

Article

Is the World Ready for Cooperative Multipolarity?

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Abstract

It is impossible to engage in a conversation about the geopolitical changes the world is currently undergoing without stumbling on the idea of multipolarity. Beyond the fascination exerted by topics such as a rising China, Europe after BREXIT, the Arab spring, BRICS or the relative decline of the United States, the 21st century has ushered in a renewed appetite for discussions on the international configuration of power. As a transition seems to be happening before our very eyes, geopolitical commentary has become a growth industry. If indeed the world is entering a multipolar era, what insights can we draw from international relations theory? What are the relevant lessons of history? What is the specificity of our situation? How can we work together to ensure multipolarity becomes a vehicle for sustainable development and durable peace? To start examining these questions we need an inclusive, multipolar debate. The following thoughts are presented in this spirit.

Keywords

Multipolarity, Multilateralism, International Relations, Global Governance, Brazilian Foreign Policy, Diplomacy

Are We Already Living in a Multipolar World?

Multipolarity has come to figure prominently in the everyday vocabulary of diplomats and world leaders. The first BRIC Summit in June 2009 expressed support for “a more democratic and just multipolar world order”. Successive BRICS communiqués have continued to strike this chord, as have declarations by the Non-Aligned Movement. In 2010 former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton observed, during an official visit to New Zealand, that “we see a shifting of power to a more multipolar world as opposed to the Cold War model of a bipolar world”. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated at Stanford University in 2013 that we have begun to “move increasingly and irreversibly to a multipolar world”. Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, declared at the second annual Russia-China Conference (2016) that “international relations have entered into

a conceptually new historical stage that consists in the emergence of a multipolar world order and reflects the strengthening of new centers of economic development and power”.

While these manifestations reveal a general acceptance of the notion that multipolarity has become an inescapable concept to understand contemporary international dynamics, there seems to be less agreement on how inevitable or irreversible the transition to multipolarity really is. In fact, some of the declarations above signal a reluctance to acknowledge the complete disappearance of unipolarity. This is the underlying message in Hillary Clinton’s choice of words when she speaks of a “more multipolar world”. It would be safe to assume that a much stronger resistance to forego unipolarity permeates slogans that vow to “make America great again”. Sergei Lavrov, in turn, speaks of an inability on the part of some to recognize that today “a unipolar world order is untenable”. Could it be that we are experiencing a certain overlap of uni and multi-polar realities?

No doubt the US will remain a formidable world power for the foreseeable future. In military terms, the US is likely to remain number one for decades, even as China takes on the leading economic position. Other major developed economies will continue to wield significant influence worldwide. In other words, the established powers are not to be written off as submerging powers. China and Russia, although sometimes described as emerging powers, already enjoy great power status as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. An additional group of nations, often referred to as rising powers, are acquiring global outreach, influence and new diplomatic capabilities: Brazil, India and South Africa are cases in point. Their role in shaping international agendas through multilateral frameworks cannot be underestimated, as recent negotiations on sustainable development and climate change indicate.

A Glimpse at International Relations Theory and the Lessons of History

Before we consider the specificity of our geopolitical context, it is worth looking at some theoretical insights and historic precedents most relevant to our situation. To begin with, it is interesting to note that there is no consensus when it comes to the debate on whether multipolarity is more inherently unstable than bipolarity or unipolarity. At the height of the Cold War, Kenneth Waltz presented one set of arguments upholding the “Stability of the Bipolar World”. In turn, Karl Deutsch and David Singer argued in favor of the greater stability of multipolarity in an article also published in 1964, entitled “Multipolar Systems and International Stability”.

More recently, and from a different angle, Amitav Acharya in “The End of the American World Order” dismisses the fears – attributed to some scholars in the West – associated with the end of a unipolar US hegemony. Simon Reich and

Richard Ned Lebow in their 2014 book “Goodbye Hegemony”, also question the belief – by both realist and liberal US academics – that a global system without a hegemon would become unstable and more war prone.

