

The Alleged Failure of Multilateralism in Syria: Beyond a Realist Trap

Written by Thomas Dayer

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2017/05/11/the-alleged-failure-of-multilateralism-in-syria-beyond-a-realist-trap/>

THOMAS DAYER, MAY 11 2017

At the dusk of the Cold War, when Francis Fukuyama thought humanity possibly witnessed 'the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government' in a famous article[1], the concept of multilateralism began attracting careful attention[2]. At that time, bipolarity was seen as a frame of the past, and the world was turning to a hegemonic period, dominated by the United States. The speed of globalisation[3], thus an increase of interdependence between countries, expelled the certainties of a balance of power between East and West. The main danger to international and 'homeland security'[4] became flagless. The 'immeasurable Islamic peril' soon succeeded to a 'measurable communist threat'.[5]

Whereas the end of the Cold War had put an end to the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, the terrorist menace increased.[6] With 'nine eleven', a crux in history[7], the 'war on terrorism' began. In 2003, George W. Bush launched a unilateral military intervention in Iraq. Since then the jihadist threat has expanded over Europe.[8] States have made of the fight against it their top priority. Attacks enjoy large media coverage and stimulate emotions.

However, the narratives of heads of states and high officials indicate that they again consider another major threat, namely a conflict between nuclear powers. East and West have anew been hostile in the past years, as have shown the Ukrainian crisis, the Syrian civil war, and the South China Sea frictions.[9] When Barack Obama sent a budget request of 582 billion to the Congress in order to fund the Department of Defense in 2017, it mentioned 'Russian aggression, terrorism by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and others, and China's island building and claims of sovereignty in international waters'.[10] At a NATO summit in July 2016, the United States announced the deployment of 1'000 extra troops to Poland.[11] Some days later, British Prime Minister Theresa May publicly estimated that the threat of a nuclear attack had increased[12], and the House of Commons approved the renewal of UK's Trident nuclear weapons system.

The year 2016 was also the vintage of the election of Donald J. Trump as the President of the United States, Brexit, and the rise of nationalist parties in Europe. All events are direct challenges to multilateralism and global governance. According to many scholars, realism and power politics are back on track: 'Whether it is Russian forces seizing Crimea, China making aggressive claims in its coastal waters, Japan responding with an increasingly assertive strategy of its own, or Iran trying to use its alliances with Syria and Hezbollah to dominate the Middle East, old-fashioned power plays are back in international relations.'[13]

The game board has changed. The hegemony of the United States has gone to an end. The rise of China, along with other emerging economies with an extensive potential and a clear determination to raise their voices in the international community, namely the 'BRICS'[14], has redesigned the world order, and the distribution of power. If the liberal system is firmly rooted around the planet, disputes arise around the weighing of values, which have developed over decades, sometimes centuries. Some consider global governance in an 'existential crisis', 'fragmented, unrepresentative and ineffective, increasingly fragile and unable to address the global challenges of the twenty-first century'.[15]

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As the world order has turned towards a system of multilateral governance without any hegemonic power, and in an era marked by a new rivalry between superpowers, is multilateralism, and specifically multilateral security, trapped by realism and power politics? In order to bring elements of response, definitions of multilateralism will allow us to link the concept to the main theories. The point 4 will highlight how multilateralism and sovereignty, albeit deemed opposite, have always been intimately linked. Finally, the Syrian civil war will be considered as a short case study.

Multilateralism: a debated concept

By opposition to 'bilateral diplomacy', which implies diplomacy conducted between two states, 'multilateral diplomacy', in purely quantitative terms, represents diplomacy between three or more states. Some early illustrations of the practice can be traced back to the Peace of Westphalia, the Congress of Vienna, the League of Nations, or the Bretton Woods agreement. The concept of multilateralism is a debated, ambiguous one[16], as it can embody varied meanings in a multiplicity of fields. James A. Caporaso questions if multilateralism is a means or an end.[17] It could also be legitimate to ask if the concept is essentially positive or normative. Some consider multilateralism as merely instrumental. Others deem it functional.

In the Cold War period, the number of multilateral intergovernmental organizations increased sharply, from under 100 to more than 600.[18] However, multilateralism has especially gained the attention of scholars from 1990 on. Robert O. Keohane defined multilateralism as 'the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institution'.[19] John G. Ruggie added that three important features characterized this organizing principle: indivisibility, non-discrimination, and diffuse reciprocity.[20]

Although they are not similar concepts, multilateralism and global governance are often associated. Global governance is another concept with no consensus on its definition. It is usually understood as 'sets of norms and rules that facilitate the coordination and cooperation of social actors'.[21] A 'world government' being fictional, global governance is supposed to regulate the relations among states in a decentralized form, notably through multilateral institutions. According to John G. Ikenberry, 'the term global governance came into widespread usage because it provided a language to describe the aggregation of institutional tools and mechanisms that states were creating to manage their increasingly complex interdependence'.[22]

In recent times, archetypes of multilateral institutions have been affected by severe crisis. The European Union has not been able to share the burden, let alone to find common grounds of understanding, on the 2015-2016 refugee crisis.[23] Since 2011, the United Nations has been paralyzed in addressing the Syrian civil war.[24] However, on some other specific issues, alliances of nations took profit of multilateralism, for instance the P5 + 1 on the nuclear deal with Iran.

All in all, multilateralism is about cooperation. But what is cooperation, and which forms of cooperation can be deemed multilateralism? I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval define cooperation as 'a situation where parties agree to work together to produce new gains for each of the participants unavailable to them by unilateral action, at some cost'.[25] The gains shall not be understood as merely 'material'.[26] Balance of power deals can be symptoms of multilateralism. To be recognized as such, it is not compulsory that they be sustained by formal international organizations.[27] Such deals can exist in a variety of ways, which John G. Ruggie names 'international orders, international regimes, and international organizations'.[28] However, they shall last for a certain duration and have deep roots.

