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WIDENING THE SCOPE

How Middle Powers are Changing Liberal Institutionalism

FOREWORD BY SHIGEO KATSU

KAZAKHSTAN INSTITUTE
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THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

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As the liberal world order faces an escalating crisis, intensified by rising great power rivalries, this book underscores the indispensable role middle powers play in preserving stability and promoting global governance. In the face of an increasingly multipolar world order, author provides a compelling argument for the significance of middle powers. It offers a deep examination of how these nations navigate between the competing pressures of great power politics, while still preserving their unique influence and enhancing multilateral institutions. Departing from the long-standing Europocentric paradigm, it explores the unfolding shifts in global power balances. It reveals how middle powers, through their resourceful diplomacy and commitment to international norms, are pioneering new paths for global governance beyond the traditional frameworks.

Content

Foreword

The demise of the Soviet Union signaled the end of the Cold War and of a more or less stable bipolar world. The ensuing decade and a half centered around a sole global superpower, the United States. The inherently unstable and unsustainable nature of a single superpower setup with essentially no multilateral check-and-balances – even if such superpower imagines itself to be a benign "force for the good"—revealed its flaws in initiating unilateral military actions against more than questionable justifications and scant evidence, most notably in the debacle in Iraq and unintended destabilizing consequences for the whole of the Middle East.

The Great Financial Crisis triggered by Lehman Brothers collapse in 2008 shifted the global spotlight on a rapidly emerging contender to a superpower title, namely China. Capitalizing on its two decades of unprecedented economic growth record and transformation into the world's manufacturer, China assumed the mantle of the global economic locomotive as the Global North struggled to cope with the worst global economic and financial crisis sine the Great Depression triggered in late 1929.

Confirming China's arrival, in rapid succession President Xi Jin Ping announced the massive Belt and Road Initiative, proclaimed the Chinese Dream, established itself as a digital technology superpower, and transformed

China's military prowess. The economic gravity point has shifted to Asia, now further buttressed by Emerging India. It is no surprise that the biggest geopolitical rivalry and tensions involve the US and China, with most countries' status reduced to worried bystanders.

The Great Financial Crisis also accelerated the emergence of a new global governance construct, the G-20 grouping of the largest economies, substantially replacing the G-7 as key economic decisionmakers. Born initially as a crisis response mechanism, the G20 at long last recognized the role and weight of leading countries of the Global South, yet, we still have to see how its membership, its modus operandi, and ultimately, legitimacy will stand the test of time.

It is this context of a rapidly evolving international order, the importance of comprehensive scholarship to decipher complex political dynamics cannot be overstated. This very endeavor lies at the heart of "Widening the Scope: How Middle Powers are Changing Liberal Institutionalism," a compelling and insightful examination of the changing dynamics of global politics. I commend Miras Zhiyenbayev for offering an incisive analysis of the role and influence of middle powers within international governance structures, filling a much-needed gap in the discourse.

The book analyzes the prevailing global political crisis, a consequence of the failure of international governance mechanisms to effectively manage the shifting power dynamics. The theoretical framework employed enables readers to contextualize this crisis within the broader narrative of international relations, providing an accessible entry point to the multifaceted issues presented.

Through the lens of this political crisis, the role of middle powers within the structures of global governance are scrutinized. A novel and significant perspective emerges, positioning these middle powers as vital, albeit often under-recognized, actors in the international arena.

When examining the institutional design of international organizations, the book carefully deconstructs the common perception of these institutions as efficient mechanisms for fostering cooperation, challenging readers to reconsider the influence of power and interest balances in shaping institutional designs.

Miras explores the dilemma faced by the great powers between their desire to uphold the status quo and the recognition of the need for change, thus guiding readers to a nuanced understanding of the complexities these powers navigate as they face new realities on the world stage, and new boundaries middle powers can test while serving increasingly as facilitators.

The book therefore probes the role and strategies of middle powers within global organizations, while also examining the shifting landscape of regional cooperation. I enjoyed the deep dive into more recent forums such as the G20 and MIKTA and have come away with a better understanding of these dynamic mechanisms.

Importantly, the book concludes with offering a bold perspective on the evolution of middle power diplomacy in the 21st century. It emphasizes the needed transition from contested to resilient multilateralism. I recall that some years ago, I had the opportunity to discuss with some countries' leadership the role of middle-power countries such as Kazakhstan or South Korea could play against the

background of great power competition. We agreed that the fate of our planet is too important to leave it in the hands of just two or so countries, as powerful as they may be. Miras Zhiyenbayev offers a compelling narrative for middle power democracies: they have agency. Their leadership roles in a post-US hegemony world will be ever more important, a proposition that is both timely and provocative.

”Widening the Scope: How Middle Powers are Changing Liberal Institutionalism” is a significant contribution to the field of international relations. It deftly combines theoretical rigor with real-world relevance, providing valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and anyone interested in understanding the complex dynamics of our geopolitical landscape.

It is my sincere hope that this work sparks much-needed debate and discussion amongst academicians and practitioners alike, and I am confident that it will inspire future research on this important topic.

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Preface

At the time of penning these words, the global political landscape is witnessing a crisis that is possibly the most consequential since the end of the Second World War. This crisis emerged, not from the global economy, but from the failure of international governance structures to manage the evolving balance of power effectively. This inability has manifested in a myriad of political disputes and power struggles that have touched nearly every corner of the world.

Organizations that govern global politics and economies – including the United Nations (UN), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), – find themselves grappling with severe crises of legitimacy and efficiency. Notably, these entities seem unable to stem the tide of unilateral or bilateral action from powerful states, demonstrating a gap between the existing mechanisms of international governance and the shifting distribution of global power.

This political crisis has underscored the weaknesses of these institutions, reflecting a growing dissonance with the realities of the global political landscape. Significant reforms have been proposed in the architecture of international governance, mirroring similar calls within the IMF and the EU. However, the adequacy of these reforms

remains in question as power struggles between leading nations persist.

The essence of the issue lies in the apparent inability of these organizations to represent a unified world government effectively. As the global power balance continues to shift, these institutions are being challenged to reinvent themselves and their modus operandi. Failing to do so risks perpetuating a system that is no longer effective in managing global political dynamics and containing power struggles between the world's most powerful nations.

In the face of these challenges, it becomes increasingly evident that numerous states are gravitating towards unilateral or bilateral policy solutions, reflecting a growing disillusionment with multilateral institutions. This drift threatens to undermine the fundamental principle of international governance – collective problem-solving in the pursuit of global peace and stability.

As we navigate this new era of global political crisis, the need for effective international governance that can adapt to the shifting global power dynamics becomes more pressing than ever. Confronted with the question of whether they should maintain their engagement in the realm of great power politics or abstain from it, it becomes apparent that global governance institutions cannot merely continue their traditional roles without substantial evolution. The escalating global power contests necessitate that these institutions transform fundamentally, not just superficially, in order to bolster their legitimacy and efficacy within the increasingly complex and contentious international milieu.

This endeavor was originally intended as an exploration of the governance mechanisms of international organizations, but as the guiding principles behind such governance unraveled, it became evident that the insights gained could be applied to a wide array of issues, that limit middle powers in such organization. However, it quickly became apparent that many of my previously held beliefs were flawed.

While it is well known that the UN often struggles with the balance of power among its member states, it is especially revealing to see the extent to which middle powers often have limited influence or leverage. The greater powers, meanwhile, tend to sidestep accusations or resolutions with impunity, further entrenching an imbalance within the system.

In my effort to make sense of these dynamics, I reviewed the models of reformation broadly applicable to international organizations, shedding light on the mechanisms and constraints that shape their actions. Consequently, this project evolved from a study of the international organization and major political crises into an examination of shaping role of middle powers in evolution of international institutions.

This work deviates from the prevalent belief among scholars of international organizations, which holds these institutions as intrinsically efficient and architectured purposefully to foster cooperation. Such a view finds its roots in the robust intellectual tradition within organizational economics and an influential branch of research in international relations.

The design of these institutions is primarily dictated by the equilibrium of power and interests. In this context, the role and influence of middle powers in these organizations emerge as crucial factors. Middle powers, caught between the ambitions of smaller nations and the hegemony of the great powers, often serve as brokers and bridge builders. They aim to negotiate and balance power and interests, but their ability to do so is often limited by the dominance of the major powers, and despite their potential collaborative endeavors, appears insufficient in proposing alternatives to the prevailing dynamics of great power politics. This insufficiency originates not merely from the disparities in their relative power but also fundamentally from the inherent divergences in their perspectives towards global governance.

These divergences are demonstrably manifested in the distinctive capacities and aspirations of middle powers to exert influence and project power on the global stage. The differential power projection capabilities and intentions of middle powers, compared to those of great powers, underscore their unique worldviews, which are often fundamentally incompatible with the more dominant paradigms of great power politics.

Additionally, these middle powers frequently find themselves navigating the tension between the need for change and the desire to maintain the status quo. While the existing order may limit their influence, it also provides a degree of predictability and stability. As such, middle powers can simultaneously push for reforms to increase their say in the institutions while advocating for the preservation of elements of the status quo that serve their interests.

The involvement of these middle powers in international organizations thus adds another layer of complexity to the already intricate dynamic of institutional design. It underscores the argument that these designs are indeed more about balancing power and interests rather than merely minimizing costs. As such, any comprehensive understanding of international organizations must consider these factors and their interplay within the larger global context.

In the first part of the book, we embark on a comprehensive examination of the theory and practice of liberal institutionalism, particularly in the context of a monopolar world where a single great power dominates the global stage. We scrutinize how this dominant power and its actions shape the dynamics of international organizations and their ability to foster cooperation and interdependence among nations.

One of the primary focus in this section is the role international organizations play in maintaining the status quo. We discuss the dynamics between the dominant powers and these organizations, and how these interactions either uphold or challenge the existing global order. This involves a critical analysis of the ways in which the status quo is preserved, both through the overt actions of great powers and the more subtle mechanisms of these institutions.

We then delve into the ongoing debate between bilateral and multilateral relations, examining their relevance and impact in today's world. This exploration raises questions about the necessity and relevance of global institutions. Are they becoming redundant in an era

where bilateral relations seem to be the preferred mode of interaction for the great powers, or do they still play a crucial role in maintaining global stability?

Lastly, we address the criticism that international organizations are marked by inefficiency and indecisiveness, leading to what some describe as a systemic crisis of institutionalism. Here, we analyze the sources of these perceived shortcomings, investigate their impact on the overall functionality of these organizations, and discuss potential pathways towards resolving this crisis.

This initial part of the book sets the stage for the arguments and analyses to follow, providing a foundation upon which we build a nuanced understanding of liberal institutionalism, the role of great powers, and the future of international organizations in our increasingly complex world.

In the second chapter of the book, we explore the critical role that middle powers play in international organizations and how they contribute to addressing global challenges at a regional level. This segment delves into the strategies and limitations of these middle powers, offering an understanding of how they navigate the dynamics of larger geopolitical forces and local realities.

We further investigate the changing landscape of multilateral regional cooperation. The shifting balances of power and evolving geopolitical landscape necessitate a thorough evaluation of regional alliances and their impact on global politics. Here, we assess the ways in which regional cooperation is adapting to these new realities

and the role international organizations play in facilitating these changes.

The emergence and evolution of the G20 is an illustrative case of this dynamic, as it has progressively matured into a significant player in global governance. As a forum that unites a diverse array of nations, both from the traditional great powers (e.g., the US, China) and from the emerging economies (India or Brazil), the G20 symbolizes an alternative model to the dichotomy of great powers versus the rest.

Instead, it exemplifies the concept of "middle power diplomacy". The G20 embodies this model of governance by creating a platform where middle powers can engage with the great ones on relatively equal footing. It acknowledges the growing importance of emerging economies and provides them with a voice in shaping the global economic policy discourse, while also recognizing the continuing role of the traditional powers.

Indeed, an increasingly dynamic form of international cooperation has arisen from middle powers, as embodied by the MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, Australia) forum and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Both groupings offer a distinct perspective on middle power cooperation and represent promising examples of alternative models of governance.

MIKTA, as a forum of middle powers from diverse geographical and economic backgrounds, presents a unique model of cooperation. These countries, although disparate in their regional affiliations, share common characteristics in their influence in global politics. They are economically significant yet not dominant, regionally

influential but not hegemonic, and active in global affairs without the comprehensive capabilities of great powers. MIKTA countries have shown a particular aptitude for harnessing their collective diplomatic influence to advocate for shared interests and norms on the global stage.

In the final chapter of this book, we explore the ascendancy of middle power diplomacy as a potent force in the 21st-century multilateral landscape. We undertake a comprehensive study of the transition from contested to resilient multilateralism, reorienting the discussion away from the traditional understanding of power dynamics.

We will then focus on multilateralism, a characteristic feature of middle power diplomacy. It is through this lens that we will dissect the intricate interplay between middle powers and international institutions, analyzing the implications for global governance. We examine the ways in which middle powers, with their emphasis on cooperation and consensus, contribute to the strengthening and evolution of the multilateral order.

Subsequently, we will examine the concept of middle power democracies, specifically focusing on their evolving leadership roles in the absence of US hegemony. The post-American world order offers an intriguing backdrop to observe the dynamics of middle powers and their potential to drive global initiatives and policies. The analysis will delve into how middle power democracies navigate this geopolitical context, and the strategies they employ to project influence and pursue their international objectives.

Following this, we present an in-depth study of Turkey as a case example of middle power activism. In recent years, Turkey has become an increasingly prominent

actor in international relations, using its growing influence to challenge the existing global order. This examination will explore how Turkey, as a middle power, leverages its geopolitical, economic, and cultural influence to challenge and reshape the system in which it operates.

In the final section, we turn our gaze to Central Asia, a region of increasing strategic importance in the wake of receding great power influences. Particularly, we question if Kazakhstan, emerging as a significant regional player, can fill the power vacuum left by the retreat of traditional great powers. This exploration will delve into Kazakhstan's potential and the implications of its ascension for the future dynamics of Central Asia, providing insights into the shifting power dynamics in a post-Great Game world.

Introduction

Liberal Institutionalism (LI), a cornerstone theory in the field of International Relations (IR), continues to shape our understanding of global governance, economic interdependence, and multinational cooperation. Rooted in liberal thought, this perspective assumes that international institutions play a crucial role in mitigating anarchy, establishing order, and promoting cooperation among states (Keohane and Martin, 1995).

The evolution of liberal institutionalism is marked by significant milestones. Initially, it developed as a response to the realist outlook, which emphasizes conflict and competition among states in a condition of anarchy (Mearsheimer, 1994). Liberal institutionalists argue that international institutions can, in fact, foster cooperation and improve the prospects for peace. A prominent example was the establishment of the United Nations after World War II, designed to prevent global conflict and foster international cooperation.

Liberal institutionalism gained significant traction during the post-Cold War era, and this period will form the primary focus of our discussion. The end of the bipolar world order provided fertile ground for liberal institutionalist ideas, as evidenced by the rise of various international institutions, particularly in the economic sphere, like the

World Trade Organization (WTO) (Simmons and Martin, 2002).

Two main approaches to liberal institutionalism exist, each focusing on a different mechanism through which institutions promote cooperation. The first, often referred to as "rational institutionalism", posits that institutions reduce transaction costs and provide information, thus facilitating cooperation among rational, self-interested actors (Keohane, 1984).

The second approach, known as "constructive institutionalism", emphasizes the role of institutions in shaping states' identities and interests, arguing that institutions can construct social realities and influence actors' preferences and behaviors (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998).

Moving forward, we will be employing a blend of the two aforementioned approaches – rational institutionalism and constructive institutionalism – to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the role and influence of great and middle powers in international organizations.

The liberal world order, underpinned by the principles of liberal institutionalism, indeed appears to be facing one of its most severe crises since the height of the Cold War. This crisis is both political, stemming from shifting power dynamics and geopolitical unrest, and conceptual, arising from an increasing uncertainty about the potential for reform and adaptation within the existing institutional frameworks.

Politically, the crisis can be traced to the rise of new powers challenging the existing order, the resurgence of nationalism and protectionism in many parts of the

world, and a growing disillusionment with liberal norms and institutions (Ikenberry, 2018). The liberal world order, historically championed by Western powers, is increasingly being tested by emerging economies like China and India that demand a greater say in international decision-making processes (Acharya, 2014). This changing geopolitical landscape has cast doubts on the ability of existing institutions to maintain the status quo.

Conceptually, liberal institutionalism is grappling with the challenge of responding effectively to these new realities. The theory, traditionally predicated on the idea of reducing anarchy and promoting cooperation through international institutions, now faces the paradox of an increasingly multipolar world where power is more diffused and the role of state actors is more complex (Keohane, 1984).

Moreover, the 'institutionalism by projection' approach – the practice of established powers projecting their institutional models onto the international system – is also under scrutiny (Pouliot & Cornut, 2015). Critics argue that this approach fails to accommodate the diverse perspectives and needs of non-Western nations, thereby contributing to the perceived legitimacy crisis of international institutions (Lake, 2009).

Another significant strand of criticism argues that institutionalism, as a cornerstone of international relations theory, is facing a systemic crisis characterized by inefficiency and indecisiveness (Mearsheimer, 1994; Barnett & Finnemore, 2004).

Institutional inefficiency can stem from various sources. Internally, the bureaucratic structure of international organizations can lead to procedural

complexities and delay in decision-making (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). Externally, the diversity of member states and their conflicting interests can create deadlocks in negotiations, impeding the capacity of these institutions to respond swiftly to emerging challenges (Koremenos et al., 2001).

Indecisiveness is another challenge that is often attributed to the consensus-based decision-making model followed by many international institutions. While this model underscores the principle of sovereign equality, it can also lead to prolonged deliberations and difficulty reaching agreement, particularly in contentious matters (Hurd, 2007). For example, the United Nations Security Council has been criticized for its indecisiveness in addressing certain conflicts and humanitarian crises due to the veto power of its permanent members (Malone, 2004).

Furthermore, critics argue that international institutions, at times, lack the enforcement capacity to ensure compliance with their decisions (Downs et al., 1996). This issue becomes especially pertinent in matters of war and political decisions where national interests can overshadow institutional mandates, further questioning the effectiveness of institutionalism (Mearsheimer, 1994).

At the heart of the crisis lies the uncertainty over whether international institutions can evolve and adapt to reflect the changing realities. Can the liberal world order, as we know it, undergo the necessary reforms to remain relevant and legitimate in an increasingly multipolar world? The answer to this question is critical for the future trajectory of international relations and global governance.

International organizations have a significant role in maintaining the status quo in global politics, a role heavily influenced by the strategic maneuvers of great powers. These influences from great powers may be either direct or indirect, which are often termed as 'explicit' and 'implicit' influences respectively.

Explicit influence refers to the direct power and control that great powers exert within international organizations. This could be through their voting power in decision-making processes, control over financial resources, or the ability to impose sanctions or rewards (Koremenos et al., 2001). For example, the United States and other great powers possess a significant voting share in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, allowing them a high degree of control over these institutions' policies (Woods, 2003).

On the other hand, implicit influence is subtler and more indirect. It could manifest in the way that great powers shape the norms, values, and decision-making paradigms within international organizations. This indirect influence can create an environment where policies and actions align with the interests of these powers, even without explicit coercion (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). A prominent example is the propagation of liberal market principles within the WTO and IMF, a reflection of the ideological leanings of the Western great powers (Stiglitz, 2002).

Maintaining the status quo is often in the interest of great powers, as it preserves the existing power hierarchies and structures that enable their continued dominance. International organizations, influenced by the explicit and implicit mechanisms of great power control, often play a significant role in sustaining this status quo, though

they can also become arenas for contestation and change (Gruber, 2000).

The growing complexity of global issues underscores the reality that no single nation or group of nations can tackle these problems alone. The intricate and interconnected nature of global challenges, including climate change, global health pandemics, nuclear proliferation, and cyber threats, necessitates concerted multinational cooperation (Hale, 2016).

The geopolitical landscape is further complicated by the rise of new powers and non-state actors, shifts in economic power, and growing interdependence among nations. In this increasingly multipolar world, the capacity of great powers to single-handedly dictate global norms and policies is challenged (Ikenberry, 2018).

International organizations, by their design, provide a platform for cooperation and dialogue among nations. However, as arenas for contestation, they can also facilitate the articulation of alternative perspectives and the negotiation of power shifts. In this context, middle powers and emerging economies often play significant roles, striving to bridge the gap between the established great powers and the developing world (Jordaan, 2003).

The world is facing a panoply of mounting global challenges that include climate change, pandemics, economic inequality, nuclear proliferation, and cyber threats, among others. These issues transcend national borders, and thus, they necessitate international cooperation to effectuate meaningful solutions. An increasing body of literature is highlighting the evolving role

of middle powers and regional cooperation in addressing these global challenges (Cooper et al., 2013).

Middle powers – nations that have moderate influence in the international arena but are not superpowers – are increasingly playing significant roles in the global governance landscape. They act as mediators, norm entrepreneurs, and bridge-builders between the global North and South, contributing to the resolution of complex global issues.

Middle powers occupy a significant, yet often overlooked, space in the international system. These nations are typically characterized by their middling economic and military capabilities, balanced geopolitical influence, and commitment to multilateral diplomacy and international law. Middle powers can further be divided into two categories: traditional or 'classic' middle powers and emerging middle powers. Classic middle powers include nations like Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands, which, though not global powerhouses, have long histories of playing outsized roles in global affairs through their influence in international organizations and commitment to global norms (Cooper, 1997).

