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Crisis of multilateralism and international security

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CRISIS OF MULTILATERALISM AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

ABSTRACT

Since the Second World War multilateralism has become a mechanism of dealing with threats to international peace and security, the implementation of Security Council decisions and principles of the UN Charter. However, the response of international organizations to these threats is often criticized in the scientific community. This paper aims to investigate whether multilateralism is now facing crisis in terms of its effectiveness, legitimacy, and equality, particularly in decision- making process and implementation of institutional decisions.

Key words

multilateralism, international security, international organizations, international arena

There exists an assertion in modern international relations theory that multilateralism is undergoing a crisis in the sphere of international security. Multilateral institutions aimed at maintaining security of its Member States do not have enough influence in the international arena, so the fact that states are less likely to turn to these institutions during crisis is absolutely warranted. In addition, institutions are facing the problem of financing and the trend of creation of informal groups to discuss priority issues. But in order to understand and evaluate the subjective reasons for the institutions not meeting the needs of the states that create them and the expectations of the international community, it is necessary to refer to the definition of security and threats to international security.

Solving problems of international security is becoming more complicated, since it is impossible to determine its magnitude and distinguish security in the traditional sense and security of a person. Ensuring human security means freedom from necessity or *freedom from desire*, it meets human needs

in economic and environmental aspects, nutrition, health, and personal safety spheres. The recognition of human rights, religion, and cultural identity is a part of this dimension. There also exists a traditional meaning of safety, according to which it is *freedom from fear*, analogical to the principles of realism and state-centered approaches to the international relations[1]. There were designed control schemes based on issues related to human security, aimed at humanitarian assistance, technical cooperation, care and disease prevention, and effective response to natural and humanitarian disasters.

Some scholars note that crisis of multilateralism exists only in a traditional dimension of security. And the main reason for that crisis is that there are serious doubts about the credibility of the United Nations after the United States and its allies invaded Iraq in 2003. The competence of the organization in maintaining international peace and security is under question. Moreover, at present humanitarian intervention is the most discussed multilateral activity, not only because the international community rejects the need to confront crimes against humanity, but also because of legitimate intervention in implementation of these operations. Humanitarian intervention is a challenge for multilateral institutions in a system that is still based on the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Moreover, multilateralism has not achieved significant progress in the fight against terrorism[2]. Although the overall concern about the situation after the attacks of 9/11, increasing efforts are much more effectively implemented at national tribunals and specific agreements rather than fight against terrorism within the official multilateral schemes.

Multilateralism can be informal and formal (institutionalized multilateralism), and it is an essential instrument for the involvement of the states in the challenges and realities of the modern globalized world. Institutionalized multilateralism also enhances deepening of the changes in international relations and has to adapt to new situations and requirements of international civil society which is an active participant of the global affairs.

There are several theoretical concepts that provide a clear and consistent understanding of the role of international organizations in contemporary international scene. The most theoretical approach to the importance of institutions in international relations is provided by the representatives of the institutional

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[1] S. Maclean, D. Black, T. Shaw, *A Decade of Human Security. Global Governance and New Multilateralism*, Canada 2006, p. 4.

[2] E. Newman, *A Crisis of Global Institutions? Multilateralism and International Security*, New York 2007, p. 10.

neoliberalism. According to the postulates of this school, multilateralism and cooperation promote stability of international relations, help to reduce the negative effects of anarchy by changing the courses of participants of international relations, and provide greater predictability in the international arena. States face challenges and they require common actions based on mutual cooperation, without losing their independence.[3]

One of the leading representatives of this approach, Peter Katzenstein argues that institutions allow states to pursue their goals without adhering to the common international rules. Institutions can change the strategies of the states, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of different areas of cooperation. Within organizations, states are provided with authentic information; there are given options for decision-making and enforcement of obligations is carried out.[4] According to the advocates of institutional neoliberalism, existence of the necessary regulatory codes is not required, it is enough for states to recognize that institutions are information centers that help them to limit their expenses and influence cooperation. We can assume that multilateralism is not necessarily intended to create strict compliance, but helps the states to solve specific problems more effectively through collective action. Crises, uncertainty, competition, and conflicts of interest contribute to the requirement of the governments to institutionalize the international regime.