A distinction could perhaps be made between two unipolar attitudes: one that is favorably inclined towards multilateralism, the other more blatantly unilateralist. George H.W. Bush represents the first, and his son George W. Bush the second. Acharya notes with irony that the neo-conservative world view typical of the latter may have hastened the end of the unipolar moment by pushing for an aggressive Pax Americana that viewed the unilateral resort to use of military force as a natural US prerogative.

Another set of differentiations worth looking at pertain to the durability of orders and power configurations, the role of hegemonic wars and types of transitions. The Westphalian system dating to 1648 has organized world politics on the basis of relations among sovereign states for more than three and a half centuries, as successive world orders and configurations of power came and went – frequently in the aftermath of hegemonic wars. Robert Gilpin’s thirty year old study on “War and Change in World Politics” remains an important reference on these questions, having given rise to a recent set of essays by a group of American scholars and edited by John Ikenberry under the title “Power, Order and Change”. This compilation can be a useful guide to current perceptions among US specialists.

As emerges from these texts, changes in world order and in the distribution of power have taken place, to this day, without impacting on the essence of the Westphalian paradigm. At the same time, nuclear weapons and the specter of mutually assured destruction set the stage for transitions which do not necessarily involve wars. Indeed, in spite of the destructive proxy conflicts, which penalized several developing countries during the Cold War, the transition from bipolarity to unipolarity – after the fall of the Berlin Wall – did not involve a large-scale hegemonic war and took place within a world order continuum (the most notable institutional adjustment was the replacement of the Soviet Union by the Russian Federation as permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1992).

The current transition towards multipolarity is perhaps more transformative. In terms of governance, it has already entailed the incorporation of the BRICS, among others, into the G20 informal group of leading economies. Although agreement has yet to be reached on an expansion of the membership of the UN Security Council, a consensus has existed since the end of the Cold War that its composition is not sufficiently representative of contemporary geopolitical realities. At the same time it is possible to argue that such adjustments to multipolarity – some already happening, others yet to take place – will not necessarily involve a challenge to the prevailing world order as shaped over the past seventy

years, with the UN Charter and the Bretton Woods institutions at its core. The so called “American-led world order” is in fact likely to survive the end of the unipolar moment and seems well suited to form the basis for a new multipolar order.

It is incorrect to imply that the rising powers aspire to create a radically different world order. Visibly, for the majority of the international community – rising powers included – the real issue is one of compliance by all with existing rules, without unilateralism, and with expanded opportunity for participation in decision-taking. In this respect, Marcos Tourinho presents an interesting view of the current world order which seems closer to reality. He considers that “the universal international society is a fundamentally syncretic society, since neither from an institutional or normative point of view was it shaped by Western powers alone” (Tourinho, 2015, 303). According to this view “parties have consistently found effective strategies to participate in international rulemaking by regulating the behavior of the most powerful and enhancing their own position in the hierarchy”.

From this viewpoint it is possible to affirm that the contemporary world order, rather than being “Western” or “American-led” already reflects a plurality of influences and is not single-handedly led by anyone. Clearly, rising powers are more attached to it than those who feel a nostalgia for unipolar unilateralism. If we are to believe, as suggested by John Ikenberry (2014, 105), that “world orders do not just rise and decline, they also evolve” it is fair to conclude, as he does, that the forces of democracy and modernity can push and pull history in new, more cooperative, directions. It is also necessary not to underestimate the political forces that will resist adjustments or try to subvert order itself.

Historically, several situations provide useful lessons or insights for a world in transition such as ours. Two centuries ago a unipolar period came to an end and gave rise to a multipolarity of sorts, after the defeat of the Napoleonic army by the combined strength of Russia, Great Britain, Austria and Prussia. At the Vienna Congress of 1815 a diplomatic effort aimed at reorganizing the European geopolitical landscape can be said to have brought about several decades of relative stability based on new forms of cooperation. The Concert of Europe was the precursor of the high-level conferences to which world leaders and diplomats have become accustomed. The Holy Alliance – though conservative in its objectives and repressive in its methods – could be considered a pioneer exercise in preserving peace. Equally noteworthy was the fact that France, although defeated in the battlefield, was not subjected to humiliating treatment by the victors.