Emerging middle powers, on the other hand, refer to countries like India, Brazil, and South Africa that have gained increasing influence in recent decades due to their rising economic and geopolitical clout. These countries often seek a greater voice in international affairs to match their newfound power, and they might challenge existing international norms even as they seek to influence them.

When considering middle powers with a regional presence and interests, both rational institutionalism

and constructive institutionalism offer valuable insights. Rational institutionalism can explain how such powers use international organizations to advance their regional interests and obtain strategic benefits (Keohane, 1984). At the same time, constructive institutionalism can shed light on how these powers' identities and behaviors are influenced by regional norms and institutions (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998).

However, for a more nuanced understanding of these middle powers' behaviors and influences, a hybrid approach combining elements from both theories may be beneficial. It would allow us to understand how strategic considerations and normative influences interplay to shape middle powers' roles in international organizations (Nossal, 2000).

Middle powers, as rational actors, interact with international institutions in a way that advances their national interests, reduces uncertainty, and achieves the benefits of cooperation. Simultaneously, these middle powers are also subject to the normative influence of the institutions they participate in, with these institutions potentially shaping their identities, interests, and behavior. This dual approach will provide a more nuanced perspective on the mutual influence between middle powers and international organizations, taking into account both the instrumental benefits an normative impacts.

This approach not only mirrors the complex nature of international relations, but also addresses the interactions between middle powers and international institutions at both the pragmatic and the ideational levels. Our ensuing analysis will unpack this interplay and elucidate how

middle powers navigate, contribute to, and are influenced by international institutions in the post-Cold War world.

As we move forward into an increasingly interconnected world, the complex dynamics of international relations require careful analysis. One particular area of inquiry that has sparked considerable debate in recent years is the relative effectiveness and relevance of bilateral versus multilateral relations. The central question here is whether global institutions, which predominantly follow a multilateral approach, are becoming redundant in the face of bilateral dynamics.

Bilateral relations refer to the direct interactions, agreements, or collaborations between two states. These relations are characterized by their simplicity and pragmatism, often facilitating quick decision-making and implementation (Dür et al., 2010). In contrast, multilateral relations involve multiple states or international organizations. While multilateral diplomacy can be more complex and time-consuming, it is believed to offer a broader and more comprehensive platform for cooperation, potentially achieving shared objectives that might be difficult to accomplish bilaterally (Keohane, 1990).

However, recent trends suggest that bilateral relationships are gaining increased prominence in international politics, posing challenges to the primacy of multilateral approaches. Some argue that this shift may signal the redundancy of global institutions, particularly in the context of the rise of nationalist sentiments, diminishing trust in multilateral institutions, and the perceived inefficiency of these institutions (Mearsheimer, 2019).

Regional cooperation represents another significant facet of global governance. By leveraging geographical proximity and shared cultural, economic, and political ties, regional entities can collaborate more effectively and efficiently to address common challenges. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union (EU), and the African Union (AU) are primary examples of regional cooperation, each with unique methods of problem-solving and conflict resolution (Börzel and Risse, 2016).

Two main approaches shape regional cooperation: the functionalist approach and the constructivist approach. The functionalist perspective emphasizes the role of common interests and rational decision-making, suggesting that cooperation is a result of mutual benefits to be gained (Mitrany, 1966). In contrast, the constructivist approach focuses on shared norms, values, and identities, arguing that these factors form the basis for regional cooperation (Adler, 1997).

Within these structures of regional cooperation, middle powers often play an essential role. These nations hold substantial influence within their regions and on certain global issues, often 'punching above their weight' in international diplomacy. The role of middle powers in regional cooperation can be understood from multiple dimensions.

First, middle powers often act as mediators and bridge-builders, leveraging their diplomatic influence to facilitate negotiation and consensus-building. With their unique position between the great powers and smaller states, middle powers can understand and reconcile

different perspectives, fostering more inclusive and balanced outcomes. Examples include Norway's role in peace negotiations and Australia's leadership in forming the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Second, middle powers frequently serve as norm entrepreneurs, advocating for international norms and principles that they believe should guide regional cooperation (Ingebritsen, 2002). By doing so, they can shape the regional agenda, promoting issues such as human rights, democracy, and environmental sustainability. Canada's advocacy for human security in the 1990s and Sweden's commitment to gender equality are illustrative examples.

Third, middle powers can also contribute to capacity-building and technical cooperation in their regions. They often have the resources and expertise to support other countries in areas such as economic development, public health, and disaster management, thereby enhancing regional resilience and stability (Soeya, 2011).

The landscape of multilateral regional cooperation is undergoing substantial change, marked by shifting power dynamics and increasing regionalization. This transformation is characterized by a dual phenomenon: on the one hand, great powers are losing some of their global dominance and are seeking to compensate for this loss through regional cooperation; on the other hand, middle powers are stepping up to address region-specific problems, increasingly becoming key actors in regional governance.

Great powers, such as the United States and China, are witnessing a relative decline in their global presence

due to a range of factors, including economic shifts, increasing multipolarity, and the resurgence of nationalism (Breslin, 2016). To retain their influence, these powers are adopting strategies to strengthen their regional footprints. The U.S., for instance, has been recalibrating its foreign policy focus towards the Indo-Pacific region through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a strategic forum comprising the U.S., Australia, India, and Japan (Medcalf, 2020). Similarly, China's Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates its ambition to build extensive regional networks through infrastructure development and economic cooperation (Nadège, 2018).

Concurrently, middle powers are emerging as crucial players in addressing region-specific problems. Their understanding of local contexts, diplomatic agility, and commitment to multilateralism uniquely position them to mediate conflicts, promote norm diffusion, and facilitate regional integration. Australia's leadership in forming the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and Norway's role in the Middle East peace process exemplify the impact that middle powers can have on regional cooperation (Jordaan, 2003; Ingebritsen, 2002).

Furthermore, regional cooperation among middle powers can generate solutions to region-specific issues that transcend national borders, such as migration, environmental degradation, and public health crises. An example of this is the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, where countries like Brazil, Colombia, and Peru work together to address environmental challenges in the Amazon basin (Flemes, 2010).

In essence, the changing landscape of multilateral regional cooperation is characterized by a diffusion of power, with great powers seeking to bolster their regional influence and middle powers assuming a more prominent role in resolving regional issues.

Transnational cooperation also includes intra-regional connectivity, which are increasingly marked by the blurring of national borders and the intensification of cross-border interactions. In this context, middle powers are becoming indispensable actors, especially due to their ability to bridge gaps, facilitate dialogues, and stimulate reforms in international organizations.

The inclusion of middle powers in international organizations is important for multiple reasons. Firstly, these states can bring unique perspectives to the table, given their often hybrid position between developing and developed countries. This allows them to provide a balanced view on global issues, potentially helping to narrow the North-South divide.

Secondly, middle powers often possess considerable diplomatic and normative influence, which they can leverage to promote certain principles and norms within international organizations (Ingebritsen, 2002). This includes, for instance, advocating for human rights, democracy, and environmental sustainability. The impact of middle powers can also be seen in their ability to shape agendas and guide discussions towards these areas.

Lastly, middle powers can play a vital role in amending and reforming the procedures of international organizations without formal changes. Through their diplomatic efforts, they can influence the culture and

practices within these organizations, thereby facilitating procedural changes 'from within'. This can involve advocating for more transparent decision-making processes, greater inclusivity, and better representation of different regions and interests (Cooper et al., 2013). An example of this is the 'MIKTA' group of middle powers (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia) that has been advocating for reform in the practices and procedures of the United Nations.

As was already mentioned, reforming international organizations represents a significant challenge in the realm of global governance. This is due, in large part, to the vested interests of great powers in maintaining the status quo, given that these existing structures often underpin their dominance (Gruber, 2000). As such, any significant proposed reforms may face resistance from these powers who perceive a threat to their established privileges and power positions.

In contrast, middle powers typically face fewer constraints when it comes to reforming international organizations. They attract less attention and therefore are less likely to provoke strong opposition or engender geopolitical rivalries. Furthermore, because they lack the ability to dominate global governance structures, middle powers have less invested in preserving the status quo and are more open to changes that could make these institutions more representative, efficient, and effective (Adler and Greve, 2009).

This relative freedom allows middle powers to exploit opportunities to instigate or support reforms. This may involve lobbying for procedural changes, promoting

inclusivity, and pushing for greater transparency within these organizations. A case in point is the role of countries like Canada, Norway, and Australia in advocating for reforms within the United Nations system, including the Security Council (Cooper, 2013).

However, it's important to note that while middle powers can capitalize on these opportunities, their capacity to drive substantial reforms should not be overestimated. Changes in international organizations usually require a wider consensus that encompasses both middle and great powers. Consequently, the effectiveness of middle powers in initiating and advancing reforms often relies on their diplomatic skills, strategic alliances, and the prevailing geopolitical context.

Middle powers have been influential in shaping and implementing humanitarian action. They often have the resources, credibility, and diplomatic capacity to advocate for and facilitate humanitarian efforts. Countries like Canada, Norway, and Sweden, for instance, have played significant roles in shaping global norms around humanitarian intervention and in mobilizing responses to humanitarian crises. By leveraging their institutional agency within international organizations, these middle powers can help to prioritize humanitarian action on the global agenda and coordinate effective responses.

Middle powers also have a long-standing tradition of acting as mediators in international disputes, using their 'in-between' status to bridge divides between conflicting parties. Norway's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and Indonesia's role in facilitating dialogue in the South China Sea disputes exemplify this mediating

role (Ramsbotham, 2011). By providing impartial spaces for negotiation and leveraging their diplomatic networks, middle powers can contribute to the maintenance of international power equilibrium.

As an attempt to better understand the potential roles and opportunities available to middle powers in global governance, it can be useful to conduct case studies on a regional level and extrapolate the findings to a broader context. Regional case studies allow us to delve into the specificities of middle power dynamics, examining the unique strategies and mechanisms these nations use to exert influence.

Central Asia, a region traditionally seen as a geopolitical playing field for great powers, has witnessed a notable shift towards 'middle power diplomacy', particularly in the case of Kazakhstan. As one of the region's key economic and political players, Kazakhstan has leveraged its regional power status to influence regional dynamics and elevate the status of regional institutions.

The term 'middle power diplomacy' refers to the diplomatic strategies employed by middle powers to influence global or regional outcomes, often through mediation, norm entrepreneurship, and bridge-building between other states (Cooper, Heine, and Thakur, 2013). In the Central Asian context, this often involves promoting regional cooperation, resolving conflicts, and driving economic integration.

Kazakhstan's effectiveness in its diplomatic strategies can be attributed to several factors. First, it has shown a unique ability to balance its relationships with major

powers such as Russia, China, and the United States, maintaining cordial relations without overt alignment with any single power (Anceschi, 2014). This balance has allowed it to maintain a degree of independence and strategic maneuverability in its foreign policy.

Second, Kazakhstan has consistently pushed for regional integration and cooperation within Central Asia, promoting dialogue and consensus-building among neighboring states. This is best exemplified by its role in the establishment and development of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (Cummings and Nørgaard, 2004).

Third, Kazakhstan has effectively utilized its vast natural resources, particularly oil and gas, as a source of economic and political leverage. Its energy diplomacy has enabled it to attract foreign investment, boost economic development, and enhance its regional and global standing (Overland, 2016).

Lastly, Kazakhstan's 'multi-vector' foreign policy, which involves cultivating diverse partnerships and balancing between different global powers, has helped it to navigate complex regional dynamics and maintain stability (Kassenova, 2017).

In the context of the book, 'middle power diplomacy' represents a significant case study of how middle powers can elevate their influence and the status of regional institutions in a geopolitically contested region. The Central Asian case study of Kazakhstan, for instance, provides us with rich insights into how a middle powers can leverage their resources, geographic position, and diplomatic strategies to foster regional cooperation,

mediate conflicts, and drive institutional development. It offers valuable lessons about the role of energy diplomacy, balanced foreign policy, and regional integration efforts in enhancing a middle power's standing and influence.

Such regionally specific observations can then be extrapolated to shed light on the potential roles of middle powers in the wider international arena. By drawing parallels between the regional dynamics observed in these case studies and the broader global context, we can identify strategies and approaches that middle powers could potentially employ to influence international outcomes.

Therefore, the premise of this book lies in the exploration of the ongoing crisis in institutionalism, the role of middle powers in addressing this crisis, and a focused case study on the Central Asian region to expand these ideas. We delve into the concept of liberal institutionalism, the dynamics of great power politics, and the systemic issues that have precipitated a crisis in the international institutional order.

We also discuss how great powers maintain the status quo through international organizations and assess the impact of both bilateral and multilateral relations on the redundancy of global institutions. Further, we evaluate the systemic inefficiency and indecisiveness that characterize the crisis in institutionalism. Our case study of Central Asia provides a regional perspective on these global phenomena, helping us to develop a nuanced understanding of how middle powers can leverage their unique capabilities to influence change in the international institutional landscape.

In essence, this book is a journey through the crisis and opportunities of institutionalism, the evolving role of middle powers, and the dynamic and complex regional geopolitical landscapes that shape our world. By unpacking these dynamics, we hope to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of global governance and to chart potential pathways towards a more effective, equitable, and sustainable international order.

However, while this extrapolation can provide useful insights, it's important to bear in mind the unique characteristics of different regional contexts. The strategies that work in one region may not necessarily be effective in another due to varying geopolitical, economic, cultural, and historical contexts. Therefore, any extrapolation should be treated as suggestive rather than prescriptive, providing a starting point for further exploration and analysis.

Chapter I

Liberal Institutionalism, Great and Middle Powers: Beyond cooperation and Interdependence

The expansion and dominance of liberal institutionalism in the post-World War II era can be seen as both impressive and, at times, paradoxical. The United States, with its partners, constructed a vast international order centered on economic openness, multilateral institutions, security cooperation, and democratic solidarity. In this arrangement, the United States assumed the role of the self-proclaimed "first citizen", providing leadership and exerting hegemonic influence to anchor alliances, stabilize the global economy, foster cooperation, and champion the values of the "free world".

Western Europe and Japan eagerly aligned themselves with this extended liberal order, tying their security and economic prospects to its framework. Following the end of the Cold War, the influence of this order expanded further, encompassing countries in East Asia, Eastern Europe,

and Latin America, which embarked on democratic transitions and integration into the global economy. As the postwar order grew in scope and scale, so did the proliferation of its governance institutions. NATO expanded its membership, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was established, and the Group of Twenty (G20) assumed a prominent role on the global stage.

At the close of the twentieth century, one could be forgiven for perceiving a linear trajectory of progress and liberal internationalism in the world. However, an ironic analysis reveals certain contradictions and limitations within liberal institutionalism. While the order emphasized economic openness, it often favored the interests of the developed Western powers, leaving less affluent countries struggling to fully participate and reap the benefits of globalization. The rhetoric of democratic solidarity and human rights espoused by liberal institutionalism sometimes clashed with the realities of power politics, as the United States and its allies engaged in realpolitik, supporting autocratic regimes that served their strategic interests.

Moreover, the expansion of liberal institutionalism faced significant challenges. Non-state actors, such as terrorist organizations, emerged as potent threats that defied traditional state-centric approaches. Regional conflicts and economic disparities persisted, undermining the idealistic vision of a harmonious and prosperous global community. The rise of new global players, such as China and India, disrupted the balance of power, prompting debates and negotiations about the distribution of influence within the international order.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, and subsequent security concerns diverted attention and resources toward counterterrorism efforts. As a result, liberal institutionalism sometimes took a backseat to unilateral actions, compromising the principles of multilateralism and raising questions about the true commitment to liberal values.

In this light, the narrative of a progressive and liberal internationalist direction appears somewhat idealistic and oversimplified. While liberal institutionalism achieved notable successes in promoting cooperation, stability, and democracy, its inherent contradictions and shortcomings suggest a more nuanced interpretation. The irony lies in the tension between the aspirational goals and the complex realities of power dynamics, economic disparities, and competing interests that shape international relations.

Rise and Fall of Liberal Institutionalism in Monopolar World

Classical Liberalism, which serves as the foundation for Liberal Institutionalism, presents a stark contrast to the realist perspective that states are destined to clash in their pursuit of power. Instead, Liberalism posits that cooperation can be sustained through the formation of like-minded groups and the establishment of domestic and international institutions, thereby mitigating competition, conflict, and war.

Liberal International Relations scholars have long emphasized the value of international institutions in promoting international cooperation (Keohane 1984, 1989; Keohane and Nye 2000). According to their perspective, institutions serve as mediators by providing a common ground for states to interact and encouraging cooperation among them. These scholars argue that states, as rational actors, prioritize absolute gains achieved through cooperation and are less concerned with the relative gains of other states. They contend that institutions, as intermediate variables, significantly influence state behavior by shaping policy preferences and choices.

However, a critical analysis of this viewpoint by their counterparts in realist and neorealist theories (Grieco 1988; Walt 2002) raises some important questions. While liberal scholars advocate for the positive role of institutions in fostering cooperation, it is essential to consider the limitations and complexities inherent in their functioning. The assumption that states will always prioritize absolute gains and disregard relative gains is overly simplistic. States operate within a competitive international system, and concerns about relative power and influence often shape their decision-making processes. Furthermore, the effectiveness of institutions in mediating conflicts and encouraging sustained cooperation is not always guaranteed. Power dynamics, differing interests, and divergent policy preferences among states can hinder the ability of institutions to achieve meaningful consensus and cooperation.

Additionally, the notion that institutions act as intermediaries influencing state behavior overlooks the

agency and autonomy of states themselves. States are not mere passive actors shaped solely by institutional forces. They possess their own policy preferences, national interests, and strategic considerations that may or may not align with institutional goals. While institutions can provide a framework for interaction and facilitate cooperation, they do not guarantee homogeneity or convergence of interests among states.

In the mid-twentieth century, realists, unable to overlook the proliferation of postwar institution-building, sought to reconcile these institutions with their own paradigm. Some realist works, such as Morgenthau's "Politics among Nations" (1948), marginalized international institutions as mere reflections of the balance of power among states. According to this perspective, institutions were viewed as peripheral, with theories focusing directly on states.

However, other realist works, such as Charles Kindleberger's "The World in Depression" (1986), took a more nuanced stance. Kindleberger, an early proponent of "hegemonic stability theory", argued that the aggressive behavior and economic turmoil of the 1930s were the result of the absence of a single dominant state capable of effectively maintaining the international system. After World War II, the United States recognized that it possessed the necessary capabilities and interests to assume the role of a hegemon. Consequently, it established a network of international institutions to facilitate economic stability and provide other public goods to the international community. In this perspective, the alignment of liberal values was deemed unnecessary, as peace could be achieved

through the self-interested enforcement of cooperation by a hegemonic power.

This portrayal underscores a critical viewpoint regarding the role of a hegemon within Liberal Institutionalism. Rather than emphasizing the collective pursuit of liberal values and shared norms, it suggests that the establishment of international institutions was primarily driven by the self-serving interests of the hegemon. The hegemon's actions were geared toward advancing its own agenda and maintaining control, rather than fostering genuine cooperation based on shared liberal principles.

While Liberal Institutionalism acknowledges the potential for sustained cooperation through institutions, such analysis highlights the tension between the pursuit of liberal values and the self-interest of the hegemonic power. It prompted scrutiny of the underlying motivations behind the establishment of international institutions and raises questions about the extent to which these institutions truly embody the principles of liberal internationalism.

More recent scholarship, exemplified by John Ikenberry's "After Victory", strives to reconcile realist and liberal perspectives on the phenomenon of post-war institution-building. In Ikenberry's analysis, state power retains its significance, but international institutions and liberal values also play pivotal roles. These institutions, once established, possess a remarkable resilience and resistance to change. They become entrenched, making it arduous to dismantle them. Consequently, a hegemonic state, at the zenith of its power, can utilize institutional rules to exercise self-restraint. Simultaneously, it can

extend its influence into the future, even as its raw power wanes.

The intriguing proposition emerges that if a hegemon infuses liberal values into these institutions, they will perpetuate the rule of law and embody the universalist principles envisioned by thinkers such as Kant. The initial self-restraint demonstrated by the hegemon serves as a persuasive incentive for other states to join. As the number of states invested in the institution grows, the institution itself becomes more entrenched, ensuring its persistence and propagation. This explanation sheds light on the expansion and enduring existence of the liberal world order, initiated in the aftermath of World War II.

Liberalism faced significant challenges in making sense of the tumultuous world wars, yet it experienced a remarkable resurgence in the post-war era. This revival can be observed both in the practical realm, as it aligned with the institution-building and relative peace that characterized the latter half of the twentieth century, and in the conceptual sphere, as it underwent a process of rehabilitation and redemption.

Time and again, the influence of Liberalism has soared precisely when its proponents are compelled to grapple with competing theoretical perspectives or unexpected historical events. These moments of reckoning have prompted the emergence of various offshoots of Liberalism, ultimately culminating in the refined form of Liberal Institutionalism that gained prominence from the 1970s onward. It is in these moments of tension and

adaptation that Liberalism has demonstrated its capacity for resilience and adaptability.

The stark contrast between the turmoil of the world wars and the subsequent era of institution-building and relative peace served as a catalyst for the revival of Liberalism. It navigated the complexities of international relations, offering a framework that resonated with the prevailing political realities and aspirations for stability. This ability to respond to changing circumstances and incorporate lessons from competing theories or unexpected historical events has been a hallmark of Liberalism's evolution.

The journey of Liberalism, from grappling with crises to flourishing amidst institution-building, demonstrates its capacity to evolve and regain relevance. The ongoing refinement and development of Liberal Institutionalism reflect its adaptability to address the complexities and challenges of a rapidly changing world. It is through these cyclical patterns of struggle, adaptation, and rejuvenation that Liberalism continues to shape and influence the field of international relations.

