

Making Sense of Multilateralism

Definition

- Three or more Independent States
- Taking Actions
- To pursue common interests or goals
- On a Temporary or Continuing Basis

History

- Greek City State Alliances (Delian and Peloponnesian Leagues) 479 BCE
- Continental Congress 1774
- Congress of Vienna 1815
- League of Nations 1919
- European Theater of Operations (vs. Pacific Theater) 1942

Post World War II

- United Nations 1945
- Cold War Regional Security Alliances
 - NATO 1949,
 - SEATO 1955-77,
 - Warsaw Pact 1955-91
- Technological and Commercial Development Alliances
 - International Civil Aviation Organization
 - International Monetary Fund
 - International Atomic Energy Agency
 - World Intellectual Property Organization
 - World Meteorological Organization
 - World Health Organization
 - Numerous Others
- Regional Trade and Political Agreements
 - European Coal and Steel Community 1948
 - NAFTA 1994

Post Cold War / Post American Age

- New Issues replace great power competition in world interest (Briefing Book):
 - Nuclear Non-Proliferation
 - Climate Change
 - Global Economic Stability
 - Economic and Human Development
 - Poverty, Hunger, Health
 - Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness – Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya
- The Decline of the United States vs. The Rise of the Rest. (Video)

Problems with Multilateralism

- “Omnipotent” nations (and their citizens) resist coalitions.
- Burdens are often unequal.
- Multilateral coalition decision-making is messy.
 - No Open Meetings Law at NATO.
 - Need for Common Interest limits applications and narrows focus.
 - Continuing Consensus on details is problematic.

Benefits of Multilateralism

- There are no “omnipotent” nations.
- The “Rise of the Rest” makes resistance to Unilateralism more effective.
- Modern Communications and Transportation make interdependence the norm and Isolation less practical.