



Imperative of Resurrecting Multilateralism

As the international community struggles to manage the Covid-19 pandemic, the health of human beings, economies and the planet will remain facing severe challenges unless multilateralism is resurrected. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi **highlighted** this urgency by questioning the role of the United Nations in the fight against Covid-19 during his address to the UN General Assembly on 26th September, 2020. Similarly in a meeting among their foreign ministers on 23rd September, 2020, Brazil, Germany, India and Japan (known as G4) have committed to push for reforms of the UN Security Council, decisively.

There is also a larger call to incorporate newer approaches like polyilateralism for the rejuvenation of a multilateral world order. The current crisis induced by the Covid-19 pandemic should be used as an opportunity to resurrect multilateralism.

Why is multilateralism in peril?

Multilateralism has never seemed more in a peril than now. It is experiencing its lowest point in the recent decades. Major multilateral institutions are struggling hard to meet their agenda.

There is a visible anachronistic nature of key multilateral organisations. The World Health Organisation (WHO) failed to make necessary warnings in timely manner during the early days of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO), which ensures a rules-based multilateral trading system, is also becoming futile.

A number of factors added to the decline of multilateralism and the Covid-19 pandemic along with the economic factors acted as catalysts. The U.S, which played a larger role in the creation of many multilateral institutions in the post war period, has retracted itself through a number of uncalled moves under the Trump administration.



The **U.S. withdrawal from WHO** and fund cutting was untimely and against the spirit of multilateralism. The U.S. also paralysed the WTO by **blocking the appointment of members** to its Appellate Body. Its unilateral **withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement** gave a blow to the international

coordinated efforts to mitigate climate change.

On the other hand, China has done everything that is **against trust** between nations, by **hiding** the seriousness of the pandemic, while making extra-territorial assertions in the Indo-Pacific and in the Himalayas. China rebuffed the attempts of the

WHO to exercise its oversight role in Wuhan, the epicentre of the pandemic, during its initial stage.

At the same time, all other major powers are becoming more and more nationalistic which is evident from their shift of priorities more towards domestic issues than international cooperation. The result is a further weakening of a multilateral world order.

Resurrection of multilateralism

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us that adhering to the principles and norms of a multilateral system is the only way forward for the world to address the issues of the deadly pathogen and destructive climatic change. Strong and impartial international institutions should be there to lead the world in the crisis.

The pandemic, which doesn't need any visas, unearthed the virtues as well as pitfalls of interconnectedness and interdependence of a globalised world. It is time for countries to cooperate to face the wider socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic such as disrupted global supply chains, poverty, unemployment and economic slowdown.

Therefore, while reforming and revitalising multilateralism, every country should be given equal voice and interests of all should be taken into consideration. Trust-gaining of all countries is important for the success and long-hauling of multilateralism. It is important to foster local level cooperation for larger global goals. Regional institutions can build momentum at the local level and help provide a trusted platform for international cooperation for global causes.

Experimenting with polyilateralism

Newer approaches have to be incorporated to resurrect multilateralism. [Polyilateralism](#) is one such approach that can be explored to resurrect multilateralism. Actors such as businesses, non-governmental organisations, think-tanks, academic institutions and mega cities have to be included and provided with an opportunity to exercise their influence and power as part of the cause.

Values that polyilateralism can bring for global peace, security, stability and prosperity has to be understood by people. Mobilisation at the local level is required to tackle the problems, which currently does not exist.

Role of India and other middle powers

The current crisis can be used as a significant opportunity for India to come to the forefront of reviving multilateralism. India, having a long tradition of international activism and promotion of a rules-based global order, has the potential to be a global interlocutor. It has recently taken a successful lead in promoting various multilateral initiatives such as the

[International Solar Alliance](#) and the Global Coalition for Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure.

With a foreign policy priority of strategic autonomy that underpins a multi-polar world order, India is well positioned to work with all major and middle powers among others in reviving multilateralism. It can help develop consensus to address major global challenges.

For that to happen, [India should be given an expanded role](#) in the United Nations as Prime Minister Modi said at the recently concluded UN General Assembly. The G4 grouping comprising India, Brazil, Germany and Japan should be given more decision-making power in the UN by making them permanent members of Security Council.

The Covid-19 pandemic should be used as an opportunity to build an active global cooperation movement. Joint development and distribution of a vaccine for the pandemic at a global level can be a significant step in this direction.

As the largest manufacturer of vaccines in the world, India's vaccine production and delivery capacity can be used to help the international community in its fight against the pandemic.

In short, international collaboration is the solution to all global problems such as pandemics, climate change, poverty, armed conflicts and terrorism, among others. Therefore, nations should join hands to rejuvenate multilateralism with reforms for the greater global good. The G4 and the G20 countries must play a greater role in stirring that through shaping a stronger leadership for multilateral institutions.

The [declaration](#) of the need to have a global coordinated action, solidarity and multilateral cooperation in the [recently concluded G-20 summit](#) is a positive sign which shows that the world is realising the importance of multilateralism.

The newly elected U.S. President Joe Biden's [promise of rejoining the Paris agreement](#) and reversing the U.S's moving out of the WHO, indicates that the U.S is returning to its global commitments and the climate for multilateralism is changing.

Polyilateralism and multi-stakeholder approach along with adequate reforms at the UN in general and in its Security Council in particular can take us towards the path of resurrecting multilateralism.

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