

Between Minilateralism and Universalism

Wonhyuk Lim

Multilateralism in an Anarchic World

◆ Introduction

- In the absence of a world government, a group of sovereign states may agree to establish a set of rules for state conduct and enforce these rules to the extent that sovereign states can be bound by them.
- However, “a league of nations” or “a league of peace” is “in constant peril of breaking loose again...” (Immanuel Kant, 1795, Perpetual Peace)

◆ Key Challenges for Effective Global Governance

- To prevent war and promote peace and security in the absence of a world government, sovereign states must agree to move from a power-based order to a rules-based order centered on shared principles.
- However, the fact of the matter is some countries are more powerful than others, and although great powers may have a common interest in preventing mutually destructive war and pooling resources to provide global public goods, they want to have more clout than less powerful countries.
- An effective global governance system should provide incentives for great powers to join and enforce the system, making adjustments based on changes in global power distribution, but at the same time, it should include positive and normative measures to constrain their behavior based on shared principles.
- In this regard, it is important for major powers to recognize their common interest in addressing global collective-action problems and mutually respect each other's vital national interest, rather than set up competing blocs that exacerbate the risk of war.

Definition and Typology of Minilateralism

◆ Definition

- Minilateralism is a type of multilateralism that emphasizes the role of a small number of countries who exercise **a large amount of regional or global influence relative to their limited membership**.
- Maximum membership threshold of what percent? Minimum influence threshold of what percent?

◆ Typology of Minilateral Grouping

	Concert of Major Powers	Club of Like-Minded Countries	Coalition of the Willing
Basic premise	Major powers work together for peaceful coexistence despite their different values and interests.	Countries with similar values and interests work together to define their common position and expand their influence.	Countries form ad hoc coalitions to respond swiftly to issues of common concern.
Examples	Concert of Europe (“G5”) UNSC (P5, NP) G20?	NATO, OECD, G7 Warsaw Pact & COMECON NAM (G77), BRICS	US-led coalition for the Iraq War without UN authorization World War II Coalition
Advantages	Pragmatic platform for managing inter-state rivalry and taking collective action	Solid platform for shaping and spreading member states’ common position	Flexible platform for agile cooperation, especially in response to contingencies
Drawbacks	Gridlock or breakdown without mutual understanding and adjustment	Risk of setting up competing-bloc dynamics and exacerbating security dilemma	Lack of legitimacy and accountability

Historical Evolution and Current Status of Global Governance

	Power distribution	Minilateral grouping	Universal grouping	Voting rule	Positive and normative constraints on major powers
Post-WW I Design (1919)	Multipolarity	League of Nations Council (P5+, NP)	League of Nations Assembly	One-country one-vote, unanimous consent	Break-up of defeated powers and constraints on rearmament; Equality of sovereign states, peaceful resolution of disputes, but not much on international equality and economic & financial cooperation
Post-WW I Reality (1920-1939)	Multipolarity	U.S. out, Germany & Soviet Union in, Axis Powers out	Limited expansion of membership (Imperialism)	OCOV, unanimous consent	Lack of credible deterrence against military adventurism of revisionist powers
Post-WWII Design: FDR's One-World Vision (1944-1945)	Multi- or Bipolarity?	"4 Policemen" to UNSC (P5, NP) Constituency system (BW)	UNGA IMF & WB	OCOV, P5 veto, 2/3 supermajority Quota-based, supermajority	U.S. and Soviet forward military deployment and respective areas of responsibility; Universal human rights, economic & financial cooperation

