

International Institutions in Decline? A Critical Analysis of Global Governance in an Era of Great-Power Rivalry

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Abstract

Renewed great power rivalry, geopolitical fragmentation and divergent visions of the international order are putting global governance under greater pressure. This article considers questions about leading institutions - the United Nations, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and World Health Organization - whether they are suffering from an institutional decline or strategic adaptation. The study assesses their performance in the fields of security, trade and finance, public health and environmental governance using a qualitative and analytical approach. It suggests that the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China and the amalgamation of the two powers with Russia have aggravated not only the intergovernmental paralysis but also legislative and executive complacency, doubts regarding the legitimacy of the rules and arrangements, and other parallel governance structures. The continued role of these bodies in offering forums, rules and coordination mechanisms have diminished in areas where major power interests come into conflict. The results show that institutional decline is not absolute, however. The final conclusion is that the success of multilateral governance depends on representative reform, on flexibility in procedures, on accountability, and on mechanisms important in limiting rivalry and maintain cooperation on common global problems.

Keywords: Global Governance; International Institutions; Great Power Rivalry; Institutional Decline; Multilateralism; Institutional Reform; Geopolitical Fragmentation.

Introduction

Global governance is the system of governance that governs affairs at the international level, through institutions, laws, conventions and other cooperative agreements, involving both states and non-state actors. The role of international organisations since WWII has been to offer forms of coordination in response to security threats, financial crises, humanitarian emergencies, pandemics, environmental degradation and other transnational challenges. Not considered a world-government, in sum, these institutions set up methods by which states debate interests, frame regulations, exchange information, and coordinate group activity. (Osman, 2026)

Since 1945, the world has been organized around the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other multilateral institutions. The establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995 further provided a forum to enable governments to cooperate economically internationally through the use of a rules-based framework for negotiations and dispute settlement. They had helped

in the political consolidation and the economic unification, financial and development and the spread of international legal norms. This also meant a wider involvement of sovereign states and the shift in a more global governance system of a predominantly western framework to a more universal institutional system. (Bukhari, Khan, et al., 2024)

But the current global context is quite different to the geopolitical setting in which they were established. Multilateral decision-making has been made more difficult by the rise of China as a great economic and strategic power, the rise of Russian challenge to the system maintained by western countries, the increase of nationalism and the renewal of the rivalry among great powers. International bodies are increasingly making their way in a context where uncertainty rules, with strategic mistrust on both sides, varying conceptions of political-economic alternatives, questionable alliances, and the questioning of rules of international order. Others argue that these conditions speak of the failure of the institutions, whilst some regard them as a sign of adjustment to an increasingly multipolar system. (Roumate, 2026)

This is illustrated by a number of developments. Since 2019, the WTO Appellate Body has been paralyzed, undermining the implementation of multilateral trade law. In recent years, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meetings have yet to formulate consolidated action on a number of international crises, emanating from schisms among the permanent members. Likewise, limitations around funding, representation, enforcement and political cooperation have been seen in global climate change, public-health emergency and humanitarian responses. Such challenges have prompted a fundamental discussion on the role that international institutions can play in managing an ever more complicated world. (Hussain et al., 2026)

This study asks not only critically whether or not the international institutions are going through genuine decline, but also what kind of institutional change is taking place. It assesses their effectiveness, legitimacy, representativeness and adaptability in the context of an era of renewed great power rivalry. Special focus is on the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Health Organisation. What is central is that these institutions are not underdetermined, but rather they are in a relative decline they are indispensable, but have become harder to employ because of geopolitical competition and antiquated governance structures.

Literature Review

Liberal institutionalist scholarship suggests that international organizations help to encourage cooperation because they lower uncertainty, offer information, help set rules that can be predicted to follow, and help to reduce the costs of negotiation. Because institutions create repeated interactions and monitoring of compliance, they may allow states to gain from engaging in common interests, even in an anarchic international system. In this view, there is still a need for global institutions, as they can be used to manage collective-action problems with that are hard to manage by unilateral policy action. (Khan et al., 2024)

