Consultation and Joint Endeavor Among All Stakeholders

China's Stance on Multilateralism and the United Nations

Mao Ruipeng

Abstract: Multilateralism is one of the key notions in China's diplomatic discourse. Unlike the European Union, China tends to define multilateralism as a consultation process amongst all related members of the international community, so that their fundamental interests and appeals can be fully heard and considered. In the Chinese view, multilateralism features inclusive participation, UN leadership, and the goal of democratization of international relations. It is believed that, as a historical trend, multilateralism is not only crucial for tackling various global challenges, but it also helps foster a favorable international environment for China's sustainable development. Multilateralism has been deeply ingrained in

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China's foreign policy, exemplified by the country's increasing support for the UN over the past two decades. Notably, both China's financial contribution to the UN and the number of personnel sent on UN peacekeeping missions have grown rapidly in recent years. Also, China has been advocating the notion of a "community of shared future for mankind" on UN platforms, hoping to share its experience of development with the world. As China deepens its engagement with international organizations, however, the United States is making every effort to constrain China's influence in the UN. In the future, China needs to work closely with supporters of multilateralism, especially developing countries, so as to play a greater role in the UN.

Keywords: China; multilateralism; United Nations; U.S. hegemony.

Despite the rising trend of unilateralism reflected in some major powers' foreign policies since 2017, multilateralism has been widely acknowledged as key to improving global governance during this age of growing uncertainties. On April 24, 2019, in accordance with UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 73/127, the UNGA convened a high-level plenary meeting to commemorate and promote the first International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, stressing that "the international norms, rules-based-system that have steered nations through seven decades must rise to meet the mounting challenges of protectionism and isolationism."¹

China has viewed multilateralism as one of its fundamental principles of foreign policy. In its white paper on *China and the World in the New Era* issued in September 2019, the Chinese government declares that "we firmly support multilateralism and advocate that international affairs should be discussed and handled by all countries."² UN Secretary-General António

¹UNGA, "Concept Note: High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly to Commemorate and Promote the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace," April 24, 2019, <https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/03/26-March-International-Day-of-Multilateralim.pdf>.

²State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China and the World in the New Era* (Beijing, September 2019), <http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/dtzt/39912/41838/index.htm>.

Guterres praised China's partnership with the UN during his visit to China in April 2018, saying that China is the backbone of multilateralism. However, the policy and strategic communities in many Western countries remain skeptical of China's intentions; some criticize China for allegedly making use of "strategic multilateralism" to serve its goals in global governance.³ As noted in a commentary by Project-Syndicate, "as long as Western commentators continue to conflate their collective West self-interest with global interest, it is very difficult for Western commentators to buy into the idea that China supports multilateralism."⁴

In this regard, it is necessary to examine China's actual stance on multilateralism and assess its policy to the United Nations, the cornerstone of the multilateral system. The first section of this article gives a brief introduction to the concept of multilateralism as well as China's understanding of the concept. The second section explores the reasons why China has increasingly supported multilateralism, and analyzes China's status in and contribution to the United Nations. The last section discusses the challenges faced by China in the UN as well as its potential measures to deal with those challenges.

Multilateralism: A Disputable Concept?

Multilateralism emphasizes greater self-restraint, cooperation, and coordination among all stakeholders in global public policymaking. The proliferation of various international institutions is a testament to its widespread acceptance in the postwar international order. Robert Keohane defines multilateralism as "the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through *ad hoc* arrangements or by means of institutions."⁵ Similarly, John Ruggie considers multilateralism as "an

³Scott Kastner, Margaret Pearson, and Chad Rector, *China's Strategic Multilateralism: Investing in Global Governance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁴Zhou Xizhou, "China Is Committed to Multilateralism," Project-Syndicate, September 2019, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-aiib-multilateral-institutions-cooperation-by-xizhou-zhou-2019-09>.

⁵Robert O. Keohane, "Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research," *International Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (1990), p. 731.

institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalized' principles of conduct." He also draws two corollaries from such a definition: "generalized organizing principles logically entail an indivisibility among the members of a collectivity with respect to the range of behavior in question"; and "successful cases of multilateralism in practices appear to generate among their members... 'diffuse reciprocity.'"⁶

In contrast with unilateralism, multilateralism requires states to strictly follow international norms (such as the principles of sovereign equality, prohibition of the use of force, and non-intervention, as written in the *Charter of the United Nations*⁷) and respect international institutions. Such international organizations as the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Foundation (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) form the core of multilateralism.