It was clear from the outset that the objective of thwarting a return to unipolarity constituted a strong unifying factor among the victorious powers, as they engaged in groundbreaking forms of cooperation in the aftermath of Napoleon. Still, the experiment involved a narrow thematic scope and limited inclusiveness – even

within a non-universal, European context. The exclusion of the Ottoman Empire from the negotiating table, for example, sowed the seeds of the Crimean War, which marked the beginning of the prelude to the Great War of 1914. It must also be recognized that cooperation was placed – more often than not – at the service of repression of dissent and nationalist uprisings. In other words, multipolarity can be reactionary rather than progressive; hegemonic rather than democratic.

The Versailles Treaty was notoriously less successful than the Vienna settlements in advancing stability, the most obvious reason being the punitive treatment accorded to a defeated Germany. By contrast, the agreements emerging from World War II provided a new example of magnanimity towards the defeated, which proved to be wise and pragmatic.

Furthermore, Chapter VII of the UN Charter, limiting the use of force, required self-restraint on the part of the victorious powers, and can be described as a step forward for international relations. It appears thus that a learning process is possible, within a power sharing system such as the one that came into being after the Allied victory in 1945. Manifestly, the strategic choices made in the 1990's, that led to NATO expansion after the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Warsaw Pact did not draw inspiration from this logic.

A new type of threat from a non-State source tragically made its appearance on the geopolitical scene with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. This threat metastasized into a non-state movement seeking to impose its rule over large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, following the instability that resulted from the military intervention against Saddam Hussein in 2003. As described by Henry Kissinger, the geopolitical pattern in the region is now in “a shambles”, with several states facing serious threats to their sovereignty. This “unrelenting foe of established order”, has come to represent a historically unprecedented challenge to the Westphalian paradigm itself, as elaborated by Kissinger (2015) in his article “A path out of the Middle East collapse”.

The declaration of a “war on terror” after the September 11 attacks inaugurated a new chapter in international relations fraught with unintended consequences. Rather than being defeated or curtailed by the most powerful military in history, terrorism assumed more radical features and expanded geographically.

We thus arrive at the latest transition, which seems to have been accelerated by a transgression of the established rules on the use of force, deliberately undertaken by the very power who was the alleged custodian of the prevailing order. The military intervention in Iraq of 2003, although it disregarded the UN System, did not spell the end of multilateralism. On the contrary, it may have indirectly reinforced it. The specificity of this new situation seems to defy our existing vocabulary as it

includes elements of unipolarity and multipolarity, and combines more traditional forms of geopolitical tension with a new threat to the very system within which world orders have evolved since 1648. Meanwhile, the tenets of our world order continue to survive.

What are the Specificities of 21st Century Multipolarity?

In certain respects the transition underway should not lead to an unqualified belief in the diminished relevance of material capabilities, economic or military. Traditional forms of competition for hegemonic influence, through arms build-ups and the search for territorial advantage, will continue to shape rivalries at the regional and global levels. In parallel, the strategic constraint on all-out war created by nuclear weapons will now be compounded by the proven limitations of military power to combat terrorism.

One of the most original features of the new configuration of power is the unprecedented fact that a non-European, non-Western power will assume the position of leading world economy during the decades ahead. China's economic growth is destined to translate into increased diplomatic influence. The same will apply to other regional powers from the South as they enhance their global outreach, admittedly in nonlinear ways. A resurgent Russia will still continue to wield considerable military might. A highly developed Europe may find a renewed sense of cohesion with Germany, France and Italy at its center. Japan will be faced with new strategic dilemmas, whether the US-China relationship becomes more cooperative, or adversarial. How the United States responds to a new situation of relative loss of influence will be of major relevance to the international community: the Obama legacy with respect to Iran or Cuba point in one direction; the "exceptionalist" mindset still prevalent among many in the US in another.

It is not clear whether this new environment amplifies the space for multilateralism, diplomacy and cooperation. But a number of characteristics that were absent from previous transitions, unique to the early 21st century, create a distinct framework for opportunity – alongside and beyond the obvious pitfalls. Certain factors, that were not present at other turning points can play – and indeed are already playing – a unifying role.

