



Summary: Panel 7 – Multilateralism, International Peace & Security

Introduction and Background

The seventh panel of the Canada-Germany colloquium focused on the conditions and prospects for international cooperation through the multilateral system of institutions, organizations, and alliances - formal and informal - that the global community has constructed to manage transnational threats of all kinds, and to promote well-being and protection for its states and citizens. The CIC-KAS RODA project itself, designed to explore ways in which Canada and Germany could benefit from the insights of scholars, experts, and centres of excellence in order to reinvigorate democratic alliances and international institutions, has been a joint civil society effort to assist governments in fostering the kind of cooperation needed to match the challenges of our time.

Introductions by Canadian and German Ambassadors, Stephane Dion, and Sabine Sparwasser situated the origins of the "Renewing our Democratic Alliance" (RODA) project in the disarray caused by the increase in recent years of competitive nationalisms to which the post-war institutional system of rules-based cooperation had meant to be an antidote. The apparent defection from reliance on this system by the Trump Administration had caused significant worry to both Canada and Germany, for whom reliance on an effective multilateral system is foundational to their internationalist vocations and outlooks.

Ambassador Sparwasser recalled the commitment to multilateralism by then-Foreign Minister of Canada Chrystia Freeland who outlined to the House of Commons in 2018, "that our friend and ally (the US) has come to question the very worth of its mantle of global leadership puts into sharper focus the need for the rest of us to set our own clear and sovereign course. For Canada, that course must be the renewal, indeed, the strengthening of the postwar multilateral order." Those sentiments, shared by Foreign Ministers Gabriel and Maas of the Federal Republic, articulated the essence of the "like-mindedness" of our two countries' perspectives which the October 12 discussion was convened to debate.

The discussion in this panel applauded that dual commitment, but also interrogated the extent to which the postwar multilateral order may now be in need of more comprehensive reform to make it fully responsive to changes and challenges in international affairs and alignments of the last several decades. It also encouraged Western governments like those in Germany and Canada to rethink their conception of "like-minded" and to recognize the degree of disenchantment with the "liberal international order," as evidenced in various speeches to the most recent General Assembly meeting in New York in September.

Earlier panels had analyzed the experience of the international community in confronting the severe global challenges of climate change and the Covid pandemic and global health, as direct stress tests of the effectiveness of multilateral institutions and global cooperation. Subsequent panels on democracy and the status of human rights, the impact of the Internet and social media in enabling disinformation, the global economy, and mass migration, confirmed the interconnectivity of outcomes in each area, and the need of a

concerted approach to reinforcing the relevance, strength, and effectiveness of the multilateral system itself.

Presentations

Prof. Jennifer Welsh set the scene for this "most integrative" of RODA panels. After the thematic panel discussions that had preceded it, the task before this panel was to assess the challenge of multilateralism's effectiveness itself, for promoting peace and security, but also for wider systemic challenges and opportunities. She urged participants to analyze what needs to be done, including in terms of reform and renewal, and specifically the roles that "like-minded" Canada and Germany might play.

In introducing his discussion paper, "Can Middle Powers Save the Liberal World Order?" Prof. Roland Paris noted that his analysis, completed before the change in the US administration, had not fundamentally changed because though the new US administration is again internationalist, the US is seemingly less able than in decades past to exercise as full and as internationally responsible a role. Because Canada and Germany share a fundamental interest in helping to ensure that existing and strained international institutions are sustained, the two governments are right to explore together and with others new ways and combinations for improving the system's effectiveness.

Prof. Paris emphasized the need to communicate more effectively how the multilateral system delivers direct benefits to our publics which show signs of increasing cynicism about its continued relevance to their interests.

Multilateral (or "plurilateral") structures need to be variable, their form fitting their functional purpose and the specific issues they are addressing. They also need to include non-state actors, civil society, as partners. Some informal solidarity groups of countries which share specific policy and performance objectives can help galvanize progress in the wider international community whose divisions and individual national ambitions are obstructing consensus. He cited the 1990s precedent of the informal Human Security Network (which included international NGOs as partners along with its like-minded state participants) as an example.

Before introducing the second paper before the panel, the German Federal Government's recent White Paper, "A Multilateralism for the People," Ambassador Sparwasser addressed the issue of German and Canadian convergence. She recalled how in 2018-19 Canadian and German Foreign Ministers consulted intensively on a joint strategy to insulate and enhance the benefits of multilateralism, and also to address internal and other strains facing democracies themselves. The Alliance for Multilateralism with France and several other similarly concerned countries ensued.