Such a view encourages us to appreciate the dynamic nature of theory, which adapts and evolves in response to political realities. The interplay between power dynamics, institutional rules, and liberal values shapes the trajectory and longevity of the liberal international order. It presents an ironic twist, as the self-restraint of a hegemon paradoxically helps foster a system that extends beyond its own supremacy.

The resilience and growth of the liberal international order is being challenged due to recent declines in liberal

reforms among ascending middle powers, leading to shifts in their foreign policy activism. The occurrence of democratic regression has complex domestic origins, which have been exacerbated by numerous factors tied to the unravelling of the liberal international order and a growing trend towards deglobalization. These factors encompass the surge in trade protectionism, increasing anti-immigration sentiment and policies, stagnation of regional organizations allied with the liberal order, and the emergence of alternate structures. Consequently, the pillars of support and legitimacy for pro-democracy and pro-market alliances in newly democratic nations are being eroded, thereby facilitating the protection and legitimization of leaders exhibiting authoritarian tendencies. As an outcome, middle powers experiencing crises have become less active in international organizations and have curtailed their advocacy of norms in regional politics, thereby applying stress to the stability of the liberal international order.

Elevating to the position of a middle power requires a country to harmonize its abilities with a foreign policy orientation towards multilateralism, mediation, coalition-building, and niche diplomacy. Historically, middle power discourse has primarily focused on wealthy, stable, and democratic nations such as Canada and Australia. However, the narrative has recently broadened to include several rising powers like South Africa, Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia, which have been assessed through the lens of middle power theory. These nations are designated as middle powers owing to their moderate material capabilities coupled with foreign policies that

emphasize coalition-building, multilateralism, and niche diplomacy. They are labeled as "emerging" due to their demonstrated rise in military and economic capabilities, exhibited diplomatic ambition in their quest for elevated status in global affairs, and their receipt of recognition from peer nations and established powers. This recognition is manifested in their participation in prestigious informal groups such as the G20.

Recent impediments in liberal reforms within these emerging middle powers have ignited apprehensions regarding the resilience and extension of the liberal international order. Domestic triggers of democratic regression have been aggravated by trends tied to the dissolution of the liberal international order and deglobalization. This has undermined the support and legitimacy for pro-democracy and pro-market coalitions, fostering the protection and legitimization of leaders leaning towards authoritarianism. This situation has driven emerging middle powers to disengage from active roles in international organizations and from promoting norms in regional politics, thereby posing threats to the stability of the liberal international order. To ascend to middle-power status, a country must amalgamate its capabilities with a foreign policy emphasis on multilateralism, mediation, coalition-building, and niche diplomacy. While traditionally middle powers were characterized by affluent, stable, and democratic states, the concept now encapsulates emerging powers demonstrating moderate material capabilities and an inclination towards coalition-building, multilateralism, and niche diplomacy. These emerging middle powers have

exhibited considerable growth in military and economic capabilities and have secured recognition from their peer nations and established powers, signifying their ambition for an elevated status in global affairs.

The international political landscape is characterized by a stratified hierarchy of states. This hierarchy is constituted by the most influential global actors, the major powers, followed by middle powers with more limited resources and influence, and finally smaller states with the least power. The behaviors and strategic approaches of middle powers, due to their constrained capabilities, have a set of defining characteristics that differentiate them from their major power counterparts (Cooper et al., 1993).

One of the key characteristics of middle power diplomacy is a preference for international institutions and a commitment to multilateralism. This proclivity stems from the belief that these institutions can function as constraining mechanisms for the dominant states, thereby creating a more level playing field (Ungerer, 2007). Middle powers often band together in international organizations, forming alliances to leverage their collective influence. A notable instance of this collaborative strategy can be observed in the Cairns Group, a coalition of agricultural exporting nations that successfully influenced the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (McRae, 1998).

In addition to this, middle powers often adopt a strategy of "niche diplomacy". This strategy involves focusing their resources and diplomatic efforts on specific areas of global governance where they have the capacity to exert influence (Cooper, 1997). Canada's role in the Ottawa Treaty, which

led to the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, exemplifies this strategy. Likewise, the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court and the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, both demonstrate the effective execution of niche diplomacy by middle powers (Axworthy, 1997; Thakur, 1998).

Moreover, middle powers frequently play important roles in mediating international conflicts. This is due in part to their reputation for impartiality, making them suitable candidates for facilitation and negotiation roles in a wide variety of conflicts (Evans, 1994).

These functions of middle powers are becoming increasingly important as the contemporary era is witnessing a crisis of institutionalism, as seen in the growing skepticism towards international organizations and agreements (Ikenberry, 2018). The shifting global balance of power and rising nationalism are exacerbating this crisis, which is further compounded by the deepening economic inequalities both within and among nations (Mearsheimer, 2018).

Nevertheless, while the crisis of institutionalism presents significant challenges to the current global order, it also opens new avenues for rethinking and reconfiguring global governance mechanisms (Scholte, 2011). Middle powers, with their commitment to multilateralism and diplomacy, have a vital role to play in this transformation. Middle powers' material capacities enable them to pursue activist policies, but the manifestation of this activism in practice is influenced by several factors. At a systemic level, periods of uncertainty such as post-Cold War era or financial crises offer more opportunities for middle-power

activism, as does the power diffusion in the international system. Domestically, factors like leadership and party ideologies may influence the level of activism, as demonstrated in the cases of Canada and Australia. For emerging middle powers, favorable domestic conditions such as consistent economic growth and democratization can enable them to allocate more resources and energy to foreign policy, and to act more confidently on the international stage. Rapid growth in material capabilities may also drive emerging middle powers to seek elevated status in the international system through a more active role.

During the Cold War, middle powers in Europe and East Asia supported the United States in the formation and preservation of the liberal international order. They benefited from the security and economic openness offered by this order and were dedicated to its stability. Similarly, middle powers that have risen in the post-Cold War era have also benefited from and contributed to the stability of the liberal international order. They have actively participated in multilateral institutions like the UN and forums such as the G20, where they have formed coalitions with similarly inclined states to pursue shared objectives. They have striven to act as intermediaries between developed and developing countries in these organizations and to expand the range of interests pursued by them, thereby helping to enhance their legitimacy. Emerging middle powers have also contributed to issues beyond their immediate self-interest, such as the promotion of human rights, humanitarian aid, and conflict mediation.

The emergence of middle powers in the post-Cold War period have contributed positively to the liberal international order, particularly through the promotion of democratic and market reforms within their respective regions. These nations ascended due to domestic reforms implemented in preceding decades, which facilitated economic growth, political transparency, and stability. These improved domestic conditions have allowed these countries to exert soft power and support democratization, market reforms, economic interdependence, and cooperation within their proximate regions. Consequently, emerging middle powers have played a crucial role in extending the norms of the liberal international order and Kantian peace to peripheral nations.

However, recent setbacks in democratic and economic reform within these emerging middle powers have negatively impacted their soft power and active foreign policy contributions to the detriment of the liberal international order. Domestic crises and democratic backsliding could lead to unpredictability in the foreign policies of these middle powers and could weaken their commitment to multilateralism. As such, emerging middle powers might shift to more aggressive foreign policies, demonstrate hostility towards international organizations and norms, and adopt transactional strategies with international and regional organizations. This shift undermines their reliability as coalition partners and consensus builders within international organizations.

Furthermore, emerging middle powers' contributions to specific areas such as human rights, humanitarian aid, and conflict mediation may suffer as resources and

willingness to engage in these areas decline and their neutrality becomes questionable. Domestic issues and the regression of reforms can undermine the efforts of emerging middle powers in promoting regional norms. If their economic institutions fail to deliver expected results or if their democratic institutions and values are compromised, these nations cannot credibly act as democratic role models, and their efforts to disseminate norms might appear hypocritical.

While the rise of emerging middle powers contributed to the stability of the liberal international order, their stagnation and decline could be harmful to it, especially at a time when it is already facing multiple challenges. As they decline, emerging middle powers no longer contribute significantly to support and legitimize multilateral organizations, and their input to niche areas and to norm promotion diminishes. Instead of acting as stabilizers and conflict mediators, they might even become disruptors of peace in their regions. This highlights how their decline may destabilize both their own regions and the international order, a perspective that has been largely overlooked in the existing literature on middle powers.

Therefore, we must recognize that theories, like the liberal institutionalist framework, are not static dogmas but dynamic constructs that transform as they encounter the complexities of international relations. The success and endurance of the liberal world order, built upon post-war institutions, reflect a delicate balance between the exercise of power, the preservation of liberal values, and the enduring influence of institutional rules.

Bilateral vs. Multilateral Cooperation – Redundancy of Global Institutions

The concept of multilateralism, although frequently deployed in the realm of International Relations, has been noted for its ambiguity and wide-ranging interpretations, as delineated in earlier waves of scholarship (Keohane, 1990; Cox, 1992; Ruggie, 1992). Keohane (1990, p.731) provides a foundational definition of multilateralism, characterizing it as "the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions." Extending this definition, Ruggie (1992, p.572) delineates three arenas of multilateral relations: international orders, international regimes, and international organizations.

Liberal institutionalist theories encompass a broad range of perspectives that advocate for the internationalization of states and societies. These theories emerged as a response to the limitations of preceding theories, such as classical realism and rational choice approaches, in comprehensively addressing the complexities of international relations. A central tenet of liberal institutionalism is the promotion of multilateralism as a means to address governance dilemmas related to efficiency and legitimacy.

According to John Ikenberry (2016), the nature of any international order is influenced by the characteristics of the state that has the opportunity to establish it. Typically, international orders are formed and settled by dominant

states following major wars, known as "ordering moments" (Ikenberry, 2001). These orders can be seen as hierarchical systems where the norms and rules of leading states are accepted by secondary and weaker states within the international system (Slobodchikoff, 2014).

The creation of an international order by leading states primarily occurs through three mechanisms, known as logics of order: balance of power based on great-power restraint and accommodation, command, or consent (Ikenberry, 2001; Ikenberry, 2011). However, a stable, enduring, and binding international order cannot solely rely on hierarchy (Kupchan, 2014). The dominant norms and rules of an international order must be mutually acceptable to both leading and secondary states. They are designed not only to protect the interests of the dominant state(s) but also to foster cooperation among states within the order, promoting stability, durability, and predictability in their interactions (Ikenberry, 2001; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier, 2012).

A successful international order is characterized by the absence of major inter-state wars, the management and ideally resolution of significant disputes without resorting to war, and the accommodation of non-violent international change (Mastanduno 2002; Bull 2002, 16-19). However, due to power asymmetries between leading and other states, achieving these primary goals, which are mutually beneficial to all parties, requires deliberate decision-making and practice.

However, history has presented challenges to the optimistic belief in the inevitability of peaceful integration into world order through multilateralism. Firstly, as

integration levels increased, they paradoxically contributed to the emergence of violent conflicts and crises from the 1970s onward. This indicates that the anticipated spill-over effects may not always result in harmonious outcomes. Secondly, the occurrence of "spill-backs" – instances where political leaders decide to withdraw from multilateral agreements and reinforce the primacy of territorial sovereignty – raises doubts about the presumed inevitability of peaceful integration. These retreats from multilateralism undermine the aspirations for a more integrated global order.

The complexities and contradictions within the history of multilateralism underscore the challenges of realizing a fully cohesive and integrated international system. While liberal institutionalist theories offer valuable insights and propose multilateralism as a solution to governance dilemmas, the realities of political dynamics and the resurgence of territorial sovereignty as a potent force caution against overly optimistic assumptions. As we navigate the complexities of a shifting global landscape, a critical and nuanced understanding of the potential benefits and limitations of multilateralism is essential for shaping effective and inclusive approaches to international governance.

Multilateralism, despite the occasional failures of specific multilateral institutions, garnered widespread domestic support in the United States and its allies after the two World Wars. The unexpected popularity of multilateralism, given its positive connotations, serves as a social fact that is subject to change and does not necessarily follow a linear trajectory.

Ruggie's meticulous analysis of this phenomenon is widely acclaimed for its ability to interweave economic, normative, historical, and political factors in explaining the emergence and significance of multilateralism. It is indeed remarkable how Ruggie managed to connect these diverse elements into a coherent framework. Building upon Ruggie's work, Helleiner further emphasized the need to study neoliberalization tendencies while considering the aforementioned factors, adding another layer to the understanding of multlateralism.

This observation highlights the complexity and surprising nature of multilateralism's popularity and significance. Despite its occasional shortcomings and the inherent challenges it faces, multilateralism has managed to maintain a strong foothold and attract support from powerful actors like the United States and its allies. The ability to navigate and unite economic, normative, historical, and political factors within the framework of multilateralism is an impressive feat.

Thus, the contributions of scholars such as Ruggie and Helleiner shed light on the multifaceted dynamics underlying the rise and persistence of multilateralism. Their nuanced analyses reminds of the unexpected twists and turns in the evolution of global governance, providing valuable insights into the complex interplay between ideology, historical context, and political motivations within the realm of multilateral institutions.

The historical-dialectic approach, drawing inspiration from Gramscian and world-system theories, shares common premises with regard to multilateralism. Within this framework, multilateralism is viewed as both an ideology

and a strategy employed by global cosmopolitan elites to maintain their positions of power within the hierarchical global society. These elites are seen as beneficiaries of the expanding global capitalist system, actively seeking to convince marginalized classes of the system's benefits.

Moreover, the multilateral arena is regarded as a battleground for marginalized groups and states situated on the periphery of capitalist production. It becomes a platform for these marginalized actors to form alliances and advocate for structural changes within the world economy.

This perspective highlights the inherent power dynamics and struggles within the multilateral system. It acknowledges the presence of influential elites who utilize multilateralism to perpetuate their positions of privilege and influence. Simultaneously, it recognizes the potential for marginalized groups and states to utilize multilateral platforms to campaign for transformative changes in the global economic order.

Within the historical-dialectic approach, multilateralism serves as a site of contention, reflecting the ongoing struggle between the elites seeking to maintain the status quo and marginalized actors pushing for structural change. This nuanced understanding recognizes the multifaceted nature of multilateralism and its implications for power dynamics and efforts to address global inequalities.

In the search of formal models challenging the notion of relative gains and need of institutions for multilateralism, some scholars like Duncan Snidal and Robert Powell found that fixation on relative gains only

occurs under specific circumstances. It seems that the fixation magically disappears in non-security issues or when there is an increase in the number of participating states, conveniently explaining why inter-state cooperation is often prevalent and enduring. Robert Axelrod even conceded that many situations in international politics resemble a Prisoners' Dilemma game, where defection is the dominant strategy. However, he argued that in the real world, repeated interactions and reputation-building can sustain cooperation through uncoordinated and self-interested reciprocity. These conceptual victories provided a departure from the grand vision Liberalism, making the pursuit of world government unnecessary.

Yet, as the 1990s unfolded, the real-world resilience of both domestic and international institutions faced a significant test. The official dissolution of the Soviet Union marked the end of the Cold War, raising crucial questions: Would international institutions crumble in a unipolar world where the United States no longer needed their assistance in its competition with the Eastern bloc and might even hesitate to restrain its newfound dominance? Would interstate conflicts proliferate without the two superpowers to rein in smaller states within their respective blocs? And, perhaps most ironically, would the camaraderie among liberal democracies collapse now that their primary external antagonist had disbanded?

The discourse on modern multilateralism is characterized by two antithetical viewpoints that each present distinctive interpretations of international relations. On one hand, traditional multilateralism is presented as intrinsically cooperative, encapsulating the

notion of aligning national policies among clusters of three or more nation-states, as elaborated by Keohane (1990). As per this viewpoint, cooperation emerges as an antidote to conflict, establishing international systems that satisfy state objectives by mitigating transactional costs and enabling the dissemination of pertinent information (Keohane, 1984).

Contrarily, a burgeoning school of thought disputes this cooperative perspective, proposing that international systems are frequently characterized by a lack of unity. This disunity is magnified by significant disputes over multilateral terms, resulting in the evolution of fragmented regime complexes, a departure from unified international systems (Raustiala and Victor, 2004). The resulting condition, termed 'contested multilateralism', not only highlights the existing tensions within international organizations, but also underscores the problem of redundancy in these institutions.

However, in this regard, it is important to take into account that this fragmentation and redundancy does not necessarily diminish the importance of multilateralism. Instead, it suggests that we need to reconceptualize our understanding of multilateral institutions, paying attention to the ways in which contestation and fragmentation are intrinsic to the process of multilateral governance.

Building upon this discourse, Morse and Keohane (2014) propose the concept of contested multilateralism as a means of reconciling these seemingly incongruent viewpoints. They characterize contested multilateralism as a complex interplay of competing coalitions and fluctuating institutional structures, encompassing both

formal and informal arrangements. According to their argument, multilateralism is not inherently a cooperative entity, defined by consolidated regulations, nor does the opposition to entrenched multilateralism purely take the form of unilateralism or bilateralism. Instead, they contend that challenges to multilateral institutions often emerge from within other multilateral bodies, acting either as an alternative to unilateral or bilateral approaches, or in conjunction with them.

Whilst states and non-state actors generally subscribe to multilateral strategies, they frequently disagree over the policies that should be implemented by multilateral institutions. Such a conception of contested multilateralism problematizes the reductive dichotomy of cooperative multilateralism versus unilateralism/bilateralism, offering a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamics at play within multilateral entities.

This perspective underscores the intricacies of contemporary multilateralism, illuminating the ways in which states and non-state actors negotiate within these arenas to further their respective interests. Such a nuanced understanding carries significant implications for the comprehension of the character and operations of international institutions, their efficacy in addressing global challenges, and the wider dynamics of international relations.

Contested multilateralism represents the strategic use of various multilateral institutions as a means to challenge the rules, practices, or missions inherent in existing multilateral organizations. This is particularly evident when states and/or non-state actors shift their

focus from one incumbent institution to another, or when they create an alternative multilateral institution to contest the established ones. Such confrontations, regardless of whether they culminate in the creation of new multilateral organizations, invariably feature a struggle between the rules, institutionalized practices, or missions of two distinct institutions.

Successful counteractions to dominant institutions tend to escalate the complexity of an international regime, either by introducing novel elements or by strengthening previously weaker institutions within the system. These challenges might be reactionary, responding to the actions of multilateral institutions, or anticipatory, adopted in anticipation of the established institutions not responding in a manner deemed satisfactory by the challenging actors. The term "contested multilateralism" emphasizes the contestation of not the broad form of multilateralism – which enjoys widespread acceptance – but specific institutional embodiments of multilateralism by the contesting coalition.

Instances of contested multilateralism can be observed across diverse areas of international relations, including but not limited to domains like counter-terrorism and global health, both of which bear considerable relevance to state security. The ubiquity of contested multilateralism in contemporary world politics implies that the strategies adopted by powerful states dissatisfied with core national security issues frequently manifest through multilateralism, rather than outright opposition to it. While observers of power politics might anticipate such powerful, dissatisfied states to resort to unilateral or bilateral options, institutional scholars like Randall

Stone (2011) suggest that powerful states may resort to informal means to exert control over existing multilateral institutions. Even influential states might find themselves restricted by established institutional practices, but in face of such circumstances, they often exhibit a preference for multilateral approaches over unilateral or bilateral ones (Morse & Keohane, 2014).

The manifestation of contested multilateralism can be identified when the following three criteria, as proposed by Morse and Keohane (2014), are satisfied:

1. A multilateral institution operates within a specific domain, maintaining a distinct mission, established rules, and institutionalized practices.
2. A coalition of actors, dissatisfied with the incumbent institution, redirects their focus towards a challenging institution possessing different rules and practices. The challenging institution could either be pre-existing or newly formulated.
3. The rules and practices of the challenging institution stand in conflict with, or significantly modify, the rules and practices of the status quo institution.

In this context, it is often observed that aggrieved intergovernmental organizations, civil society actors, and less powerful states are only likely to successfully contest the policies of established multilateral institutions with the assistance of more powerful states. Consequently, multilateralism frequently becomes their sole viable mechanism to effectively dispute such policies. Conversely, while powerful states may have the option to resort to bilateral or unilateral tactics, they often find incentives

to act multilaterally. Such incentives could include the desire to accumulate support and resources, as well as seeking legitimacy for their opposition to the established multilateral policy.

While contested multilateralism invariably involves the employment of an existing or a newly constituted multilateral institution to challenge the status quo, the outcome of such a challenge is not predestined. These challenges may fail, resulting in negligible long-term effects, and leaving the regime complex largely unchanged. However, more often than not, these challenges result in fundamental alterations in institutional practices or induce a shift in the power distribution among institutions, either by creating a new regime complex or expanding an existing one.

Some challenges may not immediately manifest in their impacts. For instance, a coalition predominantly composed of less powerful states, which may only be able to lodge a symbolic challenge, could criticize an existing institutional practice without inducing instantaneous change. However, over time, such a challenge may instigate shifts in actor preferences, ideas, and values that delegitimize an institution, thereby necessitating concurrent changes or institutional disengagement.

The dissatisfaction of states or other actors with multilateral institutions often stems from exogenous modifications in the global environment or changes in state preferences. Such dissatisfaction can be catalyzed by pressure exerted by domestic interests, international institutions, or transnational activists. Occasionally, however, the discontent is generated endogenously

due to ingrained practices of established multilateral institutions.

When such dissatisfied actors are unsuccessful in effecting change within the status quo, a potential scenario for contested multilateralism may arise. The inclination of the disgruntled coalition to engage in a strategy that engenders contested multilateralism depends on the presence of an external option, the degree to which credibility issues impede communication, and the existence of institutional or domestic constraints.