Hence cooperation can be specific or general. Nevertheless, a short-term cooperation shall not be called multilateralism, which needs stronger cooperation on a long-term perspective. Thus all partners shall have a vision entailing the wish to sustain and enhance their interactions.

Multilateralism and IR theories

Multilateralism and realism

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Realist thinkers^[29] hold Westphalian sovereign states to be the primary units in a world order imprinted by anarchy. States are considered rational actors, which seek to warrant their own survival and enhance their welfare, aiming to improve their positions versus other units in a zero sum game.^[30] They are 'self-interested entities', therefore 'in competitive or conflictual relation with other states'.^[31] In order to achieve their objectives, states rely on certain military capabilities, which are intrinsic sources of fear and danger for others, insofar as a veil of uncertainty hides each state's plans. Therefore power politics and balance of power appear fundamental.^[32] Conflicts stem from the security dilemma, and the perception of threats.^[33]

Realists estimate that national interest and survival are the most important concerns of states. Prominent realist thinker Thomas Hobbes already asserted that states enjoyed freedom to act in their best self-interest, as no higher authority dominated them.^[34] According to an important figure of neoclassical realism, Hans Morgenthau, the state being the central actor, 'international organizations and other non-governmental formations, whether commercial enterprises or co-coordinated networks of individuals of like mind, are either essentially reflective of the interests of established sovereign states, and thus would be covered under the general rubric of his classical realism, or are simply not relevant in terms of his paradigm'.^[35]

The idea of sovereignty is strong, and overshadows any international cooperation. John Mearsheimer illustrates the position of neorealism towards multilateralism as applied through international institutions by underlining that those are 'basically a reflection of the distribution of power in the world'.^[36] Although they constitute fora where multiple individual states can raise their voices, they do not influence the behaviours of states. Merely short-term interests could incite such links.

Following neorealism, cooperation amidst countries is not inconceivable. However, it is difficult to achieve, even more difficult to sustain, and it merely remains an instrument to pursue individual states' policies. According to Robert W. Cox, 'in the realist perspective, there is room for a considerable proliferation of international institutions, but little room for any cumulative acquisition of authority by these institutions'.^[37] The United Nations, for instance, are not more than 'a collection of sovereign states that occasionally delegate collective authority to that body'.^[38] Realists concentrate on relative power, and are convinced that a party will leave a groupe as soon as it will be able to find a more attractive benefit elsewhere. Hence they do not pretend that cooperation is impossible, but that it can occur only temporarily, if gains are certain. As already seen, this shall not be called 'multilateralism' in its purest sense.

All things considered, realists do not attribute any potential to multilateralism, which they deem marginal and inefficient in terms of costs, results and purpose.

Multilateralism and liberalism

At odds with realism, liberalism values multilateralism. As Zartman and Touval reminds us, some scholars 'question the view that interstate relations are characterized by a Hobbesian 'state of nature' and are inherently conflictual'.^[39] Grotius, Montesquieu and Adam Smith, for instance, believed in an innate sociability, and were convinced that trade could enhance mutual regulation and gains. For Grotius, the man was an animal 'of a superior kind'.^[40] Although he admitted that states are the 'sole guardians' of the law of nations, he had 'envisaged the possibility of an international community responsible for enforcing agreements'.^[41] An important ambassador of liberalism, Woodrow Wilson^[42] founded the League of Nations, anticipating to transform the 'jungle' of the international relations into a 'zoo'.^[43] Liberals believe in cooperation since, in the future, it will benefit to states in a non-zero sum game.^[44] According to neoliberal institutionalists, sovereign states are unified and interdependent albeit autonomous in an anarchic world. They endorse a long-term view, and think that institutions have a strong power to enhance stability.

While realists make their first concern of security and military resources, liberals favour market and economic resources. To prevent cheating, nothing is better than information sharing, which explains the creation of multilateral institutions to uphold transparency. In 1993, Robert O. Keohane thought that 'a continuous pattern of institutionalized cooperation in the next decade' would greatly help 'avoiding military conflict in Europe', and even shape the destiny of the continent.^[45] John G. Ruggie also estimated that multilateral norms and institutions were able to manage

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regional and global changes, and contributed to stabilize the consequences of the Soviet Union collapsing.[46]

All things considered, according to liberals, institutions are not instrumental, but functional, and they have a central purpose as they can lock states in predictable behaviours with common procedures, facilitate the exchange of information, enhance trust and transparency, thus discourage spoilers, while being cost efficient as they lower transaction expenditures.

Multilateralism and constructivism

Since the end of the Cold War, constructivism has constantly tried to insufflate new values in the debate. As a starting point, constructivists deny the existence of an objective political reality outside of the meaning that humans give to it. Intersubjectivity and shared understanding, thus ideational factors, become central. People permanently build the world they live in, or, as the famous constructivist thinker Alexander Wendt stated it, 'anarchy is what states make of it'.[47] According to him, anarchy shall not necessarily be seen as a threat, but could be deemed an opportunity.

Multilateralism is also concerned about values, and historical experience. As Terrence Hopmann underlines, the asymmetry of power is nearly similar between the United States and Canada, and the United States and Iran. Therefore power is not sufficient to explain why the cooperation between the United States and Canada works better than the one with Iran. Common ideas, interests and identities can help, though.[48]

Some constructivists regret that the notion of power is reduced to material resources. As Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall state, 'much of the conversation triggered by the US invasion of Iraq, for instance, has focused on unipolarity, the ability of the United States to use its military and economic resources to overcome resistance by states and nonstate actors, and whether other states will balance against or bandwagon with US power'.[49] To their point of view, these features obviously have to be taken into account. Hence other schools of thought are mistaken in letting the parameter of power in the exclusive realm of realism, which is caught in a 'theoretical tunnel vision': 'Because these rivals to realism have juxtaposed their arguments to realism's emphasis on power, they have neglected to develop how power is conceptualized and operates within their theories.'[50]

Power shall be defined by conditions, causes, and time. Barnett and Duvall illustrates this through the development of a matrix based on how it is expressed (by interaction or constitution) and the specificity of its social relations (direct or diffuse). From there, they create a 'taxonomy of power', which can be compulsory (direct control over another), institutional (actors' control over socially distant others), structural (direct and mutual constitution of the capacities of actors) or productive (production of subjects through diffuse social relations).[51] Such a matrix could be valuable in an analysis linking power and multilateralism.