However, the extent to which the civil society assigns to international mechanisms of participation and facilitates interaction between states is inadequate. The civil society and the state started demanding for much more influential role in international organizations to promote their efficiency in solving common problems. In order to improve their efficiency states need to actualize inside changes and to carry out reforms. According to Castells, the world is experiencing a period of dramatic change in different areas (communication, technology, and economy), and organizational and institutional instruments of governance are inadequate and need proper guidance. In addition, crisis management is related to the crisis of political legitimacy, so the gap between citizens and their representatives deepens.[5]

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[3] D. Baldwin, *Neoliberalism, Neorealism, and World Politics* [in:] *Neoliberalism, Neorealism: The Contemporary Debate*, D.A. Baldwin (ed.), New York 1993, pp. 2–25.

[4] P. Katzenstein, R. Kehohane, S. Krasner, *International Organizations and the Study of World Politics*, "International Organization" 1998, No. 52 (4), p. 622.

[5] M. Castells, *Global Governance and Global Politics*, "Political Science and Politics" 2005, No. 38 (1), p. 9.

One of the drawbacks of multilateral institutions is the political responsibility and informational accountability, reporting for decisions and activities they carry out. The problem is that the institutions are created by states, most of them do not have supervisors, and those who have – are in fact controlled by the Member States, and this control is based on the political strategies of states. This ensures that organizations continue to play a weightless political role because their political responsibility disappears when it comes to accountability of institutions. Difficulties of accountability consist in the responsibility of multilateral institutions to the states, members of these organizations, as well as in the lack of coordination and misunderstandings between officials of organizations and the authorities. The greater the influence of the members on the political responsibility of the institutions, the more noticeable is the lack of legitimacy in the international arena.

Moreover, when it comes to security, the perceptions of interest among the actors are different and not always authentic. However, Jervis believes that since multilateralism is a stable phenomenon, powerful states should take part in its formation. Even though, the importance of mutual security and cooperation should prevail, the perception of defense and aggression should be more or less similar, and perhaps what is the most important – states must realize that war and individualistic desire to security promote unilateralism.[6]

From the perspective of the neorealists, multilateralism in security is explained by the example of prisoner's dilemma: to extend cooperation between the most powerful countries, it is necessary for this cooperation to be attractive. If the costs and benefits of participation in collective security institutions are not advantageous for the state, it is clear that its choice will be in favor of unilateralism. Is it expedient for the great powers to cooperate with the less powerful states, if such relations do not grant them prerogatives? For example, the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council, in a sense, reduces the involvement of the great powers in collective affairs. Another example is the idea of creating the UN with recognition of the need to create a "world policeman". In addition, neorealists emphasize that usually multilateral security schemes are asymmetric: there exists cooperation, but on the different conditions which depend on particular state, and weak collective security within

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[6] R. Jervis, *Security Regimes* [in:] *International Regimes*, S. Krasner (ed.), London 1983, pp. 173–194.

institutions – because there exist unions and states that take into account only their own interests and benefits (*free riders*).[7]

Institutions are designed to operate in favor of collective security that can be achieved by following certain rules and prior agreements, but we cannot ignore the fact that in political relations the authorities are often criticized for actions and powers directed towards unilateralism versus multilateralism, if it is in their interests and needs.

The problem that led to the United States intervention in Iraq is related, among other things, to the lack of clarity in the content of the resolutions adopted by the Security Council; at least, there is an assertion that the United States justified their actions by saying that the resolution 1441 in 2002 was not sufficiently specific and clear.[8] Consequently, the UN Security Council is an institution that in moments of crisis plays a passive role, and it must be considered that the problem lies not only in decision-making process but also in the fact that there is no specific action framework or rules in times of crisis, or the rules are differently interpreted.