Hegemonic Multilateralism

Since major powers are in a better position to take unilateral actions, multilateralism is of special importance to regulate major powers' international behavior. However, if a major power chooses to violate the reciprocity principle among countries and abandon, revise, or support international organizations or international norms purely to meet its own interests, then it follows a certain "hegemonic multilateralism." As former U.S. President Obama pointed out in his last address to the UNGA on September 20, 2016,

We can only realize the promise of this institution's founding — to replace the ravages of war with cooperation — if powerful nations like my own accept constraints. . . in the long run, giving up some freedom of action — not giving up our ability to protect

⁶John Gerard Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (1992), p. 571.

⁷Atsushi Tago, "Multilateralism, Bilateralism, and Unilateralism in Foreign Policy," Oxford Research Encyclopedias, August 2017, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-449>.

ourselves or pursue our core interests, but binding ourselves to international rules over the long term — enhances our security.⁸

The United States is becoming a rogue, revisionist superpower in the global governance system.

In contrast, President Trump has been advocating the “America First” notion, showing strong distrust and resentment toward multilateralism. Indeed, the United States is becoming a revisionist power in the sense that its actions suggest attempts to overthrow the rules-based global governance

system. As President Trump said explicitly in his address to the UNGA on September 25, 2018, “We reject the ideology of globalism and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism. . . [R]esponsible nations must defend against threats to sovereignty. . . from global governance.”⁹ Echoing President Trump, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticized the UN, the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU) in a speech in Brussels on December 4, 2018, professing that “[m]ultilateralism has too often become viewed as an end unto itself. . . Our administration is thus lawfully exiting or renegotiating. . . international arrangements that do not serve our sovereign interests, or the interests of our allies.”¹⁰ In other words, the Trump administration is openly adopting a selective stance on existing international institutions.

Rules-based Multilateralism

Unlike the United States, the EU regards multilateralism as an essential part of its foreign policy. Standing up for multilateralism is in the EU’s DNA,

⁸Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/71/1), September 20, 2016, p. 18, <https://undocs.org/en/A/71/PV.8>.

⁹“Tribute to the Memory of His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations,” September 25, 2018, p. 17, <https://undocs.org/A/73/PV.6>.

¹⁰Michael R. Pompeo, “Restoring the Role of the Nation-State in the Liberal International Order,” U.S. Department of State, December 4, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/restoring-the-role-of-the-nation-state-in-the-liberal-international-order-2/>.

since it has no other choice and does not want to have other choices.¹¹ In December 2003, in light of the U.S. intervention in Iraq earlier that year, the European Council adopted the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) stating that the European security and prosperity increasingly depend on an effective multilateral system.¹² The Global Strategy for EU Foreign and Security Policy unveiled on June 28, 2016, reiterated that multilateralism with the UN at its core is a cornerstone of the EU's external policy.¹³

The characteristic of the EU's illustration of multilateralism is that it stresses the importance of international law, agreements, and rules, commonly known as "rules-based multilateralism." On June 17, 2019, Council of the European Union adopted a document on the EU action to strengthen rules-based multilateralism, declaring that

We depend on a rules-based international order and need commonly agreed rules and effective and inclusive global institutions, within and beyond the United Nations (UN) system, to ensure peace, security, human rights, prosperity and sustainable development for all.¹⁴

In view of waning multilateralism, France and Germany jointly initiated the "Alliance for Multilateralism" during the 74th UNGA. The sponsors believe that the key principles of the rules-based international order and essential

¹¹Martin Selmayr, "Europe, Multilateralism, and Great Power Competition: A Conversation with Secretary-General of the European Commission Martin Selmayr," Brookings Institution, March 6, 2019, p. 11.

¹²Council of the European Union, "European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World," December 12, 2003, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/qc7809568enc.pdf>.