An important cross-cutting aspect is the higher degree of global interconnectedness among governments, economies and societies through, trade, investment, telecommunications, the media and people-to-people contacts. The flip side of this coin is the fact that this increase in connectivity may also be placed at the service of destabilizing agendas.

Among the most notable unifying elements is the challenge posed by global warming and climate change. This is a situation that, for the first time in human

history, forces the community of nations to confront the stark reality that there will be no salvation without cooperation. It affects countries large and small independently of their level of development, and cannot be mitigated without the active engagement of the largest emitters. As the resolution that adopted the Paris Agreement in December 2015 acknowledges, “climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet and thus requires the widest possible cooperation by all countries” (United Nations, 2015).

Violent extremism conducive to terrorism is increasingly perceived as a global threat requiring comprehensive, coordinated international efforts. The failure of the so called “war on terror” has created a heightened awareness of the need for harmonized, multilaterally agreed approaches to curtail the phenomenon. A recent UN report on the subject was particularly direct when it stated that “we must take action now to save succeeding generations”.

The Ebola outbreak in 2014, which caused thousands of preventable deaths, has demonstrated that the world is ill-prepared to address the threat posed by epidemics. Although not a new threat in itself, the potentially devastating social and economic effects of health crises in an age of unprecedented human mobility has increased the level of international alert. The world drug problem is now considered a “common and shared responsibility”, as nations at different points in the production and consumption chain acknowledge the unsatisfactory results of the “war on drugs” and seek more effective solutions through multilaterally concerted efforts.

Moreover, it is possible to affirm that civil society is assuming an increasingly important role in influencing international debates and agendas, in contrast with previous eras or transitions. The appearance on the world stage of a myriad of non-governmental organizations promoting causes which range from gender equality to disarmament and non-proliferation represent a historical evolution that cannot be ignored.

Differently from the 19th century’s euro-centric multipolar experiment, a 21st century multipolar world order will be universal in scope. In other respects, however, the two periods may yet come to share certain similarities.

It is not unlikely that the new multipolar world order will give rise to coordinated attempts at thwarting a return to a unipolar hegemony. It is conceivable that rivalry and competition involving the main military powers will degenerate into increased tensions that could lead to widespread instability and even war. It is also possible to imagine other bleak, 21st century-specific scenarios involving the possession of weapons of mass destruction by non-state actors. The pressures resulting from large groups of refugees fleeing conflict and of migrants searching

for economic opportunity represent new challenges with unpredictable domestic and international repercussions.

Are We Dealing Constructively With the New Situation?

These imaginable and other as yet unimagined pitfalls could be avoided or circumvented in the presence of enlightened leadership and effective diplomacy. And there are reasons to draw encouragement from at least some of the responses to shared challenges that are already being articulated – both as regards multilateral governance structures, and with respect to the challenges themselves.

Let us first look at governance. International governance mechanisms have begun to incorporate a larger number of participants, as they adapt to a multipolar context. One of the first examples of this trend was the disappearance of the “Quad” group, composed of the US, the EU, Japan and Canada, from the GATT/WTO negotiating praxis. Since the Cancun Ministerial conference in 2003, developing countries with a special stake in negotiations on agriculture started making their way into the inner decision making circles of the WTO, with India and Brazil often taking the lead. The informal group of larger economies, known as the G7 (and then G8 as it temporarily reached out to Russia) was enlarged, in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, due to the perception – among its founders – that the group should embrace other players, including in particular the BRICS. Quota reform at the IMF and World Bank is starting to redress the asymmetries in voting rights at the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), bringing these more in line with the real economic weight of member states.

Within the United Nations system small steps are being taken to respond to a widespread demand for greater inclusiveness. An expanded Human Rights Council has been functioning in Geneva with new, more democratic, procedures such as the universal Periodic Review. Following a recommendation by the Rio+20 Conference, the membership of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme became universal. The procedures for the selection of a new Secretary-General now contemplate public hearings with the official candidates and include the possibility of participation of civil society. The High Level Plenary of the UN General Assembly on Migration and Refugees incorporated the International Organization for Migration into the UN family – a development that many hope will help to improve international coordination in response to the plight of migrants worldwide.