In response to specific problems and challenges, states use several mechanisms: they enter into alliances or even agree to delegate a part of their sovereignty (as it is in the case of integration into blocks), they build a network of international institutions to address global challenges, and, in addition, they involve into *ad hoc* organizations that are designed to address specific issues and decentralize power to increase its legitimacy. In the sphere of security, states are mostly involved in activities of either less stable alliances or collective security institutions such as NATO, which is almost an universal institution of collective efforts to achieve security and is regulated by the principles of the UN Charter in developing global scheme of control.

In the scientific community there is a belief that nowadays multilateralism is suffering a crisis of efficiency, legitimacy, and equality. In case of the crisis of efficiency, it is necessary to emphasize that institutions are experiencing serious difficulties for the proper consideration of such issues as climate change, financial markets or fight against terrorism. It is believed that international organizations can provide a decisive answer to all challenges of the international community and it is forgotten that they are only functional means of states, each of which has certain problems with different priorities based on their real interests and

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[7] J. Frieden, *The International System: International Institutions and War* [in:] *World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions*, J.A. Frieden (ed.), New York 2010, pp. 170–213.

[8] J. Alvarez, *International Organizations as Law Makers*, Oxford 2005, p. 114.

needs, as they seek to meet individual interests through cooperation. In order to provide more efficient actions, international organizations require significant financial and human resources, and many countries cannot join their activities, or are afraid to bear the burden of financing global action. Administrative and bureaucratic obstacles (for example, budget deficit) also create problems for international organizations. This situation is exacerbated by the global economic crisis facing the world today and it impulses the state to focus on providing multilateralism.

The crisis of multilateralism legitimacy is perhaps the most significant in terms of security. While this factor affects the majority of international organizations, the obvious problem is presented in the UN Security Council and its decision making process. The Security Council not only affects the international community, but also is one of the most closed policy forum in the world. In addition, the solutions pertaining to the use of force in accordance with the principle of international responsibility (as in the case of Libya) and humanitarian intervention are still very controversial, especially if decisions are made by individual states (NATO and Security Council), regardless of the legal and recognized criteria.

Overcoming the crisis of equality also is of great importance in the international arena. As one of the key problems of multilateralism in terms of collective security, decision-making based on standard criteria is optional. This leads to an obvious ambiguity and double standards in the implementation of international organizations responsibility principle to protect population against systematic attacks. For example, what is the difference between the crisis in Libya and Syria? What were the roots of the decisions to provide multilateral help in Libya and to ignore what is happening in Syria? The answers to these questions may be found in the political rather than in the legal sphere. One of the main problems, which affect the legality and transparency and undermine the equality of states in the international arena, is that most of the international organizations in the decision making process act with the emphasis on the individual interest, and the functioning of international organizations can be clearly defined, funded, and make significant impact on society, but making major decisions and their implementation still has *ad hoc* character.[9]

In order to improve the image of international organizations at the global level there should be established clear standards defining what is legal (the principle of sovereign equality of states and the principle of non-interference

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[9] E. Newman, op.cit., p. 23.

in the internal affairs) and what is legitimate (the principle of international responsibility), in addition, international law still remains to be an instrument of power. The situation worsens when, while deciding to carry out humanitarian intervention or during its implementation, the agreement for these actions of the sovereign state, in which they are to be carried out, is not taken into account.