But liberal institutionalists also argue the institutions are not always irrelevant, just because they are weak. International organisations can even if enforcement is restricted, influence the development of expectations, state action, and offer forums for negotiation. In part, their ongoing significance is most apparent in spheres like global health, trade coordination, humanitarian relief and development assistance, where no one state has the capacity or legitimacy in itself to do so on behalf of the international community. Other scholars, the realists, read the passage more skeptically. They feel that international bodies tend to mirror the balance of power among states and that they will only operate effectively if powerful governments collaborate with them. While institutions can help to facilitate cooperation, they cannot resolve underlying disagreements on matters related to national security,

geopolitical power or relative gains. In the case of conflict of major-power interests, procedural rules and legal obligations may be inadequate to induce collective action. (Abbaszada & Liu, 2026)

In today's world, the likely explanation for the institutional impasse is the shift in the distribution of power. The United States wants to maintain institutions that will help maintain its leadership and China wants its voice heard, and Russia doesn't like institutions that it feels are itching to hand the United States a chance to wield its authority. The upshot of this rivalry is that international organisations turn into an arena of strategic competition, and not neutral systems of governance. International organizations have the power to impose on other actors not only on the basis of material force, but also through norms, common thoughts and legitimacy, which are the foci of constructive scholarship. Organizations define the extent to which it is acceptable to behave in a particular manner, helps build political identities, and helps establish standards to which state actions are compared. They seek to apply their authority therefore, in part, based upon whether the members see their procedures and decisions as legitimate. (Olsson & Tryggstad, 2026)

When the representative, selection or consistency of institutions are not seen to be legitimate, the counter legitimacy of the institution is undermined. When the mighty seem to be outside the rules lawfully afforded to the weaker, confidence in multilateral governance is undermined. Inclusive mechanisms, transparency and fair enforcement, however, can boost institutional authority even with underdeveloped formal enforcement power. Recent literature focuses on the relative decrease and atomisation of international institutions. Where universal institutions fail to achieve agreement, states are increasingly relying on arrangements with other regional bodies, bilateral making arrangements, informal coalitions, and arrangements by specific issue. These alternative institutions are not always substitutes for international institutions, but they do diminish their centrality and while they do herald the outline of a more diffused governance sphere. (Zinchenko et al., 2026)

Fragmentation can be advantageous because it enables small groups of states to cooperate more quickly. It can, however, lead to overlapping rules, unequal participation, differential standards and accountability issues. So the spread of alternative forms of governance also amounts to adaptation and possible to a challenge to institutional coherence. The diffusion of global power has been a major theme in current scholarship. Western domination has created institutions that are now hard to fit into the economic and political rises of China, India, Brazil and other emerging powers. Decisions have not necessarily been made at the same pace as the global distribution of capabilities, for example in terms of representation within decision-making bodies, voting systems and leadership. (Schäfferle & Schmid, 2026)

This inequity plays a part in affecting legitimacy issues. Emerging powers seek to be offered more influence, while established States may be reluctant to make changes that would make fewer demands on their institutional powers. The tension that this creates leads to gridlock and helps to motivate discontented nations to establish alternative organizations or partnerships. The World Trade Organization research highlights the effects of disagreement among the bigger powers on enforcement by institutions. Historically, the WTO was considered to have one of the most powerful legal systems in global governance, namely its dispute settlement body. But it has been paralysed by the lack of activity of its Appellate Body since December 2019, which means it has not been capable of delivering final and binding rulings in trade disputes. (Ustiashvili, 2025)

The crisis is also a symptom of more complicated issues of consensus-driven decision making, industrial subsidies, technology restrictions, national-security exceptions, and divergent models of economic growth and development. Governments are more willing to use measures such as tariffs, sanctions, export control and investment restrictions which are imposed outside multilateral mechanisms, as trade relations are becoming increasingly securitized. Tensions between institutional authority and great-power privilege have been emphasized in literature on the UN Security Council. Veto system was intended to secure the involvement of the dominant powers into the post war world

but was also used to block action when they did not serve their strategic interests when deemed necessary by the members. As a result, successive vetoes in major conflict situations have helped to support perceptions of paralysis and a waning level of legitimacy. In spite of these constraints, the United Nations is still serving critical roles in peacekeeping, humanitarian coordination, protection of refugees, development, and in the creation of international norms. Its troubles are thus inherently a manifestation of an institutional imbalance and a political disagreement, not organizational failure. (Buheji, 2026)