To sum it up, constructivists value multilateralism even more than liberalists, in the sense that they deem institutions responsible for the regulation of state behaviour, but also for the development of 'collective identities that can ameliorate the security dilemma'.[52]

Multilateralism versus sovereignty: a ditch between East and West

To identify the nature of the ties between multilateralism and realism, it seems helpful to link the former to 'sovereignty'. This concept is usually connected with the Peace of Westphalia, which brought the Thirty Years war to an end in 1648.[53] This moment is deemed crucial in the development of our modern model of states, each one enjoying exclusive authority over a definite territory. However, defining sovereignty remains challenging.[54]

It seems acceptable to assert that, in the current world order, sovereign states are still the primary units, but that globalization and interdependence threaten them[55], although realists still acclaim sovereignty[56], a firmly state-related concept, traditionally part of their territory.[57] Hence multilateralism and sovereignty are sometimes seen as antithetical. For instance, according to Schlagheck, state sovereignty thwarts the development of an effective response to genocide by the international community.[58] More generally, a salient engagement in multilateralism

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would undoubtedly hint a loss of sovereignty. Conversely, a confined implication in the international order would obviously imply a gain in sovereignty.[59]

Challenges to sovereignty have been old and numerous.[60] To Krasner, 'powerful states have never fully respected the sovereignty of weaker states'.[61] He highlights that 'breaches of the sovereign states model have been an enduring characteristic of the international environment'[62] in the name of values such as 'human rights, minority rights, democracy, communism, fiscal responsibility, and international security'.[63] A recent example would be the multilateral military intervention in Libya, in 2011.

Notwithstanding the impression that multilateralism and sovereignty are worst enemies, it shall never be forgotten, however, that both have been intimately linked. For instance, the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, prioritized on more than one occasion state sovereignty over human rights norms.[64] Amitav Acharya has also extensively shown how multilateralism 'helped to define, extend, embed and legitimize a set of sovereignty norms'.[65] Thus it helped the post-war international order, notably in the decolonization process, to incorporate norms of independence, sovereignty, non-intervention, or national interest. Territorial integrity, equality of states and sovereignty were enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which also promotes collective security. The respect for borders was sanctified by the OAU at its very first summit, in 1964. By essence, even the Treaty of Westphalia must be considered a multilateral action[66], as well as the Congress of Vienna.[67]

Multilateralism has also broadly been used to promote specific interests, notably by the United States after World War II. As Roosevelt, through the 'New Deal', wanted to avoid new perspectives of isolationism, the US used institutions to establish its dominion.[68] Multilateralism was a tool to develop a modern form of *transnational sovereignty*, widening values of democracy, capitalism and human rights through modernization and globalization.

However, the United States, although pursuing a multilateral policy in Europe, did not take the same option in Asia.[69] They were also unable to lean on multilateralism in Africa, where they had to conclude bilateral agreements to contain the Soviet threat.[70] The influence in the Third World was at stake, and the new architecture of the General Assembly of the UN deeply altered the relation between newly independent states and Western powers.[71] The rivalry between East and West was prominent, and exemplified by the vetoes during the Vietnam War (the US and the USSR each pursuing outright victory directly or through regional proxies).[72] China stayed mostly passive, but was clearly 'a champion of NAM [Non-Aligned Movement] views and interests'.[73] As soon as the Cold War was over, the US engaged in strong multilateralism in Africa, notably through conflict resolution and mediating efforts.[74] A drop in the use of the veto and the creation of International Criminal Tribunals did not prevent the re-emergence of spheres of influence.

Moreover, the permanent members began to have conflicts again in 1998 and 1999 around Iraq and Kosovo.[75] Historically, Soviet jurists had been arduous defenders of the notions of peaceful coexistence and non-intervention.[76] Thus it is not surprising that the Kosovo crisis[77], in 1999, was decisive in digging the ditch between the United States, as a hegemonic power, and Russia, weakened by the end of the Cold War. Some deem it 'first major crisis of multilateralism in the international system after the end of the Cold War'.[78] In 2006, Vladimir Putin and Sergei Lavrov still deemed the talks on the final status of Kosovo as one of the four top priorities in Russia's foreign policy.[79] Furthermore, Vladimir Putin referred to the Kosovo precedent in the Crimean issue, stating that 'the Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent - a precedent our western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country's central authorities'.[80]

According to Russian scholars quoted by James Hugues, the Kosovo crisis fundamentally modified the perspective of Russia while treating with the rest of the world.[81] Obviously, the pressure of NATO in Eastern Europe also influenced their foreign policy, along with the development of the doctrine of the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P).[82] Kosovo has deepened mistrust, and it 'was pivotal to Russia's uncompromising approach in the Russo-Georgian War of summer 2008 and its subsequent unilateral recognition of the secessions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia'.[83]

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All in all, in the course of history, multilateralism championed, as much as it defied sovereignty in a subtle relationship, not one between enemies.