In situations where a dissatisfied coalition – consisting of states or a mix of states and non-state actors – intends to amend a blocked institution, the availability of external options is a crucial prerequisite for successful contested multilateralism. External options could involve a transition to an already existing alternative multilateral institution or the establishment of a new institution more aligned with the coalition's preferences in terms of either substantive policy or institutional form. The essential factor is that the challenging coalition must possess an alternative to the existing institution that caters to its interests, and must be able to credibly threaten to utilize this alternative organization or practice. The power of states plays a significant role in determining whether coalitions have access to external options. A group of dissatisfied actors that includes states with considerable resources and institutional leverage is more likely to identify credible external options compared to a coalition of weaker actors.

In situations where dissatisfied actors possess an external option, one would typically anticipate the existing institution to adapt, given that its authority and the

extent of its influence would be adversely impacted by the emergence of alternative organizations or practices. However, existing institutions may fail to adapt. According to Morse and Keohane (2014), there are two primary pathways through which such failure can occur.

Firstly, one pathway arises when dissatisfied actors project an illusion of possessing outside options, even when they might be bereft of such alternatives, thereby creating credibility concerns. If the disgruntled coalition fails to make convincing threats or promises about its willingness or capability to leverage outside options to enforce change, it may resort to actions that give rise to contested multilateralism.

Secondly, another pathway occurs even when the dissatisfied coalition presents credible threats. The possibility of policy adjustment may be thwarted due to conflicting state interests, or ideational or institutional constraints. Certain veto players, which could include states, organizational bureaucracies, or other influential actors, might obstruct the alterations desired by the challenging coalition. They do so if they perceive their interests – be they related to substantive policy or institutional authority – as being endangered by the proposed modifications. Conceptions of institutional roles and objectives are often enduring and resistant to alteration.

The notion of contested multilateralism encompasses two primary manifestations: the transition from one regime to another, termed 'regime shifting', and the competitive development of a new regime, referred to as 'competitive regime creation'.

In the case of regime shifting, actors expressing dissatisfaction with an existing set of norms and practices transition to an alternate multilateral forum, offering a more favorable mandate and procedural regulations. Upon integration into this new forum, they attempt to dispute or undermine the authority of the original institution by challenging its established norms. This form of regime shifting can be triggered not only by states – as illustrated in Laurence Helfer's work – but also by autonomous multilateral organizations that propagate regulations contradicting established international norms.

Conversely, competitive regime creation transpires when discontented actors establish a new institution or initiate informal modes of multilateral cooperation, with the intention of challenging the prevailing institutional status quo. The contesting coalition initiates this process by establishing a new multilateral institution or forum that aligns more closely with their interests, potentially via selective membership, informal channels of influence, or the formulation of transgovernmental networks. This newly formed institution is subsequently leveraged to dispute existing organizations or networks, creating conflict that may or may not facilitate inter-institutional collaboration.

Successful manifestations of contested multilateralism frequently culminate in the creation, strengthening, or expansion of a regime complex. If the established regime exhibits a high degree of integration and hierarchy, challenges provoke the emergence of a regime complex. Through the establishment of new institutions or the reallocation of authority to institutions that were previously devoid of power in certain domains, the regime

becomes less integrated. In circumstances where a regime complex already exists, successful challenges reinforce complexity by strengthening competing institutions or introducing new entities into the mix.

If disgruntled coalitions can locate alternate institutional forums within a specific issue domain, they may choose to transition to a multilateral venue that provides more favorable mandates or decision-making rules. By producing alternate norms or practices that are in conflict with those of the original institution, they set in motion a process aimed at transforming the institutional status quo. Conversely, when no existing multilateral institutions are available to challenge undesirable practices, discontented coalitions may choose to erect new multilateral forums with differing rules and practices that align more closely with their preferences. This strategic institution creation provides additional negotiation leverage and poses a challenge to the existing institutional balance.

An examination of contested multilateralism illuminates the dynamic nature of international institutions, in which discontented actors work towards altering the norms, practices, and power dynamics that pervade the multilateral system. This underscores the importance of alternate institutional avenues and the role of competition in shaping the trajectory of global governance.

For the purpose of this analysis, the study adopts Keohane's (1990) state-centric conceptualization of multilateralism, with a focus on international regimes within the framework furnished by Ruggie (1992). The spheres of international orders and international

organizations are subsequently reintegrated as arenas of competition among international regimes, thereby reflecting the revised emphasis on contested multilateralism as postulated by Morse and Keohane (2014, p.387). They define contested multilateralism as the use of distinct multilateral institutions to challenge the norms, practices, or missions of existing multilateral institutions.

Such a perspective is instrumental in shaping the strategies employed by middle powers to facilitate multilateral action across diverse international organizations and orders. As such, this study draws upon historical instances as a guide to map potential trajectories for the future.

Contested multilateralism theory underscores the inherent challenges faced in any reformation of international organizations. One fundamental concern is the potential for redundancy and inefficiency in the international system. The theory posits that when rules of existing international organizations are inappropriate or disadvantageous to a great power, such a state will likely bypass reforming the established organization and instead create alternative institutions that align better with its preferences. This process results in a duplication of multilateral structures that can contribute to systemic redundancy, and at the same time, dilute the overall effectiveness of international organizations.

Furthermore, the theory suggests that establishing new organizations from the ground up is a nearly impossible task. This is primarily due to the lack of potential unity among international actors, which is necessary to provide the credibility that is indispensable for the effective

functioning of any international organization. Therefore, the conventional approach to reforming international organizations, which involves bottom-up creation or substantial transformation of existing institutions, may not be viable in practice.

The theory also contends that any external influence, including that exerted by groups of middle powers, is likely to be challenged by the great powers. The dynamics of international relations frequently dictate that middle powers and great powers have diverging interests. While middle powers may seek to reform the international system or influence its norms, great powers are typically more interested in maintaining their dominant positions and thus resist systemic change. Moreover, great powers are more likely to align with each other against middle powers, as they have shared interests in maintaining their dominance and would rather replace the hegemon than change the system.

Overall, the theory of contested multilateralism provides critical insights into the difficulties involved in reforming international organizations. It highlights the systemic complexities, the issues related to the credibility of new institutions, and the power dynamics that often hinder effective reformation. As such, it provides a foundation for rethinking strategies for international organizational change in a manner that accounts for these constraints and challenges.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union, in one sense, represented the greatest victory for the liberal order, as it signaled the triumph of liberal values and principles. However, it also presented the greatest challenge, as the

international system had to grapple with the uncertainties and power dynamics unleashed by this seismic shift. The demise of the Eastern bloc left a void in the global balance of power, calling into question the future of international institutions and the cohesion of liberal democracies.

In a twist of irony, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while celebrated as a victory for liberal values, simultaneously posed formidable challenges to the endurance and effectiveness of the liberal order. It forced a reconsideration of the role and relevance of international institutions, the dynamics of power in a unipolar world, and the ability of liberal democracies to maintain their unity in the absence of a common external adversary. The post-Cold War era became a testing ground for the resilience and adaptability of the liberal order, revealing the complex interplay between ideals and realities in the international arena.

Concurrent Crisis of the Liberal World Order and the United Nations Organization

The American liberal hegemony, as a specific manifestation of the liberal international order, rests upon several foundational elements. These include a commitment to open multilateralism in trade and international institutions, as well as the establishment of

a "managed" open economy that safeguards the economic and social security of the working class – a concept known as "embedded liberalism" (Ruggie, 1982). Furthermore, the values of liberal democracy, including principles of equality and the rule of law, serve as essential pillars. Lastly, there exists a special relationship among Western liberal democratic nations.

It is crucial to note that the implementation and dissemination of Pax Americana throughout the world has been uneven, and the concept of liberal internationalism itself has undergone significant transformations since its inception in 1945 (Ikenberry 2009). The evolution and application of these principles have varied across different regions and historical contexts, contributing to the dynamic nature of the liberal international order.

The American hegemonic organization of the liberal order appears to be experiencing a period of weakening (Ikenberry, 2018), yet the fundamental organizing ideas and principles of liberal internationalism continue to hold significant sway in world politics. What distinguishes liberal internationalism is its vision of an open and loosely rules-based order, shaped by the emergence and dissemination of liberal democracy. Over time, the ideas and agendas associated with liberal internationalism have been honed through the encounters and struggles of nations with the profound forces of modernity.

The underlying objectives of liberal internationalism include creating an international framework that accommodates liberal democratic values, reconciling the complexities arising from sovereignty and interdependence, and safeguarding protections and rights within and

between states. These aims have been the driving force behind the endurance of liberal internationalism throughout the "golden eras" and "global catastrophes" that have punctuated the last two centuries. Despite the upheavals wrought by world wars, economic downturns, and the ascent and decline of fascist and totalitarian regimes, the liberal international project has withstood the tests of time.

In the face of present-day crises, it is expected that liberal internationalism will once again need to undergo a process of introspection and reinvention to ensure its continued relevance and resilience. This imperative for reevaluation mirrors the historical precedent set by liberal internationalism, which has consistently adapted and evolved to confront new challenges.

It is both ironic and intriguing that the survival of international institutions can depend on the presence or absence of a hegemon, as demonstrated by the perspectives of John Ruggie (1991) and Robert Keohane (2005). While their views differ, they both offer insights into the resilience of institutions even in the absence of a hegemonic power.

Keohane, in his work "After Hegemony" (2005), aligns with core realist assumptions but challenges the notion that international politics is solely a zero-sum quest for power. He draws on functionalism and neofunctionalism to argue that institutions can persist by providing information, coordination, enforcement, and other benefits that states cannot achieve individually. By selectively modifying realist principles, Keohane highlights the potential for cooperation even in the absence of a hegemonic patron.

On the other hand, Ruggie takes a different approach in his work on "embedded liberalism" (1991). Departing from realist tenets, he emphasizes the significance of social purpose in sustaining institutions. Ruggie argues that institutions endure when a larger community of states continues to share the values embodied within those institutions. In a prescient foreshadowing of future divisions in international relations theory, Ruggie anticipates the emergence of Constructivism, while Keohane aligns the new "Liberal Institutionalism" with Realism.

This ironic juxtaposition underscores the complex nature of international cooperation. While Keohane's perspective suggests that institutions can thrive through functional benefits, Ruggie's viewpoint emphasizes the shared values and norms that underpin their longevity. However, both perspectives acknowledge the role of power dynamics and the importance of hegemonic influence, albeit from different angles.

In this sense, it becomes apparent that the international system of cooperation, despite its aspirations for inclusivity and universal values, relies on the presence or influence of a hegemon. This realization adds a layer to the very foundations of international institutions and raises critical questions about the nature of power, cooperation, and the long-term sustainability of the liberal international order.

One such question highlights the concerning deviations from Kant's philosophical foundations within liberal institutions. While Kant envisioned a universal embrace of similar values and institutions as the natural

path to peace, the modern manifestation of democratic peace is far from universal and may even diverge from Kantian ideals. According to Kant, peace emerges when states and their citizens voluntarily adopt these values and institutions, fostering reciprocal hospitality. However, critics today point out a paradox: this incomplete universalism may prevent liberal states from engaging in conflict with one another, but it can also enable or encourage them to intervene or wage war against non-liberal states.

In the pursuit of peace, there has been a strong inclination to impose liberal values and democratic institutions on non-liberal states. However, such interventions pose a threat to Liberal Institutionalism itself. Coercively spreading liberal ideals is, in essence, promoting particularist laws under the guise of universality, as it disqualifies non-liberal states from choosing their own laws. If genuine Kantian peace stems from the spontaneous alignment of universal political principles by states, then forced adherence to liberal norms cannot achieve true peace. Instead, it undermines the essence of Liberalism by operating in an illiberal manner.

This critical perspective emphasizes the need for a more nuanced and self-reflective approach within liberal institutions. It cautions against the imposition of values and institutions on non-liberal states, recognizing that genuine peace and cooperation cannot be achieved through coercive measures. Instead, it calls for a more inclusive and respectful engagement that allows states to determine their own paths, while fostering dialogue and understanding among different political systems. In

this context, the perspective of middle powers becomes particularly relevant, as they can offer alternative perspectives and bridge the gaps between liberal and non-liberal states, contributing to a more balanced and inclusive global order.

Critics from non-Western perspectives also offer disparaging remarks regarding the foundational principles of Liberal Institutionalism. The dominance of Western thinkers in debates between realists and liberals, as well as between neo-realists and neo-liberals, has resulted in a narrow focus on Western states and institutions. This oversight neglects the experiences of non-Western states and risks marginalizing their full participation in international affairs. Many of the prevailing standards of domestic governance and major inter-governmental organizations reflect the perspectives and expectations of the former Western bloc, consisting primarily of North American and Western European states that were among the earliest liberal democracies.

Despite the voluntary adoption of these standards and organizations by additional states, the West still appears to possess an advantage, enjoying greater benefits from international institutions and exerting more influence over international norms. In a manner reminiscent of Marxist analysis, subaltern critiques argue that the structures of global governance favor a select group of transnational elites. These elites, by packaging their own interests as a "liberal consensus," perpetuate oppressive global governance structures that disadvantage non-elites in both developing and industrialized countries.

These non-Western perspectives highlight the inherent biases and imbalances within global governance structures. The concentration of power and influence in a small group of states and transnational elites undermines the inclusivity and fairness of international institutions. It calls into question the notion of a truly universal and equitable liberal order when certain actors wield disproportionate control over the global agenda.

Recognizing the perspectives of non-Western middle powers becomes crucial in addressing these imbalances and fostering a more inclusive international system. Their insights and experiences offer alternative viewpoints that challenge the status quo and promote a more equitable distribution of benefits and decision-making power within global governance. Embracing the perspectives of non-Western states is essential for rectifying the inherent biases and power dynamics that persist within liberal institutional structures.

As the field of international relations theory continues to evolve, these contrasting perspectives remind us of the dynamic interplay between theory and practice. The irony lies in the recognition that the international system, in its pursuit of cooperation and stability, depends on both the functional benefits provided by institutions and the presence or influence of a hegemon.

In this context, it is worth considering that the most promising avenue for reformation lies not in predictable confrontations among multiple poles of power or in bipolar dynamics, but rather in the constructive engagement of middle powers. These nations, often overshadowed by their larger counterparts, possess

distinctive capabilities and diplomatic acumen that allow them to navigate the intricacies of global governance with finesse. By leveraging their unique position, middle powers can contribute significantly to reshaping the foundations of the liberal international order.

Therefore, as we embark on this critical journey of rethinking and reinventing liberal internationalism, it is essential to honor the essence of its storied past. Through careful analysis and measured skepticism, we will bear witness to the enduring resilience and transformative potential of this tradition. The role of middle powers shall assume prominence, illuminating a path forward that is both unexpected and intellectually captivating.

The operations of international organizations are generally aligned to a significant extent with the aspirations of their most influential member states. It is typically these dominant powers that set the agenda and drive policy decisions. However, the potential for lesser powers to significantly influence the decisions made within these bodies should not be entirely dismissed. While they may not command the same level of clout as the larger states, their collective voices and strategic alliances can sometimes sway decisions and contribute meaningfully to the policy-making process.

How far do the actions of international organizations align with the aspirations of their most influential member states? Is it possible for lesser powers to significantly affect the decisions rendered within these bodies? A recent observation by experts studying international organizations stated that "there seems to be a unanimous understanding that smaller

states have negligible impact on the behaviour of International Organisations" (Lyne, Nielson and Tierney, 2006, p.56). This aligns with the longstanding perspective that a state's power reflects its national capabilities and the claim that international organizations function primarily as platforms for interactions influenced by the power dynamics among member states (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 1994). Following this logic, Drezner (2007) asserts that a "concert of great powers is an essential and adequate precondition for successful governance across any international issue." Along the same lines, the theory of liberal intergovernmentalism attributes European integration to the desires and negotiations of Europe's three major powers (Moravcsik, 1998). Furthermore, the rational design theory applied to the examination of international institutions suggests a related hypothesis that power disparities among member states lead to differential levels of institutional control by its members (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal, 2001).

The prevailing understanding is that the balance of power in international organizations is skewed heavily in favor of the more powerful members. The potency of these arguments is rooted in the relative paucity of viable unilateral alternatives for minor powers to realize benefits that could be gained through structured multilateral cooperation (Katzenstein, 1985; Moravcsik, 1998; Stone, 2011). These minor powers, despite their numerical strength in organizations that operate on majority voting rules, cannot effect significant changes in international regimes that contradict the wishes of the great powers.

The reason for this seeming powerlessness is not far-fetched: any attempt by the less powerful nations to impose their will on the more potent ones could provoke the latter into withdrawing their crucial support for the institution (Krasner, 1985, p.30). This perceived threat has a chilling effect on the ambitions of minor powers and aids in maintaining the status quo. Moreover, the balance of power is further tipped by the ability of the more influential nations to proceed unilaterally, thereby disregarding the interests of the minor powers when it serves their purpose.

One of the significant implications of this power imbalance is the potential to coerce minor powers into consenting to multilateral cooperation, even when such collaboration might leave them in a position worse than their previous state (Gruber, 2000). In such circumstances, the status quo is retained not by choice but by the minor powers' limited capacity to negotiate better terms within the institutional framework. Thus, the structure of international organizations tends to sustain the status quo, predominantly benefiting the most influential member states while leaving minor powers at a distinct disadvantage.

Despite the conventional wisdom arguing the contrary, recent studies reveal that minor powers can exert substantial influence on international organizations' behavior, including international financial institutions and the European Union. Empirical evidence demonstrates that weak powers can significantly shape the functioning of IFIs (Lyne, Nielson and Tierney, 2006; Copelovitch et al., 2013). This challenges the notion that these institutions are merely

arenas for power interactions between member states, exclusively dominated by great powers.

Stone (2011) offers an interesting perspective, asserting that powerful states often yield disproportionate influence in institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the EU to weaker members. This concession occurs during ordinary times in exchange for the consent of weaker powers to the exercise of informal governance by great powers during exceptional circumstances when their core interests are at stake. This gives the smaller states a level of sway in decision-making processes, albeit conditional and circumstantial, potentially disrupting the status quo.

The World Trade Organization's Doha round of talks further illustrate the capacity of coalitions of minor powers. These coalitions, as studies show (Narlikar, 2005), can block multilateral trade agreements, thereby demonstrating their ability to influence outcomes at a multinational level. Similarly, research on decision-making within the EU indicates that weak powers can wield substantial influence (Mattila, 2006; Aksoy and Rodden, 2009).

While Europe's resource-rich states continue to shape intergovernmental bargaining in the EU, their dominance is mediated, and at times offset, by weak states' power. This power, derived largely from institutional features (like veto rights and rotating presidencies) and leaders' personal attributes, serves to balance the scales somewhat (Tallberg, 2008). Furthermore, the ability to make credible veto and exit threats allows minor powers to influence the decisions of the Council of the EU

(Slapin, 2009; Schneider, 2011). Therefore, it's evident that minor powers can, and do, exert considerable influence on the operations of IFIs and the EU, challenging the conventional wisdom about international organizations and their intrinsic power dynamics.

The current juncture in international relations appears to indicate a profound crisis of institutionalism, encapsulated by the precarious standing of the United Nations (UN) within the waning U.S.-dominated global order. The UN's role oscillates between being a foundational cornerstone and a sidelined irritant, reflecting the tumultuous state of liberal internationalism (Cooley & Hexon, 2020). This uncertainty invites a critical examination of the future of the UN, which, in turn, could illuminate the core challenges confronting liberal internationalism.

The roots of the rules-based global order, in which the UN has a central role, are deeply pragmatic and realist, a fact that appears to have been forgotten by liberal internationalists (Ikenberry, 2011; Ikenberry, Parmar, & Stokes, 2018). Thus, the survival of liberal internationalism in the evolving international order necessitates a revised formulation that reinvigorates pragmatism and reaffirms the imperative of compromise in global affairs.

The emergence of such a revision is arguably more likely to come from 'middle powers', nations that possess sufficient authority to act autonomously from the great powers but whose limited capabilities render them more inclined towards negotiation rather than resorting to force (Cooper, 1997; Jordaan, 2003; Cooper & Dal, 2016). The debate surrounding the crisis of the current global order is largely dominated by the perspective of the United States,

with the focus on issues related to hegemonic decline, imperial overstretch, and the rise of global powers such as China. The ascendancy of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency further intensified this focus (Norrlof, 2018).

While the U.S.'s role in both establishing and now potentially undermining the post-1945 institutional order is undeniable and significant, it is imperative to broaden our viewpoint to grasp the complexities that precipitated this crisis. A nuanced perspective will enable a better understanding of the forces that have thrust the existing global order into its current state of flux and allow us to contemplate the possible future forms of liberal internationalism, as well as the potential key actors in its preservation.

In this context, desire for the United States to reemerge as the "leader of the free world," is perceived as harmful. This perspective obstructs a realistic assessment of the potential for order by lesser powers, who have vested interests in a rules-based, institutional approach to global affairs. The debate on middle powers is typically delineated by a distinction between traditional, Western middle powers – broadly perceived as stabilizers and legitimizers of the existing US-led order – and emerging middle powers from the Global South, who are more inclined toward revisionist and counter-hegemonic behavior (Cooper, 1997; Jordaan, 2003).

However, this distinction is growing increasingly inadequate. When the hegemon is determined to dismantle the institutional order it once established, "traditional" middle-power liberal internationalism assumes a counter-hegemonic position, while the revisions proposed by

emerging powers surface as stabilizing forces (Cooper & Dal, 2016).