Current academic opinion is that, while the international institutions are still relevant, they are being undercut by issues of representation, enforcement, legitimacy and geopolitical fragmentation. But the performance of institutions is highly policy-specific. Security institutions are paralyzed by veto players, trade institutions are faced with enforcement problems, financial institutions have representation problems, health and climate institutions have issues with implementation and political acceptance. This complexity is circumvented by the present research which compares several major institutions rather than attempting to evaluate the decline in terms of a single institution. It allows to differentiate between absolute institutional weakening and a weakening in terms of authority, centrality and effectiveness. This separation offers a more fair framework for judging the evolving state of global governance. Bukhari's *Nuclear Iran: Deterrence, Power Shifts and the Future of the Middle East* makes an appropriate contribution to debates on the effectiveness of the institutions of the Middle East. The Iranian nuclear issue also offers a telling prism for the ability of International Institutions to handle proliferation risks, regional deterrence, sanctions and great power disagreements. International institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, International Atomic Energy Agency and multilateral diplomatic fora still have a role to play in verification, negotiation, and in establishing a legitimate rules regime. The case, however, also opens up the fact that one of the most critical factors of institutional effectiveness would be the ongoing engagement of the main powers of the world as well as the cooperation of states regarding compliance with negotiated arrangements. Strategic decisions can cut down on the credibility of institutions and hinder permanent settlements as competing strategic interests, selective enforcement, and shifting regional balances come into play. Bukhari's analysis thus lends weight to the view that international institutions are not losing their relevance; rather, they gain or lose it depending on the existence of geopolitical consensus, their institutional neutrality and their ability to adjust to new security developments. (Bukhari, 2026)

Research Methodology

This work is qualitative and uses three approaches: descriptive, comparative and critical analysis. It utilizes secondary sources from research articles, institutional documents, policy reports, strategic assessment and scholarly analysis about global governance. Four complementary methods are used in the research. Through historical analysis, the major international institutions from post-Second World War to the present are traced from their establishment to their transformation. Second, comparative analysis reviews institutional performance in the areas of security, trade and finance, health and climate governance. Thirdly, a case-study analysis is analysed for the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World bank (WB) as well as the World Health Organization (WHO). Fourth, critical analysis analyzes the influence of geopolitical competition, representation conflicts, institutional inflexibility, and other forms of governance on the effectiveness of institutions. The study will mainly focus on developments since the post-Cold War era, with special attention given to the further intensification of geopolitical competition particularly after 2010. Common patterns of institutional gridlock, legitimacy conflicts, governance fragmentation and strategic adaptations are identified through thematic analysis.

Discussion

- **The Resurgence of Great-Power Rivalry.** The United States rivalry with China and Russia rising in the modern international system. While the U.S. wants to maintain its dominant position in the existing international order, China is pushing for more clout in the rules and decision-making criteria of such institutions, and Russia is challenging some of the west's assumed political and security supremacy. The various competing goals make cooperation in the areas of trade, conflict management, technology, finance and international law challenging (Noor & Ali, 2026). International organizations are, therefore, increasingly being viewed as playing fields of conflict and not just cooperative forums. The institutional processes, appointments, voting coalitions, funding decisions and diplomatic influence are among the means through which the major powers advance competing strategic narratives. This does not destroy institutional cooperation, but it does makes consensus more difficult and there is incentive for selective participation (Latif, 2026). Among the various dimensions, U.S.–China rivalry is especially impactful due to the fact that it can be found in trade, technology, military security, development finance, supply chains, and institutional leadership. Multilateral negotiations have been impacted by concerns about digital infrastructure, semiconductor restrictions, industrial policy and competing visions of development. Consequently, governance frameworks put in place to further economic integration are now functioning in a context of strategic disconnection and geo-political mistrust. (Bukhari, Malik, et al., 2024)
- **The United Nations and Security Governance.** The UN is the most comprehensive institution in the international system with 193 member states and is responsible for peace and security, humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, international law and human rights. It enjoys true political legitimacy through its universal membership which can't be reproduced at the regional or informal level (Tran, 2026). But the Security Council is still limited by veto power of its five permanent members. Syria, Ukraine, and Palestine often have been the source of conflicts that have hindered collective responses to crises abroad. Collective action is especially challenging when a permanent member or its strategic partner is embroiled in dispute. This detracts from the credibility of the Council and helps to perpetuate the idea that enforcement is subjective (Yasmin et al., 2024). The composition of the Council mirrors power relations in 1945 and not necessarily in the present day. India, Brazil, Germany, Japan and some African countries have made repeated calls for increased representation. Permanent seats for Africa and Latin America are notably absent and it is hard to see how this can tally with universal legitimacy (Gelot & Khadka, 2026). In this institutional imbalance, the United Nations are indispensable. It facilitates peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, refugee assistance, development activities, election assistance and norm building. Thus, it should be recognized that its shortcomings are ailments of political limitation and structural reorganization, and not a sign that its importance is waning.
- **The WTO and the Crisis of Economic Governance.** World Trade Organization is one of the most obvious examples of weakening because of its institutional process. It was created in 1995 and came to have a decisive role in the administration of international trade and supplies a legal system to settle disputes among states. The Appellate Body was an integral part of the WTO enforcement system but was rendered practically useless in December 2019 due to conflicts over appointments of judges, jurisdiction and interpretation of trade laws. The lack of an effective appeals process enables legal decisions to be challenged into a legal vacuum. This has significantly undermined belief in multilateral trade enforcement (Kilian, 2026). The WTO also has challenges stemming from its 'consensus-based' decision making. It has a wide membership of developed, emerging, least developed countries as well as those countries with overlapping economic governance models. Agreement on key and sensitive areas, such as agricultural subsidies, industrial policy, digital trade, state owned enterprises and development exemptions has thus become more difficult (Fu et al., 2026). Further, protectionism and economic nationalism, as a