She cautioned against idealizing our shared commitment to multilateral approaches. Canada, Germany and other committed countries should aim for the immunization of the international order from global shocks such as the pandemic by enhancing and demonstrating its effectiveness in the interests of all, rather than by vaunting the value of multilateral cooperation as a superior value in itself. To be an antidote to cynicism and despondency, multilateralism has to work in the interests of all, as the White Paper documents how it does work for the interests of an internationalist Germany.

Thorsten Benner, in speaking also to the White Paper, and in addressing the analytical challenge of 'where we go from here, identified overlapping multilateral 'circles' in which cooperation takes place and needs to be reformed: 1) a tight circle of organizations/processes that bring like-minded countries together, such as the EU, NATO and G7, where the primary challenge is to keep the organizations credible and adaptable, and to proactively address signs of "illiberalism"; 2) competing arrangements sponsored by states such as China and Russia (e.g. Belt and Road), where the task for states like Canada and Germany is to encourage the development of credible alternatives; 3) universal membership bodies such as the UN, where the task is to

work through effective diplomacy and shared Can-German leadership on issues of key concern and to look out for new functional coalitions and partners (i.e., with 'non-usual' states from Africa and Latin America), relinquishing some privileges in the process; and 4) organizations designed to manage 'global public goods' (e.g., climate, health), where everyone must be at the table and where efforts should focus on what kind and what level of cooperation are really possible. At the same time, the need for universal participation on these over-riding global issues should not imply that democracies should trade off basic values, such as human rights, to obtain functional policy consensus outcomes.

Prof. Benner also stressed that democratic countries like Canada and Germany must keep "their own houses in order," for exemplary reasons, and to strengthen defence against any coercive intentions of great powers, and the emergence of competitive groupings of countries led by states like China or Russia that are *not* like-minded in their support for alternative political systems. We need to share solidarity with each others' positions in defence of human rights in the world, as was less than adequately experienced by Canada in 2018 over the abuse of human rights by Saudi Arabia.

The Panel Discussion

At this point, the Chair turned to former Ambassador Louise Frechette, who was the first Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1998-2006, responsible for steering systemic coordination of the UN system of agencies and secretariats.

Mme. Frechette stressed that any global issues agenda needs to take into foremost consideration the views and interests of the of the roughly 150 member states of the United Nations who are not primary influencers, but whose support and indeed votes will determine success or failure of initiatives.

She underlined that most of these more vulnerable countries of the UN's "silent majority" wish very much to preserve a *rules-based* international order because it represents their best protection from coercion from greater powers. But they wish a *fairer* and more equitable order. Mme. Frechette warned that the ritualistic reference to the need of a "liberal" world order evokes for many the extended domination of Western values and interests.

Moreover, most of these countries do not want to be entangled in super-power rivalries. "Western" countries rightly confront challenges from China and Russia to the positions and values of democracies, but systemic unfairness such as the current inequitable system distribution of anti-Covid vaccines in COVAX continues to undermine the confidence of many countries in the capacity and commitment of democracies – and those organizations that they dominate - to deliver equitable global outcomes.

Western countries must therefore listen to this much broader UN membership and to non-state advocates and NGOs. They should multiply and intensify *bilateral* state-to-state consultations across the board, which experience shows is crucial to facilitating multilateral solutions. These bilateral engagements, which must diversify, can enable the emergence of new policy approaches that make balanced demands from all sides and that can be seen to serve the lives and interests of all.

The subsequent panel debate from the assembled group of practitioners, scholars, and advocates took up many of these themes, but was especially open to the need to consult with a broader range of countries as urged by Mme Frechette, and to non-state advocates from civil society and the philanthropic community. (A vivid expression of the importance of this need was offered by the Prime Minister of Barbados in her recent exemplary address to the UN General Assembly. <https://www.passblue.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Barbados-E.pdf>)

It was recognized that core challenges to the multilateral system today include intensified geopolitical competition, unilateralism, and sovereignty-first approaches. Additionally, China is seeking to have its growing influence reflected by attempting to reshape multilateral bodies, and the wider order, to accommodate better its national interests and perceived needs.

There was general agreement that Canada and Germany ought not be devoted to multilateralism for its own sake, but primarily because in an increasingly interdependent world only multilateral tools of international cooperation can deliver vital transnational outcomes, as well as demonstrable benefit to our own societies. It was emphasized that the case for multilateralism not only needs to be renewed, but also should be communicated, in better ways, to German and Canadian publics. That case could include the following kinds of arguments:

- Multilateral institutions provide access, vital data, technical expertise, policies and perspectives that serve the interests of Canadians and Germans (and millions of others) every day.
- Multilateralism supports economic growth for open economies and facilitates cooperation on joint security challenges. An agreed system where we all shape and are expected to follow the same rules (and hold one another to account when we do not) advances prosperity and stability.
- Multilateralism builds trust and transparency, reduces misunderstandings, is an extension of bilateral relations, and a means to strengthen collaboration with cross-regional partners.
- Multilateral institutions provide a framework of rules and procedures that can constrain the powerful, while according more influence to committed middle powers like Germany, Canada and the EU itself, which consider that advancing international cooperation is a special challenge and indeed opportunity.