The Syrian crisis: multilateralism between apogee and failure

In the flow of the Arab upheavals, Syria has been the stage of a popular revolt from March 2011, which later turned to a civil war involving a multiplicity of actors. Civil wars are considered a threat to international security. In such a situation, multilateralism, through the UN Security Council, shall be the guarantor of legitimate interventions.[84]

The main split related to the Syrian civil war divided Russia and the United States. The UN Security Council has been unable to solve the crisis, notwithstanding a number of multilateral initiatives. As their downfall is seen as a failure of multilateralism[85], and many observers analyze the war through the lenses of realism or *realpolitik*[86], it seems interesting to develop prospects of reflection around these two assessments.

According to realist theories, the failure of multilateralism in this case could be deemed unavoidable because of power plays. A balance of power in the region unified Russia, Iran and the Syrian regime to maintain their influence. The Irano-Syrian partnership axis has lasted for more than three decades.[87] As Iran was deemed a pariah state by the United States, its relations with Syria were useful to build a counter-alliance against the US and their allies in the Gulf.[88] For Iran, the need of a 'friendly' leadership in Syria appears vital to maintain a geographical link with Hezbollah in Lebanon.[89] Furthermore, in the Middle East, Syria has historically been under Soviet influence. The military cooperation between Russia and Syria is firmly rooted.[90] According to Hinnebusch, 'Syria relied on the Soviets to balance American support for Israel and to achieve the military capability to balance Israeli power'.[91] Some have also stressed the geo-strategic importance of the mere military port of Russia in the Mediterranean Sea, which is based in Tartus, on Syrian territory.[92]

The realist explanation, albeit convincing, is unable to capture the whole picture. If power and military resources had been the mere decisive factors, the United States could have rallied their partners and intervened. Henry Kissinger provides one hypothesis by writing that 'when the United States declined to tip the balance, they judged that it either had an ulterior motive that it was skillfully concealing – perhaps an ultimate deal with Iran – or was not attuned to the imperatives of the Middle East balance of power'.[93]

However, it could also be asserted that a public intervention favouring the Saudi side would have been difficult to sustain for ideational purposes. Or that the United States did not intercede in Syria precisely because *Barack Obama cherished multilateral approaches* more than his predecessors. Thus the failure to gain multilateral approval through the Security Council refrained him to act. Furthermore, domestic politics played a role. No strong popularity could support another operation involving boots on the ground.[94] Such a feature contradicts the realist assumption according to which states are unitary rational actors. Depending on the circumstances, the administrations, and bureaucratic or organizational competition, their reactions can vary to a great extent.[95]

Liberal approaches could also provide interesting insights by highlighting the weakness of cooperation with these countries. Both Iran and Syria have had chaotic relationships with the West in history, and experienced economic sanctions in a recent past.[96] The failure to accommodate them earlier and deeper into multilateral approaches may have contributed to shape the situation.

But more significantly, the constructivist approach, which stresses the importance of shared values, shall not be disregarded. The Syrian War has been a strong battle between two camps: on one hand the side of non-intervention, on the other hand the advocates of R2P (or 'responsibility to protect'). Russia, whose intervention was backed by the invitation of the Syrian government, took the opportunity to respond to US unilateralism in Kosovo, Afghanistan or Iraq. In this sense, it was a battle around norms.

Going back to our considerations around multilateralism and sovereignty, and how the Kosovo crisis deepened mistrust between Russia and the US, James Hughes mentions that 'consequently, Russia's veto power, so energetically wielded over Kosovo, has been used to subdue Western efforts to engage the UN more proactively on a

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range of issues post-Kosovo, from Libya, to Iran and the civil war in Syria'.[97] Furthermore, for the Syrian regime, this long-standing war has less been related to balance of power, than to a matter of personal, intimate survival. As Magnus Lundgren reminds, 'regime leaders feared for their personal security, should they lose the war, and their key demographic base, the Alawite minority, feared widespread ethnic reprisals and long-term oppression'.[98] The power of identity and normative expectations has been crucial as well. 'Not just a power balance but normative agreement is important to order building. As Barnett argues, a stable order depends on congruence between the normative expectations of society and those of state elites.'[99] The knot is that Syria, long before 2011, was soaked by multiple *identities*. [100] Hence this issue has to be assessed within the specific context of the Middle East, which, in its construction, did not neatly follow the Westphalian path.

Historically, in an era where the Europeans already sustained a multipolar system of states, the Ottomans still fed the concept of a universal empire. Thus their visions of the world order were deeply conflicting.[101] At the end of World War I, the Sykes Picot agreement divided the Middle East into spheres of influence.[102] The states born out of the deal later tried to shape their own rules. Two schools of thought were in opposition: pan-arabism, which promoted a state-based system for a United Arab Nation, and political islam. Syria as a country was central to a pan-arabism developed through values, or 'dialogues', as Michael Barnett states in a consistent approach imprinted by constructivism.[103]

Over time the Syrian conflict became a sectarian 'proxy' war, fuelled in arms and money by regional and international powers, involving militias, which are not easy to control. However, it has less to do with states' balance of power, military, security (not to mention that many non-state actors are involved, which is a challenge for realist theories), than with normative challenges amplified by the fragmentation in the country. That could also been noticed in the peace negotiations, which certainly suffered of the decline of hegemony of the United States. Therefore no actor had the benefit of leverage on all major parties.[104] However, it has mostly failed due to three other factors: lack of trust, disputes on values, and fragmentation of the Syrian opposition.

The lead in the mediation efforts was first entrusted to Turkey, then to the Arab League. The Syrian regime had no real faith in these mediations, which it deemed influenced by Qatar and Saudi Arabia.[105] Then Kofi Annan, who was formally a joint envoy of the UN and the Arab League, which did not favour trust, tried to use the strategy of *multilateral power*. [106] At some point, in 2012, the pressure put on the regime through Russia was high enough to make a 'six points plan' adopted, pass the UN Security Council resolutions 2042 and 2043, as well as implement a ceasefire on the 12 April. Thus Kofi Annan kept convinced that a certain level of external pressure could force Assad to cooperate[107], in order to '*engineer his exit*'. [108] This tends to confirm that the process mobilized more than balance of power considerations.

