 6, in what was certainly Castlereagh’s drafting, [a shift in] emphasis from a specific guarantee to a scheme for the continuous management of the international system by the great powers.”

“they sought adjustment within [it] rather than in its overthrow.”⁵⁴ In doing so, according to Robert Jervis, they “behaved in ways that sharply diverged from normal ‘power politics.’”⁵⁵

As Jervis describes it, the five leading powers—Austria, Great Britain, Prussia, Russia, and a French monarchy restored with the aid of the other four—refrained from seeking to maximize their relative power positions vis-à-vis one another, instead moderating their demands and behavior; they refrained from exploiting one another’s temporary weaknesses and vulnerabilities; and they threatened force sparingly and used it rarely as a means to resolve differences among them—except, Kal Holsti adds, that they “were clearly of the opinion that force could be used individually or collectively for enforcing certain decisions and for coercing those who threatened the foundations of the order or the system of governance.”⁵⁶

How were these feats achieved? The five powers constituted themselves as “an executive body” of the European international system,⁵⁷ convening extensive multilateral consultations through which they acted on matters that could have undermined the peace. For example, they collectively created and guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium and Greece, thereby removing those territories from the temptations of bilateral partition or competition. As Rene Albrecht-Carrie has argued, the “Eastern question” in general—that is, the problem of how to secure orderly change and national independence in the wake of the irreversible decay of the Ottoman Empire—“provides many illustrations of an authentic common preference for orderly and peaceful procedure, more than once successfully implemented.”⁵⁸

What could account for this unusual institutional development? It seems that the threat posed by Napoleon’s imperial ambitions to the very principle of the balance of power proved weightier than the usual risks and uncertainties that plague cooperation in the security realm. Moreover, the threat posed by the French revolutionary wars to the very principle of dynastic rule seems to have proved weightier than the differences in domestic social formations, such as those existing between liberal and protestant England on the one hand and the more conservative and catholic Austria and orthodox Russia on the other. These two threats helped crystalize the norm of systemic stability—the

54. See Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored* (New York: Universal Library, 1964), p. 5. Kissinger concentrates on the *Congress* system, a subset of the Concert of Europe, which ended by about 1823, but my commentary holds for the entire concert system.

55. See Robert Jervis, “Security Regimes,” p. 178. See also Jervis, “From Balance to Concert”; and Richard B. Elrod, “The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System,” *World Politics* 28 (January 1976), pp. 159–74.

56. Kal Holsti, “Governance Without Government: Modes of Coordinating, Managing and Controlling International Politics in Nineteenth Century Europe,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Vancouver, Canada, March 1991.

57. The term is used by Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George in *Force and Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 31.

58. Rene Albrecht-Carrie, *The Concert of Europe* (New York: Walker, 1968), p. 22.

“repose” of Europe was the term the five preferred⁵⁹—that the concert was geared to sustain. They emboldened states to place a *collective* bet on their future. And the multilateral consultations instituted via the concert limited the extent of cheating on that bet by providing a forum within which intelligence could be shared, actor intentions questioned, and justifications for actions proffered and assessed.

The Concert of Europe gradually eroded not only because the memory of the initial threats faded but also because over time the parameters of the situation were transformed. Above all else, the revolutions of 1848 seriously shook the prevailing concept of legitimate political order from within, and the sense of international cohesion diverged sharply thereafter. “I do not see Europe anymore,” a French foreign minister lamented at the time.⁶⁰ In the second half of the nineteenth century, multilateral consultation and self-restraint yielded to the striving for unilateral advantage checked only by external constraints, while bilateral alliance formation was raised to a new level of sophistication by Bismarck.

In the economic realm, the nineteenth century witnessed what economists consider to be paradigms, if not paragons, of multilateralism: free trade and the gold standard. By free trade is meant two things: a minimum of barriers to trade, including tariff and nontariff barriers; and nondiscriminatory treatment in trade. An international gold standard exists when two sets of conditions are approximated. First, the major countries must maintain a link between their domestic money supply and gold at substantially fixed ratios. Second, in principle they must allow the outflow of gold to liquidate an adverse balance of current obligations and must accept a corresponding inflow in case of a favorable balance. These conditions also establish the convertibility of currencies at relatively fixed rates, and they facilitate international adjustment insofar as the initial imbalance in the current account in principle will be rectified automatically in both surplus and deficit countries by the appropriate domestic measures that follow from the inflow and outflow of gold.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Great Britain—the front-runner in the Industrial Revolution, the foremost importer of raw materials and exporter of manufactured products, and the enthusiastic occupant of the doctrinal house built by Adam Smith and David Ricardo—was prepared to move toward free trade on a unilateral basis. Prime Minister Robert Peel declared in Parliament that “if other countries choose to buy in the dearest market, such an option on their part constitutes no reason why we should not be permitted to buy in the cheapest.”⁶¹ Indeed, Britain did liberalize trade unilaterally, culminating in the

59. Holsti, “Governance Without Government,” p. 4.

60. The French official is cited by F. H. Hinsley in *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 243.

61. Robert Peel, in *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, London, 29 June 1846; cited by Jagdish N. Bhagwati and Douglas A. Irwin in “The Return of the Reciprocitarians,” *The World Economy* 10 (June 1987), p. 114.

abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846. Others, however, did not follow the British example as Britain had expected. Reluctantly, therefore, and in part also inspired by broader diplomatic considerations, Britain commenced with a series of bilateral tariff negotiations with other countries, and those other countries did the same with third parties, and this had the effect of significantly lowering tariff barriers. The model was the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty between Britain and France, concluded in 1860.⁶² Although this was a bilateral treaty, it had multilateral *consequences* because it contained an unconditional MFN provision: it committed Britain and France to extend to each other any subsequent concessions obtained from agreements with any third party. Bismarck, Louis Napoleon, and Cavour all viewed such trade treaties primarily as instruments of traditional bilateral diplomacy and less as the means to multilateralize trade. But they negotiated them, and they included the MFN provision. The inclusion of this provision in a series of trade treaties had the effect of multilateralizing the trading order.⁶³