While the EU is the “arch multilateralist” by vocation, it was urged by one panelist to strengthen its capacity to act as more of a global player, and not just as a “global preacher.”

It was noted that multilateralism is suffering not just from external pressures, but also problems of the membership's own making – including the proliferation of institutions, and the default to alternative arrangements. It was argued that coordinated policymaking needs to be brought back into the core multilateral institutions. Additionally, member states need to arrest the ‘drift’ of divisive political judgments and activities into essential technical bodies. The trend damages the legitimacy of multilateral architecture in the eyes of many, adding to perceptions about multilateralism’s ‘democratic deficit’.

Participants also stressed that the multilateral landscape is extremely varied. Its complexity of stresses and issues requires a more *variable geometry* of alliances, solidarity groups, and consultative partners to advance cooperation in specific functional areas and to alter the overall condition of gridlock in the system. Multiple examples were cited, including the "Ottawa Group" for WTO reform, or groups supporting media freedom, or other networks, such as on conflict and state fragility.

It was also emphasized that we need to be more discerning about whether and how the current multilateral system is really decaying. Rather than uncritically accepting the refrain that the ‘system is in crisis,’ we should begin by identifying specifically where the rules-based order is under pressure, what priorities for diplomatic effort should be established, and who should be ‘out in front’ leading on necessary reforms (in some cases, it should not necessarily be leading democratic states). In so doing, Western countries should take care not to reinforce notions of ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’, and thereby deepen competitive dynamics. They should also be more acutely aware, as one participant noted, that China and Russia have their own particular vision of multilateralism and argue forcefully that *they* are the key custodians of international law and order – particularly in light of the recent Western retreat from Afghanistan.

Speakers did acknowledge that Canada and Germany, along with others in the Alliance for Multilateralism, are 'like-minded' in many key respects. They face the challenges and opportunities of the international agenda with a mix of 'offensive' purposes, such as the injection of ideas and financing to protect human rights and the rule of law, and also more 'defensive' preoccupations such as cyber-security, and backsliding on core values of inclusive democracy.

At the same time, democracies need to work out in real time when and how to use new, flexible processes to complement (not undermine) the work of existing institutions, thereby rebutting claims such as those of Russian FM Lavrov when he complains that the Alliance for Multilateralism aims to supplant the UN. We should be sure to position it as a complementary mechanism that is aimed at bringing together the majority of states that believe in and want to make universal institutions more effective.

But the core question, '*Whose* multilateralism?' was repeated in different ways.

Panelists echoed the view that we should not privilege only democratic partners when it comes to building support for essential multilateral outcomes. There were concerns about a new global divide emerging between democracies and authoritarian countries deepening global division and consequent gridlock. Most countries, it was noted, do not interpret the 'rule of law' in international activity as being synonymous with domestic democratic governance, and consultation and negotiation should not mingle the two unproductively. A decoupling from these divisions was recognized as essential for issues of existential universal significance, such as global health and climate, and outcomes on chronic debt and migratory pressures, etc.

It was also argued that the eternal debate of values and interests should not lead us to attempt to pursue in universal fora one at the expense of the other, even if the "unique national interests" of individual countries need accommodation. A plurality of models should be respected in our diverse world community, within common understandings about core values and consequent behaviour. In this respect, many participants saw the more defining competition as being between countries which rely on multilateral cooperation within a rules-based world order (not obligatorily "liberal") and those countries that favour pursuing their interests in the international arena via national competition, and notably such national powers as China, Russia, and the US. A more compelling set of common values could pivot around notions of pluralism and accountability, rather than the specific requirements of advanced liberal democracy.

Crucially, the panel was urged to face up to the needs of a new era in the distribution of global influence and power, following the serial eclipses of 19th century imperial empires, the 20th century's bipolar superpower rivalry of the Cold War, and the ensuing impression of a unipolar hegemonic moment for the US. It was generally agreed that the emergence of newly "risen" powers complicates the likelihood of a new concert of great powers at the top, some of which are backsliding to the supremacy of national sovereignty above all. In this context, "cross-walks" to China are essential, but so is messaging about mutual respect including for respective core values. The hope was expressed that adverse world public opinion could influence leaders of countries abusing universally acknowledged human rights.