¹³European Union External Action, "Shared Vision, Common Action — A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy," June 28, 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

¹⁴Council of the European Union, "Council conclusions — EU Action to Strengthen Rules-based Multilateralism," June 17, 2019, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10341-2019-INIT/en/pdf>.

instruments of international cooperation are being challenged¹⁵ by resurgent power politics, rising nationalism, and global political and economic fragmentation. To address these challenges, this voluntary Alliance aims to bring together willing partners for three goals: compensating for the insufficient involvement of states and defending fundamental standards; reforming and modernizing the international institutions compared with the *status quo*; and driving strong initiatives, particularly where governance is absent or insufficient.¹⁶ Besides, the sponsors of the Alliance realized that in a multipolar world, they face the difficulty of being a “rule maker” individually, yet at the same time, they are not content to merely accept the role of “rule taker”.

If we pool our strengths — and we can do so to a greater extent than we have done in the past — perhaps we can become something like ‘rule shapers,’ who design and drive an international order that the world urgently needs.¹⁷

To many Europeans,
multilateralism
equals the liberal
international order.

To the European Union, multilateralism
equals the liberal international order. But as
Stewart Patrick pointed out, these two are
not synonymous:

The first pertains to the broad
system of multilateral cooperation outlined by the UN Charter,
whereas the latter is a largely Western vision of world order

¹⁵Permanent mission of France to the United Nations in New York, “Alliance for Multilateralism — Building the Network and Presenting Results,” Side-event at UNGA 74, September 26, 2019, <https://onu.delegfrance.org/Alliance-for-Multilateralism-Building-the-Network-and-Presenting-Results>.

¹⁶France Diplomatie, “Alliance for Multilateralism,” <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/united-nations/alliance-for-multilateralism-63158/>.

¹⁷Federal Foreign Office of Germany, “Speech by Minister for Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo, Japan,” July 25, 2018, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-japan/2121846>.

based on 'democracy, human rights, free trade, and collective security institutions.'¹⁸

As to the laws-based dimension of multilateralism, Patrick cited the words of Hans Maull of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) that "the question is not whether there are rules but what these rules are and who determines, legitimizes, follows, and enforces these, and through which arrangements."¹⁹

Consultative Multilateralism

Different from both the United States and the EU, China tends to see multilateralism as a consultation process involving all related members of the international community, so that their fundamental interests and aspirations can be fully heard and considered. As Chinese President Xi Jinping said on a side event at the 11th BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Summit on November 14, 2019,

Multilateralism needs to be further advocated, the essence of which is that international affairs must not be determined by one or few countries, but by all related countries through full consultation.²⁰

In fact, China advocates multilateralism in a broader sense instead of confining itself to a few specifics of the concept. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in Madrid on December 16, 2019, "[w]hatever the version of multilateralism, the goal is to promote world peace and development."²¹

As multilateralism makes its way into Chinese foreign policy discourse, Chinese leaders have voiced ever stronger support for it on various

¹⁸Patrick Stewart, "Can an 'Alliance for Multilateralism' Succeed in a New Era of Nationalism?" *World Politics Review*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28174/can-an-alliance-for-multilateralism-succeed-in-a-new-era-of-nationalism>.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Du Shangze, "Xi Jinping Attends 11th BRICS Summit and Delivers Keynote Speech [习近平出席金砖国家领导人第十一次会晤并发表重要讲话]," *People's Daily*, November 15, 2019, p. 1.

²¹"Wang Yi Attends the 14th Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)," Chinese Embassy in the Republic of Indonesia, December 16, 2019, <http://id.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t1725510.htm>.

international platforms. For example, President Xi attended China-France Global Governance Forum in March 2019; two high-level delegations were sent to attend the Paris Peace Forum in November 2018 and November 2019, respectively; Foreign Minister Wang Yi joined in the 14th Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in December 2019, with the theme of "effective multilateralism"; and Wang Qishan, Vice President of the People's Republic of China, attended the Imperial Springs International Forum featuring "multilateralism and sustainable development" in December 2019.

To China, multilateralism has the following three dimensions:

Inclusive participation. As a basic approach to making international public policy, multilateralism necessarily constitutes a set of commonly accepted international norms and rules. Believing that international affairs should be conducted through consultation among related countries, so as to reach a balance among their fundamental interests and concerns, China proposes fully reforming the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), increasing the representation and power of speech of developing countries, and enhancing the role of emerging and developing countries in such international financial institutions as the World Bank and IMF. Only a multilateral, democratic, and transparent governance institution can ensure that common norms and rules are observed in the long run.