Hurrell aptly highlights that "both the players and the plot look very different than just a short while ago" (Hurrell, 2007, p. 203). In alignment with this observation, this study references Jordaan's proposal to confine the term "middle power" to mid-range states that actively bolster the liberal international order (Jordaan, 2003). Contrary to Jordaan's association of this concept with sustained US hegemony, the emphasis in historical context should be placed on the proclivity of middle powers for pursuing multilateral, negotiated resolutions to international dilemmas (Jordaan, 2003). The focus should not be on their relationship to the United States, or whether they are situated in the West or the Global South.

Retaining this traditional understanding yields two benefits in the prevailing interregnum: First, it aids in transcending previous inclinations to associate internationalism and global governance solely with the policies and practices of Western nations. Recognizing and appreciating the agency of the Global South is paramount to comprehending the stakes and dynamics in historical and contemporary global re-orderings (Acharya, 2014). Second, it acknowledges that shifts in global power are both real and enduring. The necessity for a revised, more pragmatic approach to liberal internationalism originates directly from this recognition.

To validate and delve into these assertions, we considers the present to delineate the troubled position occupied by the United Nations within the US-led world order, and its connection to the current crisis of the liberal

order (Luck, 2003). After that we anticipates the future to identify how a revised, pragmatic middle-power liberal internationalism centered around the United Nations may help stabilize the current interregnum (Cooper & Heine, 2010).

The United Nations (UN), by its very nature, presents a paradox. Its legitimacy stems from its universal declarations in the name of "we, the peoples," yet it offers membership to states, not individuals (Claude, 1966). It extols the sovereign equality of all its member states, yet it grants unique policing privileges to five powerful nations to uphold international peace and security (Luck, 2003). Furthermore, the UN commits to a collaborative approach to achieve the organization's objectives, yet its institutional frameworks encourage a disjointed strategy to problem-solving (Weiss, Forsythe, Coate, & Pease, 2018). These inherent tensions have rendered the organization susceptible to critique from all political quarters.

Contrarily, these contradictions are not design flaws or the primary catalysts for the UN's incessant crisis. They have instead consistently provided a surprisingly robust base for sustained international collaboration, replacing the failed idealism of the League of Nations (Hurd, 2007). The UN's endurance as an organization for over 70 years, despite recurrent crises and major setbacks, attests to the resilience of its paradoxical structure (Claude, 1966).

International Relations scholars, spanning realist to liberal perspectives, are largely in agreement that the end of the Cold War triggered a wave of "liberal triumphalism," which subsequently sowed the seeds of crisis (Kupchan, 2002; Ikenberry, 2018). The collapse of bipolar geopolitical

constraints morphed liberal internationalism into a precarious and unsustainable form of liberal imposition, characterized by prescriptive solutions and forceful actions to establish conditions for "true freedom" (Fukuyama, 1992). Despite the plausibility of this liberal hubris narrative, the story becomes more intricate when analyzed through the United Nations (UN) lens. This perspective reveals two related yet distinct paradoxes: firstly, the UN simultaneously facilitated and restricted liberal overreach post-Cold War, and secondly, the UN itself was both sidelined and transformed during this unipolar era.

To address these points, subsequent sections will illustrate how certain liberal agendas expanded the UN's role while others led to its marginalization. This will be followed by an analysis of the UN's transformation and the implications for the growing crisis of the liberal order. At the normative level, the UN has been instrumental in promoting a people-oriented, post-Westphalian approach to international peace, security, and development (Evans, 1997). Notably, this agenda did not solely originate at the end of the Cold War but has been integral to the UN since its inception. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, has been continually expanded with new rights-holders and rights dimensions, even during the Cold War (Morsink, 1999). Both during the UDHR's initial preparation and subsequent expansions, Global South actors played significant roles alongside their Western counterparts. As Petrasek (2022) points out, the historical record shows that numerous non-Western powers, irrespective of their liberal orientation, were

instrumental in establishing and maintaining human rights on the global agenda, a trend that persists today.

Currently, the concept of liberal overreach is increasingly tied to an expansive human rights agenda, a recent shift resulting from the rise of backlash politics within the Western bastions of the liberal order. Just a few years ago, the notion of liberal hubris was associated with the emergence of a liberal interventionist agenda aimed at remedying the so-called failed or conflict-ridden states within the Global South (Paris, 2001).

During both the pre- and post-9/11 era, the US – historically a reluctant multilateralist – preferred to operate through 'coalitions of the willing' or less universal international organizations (Patrick, 2002). Consequently, the UN's role was somewhat crudely relegated to 'saving strangers' in distant locales, while key Western interests (both security and economic) were pursued through organizations and collaborations that offered fewer impediments to US hegemony.

Although the United Nations (UN) has indeed played a crucial role in expanding the universal human rights regime, its contribution towards advancing 'hyperglobalization' has been relatively cautious (Scholte, 2005). The UN did not orchestrate what historical sociologist Michael Mann refers to as the 'Great Neoliberal Recession of 2008' (Mann, 2013).

The agenda of liberalizing trade and financial markets, including the associated privatisation and outsourcing of public services, was predominantly promoted, supported, and enabled through less universal, more Western-dominated institutions such as the

World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Union (EU) (Stiglitz, 2017).

In contrast, economic discussions within the UN system, encompassing the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and various UN agencies reporting to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), have largely been dictated by the concerns of developing nations. They have consistently adhered to a social-liberal focus on redistribution, social equality, and universal welfare provision, as opposed to a neoliberal emphasis on supply-side economics (Annan, 2002).

However, this orientation did not position the UN as the principal global forum for managing the immediate fallout of the 2007–2008 financial crisis or the subsequent endeavours aimed at 'making globalization work for all' (Stiglitz, 2017). Rather than turning to the UN, the US and its European allies sought solutions within the OECD, the IMF, the World Bank, and particularly the Group of 20 (G20). The G20, initially established in response to the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis, attempts to incorporate major emerging market countries into discussions on the international financial system and global economic governance (Cooper, 2010).

Following the 2007–2008 crisis, the G20 was elevated from the level of finance ministers and central bank governors to the level of heads of states and government. They subsequently designated it as the 'premier forum for our international economic cooperation', further

solidifying the UN's marginalized position in matters of global economic governance (Kirton, 2013).

Engaging non-state actors and mobilizing private resources are perceived by many liberal internationalists as the key to rescue the United Nations (UN) from its alleged 'yawning chasm of irrelevance' (Jönsson & Tallberg, 2010). Looking ahead, the UN must increase its focus on people rather than states, transforming itself into a 'hub' rather than a 'centre' for global solutions. The UN's power lies in its capacity to assemble vast webs of global actors, guide them towards common goals, and monitor their progress (Weiss & Thakur, 2010).

This approach, often termed multistakeholderism, however, introduces its own set of issues. While it broadens the range of involved actors, the mode of inclusion seldom amplifies the voice of 'ordinary' people or marginalized groups. Moreover, it does not rectify the fundamental issue that the UN's decision-making structures mirror a past era (Luck, 2003).

In 1945, the UN began with 51 member states; currently, it has 193. In 1945, the world economy was primarily trade-based; today, it comprises trade, finance, and global production networks and value chains (Helleiner, 2011). In 1945, the UN was largely the sole player in global governance; today, the exact number of international organizations, including governmental, non-governmental, and hybrid forms, that contribute to governing our globalized world is not definitively known (Betsill & Corell, 2008).

The need for comprehensive UN reforms, particularly of the Security Council, has never seemed more pressing,

yet the prospects for progress appear increasingly bleak (Karns, Mingst, & Stiles, 2015). Amid escalating tensions among the Permanent Five and the great powers once again relinquishing their roles as 'responsible managers of the affairs of international society as a whole', the reform agenda has reached an impasse (Hurrell, 2007).

As a result, UN reforms are increasingly linked with efforts aimed at streamlining bureaucracy rather than changing the ways in which member states convene and make decisions. Yet, somewhat counterintuitively, the concluding section posits that the UN, by virtue of its limitations, offers a useful platform for sustaining liberal internationalism in the interregnum by reviving the noble art of compromise (Ingebritsen, 2002).

The notion of liberal 'nostalgia' has been perceived to impede a realistic assessment of the mechanisms and actors that may preserve elements of liberal internationalism in a future world order. Embedded in this proposition is the idea that the precise shape of the emerging order remains not only under construction but also, crucially, influenced by human action (Cox, 1981). The ongoing global realignment involves a renegotiation of norms, values, and institutional practices that cannot be comprehended strictly in traditional International Relations terms as a matter of the distribution of material power or of 'who is up and who is down'. Such perspective overlooks the historicity of the varied ways in which social power is constituted and systemic change occurs (Adler & Bernstein, 2005).

The adaptable nature of the United Nations (UN) is not overlooked by China. Unlike the United States'

disengagement from most UN endeavors, China is increasingly perceiving all segments of the UN as crucial platforms for showcasing its stance as a responsible global leader and for swaying other member states and UN officials to act in manners that advance Chinese national interests (Economy, 2018). As explicitly expressed by a Chinese official, China is now utilizing the UN as a platform for "translating domestic governance philosophies into international consensus" (Foot, 2016).

The positioning between American disregard and China's illiberal embrace presents the UN secretary-general with both vested interests in, and responsibilities for, defending the universal values and moral authority of the United Nations, as well as its capacity to assist member states in discovering common solutions to shared problems (Thakur, 2018). However, to achieve success, he requires the backing of member states who are prepared to commit themselves to binding international cooperation and provide the essential political and financial resources to sustain the multilateral system.

In the face of such energetic, yet misconstrued, impressions of the UN as the pinnacle of a powerful, pervasive, and unaccountable system governed by globalist elites, the defense of the deteriorating rules-based international order is increasingly couched in statist terms, emphasizing not what the sovereign state can do for multilateralism, but what multilateralism can do for the sovereign state. Secretary-General Guterres, therefore, insists on portraying multilateralism not as a choice, but rather as a necessity for addressing the complex and interconnected transnational problems of

an interdependent world: "Governments will not be able to meet their people's expectations for protection in the absence of international cooperation," he posits. This perspective echoes the realist pragmatism that guided the establishment of the UN as an intrinsically limited instrument in the first place (Acharya, 2019).

Following the argument that the 'crisis of the liberal order' is more appropriately interpreted as a transitional period of uncharted territories where new orders are feasible but not yet materialized, the preceding sections have revisited the history of the United Nations (UN) to scrutinize its pragmatic origins and its complex position in the U.S.-led world order. From this emerges the observation that the UN Charter allows for a more flexible and adaptable organization than the conventional wisdom acknowledges (Willetts, 2006).

For better or worse, the UN's inherently paradoxical construction as an intermediary between the national and the global has enabled the organization to serve varying functions to different actors at different times, thereby maintaining the organization's relevance for over 70 years. This adaptability is evident in how peacekeeping – now the UN's flagship enterprise – although not mentioned in the Charter, was invented during the Cold War, and in the more recent ability to involve private corporate actors and market-based solutions in delivering global public goods (Aoi, de Coning, & Thakur, 2007).

While the UN is no longer the sole player in global governance and other formal and informal institutions like the G7 and the G20 have emerged as crucial

forums for global decision-making and international rule-making (Slaughter, 2004), it continues to hold an indispensable position for state leaders. By virtue of its unique blend of universal membership, great power control, and international bureaucracy, the UN remains an exclusive forum for the ceaseless political negotiations, contestations, and innovations over what constitutes legitimate international norms and practices.

Conclusions to Chapter I

In the realm of international politics, a paradox often arises for the most influential players: the great powers. These entities, which hold an exorbitant amount of influence and resources, are inherently positioned to be the key drivers of change. They have the ability to shape international norms, promote transformative initiatives, and dictate the trajectory of global policies. Yet, the irony lies in their entrenched investment in the very system that provides the means to exercise this dominion.

The existing international order, characterized by norms, treaties, alliances, and institutions, essentially serves as a platform for the projection of great powers' influence. It acts as the arena in which their political, economic, and military prowess is recognized and operationalized. The greater the power's investment in this system, the more effective it is in asserting its interests and maintaining its hegemonic status. The system, therefore, becomes a double-edged sword. On one hand, it furnishes

the tools for control and manipulation; on the other, it binds the hands of the wielder to its maintenance.

This creates a significant paradox for the great powers. Their potential to drive systemic change is thwarted by their very dependency on the existing system. Their continued dominance relies on the status quo, which is often at odds with the radical change they could potentially advocate for and implement.

For instance, in the face of calls for systemic reform in international governance or global financial architecture, these powers are caught in a conundrum. While they have the capacity to push for reform, doing so might risk altering the dynamics that favor them. Similarly, in response to calls for enhanced multilateralism or democratization of international institutions, these powers find themselves walking a tightrope between appeasing the demands for reform and safeguarding their vested interests.

The crux of this irony, therefore, lies in the delicate balance between power and change. While the great powers are best positioned to instigate systemic changes, they are simultaneously the most invested in preserving the structures that maintain their privileged position. It is this investment that often results in a stalemate, with the potential for reform being compromised by the very forces that hold the power to initiate it.

The great powers' paradox, as we have seen, emanates from their central dilemma: whether to initiate transformative changes that could potentially destabilize their dominion, or to maintain the status quo that secures their hegemony but may lead to systemic redundancy. This ironic predicament invariably leads us to the question:

Should they instigate these changes, or is there an alternative that does not result in systemic inertia?

Arguably, the most viable solution to this conundrum lies in gradual yet decisive transformation. While immediate and drastic overhauls could indeed unsettle the power structures, a series of calibrated, stepwise modifications might strike a balance between the need for change and the stability of power dynamics. This approach requires a reframing of the conventional perspective on power and influence, a shift from domination to stewardship.

In the spirit of stewardship, great powers would then serve as architects of change rather than its deterrents, guiding the system's evolution to reflect the changing realities of global politics. They would strive to create an environment conducive to shared decision-making and more equitable power distribution, while concurrently ensuring the stability and integrity of the system that enables their influence.

This transformative shift from domination to stewardship could manifest in a variety of ways. It might include more transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, increased recognition and accommodation of emerging powers, and proactive efforts to address systemic disparities. The goal would not be to dismantle the structures of power, but to shape them into more adaptive, responsive, and representative frameworks.

The irony is that, by choosing to champion this shift, the great powers could indeed be securing their own relevance in the evolving international order. The alternative – clinging to outmoded structures of power –

risks leading to redundancy and obsolescence. As the global political landscape continues to shift, so too must the actors that shape it. Therefore, the ironic solution to the great powers' paradox may indeed be to embrace the very change they seem most poised to resist. This ironic twist represents an opportunity for great powers to demonstrate global leadership by navigating the delicate balance between preserving their influence and fostering systemic evolution.

Nevertheless, the postures of great powers are often characterized by a pronounced focus on maintaining the status quo rather than initiating significant changes within the operational frameworks of international institutions (Mearsheimer, 2001). This tendency towards the status quo emanates primarily from their strategic interests in retaining their dominance and influence within the global arena. Accordingly, rather than investing in the transformation of institutional frameworks, great powers tend to consolidate their regional presence to compensate for any potential loss of influence within these institutions (Morse & Keohane, 2014).

In light of these dynamics, the tactics adopted by great powers often involve strengthening their regional footprints, particularly in instances where their global influence might be wavering or under threat. These powers, cognizant of the difficulties involved in effecting substantial changes in international organizations, opt instead for strategies that amplify their regional presence and thus reinforce their overall influence in international affairs (Hurd, 2007).

Within this context, it is noteworthy that the contemporary landscape of multilateral regional cooperation is increasingly characterized by a dispersion of power. Great powers, through their concerted efforts to augment their regional clout, are instrumental in this evolving paradigm. However, it is important to recognize the concomitant rise of middle powers and their increasingly conspicuous role in addressing regional issues (Cooper et al., 2013). Notwithstanding the attempts of great powers to retain their preponderant status, middle powers are progressively exerting influence, effectively contributing to a more complex and multipolar regional and global order.

This multiplicity of actors and the diffusion of power within the regional context are indicative of a shift from a traditionally unipolar or bipolar international system to a more complex and nuanced multilateral landscape. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is crucial to analyze and predict the future trajectories of international politics and the evolving role of international institutions therein.

Chapter II

Middle Power Cooperation to Address Global Challenges at the Regional Level

In this chapter, we will further delve into the increasing role of middle powers and regional cooperation in addressing global challenges. We aim to shed light on how these actors and strategies can offer new avenues to global problem-solving and foster a more equitable and sustainable future. However, before the analysis of regional cooperation, it is crucial to establish a clear understanding of the concept of a "middle power" and provide a comprehensive definition within the specific context of this research.

Middle powers occupy a noteworthy position within the global order, as they are increasingly assuming strategic roles that enable them to mold regional political, economic, and security landscapes (Bergin et al., 2014). Notwithstanding their importance, the defining parameters of what constitutes a middle power

are yet to be clearly delineated, as a consequence of the prevailing approaches' rhetorical leanings. The endeavor to establish an unambiguous definition or to incessantly redefine it is not only fruitless but also inadvertently hampers the progression of our understanding. The task of effectively articulating the concept of 'middle powers', in order to transcend its current impasse, calls for a more pragmatic and adaptive definitional methodology.

The characterization of middle powers presents a persistent challenge in both scholarly literature and policy discourse. Numerous nations, including India, New Zealand, Nigeria, and Brazil, have been identified as middle powers, giving credence to McMahon's (2012) assertion that 'everyone is a middle power now'. Simultaneously, states previously deemed as middle powers are increasingly shunning this designation (Bergin et al., 2014). In this book we rely on the research by Jeffrey Robertson, who reviewed the evolution of 'middle power' definitions (Roberstson et al., 2017).

Beeson and Higgott (2014) posit that the conventional interpretation of the term 'middle power' can be dissected into three definitional groups, a perspective echoed by Holbraad (1971). The designations are dependent on a state's intermediary position between major power structures, its intermediate size, or its mediating position within ideological or political systems.

Soward's early examination of the concept (1963) also identifies three definitional categories. The first pertains to middle powers based on prior definitions centered on material capacity. The second traces Canada's development, using functionalism to carve out a unique

category of middle powers. Lastly, the third category pertains to the distinctive characteristics of middle-power diplomacy, such as the propensity to maintain 'strategic know-how' in key diplomatic areas and the inclination to collaborate with similar states. These practices have been later encapsulated as 'coalition-building' and 'niche diplomacy' by subsequent advocates of middle-power studies, as they shape their definitions based on behavior.

Three prominent scholars from the post-Cold War revival school, Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal (1993), have offered a typology of middle power definitions, encompassing positional, geographic, normative, and behavioural classifications. The 'positional' category harks back to previous attempts to define middle powers based on their material capacity and their place within an international hierarchy of states. The 'geographic' category references states that are situated amid the system's major powers, with Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal introducing two variants – one concerning geographically located states with distinguishing regional power, and the other concerning states ideologically positioned between major powers. The 'normative' category involves states engaging in 'honest broker' practices, such as mediation and facilitation, indicative of their ability to operate on a global scale while lacking hegemonic influence. Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal champion the 'behavioural' category (later emerging as a separate definition), which builds upon the behavioural notion suggested in Evans and Grant's work (1995). The 'behavioural' definition encapsulates common diplomatic conduct, such as pursuing multilateral solutions, facilitating compromise in international disputes, and

maintaining 'good international citizenship' (Cooper, Higgott & Nossal, 1993).

Towards the end of the post-Cold War era, Chapnick (1999) delivered a comprehensive summary of the unique middle power categories. Chapnick proposed that functional, hierarchical, and behavioural methodologies form the three 'middle power models'. In line with Soward's perspective, the functional model pertains to a middle power's ability to impact and take on certain roles in international society. The hierarchical model pertains to states with material capabilities that surpass the majority of other smaller powers, yet fall short of great powers. The behavioural model relates to states committed to multilateralism, conflict resolution, and moral power.

Similarly, Ungerer (2007) acknowledges the distinct classifications of middle power definitions, underscoring that authors employ the concept to encapsulate 'geographic, material, normative, and behavioural attributes'. Andrew Carr (2014) offers a more recent reconceptualization of middle-power definitions, distilling it into three categories: position, behaviour, and identity. The 'position' category is linked to measurable elements such as gross domestic product, military prowess, or population size, but can also incorporate additional power-related aspects such as geographical location, strategic position, and proximity. The 'behaviour' category refers to distinct patterns of diplomatic conduct, building upon the framework posited by Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal. Carr's final category, 'identity', pertains to definitions premised on a state's self-identification as a middle power. This conceptualization is particularly valuable given the

expanding and diverse range of states laying claim to middle-power status.

Some scholars have sought to refine these definitions by drawing upon one of Carr's categories as a foundational basis. For instance, Jonathan Ping (2005) critiques prior authors for their failure to enhance and build upon the definition, and instead uses hybridization theory to construct an improved statistical measure. Similarly, Carr (2014) elaborates on extant capacity-based definitions, acknowledging the inherent difficulties in gauging a state's power and offering a systematic approach to circumvent such challenges.

Other scholars adopt an eclectic approach by merging one or more of the aforementioned categories to frame a more apt definition. Eduard Jordaan (2003) distinguishes between emerging and traditional middle powers – the former characterized by their ascending economic status and the latter by their entrenched economic standing and democratic stability. Jeffrey Robertson (2006), employing all three definitional categories, contends that states initially assume a function (regardless of their ability to execute it), subsequently achieve middle-power capacity via economic development, and ultimately exhibit middle-power behaviour through political and social evolution.