It is hard to change the tradition of humanitarian intervention, and even though today the world is well-informed and Westphalian system is no longer able to effectively respond to the current situation in the world, the transformation of institutions that were created in this system takes time. States face many challenges in the era of global networks,[10] and to compensate for this situation, they form organizations and other forms of accumulation of interests and organized position. Thus, *de facto* management system expands. Some radical neoanarhists perceive in this state disintegration and replacement of its components at all levels of society by individuals, non-governmental, and governmental organizations. These are just other forms of multilateralism: multilateral networks.[11]

The solution that states can adopt concerning global crisis management is creating a new state – state network; and international transpolation of national governments is a model for states. However, the process of global issues management includes partnerships with private entities, development of civil society, emergence of a global movement for justice, redefining the role of international institutions, and attempt to build a new institution devoted to solving the most immediate issues.[12]

Newman finds the statement that multilateralism is in crisis biased. Crisis situations occur in specific multilateral formal institutions, but not in the concept of multilateralism itself. It can be confirmed that multilateralism is in crisis, if it is inefficient or outdated in terms of form or activity, and thus loses diplomatic support and funding resources.

Some scholars believe that institution is in a state of crisis when the founding principles on which it is based and the current transaction institutions face the challenge of activity and the position of their members or, if consensus is achieved, epistemological values and institutions of a particular form of multilateralism are no longer effective or legitimate. The main reason for that multilateralism is in

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[10] M. Castells, op.cit., p. 11.

[11] T. Legler, *Multilateralism and Regional Governance in the Americas* [in:] *Latin American Multilateralism: New Directions*, Ottawa 2010, pp. 12–17.

[12] M. Castells, op.cit., p. 12.

crisis is that multilateral agreement is not necessary or possible, in accordance with formal or informal criteria of the Member States.[13]

Also, quite often in the international arena there is a situation when decision-making process is changing as a result of rebalancing of powers; it ensures that its members or leaders become less influential and it is unlikely that they will take into account the uneven and unattractive benefits to deal with free riders. One can also assume the situation when multilateralism is unable to adapt to changing circumstances and to respond adequately to the challenges or when certain principles of the institution are not suitable for the tasks facing the organization.[14]

According to Thakur, "the United Nations is both a stage on which member states have the starring roles and work out their relationships, partnerships and rivalries; and an actor implementing the decisions made on the stage by the member states. If the UN is in crisis, it is a crisis of contradictory expectations. Its Charter begins with the grand words 'We the peoples of the world'. The reality is that it functions as an organization of, by and for member states (…) The UN needs to achieve a better balance between the wish of the peoples and the will of governments; between the aspirations for a better world and its performance in the real world; between the enduring political reality enveloping and at times threatening to suffocate it and the vision of an uplifting world that has inspired generations of dreamers and idealists to work for the betterment of humanity across cultural, religious and political borders."[15]

Yet, multilateralism faces unprecedented challenges, from arms control to climate change, international justice, and the use of force outside. In this context, the UN needs to confirm the role of the largest and most important forum, which implements the embodiment of the principle of sovereignty and the benefits of diplomatic negotiations. Causes and consequences of policy issues and decisions are international, but the power of each state still considers them as the competence of the state. The mandates of the UN are global in nature, while the financial resources of individual countries are limited by the municipal authorities.[16]

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[13] E. Newman, op.cit., p. 27.

[14] Ibidem, p. 40.

[15] R. Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security. From Collective Security to the Responsibility to Protect*, Cambridge 2006, p. 344.

[16] Ibidem, p. 345.

According to Newman, the challenges of multilateralism may be traced in three areas. Firstly, the structural and systemic challenges that are derived from the structure and nature of the international system. Westphalian nation-state system is no longer able to solve a wide range of problems that modern states are facing, which leads to a crisis of multilateralism. At a time when one of the main goals of the international organization is to support international peace and security, most conflicts are internal rather than interstate; in addition, the formation of an international organization, as well as the formation of a new state is based on the principle of sovereignty, with the emphasis on human rights protection.