But the picture is not an entirely encouraging one, with many anachronistic institutional arrangements still in place, in spite of the pressure for change. The IFI’s continue to be headed by nationals of developed countries. Key positions in the UN Secretariat tend to be monopolized by the five permanent members of

the Security Council. The unchanged composition of the Security Council itself reveals an incapacity on the part of the Organization to adapt to the geopolitical realities of the new century. When the membership of the UN doubled from the original 51 signatories of the Charter in 1945 to approximately 100 members in the early 1960s, the Council's composition increased from 11 to 15 – all new seats being in the non-permanent category. Today the UN has 193 members, a majority of which favor an expansion in the permanent and non-permanent category. As Bruce Jones from the Brookings Institution sustains in a recent paper, the Organization needs to more directly engage a wider set of states in the promotion of international peace and security and re-position itself for the new realities of geopolitics.

On the substantive front, the record is also mixed, with an array of unresolved problems and a few brighter spots. On the positive side, 2015 was hailed as a good year for diplomacy and multilateralism, on account of the consensus reached on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the successful negotiations on the Iranian nuclear file. These are not minor accomplishments and represent a victory for patient dialogue and persuasive diplomacy.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an innovative, transformative, universally applicable platform that seeks to combine economic growth with social progress and environmental awareness. With poverty eradication at its center, the Agenda is the most ambitious and comprehensive program of action ever adopted by the UN membership with its 17 goals and 169 targets. Development henceforth will be inextricably linked to sustainability. With active leadership from Brazil and Latin American countries, reducing inequality within and among nations was singled out as a stand-alone goal.

The Paris Agreement under the Framework Convention on Climate Change – adopted in December 2015 – lays the ground for holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. With all major emitters on board, the agreement proved the skeptics wrong, notwithstanding the technical complexity and political sensitivity of the matter.

Three recent reports brought to the attention of the UN membership the related topics of peace operations, post-conflict peace building (or “sustaining peace” under the new terminology) and the role of women in the promotion of international peace and security. All three converged on the emphasis attributed to prevention; all three underlined the primacy of politics and diplomacy. The message was clear: military action should always be a measure of last resort, and carried out in full compliance with UN Charter provisions. This message can be seen as

a clear rejection of the more militaristic and interventionist mindsets of the first years of the century. The agreement reached by the P5+1 and Iran, with a view to ensuring that its nuclear capability is applied for peaceful purposes alone, should be appreciated through a similar logic. It stands as an example of a preventive measure obtained through effective diplomacy and political leadership on an issue of obvious relevance for world peace.

In the field of human rights, contemporary challenges, such as those related to the Edward Snowden revelations on mass surveillance, have been confronted multilaterally with the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy in the Digital Age. Another significant recent development was the appointment of an independent expert on the protection against discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

On the negative side a longer list could no doubt be drawn up, composed of the many unresolved international challenges with respect to which a constructive way forward is yet to be found. These are predominantly in the peace and security domain. A deadly fight for military advantage has been the hallmark of the tragic civil war in Syria, in spite of frequent admonitions to the effect that “there is no military solution to the conflict”. Neglect has supplanted active diplomacy in the search for a two state solution in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Iraq, Libya and Yemen face momentous challenges. A defiant Taliban is a persistent source of instability in Afghanistan.

The absence of progress on the de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula is a stark reminder of the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the failure of the 2015 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty exposed the continuing reluctance of the nuclear weapon states to fulfill their commitments. The persistent impasse regarding the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East further highlights the limitations of the Treaty and its regime. The crisis in Ukraine reignited a level of animosity between Russia and the West reminiscent of the Cold War. In Africa, notwithstanding visible progress at sustaining peace in the western part of the continent, terrorism has spread across a large arc of instability along the Sahel, while efforts at stabilization in the Great Lakes region, in South Sudan and in the Central African Republic cannot be considered irreversible.