As it did in international trade, Britain followed the rules of the gold standard more closely than anyone else. It thereby provided the world economy with a pillar of financial stability in the pound sterling, making multilateral convertibility and adjustment that much easier to achieve.⁶⁴ Britain's policies may have been conducive to multilateralism in two other ways as well. As the world's largest creditor country, Britain did not exploit its position to accumulate large gold stocks but instead made those surpluses available for additional overseas investments and loans. The international economy as a result functioned more smoothly and grew more steadily than would otherwise have been the case. In addition, Britain always allowed debts to Britain incurred by other countries to be cancelled by credits they earned elsewhere. That in turn facilitated the multilateral clearing of payments balances.⁶⁵

The multilateralism of free trade and the international gold standard appears to have been created and sustained by two sets of factors. Although it may appear paradoxical, these paragon cases of multilateralism were not achieved by multilateral means. The decisive factor seems to have been

62. For an excellent heterodox treatment of these developments, see Stein, "The Hegemon's Dilemma."

63. See Jacob Viner, "The Most-Favored-Nation Clause," in Jacob Viner, *International Economics* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1951). The United States continued to reject unconditional MFN provisions in its trade treaties until 1923.

64. Barry Eichengreen, "Conducting the International Orchestra: Bank of England Leadership Under the Classical Gold Standard," *Journal of International Money and Finance*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1987, pp. 5–29.

65. According to Briggs, "The key equations of multilateralism were that the United Kingdom itself had a credit balance in its dealings with the primary producing countries, and that they settled their balance of indebtedness by an export surplus to the continental countries and to the United States. The continental countries in their turn financed import surpluses with the primary producing countries and with the United States by export surpluses to the United Kingdom." See Asa Briggs, "The World Economy: Interdependence and Planning," in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), vol. 12, p. 42.

Britain's unilateral move toward free trade and the gold standard and its bilateral dealings to achieve both goals. Britain thereby signaled its willingness to bear the costs of an open trading order and a stable monetary order and thus reduced the distributive and strategic uncertainties of these arrangements for others.⁶⁶ In that sense, free trade and the gold standard can be said to have been less "regime-ish" than was the Concert of Europe. Another critical factor was a permissive domestic political environment. As Arthur Bloomfield has pointed out with regard to the monetary realm, "The view, so widely recognized and accepted in recent decades, of central banking policy as a means of facilitating the achievement and maintenance of reasonable stability in the level of [domestic] economic activity and prices was scarcely thought about before 1914, and certainly not accepted, as a formal objective of monetary policy."⁶⁷ Indeed, many countries lacked the institutional capacity to pursue such a monetary policy, in some cases including even a central bank itself. The second of these conditions collapsed well before the first.⁶⁸

This brief overview of multilateralism prior to the twentieth century suggests several broad generalizations that shed further light on the character of the multilateral institutional form. First, the strategic task environment has an impact on the form that agreements take. Defining and delimiting the property rights of states is as fundamental a collective task as any in the international system. The performance of this task on a multilateral basis seems inevitable in the long run, although in fact states appear to try every conceivable alternative first. Moreover, in the past the multilateral arrangements that did emerge in this domain were monopolized by states and essentially codified state practice into prevailing orders of relations. At the other extreme, limiting transaction costs by solving coordination problems is institutionally neither complex nor particularly demanding, and it was the domain in which multilateralism in all three institutional expressions—orders, regimes, and organizations—flourished in the nineteenth century. Between these two lies the problematic terrain of significant conflict of interest situations, in which states *sometimes*, but prior to the twentieth century not often, construct multilateral arrangements *even though* alternatives are available and viable. The major powers could have selected bilateral alliances in the early nineteenth century and selected discriminatory economic arrangements in the mid-nineteenth century, as they had done before and as they would do again subsequently. But at those particular points in time, they did not. Why not? Presumably, multilateralism was in their interest. But what, concretely, does that mean? How and why did states come to define their interests in a manner that yielded such an unusual institutional outcome? As noted above, it seems that the Concert of Europe

66. Stein, "The Hegemon's Dilemma."

67. Arthur I. Bloomfield, *Monetary Policy Under the International Gold Standard* (New York: Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 1959), p. 23.

68. Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), chap. 3.

was due in part to exogenous shocks to both the international system and the system of domestic rule. Free trade and the gold standard in part seem to have been due to the willingness and the capability of Great Britain to take the lead. Both cases also were made possible by the existence of compatible or at least permissive domestic settings.

Second, as was alluded to earlier, it seems that successful instances of multilateralism come to exhibit “diffuse reciprocity.”⁶⁹ For example, what was crucial to the success of the Concert of Europe, according to Jervis, “is that ‘self-interest’ was broader than usual [and] also longer-run than usual. . . . For this system to work, each state had to believe that its current sacrifices would in fact yield a long-run return, that others would not renege on their implicit commitments when they found themselves in tempting positions.”⁷⁰

Third, the record shows that prior to the twentieth century, very few instances of multilateralism generated formal organizations. The Concert of Europe never went beyond great power consultations, while free trade and the international gold standard were instituted and sustained by even more ad hoc bilateral and unilateral means. The multilateral organizations that did exist functioned exclusively in the domain of coordination problems, where the task at hand was to devise mutually acceptable rules of the road and to change them as technology and other such factors changed. And the role of these organizations was strictly circumscribed by the overall normative structure within which they existed.

The twentieth-century discontinuity

An important break in this third pattern occurred with the twentieth-century “move to institutions,” as the critical legal theorist David Kennedy has described it—by which he means a move to formal organizations.⁷¹

Above all, a completely novel form was added to the institutional repertoire of states in 1919: the multipurpose, universal membership organization, instantiated first by the League of Nations and then by the UN. Prior international organizations had but limited membership, determined by power, function, or both, and they were assigned specific and highly circumscribed tasks. In contrast, here were organizations based on little more than shared aspirations, with broad agendas in which large and small had a constitutionally mandated voice. Moreover, decision making within international organizations increasingly became subject to the mechanism of voting, as opposed to treaty drafting or customary accretion; and voting itself subsequently shifted away in most instances from the early unanimity requirement that was consistent with the traditional mode of conducting international proceedings. Finally, the

69. Keohane, “Reciprocity in International Relations.”

70. Jervis, “Security Regimes,” p. 180.

71. David Kennedy, “The Move to Institutions,” *Cardozo Law Review* 8 (April 1987), pp. 841–988.

move amplified a trend that had begun in the nineteenth century, a trend toward multilateral as opposed to merely bilateral diplomacy, especially in the form of “conference diplomacy.”⁷²