In an exploration of middle powers, Allan Patience (2014) revisits the historical conceptualizations or 'imaginings' of what a middle power could or should represent. He criticizes established definitions and advocates for a novel categorization scheme, proposing three types of middle power grounded in the 'Concert of Europe', 'regionalist', and 'neo-Kantian' paradigms.

Kim Sangbae (2009, 2011) bridges traditional international relations theory with innovative research in information technology and associated disciplines, delineating middle powers as nodes within diplomatic networks. However, all definitions of middle powers grapple with pronounced weaknesses and have not been wholeheartedly embraced within the intellectual frameworks of political science and international relations, a predicament that has simultaneously spurred debate and hampered effective pedagogy in the field.

Recent developments in middle power scholarship introduce additional layers of complexity, particularly with respect to the fluidity of definitions surrounding middle powers in the existing literature.

Scholars such as Jordaan (2017) and Andersen (2017) have articulated skepticism regarding the term 'middle power', given its fluctuating definitions across studies. Their observations highlight the assortment of theoretical frameworks employed to underpin competing definitions, with a general dichotomy discerned between 'traditional' and 'emerging' middle powers. In response to this definitional ambiguity, Jordaan advocates for a significant narrowing of the criteria for middle powers to facilitate a more meaningful analysis of international relations.

Robertson (2017), while echoing similar concerns about the nebulous definitions of middle powers, proposes a distinctive perspective by focusing on the deeper, systemic facets of middle power discourses. From his viewpoint, efforts to define middle powers transcend the realm of conventional social science categorization and enter the sphere of power dynamics, which are aimed at controlling

the narrative surrounding middle powers. Consequently, Robertson argues that the pursuit of a singular, static definition of middle powers is an exercise in futility.

However, Woo (2021) challenges this perspective by presenting objective criteria for an alternative definition of middle powers. His delineation between 'latent' and 'mature' middle powers is exemplified through the International Monetary Fund's distinct treatment of India and South Korea. While this could be interpreted as a rebuttal to Robertson's posited futility, it could also be seen as a pragmatic solution akin to Jordaan's proposed narrowing of definitional criteria.

Unsurprisingly, the shifting conceptual goalposts and the divergence of theoretical premises underpinning the definition of middle powers have elicited criticism, as evidenced by Jeong's (2019) critique of the potential misuse of the middle power category. Jeong argues that the category can serve as a conduit for implicit biases and circular reasoning. However, this theoretical flexibility can also be seen as a reflection of the ever-changing realities of international relations, underscoring the necessity for the concepts and categories within this field to continually adapt and evolve.

Some scholars researching middle powers have implicitly adopted an approach that emphasizes context in definitions. For instance, Andrew Cooper (2013), in an article examining the role of middle powers in global governance and the Group of Twenty, articulates the paper's intent as a 're-examination of the diplomatic styles and impact of secondary or intermediate powers in a world of diminished hegemony and leadership.'

Power, as a decisive factor in international relations, offers a prism through which to classify states within the world political system. While consensus eludes scholars on power's precise definition or classification – such as soft, hard, sharp, smart, or coercive power – certain states, by various criteria, demonstrate superior potency over others (Haukkala, 2011). Material and non-material resources underpin this power distribution among actors within the international system, rendering its structure as unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar, based on the number of superpowers or great powers present (Mearsheimer, 2001).

In this regard, middle-power behavior offers a source for niche diplomacy, central to the traditional perspective that middle powers act as responsible, good international citizens with the national will and capability to uphold such a role (Jordaan, 2003). However, this normative bias and strong positive appreciation of middle-power diplomacy have also been accompanied by expectations that these states only engage in constructive internationalism when aligned with domestic interests (Cooper, 1997).

Nevertheless, internal pressures often present constraints on policy formulation and implementation. For instance, certain interest groups' potential vulnerability to the changing international economic order might prompt a middle power to refrain from action despite high international expectations on an issue (Cooper, 1997). As such, middle powers may need to consider alternative pathways forward that align both domestic and international interests.

In examining the evolving nature of middle-power diplomacy, Cox's (1989) work provides a valuable

perspective. Cox (1989) suggests that the continuing value of middle-power diplomacy in a shifting world necessitates the continuous rethinking of the middle-power role in the context of the international system's changing state. This extended framework could better elucidate the balance of continuity and change within middle-power behavior. The foreign policy objectives of self-identified middle powers, traditionally supporting the international system, have persistently held their place (Chapnick, 1999).

Given this, a feasible definition for a middle power could be "a state possessing the interest and ability (material resources, diplomatic influence, ingenuity, etc.) to actively cooperate with akin states to augment and bolster institutions for the governance of global commons" (Robertson et al., 2017).

North vs. South: Generational Difference of Middle Powers

In the preceding chapter, we embarked on an extensive exploration of the role and characterization of 'middle powers' within the international system, providing a thorough understanding of the multifaceted dynamics they bring to the global governance table. As we turn the page to this chapter, it is worth remembering that middle powers, with their distinct positioning and capabilities, shape the course of international relations in significant

ways, straddling the gap between smaller nations and the colossuses of the global stage.

In the realm of international relations theory, the analysis of middle powers is a critically insightful avenue. It unveils the distinctive roles these nations play and the impacts they exert on the mechanics of global governance. The nomenclature of 'middle powers' is a subject of diverse interpretations and definitions, with multiple ways to identify and categorize these countries. One widely respected approach that particularly resonates with policymakers is to classify nations based on quantifiable criteria such as gross domestic product (GDP), population size, and military expenditure (Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013).

By employing this quantitative framework, a country can be ascertained as a middle power if it exhibits proximity to the world's superpowers concerning these measures, albeit falling short of surpassing them. While these nations might not hold the commanding authority that the superpowers wield, their relatively significant resources and influence position them as crucial actors in the international system, capable of engendering consequential impacts on global governance. As we delve further into this chapter, we will examine the strategic manoeuvres of such middle powers within the broader global context and how their actions influence the dynamics of international institutions and governance.

Conceptualised as those nations that occupy a space between small and major powers (Taylor, 2010), these middle powers represent states with mid-range levels of power (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993). However, the

task of accurately delineating what characterises a middle power is fraught with challenges due to varied perspectives on the factors that constitute a state's power.

In the realm of these academic discourses, the work of Bernard Wood (1988) stands out due to his distinct approach to the study of middle powers. His unique approach consisted of primarily identifying middle powers by a rather tangible factor – the Gross National Product (GNP) of the state. Wood concluded that the countries ranking between sixth to thirty-sixth in terms of their GNP in the year 1979 were the middle powers. The preference for GNP as a determining factor was largely due to its ease of measurement and perceived objectivity.

Despite the seeming simplicity of this approach, Wood added an additional layer of complexity by including Algeria, Iran, and Pakistan to his list, owing to their 'special regional or global importance'. This inclusion implicitly acknowledged the inadequacy of a singular measure, like GNP, to accurately capture the essence of state power. This conclusion resonates with Holbraad's (1984) notion of power, which includes elements such as leadership, internal cohesion, and diplomatic skill. This expansion in defining power suggests a recognition of the multi-dimensionality of power that transcends merely economic prowess.

While many researchers have gradually distanced themselves from the notion of identifying middle powers solely on the basis of state power or their position within the international system (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2004), there are those who persist in this tradition. Gilley and O'Neil (2014), for instance, advocate a hierarchical approach,

perceiving middle powers as a tier below the well-recognised emerging or established great powers such as the United States, China, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and India. Despite these varied approaches, a persistent challenge remains in establishing a uniform method for the measurement of state power, as well as determining how to weight the various components of power in such a measure (Gilley & O'Neil, 2014).

A fundamental issue with recognising middle powers based on a form of international ranking is the inherent assumption that states with similar standing will exhibit parallel international behaviour. A thorough examination of Wood's (1988) list, encompassing a range of countries from India, apartheid South Africa, Sweden, to communist states such as Czechoslovakia and China, unveils the great disparity in foreign policies among similarly ranked states. Echoing this sentiment, Gilley and O'Neil's (2014) more contemporary list displays an analogous diversity, with the inclusion of countries as disparate as Spain and Saudi Arabia, and Italy and Iran.

This diversity challenges the presumption of homogenous behaviour among middle powers. As an illustration, Cooper (2008) posits that Iran is a robust global middle power, yet discerning commonalities between Iranian foreign policy and that of Canada, a country widely regarded as a middle power, proves elusive. In fact, this discrepancy is not limited to these examples but pervades the broader concept of middle powers. Ravenhill (2017) elucidates this by stating that middle powers are countries sandwiched between great powers, regardless of whether they are emerging or established, and small powers. Given

the paucity of great powers, this dichotomy implies that a substantial majority of the world's nations must be categorised within these two remaining brackets.

However, it becomes increasingly evident that ranking alone provides a rather limited insight into the behavioural traits or potential actions of middle powers. As Walt (1998) posits, foreign policy does not unambiguously or directly stem from a state's capacity, power, or international standing. This is especially pertinent in a unipolar international system where foreign policy may be less predictably linked to a state's power. Consequently, many scholars studying middle powers have shifted their focus towards analysing their international behaviour (Ungerer, 2007), although maintaining a vague and unspecified notion of middling power – necessary to avoid rendering the term 'middle power' a misnomer.

The shift from a power-centric to a behaviour-centric perspective has led to some peculiar outcomes in the identification of middle powers. An instance of this is the classification of India, a nation of significant size and population, as a middle power (Buzan & Wæver, 2003), which, it could be argued, undermines the concept of 'middling' size that is traditionally associated with the definition of middle powers.

Notwithstanding the complexity of determining middle powers based on size, the ambiguity persists when analysing behaviour. Brazil serves as a case in point, exhibiting characteristics of middle power behaviour (Hurrell, 2007), yet scholars remain at odds over whether its vast scale disqualifies it as a middle power (Amorim, 2010).

An intriguing strand of behaviour-based approach delineates middle powers as 'good international citizens', guided by the principles of 'humane internationalism' (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993). This perceived altruism is ostensibly demonstrated by the propensity of traditional middle powers to be substantial donors of development aid, active contributors to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping efforts, and peace brokers during violent conflicts. Former Australian Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans (2003), advocates for this perspective, highlighting Chile's stance during the 2003 US-Iraq conflict, when it used its crucial vote in the UN Security Council to deny the US a UN mandate to attack Iraq. Nevertheless, this notion of middle powers as 'good international citizens' is subject to critique. Critics argue that such characterisations are vulnerable to distortions, ambiguity, and the romanticisation of past actions (Neumann & Gstöhl, 2004). Furthermore, middle powers, like any states, have engaged in controversial international actions, calling into question the moral exemplar status often attributed to them (Ungerer, 2007).

A separate behavioural approach turns its attention away from the moral dimensions of middle power actions, instead focusing on the method of their actions (Cooper, 1997). Despite their limited capacity, which constrains these states to a narrow range of issues, middle powers demonstrate diplomacy marked by 'entrepreneurial flair and technical competence' (Long & Woolaver, 2018). This capacity limitation also naturally inclines middle powers towards multilateralism and coalition-building. When intervening in international issues, middle powers frequently act as mediators, catalysts, facilitators,

managers or bridge-builders, with their positions often reflecting a tendency to seek compromise (Evan, 1993).

However, it is crucial to note that middle power states do not consistently exhibit these behaviours. They do so selectively, giving rise to the concept of 'niche diplomacy' (Keating, 1993). This approach implies that middle powers concentrate their efforts on specific areas of international affairs where they can wield a substantive influence, instead of adopting a broad approach to global issues.

A constructivist approach, as proposed by Hurrell (2008), suggests an alternative method for the identification of middle powers, indicating that middlepowership could be seen as a self-created identity or ideology. In this context, middle powers can be defined as those states that perceive themselves as such and whose foreign policy actions align with a middle power narrative. Yet, this approach is not devoid of drawbacks. Notably, while countries like Australia, Canada, and South Korea perceive themselves as middle powers, there are states often categorized by scholars as middle powers – Brazil and South Africa, for instance (Jordaan, 2003) – whose foreign policy bureaucracies and traditions do not necessarily align with such self-perceptions.

An additional issue arises with the principle of self-definition. If a country proclaims itself a middle power, such as Malaysia, should this self-proclamation be accepted as accurate, or should an independent set of criteria inform our understanding of its status? Arguably, the latter approach seems more reasonable. Accepting a country's self-proclaimed status without scrutiny can lead to misrepresentations – as when the Democratic People's

Republic of Korea describes itself as a democracy, a claim that is demonstrably untrue.

A further behaviour-based perspective perceives middle powers as actors that contribute to stabilizing the international system (Ravenhill, 1998). These states do so primarily out of enlightened self-interest. They are driven by their concern over international instability and feelings of vulnerability. According to this perspective, the pursuit of international stability, orderliness, and predictability motivates middle powers to strive for conflict reduction, international institution-building, and adherence to international law (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993).

Middle powers often engage in coalition-building and work through international institutions to enhance their own relatively limited power. In instances where great powers refrain from contributing to international order, middle powers step in and, from some vantage points, are even anticipated to assume such a role (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993). A recurrent theme in literature on middle powers is the decreasing ability or inclination of the United States to provide international leadership, and correspondingly, the need to involve a larger number of states in managing international order (Higgott, 1998). Such dispersal of responsibility renders midrange states more pertinent than ever before.

Middle powers generally favour order and stability. Consequently, when international changes do occur, middle powers attempt to ensure these changes transpire in an orderly manner (Ravenhill, 1998). The most notable development since the end of the Cold War has arguably been the rise of China. Historically, the ascension

and decline of great powers have been associated with instability and an increased likelihood of armed conflict among these powers. For middle powers, the drive is to incentivize China, similar to past efforts with the United States, to act through international institutions and to adhere to acceptable norms of international relations (Hurrell, 2007).

Nevertheless, the notion of middle powers as stabilisers is challenged by their varied responses to hegemony – more specifically, to the responses of many emerging middle powers. It is plausible to distinguish three middle power attitudes towards the United States and the liberal hegemonic order, revealing a crucial distinction between traditional and emerging middle powers. One perspective views middle powers essentially as supporters of hegemony.

Middle power conservatism, that is, the desire for stability and the preservation of the status quo, has typically translated into support for the liberal hegemonic order and the United States (Chapnick, 1999). This is consistent with Neack's (1995) assertion that middle powers are states that prove themselves useful to the relevant great powers in the system. Similarly, Cox (1987) argues that it falls upon middle powers to support and legitimise the prevailing international order.

Middle powers legitimize the international order by endorsing the rules, values, and practices that characterize the particular international system in which they operate (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993). This role of legitimization is particularly relevant for theoretical perspectives that understand hegemony not merely as material dominance, but as also entailing an acceptance of the principles and

ideologies associated with a particular world order (Keohane, 1984). While these principles and ideologies align with the interests of the dominant power, acquiescence from less powerful states requires the perception that the hegemon's preferences coincide with the general interest and that it makes concessions to weaker states to maintain the sense that the system is mutually beneficial (Keohane, 1984).

A second perspective views middle powers as ambivalent towards the United States and its hegemony. Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal (1993) interpret the middle power inclination for multilateralism and their enthusiasm for international law as a quest for safety in numbers. They posit that this is not so much a defense against the predations of enemies as it is against the overbearing embrace and dominance of great power allies.

Both the aforementioned perspectives agree that some distinction between middle powers and the hegemon is necessary. Even Cox (1987), who perceives middle powers as supporters of hegemony, asserts that middle powers necessitate a sufficient degree of autonomy relative to major powers. Evans (1993) underscores that independence from the major powers is requisite if middle powers aspire to act as credible mediators and honest brokers.

When middle powers find themselves at odds with great powers, it is often because it is incumbent upon middle powers to uphold the principle of adherence to acceptable rules and conduct by all powers, regardless of their size (Ungerer, 2007). While such affirmations are intended to constrain a great power, they typically invoke the principles of the current hegemonic order – human rights, multilateralism, democracy, economic liberalism,

peaceful resolution of conflict, for example – and thus do not challenge the foundational ideas upon which an international order is built. At their most assertive, middle powers seeking to constrain a hegemon from acting against these norms should be considered at most reformist, and certainly not radical (Ungerer, 2007).

Despite serving as sporadic antagonists or dissenters on specific matters, middle powers have assumed the roles of 'supporters' and 'loyalists' to the prevailing authority in the aftermath of the Cold War, as per the first two schools of thought (Cox, 1981). These perspectives suggest a harmony and alignment of interests between middle powers and the global hegemon. The third perspective, on the other hand, positions the interests of middle powers as challenging or counterbalancing the supremacy of great powers (Soeya, 1997).

In this third viewpoint, middle powers exhibit a preference for a multipolar international order. This inclination arises due to the democratization of influence it entails; more states are able to exert influence over specific international issues in such an order (Holbraad, 1984). The first two perspectives resonate with the posture and actions of traditional middle powers, while this third perspective seems especially relevant to the conduct of emerging middle powers.

Emerging middle powers exhibit a distinct attitude towards the United States and the liberal international order, which the U.S. has historically spearheaded. The key difference between emerging and traditional middle powers becomes evident in this attitude (Mearsheimer, 2001). Traditional middle powers, such as Canada and

Australia, have generally been unwavering followers of the U.S. and do not question American international leadership at a foundational level (Cooper, 1997).

Contrarily, emerging middle powers, such as India or Brazil, often display a resistance to the U.S. and challenge international structures more deeply than their traditional counterparts (Jordaan, 2003). This is not to say that emerging middle powers desire a radical transformation of the global order. Previously, this author posited that emerging middle powers seek a 'reformist' change – a modification that, while significant, still aligns with and supports the current international order and its liberal character.

This earlier summation, however, might have underestimated the extent to which emerging middle powers might diverge from the hegemonic system. South Africa, as an emerging middle power, has exhibited a tendency towards a more 'Third Worldist', 'solidarist', and 'revisionist' stance. The nation's international conduct increasingly surpasses what might be termed 'reformist', thus demonstrating a more profound divergence from the dominant international order.

The type of foreign policy behaviour aligns with the third approach outlined here. This approach characterizes middle power behaviour as aspiring towards a more significant international change, a change that diverges from liberal principles and opposes American leadership. Scholars have noticed an increase in middle power contestation, predominantly emanating from non-traditional middle powers (Jordaan, 2003).

Andrew Cooper observes a shift in middle power activism compared to earlier periods. He contends that there is a waning "sense of like-mindedness based on shared attitudes" (Cooper, 2005). Contrarily, numerous middle powers now display a contrarian approach, clashing with the traditional 'followership' that has been associated with middle powers in the past.

The notion of 'soft balancing,' proposed by Pape in 2005, offers an explanation for this shift (Pape, 2005). Flemes (2007) draws upon this concept to illustrate how emerging middle powers were already attempting to hinder and undermine American unilateralism. Soft balancing is an approach to counter hegemonic power indirectly, intending to delay and frustrate the unilateral actions of the hegemon. This strategy also entails strengthening ties among Southern states, aiming to shift the balance of economic power away from the U.S. Such 'South–South cooperation' strives to build a coalition to resist the North.

Taking a closer look at individual emerging middle powers, Matthew Stephen points out that India, Brazil, and South Africa have emerged as significant antagonists to the U.S. (Stephen, 2014). Turkish foreign policy has pivoted away from its former close alignment with the West towards a greater assertion of its independence as an international actor. Indonesia maintains priorities and foreign policy goals that are markedly different from those of traditional middle power Australia (Neack, 2019).

Emerging middle powers are suggested to "seek fundamental revisions" to the primary post-war institutions (Neack, 2019). Both Cooper and Flemes pose an important question: Will middle powers continue to engage through

existing international institutions, or will they turn towards parallel mechanisms of international coordination? In the case of emerging middle powers, it appears to involve a mix of all three: ongoing participation, advocacy for reform, and the establishment of parallel institutions.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) provides a pertinent illustration of how emerging middle powers navigate international governance. These states frequently strive to gain election to this pivotal body, exemplified by Brazil's multiple terms as a non-permanent member (United Nations, 2021). Concurrently, middle powers have been at the forefront of campaigns advocating for varying degrees of UNSC reform. For instance, South Africa, as part of the African Union's plan for UN reform (known as the Ezulwini Consensus), advocates for the expansion of permanent seats with veto power (Lynch, 2006). Similarly, Brazil, within the G4 group, which also includes Germany, India, and Japan, is seeking additional permanent seats, albeit without the demand for veto rights for these new members (Hurrell, 2006). Other emerging middle powers such as Mexico, South Korea, and Turkey belong to the United for Consensus group, which proposes less extensive UNSC reforms than the G4 and the African Group (Volgy et al., 2011).

In addition, the establishment of parallel institutions further indicates the evolving role of these middle powers. South Africa's role in establishing the Peace and Security Council of the African Union exemplifies this trend. A similar pattern of participation, reform, and creation of parallel structures can be observed regarding the Bretton Woods institutions.

New middle powers, including Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey, and South Korea, are all among the most substantial borrowers from the World Bank (World Bank, 2022). These countries have advocated for reform in the governance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), especially in regard to the distribution of voting power. They argue that this should more accurately reflect the growing economic might of countries beyond the traditional Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members (Woods, 2006). This culminated in a voting power increase in 2016 for Brazil, China, India, and Russia, albeit with a corresponding decrease for South Africa (IMF, 2016). Despite these reforms, developing countries still lack voice and voting power commensurate with their economic weight.

In response to their underrepresentation in the IMF and the global role of the dollar, the BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – established the New Development Bank in 2014 (Stuenkel, 2015). While it is yet to be determined how distinct the policies and perspectives of the New Development Bank will be from those of the Bretton Woods institutions, its self-proclaimed objective is to operate as an alternative to the US-dominated World Bank and IMF (NDB, 2014).