As Hugh White elaborates in “The China Choice” published in 2012, there are many ways in which the potential rivalry between the US and China could dangerously escalate, particularly along the maritime Asian fault lines. De-escalation will require dialogue, diplomacy and compromise, and the political vision capable of creating effective bilateral, regional and multilateral frameworks to reach the

necessary understandings. Such frameworks need to be established with a sense of urgency. It is obvious that the peaceful evolution of the China-US relationship is of paramount significance for the consolidation of a new order of international cooperation.

On the counter-terrorism front, even if a number of initiatives have met with consensus at the UN, a common sense of purpose based on collectively agreed strategies has yet to emerge in specific situations. As growing attention is given to the protection of civilians in situations of conflict, divergences persist, in particular with regard to the use of force – whether by peacekeepers or others – with legitimate concerns being raised regarding the negative consequences thereof. Mistrust generated by the instability wrought by the NATO intervention in Libya – authorized under a “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) mandate – has revived interest in the Brazilian proposals on “Responsibility while Protecting (RWP). It is ironic to note that the same Governments who are the most readily inclined to embrace military intervention for the alleged protection of civilians in situations of conflict, do not necessarily demonstrate a corresponding humanitarian impulse, when it comes to welcoming civilians fleeing conflict at their borders.

Subjacent to these problems is the major strategic challenge of de-conflicting great power tensions. Tensions involving the three top military powers might be compounded by several imaginable situations that need not be enumerated. If the UN evolves into a more capable machinery, built on a wider political coalition in line with multipolarity, there may be a chance that the top military powers will be able to develop confidence in such a tool. It is difficult to see how this can happen, however, without the long overdue Security Council reform.

Cooperative Multipolarity is Achievable

Former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski has spoken of the current geopolitical configuration as one without historic precedent, with none of the three top military powers in a position to assume a hegemonic role. In this respect Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow (2014, 183) correctly point out that “ultimately, hegemony is difficult to reconcile with democracy”. It is undeniable that in the emerging multipolar configuration of power divergent agendas and world views will continue to collide and could well lead to open hostility and destructive competition. But it is also true that cooperative, and increasingly inclusive forms of interaction are happening every day on important, unifying issues, through multilateral arrangements which – although described as “American led” by some – in reality reflect an evolutionary path paved with the engaged participation of many nations large and small.

Cooperative multipolarity is therefore achievable and can be seen as the next,

more democratic and just stage in the evolutionary path of the international system. Important achievements, brought about through the active leadership of the victors of World War II, provide a firm foundation for our future efforts. These include the ruling out of the use of military force, except in situations of self-defense or in accordance with specific multilateral authorization, respect for the universality of human rights, as well as compliance with a vast body of international law establishing rights and obligations in a wide range of topics – from trade, finance and social justice, to health, education and culture.

Of the three “pillars” that compose the triad of the UN’s field of activity – namely, development, human rights, peace and security – it is possible to affirm that a process of modernization and adaptation to new contemporary realities has been successfully advancing with respect to the first two. Such is the meaning of the universally applicable 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015; such is the sense of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council created ten years ago.

In the peace and security realm, however, there is considerable room for improvement. But the situation is not hopeless. The militarism of the first years of the 21st century has come to illustrate the limitations of the use of force to confront new challenges posed by violent extremism conducive to terrorism, opening opportunities for cooperation on prevention. An effective combination of multilateral and bilateral diplomacy has produced constructive outcomes in dealing with thorny issues such as the Iranian nuclear file.

This of course is not sufficient or irreversible. Multipolarity will not lead to a more stable, cooperative world in and of itself. Governance mechanisms must become more inclusive and democratic. The most powerful will have to give up the inclination to view themselves as “exceptional” in favor of a universal, humanistic proclivity capable of celebrating our common, and diverse, humanity. Rising democratic powers can exercise their growing diplomatic influence by helping to build bridges across ideological divides, and reducing the many gaps in communication and understanding that separate countries from different cultural traditions or at different stages of economic and social development.

Nations of all sizes will need to derive benefits from the sovereign equality of states that lies at the core of our system, through improved and more inclusive multilateral frameworks for decision-taking and cooperation. Civil society will need to be afforded appropriate channels for their voices to be heard within states and internationally. The new UN Secretary-General will be called upon to exercise strong leadership, as cooperative multipolarity will not be able to thrive in the absence of robust multilateralism.