Furthermore, the main point of disagreement between P3 (United States, Great Britain, France) and the duo Russia/China was around a chapter VII resolution. Russia unconditionally rejected this option, on account of the Libyan intervention.[109] In the negotiation process, the fate of Assad has obviously been a key issue. Through the *Geneva communiqué*, for instance, 'it appeared that the world powers were united behind a common approach, but agreement swiftly eroded as interpretations of the adopted text diverged, especially with regard to the question of al-Assad's inclusion in a future political process'. [110] The battle around values of sovereignty and non-intervention was the most ferocious.[111] The opposition of ideas seemed even stronger as the P3 thought that a 'unipolar logic' championed the crisis, believing that the Arab world would 'march towards Western democratic value', and that 'no force could stand' on the way.[112]

Added to the lack of trust between the negotiator and the disputants in the three first cases at least[113], and the battle over fundamental values, the fragmentation of the rebels also played a significant role. As Touval states, the likelihood of conflicting interests increases with a higher number of participants, which inevitably complexifies the interconnexions, lengthen the 'learning process', and more easily embroils trading concessions than in bilateral negotiations.[114] In Syria, the question of actors' inclusion was fundamental in a complex context, which necessitated an isolation of jihadists albeit an inclusion of islamic factions and a pulse for a desescalation in the rivalry between Sunnis and Shias.[115] The latter envoy of the UN, Staffan de Mistura opted for a down-top approach. However, in the years 2014-2015, the context changed drastically: the Islamic State entered the game, the

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nuclear deal with Iran was ratified, and Russia intervened.[116] And a mutual trust along with a management of the endgame could never be firmly established.

Towards normative change, or a revenge of sovereign autocracies?

Like order and freedom, cooperation and competition are inextricably linked, although they are at opposite ends of a spectrum. The latter must exist in order to bring the former to life, and the former is used in order to pursue the latter. What is balance of power, if not a form a cooperation in order to compete against another alliance? Hence the connection between multilateralism and realism has always been strong, and it would be wrong to claim that the former is trapped by power politics. It merely works with it – but not only. Realism is insufficient to explain multilateralism. Barnett and Duvall argue that the permanent link between global governance and notions of cooperation, coordination, and common interests, wrongly hides any power involved.[117] As Ikenberry states, multilateralism and power do not exclude themselves.[118]

An economic convergence, along with an alignment in interests, and, most importantly, trust, can lead to multilateralism[119], which is deeper than a mere partnership: an existential tie.[120] Such a tie has undoubtedly linked Russia, Iran and Syria in the past years. This alliance of states did whatever it had to, and invoked values such as sovereignty and the fight against terrorism to maintain, and reinforce it.[121] It is fundamental to highlight that the morality of values – among them non-intervention[122] – is subjective, thus non-consistent, and hinges on perception, time, and place. However, shared values and interests, common cultural values and grounds of understanding, mutual goals and absence of institutional rivalries play a central role in the world order. As Henry Kissinger states, 'outside the Western world, regions that have played a minimal role in these rules' original formulation question their validity in their present form and have made clear that they would work to modify them.'[123]

George W. Bush and Barack Obama could lean on quite similar material resources. Nevertheless, the foreign policy pursued by the two administrations could not be compared. The heart of the battle is more than about realism and power politics. It is about a balance between legitimacy and power, values, and shared definitions of a system in a post-hegemonic world, where different countries want to raise their voice, with new bargains, new coalitions, new forms of authority.[124] Hence the crisis of some multilateral institutions[125] may well represent a new starting point towards normative changes, which reshape multilateralism. The norms of multilateralism vary from one institution to another, from a country to another. It has already developed into 'counter-hegemonic coalitions', 'cosmopolitan moral movements' and 'epistemic communities'.[126]

This essay did not demonstrate why and how states sustain cooperation, which would be crucial in the understanding of multilateralism. It would also be interesting to assess more precisely the degree of authority of multilateral institutions (which obviously exists, as shows the level of compliance with international law in some realms), and to describe the battles between regimes, such as human rights and sovereignty. Hence 'power' and 'sovereignty' shall be analyzed with diverse lenses, to better understand how they work.

Earlier in history, multilateralism was deemed a 'realist necessity'.[127] In the current era, it is reshaped through battles of values. It is because of a form of multilateral engagement that the US did not intervene in Syria, and it is a form of multilateral alliance – albeit not multilateralism under the Western values, or multilateralism *as we know it* – between Russia, Iran and Syria, that ceiled the fate of Syria. With a new administration at the helm, the foreign policy posture of the United States is changing. So will the world order

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Footnotes

[1] Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?' in *The National Interest* (Summer 1989) <https://www.embl.de/aboutus/science_society/discussion/discussion_2006/ref1-22june06.pdf> accessed 26 December 2016. In this article, Francis Fukuyama notably predicted that the end of history would be imprinted by 'economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands'. He also asserted that there would be 'neither art nor philosophy'.

[2] For instance, Robert W. Cox released the article 'Multilateralism and world order' in 1992. One year later, John G. Ruggie published *Multilateralism matters*, which has not lost its status of reference book until today.

[3] Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World* (London: Profile Books, 2002).

[4] The term was used to name a new Federal Department in the United States in 2002. It focuses on the civilian defense of the country.

[5] Olivier Moos, 'Lénine en djellaba: néo-orientalisme et critique de l'Islam' ['Lenine in djellaba: neo-orientalism and critics of Islam'], *Cahiers de l'Institut Religioscope*, No. 7 (August 2011), at p. 10.

[6] In the United States, the danger materialized with the attacks in the parking of the World Trade Center in 1993, on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, on the USS Cole destroyer in Yemen in 2000.