result of growing voices, negatively affects the multilateral trading system. Tariffs, export controls, sanctions, industrial subsidy, and national-security restrictions are being increasingly employed by states to shield strategic industries. Such steps signal the tight coupling of trade policy with the geopolitical and technological competition.

- **International Financial Institutions and Legitimacy.** The IMF and World Bank are still playing significant roles in Financial Stabilization, Policy Advices, Poverty Alleviation & Infrastructure Development and Emergency Financing. Because of their technological knowledge, money, and international network, they are key players in times of economic crisis (Ustiaşvili, 2025). However, there has been increasing criticism of the way they govern. Emerging economies say that voting power, leadership and policy influence are heavily skewed toward the advanced economies of the West. These fears have been heightened by the growing economic influence of emerging states. With its increased financial influence, China has helped build alternative institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. While these organizations do not inherently supplant the Bretton Woods system, they do offer other financing options and convey that they are not happy with the systems in place. They have arisen as part of a wider financial governance diversification that has taken place globally. The fact that the role of the IMF and the World Bank is still very relevant indicates that the institutional role is still very important. But their legitimacy will depend on how representation, conditionality, transparency, and structures for decision-making are altered to address the changes in the economy (Jamali & Hussain, 2026).
- **Global Health Governance After COVID-19.** COVID-19 underscored the need and shortcomings of a global health governance. The World Health Organization played a key role in information sharing, providing technical advice, networking of experts and assisting the international public-health response. Meanwhile, there were political differences regarding the source of the virus, information sharing, travel bans, and vaccine rollout, which undermined collaboration. Vaccine nationalism and inequity have exposed the limits of solidarity in a global emergency. The pandemic underscored that technology has a limited role to play in effective governance. States are the key for the information, finance, compliance and implementation of international health bodies. Thus, better preparedness mechanisms need not only organizational changes, but also a continued political cooperation.
- **Climate Governance and Institutional Fragmentation.** Climate change is a very demanding challenge for international institutions since it demands long-term cooperation, domestic implementation, financial transfers among States with different capacities, technological adjustment and burden-sharing. The Paris Agreement illustrates how a more comprehensive cooperation on the international level is still possible, but it will be implemented in a way that is uneven and not prescribed on the national level. States often have grand objectives, but will not accept strategies that have high economic and/or political costs. The governance of climate change is also becoming more disjointed. Climate action is a task, in which the national governments, international organisations, regional institutions, corporations, cities, scientific communities and civil-society groups are all involved. This diversity opens up room for experimentation, yet may compromise for accountability and coordination. Climate governance is tainted by great-power rivalry as well. Just as the U.S. and China have a stake in preventing catastrophic environmental effects, their broader strategic conflict has implications for talks about technology, money, trade, and industrial policy. Cooperation around climate change is thus subject to a decline in overall political relations.
- **Alternative and Regional Governance Arrangements.** One of the more obvious institutional adaptations is the emergence of regionally and/or issue oriented forms of arrangements. As more and more states become interested in responsible technology, they are forming smaller coalitions where universal consensus is not found. These approaches have the