This move to institutions produced several important consequences for the status of multilateralism. First, it complicated, and in some instances actually reversed, the straightforward ends-means relation that previously prevailed between the goals embodied in multilateral arrangements and whatever formal organizational mechanism may have existed to serve them. Or, to put it differently, it created principal-agent problems that had not existed before. Any form of organizational mediation is capable of affecting outcomes, of introducing elements into the substance or process of decision making that previously were not present. A multipurpose, universal membership organization complicates that situation by involving itself even in areas where no normative consensus exists; aspects of both the League of Nations and the UN illustrate that problem in spades. Second, multilateral forums increasingly have come to share in the agenda-setting and convening power of states. For example, such forums increasingly drive the international conference diplomacy game. Third, and perhaps most important, multilateral diplomacy has come to embody a procedural norm *in its own right*—though often a hotly contested one—in some instances carrying with it an international legitimacy not enjoyed by other means.

In short, as a result of the twentieth-century move to institutions, a multilateral political order that is “capable of handling at least some collective tasks in an *ex ante* co-ordinated manner” has emerged.⁷³ I might add in conclusion that while numerous descriptions of this “move to institutions” exist, I know of no good explanation in the literature of why states should have wanted to complicate their lives in this manner. And I would think it particularly difficult to formulate any straightforward explanation within the currently ascendant logic of instrumental rationality.

The United States and postwar multilateralism

The preceding discussion makes it abundantly clear that multilateralism was not invented in 1945. It is a generic institutional form in the modern state system, and incipient expressions of it have been present from the start. However, the breadth and diversity of multilateral arrangements across a broad array of issue-areas increased substantially after 1945. Quite naturally, therefore, one associates the change with the postwar position of the United States.

72. For a brief though excellent review, see Volker Rittberger, “Global Conference Diplomacy and International Policy-Making,” *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1983, pp. 167–82.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 167–68.

According to the theory of hegemonic stability, hegemonic powers are alike in their quest to organize the international system. Hegemonic stability theory is right only up to a point. To the extent that it is possible to “know” these things, historical counterfactuals suggest that the likeness among hegemons stops short of the *institutional form* by which they choose to organize the system.⁷⁴ For instance, had Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union ended up as the world’s leading power after World War II, there is no indication whatsoever that the intentions of either country included creating anything remotely like the international institutional order that came to prevail. Politically, Germany pursued an imperial design in the European core, complete with tributary states on the periphery. Economically, the Nazi scheme of bilateral, discriminatory, and state-controlled trade pacts and monetary clearing arrangements no doubt would have been extended geographically to complement Germany’s political objectives. The Soviet Union presumably would have sought political control through a restored Comintern while causing the modes of production in its subject economies to be socialized and the relations among those economies to be administered on a planned and discriminatory basis.

In point of fact, and this we can say with greater assurance, things would have differed in some respects even if Britain had become hegemon. Colonialism as a political institution would have continued longer. And while monetary relations probably would have been organized similarly, merely based on sterling instead of the U. S. dollar,⁷⁵ British imperial preferences would have remained a central feature of international trade, possibly forcing others to carve out regional trading blocs for themselves.⁷⁶

Finally, Europe certainly would have been “integrated” by a German or a Soviet hegemony—but in a markedly different fashion than exists via the EC today. And in a British-run system, Europe most probably would have returned to prewar multipolarity and the continued existence of separate national economies.

Thus, all hegemonies are not alike. The most that can be said about a hegemonic power is that it will seek to construct an international order in *some* form, presumably along lines that are compatible with its own international

74. The counter to my argument, of course, would be that “systemic factors” determine or at least shape the preferences and behavior of hegemons. That, too, is plausible as a hypothesis. As it concerns this particular instance, however, I attach greater credibility to the actual postwar plans of the Third Reich and to what, since 1917, we knew Leninist world order designs to be than I do to the explanatory or predictive value of systemic theory. For general methodological discussions of counterfactuals, see Philip Nash, “The Use of Counterfactuals in History: A Look at the Literature,” *Newsletter of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations*, no. 22, March 1991; and James D. Fearon, “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science,” *World Politics* 43 (January 1991), pp. 169–95.

75. The consensus on the basic contours of a desirable postwar monetary order was quite strong and widespread beyond the Axis powers and the Soviet Union. See League of Nations [Ragnar Nurkse], *International Currency Experience: Lessons of the Inter-War Period* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1944), especially pp. 66–112.

76. Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy in Current Perspective*, chaps. 5–8.

objectives and domestic structures. But, in the end, that really is not saying much.

For American postwar planners, multilateralism in its generic sense served as a foundational architectural principle on the basis of which to reconstruct the postwar world. Take first the economic realm. During the war, when planning for the postwar era began, the Nazi economic order was the focal point of American antipathy.⁷⁷ It had effectively excluded nonparticipants, which according to U. S. officials not only limited American trade opportunities but also triggered economic conflicts that readily spilled over into the security realm. "Nations which act as enemies in the market-place cannot long be friends at the council table," warned the assistant secretary of state for economic affairs, William Clayton, echoing a favorite refrain of his boss, Cordell Hull.⁷⁸

The defeat of Germany and the allied occupation of its Western sector afforded the United States an opportunity to help implant the domestic social bases for a markedly different form of foreign economic policy by the new West German state. Much of the negotiating energy expended by the United States on the creation of the postwar economic order, therefore, was directed toward undoing the more benign but still vexing British position. It consisted of a commitment to imperial preferences on the part of the Tories and to extensive controls on international economic transactions by the Labour party as part of its objective to institute systematic national economic planning. Both were inherently discriminatory. The United States sought to substitute in their place a global version of the "open door."⁷⁹ Discriminatory trade barriers and currency arrangements were to be dismantled, tariffs reduced, and decolonization supported. But nowhere would domestic politics sustain a mere return to the nineteenth-century laissez-faire of unrestricted trade and the gold standard, wherein the level of domestic economic activity was governed by the balance of payments. Even for the relatively more liberal United States, the international edifice of the "open door" had to accommodate the domestic interventionism of the New Deal.⁸⁰

77. This is quite clear from the provisions of the Anglo-American Atlantic Charter, promulgated in August 1941.

78. William Clayton, cited by Pollard in *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War*, p. 2.

79. Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy in Current Perspective*, part 1.

