



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**MULTILATERALISM: UPHOLDING A
RULES-BASED GLOBAL ORDER IN A
FRAGMENTING WORLD**

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Context

- Recently, India reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to **multilateralism and collective global action**, following the **USA's announcement to withdraw from 66 international organisations**, including the **India-France-led International Solar Alliance (ISA)**.

About Multilateralism

- Multilateralism** refers to a mode of cooperation where **three or more countries work together on common issues**, based on **shared rules, norms, and institutional frameworks**.
- It brings multiple states into collective engagement to address global challenges, rather than **acting alone** (unilateralism) or with just **one partner** (bilateralism).
 - Multilateral cooperation is central to addressing **global and cross-border challenges**.
- Key characteristics include:**
 - Collective decision-making** through agreed norms and procedures.
 - Shared responsibility and reciprocity** among participating states.
 - Institutional legitimacy** through international organizations such as the UN.

Historical Evolution

- World War I & II:** The '**League of Nations**' took the shape and further establishment **of the United Nations** and other global bodies.
 - The **period of World Wars** saw the establishment of **many permanent multilateral institutions** like the **UN, WHO, IMF, and World Bank** to govern **peace, security, economics, and development**.

Principles of Multilateralism

- Inclusivity:** Participation of a broad set of states on equal terms.
- Consultation and coordination:** States consult and negotiate before decisions are made.
- Shared norms and reciprocity:** Members agree to norms that govern interactions and balance obligations.
- Institutional frameworks:** International organizations act as platforms for negotiation and implementation.
 - These principles **distinguish multilateralism from ad-hoc alliances** or regional cooperation that may lack universal norms.

Why Is Multilateralism Important For the Current World Order?

- Addresses Global Challenges No Nation Can Solve Alone:** *Multilateral cooperation is the only effective way* to coordinate responses and share solutions equitably for problems like **climate change, pandemics, terrorism, poverty, and migration**.
- Helps Maintain Peace and Security:** Post-World War II institutions like the UN were designed to prevent future global conflicts by promoting **dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution**.
 - It reduces the risk of unilateral aggression and fosters stability.
- Promotes a Rules-Based, Stable Global Order:** Institutions such as the WTO and UN frameworks ensure that **trade, human rights, and development goals** are negotiated and upheld fairly.
- Enhances Cooperation and Trust Among States:** Multilateral forums like the **G20, BRICS, and UNGA** give **small and large states equal voice** in shaping global agendas.
 - It builds **collective legitimacy and shared responsibility**, making policies more durable and equitable.
- Promotes Global Development Goals:** Sustainable development, health, and education initiatives often depend on **international funding, knowledge sharing, and coordinated policy frameworks** derived from multilateral agreements.

What Are the Concerns & Issues Surrounding Multilateralism?

- **Geopolitical Rivalries & Great Power Competition:** Great-power tensions between the **USA, China, Russia, and other major states** are complicating consensus in multilateral forums.
 - ◆ For example, the USA's decision to **withdraw from multiple international organizations** including many linked to the UN system highlights a **shift toward unilateral decision-making** and skepticism about institutional effectiveness.
- **Rise of Nationalism & Protectionism Policies :** These are pushing countries to **prioritize domestic interests over collective action**, undermining cooperative frameworks.
 - ◆ Protectionist trade measures, decoupling strategies in tech and supply chains, and nationalist rhetoric make it harder to sustain binding multilateral agreements.
- **Institutional Legitimacy & Representation Gaps:** Bodies like the **UNSC** and **some Bretton Woods institutions** retain power structures shaped in the post-WWII era, leading many **developing nations to argue for reform**.
 - ◆ **Disparities in influence**, where Western powers have disproportionate leverage, can undermine the perceived legitimacy of these institutions, making consensus and fairness harder to achieve.
- **Operational Weaknesses & Slow Decision Making:** Decision protocols (such as unanimity or consensus) can slow down action when urgency is required, as seen in **climate negotiations, pandemic response coordination, and trade disputes**.
 - ◆ The deadlock over ambitious climate commitments **at COP30** illustrated how divergent national priorities translate into watered-down multilateral agreements.
- **Funding, Resource Constraints & Operational Pressures:** Funding shortfalls (e.g., recent efforts to defund UN Human Rights Work) can weaken institutions' ability to carry out mandates effectively, eroding confidence in collective action.
- **Global South Vulnerabilities & Inequality:** The Global South may bear disproportionate impacts of climate change, pandemics, and economic shocks yet lack influence commensurate with their needs.
- **Fragmentation & Emergence of Alternative Cooperation Models:** Bilateral and regional/group arrangements (minilateralism) are increasingly common as countries seek more agile decision-making.
 - ◆ They risk **fragmenting** international cooperation and creating overlapping, sometimes conflicting, governance frameworks.
- **Technological & Issue-Specific Challenges:** Difficulties in forming global consensus on **digital governance** (e.g., AI regulations, data rules) reflect competing national policies and priorities.
 - ◆ **Complex cross-border problems** such as pandemics, cyber threats, and supply chain disruptions require cooperation that current multilateral structures sometimes fail to deliver efficiently.

How India Proactively Reaffirms Multilateralism?

- **Constitution of India & India's Commitment:** The **constitutional directive** to promote *international peace and cooperation, uphold international law, and encourage the settlement of disputes through dialogue and arbitration (Article 51; DPSP)*.
 - ◆ It provides a **foundational normative basis** for India's proactive multilateral engagement on issues from peace to trade.
- **India & Rules-Based Global Order:** India publicly reaffirms commitment to **rules-based cooperation**, even as some major powers retreat from international bodies or act unilaterally.
 - ◆ India believes that **global issues require consultative, cooperative action**, not unilateralism and continue to assert support for a **rules-based global economic system**.
- **Multi-Forum Engagement:**
 - ◆ **United Nations (UN):** India works through the UN on peacekeeping, development agendas like SDGs, human rights dialogues, and security collaborations.
 - ◆ **World Trade Organization (WTO):** Advocacy on trade rules and dispute mechanisms.

- ◆ **G20 / BRICS / SCO / Quad:** Engages across diverse multilateral and plurilateral platforms to address economic, health, climate, and security challenges.
- **Leading Institutional Reform and Engagement:** India has repeatedly called for reform of **key multilateral institutions like UNSC, WTO, G20** to make them more **equitable, representative, and relevant** to contemporary global challenges.
 - ◆ These efforts aim to **modernise and revitalise multilateral institutions**, reinforcing their legitimacy rather than abandoning them under pressure.
- **Indian-Hosted Dialogues (Raisina Dialogue):** It strengthens India's voice on global issues and bridges *North-South* and *global South* priorities.
- **Issue-Based Multilateral Initiatives:**
 - ◆ **Climate and energy:** Co-founder of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), coalition of **125 countries**, to accelerate solar energy adoption.
 - ◆ **Development Cooperation:** Indian foreign policy emphasizes partnerships with *Global South* countries for sustainable development, infrastructure, and capacity building.
 - ◆ **South-South cooperation:** India pushes for development internationalism and shared advancement through BRICS, IBSA, India-Africa Forum.

Source: ANI

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss how India's reaffirmation of multilateralism in response to the United States' withdrawal from global organizations reflects its approach to international diplomacy and global governance.