Secondly, there is a problem of emergence of hegemonic institutions that are directly related to the exercise of power, which is especially true regarding the US. This ensures that organizations do not meet the standards of legitimacy and transparency. If international organizations are not able to solve global problems, their legitimacy is under doubt, even if they follow all applicable rules and procedural details.[17]

Many scientists have criticized the passive role of the UN in certain events and its neutrality is put in doubtful position; in addition, the actions and decisions of the organization are implemented very slowly. According to Newman, "Member States do not want the United Nations to be a strong organization with positive reputation and independent from hypocritical statements according to which the situation is not so,"[18] overcoming the limitations characteristic for multilateralism in international security.

Multilateralism is not in crisis; furthermore, institutions that represent multilateralism and have been remain from the past, are time-varying, transforming, and adapting to the modern realities. International organizations create two situations within which they force the international community to feel the need for institutions. Firstly, they use precedent: some action is implemented, after which the collective problem solving is expected. Analogically, an expectation is created that goes beyond the mandate, given to the states-members. These expectations are reflected in the demand for a response from the civil society and how non-governmental organizations and other non-state actors are seeking to join an international organization to better respond to global challenges. Functioning of organizations is far from the expected and it is

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[17] E. Newman, op.cit., p. 17.
[18] Ibidem, p. 58.

obvious that it is difficult to justify these expectations, and the weakness of their activities is related to the lack of clear rules and legitimacy.

Some scholars believe that an international organization can solve everything, but most often it is the only means of reflecting the interests of its members and decisions of international organizations tend to prove this statement. Or on the contrary, organizations are limited in their actions because the state refuses to provide them with enhanced powers. Chapman proposes the creation of strategic information transmission patterns, which confirms that the audience tends to be involved in making institutional decisions but only to the extent not inconsistent or shifting the position of countries – members. Conversely, when the decision reinforces the position of the authorities, they may be discarded depending on the ratio of the audience.[19]

The volume of institutionalized multilateralism expands by the formation of networks and cooperation between organizations, while reducing costs and promoting cooperation. It is also clear that the transformation of international organizations, although the circumstances under which they were established have changed or disappeared, are able to respond to the new needs and threats. For example – NATO: Cold War ended, the enemy, to fight against the entity was created – the Soviet threat – was gone. However, NATO not only continued to function, but has undergone expansion by annexing countries that once belonged to the Soviet bloc. The Alliance has expanded not only in terms of participating countries, but also expanded its mission. Participation in the Yugoslav conflict has given to the international community understanding that NATO will accomplish humanitarian intervention, if any state ally faces threat or suffers an attack against it, and, after the terrorist attacks in September 2001, its mission continues in terms of counteracting terrorist threat.[20]

There not only exists the demand for international regimes, created and coordinated by international organizations, but the organizations themselves influence such a *status quo*. Moreover, according to the legal approach, international organizations adapt to the norms and principles of international law.[21]

International organizations managed to create such mechanisms of regulatory and procedural issues which allowed them to expand the scope of their competence and their functional coverage, and in some cases, such as the UN

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[19]   T. Chapman, *International Security Institutions, Domestic Politics, and Institutional Legitimacy*, "The Journal of Conflict Resolution" 2007, No. 51 (1), p. 157.

[20]   J. Frieden, op.cit., pp. 170–213. Here p. 187.

[21]   E. Newman, op.cit., p. 149.

Security Council, they have become quasi-judicial bodies and their resolutions are binding.

All institutions mentioned in the article continue to exist because states continue to consult with them as they need to learn the consequences of their decisions and their impact on foreign policy.[22] Moreover, according to Thakur, the UN, for example, indicates the ability of international organizations to implement innovations and the conceptual, adaptive to the policy, organizational learning. It is shown by peacekeeping operations, human rights protection, sanctions, use of force, etc.[23]

With all its limitations, multilateralism is not in crisis; there is a need for it and it meets the requirements of the modern world. Even the strongest state cannot achieve security and economic prosperity if it acts unilaterally.

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[22] T. Chapman, op.cit., p. 135.
[23] R. Thakur, op.cit., p. 343.