potential of being very quick to address particular challenges and to enable policy coordination among like-minded governments. But, other governance could also question international regulations and generate unequal partition. Larger states have the ability to overwhelm smaller coalitions, and smaller states could be cut out of decisions affecting their interests. The rise of new institutions thus has two prongs. That all enhances flexibility and innovation and diminishes the centrality of the universal organizations. Global governance is shifting towards a more polycentric one, where authority is not centralised in one multilateral negotiating forum, but is spread across various institutions, where the one institution overshadows and interferes with the other.

- **Are International Institutions Actually Declining?** There is some evidence that suggests a nuanced conclusion. International institutions are not going out of business and they are not redundant. They still play vital roles in security, trade and finance, health, development, and humanitarian governance. Nevertheless, they are relatively declining in a number of ways. Decision-making has become more problematic, law enforcement has been undermined, legitimacy has been challenged, and states tend to resort to one-sided or regional strategies. Traditional institutions have also seen their exclusivity cut down by the presence of alternative ones and/or informal coalitions. So, the institutional decline is variable from one sector to another. With Security Council political deadlock, WTO enforcement deadlock, representation issues in financial institutions and compliance issues in health and climate sectors everyone is seeking to identify ways to “vitalize” the institutions. No, the modern period would be better labeled as institutional change in a more fractious and challenged governance model.

Results and Findings

The results reveal that international institutions continue to play an important role in global governance, but their ability to generate timely, binding, and politically acceptable examples of decision-making have decreased. United Nations, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Health Organization and others are still playing a role in negotiations, sharing information, humanitarian aid, financial stabilization, technical cooperation and development of rules. But their effectiveness becomes very stingy when they come into contact with major power interests. This makes clear that international institutions are still quite relevant but at the same time do not have a complete autonomy from the political preferences of the dominant states.

But, the main source of institutional gridlock has been the rise of great-power competition, especially between the United States, China, and Russia. Bigger and greater influence is now occurring in decision-making in security, trade, technology, development finance and international law, as the result of strategic disagreement. Even institutions aimed at creating impartial forums for collaboration often end up being arenas of geopolitical competition. The paralysis of the WTO Appellate Body shows how disagreement among some key countries can affect the functioning of an enforcement mechanism, and the repeated vetoes by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council in the United Nations venue show how any peace-promoting body can be paralysed during situations of major international conflict. As demonstrated in these cases, the institutional power is extremely reliant on political backing from dominant powers.

Additionally, the study reveals that a lot of the institutional arrangements that were created in the aftermath of the Second World War are obsolete today and don't necessarily correspond to today's lines of economic, demographic and political power distribution. The lack of representation in the Security Council, IMF, World Bank, etc. has led to increasing discontent among emerging and developing countries. China, India, Brazil and other emerging powers seek more to be consulted and involved in decision-making and agenda setting processes. Such requirements do not only signal material changes—but also some general grapples with the legitimacy of governance systems left to them from past geopolitical cycles, selective rule enforcement practices and Western dominance.

An important finding is the growing spread and development of other forms of governance arrangements that are both alternative and complementary. As parties can no longer reach consensus, other less formal networks of regional organizations, development banks, informal coalitions, bilateral partnerships, and issue-specific frameworks are beginning to complement the traditional institutions. These mechanisms allow for greater flexibility and can generate more speedy reactions to distinct difficulties. However, their multiplication also accounts for fragmentation, code duplication, and different levels of participation and compliance. The governance is thus becoming more polycentric and diverse on a global scale with some degree of fragmentation, yet less universally representational and more under lacking coherence.

Nevertheless, there are weaknesses that mean transnational challenges, continue to need multilateral co-operation. The impact of climate change, pandemics, humanitarian emergencies, financial instability, and technological risk as well as international trade deserves more than a unilateral policy approach. The evidence thus confirms that what is at stake is the relative, not the absolute, decline of international institutions. Their role and status, meaning, and centrality are becoming more and more questioned, but their expertise, their convening power and coordinating functions are more important than ever. Thus, institutional reform, procedural flexibility, increased representation and co-operation with regional arrangements are more likely to happen than institutional collapse.