China regards the UN as key to upholding multilateralism.

The centrality of the United Nations. Since the United Nations is the most representative international organization, China advocates that the key to safeguarding multilateralism is to maintain the basic principles of international relations based on the *Charter of the United Nations*, as well as to strengthen the

multilateral system centered on the UN and the international trade system centered on the WTO.²² In the white paper *China and the World in the New Era*, the Chinese government highly values the importance of the United Nations, emphasizing that "[t]he UN is at the core of the global governance system. The UN Charter is the fundamental cornerstone for maintaining

²²Zhong Sheng, "It's the Right Way to Stick to Multilateralism [坚持多边主义是人间正道]," *People's Daily*, April 12, 2019, p. 2.

stability of the international system and regulating relations among countries.”²³

Democratization of international relations. China advocates that all countries — regardless of their differences in size, power or wealth — are equal and believes that multilateralism is consistent with democratization of international relations, the essence of which is opposing hegemonism and power politics. In this regard, multilateralism makes it possible for middle-sized and smaller countries to participate in international affairs. It is especially helpful for reining in hegemonism (as the political disturbance in many developing countries is at least in part caused by major power intervention), in order to guarantee the developing countries’ rights to peace and development. Like Western countries, China believes that international law is crucial for regulating state behavior and guiding international relations. What is different is that China puts special emphasis on the basic principles of the *Charter of the United Nations*, including, among others, sovereign equality, non-intervention in others’ internal affairs, settling disputes by peaceful means, no use or threat of use of force, and faithful fulfillment of due international responsibilities.

Why China Endeavors to Uphold Multilateralism

Insisting on multilateralism has become a key element of China’s foreign policy. Notably, China’s turn to multilateralism in its diplomacy is not an “opportunistic” act, but a strategic move as a result of growing interaction and experience-sharing with the international community.²⁴ China believes that as a historical trend, multilateralism is not only crucial for tackling various global challenges, but also helps foster a favorable international environment for China’s sustainable development.

Most importantly, multilateralism has demonstrated itself as a major trend of history that can hardly be reversed. The postwar world order features the emergence of various international regimes, such as the

²³State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 2019, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/ztk/dtzt/39912/41838/index.htm>.

²⁴Wei Zongyou and Wu Meng, “China’s Multilateralism Diplomacy: A Paradigm Shift [中国的多边主义外交：一种范式的转移],” *Fudan International Studies Review*, No. 1 (2006), pp. 244–256.

United Nations and other international organizations as necessary platforms for negotiation and consultation among countries, and the expanding role of international law and norms in all fields of the international community. Although multilateralism and the role of the United Nations are being challenged due to growing nationalism and new trends of power politics in recent years, multilateralism remains a basic consensus of the international community. Thus, sticking to multilateralism helps China to take the moral high ground and improve its relations with most countries in the world.

Besides, multilateralism is conducive to tackling global challenges. In a globalized age, an increasing number of challenges have global consequences, such as climate change, financial crisis, energy shortages, raging terrorism, proliferation of weapons of massive destruction, regional conflicts, refugee crisis, and pandemics, to which no country can stay immune. International cooperation based on multilateralism is thus necessary for the well-being of humanity, whether to maintain peace and common development, or to deal with climate change and provide humanitarian assistance to countries in need.

China's multilateralism diplomacy is both for global common good and for its sustainable development.

Furthermore, multilateralism helps foster a relatively stable, open, and inclusive international environment for China's sustainable development. As written in the Constitution of the Communist Party of China (CPC),

The Communist Party of China shall uphold an independent foreign policy of peace, follow a path of peaceful development, continue

with the win-win opening-up strategy, consider both domestic and international situations, and actively foster relations with other countries, endeavoring to develop a favorable international environment for China's reform, opening-up, and modernization.²⁵

²⁵*Constitution of the Communist Party of China* (2012), http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/18da/2012-11/19/content_27156212.htm.

With regard to many grave challenges to the existing global trade system and economic globalization, especially the growing protectionism and unilateralism of some countries, it is in China's interest to strive to maintain world peace and strengthen the open and inclusive global economic system through various multilateral institutions.