Gilley and O'Neil (2005) note that the 'counterhegemonic instincts of new middle powers' often manifest in resistance to values perceived as being Western-imposed. Voting records in the UN General Assembly provide a snapshot of such disagreements. For example, US Government reports reveal that, between 2012–2015, the voting coincidence rate with the US for countries like Australia and Canada

exceeded 90%, while for Brazil and Turkey it was under 50% (U.S. Department of State, 2016).

Further expanding on these observations, scholars Gilley and O'Neil (2005) postulate that emerging or new middle powers, despite being democratic and respecting human rights within their own borders, often express considerable scepticism about liberal-democratic values on the international stage. According to these authors, emerging middle powers demonstrate less commitment to the global promotion of human rights compared to their traditional counterparts.

An illustrative example of this stance can be found in a Canadian parliamentary report on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), established in 2006. The report criticized the Council's inability to adopt robust human rights resolutions, attributing this failure to the opposition from developing countries, among which are various emerging middle powers, consistently voting against Western proposals (Canada Parliament, 2007).

Individual emerging middle powers have similarly been criticized for lackluster international records on human rights promotion. On the UNHRC, South Africa and Brazil have been accused of disappointing performance, while South Africa and Indonesia have drawn criticism for their readiness to defend regimes notorious for human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Turkey, although not a member of the UNHRC, has been identified as aligning itself with countries lacking democratic credentials and exhibiting strong anti-Western stances (Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009).

In contrast to traditional middle powers, which often lack regional clout and express ambivalence about deeper regional integration, emerging middle powers are typically enthusiastic regionalists. Middle powers occasionally employ regional integration as a mechanism to counteract U.S. influence, as demonstrated by Brazil with the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) (Wehner, 2015).

However, as noted by Chris Alden (2007), regional organizations in the developing world have frequently failed to serve as effective conduits for promoting adherence to progressive norms within global governance structures. Instead, these organizations are often utilized as buffers to prevent external interference in relation to regional members with poor human rights records.

This third approach, which positions emerging middle powers as adversarial to hegemony, appears incompatible with the portrayal of middle powers as agents of international stability. The purported preference of middle powers for international stability appears at odds with their desire for a shift from the current unipolar global order towards a multipolar configuration (Cooper et al., 2012).

As proposed by esteemed scholar William Wohlforth (1999), a unipolar international system enjoys greater stability compared to its bipolar or multipolar counterparts. This superior stability can be attributed to the enormous power gap that separates the hegemon from its closest rivals. As Robert Jervis (1997) argues, such a power gap minimizes the likelihood of world war, as great power conflict is contingent upon a disagreement regarding the relative power of the leader and its main challenger.

Even though, as Kenneth Waltz (1979) warns us, unbalanced power can present a potential threat to others, the identity of the power holder is of significant importance. This idea is underscored by John Ikenberry's (2011) characterization of the U.S. as a 'liberal leviathan.' According to Ikenberry, the U.S.-led order, despite being hierarchical, bears liberal characteristics; the hegemon offers global public goods, fosters networks for mutual communication and influence, and operates within a framework of negotiated rules and institutions that curtail the arbitrary use of power.

However, middle powers advocating for multipolarity appear to be encouraging a reconfiguration of the relative positions of the great powers. Such a shift from a unipolar system is likely to instigate considerable destabilization. As Graham Allison (2017) has noted, historical analysis shows that out of 16 instances of great power transitions in the past 500 years, 12 have culminated in war.

The notion of middle powers acting as stabilizers initially seemed promising, yet the actions of the new generation of middle powers often contradict this idea. The attitudes of emerging middle powers towards U.S. hegemony are deep-rooted and unlikely to undergo significant change in the near future.

Contrary to traditional middle powers, which usually do not challenge the principles of the liberal international order, the attitudes of emerging middle powers towards this order cover a wide spectrum, from support and ambivalence to outright opposition. Foreign policy researchers have identified a dichotomy, even contradiction, within the foreign policies of many emerging middle powers. On one

hand, a foreign policy tradition exists among these powers favoring close alignment with the West; on the other, there is a simultaneous trend striving for separation.

For instance, Brazil exemplifies a nation grappling with a dichotomy between its long-standing affiliation with the West and an emerging propensity towards broader global engagement (Souza, 2023). This dichotomy became evident during former President Lula's tenure, when his pivot towards enhanced association with the Global South was perceived by some as an abandonment of years of effort dedicated to fostering closer ties with the West (Spektor, 2010).

South Africa likewise demonstrates an increasing alignment with the Global South, yet retains facets of its foreign policy that are 'Western' in orientation (Nel, 2015). Indonesia, on the other hand, oscillates between its roles as a Western partner and a so-called 'problem state' (Rüland, 2012).

Turkey provides another interesting case. During the Kemalist era, Turkey's foreign policy was tightly aligned with the West. However, under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkey has drifted away from the West, cultivating a stronger association with the Islamic world (Çağaptay, 2014). According to Laura Neack (2017), Turkey exhibits ambiguity in its foreign policy orientation, oscillating between revisionism and support for the international order. Despite instances of increased 'independence', Turkey has frequently reassumed its commitment to the international status quo when its security is threatened (Neack, 2017).

These conflicting attitudes of emerging middle powers towards the hegemonic order can be traced back to various root causes. Janis van der Westhuizen (1998) identifies domestic class conflict as one such root cause, proposing that emerging middle powers often face a choice between economic liberalisation and redistribution. Furthermore, these emerging middle powers often assume the role of spokesperson for the developing world in their engagements with industrialised states. Indonesian leaders, for example, perceive their country's role as a 'bridge' that mediates and links the small and great world powers.

Mexico exemplified this active bridging role during the Heiligendamm process (Hurrell, 2008). Likewise, South Korea emphasized its bridging role by hosting the first G20 summit outside the Anglophone world, drawing attention to its own transition from a developing to a developed economy.

Nevertheless, the assumption of a bridging role by emerging middle powers places these nations between opposing demands, often resulting in a pull in different directions. As Burges (2009) noted in the context of the World Trade Organization, Brazil constructed a coalition with Southern nations to secure its place at the table with the European Union, India, and the United States. However, once Brazil achieved this goal, it began to deviate from the coalition's agenda, advocating that its partners make further concessions, such as on non-agricultural market access.

Moreover, the alignment with the South has often resulted in emerging middle powers compromising on human rights in an effort to preserve sovereignty

(Acharya, 2018). Furthermore, these nations sometimes grapple with a tension between local values and those perceived as Western. For instance, under the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Islamic influence has become more prominent in Turkish domestic and foreign policy (Çağaptay, 2014), which necessitated a cautious stance on NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011.

Despite being a democracy, Indonesia's membership in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation led the country to support a series of resolutions at the United Nations against the defamation of religions. These resolutions aimed at limiting speech critical of Islam were perceived by many as undermining and distorting guarantees on freedom of expression in international human rights law (Hicks, 2012).

In the case of South Africa, Laurie Nathan (2012) has identified a foreign policy conflict between liberal values and the country's commitment to Africa. An additional factor contributing to emerging middle powers' ambivalence about the liberal international order is the fact that, despite being constitutionally committed to the protection of human rights, these nations often grapple with significant internal human rights challenges.

This dichotomy propels emerging middle powers in two directions. On one hand, they might seek to bolster international responses to overcome domestic issues. For instance, Latin American support for sexual orientation and gender identity rights at the UN Human Rights Council was evident when Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay were the lead sponsors of a landmark resolution on sexual orientation in 2014 (Bauder, 2016). This move

underscores the affirmation of the liberal aspects of the international order.

On the other hand, emerging middle powers with domestic human rights issues might opt to evade the subject on an international stage, as in the case of Indonesia, so as not to highlight their own domestic human rights difficulties (Tan, 2017).

Another source of foreign policy tension for emerging middle powers is their position within regional contexts. Newly established middle powers are often recognized as regional powers, with Mexico and South Korea serving as notable exceptions (Söderbaum & Taylor, 2008). In certain instances, it is the regional dominance of these states that bestows upon them the capacity to function as middle powers (Schirm, 2010).

South Africa and Brazil, for instance, have emerged as significant regional stabilizers and brokers (Soares de Lima & Hirst, 2006), while Turkey has progressively assumed a leadership role within its region over the years (Öniş, 2011). However, the leadership claims of these regional powers are frequently met with resistance from other nations within the same region (Santiso, 2003). Consequently, these regionally influential emerging middle powers often find themselves trapped between international expectations for leadership and the need to demonstrate that they are not simply regional bullies executing the mandates of forces from the liberal core.

This discussion has highlighted numerous factors contributing to the conflicted attitudes of emerging middle powers towards the liberal hegemonic order. The quantity and nature of these factors suggest they are unlikely

to dissipate in the foreseeable future, implying that the counter-hegemonic tendencies observed in the foreign policies of emerging middle powers will persist.

Conceptualizations of middle powers based on international rankings of size, power, or capability are arguably insufficient, as these factors alone do not enable the prediction of a state's international actions. Similarly, defining middle powers as 'good international citizens' presents challenges due to observed actions that contradict this characterization.

By definition, middle powers possess limited capacity for international action, hence their niche or bridge-building interventions are typically intermittent. Such sporadic demonstrations of what is assumed to be a defining characteristic therefore limit the predictive power of middle power theory. Identifying middle powers as states that self-define as such also raises issues, as such self-description necessitates an external comprehension of what constitutes middlepower-ship.

These attempts to define middle powers remain inadequate, irrespective of whether we are discussing new or traditional middle powers. This leaves the definition of middle powers as stabilizers of the international system as a remaining contention.

The definition of middle powers as stabilisers of the international system encounters a challenge due to the counter-hegemonic – and often destabilising – actions of certain middle powers. This counter-hegemonic tendency is predominantly observed among non-traditional middle powers. Acknowledging this divergence in middle power attitudes and its implications for the definition of middle

powers, Stephen (2012) posits a question: can middle powers exhibiting antagonistic attitudes towards the United States still be considered as such?

Therein lies a dichotomous choice: Chen Zhao (2016) proposes that we regard traditional middle powers such as Canada and Australia as outliers due to their close alignment with the United States. Chen suggests that the growing roster of "unaligned new middle powers" (including nations like Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey) should be the recipients of the middle power designation. This perspective essentially calls for a total departure from our initial frame of reference – traditional middle powers. Implementing this approach would bring about a significant shift in our understanding of what constitutes a middle power.

Contrary to Chen's proposal, the solution by Jordaan (2017) is to eliminate qualifying adjectives such as 'emerging' or 'Southern' from the middle power discourse, and to cease classifying intermediate states exhibiting counter-hegemonic tendencies as middle powers. Effectively, this would confine the middle power designation to mid-range states that actively support the liberal international order. This set of criteria will restrict the application of the term to traditional middle powers and a select few others.

South Korea could potentially fall into this category. As a close ally of the United States, it shares many American values, actively participates in global governance, and as an OECD member, may possess economic interests more closely aligned with traditional middle powers than many other states currently bearing the middle power label.

Murphy (2013) also observes that Indonesia has shown less opposition in recent years. Mexico could be another candidate for the middle power classification as, despite being a developing country, its reluctance to challenge the principles of the hegemonic order largely arises due to the United States' significant influence over its affairs.

While Jordaan's (2017) proposed approach offers a valuable lens to analyse international relations, it does adopt a reductionist perspective by applying a limited set of criteria to classify middle powers. On one hand, this methodology carries potential benefits. By narrowing the definition of middle powers to states that actively support the liberal international order, it provides a clear, workable framework to identify and study these actors. This could simplify research in this field and provide a level of coherence to discussions and debates about middle powers and their roles in international affairs.

On the other hand, such a reductionist approach might limit the depth and scope of understanding we can gain about the complexities and nuances of middle powers. The international landscape is dynamic, and states do not necessarily fit neatly into binary categories. For instance, nations such as Brazil and India are often classified as middle powers, yet they exhibit both support for and resistance to the liberal international order (Soares de Lima & Hirst, 2006; Baru, 2012). Similarly, Turkey's foreign policy under different administrations has oscillated between support for Western norms and alignment with Islamic worldviews (Oguzlu, 2008). If we follow Jordaan's proposed approach, these states would be excluded from

the category of middle powers despite the influential roles they play in international politics.

Therefore, while a reductionist approach can certainly be useful for certain aspects, it may not universally apply to the study of middle powers. Its greatest value lies perhaps in its capacity to highlight a particular dimension of middle powers – their relationship with the liberal international order. However, a comprehensive understanding of middle powers will require a more nuanced approach that takes into account factors such as regional influences, historical trajectories, economic interdependencies, and ideological positions. Such an approach would be more inclusive and reflective of the multifaceted nature of international politics. The dynamic interplay of forces that shapes the behaviors and strategies of middle powers warrants an all-encompassing approach, rather than one exclusively centered on their alignment with or opposition to the liberal international order.

The critical need for a comprehensive understanding of middle powers from both ends of the spectrum stems from their multifaceted and complex roles in international politics. Middle powers are not simply state actors positioned between major and minor powers; they are influential participants with distinct roles and strategies. Their identity is influenced by a combination of their historical legacies, regional contexts, economic dependencies, and ideological leanings.

The Group of Twenty (G20), an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from nineteen countries and the European Union, provides the

most explicit evidence of this expansion of responsibility. According to the evaluation by Gilley and O'Neil (2014), a considerable number of G20 members can be classified as middle powers. Cooper (1997) further notes that while attention often gravitates towards the major powers in the G20, middle powers are the forum's greatest advocates and the ones who work relentlessly behind the scenes to ensure its functionality.

As we delve into the following chapter, we'll be exploring the middle powers of the Global South in greater depth. Our aim is to reassess and reframe their roles within the context of the contemporary international system. We will examine their distinct characteristics, challenges, and contributions, which often diverge from traditional notions of middle power behavior. Through this in-depth exploration, we will come to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of middle powers, thus paving the way for more effective analyses and policy-making strategies in international relations. This reassessment and reframing will provide us with a more holistic picture, enabling us to navigate and understand the intricate landscape of global politics with greater nuance and depth.

South-South Cooperation: Emerging alternative to Europocentric International Order

The dynamic and complex international environment is continually being reshaped, partially, through the evolving roles of non-Western middle powers, also referred to as 'Southern middle powers' (Cooper et al., 2013). A prevalent challenge for these countries lies in their engagement with the liberal international order, particularly in an era where Western democracies are battling the rise of populism, and certain Southern powers are augmenting their authoritarian influence (Hurrell, 2006). This discourse necessitates a reassessment of the systemic role of Southern middle powers in the contemporary international arena.

Firstly, despite the structural and material constraints Southern middle powers face, they hold theoretical potential to chart distinct courses within the international order. Such countries possess the capability to alleviate challenges within this global structure, thereby exerting significant agency (Woods, 2008). There is a possibility for these nations to engage in diverse internationalisms, promoting collective action for addressing global challenges. Indeed, the potential for these powers to act as bridge-builders or facilitators among nations is a critical topic of inquiry (Ravenhill, 1998).

Secondly, Southern middle powers are also in a position to coordinate coalitions of like-minded actors.

This coordination may include both horizontal (with other middle powers) and vertical (with larger or smaller powers) relationships (White, 2011). A salient example is the 'IBSA Dialogue Forum' (India, Brazil, South Africa), which illustrates how these nations are forging partnerships based on shared interests, and employing diplomacy to enhance their collective bargaining power (Flemes, 2007).

Thirdly, sustaining the operation of existing multilateral institutions remains an area of potential influence for Southern middle powers. Their role in upholding the norms and principles of these institutions, including peacekeeping and the upholding of human rights, is significant (Geldenhuys, 1997).

Historically, the attribute of internationalism has been a cornerstone in defining middle powers. It underpins the willingness and capacity of these states to carve out unique roles, strategies, and interests on the international stage (Chapnick, 1999).

While the systemic role of Western middle powers can be considered historically steady, notwithstanding fluctuations in their capabilities, the emergent middle powers from the Global South seem to subscribe to an internationalism that is less clearly defined (Cooper, 1997). They engage in what might be termed 'reformist internationalism', which entails a dual process: firstly, the emergence within the liberal order driven by an augmentation of their primarily economic capabilities; and secondly, an ideational shift leading to a curtailment of their transformative potential and their counter-hegemony of Third Worldism (Ayoob, 2003).

This dual process propels emerging middle powers to increasingly function as stabilisers and validators of the liberal order, instigating some degree of change from within – such as the redistribution of decision-making influence within various institutions – without fundamentally challenging the core norms of the liberal order, including privatisation, deregulation, and liberalisation (Acharya, 2004). However, the diplomatic behaviour of middle powers during their emergence does not fully align with reformism due to various international and domestic contradictions (Beeson, 2009).

The trajectory of emergent middle powers since the conclusion of the Cold War vividly illustrates such contradictions. Reformist initiatives of states like Brazil and South Africa fell short of restructuring the hierarchical decision-making processes of global governance, despite their increasingly prominent roles in institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Narlikar, 2003). Domestic divisions often forced countries like South Africa to tread a fine line between leading the Global South through anti-imperialist rhetoric and maintaining beneficial trade and investment relationships with key Western economies (Alden, 2010). The concept of reform internationalism itself has come under scrutiny by administrations striving to utilise their national material capabilities to transcend what is perceived as a limited middle power role (Flemes, 2010).

In the ever-changing global dynamics, certain states have begun to adopt an assertive stance, forsaking reformist tendencies, and challenging the traditional liberal order without completely undermining it. This

phenomenon disrupts the typical operation of international systems and raises critical questions about these states' responsibilities and roles (Rapkin & Thompson, 2003). These entities, predominantly situated in the Southern hemisphere and recognized as democracies, propagate a concept of a pluralistic international society that starkly contrasts the expectations of Western societies. This is particularly noticeable in contexts such as humanitarian intervention and the ongoing reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Chesterman, 2011).

The term 'Southern middle powers' has increasingly been suggested as an appropriate terminology for comprehending the current path of states such as Brazil and South Africa. This proposition is supported by three main arguments (Cooper et al., 2013).

Firstly, emerging economies manifest diverse degrees of resilience towards crises, as observed in their response to the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, and their respective rates of economic growth vary significantly. This implies that the state of emergence may not be viable for many countries due to several factors including substantial debt, depopulation, absence of domestic reforms, and unstable commodity prices (Schirm, 2010). The concept of emerging middle powers may hence be under scrutiny, considering the myriad socio-economic challenges these countries face. These hurdles precipitate a collapse of the anticipated rise of these nations, indicating that it may be premature to foresee development and democratization culminating in the emergence of key Western allies (Woods, 2010).

Secondly, the foreign policies of these middle powers that lie beyond the Western world are predominantly focused on the Global South. Their international relations are significantly influenced by the necessity of promoting regional and South–South cooperation, albeit to varying extents (Woods, 2008).

Thirdly, the reformist agenda appears to be waning in light of China's large-scale projects, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). These initiatives overshadow those of the middle powers. Moreover, consortia incorporating middle powers, including the BRICS group (comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), seem divided on the extent of reform required to tackle global challenges, such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic (Narlikar, 2010).

Amid the aforementioned challenges, Southern middle powers are gradually edging towards an ambivalent internationalism. Within this framework, these countries maintain some traditional middle power roles like mediator or facilitator, yet they are selective in how these roles are carried out (Cooper et al., 1993). Noteworthy challenges compel middle powers, such as Brazil, to retrench their foreign policies via a process aptly referred to as 'status downgrading.' In such a state, the emphasis on pragmatism supersedes aspirations of international leadership (Pinheiro & Gaio, 2014).

This calculated deployment of resources by middle powers gives reason to reconsider the initial expectations of these states as legitimisers and stabilisers of the existing global order. This perspective aligns with Cox's (1987) earlier assertion that the role of a middle power is not a

fixed constant, but a variable that demands continuous reevaluation within the context of the evolving state of the international system.

In essence, ambivalent internationalism presents a critical choice about the paths to international order that Southern middle powers can traverse. This paradigm allows these states to either commit more solidly and meaningfully to the liberal order, or increasingly retreat from diplomatic initiatives offering concrete support for this order (Cooper et al., 1993). Should middle powers opt for a more definitive internationalism, observable in their foreign policy direction across political and economic issues such as immigration and trade, and display greater consistency in adopting internationalist policy options, then Southern middle powers can assume a more central role in buttressing the liberal order (Reich & Lebow, 1994).

Middle powers have traditionally been anticipated to form and spearhead coalitions of states with mutual interests in fostering internationalism, multilateralism, and good international citizenship (Evans & Newnham, 1998). Such coalitions, encapsulating a wide-ranging membership of middle powers and smaller states, possess the potential to nurture a collective bargaining capacity in support of the institutions central to the liberal order.

This concept of like-mindedness within coalitions is not only driven by a shared vision of good international citizenship, but also by an instrumental objective of 'mutual empowerment' within a competitive multipolar world (Bennett, 1991). With such a flexible notion of like-mindedness, coalitions may integrate both Western and Southern middle powers (Cooper et al., 2013). The

burgeoning presence of Southern middle powers can further bolster the capacity and legitimacy of coalitions in molding issues pertaining to global governance.

Particularly, issue-based coalitions can instigate a significant convergence of interests when crises such as COVID-19 incite diverse middle powers to realign their strategic priorities to confront emergent threats, especially when established institutions or alliances fall short in addressing such challenges (Ravenhill, 2017).