80. For a depiction of the subsequent economic regimes along these lines, see John Gerard Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," in Krasner, *International Regimes*, pp. 195–231. For additional documentation, see G. John Ikenberry, "A World Economy Restored: Expert Consensus and the Anglo-American Postwar Settlement," *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1992), pp. 289–321. The historian of the Marshall Plan, Michael Hogan, similarly has argued that U. S. postwar planners "married Hull's free-trade dictums to the new theories of economic regulation and countercyclical stabilization." See Michael J. Hogan, "One World into Two: American Economic Diplomacy from Bretton Woods to the Marshall Plan," unpublished manuscript, Ohio State University, Columbus, n. d., p. 7.

There is little debate in the literature about the role of multilateralism in organizing the postwar economic order; the consensus is that its role was substantial. There has been little debate about its role in the security domain either—but here for the very different reason that students of international relations have assumed that there was none. That interpretation is not supported by the historical record if we think of multilateralism in its broad generic sense rather than merely in the form of multilateral organizations.

As World War II drew to a close, President Roosevelt faced an institutional problem. The United States must not retreat back into a “fortress America,” Roosevelt insisted, or else it would once again have won the war only to lose the subsequent peace. Winning the peace, Roosevelt felt, would require active U.S. international involvement. But at the same time, the American public would not accept international involvement via “entangling alliances.”⁸¹ Hence, some other form would have to be found. To complicate matters further, as John Gaddis puts it, Roosevelt favored a policy of “containment by cooptation” toward the Soviet Union and felt that a stable postwar security order required “offering Moscow a prominent place in it; by making it, so to speak, a member of the club.”⁸² That in turn required a club to which both belonged.

Given that combination of objectives, Roosevelt had little alternative but to move toward some form of collective security organization. But it was to be a modified form in the sense that it stripped away the Wilsonian aspiration that collective security somehow be *substituted for* balance-of-power politics. That was too wild and woolly a notion for the depression- and war-hardened U. S. officials in 1945. Instead, they sought to make the two compatible, so that the collective security mechanism would have a basis in the balance of power but also mute the more deleterious effects of balance-of-power politics. Thus was the UN born: at its core, an enforcement mechanism “with teeth,” but subject to great power veto.⁸³

81. See Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 406–41. Woodrow Wilson had confronted a similar dilemma at the end of World War I—though, unlike Roosevelt, Wilson sought to transcend what he termed “the evil machinations” of balance-of-power politics in the process of resolving it. “We still read Washington’s immortal warnings against ‘entangling alliances’ with full comprehension and an answering purpose,” he proclaimed in a 1918 speech. “But only special and limited alliances entangle; and we recognize and accept the duty of a new day in which we are permitted to hope for a general alliance which will avoid entanglements and clear the air of the world for common understandings and the maintenance of common rights.” Wilson is cited by Ambrosius in *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition*, p. 46.

82. See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 9. See also Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 508. According to Dallek, for Roosevelt “a United Nations would not only provide a vehicle for drawing Russia into extended cooperation with the West, but would also assure initial American involvement in postwar foreign affairs.”

83. For a good discussion of this compromise, see Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 442–82. On the Kupchans’ continuum (as outlined in their “Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe”), the UN design may be described as a concert placed within a collective security organization.

Once the iron curtain went down and Europe was split, containing Moscow by exclusion became the dominant U.S. objective, and the UN became marginalized to core U.S. security concerns.⁸⁴ But the American problem of simultaneously avoiding both a retreat into fortress America and an entrance into entangling alliances still had to be resolved vis-à-vis a threatened Europe. As Steve Weber reminds us, the United States repeatedly turned back requests from its European friends to form bilateral alliances with them.⁸⁵ Instead, the United States initially pursued a strategy of “economic security,” of providing the Europeans with the economic wherewithal to take care of their own security needs.⁸⁶ By 1947, bilateral economic assistance to Europe gave way to the more comprehensive Marshall Plan, which required the Europeans to develop a multilateral framework for their own postwar reconstruction in return for receiving aid. Moreover, the United States was an early advocate and strong supporter of European efforts to achieve economic and political integration.⁸⁷

But European security demanded more. Driven by “*la grande peur*” of 1948, the Europeans came to feel that “it was [also] necessary to have some measure of military ‘reassurance,’ ” as Michael Howard argues.⁸⁸ Still, the United States continued to resist bilateral deals and avoid military commitments of any kind.⁸⁹ Eventually, the State Department relented, but not until succeeding in its insistence that the United States would only aid a European-initiated collective self-defense effort. The Belgians under Paul-Henri Spaak took the lead. In March 1948, the Benelux countries, France, and Britain signed a mutual assistance treaty. But how could they tie the United States to this framework? The British played the critical swing role in defining an indivisible security perimeter from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean and, with Canadian

84. The UN with U. S. support acquired a more modest collective security role in the form of peacekeeping in the 1950s and acquired a nuclear nonproliferation role via International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and the nonproliferation treaty in the 1960s.

85. Weber, “Shaping the Postwar Balance of Power.”

86. Pollard, *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War*.

87. The requirement that the Europeans cooperate in reconstruction on a multilateral basis produced the Organization for European Economic Cooperation in 1948; it eventually became the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—the chief mechanism through which economic bureaucrats of all the advanced capitalist countries coordinate the conduct of day-to-day policies. As for European integration, by 1947 the idea had gained strong support in U. S. media and political circles. Senator Fulbright and Representative Boggs went so far as to introduce identical resolutions into the Congress that year, asking it to endorse “the creation of a United States of Europe within the framework of the United Nations.” The bills were passed overwhelmingly. European integration was seen as a more promising idea for European economic recovery than individual national efforts alone, and it offered safeguards for the reindustrialization of Germany, which in turn was increasingly seen as being necessary for European recovery and for the success of the newly articulated U. S. policy of containing the Soviet Union. See Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

88. Michael Howard, “Introduction,” in Olav Riste, ed., *Western Security: The Formative Years* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1985), p. 14.

89. Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, pp. 48–71.

help, getting it to reach across to the Western hemisphere.⁹⁰ The concept of the “North Atlantic” emerged as the spatial image that helped tie the knot. Its formulation and acceptance perhaps were facilitated by the recent revolution in military cartography, whereby the “airman’s view,” and thus the polar proximity of the Soviet Union to the United States, came to shape U.S. strategic planning.⁹¹ The North Atlantic Treaty was concluded in 1949. “The signing of the NATO Alliance,” Howard has said, “provided a sense that now at last all were for one and one was for all.”⁹² And this, of course, is what the notion of collective security has always meant.

Indeed, NATO was conceived and justified as an expression of the collective self-defense provision of the UN Charter. There is a direct path from the negotiations over Article 51 of the UN Charter, endorsing an inherent right of individual and collective self-defense, to the drafting of the North Atlantic Treaty.⁹³ The same cast of characters who negotiated the UN provision at San Francisco, Gladwyn Jebb on the British side and Senator Arthur Vandenberg on the American side, also sought to ensure that the North Atlantic Treaty would be compatible with it. That accomplishment allowed the United States to operate “within the Charter, but outside the [Soviet] veto,” as the Senator liked to say.⁹⁴ What is more, Article 51 was *not* drafted with a future NATO in mind; it was instigated by the Latin Americans to allow for a Latin American regional security organization that was beyond the reach of the U. S. veto in the UN Security Council.

To underscore the obvious, the United States did not seek to endow formal international organizations with extensive independent powers; that was not its multilateralist agenda. The Americans insisted on a veto in the UN Security Council every bit as much as the Soviets did. Voting in the international financial institutions was and remains weighted, the United States still having the largest single share. GATT barely exists as a formal organization (it was supposed to have been folded into the International Trade Organization that never came into being), and until recently State Department funding for it came out of an account for ad hoc international conferences. And the “O” in

90. Martin H. Folly, “Breaking the Vicious Circle: Britain, the United States, and the Genesis of the North Atlantic Treaty,” *Diplomatic History* 12 (Winter 1988), pp. 59–77.

91. Alan K. Henrikson, “The Map as an ‘Idea’: The Role of Cartographic Imagery During the Second World War,” *The American Cartographer* 2 (April 1975), pp. 19–53 and 88.

92. Howard, “Introduction,” p. 16.

93. On Article 51, see J. Tillapaugh, “Closed Hemisphere and Open World? The Dispute over Regional Security at the U. N. Conference, 1945,” *Diplomatic History* 2 (Winter 1978), pp. 25–42. On the Vandenberg resolution, which paved the domestic political way for the eventual negotiations of the North Atlantic Treaty, and its explicit link to Article 51, see Daryl J. Hudson, “Vandenberg Reconsidered: Senate Resolution 239 and American Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 1 (Winter 1977), pp. 46–63.

94. Arthur Vandenberg, cited by Hudson in “Vandenberg Reconsidered.” Those who assume that Vandenberg’s expressed concerns amounted to nothing more than window dressing have not made a case for why a Republican senator, who had only recently been converted from isolationism, should have thought it necessary to expend so much energy for so puny a purpose.

NATO never has and does not now determine the collective security of its members.

The American postwar multilateralist agenda consisted above all of a desire to restructure the international order along broadly multilateral lines, at the global level, and within Western Europe and across the North Atlantic. (In East Asia, on the other hand, the potential was lacking to construct anything but the bilateral security ties on which the United States turned its back in Europe.⁹⁵) Secondarily, the United States occasioned the creation of several major multilateral regimes, as in the fields of money and trade, and also helped establish numerous formal international organizations to provide technically competent or politically convenient services in support of those objectives.⁹⁶

To be sure, the United States hardly acted against its self-interests. But the fact that U. S. behavior was consistent with its interests does not explain the behavior. Nor was multilateralism what some would call “a consumption good” for the United States, an end in itself. So how do we explain U. S. actions? One possible source of explanation for the American multilateralist agenda is the international system itself. System-level theories of international relations, much favored in the discipline at the moment, essentially are of two sorts. One is structural, the other functional. Both offer parsimonious and often powerful first-cut explanations. Structural accounts of the postwar multilateralist posture of the United States would focus either on U. S. hegemony or on strategic bipolarity as the independent variable.⁹⁷ The problem with using hegemony—*tout court*—as an explanation has already been addressed: other hegemon would have done it differently, and so subsequent history would have been different. Hence, we still require insight into why this particular hegemon did things in this particular way.

Invoking bipolarity as an explanation is much more promising—once bipolarity exists.⁹⁸ But it is not without problems for the earliest postwar years, when bipolarity was just in the process of becoming, even as some of the multilateral developments described above were taking place. Indeed, it took policymakers and analysts quite some time to grasp the fact of bipolarity. Serious postwar planning by the United States began in 1942. William Fox’s book, *The Super-Powers*, published in 1944, still assumed that there would be

95. See Marc S. Gallicchio, *The Cold War Begins in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, pp. 72–103; and Pollard, *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War*, chap. 8.

96. For example, *The New York Times* described the April 1943 Hot Springs conference on food and agriculture, a conference that led eventually to the creation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, as “a prologue—a kind of dress rehearsal—preparatory to the world organization [Washington] hoped to set up after the war.” Cited by Craig Alan Wilson in “Rehearsal for a United Nations: The Hot Springs Conference,” *Diplomatic History* 4 (Summer 1980), p. 264.