Profound concern was expressed, including from an EU perspective, that strategic competition for primacy between China and the US would come to dominate the landscape, forcing the consolidation of rival "teams," the hardening of adversarial strategy, including at NATO, and foreclosing essential cooperative outcomes, with multiple dangers including an accelerated arms race. The enduring dangers of nuclear proliferation also remain grave.

Several panelists therefore urged governments to undertake a new, fresh look at the needs of the multilateral system today, as opposed to an effort just to preserve the one that we inherited from an earlier era. "Strategic foresight" has been lacking. Better forecasting would be supported by more inclusive consultation with all states and non-state actors concerned.

Planning cycles should also take on the challenge of designing a rules-based system for a quarter-century from now, in addition to addressing multiple grievances and defects that have accrued from the post-war system of agencies, institutions, programs, privileges, and mixed purposes that we have today.

In closing the very rich debate, Dr. Welsh emphasized the essential step of Canada and Germany strengthening communications with the "150" countries of the world's "silent majority" in order to prod the multilateral system to undertake wholesale review and reform going forward. She identified five areas of convergence that could help to inform a concrete agenda going forward;

1. First, she urged governments and centres of excellence and research to take seriously the need for long-range planning address the system as we shall need it in years to come, for challenges unaddressed, and for the full global community, to which this panel debate will be a valuable contribution. Such an exercise in strategic foresight needs to engage a broad set of countries, both Western and non-Western, and be coupled with a process that can help to mediate differences. The key question that should motivate this planning: How do we enable effective and results-based multilateral cooperation on issues of the shared global commons into the future? One of the key side benefits of strategic foresight should be to make the political class of core countries 'multilaterally literate'.
2. Second, a key priority for future multilateralism must be one of 'grievance reduction', whereby advanced democratic states acknowledge and consciously address inequities in the system, and identify specific areas in which to share power and/or relinquish control. This task should be informed by a careful analysis of where, specifically, multilateralism is decaying or failing (and why).
3. Third, Canada and Germany should identify a set of *offensive* objectives where the goal is to expand the group of states dedicated to particular multilateral institutions or initiatives – and a set of *defensive* objectives – where the task is to defend particular norms and laws or strengthen particular institutions.

One example of a key practical measure to meet these objectives could include collaboration on staffing procedures within key multilateral arrangements, so that they ensure competent representatives from a broad range of states committed to the rules-based order, as well as greater cooperation on voting and procedures. By coordinating on leadership positions and elections in key bodies, Canada and Germany could also help to prevent backsliding (i.e., converging around single candidates where we can so that authoritarian states cannot divide our vote to their advantage). At the board level of UN institutions, we have strong cooperation and could strengthen our joint messaging on efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability.

To take another example, Canada and Germany share many common priorities, including protecting and promoting human rights and advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Reinvigorated leadership and coherent international action to combat and reverse an ongoing anti-human rights backlash – if executed with humility (given each state's historical record) – could help to strengthen multilateral and plurilateral collaboration that enables norm enforcement. (Participants observed dividends on such an approach through Arbitrary Detention.)

As a final example, Canada and Germany could collaboratively shape emerging norms of responsible state behaviour with respect to cyberspace and AI, given that both countries have committed to reinforce respect for the application of international law and norms in cyberspace. Both countries have called out malicious behaviour, and Canada supported Germany's recent critique of Russian hacking efforts targeting German officials. With respect to AI, Canada and Germany have been working closely through multiple forums, including the GPAI, UNESCO, and OECD on AI norms. In order to drive inclusive growth and stem the tide of digital authoritarianism, Canada and Germany

could use their convening power, strong digital industries and thriving research communities to act in concert in support of the global governance of digital technologies – grounded in international law, including human rights law.

4. Fourth, any offensive/defensive diplomatic efforts should include an agreed-upon division of labour, whereby Canada and Germany – along with other partners – can agree to lead or instigate, in particular forums, or with countries where they have historic relationships. A clear-headed analysis of who has leverage, and where, should inform this kind of effort.
5. Finally, more conscious efforts need to be made to communicate the goals and benefits of multilateralism in a new era, and to signal how it will advance a more equitable world going forward. Without public support, the populist trends that are draining support from the multilateral system could prove even more damaging.

If the ongoing pandemic has taught us anything, it is that global issues require collaboration across many countries, governments, and sectors.

Maintaining the best of the current system, while reforming the components in need of revitalization, will require an increasingly strategic approach, advanced through nimble alliances, new partners and partnerships, and support to the most vital institutions.

The challenge is to broaden the tent, to listen, to recognize concerns around the representativeness and legitimacy of shared institutions, while ensuring that a revitalized rules-based system reflects our core democratic values.