China's Contribution to the United Nations

Since the restoration of its legal seat in the United Nations in 1971, China has regarded the UN as a key platform for conducting multilateral co-operation, faithfully observed international agreements, and tried its best to fulfill its political commitments. Not only has China stuck to its commitment on emission reduction made in the *Paris Agreement on Climate Change* while the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the Agreement, it also continues contributing to the United Nations in many ways.

Financial Contribution

According to the United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination Secretariat (UNSCEB), the Chinese government provided a total of \$1.423 billion for the UN system in 2017, ranking after the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan. China's membership dues to UN organizations reached \$1.214 billion in that year, behind only after the United States. Besides, China offered an extra \$209 million in voluntary donations.²⁶

Indeed, China's financial contribution to the UN has been on the rise since 2000. In 2019, its share of membership dues in the UN regular budget was over 12 percent, ranking second in the world (Figure 1); and its share in the UN peacekeeping budget for 2019–2021 rose to 15.22 percent from 10.24 percent in the previous year.²⁷ Notably, China has always paid its due

²⁶United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination Secretariat, "Total Revenue by Government Donor," <https://www.unsceb.org/content/FS-D00-02>.

²⁷For membership dues of all countries in 2019, see the United Nations website: <http://www.un.org/zh/members/contribution.shtml>.

Fig. 1. China's Share in UN Regular Budget.

Source: Compiled by author based on the UNGA resolution data.

shares to the UN on time, which indicates its credibility and determination as a responsible major country.²⁸

China's funding for the UN system has risen rapidly in recent years.

In September 2015, for example, President Xi announced at the UNGA that China would establish a ten-year, \$1 billion China-UN Peace and Development Fund (UNPDF) and contribute the first \$200 million in 2016. As Figure 2 shows, China's total funding for the UN development system (UNDS)

jumped 280 percent between 2008 and 2017, with core funding increasing by 275 percent and non-core funding by 283 percent.²⁹ Local resources (for domestic development) aside, China's funding has grown at an annual rate of 33.8 percent on average since 2013, peaking at \$325.9 million in 2017. Since 2015, it has become the largest funder among the BRICS if local

²⁸Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "2019 Budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjb_673085/zfxgk_674865/xxgkml_674869/ysxxl_674871/P020190402570648999673.pdf.

²⁹The technical note on definitions, sources and coverage in the UN Secretary-General's 2019 report on system-wide policy and orientation explains that *core resources* refer to non-earmarked funding used at the sole discretion of the respective UNDS entity and its governing board. *Non-core resources* refer to funding directed by donors towards specific locations, themes, activities and/or operations and *local resources* are by nature non-core funding: earmarked funding used by UNDS entities for donors' domestic projects.

Fig. 2. China's Contribution to the UNDS.

Source: Compiled by author based on the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) data.

resources are excluded, and one of the biggest non-OECD/DAC³⁰ funding countries. In 2017, China contributed more to the UNDS than any other emerging economy.

Personnel Contribution

Of the five permanent members of the UNSC, China sends the largest number of peacekeeping personnel around the world. China dispatched soldiers on joint UN peacekeeping missions for the first time in 2001. Within two years, the number of soldiers constituted the majority of all the personnel sent by China on peacekeeping missions. China's personnel dispatched on UN peacekeeping missions comprised more than 3 percent of the world's total in 2019.³¹ In September 2019, President Xi announced at the UN Peacekeeping Summit that China would support the new UN peacekeeping standby system by establishing a standing police corps and an 8,000-troop standby military force. Furthermore, the Chinese government pledged to help train 2,000 peacekeeping personnel from all countries and provide

³⁰OECD/DAC refers to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

³¹United Nations Peacekeeping, "Troop and Police Contributors," <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>.

Table 1. Number of Staff in the UN by Nationality (2017).

	China	France	Russia	United Kingdom	United States	India
Stuff number by regular budget (%)	609 (2.09)	2,384 (8.18)	529 (1.82)	1,030 (3.54)	2,165 (7.43)	534 (1.83)
Stuff number by other financial sources (%)	505 (0.66)	1,948 (2.55)	475 (0.62)	1,410 (1.84)	3,109 (4.07)	1,734 (2.27)
Total (%)	1,114 (1.06)	4,332 (4.10)	1,004 (0.95)	2,440 (2.31)	5,274 (5.00)	2,268 (2.15)

Source: Compiled by author based on UNSCEB data.