[7] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004).

[8] In January and November 2015, two major attacks targeted Paris. In July and December 2016, two trucks charged at crowds, in Nice and Berlin. On New Year's Day 2017, a night club was assaulted in Istanbul.

[9] See, for instance, James Fallows, 'China's Great Leap Backward' in *The Atlantic* (December 2016).

[10] 'Department of Defense (DoD) Releases Fiscal Year 2017 President's Budget Proposal', press release <<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/652687/department-of-defense-dod-releases-fiscal-year-2017-presidents-budget-proposal>> accessed 1 January 2017.

[11] Julian Borger, 'Nato summit: US says it will deploy 1,000 extra troops to Poland' in *The Guardian* (8 July 2016) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/08/nato-summit-warsaw-brexit-russia>> accessed 1 January 2017.

[12] Peter Dominiczak and Christopher Hope, 'Theresa May: Britain must renew Trident because nuclear threat against Britain and the world has increased' in *The Telegraph* (16 July 2016) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/17/theresa-may-britain-must-renew-trident-because-of-increased-thre/>> accessed 1 January 2017.

[13] Walter Russell Mead, 'The Return of Power Politics: The Revenge of Revisionist Powers' in *Foreign Affairs*

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(May/June 2014) <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141211/walter-russell-mead/the-return-of-geopolitics>> accessed 4 January 2017.

[14] The acronym used for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

[15] Colin I. Bradford Jr. and Johannes Linn, 'Reform of global governance: Priorities for Action' *Policy Brief #163* (The Brookings Institution, 2007).

[16] Mario Telò, 'Introduction: The EU as a model, a global actor and an unprecedented power' in Mario Telò (ed.), *The European Union and Global Governance* (London: Routledge, 2009), at pp. 28-29.

[17] James A. Caporaso, 'International relations theory and multilateralism: the search for foundations' in *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Summer 1992), pp. 599-632.

[18] Robert O. Keohane, 'Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research' in *International Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Autumn 1990), pp. 731-764.

[19] *ibid.*

[20] John G. Ruggie, 'Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution' in J. G. Ruggie, *Multilateralism matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). Indivisibility implies that an attack on one member is an attack on all members. Non-discrimination means that members are being treated as equals. Diffuse reciprocity engages members to favour the long-term view, and to see the total bargain on the collective balance, not only their self-interest.

[21] Andreas Kruck and Volker Rittberger, 'Multilateralism Today and its Contribution to Global Governance' in James P. Muldoon (ed.) *The New Dynamics of Multilateralism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011) pp. 43-65, at p. 47.

[22] John G. Ikenberry, 'The Future of Multilateralism: Governing the World in a Post-Hegemonic Era' in *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2015), pp. 399-413, at p. 401.

[23] Stefan Lehne, 'How the refugee crisis will reshape the EU' (4 February 2016) Carnegie Endowment for International Peace <<http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/02/04/how-refugee-crisis-will-reshape-eu-pub-62650>> accessed 2 January 2017.

[24] 'UN Documents for Syria', Security Council Report <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/syria/>> accessed 2 January 2017.

[25] I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval, 'Introduction: return to the theories of cooperation', in I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval (eds.), *International Cooperation, The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-10, at p. 1.

[26] *ibid.* They also include 'perception of progress toward goals, such as improved security, status, or freedom of action for oneself and the imposition of constraints on other actors, and so on'.

[27] Edward Newman, *A Crisis of Global Institutions? Multilateralism and International Security* (London: Routledge, 2007). The ASEAN or the OPEP are examples of informal organizations.

[28] John G. Ruggie, *op. cit.*, n. 20, at p. 12.

[29] Albeit interesting to assess, any distinction between classical realists and neorealists will not be deepened for the purpose of this short essay. See David G. Haglund, 'Trouble in Pax Atlantica? the United States, Europe, and the Future of Multilateralism', in Rosemary Foot, S. Neil MacFarlane, and Michael Mastanduno (eds.), *US Hegemony*

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and *International Organizations: The United States and Multilateral Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 215-238, at p. 230.

[30] What is 'gained' by one state must have been 'lost' by the others.

[31] I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval, op. cit., n. 25, at p. 5.

[32] For valuable insights on international relations schools of thought, see, for instance, Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations, Theories and approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[33] Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma' in *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167-214.

[34] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin Classics, 1981, first published in 1651).

[35] Brian A. Keaney, 'The Realism of Hans Morgenthau' *Graduate Thesis and Dissertations* (2006) <<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/2580/>> accessed 1 January 2017.

[36] John J. Mearsheimer, 'The False Promise of the International Institutions' in *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/1995), pp. 5-49, at p. 7.

[37] Robert W. Cox, 'Multilateralism and world order' in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (April 1992), pp. 161-180, at p. 167.

[38] John T. Rourke and Mark A. Boyer, *International Politics on the World Stage* (New York: McGrawhill, 2008), at p. 141.

[39] I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval, op. cit., n. 25, at p. 5.

[40] Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, first published in 1625), at p. 2.

[41] Alexis Keller, 'Debating cooperation in Europe from Grotius to Adam Smith', in I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval (eds), op. cit., n. 25, at p. 21.

[42] Woodrow Wilson was the President of the United States from 1913 to 1921.

[43] Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, op. cit., n. 32, at p. 108.

[44] By opposition to a zero sum game (what is gained by one state must have been lost by the others), in a non-zero sum game, all the states involved win from a cooperation.

[45] Robert O. Keohane, 'The Diplomacy of Structural Change: Multilateral Institutions and State Strategies' in H. Haftendorn and C. Tuschhoff (eds.), *America and Europe in an Era of Change*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), at p. 53.

[46] John G. Ruggie, op. cit., n. 20, at p. 3.

[47] Alexander Wendt, Anarchy is what States make of it, in *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 391-425.