97. While the work of Robert Gilpin exemplifies the first, that of Kenneth Waltz exemplifies the second.

98. Joanne Gowa, “Bipolarity, Multipolarity, and Free Trade,” *American Political Science Review* 83 (December 1989), pp. 1245–56.

three of them.⁹⁹ The Bretton Woods conference was held that year, with the Soviets in attendance. Moreover, the option of dividing the world into three spheres of influence for the purposes of conflict management had not yet been entirely discarded in 1944. By 1945, it had been discarded, but in favor of the universal UN.¹⁰⁰ In his 1946 “long telegram” and again in his 1947 “Mr. X” article, George Kennan warned about the emerging Soviet sphere of influence, but he explicitly expected multipolarity to reemerge from the devastation of the war before long, and he designed his proposed containment strategy in order to achieve that goal.¹⁰¹ Moreover, as late as 1947, trade negotiators were trying to square circles to devise a multilateral trade regime that could accommodate socialist state trading countries.¹⁰² Even more important, also in 1947, Lucius Clay, the U. S. military governor in Germany, initially blamed the French, not the Soviets, for impeding quadripartite government there when it was still doable; the failure to achieve it resulted ultimately in the bizonal division of Germany that became emblematic of the cold war.¹⁰³

Admittedly, actor perceptions do not matter much in structural theories. Nevertheless, it does seem more than a little awkward to retroject as incentives for actor behavior structural conditions which had not yet clearly emerged and were not yet fully understood and which in some measure only the subsequent behavior of actors helped to produce.¹⁰⁴

Functional theories of international institutions, as we noted at the outset, thus far have focused largely on undifferentiated “cooperation” and “institutions,” not the specific form of multilateralism. Their limited utility on this count has already been commented on. Moreover, functional theories have been concerned largely with such factors as the desire to minimize transaction costs, information costs, and similar institutional inefficiencies. This rationale, too, has limits. First, although our historical cases are too few to make a strong case, they do suggest that the drive to limit institutional inefficiencies of this

99. William T. R. Fox, *The Super-Powers: The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944).

100. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, chaps. 14–15.

101. For a discussion of Kennan’s strategy, see Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, pp. 25–53.

102. See Viner, “Conflicts of Principle in Drafting a Trade Charter”; and Feis, “The Conflict Over Trade Ideologies.”

103. See Jean Edward Smith, *Lucius D. Clay: An American Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), especially pp. 423–49. Smith’s overall assessment of U. S.–Soviet relations as seen on the ground in Germany is this: “The question of erecting a counterpoise to the Soviet Union did not enter Clay’s thinking until late 1947, and until then his relations with the Russians were warm and cordial” (p. 7).

104. Jervis has pointed out that the decisive event in instituting the peculiar form of bipolarity known as the cold war was the Korean War. High U. S. defense budgets, a large U. S. armed presence in Europe to back the North Atlantic Treaty security guarantees, and anticommunist commitments all across the globe took hold only after that war. What is more, Jervis argues, “there were no events on the horizon which could have been functional substitutes for the war”—and which, therefore, would have been capable of producing those features of the international security environment. See Robert Jervis, “The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24 (December 1980), p. 563.

kind is most decisive in the realm of coordination problems. When it comes to shedding blood or institutionalizing hopes for lasting peace, the calculus of countries appears to draw on a different universe of discourse. Second, it also seems that what constitutes institutional inefficiencies or costs is not entirely independent of the attributes of the states making the calculation. For example, it is difficult to imagine an institutional arrangement that imposed higher transaction costs on all concerned than the Nazi trade and monetary regimes. But given the overall strategic objectives of the German state at the time, the price of administering those arrangements was seen as an investment, not an expenditure to be minimized. The domestic mechanisms that shape the Japanese foreign trade posture today, with all their reputed institutional “inefficiencies,” may pose an analogous conceptual problem.¹⁰⁵

In short, to determine why *this* particular institutional agenda was pursued, it is inescapable at some point to look more closely at *this* particular hegemon. That in turn requires not only examining the hegemon’s international situation but also delving into its domestic realm.

It seems clear that across a broad array of social and economic sectors, the United States after World War II sought to project the experience of the New Deal regulatory state into the international arena.¹⁰⁶ According to Anne-Marie Burley, this endeavor entailed two distinct dimensions.¹⁰⁷ The first was a belief that the long-term maintenance and success of domestic reform programs required a compatible international order. The second was a commitment at the international level to institutional means which had already been tried domestically and which grew out of the legal and administrative revolution that accompanied the New Deal. The combination of the two translated into an active U. S. effort to institutionalize a multilateral international economic and social order.

In the security realm, a count of the domestic political noses led President Roosevelt to believe that isolationist tendencies could not be neutralized by having the United States form bilateral alliances with or against the very European states that kept dragging it into war—which is how the isolationists viewed the world. Accordingly, the notion was foremost in Roosevelt’s mind that only by “binding” the United States to a more permanent multilateral institutional framework, which promised to *transform* traditional international

105. The so-called Gang of Four (Chalmers Johnson, Clyde Prestowitz, Karel van Wolferen, and James Fallows) has insisted that Japan is different in this regard; see “Beyond Japan-Bashing: The ‘Gang of Four’ Defends the Revisionist Line,” *Business Week*, 7 May 1990. For a dispassionate empirical analysis, which does not reach radically different conclusions, see Edward J. Lincoln, *Japan’s Unequal Trade* (Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution, 1990).

106. See Michael J. Hogan, “Revival and Reform: America’s Twentieth-Century Search for a New Economic Order Abroad,” *Diplomatic History* 8 (Fall 1984), pp. 287–310; and Anne-Marie Burley, “Regulating the World: Multilateralism, International Law, and the Projection of the New Deal Regulatory State,” in Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters*. While Hogan stresses the economic interest group dimension, Burley focuses on the administrative and legal dimensions.

107. Burley, “Regulating the World.”

politics, could a relapse into isolationism be avoided.¹⁰⁸ By 1947, the Truman administration discovered anticommunist rhetoric to be a useful tool toward that same end.¹⁰⁹

More generally, Peter Cowhey has advanced the provocative thesis that the very structure of the U. S. polity enhanced the credibility of America's postwar commitment to multilateralism.¹¹⁰ The problem of "defection" that is explored at length in the literature focuses not on the hegemon but, rather, on the other states, potential free riders one and all. But multilateralism is an extremely demanding institutional form, and the fact is that the hegemon has far more unilateral and bilateral options available to it than any other state. So how does the hegemon make its own commitment to multilateralism credible? How can the other states be assured that the hegemon will not defect if it should change its mind or recalculate its short-term interests, leaving them in the lurch? Ironically, Cowhey attributes the credibility of the American commitment to multilateralism to the very features of the U.S. polity that are often said to hamper its effective conduct of foreign policy. These include the institutional consequences of an electoral system geared to the median voter; a division of powers making reversals of fundamental policy postures difficult; and greater transparency of and access to the domestic political arena even on the part of foreign interests. No potential *Pax Nipponica* today, Cowhey concludes, would instill a sufficient level of confidence; it lacks the appropriate domestic base. Cowhey's thesis and the comparison deserve more extensive study.