\$100 million free military aid to the African Union between 2015 and 2020.³² Over the past decades, Chinese people have made much sacrifice for world peace and security, including 13 soldiers who died in the line of duty.³³

China has also sent its best talents to work in the United Nations. According to the UNSCEB, 1,114 Chinese were working in the UN system as of December 31, 2017, including 609 under regular budgets and 505 under voluntary donations, trust funds, and other funding programs.³⁴ What is

worth noting is that Chinese personnel constituted only 1.06 percent in the UN system, far lower than the number of other standing UNSC members except Russia (Table 1).

China's advocacy for building a community of shared future for mankind reflects its faith in multilateralism.

New Thinking on Peace and Development

Apart from financial and personnel contributions, China has provided the UN with

³²"Xi Jinping Addresses the UN Peacekeeping Summit [习近平出席联合国维和峰会并发表讲话]," Xinhua News, September 29, 2015, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-09/29/c.1116705308.htm>.

³³"In Memory of the 13 Chinese Soldiers Sacrificing Their Lives on Peacekeeping Missions since 1990 [1990年以来13名中国军人牺牲在维和一线]," China Military Network, April 5, 2017, http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2017-04/05/content_7550284.htm.

³⁴United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination Secretariat, "Human Resources by Nationality" (as of December 31, 2017), <https://www.unsceb.org/content/hr-nationality>.

many new ideas and visions on peace and development. For instance, China proposes constructing a community of shared future for mankind as the ultimate goal of global governance, which is to build a world of “lasting peace, universal security, common development, openness and inclusiveness, as well as cleanness and beautiful scenery,” as depicted at the 19th National CPC Conference held in November 2017. In contrast with the zero-sum mentality, to build a community of shared future for mankind calls for new international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation. Contrary to the “America First” notion, the basic principles of a community of shared future for mankind are consistent with multilateralism, which stresses the interaction among different interests of countries and aims to strive for the collective and long-term interests of humanity.

China is also active in sharing its experience of development on multilateral platforms like the UN, since its successful experience from 40 years of reform and opening-up has laid a solid foundation for its participation in global governance. At the same time, China insists that every sovereign country has the right to choose the development path that best suits its national conditions. This can be seen in China’s proposal to align the UN 2030 Agenda (for sustainable development) with the development strategy of each country.³⁵

New Demands for China’s Engagement with the United Nations

At present, a major challenge for China in the United Nations is that the United States is trying every means to undermine China’s growing influence. To maintain the U.S. dominant position in multilateral institutions, the Trump administration has been very cautious about the increasing contribution and engagement of emerging countries in international organizations.³⁶ On September 19, 2019, U.S. Senator Todd C. Young also proposed a

³⁵“Li Keqiang Chairs Talk on UN 2030 Agenda and Issues ‘China’s Blueprint to Implement the UN 2030 Agenda’ [李克强主持 2030 年可持续发展议程主题座谈会并发布‘中国落实 2030 年可持续发展议程国别方案’],” Chinese State Council, September 20, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2016-09/20/content_5109892.htm.

³⁶USAID, “Joint Strategic Plan, FY 2018–2022,” February 2018, p. 47, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277156.pdf>.

bill that requires the Director of National Intelligence to submit to the Congress a report on the purpose, scope, and means of expanded Chinese influence in international organizations.³⁷ Meanwhile, the United States tries to rally with some other countries to oppose or even vilify such Chinese notions as “community of shared future for mankind” and “win-win cooperation” in the UN. For example, in September 2019, the United States voted against the widely accepted resolutions on “new partnership for Africa’s development (A/RES/73/335)” and the “causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/RES/73/336),” for they both mentioned “win-win cooperation” in the texts.³⁸

As a matter of fact, China does not have the intention to shatter the existing international order; nor does it have the capacity to challenge the United States in the UN or other major international organizations. For example, as mentioned previously, the number of Chinese staff in the United Nations, especially in high-level positions, remains small; only 10 Chinese, including one deputy secretary-general, serve at Level D1 posts or above.³⁹ Moreover, China has seldom initiated resolution proposals at the UNSC.⁴⁰ Because of that, Luke J. L. Eastin of Easter Illinois University comments that

While China’s recent exponential increase in contributions to UN peacekeeping and the UN regular budget signals growing Chinese global leadership, its consistent focus on regional interests, as displayed in UN Security Council and UN General Assembly debate and discussion, indicates the absence of an internationally supported agenda.⁴¹

³⁷S.2528, 116th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/2528?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Todd+Young%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=23>.