[48] P. Terrence Hopmann, 'Synthesizing rationalist and constructivist perspectives on negotiated cooperation', in I.

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William Zartman and Saadia Touval (eds.), op. cit., n. 25; Brian Frederking, 'Constructing Post-Cold War Collective Security' in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (August 2003), pp. 363-378.

[49] Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, 'Power in international politics' in *International Organization*, Vol. 59 (Winter 2005), pp. 39-75, at p. 40.

[50] *ibid.*, at p. 41. They do not forget to mention that some have tried to do so, for instance Joseph Nye, who opposed 'soft power' to the traditional 'hard power' of realists, at p. 43.

[51] *ibid.*, at p. 48.

[52] Amitav Acharya, 'Multilateralism, sovereignty and normative change in world politics' in Edward Newman, Ramesh Thakur and John Tirman (eds.), *Multilateralism under challenge?*

Power, international order, and structural change (New York: United Nations University, 2006), pp. 95-118, at p. 96, quoting Martha Finnemore, 'International organizations as teachers of norms' in *International Organization*, Vol. 47 (October 1993), pp. 565-597.

[53] The Thirty Years War was a complex series of conflicts in Central Europe. The Peace of Westphalia was a set of independent arrangements achieved by no less than 235 envoys and their staff, and assembled in three complementary agreements. See Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[54] Stephen D. Krasner identifies four meanings in the contemporary usage. See Stephen D. Krasner, 'Rethinking the Sovereign State Model' in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (December 2001), pp. 17-42, at p. 19.

[55] Hence diplomacy is 'multi-layered'. It not only happens between states, but also with international or non-governmental institutions, or the civil society. See Brian Hocking, 'Catalytic diplomacy: Beyond 'newness' and 'decline'' in Jan Melissen (ed.) *Innovation in diplomatic practice* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

[56] Stephen D. Krasner, 'Abiding Sovereignty' in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2001), pp. 229-251.

[57] Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (eds.), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), at p. 7.

[58] Donna M. Schlagheck, 'Global Terrorism, Nuclear Proliferation, and Genocide: The Threats Posed to States and Global Stability' in James P. Muldoon, Jr., op. cit., n. 20. Such an intervention would be justified under the principle of R2P ('responsibility to protect').

[59] See, for instance, the address of Jesse Helms in David M. Malone, 'US-UN Relations in the UN Security Council in the Post-Cold War Era' in Rosemary Foot, S. Neil MacFarlane, and Michael Mastanduno, op. cit., n. 28, at p. 86. The same article highlights that the George W. Bush administration suspected that multilateralist approaches would alter US sovereignty, at p. 91. Another enlightening example concerning Condoleezza Rice is given by Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's only Superpower can't go it alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), at p. 137.

[60] Stephen D. Krasner, op. cit., n. 52, at p. 18.

[61] Stephen D. Krasner, 'Sovereignty and Intervention' in Gene M. Lyons and Michael Mastanduno (eds.), *Beyond Westphalia? State sovereignty and international intervention* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[62] Stephen D. Krasner, op. cit., n. 54, at p. 17.

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[63] *ibid.*

[64] Lorna McGregor, 'Torture and State Immunity: Deflecting Impunity, Distorting Sovereignty' in *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (2008), pp. 903-919.

[65] Amitav Acharya, *op. cit.*, n. 52, at p. 95.

[66] Detlef von Daniels, *The Concept of Law from a Transnational Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2016), at p. 11.

[67] Its order, based on balance of power (thus mixing multilateralism and realism), was later blamed as having prepared the grounds for World War I. But nationalism, revolutions, and the Crimean War surely played their role.

[68] John G. Ikenberry, *op. cit.*, n. 22, at p. 407.

[69] Victor Cha, *Powerplay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). The book gives good insights about the reasons why different options were used depending on regions.

[70] Philip Nel, 'Making Africa Safe for Capitalism: US Policy and Multilateralism in Africa' in Rosemary Foot, S. Neil MacFarlane, and Michael Mastanduno, *op. cit.*, n. 29, at p. 167.

[71] David M. Malone, *op. cit.*, n. 59, at p. 83. The votes of African countries in the UN General Assembly showed a reject of the American positions because of the links the West and neocolonialism or white-minority regimes.

[72] *ibid.*

[73] *ibid.*, at p. 76.

[74] Philip Nel, *op. cit.*, n. 70, at p. 168 and 181.

[75] David M. Malone, *op. cit.*, n. 59, at p. 74.

[76] Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, 'The Principle of Nonintervention, the United Nations, and the International System' in *International Organization*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring 1971), pp. 209-227, at p. 216.

[77] NATO intervened without a mandate of the Security Council.

[78] James Hugues, 'Russia and the Secession of Kosovo: Power, Norms and the Failure of Multilateralism' in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 65, No. 5 (2013), pp. 992-1016, at p. 993.

[79] *ibid.*, at p. 994.

[80] Address by President of the Russian Federation, 18 March 2014 <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>> accessed 1 January 2017.

[81] James Hugues, *op. cit.*, n. 78, at p. 993.

[82] *ibid.* The rights of sovereign states are deemed linked to a duty to protect their people ('state responsibility'). A failure to do so would provide the international community with a justifiable reason to act. However, some scholars do not acknowledge the norm. See Jeremy Moses, 'Sovereignty as irresponsibility? A Realist critique of the Responsibility to Protect' in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 2013), pp. 113-135.

[83] *ibid.*, at p. 1013.

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[84] Fen Osler Hampson, 'Deconstructing multilateral cooperation' in I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval (eds.), *op. cit.*, n. 25, at p. 61.

[85] 'Syrian Tragedy 'Shames Us All', Secretary-General Tells Security Council, Saying that Failure to End Conflict Should Haunt Entire Membership' UN Security Council, SC/12526, 21 September 2016 <<https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12526.doc.htm>> accessed 4 January 2017.