Historical Evolution and Current Status of Global Governance

	Power distribution	Minilateral grouping	Universal grouping	Voting rule	Positive and normative constraints on major powers
Cold War (1946-1991)	Bipolarity+	UNSC Constituency system (BW) NATO, OECD, G7 Warsaw Pact & COMECON NAM (G77)	UNGA IMF & WB Decolonization	Same as planned	U.S. and Soviet forward military deployment (Suez Crisis vs. Vietnam/Afghanistan), MAD (Cuban missile crisis), mutual understanding of each other's vital interest while maintaining competing blocs
End of Cold War (1992-2007)	Unipolarity	UNSC NATO expansion, OECD, G7+ G20 Ministerial	UNGA IMF & WB WTO	Same Unanimous consent	U.S. forward military deployment, MAD, extended nuclear deterrence
Current status (2008-Present)	Unbalanced multipolarity	UNSC G20 Summit NATO, OECD, G7 BRICS	UNGA IMF & WB WTO	Same as before	U.S. forward military deployment, MAD, mutual understanding of each other's vital interest <u>without creating exclusive spheres?</u>

Balancing Minilateralism and Universalism for Effective Global Governance

◆ Global Power Distribution and Global Governance Architecture

- Unbalanced Multipolarity: Evolving Scenarios
 - Decoupling: reduced to bipolarity between the U.S.-led bloc and China/Russia-led bloc
 - Derisking: “small yard, high fence”
 - One world: common but differentiated responsibilities
- Minilateral Arrangement: Viable Options
 - UNSC P5 + re-electable non-permanent members without veto power
 - G20 for international security as well as economic cooperation (cf. 2022 G20 Bali Summit)
 - New constituency system with several predominant powers and regional organizations
- Voting Rule
 - Non-financial institutions: One-country, one-vote but no requirement for unanimous consent, with a supermajority or variant of double-majority rule on important matters
 - Financial institutions: voting power proportionate to economic power but upgraded every 5 to 10 years to reflect changing realities

◆ Positive and Normative Constraints

- U.S. forward military deployment at reduced level and cost, consistent with its stabilizing role and extended nuclear deterrence (abandonment vs. entrapment risk), based on the notion of common security
- Shared principles emerging as behavioral norms backed up by positive measures, with reputational and substantive consequences for violation

Appendix: Population and GDP Shares by Region

Western Europe and Western Offshoots (U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand) together accounted for 46.8% of global GDP with only 12.9% of global population in 1990, but by 2018, their combined GDP share had declined to 33.4% with a combined population share of 10.9%.

	1820		1870		1900		1950		1990		2018	
	Pop.	GDP	Pop.	GDP	Pop.	GDP	Pop.	GDP	Pop.	GDP	Pop.	GDP
NE Asia	*41.4	*38.4	32.3	21.3	29.7	14.6	26.7	8.9	25.8	19.2	21.7	#23.3
S. & SE Asia	24.7	#19.6	25.8	14.7	23.8	10.7	26.0	8.3	29.8	9.3	*32.5	16.3
MENA	3.4	2.9	3.9	3.1	3.6	2.1	4.1	2.9	5.9	4.6	*7.1	#8.7
W. Europe	12.8	25.2	14.7	*32.4	*15.1	32.2	12.0	26.1	7.2	#22.1	5.6	14.7
E. Europe	8.8	6.1	11.2	11.7	*12.6	*15.4	10.6	12.9	7.8	9.8	5.4	#7.4
W. Offshoots	1.1	2.3	3.6	11.3	5.6	19.6	*7.0	#31.0	5.7	24.7	5.3	18.7
Latin America	1.9	1.6	3.0	2.6	4.0	3.1	6.3	#7.0	8.2	8.1	*8.3	7.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	5.8	#4.0	5.5	2.9	5.0	2.1	7.2	2.9	9.7	2.1	*14.0	3.3
Total Level	1.0b	\$1.2t	1.3b	\$1.9t	1.5b	\$3.4t	2.5b	\$8.4t	5.2b	\$43.0t	7.5b	\$113.6t

Note: GDP is adjusted for purchasing power parity at 2011 prices. An asterisk (*) denotes the peak population or GDP share value for the region. A sharp (#) denotes the peak GDP-to-population ratio for the region during the 1820-2018 period.

Source: Author’s calculation based on Maddison Project Database (2020)