In sum, in one crucial sense the origins of multilateralism in the postwar era reiterate the record of prior periods. Between the deep level of defining and stabilizing the international property rights of states and the relatively superficial level of solving coordination problems, a pronounced shift toward multilateralism in economic and security affairs requires a combination of fairly strong international forces and compatible domestic environments. If that is so, then it was the fact of an *American* hegemony that was decisive after World War II, not merely *American hegemony*. And this in turn makes the role of multilateralism in the current international transformation of even greater interest.

Multilateralism and transformation

The issue of whether the United States is in relative decline and, if so, whether it is taking the international order along with it has been debated in the

108. See Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*.

109. See Thomas G. Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 3–158.

110. Peter F. Cowhey, "Elect Locally, Order Globally: Domestic Politics and Multilateral Cooperation," in Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters*.

literature for nearly two decades.¹¹¹ More recently, the end of bipolarity has been adduced as a cause for similar alarm.¹¹² The new institutionalists were the first to question any direct relationship between international power shifts and institutional unraveling. They provided several functional reasons why states would, under some circumstances, remain committed to existing institutions even “beyond hegemony,” focusing on such factors as institutional inertia, sunk costs, the services that institutions continue to provide, and the common objectives that they may continue to pursue.¹¹³

But as we saw at the outset of our discussion, the situation today, especially but not exclusively in Europe, is not simply one of past multilateral arrangements hanging on for dear life. There are numerous instances of active institutional adaptation and even creation. Again, there is not much in the theoretical literature that provides ready explanations. The definitional and historical analysis of multilateralism presented here, however, does suggest several factors that may be at work.

One such factor is logically implied by the definition of multilateralism itself. Ironically, the very features that make it strategically difficult to establish multilateral arrangements in the first place may enhance the durability and adaptability of these arrangements once they are in place. I pointed out earlier that successful multilateral arrangements in the past have come to exhibit expectations of diffuse reciprocity. It seems plausible to hypothesize that as long as that expectation continues to hold, as long as each party does not insist on being equally rewarded on every round, the sustainability of the arrangement should be enhanced because it makes both cross-sectoral and intertemporal trade-offs and bargains feasible. Cooperation with the EC seems most clearly to exhibit this pattern. It may have benefited from or perhaps even required active U. S. encouragement at the start, but obviously it has long since taken off on a self-sustaining institutional path.¹¹⁴

Similarly, all other things being equal, an arrangement based on generalized organizing principles should be more elastic than one based on particularistic interests and situational exigencies. It should, therefore, also exhibit greater continuity in the face of changing circumstances, including international power shifts. A collective security arrangement more readily absorbs such shifts, as

111. The debate was triggered by Charles Kindleberger's book, *The World in Depression, 1929–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), which also made popular the analogy between the 1930s and subsequent decades—first the 1970s, then the 1980s, and now the 1990s?

112. See, for example, Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future.”

113. See Krasner, *International Regimes*; and Keohane, *After Hegemony*.

114. In his contribution to our project, Garrett analyzes the most far-reaching instance of multilateralism ever: the EC members' adoption and implementation of the Single European Act. He describes his story as being entirely consistent with a “rationalist” view of institutions. If he is correct, it would suggest that, given a certain set of incentives to collaborate and given a certain institutional framework for collaboration, beyond some point no extra push from any “extraneous” forces, symbols, or aspirations may be necessary to achieve integrative solutions. See Geoffrey Garrett, “International Cooperation and Institutional Choice: The European Community's Internal Market,” *International Organization* 46 (Spring 1992), pp. 533–60.

does a trade regime based on MFN treatment. It is hard to imagine the discriminatory order of the Nazis surviving the hegemony of the Third Reich, however. And even in the case of traditional alliances, the major means of adjustment is simply to abandon the prevailing dyadic ties. Although the cases no doubt are overdetermined, the ready adaptation of NATO at least as a transitional arrangement versus the total collapse of the Warsaw Pact nevertheless may help illustrate this point.

The durability of multilateral arrangements, the analysis presented here suggests, is also a function of domestic environments. For example, there was no shift in multipolarity around the mid-nineteenth century that could have accounted for the final collapse of the Concert of Europe and the reemergence of competitive alliances, but domestic environments did diverge sharply after the revolutions of 1848. The erosion of the gold standard and free trade to some extent may be overdetermined in that both sets of factors changed; but even before Britain declined appreciably as a world power, governments were politically compelled to intervene in their domestic economies in ways that were incompatible with the two multilateral arrangements. In fact, even Charles Kindleberger's climacteric case of the 1933 London Economic Conference—when “the British couldn't and the United States wouldn't”—does not lend itself to a straightforward systemic account. What the United States “wouldn't” was to support the *prevailing form* of economic multilateralism: the laissez-faire kind, the London and New York bankers' kind, and Herbert Hoover's kind. But no one, including President Roosevelt, had yet figured out a viable and mutually acceptable alternative.¹¹⁵ As Arthur Schlesinger notes in his classic account, “This difference [between the United States and Britain] was too great to be bridged by any form of economic or diplomatic legerdemain. The London Conference did not create the difference. It simply came along too late—or too early—to do anything about it.”¹¹⁶ No domestic divergence that stark exists among the major powers today. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the domestic changes in Eastern Europe have eliminated the international significance of the socialist economic model. The domestic economic structure of Japan may pose a remotely comparable problem, but it is hardly of the same magnitude.¹¹⁷

115. See Herbert Feis, *1933: Characters in Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966).

116. See Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, vol. 2 of *The Age of Roosevelt* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 229. For a game-theoretic rendering of this case, which not only supports Schlesinger's conclusion but also sheds considerable light on the broader debate, see the following works of Kenneth A. Oye: “The Sterling-Dollar-Franc Triangle: Monetary Diplomacy, 1929–1937,” *World Politics* 38 (October 1985), pp. 173–99; and “On the Benefits of Bilateralism: Lessons from the 1930s,” paper prepared for the Workshop on Change in the International System, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 5–6 May 1989.