[86] Marc Pierini, 'Syria: The Ultimate Example of Cynical Realpolitik' (5 February 2015) Carnegie Endowment for International Peace <<http://carnegieeurope.eu/2015/02/05/syria-ultimate-example-of-cynical-realpolitik-pub-58991>> accessed 4 January 2017.

[87] Jubin M. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power in the Middle East* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

[88] Raymond Hinnebusch, *The international politics of the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), at p. 200.

[89] See, for instance, Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday and Sam Wyer, 'Iranian Strategy in Syria' (May 2013), Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project.

[90] Roy Allison, 'Russia and Syria: explaining alignment with a regime in crisis' in *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (July 2013), pp. 795-823, at p. 802.

[91] Raymond Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, n. 88, at p. 149.

[92] 'Russia plans permanent naval facility in Syrian port of Tartus – MoD' in *Russia Today* (10 October 2016) <<https://www.rt.com/news/362209-russian-permanent-naval-facility-tartus/>> accessed 7 January 2017.

[93] Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), at p. 127.

[94] Lesley Wroughton, 'As Syria war escalates, Americans cool to U.S. intervention: Reuters/Ipsos poll' (24 August 2013) *Reuters* <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-usa-poll-idUSBRE97O00E20130825>> accessed 7 January 2017.

[95] See, for instance, on the Libyan case: Mikael Blomdahl, 'Bureaucratic roles and positions: explaining the United States Libya decision' in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2016), pp. 142-161.

[96] Gary C. Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, Kimberly A. Elliott, and Julia Muir, 'Post-2000 sanctions episodes' (May 2012) Peterson Institute for International Economics <<https://piie.com/publications/papers/sanctions-timeline-post-2000.pdf>> accessed 7 January 2007. Penalties, albeit deemed mild by some analysts, also hit Russia after the Second Chechnyan War and the Georgian War.

[97] James Hugues, *op. cit.*, n. 78, at p. 1013.

[98] Magnus Lundgren, 'Mediation in Syria: Initiatives, strategies, and obstacles, 2011-2016' in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2016), pp. 273-288, at p. 283.

[99] Raymond Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, n. 87, at p. 228, quoting M. Barnett, 'Regional Security after the Gulf War' in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 111, No. 4 (Winter 1996-1997), pp. 597-618, at p. 614.

[100] Robert D. Kaplan, 'Syria: Identity Crisis' in *The Atlantic* (February 1993) <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/02/syria-identity-crisis/303860/>> accessed 7 January 2017.

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[101] Henry Kissinger, op. cit., n. 93, at p. 107.

[102] James Barr, *A Line in the Sand* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

[103] Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[104] Tom H. J. Hill, 'Kofi Annan's Multilateral Strategy of Mediation and the Syrian Crisis: The Future of Peacemaking in a Multipolar World?' in *International Negotiation*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2015), pp. 444-478, at p. 446.

[105] Magnus Lundgren, op. cit., n. 98, at p. 275.

[106] Tom H. J. Hill, op. cit., n. 104, at p. 447.

[107] *ibid.*, at p. 464.

[108] *ibid.*, at p. 463.

[109] The Libyan intervention, on the ground of the R2P principle, ultimately led to a regime change.

[110] Magnus Lundgren, op. cit., n. 98, at p. 276.

[111] Roy Allison, op. cit., n. 90, at p. 795.

[112] Tom H. J. Hill, op. cit., n. 104, at p. 471.

[113] Magnus Lundgren, op. cit., n. 98, at p. 281. See also: M. Lundgren and I. Svensson, 'Leanings and Dealings: Exploring Bias and Trade Leverage in Civil War Mediation by International Organizations' in *International Negotiation*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2014), pp. 315-342.

[114] Saadia Touval, 'Multilateral Negotiation: An Analytic Approach' in *Negotiation Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1989), pp. 159-173, at p. 162.

[115] Magnus Lundgren, op. cit., n. 98, at p. 285.

[116] *ibid.*, at p. 278.

[117] Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, op. cit., n. 49, at p. 57.

[118] John G. Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) quoted by M. Barnett and R. Duvall, op. cit., n. 49, at p. 59.

[119] John G. Ikenberry, op. cit., n. 22, at p. 407.

[120] *ibid.*, at p. 408.

[121] Obviously, one would easily argue that while invoking sovereignty and nonintervention in Syria, Russia invaded and annexed Crimea. However, in this case, Russia referred to self-determination. On all sides, it played with different norms. The main element to bear in mind is that those events were all related to former events (Syria with Libya, Crimea with Kosovo). See Anne Peters 'Does The West now pay the price for Kosovo?' (22 April 2014) EJIL: Talk! <<http://www.ejiltalk.org/crimea-does-the-west-now-pay-the-price-for-kosovo/>> accessed 7 January 2017.

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[122] Amitav Acharya, op. cit., n. 52, at p. 98. For instance, Amitav Acharya reminds that India Prime Minister Nehru was a strong defender of the nonintervention norm, which he saw as a protection of the weak. Later, human right abuses increasingly shed a dark light on the norm.

[123] Henry Kissinger, op. cit., n. 93, at p. 1.

[124] John G. Ikenberry, op. cit., n. 22, at p. 400.

[125] It is worth mentioning that, still today, the Southern countries do not feel represented at the United Nations, thus undermining its legitimacy. As well, the question of the accountability of international institutions to the public shall be raised.

[126] Amitav Acharya, op. cit., n. 50, at p. 107.

[127] Dan Plesch and Thomas G. Weiss, '1945's Forgotten Insight: Multilateralism as Realist Necessity' in *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 17 (2016), pp. 4-16.

Written by: Thomas Dayer
Written at: Lancaster University
Written for: Dr. Thomas Mills
Date written: December 2016 / January 2017