A convergence between a multipolar distribution of geopolitical influence and functional multilateral institutions that draws strength from confronting collective, unifying challenges absent from previous transitions can lead to a new international, sustainable, cooperative multipolarity. With enlightened political leadership, diplomatic resourcefulness and social mobilization, the citizens of our interconnected societies, who expect stability and opportunity to realize their potential and pursue happiness, will be supportive and ready.

Post-Scriptum

These thoughts were collected in 2016, and it seems appropriate to include a post-scriptum in order to take the 2017 context into account. I would start by saying that the unilateralist impulse, which has come to manifest itself anew, is not in essence something new. We witnessed it in 2003 with respect to Iraq. As Amitav Acharya points out, a neo-conservative disregard for multilateralism, at that time, may have hastened the end of the unipolar moment rather than enhanced the standing of the predominant military and economic power in world affairs. In today's more multipolar environment, a renewed disregard for multilateralism could have even more problematic effects.

Moreover, it is worth remembering, as Marcos Tourinho argues, that the current world order – with its multilateral institutions – cannot be adequately described as led or owned by a single country or region; it has become our collective property. In this sense, it is to be expected that the international society – including governmental and non-governmental actors – will join forces to uphold the tenets of the established order and the international rules-based system. Climate change, the fight against terrorism and other unifying factors will play a part in exposing the limitations of unilateral approaches to common challenges.

Another set of considerations pertains to the limited power of nationalism to conquer hearts and minds internationally. Defending the national interest remains a priority for every government. But international leadership is difficult to sustain if it is lacking in content of universal resonance. Many in the Western media were quick to point out that Chinese President Xi Jinping struck a universal chord this year, at the Davos World Economic Forum, in highlighting the rewards of globalization, while recognizing that many had been excluded from its benefits and defending a more inclusive and humane economic order. Independently of one's religious affiliation, Pope Francis' words at the 70th UN General Assembly were met with a long unparalleled standing ovation, as his emphasis on the importance of enhancing international cooperation to alleviate poverty and protect the environment inspired and reassured. These two examples illustrate the fact that in our current international landscape, traditional categories of East and West, North and South may not fully capture the affinities that can arise across and above

divisions based on geography, ideology or level of development. The new divisions seem to be between rationality and irrationality, humanism and exceptionalism, the politics of cooperation and the politics of confrontation.

Multipolarity presupposes a competitive market for international political influence. Diplomatic clout, the capacity to lead and persuade is not a direct consequence of economic and military power, as the reference to the Vatican, above, demonstrates. The rise in the kind of populism that is lacking in solidarity towards migrants and refugees, tolerant towards prejudice, and ready to compromise universal values in favor of narrowly defined national interest represents a challenge of considerable scope. This only increases the responsibility of those who see merit in the institutional framework enshrined in our multilateral institutions to work together to preserve it, adapt it where necessary to the new geopolitical realities of multipolarity, and join forces across ideologies, religions and continents to construct a more rational, humane, cooperative international society.

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The views expressed in this article are offered by the author in an individual capacity.

Bio

Antonio de Aguiar Patriota was appointed Ambassador to Italy, Malta and San Marino in August 2016. He was the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations from 2013 to 2016. During his period as Ambassador to the UN, he was Chair of the 60th and 61st Sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women and chair of the Peacebuilding Commission of the UN (2013-2014). He served as Foreign Minister (2011-2013), Deputy Foreign Minister (2009-2010) and Ambassador to the United States (2007-2009). During his diplomatic career, he was also posted twice in Geneva (1983-1987 and 1999-2003) and in New York (1994-1999), Beijing (1987-1988) and Caracas (1988-1990). Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1954, he graduated from Brazil's Diplomatic Academy in 1979, having studied Philosophy at the University of Geneva. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Public Service by Chatham University in 2008. Among his publications are his thesis entitled "The UN Security Council after the Gulf War" (1998) and two volumes of "Speeches, articles and interviews" during his period as Foreign Minister. Ambassador Patriota is married to Tania Cooper Patriota, currently the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Colombia. They have two sons, Miguel and Thomas.

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