117. Gilpin raises this, correctly in my judgment, as one potential factor that could undermine the embedded liberalism compromise on which the postwar economic regimes have rested. See Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Furthermore, by and large actual multilateral arrangements with well-defined tasks simply have not lived up to the bad billing they get in some of the literature as unwieldy expressions of the law of large numbers. This is so for several reasons. First of all, most major multilateral arrangements in practice are governed by subsets of states—the “k-groups” that Duncan Snidal, following Russell Hardin, suggests attenuate many international collective action problems.¹¹⁸ Miles Kahler shows empirically what Snidal postulates theoretically: the major postwar global regimes have been governed by what he terms “minilateralist” groupings within them.¹¹⁹ Thus, the regimes were not mere expressions of hegemony, and they thereby avoided obvious legitimacy problems. Nor did they operate purely on the basis of egalitarian decision-making rules, however. Decolonization began to strain this “minilateralist” solution in the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, whether in the subsequent Law of the Sea negotiations, GATT rounds, or drafting of global environmental conventions, Kahler finds little evidence that states have encountered insuperable difficulties in devising institutional mechanisms which, at one and the same time, accommodate larger numbers of participants while retaining their capacity to reach decisions. Even in the extraordinarily complex and more “democratic” context of the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea, as Barry Buzan has shown in great detail, the institutional inventiveness of states to accommodate large numbers was impressive, and the failure to obtain a ratified treaty resulted from fundamental conflicts of interest, not from any mechanical problem of size.¹²⁰

A final factor to be considered in explanations for the adaptability of multilateral arrangements is that in some instances the twentieth-century “move to institutions” clearly has kicked in. Indeed, much of the institutional inventiveness within multilateral arrangements today is coming from the institutions themselves, from platforms that arguably represent or at least speak for the collectivities at hand. Again, the EC offers the most dramatic illustration, whether it concerns plans for orchestrating EC relations with the European Free Trade Area, the East European states, or the future of the Community itself.¹²¹ Patrick Morgan goes so far as to argue that West European actors today are explicitly applying to Eastern Europe some of the institutional lessons that they derived from their own earlier postwar experience with the United States, not only in the economic realm but also in the security realm.¹²² Beyond Europe, the

118. See Snidal, “The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory”; and Russell Hardin, *Collective Action* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

119. Kahler, “Multilateralism with Small and Large Numbers.”

120. Barry Buzan, “Negotiating by Consensus: Developments in Technique at the U. N. Conference on the Law of the Sea,” *American Journal of International Law* 75 (April 1981), pp. 324–48.

121. See “Western Europe Moves to Expand Free-Trade Links,” *The New York Times*, 8 December 1989, pp. 1 and D5; “All Europe’s a Stage,” *The Economist*, 16 March 1991, p. 48; and “Inner Space,” *The Economist*, 18 May 1991, pp. 53–54.

122. See Patrick M. Morgan, “Multilateralism and Security Prospects in Europe,” in Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters*. See also Kupchan and Kupchan, “Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe.”

convening- and agenda-setting power of multilateral organizations is perhaps best illustrated in the area of the commons. There would be no plan to try to salvage the Mediterranean were it not for multilateral players, as Peter Haas has shown.¹²³ Similarly, multilateral players kept first the ozone issue and now global warming on the negotiating table even when major powers, including the United States, were reluctant participants at best.¹²⁴

In sum, parts of the international institutional order today appear quite robust and adaptive. The above discussion suggests that the reason is not simply that these are institutions and that institutions are “in demand.” The reason is also that these institutions are multilateral in form and that this form, under certain circumstances, has characteristics which may enhance its durability and ability to adapt to change. This, at any rate, is the central notion that the exploration of the concept of multilateralism presented here advances for further scrutiny. Discovering precisely what those circumstances are and why the picture is far from being uniform across issue-areas is clearly a necessary next step in this line of inquiry.

Conclusion

This article was written with two sets of protagonists in mind. The first are those theorists of international relations for whom institutions matter little. It may be true, as these theorists insist, that they do not purport to explain everything but that what they do explain is important.¹²⁵ It does not follow from that truth, however, that what they leave unexplained is unimportant. And institutions, clearly, are not unimportant.

The second set of protagonists are those of my fellow institutionalists for whom the form that institutions take is left unexplored. Their focus is on institutions in a generic sense or on cooperation even more generally. Much can be learned about international relations from that perspective. But at the same time, too much is left unsaid. And what is left unsaid—the form that institutions assume—affects vitally the role that institutions play on the world stage today. Above all else, policymakers groping for alternatives amidst rapid change, hoping to grasp the flow of events and channel it in desirable directions, do not deal in generic choices; their choices are palpably concrete.

123. Peter M. Haas, *Saving the Mediterranean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

124. See Peter M. Haas, “Banning Chlorofluorocarbons: Epistemic Community Efforts to Protect Stratospheric Ozone,” *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1992), pp. 187–223; James K. Sebenius, “Crafting a Winning Coalition: Negotiating a Regime to Control Global Warming,” in Richard Elliot Benedick et al., *Greenhouse Warming: Negotiating a Global Regime* (Washington, D. C.: World Resources Institute, 1991); and Mark W. Zacher, “Multilateral Organizations and the Institution of Multilateralism: The Development of Regimes for the Non-Terrestrial Spaces,” in Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters*.

125. This has been Waltz’s standard response; see, for example, Kenneth Waltz, “Reflections on *Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics*,” in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 322–45.

A core and concrete feature of current international institutional arrangements is their multilateral form. Why both the conventional literature on international relations and the literature on institutions should remain relatively silent on it may well have something to do with the atomistic ontology of the one and the instrumental-rationalist epistemology of the other, as James Caporaso and Friedrich Kratochwil, in different ways, suggest.¹²⁶ Be that as it may, I hope that the present article has established, at minimum, that it is worth investigating seriously the issue that form matters.

No theory has been advanced in the present article; no theory was vindicated or even tested. We cannot explain what we have not first described. And conceptual explication is a requisite for theoretically informed description, leading ultimately to theory building itself. My main objective here has been to explicate the concept of multilateralism, both analytically and historically, and to offer some preliminary guiding hypotheses about what may and may not explain its incidence and correlates and about how and why it matters.

126. See Caporaso, "International Relations Theory and Multilateralism"; and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Multilateralism and the Rationalist/Reflectivist Divide: A Unilateral Plea for Communicative Rationality," in Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters*.