Conclusion

A basic paradox of the current international system. Geopolitical friction has undermined collective governance institutions and economic, environmental, and technological and health interdependence has grown and consequently, the need to structure and support that interdependence. This study reveals that the international institutions are by no means a phenomenon that is vanishing. The UN, WTO, IMF, WB and WHO are still very important sources of coordination and expertise, as well as of legitimacy and continuity. Their scope of action is, however, more and more limited due to the competition of strategies, representations conflicts, directiveness of procedure, enforceability restrictions, and distrust of the political sphere. The geopolitical situation has changed, with the resurgence of Russia, the rise of China and the seemingly waning influence of the West. The institutions have been created to address previous power distributions and find themselves hard pressed to accommodate new actors and competing visions of international order. The current period should therefore not be read as a one of institutional collapse, but one of institutional change. International governance regimes, governance structures and practices are being challenged and checked. Its success or failure in strengthening international cooperation will depend on whether or not states are willing to do internal institutional reform and maintain the multilateralism principles.

Recommendations

- **Reform the United Nations Security Council.** The UN Security Council, to be updated for current demographic, economic and geopolitical realities. Its permanent membership is a reflection of the international hierarchy of 1945, and omits some powerful regions and states. The number of permanent/representative members for Africa, Asia, Latin America, and major emerging powers needs to be increased to boost the legitimacy of the institutions and the acceptance of Council decisions. Also includes a consideration of regional representation practices, regular review of membership, and more clearly defined criteria for choosing new members. A different, more representative Council would not be a magic bullet to suppress or eliminate political disagreement, but it would diminish perceptions of institutions inequality and provide more inclusive global security governance.
- **Restrict Veto Use in Humanitarian Emergencies.** Permanent members should formally or voluntarily commit to not using the veto power in the case of genocide, crimes against humanity,

mass displacement or severe humanitarian crisis. The veto should never be applied to protect allies or to prevent action in the interest of civilian populations when their immediate safety is involved. A mechanism may need to be developed for permanent members to be able to provide detailed legal and humanitarian justification for behalf of using the veto to the General Assembly. An alternative solution would be to halt the use of vetoes following reports of mass atrocities from independent international bodies. This would help maintain the constitutional nature of the Security Council and minimise paralysis in time of emergency humanitarian situations.

- **Restore the WTO Dispute-Settlement System.** A working, credible and timely dispute settlement mechanism should be foremost for the WTO members. The issue of judicial overreach, and the time taken to get the results, creates difficulties with how these results are interpreted as well as the question of appellate authority – issues that should be addressed in reform. A revised system might include even more hard-and-fast time limits, tighter parameters on judicial interpretations, greater transparency, and more even-handed rules for developed and developing economies. Temporary arbitration mechanisms provide some interim options, but are no substitute for an accepted enforcement structure. Restoring the ability to settle disputes is very important for a rules-based trading regime to function, without confidence of a settled and equitable resolution of disputes states aren't going to have much faith in them.
- **Increase Representation in International Financial Institutions.** IMF, World Bank institutions need to change the voting quota and selection of leaders, and the subsequent governance. In today's world, emerging and developing economies play an increasingly important role in the production, international trade and investment and population growth and continue to be underrepresented in the process of decision-making in institutions. Quota reform should therefore allow more influence to be given to the economically important, largely populated states, and safeguard the interests of lower populated and income countries. Leadership positions should be internationally competed for on merit and be transparent, not based on informal regional connections. Better financial institutions would help make them more legitimate, more borrower-friendly, and help lessen the incentives to set up competing forms of financial institutions.
- **Coordinate Traditional and Emerging Institutions.** Structured cooperation should be developed between traditional international institutions and the regional institutions and development banks, as well as emerging multilateral institutions. New resources and opportunities have emerged with the growth of organisations like regional development banks, and specialised coalitions, but so too has the potential for duplication, conflicting standards and sub-optimal policy responses. Cooperation may involve common funding, establishment of common data systems, coordinated emergency responses, common reporting requirements and regular institutional consultation. Instead of viewing new institutions as rivals, incumbent firms should think of them as possible allies. Improved coordination would bring global credibility and local knowledge and make institutions more effective in addressing complex and geographically diverse issues.
- **Promote Flexible Issue-Specific Coalitions.** International institutions should allow clear and open issue-specific coalitions to deal with pressing issues, if there is no universal consensus on them. Smaller state collections, willing states may act quicker on climate adaptation, pandemic preparedness, maritime security, cyber threats, or humanitarian relief. But these coalitions should not be exclusive, run by powerful countries alone and should remain in line with international law. Information about their membership requirements, mission, funding and decision-making processes should be transparent. They further ought to report what they do to larger multilateral bodies as well. If they are designed well, coalitions can help to break the institutional logjam, ensure accountability, and remain connected to universal governance institutions.
- **Strengthen Transparency and Accountability.** International institutions should make decisions and financing, appoint leaders, enact policies and evaluate performance at international