³⁸UN Doc., A/73/PV.105, September 10, 2019.

³⁹Gu Zhenqiu, “Chinese Staff in the United Nations [联合国里的中国人],” November 1, 2015, <http://www.sxrb.com/sxxww/xwpxd/gjxw/5712576.shtml>.

⁴⁰Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Bruno Stagno Ugarte, “The UN Security Council in an Age of Great Power Rivalry,” United Nations University Working Paper Series, No. 4 (February 2015), p. 4.

⁴¹Luke J. L. Eastin, “Legitimacy Deficit: Chinese Leadership at the United Nations,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Issue 18 (2013), p. 389.

It is for the same reason that China should enhance the UN's role in global governance while trying to play a more active part in the organization. To be more specific, China needs to make bigger contributions — financial, personnel, and intellectual — to the United Nations, strengthen cooperation with other developing countries, and gain more international support for multilateralism.

First, *China should enhance policy coordination with other developing countries while promoting South-North dialogue.* China's developing-nation identity has been the foundation for its engagement in the United Nations, manifested in its insistence on the principle of national sovereignty, its inclination to provide more funds for UN actions related to devel-

China needs to assume a more active role in the UN as a developing country.

opment, and its prioritization of such fields as poverty reduction, food security, and healthcare improvement where funding is most needed by recipient countries; China also puts great emphasis on policy coordination with the Group of 77 (G77), a group of developing countries seeking to gain greater independence from major-power monopoly, and on cooperation with other emerging countries. For example, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his counterparts from India and Russia on December 11, 2017, to discuss possible ways for the three countries to push for the UN reform. As written in their joint communiqué,

Implementation of new initiatives must clearly follow the mandates given by the General Assembly. In any outcome, Member States must maintain realistic mechanisms for monitoring the use of UN financial and human resources. In this context, prerogatives of the UN main organs, including in particular the UNGA, as stipulated by the UN Charter, must be respected.⁴²

Meanwhile, China needs to promote South-North dialogue on enhancing the UN's role in meeting the urgent demands of the international

⁴²"Joint Communiqué of the 15th Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China," Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India, December 11, 2017.

community, so as to strengthen cooperation between developed and developing countries by bridging their gaps of understanding.

Second, China should offer more valuable thinking in the UN and push forward discussion on the relationship among development, peace, and human rights. Indeed, managing the development-peace-humanitarian nexus properly within the UN system is another challenge that China faces in the UN reform. China insists that resources for development cooperation should not be diluted, which has been a common concern among developing countries. Such concern is apparent in the position of the G77 and China on such occasions as various funding dialogues and the UN Development Finance Forum. For example, they announced in the briefing on the re-positioning of the UNDS in February 2018 that “we express our concerns about any reallocation of resources [allocation of non-core resources to ‘joint activities’] without focusing on the priority areas of the developing countries”;⁴³ a year later, they worried that “[t]his shift in ODA (official development aid) resources towards humanitarian and crisis situations is not consistent with long-term and sustainable approach to financing development needed to achieve 2030 Agenda targets.”⁴⁴

It is widely acknowledged that development, peace, and human rights are the three pillars of the United Nations and the three most important tasks for the international community; definition of their relationship is key to determining the future course of the UN and even the international community itself. While developed countries tend to prioritize human rights over development and peace agendas, China and other developing countries feel that their developing conditions and core needs for development are often ignored. That is why President Xi pointed out at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 that

⁴³Group of 77, “Statement on Behalf of the Group of 77 and China by Mr. Mohamed Gad, Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations: Questions and Comments on Funding Compact, at the Briefing on the Repositioning of the United Nations Development System, in Preparation for the Operational Activities for Development Segment of the Economic and Social Council,” New York, February 12, 2018, <http://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=180212>.

⁴⁴Group of 77, “Statement on Behalf of the Group of 77 and China by H.E. Minister DR. Riyadh Mansour (State of Palestine), Chair of the Group of 77, at the 2019 ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up,” New York, April 15, 2019, <http://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=190415c>.

We must hold fast to development as our master key, for only through development can we resolve the root cause of conflicts, safeguard the basic rights of the people, and meet the ardent hopes of people for a better future.⁴⁵

Therefore, more research must be done by Chinese academia in this regard and related discussion should be promoted in the United Nations.

To be more specific, China should continue advocating the notion that development is the “master key” to all the prevailing problems in the world today, for only through sustainable development can peace be guaranteed, internal disturbance or conflicts be mitigated, and human rights be incrementally enhanced. China should also promote global discussion on the uniformity between peace and human rights. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres confirmed in his remarks to the Human Rights Council on February 27, 2017,

The world needs to come to the consensus that sustainable development is key to all the prevailing problems.

Our three pillars of peace, development and human rights are inseparable and they are mutually reinforcing. . . we must make prevention our priority, tackle root causes of conflict, and react earlier and more effectively in addressing human rights concerns.⁴⁶

Such a view is in line with China’s longstanding principle of “maintaining stability as top priority” — in the belief that stability is the precondition for lasting reform and development and that much international disturbance is caused by the willful intervention of some Western powers in the internal

⁴⁵Xi Jinping, “Towards Win-win Partnership for Sustainable Development,” Chinese Foreign Ministry, September 26, 2015, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1306508.shtml.

⁴⁶António Guterres’ remarks to the UN Human Rights Council, February 27, 2017, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2017-02-27/secretary-generals-human-rights-council-remarks>.

affairs of developing countries in the name of “safeguarding human rights.” It must be understood that progress in human rights is usually a result of greater peace and development, rather than the other way round. As one of the three pillars of the UN, human rights can only be enhanced on the basis of sustainable social and economic development and stable external and internal environments; and since the state remains the most important actor on the world stage and holds the ultimate responsibility for protecting human rights in the way it perceives as best suits its national conditions, its role in domestic governance and external representation must be respected, if not fully supported.

Third, China needs to enhance collective efforts with the UN in building the Belt and Road. As a China-initiated grand project joined by many countries, the “Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)” can be aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda in many ways and thus provide growing momentum for deeper Chinese engagement in the UNDS. Through their joint efforts, the UN’s advantages in expertise, resources, and research can be fully utilized to promote the infrastructure interconnectivity of the world. In fact, to include the BRI in the UNDS so as to facilitate the fulfillment of the UN 2030 Agenda and sustainable development goals is not only an important objective of China’s engagement in the UNDS, but it should also become a dimension of the reform and readjustments of the UNDS. In the meantime, the UNDS can participate in more trilateral cooperation with emerging countries and developing countries.

Conclusion

This article discusses China’s stance on multilateralism and the United Nations. In contrast with the European Union’s differentiation of the varying meanings of multilateralism, China tends to highlight the fundamental agreement of different countries on the concept, i.e., a process by which consensus is reached through consultation and negotiation among all stakeholders. Featuring inclusive participation, emphasis on the role of international organizations, and the promotion of democratization of international relations, multilateralism has become an integral part of China’s diplomacy. The ultimate rationale is that multilateralism is consistent with China’s longstanding principle of equality among all countries, which makes it possible for them to participate in international affairs on an equal

footing — a major trend of human history. As a strong advocate for democratization of international relations, China is doing its best to champion multilateralism while opposing hegemonism and unilateralism. As shown by world history in the past decades, multilateralism is both conducive to China's lasting development and to collective global efforts to tackle various global challenges.

Strengthening the role of the UN has been China's never-changing stance. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, China's financial contribution to the UN has been on the rise and ranks the second in the world today. Of the five permanent members of the UNSC, China sends the largest number of peacekeeping personnel. China is also strongly advocating building a community of shared future for mankind on UN platforms. All these efforts prove that China is a robust supporter of multilateralism and the United Nations. However, with ever deeper Chinese engagement in international organizations, the United States has taken more measures to undermine China's endeavor; major power competition has thus become a strong impediment to the UN playing its role in global governance. With regard to the rising populism and unilateralism in the world, solidarity of the international community, especially among developing countries, will be crucial for safeguarding multilateralism, which has been proven necessary for world peace, stability, and sustainable development.