institutions more transparently. Organizations lose credibility when decisions seem to be politically made, behind the scenes, or based on decisions of the powerful members. Showing the voting records, how money is spent, how it's evaluated and how key policies are decided on. Independent oversight bodies should periodically review to determine the effectiveness of program objectives. Further, consultation with affected communities needs to happen prior to big interventions or financial conditionals. Enhanced transparency and accountability would lessen the perception of bias, highlight inefficiency, deter the political use of multilateral governance, and increase public confidence in multilateral governance.

- **Protect Cooperation from Great-Power Rivalry.** To keep less-substantive cooperation areas functioning despite broad geopolitical divisions, major powers should add "protected zones" of cooperation. Strategic competition should not get in the way of the joint action needed to address climate change, the next pandemic, nuclear security, financial crises, humanitarian crises and transnational crime. Establishment of permanent technical working groups and crisis-communication mechanisms in these areas should be set up between the United States, China, Russia and other important countries. Political conflicts could be short-circuited by entrusting cooperation to science organizations, technical institutions, and expert groups. Clearly distinguishing between necessary cooperation and more general rivalry would not remove competition but minimize the chances that political conflict will hinder responses to common issues impacting all societies.
- **Expand Participation of Non-State Actors.** There needs to be a greater and more meaningful role for civil society organizations, academic institutions, scientists, corporations, communities and professional organizations in global governance. Local actors frequently have extensive local knowledge, expertise, financial means and capacity for implementation that international organizations and national governments may not have. They should be more involved even than symbolically consulting in the design of policies, monitoring, data collection and programme evaluation. Measures to guard against the risks of corporate capture, unequal access, and undue influence from rich organizations should be established. International institutions would be better informed, more responsive, more innovative, more better connected with the people impacted by its decisions in this way.
- **Build Adaptive Governance Frameworks.** International institutions need to have governance structures to adapt to the new geopolitical, technological and environmental circumstances quickly. For a pandemic, cyber crisis, financial disruption, AI threat and unforeseen humanitarian emergency, traditional processes can be too slow. Incorporating emergency decision-making processes, emergency contingency funds, online coordination systems, regional implementation systems, and recurring institutional evaluation. It's important that rules are flexible enough to allow timely actions without being too lax to allow abuse. Forecasting, scenario planning, data analysis and early-warning systems should also be invested by the institutions. More flexibility would be beneficial for global organisations so that they can continue to be relevant without falling prey to the extremes of illegality, exclusiveness and multilateral collusion.

Final Observation

Institutional change and political will are required for global governance in the future. Changes in structure will not alone make the institutions work when the key players continue to put strategic competition above the collective responsibility. Meanwhile, one thing remains universal: climate change, pandemics, economic instability, humanitarian crises, nuclear risks and technological threats know no national borders. These issues cannot be handled alone by any state, doing as much as it can militarily or economically. International institutions thus need to be expanded, to be open, flexible and responsive, but to remain universal. A recognition of and a commitment to cooperation on the shared

areas also does not mandate an absence of strategic competition among major powers. The main issue is how to avoid negative dynamics that undermine the institutions facilitating common survival and stability. Perhaps one of the most significant political challenges of the twenty-first century will be to tailor global governance structures in a way more suited to the modern world of power, power struggles and cooperation, and at the same time preserve cooperation on a multilateral level.

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