Presently, queries arise as to whether middle powers can forge like-minded coalitions capable of effectively mitigating major global challenges such as authoritarianism and COVID-19, and whether Southern middle powers can assume a leadership role in these efforts. Concerning the former aspect, a consensus appears to be forming around the efficacy of informal and issue-based coalitions. Unofficial alliances of developed democracies, encompassing countries like Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom, could potentially counter the unilateralism exhibited by China, Russia, and the United States, defend the rules-based international order, and initiate the creation of new institutions that uphold liberal values (Rapp-Hooper & Ikenberry, 2019).

Issue-based coalitions comprising like-minded democracies are poised to address various realms, including climate change and World Trade Organization (WTO) reforms, through a concerted campaign of plurilateralism, thus contributing to the protection of the liberal order (Schirm, 2010). These coalitions may circumvent the constraints of formalized 'static' alliances, enabling other actors such as legislatures to confront 'democracy-

adjacent issues,' encompassing anti-corruption, injustice, discrimination, and economic recovery (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013). Versions of this strategy include Japan's proposal for an Arc of Democracies, Germany's proposition for an Alliance for Multilateralism, and the United Kingdom's recent call for a D-10 Summit of Democracies.

Although informal and issue-based mobilization appears promising, the role of Southern middle powers in this process retains an element of uncertainty. Like-mindedness can foster concerted or ad hoc actions among different middle powers, but often these shared world-views are molded along North-South axes where historical divides persist (Narlikar, 2010). The liberal order could potentially be revitalized by coalitions involving non-Western democracies and through a process of reassigning rights and responsibilities, bestowing greater authority upon these states (Nayyar, 2008).

For instance, such coalitions could rejuvenate the human rights regime by endorsing a novel agenda anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while advancing proposals to reform UN treaties and UN bodies like the Human Rights Council (Alston, 2017). While the inclusion of Southern middle powers enhances the representativeness and legitimacy of a global cluster of democracies, it concurrently dilutes the like-mindedness of such a concert as these states hold distinct interpretations of issues, such as the promotion of democracy (Cooper et al., 2013).

States like Brazil, India, and South Africa have the potential to act as democratic exemplars within their respective regions. However, certain domestic policies that

they currently uphold could indicate, particularly from a Western viewpoint, that these states are not as staunchly democratic as their Western contemporaries (Cooper et al., 2013). Moreover, the preoccupation with resisting pressures from major powers often distracts middle powers from forming alliances with like-minded nations.

Southern middle powers find themselves constrained within the emerging 'dual hierarchy' of the United States and China, endeavoring to avoid dependence on either while capitalizing on bargaining opportunities arising from U.S.-China competition (Foot & Walter, 2011). These states remain reticent about joining a U.S.-led concert of democracies, intending to maintain access to China's trade and investment flows. Simultaneously, they employ strategic choices, such as engagement and hedging, in their attempts to stabilize the dual hierarchy.

Within the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad alliance – comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. – has provided a platform for Asian middle powers to engage with the rise of China. However, certain middle powers, such as South Korea and Indonesia, strive to retain their autonomy and devise their own policy options for engaging with the liberal order.

The potential for an autonomous coalition of Southern middle powers remains ambiguous. The IBSA group (India, Brazil, and South Africa) frequently cites democracy as the cornerstone for conflict resolution, particularly evident in declarations from 2003-2011. Yet, this group is currently overshadowed by BRICS, displaying reluctance to question the authoritarianism of Russia and China, and finding

itself unable to utilize its democratic credentials to support the promotion of democracy (Malamud & Gardini, 2012).

Another noteworthy coalition is MIKTA, comprising Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia. This group seeks to leverage the rise of 'informal minilateralism' that has been evident since the 2008 economic crisis. However, organizational deficiencies impede the group's capacity to project its democratic credentials and function as a bridge between the Global North and South (Armijo, 2017).

In their current state, Southern middle powers seem to occupy a position of limited like-mindedness. They face a choice between mobilizing resources required for coordinating their diplomacy with other democracies to address global challenges or focusing on strategic bilateral partnerships that cater primarily to narrowly-defined national interests (Cooper, 2016).

Should they opt for the former, promoting a higher degree of like-mindedness and taking the lead in coalitions that include both Southern and Western middle powers and smaller states, then Southern middle powers could foster coalitions with a broad membership base capable of playing a more systemic role in sustaining the liberal international order (Narlikar, 2010).

Adherence to the principles of multilateralism has traditionally been a core attribute of middle power internationalism. Such states often regard multilateral institutions as optimal platforms for tackling global challenges, in addition to exploiting these arrangements to boost their bargaining capacities and projecting their identities as responsible global citizens (Chapnick,

1999). This strategic approach necessitates persistent multilateral activism, which may materialize in substantial contributions to existing multilateral arrangements or the establishment of novel ones.

The inclusion of middle powers in the G20 summit post-2008 exemplifies how membership in multilateral fora can contribute to mitigating the crises facing the liberal order (Cooper, 2016). Nevertheless, the current weakened state of multilateralism provokes questions about the capacity of Southern middle powers to rejuvenate entities like the UN and the WTO.

A significant challenge for middle powers dedicated to multilateralism is whether they can supplement the leadership of major powers. The rejuvenation of the liberal order requires both pragmatism and compromise, and in theory, middle powers can uphold a rules-based order that is not contingent upon the leadership of major powers (Keohane, 1984). As suggested by Andersen (2017), this kind of revision is most likely to originate from middle powers who have the authority to act independently of the great powers. Yet their limited capabilities and inability to dictate outcomes or decisions make them more inclined to favor negotiated solutions over the use of force.

Middle powers can provide leadership in managing rules-based regimes that curb the unilateralism of major powers during power transitions, even if such contributions are confined to operationalizing existing frameworks, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Evans, 1997).

For instance, Asia-Pacific middle powers such as Australia, Indonesia, and South Korea have joined

forces to preserve the Trans-Pacific Partnership following the withdrawal of the US (Capling & Ravenhill, 2011). Another approach for middle powers is the establishment of communities of like-minded states (possibly via "open regionalism") and subsequent creation of institutions to formalise these communities. However, these endeavours may compete with existing institutions and potentially fail in establishing a new governance architecture if the leadership of middle power is perceived as self-serving and unilateral.

Nonetheless, Southern middle powers encounter additional challenges in performing these multilateralist roles. Rather than serving as rule-makers in multilateral institutions, they may strategically opt to function as rule-promoters within their respective regions (for instance, in economic sectors such as competition law and policy) to evade contradicting the preferences of major powers. Concurrently, Southern middle powers show openness towards joining alternative developmental institutions, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS-led New Development Bank. These organizations are positioned outside the liberal order, potentially allowing these states to pursue more interventionist strategies of state capitalism (Stuenkel, 2013).

If the like-minded coalitions previously discussed are also a precondition for effective action, then divisions among middle powers could impair their prospects as leading multilateralists. Southern middle powers often prioritize status-seeking strategies, and status competition frequently overshadows multilateral commitments, such

as compliance with and fulfilment of G20 targets (Larson & Shevchenko, 2014).

The potential for bolstering the liberal order is palpable, with nations such as Indonesia and South Korea fostering like-minded 'communities of practice' via bilateral partnerships spanning defence and security policies. However, a higher degree of coordination and commitment is necessary for such ventures to transform into multilateral efforts and exert a systemic influence (Laksmana, 2011). Generally, collective and coordinated initiatives by nations like Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, and Turkey have primarily been propelled by selective multilateralism and have yet to achieve the magnitude requisite for the sustenance and revitalisation of multilateralism (Cooper & Mo, 2013).

For Southern middle powers, selective multilateralism thereby presents the choices of either exercising niche diplomacy to function as a catalyst in maintaining and rejuvenating key regimes of the liberal order during critical periods or selectively engaging only with certain types of multilateral regimes, such as trade and investment, which are crucial for their own national interests and status (Chimni, 2007). Should Southern middle powers elect the former approach and mobilise their diplomatic resources to provide intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership across a variety of issues, furthering negotiating agendas that aid in addressing the challenges faced by multilateralism today, then these nations can be perceived as performing a critical role in upholding the institutions of the liberal order.

In their capacity as Southern middle powers, nations have the choice to either utilize niche diplomacy, acting as a catalyst to maintain and rejuvenate key facets of the liberal order during critical times, or to selectively engage with certain types of multilateral regimes such as trade and investment, which are vital to their national interests and status (Chimni, 2007). If these nations choose to mobilize their diplomatic resources and provide intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership across various issues, forwarding negotiating agendas that contribute to addressing the challenges faced by multilateralism today, they may then be viewed as playing an essential role in upholding the institutions of the liberal order.

Continuing this exploration into the evolving roles and strategies of middle powers, it is valuable to assess the formation and function of groups like MIKTA, which includes Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia. These nations not only exemplify the fluid and complex nature of middle power diplomacy, but also their collective efforts within the G20 framework can offer novel insights into the dynamics of international cooperation and the role of middle powers in shaping the global agenda.

Rise of G20 as Premier Forum for Middle Power Cooperation

G20 has emerged as a pivotal entity in the international political economy, superseding alternatives such as the

G7 and the BRICS as the paramount forum for economic cooperation. This was firmly reiterated at the Pittsburgh summit in 2009 when G20 leaders affirmed the Group's role as the 'premier forum for international economic cooperation' (Cooper, 2010).

Functioning as an informal 'board of directors' for international financial institutions, the G20's scope extends beyond mere consultation and collaboration. It actively prescribes mandates to international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Financial Stability Board, and meticulously reviews reports submitted as responses to their requests (Callaghan & Hubbard, 2016).

This arms-length relationship has manifested intentionally; many G20 countries, particularly the burgeoning economies, are hesitant to accord preponderant authority to formal international organizations (Vestergaard & Wade, 2015). They favor the utilization of these institutions as technical consultants, capitalizing on their expertise while avoiding absolute reliance on them.

In the evolving dynamics of the G20, a discernible theme is the gradual attrition of a long-standing, and possibly outdated, global order (Helleiner, 2014). Intriguingly, some established proponents of multilateral cooperation are showing signs of ambivalence, and in some cases, retreating from the global order they were instrumental in constructing.

Simultaneously, a number of emerging powers have demonstrated a nuanced dualistic approach, acting both as insiders conforming to the established system, and outsiders actively shaping the changing dynamics. These

countries, while significantly integrated into the existing global governance system, have also sought to broaden their autonomous options. This move indicates a strategic positioning to avoid confinement solely within the G20, enabling the creation of new institutions that align more closely with their interests.

Key elements of this expanding architecture include not just the BRICS, but also the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Armijo & Roberts, 2014). These entities represent well-calculated endeavors by rising powers to assert their influence and to shape international institutional structures that cater more effectively to their interests.

Furthermore, these emergent states have utilized their G20 memberships to wield influence within the group. Primarily, they have led efforts advocating for governance reforms within the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The focus of these reforms is to increase the voting share of non-western countries, thereby challenging the traditionally dominant Western influence within the IMF (Griffith-Jones & Ocampo, 2018).

International organizations have been proactive in their engagement with the G20 process, cognizant of the Group's increasing influence and significance (Carin & Smith, 2010). Striving to retain relevance and to advance their interests, these organizations have made concerted efforts to be included in the G20's discourse. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for instance, has lobbied aggressively for the G20 to incorporate anti-corruption initiatives into their agenda (Heimann & Pieth, 2017).

The inception of the G20 occurred amidst a significant global crisis, where the organization played a pivotal role in coordinating policy responses (Hajnal, 2014). This 'crisis management rationale' remains embedded in the ethos of the G20, rendering it a vital mechanism – an international insurance club – for potential crises of similar or even greater magnitude. Whether such crises emerge from the global financial system or other sectors, the G20 is perceived as a crucial element in the global response framework.

In the context of realism, the G20 operates as an arena for power negotiations, where national representatives strive to secure optimal outcomes for their respective countries (Kahler, 2013). This involves navigating complex transactional arrangements, strategically blocking certain initiatives, and making concerted efforts to further their interests. Through this lens, the G20 can be seen as an international clearance board, composed of leading economic powers.

This forum facilitates regular interactions among major global players, where each of the 20 members assumes responsibility and sets a somewhat ambiguous agenda for one year (Cooper & Thakur, 2013). This process engenders structured international discussions, fostering political capital and contacts. The ultimate aim here is to leverage this acquired capital and these contacts for support when necessary.

Hence, the G20 primarily serves national interests wherever mutual ground can be identified (Ravenhill, 2018). This realist, minimalist interpretation of the G20 may partly elucidate why no member country has defected from the group so far. Although the incentives for retaining

membership may have evolved over time, they continue to be compelling.

However, this minimalist view may not suffice to justify the enduring existence of the G20. Beyond the goal of establishing the lowest common denominator of national self-interest, the G20 is envisaged to contribute to the global common good (Bradford & Linn, 2010). This entails facilitating a shared understanding of the global common good and delivering policies that reflect the shared responsibility towards global commons.

The leadership role within the G20 carries inherent complexities, requiring a delicate balancing act that prioritizes not only national interests but also the pressing concerns of other member states (Cooper & Thakur, 2013). In the absence of an imminent economic shock that necessitates immediate collective action, achieving consensus on fundamental matters such as trade protectionism mitigation and the reduction of dangerous climate change becomes increasingly challenging (Callaghan & Hubbard, 2016).

Unlike the G7, which is often portrayed as a 'club of like-minded' nations, the G20 serves as a forum uniting large economies – incorporating both established and rising global powers – to coordinate and deliberate on problem-solving approaches (Hajnal, 2014). These actors may not necessarily share common views regarding potential solutions or even agree on the initial problem assessment (Armijo & Roberts, 2014). This complex and occasionally unproductive environment potentially instigates a reversion to the veneer of like-mindedness for the sake of maintaining perceived cohesion and productivity.

Despite potential resurgences in its relevance, the G7 does not appear to have a straightforward path towards recalibration, particularly given the internal disagreements over fundamental issues (Bradford & Linn, 2010). The persistent dichotomies and the complexities within these global fora underscore the importance of nuanced leadership that is capable of navigating these differences while fostering productive discussions and resolutions.

As the international landscape continues to evolve, the G20 appears to be leaning towards adopting ad hoc initiatives involving a subset of its membership. A seminal indication of this shift was French President Emmanuel Macron's proposal of 'vanguard countries,' a selective inclusion of states willing to engage on specific issues based on an à la carte approach (Clegg, 2022). However, this new arrangement necessitates vigilance to ensure that these ad hoc coalitions bolster the multilateral system rather than undermine it by creating alternative forums (Vestergaard & Wade, 2012).

Contrasting the minimalist approach, the G20 has pursued a policy of increased inclusivity regarding participation. Since its inception in 2008, the scope of topics on the G20's agenda has broadened considerably, as has the number of stakeholders involved in the process (Cooper & Thakur, 2013). However, inclusive environments can prove to be challenging to manage and notoriously slow in reaching consensus, raising questions about output legitimacy, particularly when swift solution development is required (Kahler, 2013).

To circumvent this issue, the G20 has adopted a strategy known as 'differentiated inclusion.' This approach

has led to the widening of the range of internal actors, reflecting the expansion of the G20's agenda beyond core economic matters such as financial stability and economic growth. Today's G20 agenda encompasses issues ranging from climate change and sustainable development to women's empowerment, and from digitalisation to the future of work. This expansion of the agenda has spurred the establishment of new working groups, study groups, and task forces, fostering further broadening and deepening of the agenda. Consequently, ministerial meetings have become a staple feature on the annual G20 calendar.

The G20 encompasses a multitude of dimensions beyond its highly publicised two-day summit of heads of state and government, including the participation of a broader range of governmental agencies from member countries (Cooper & Thakur, 2013). Furthermore, the G20 has co-opted supplementary actors in the international sphere, enabling efficient policymaking on specific matters and potentially providing an added layer of legitimacy (Armijo & Roberts, 2014).

Representing 19 countries and the EU, the G20 initially emphasized the exclusivity of its membership during the early years of the financial crisis. However, in recent times, there has been a growing emphasis on inclusivity and outreach, as this is seen as vital for legitimacy (Callaghan & Hubbard, 2016). Consequently, it has become customary for the annual presidencies to extend invitations to additional countries as guests. Among these regular guest countries are some larger European economies, such as Spain and the Netherlands, who

question the composition of the G20, and others, primarily smaller partners, representing regional organizations.

However, it is notable that Africa, despite being a large and populous region, is largely absent from the G20, with only South Africa as a member. Nigeria, the continent's largest economy, is not represented, and the collective entity, the African Union, is more of a guest than a participant thus far. This dynamic facilitates dedicated discussion rounds between members and guests while retaining an inner circle within the G20 for targeted discussions before engaging with 'the wider world' (Hajnal, 2014).

Finally, driven by concerns over 'output legitimacy', the G20 endeavors to contribute to global discussions through the quality of input, deliberations, and agreements based on evidence (Armijo & Roberts, 2014). Despite the lack of a permanent secretariat or coordination structure, barring a loose troika format, various international organizations are solicited to produce analytical input for the G20 work streams and to aid in the implementation of G20 decisions. However, these contributions often lead to these organizations demanding a place at the top table (Kahler, 2013).

G20 as an international forum of governments and central bank governors from major economies, has been instrumental in shaping the global economic and political dialogue. Its evolution has been marked by an increasingly broad engagement with transnational actors, reflecting the shifting paradigms of foreign policy in a globalized world (Cooper, 2011). This shift acknowledges the necessity of including a wider array of societal stakeholders, ranging

from governmental and non-governmental organizations to private sector entities and think tanks, in policy deliberation and decision-making processes (Kirton, 2013). The widening of its consultation sphere can be interpreted as a strategy to enhance the legitimacy of the G20 through the creation of a multi-tiered engagement platform.

Inherent in the evolution of the G20, as an expansive governance structure, are critiques that question its efficiency. These critiques can be positioned within the broader literature on global governance (Kahler, 2013) and multilateralism (Keohane, 1990). A central concern revolves around the effectiveness of the G20 in navigating the complexities and challenges that arise in its unique role as an inclusive and wide-ranging global governance structure.

The G20's internal dynamics are affected by its positioning amidst discourses concerning multilateral systems and international negotiations (Jørgensen, 2019). As an exclusive club designed to foster trust, cultivate reputations, promote open communication, uphold fairness, and construct an 'esprit de corps', or a collective identity among its members, the G20 naturally encounters hurdles, even within its circle (Pettis, 2013). This complexity is encapsulated in the 'cooperation hexagon' paradigm that strives to address these challenges (Slaughter, 2004).

There are striking parallels between the criticisms levelled against the G20 and those directed towards the European Union's (EU) erstwhile Common Foreign and Security Policy, particularly the concept of the 'capability-expectation gap'. This analogy highlights the inherent

difficulties of managing expectations and delivering capabilities in large, multilateral institutions.

The metamorphosis of the G20 into a hub of global governance does not imply the depletion of its effectiveness. The parameters for evaluating the G20 have evolved, and while it was once appraised based on policy output and implementation of specific commitments, it is now also assessed on its contributions to the maintenance of global governance (Cooper, 2021). This shift in evaluation is an adaptation to an era marked by increasingly contested multilateralism.

The G20, in certain aspects, has proven instrumental in stabilizing international cooperation. This is achieved not merely by functioning as an intergovernmental forum, but also by facilitating engagement with societal actors that endorse international cooperation. By incorporating these stakeholders, the G20 has the potential to stabilize, and possibly even reshape, multilateral cooperation beyond the traditional confines of nation-states.

However, as we confront systemic challenges on an unprecedented scale, including climate change, societal inequalities, and the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution, it becomes clear that merely maintaining the status quo of international cooperation is insufficient. These meta-challenges necessitate a proactive, not reactive, approach. This raises the pivotal question of how the G20, as a forum of leading economies and an instrument of global governance, can effectively facilitate multilateral cooperation to address these profound, transformative challenges.

The efficacy of the G20 hinges on its capacity to form political coalitions, secure support from international organizations, and refine its foundational working group structure. However, there is a divergence of perspectives concerning the necessity of a formalized institutional structure for the G20. Historical analysis suggests that the G20 is most effective when the rotating presidency successfully forms a broad coalition within the G20 and secures the technical support of vital international organizations. This alignment is crucial not only for the adoption of joint policy initiatives, but also for their sustained implementation across subsequent presidencies.

The unique role assigned to rising powers within the G20 structure, often represented through distinct groups such as MIKTA or BRICS, warrants specific consideration, particularly given their unique status-seeking trajectories. The complexities of integrating these rising powers into the global system have sparked significant academic interest (Armijo & Roberts, 2014). Often overlooked, however, are the perceptions and expectations held by the societies of these rising powers.

Analysing the dynamics of legitimization with respect to club governance, particularly contrasting the perspectives of rising and established powers, uncovers intriguing patterns (Brandi, 2023). An essential observation posits no significant differences between old and new powers concerning output legitimacy; both prioritizing indicators such as effectiveness. Yet, when evaluating input legitimacy, participation emerges as a

slightly more critical factor for societal actors from rising powers compared to those from established powers.

Moreover, it has been observed that speakers from rising powers tend to discuss the challenges of less affluent nations more frequently than speakers from established powers. This discrepancy underscores a potential divergence in priorities and perspectives that could influence the future direction of the G20 and its role in global governance (Cooper, 2010).

Within the G20's structure, beyond the delineations of established and rising powers, there exists a subset of nations termed as 'middle powers.' Notably, the MIKTA grouping (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia) within the G20 has been marginally addressed in existing academic discourse (Cooper & Antkiewicz, 2014). It is therefore imperative to explore how these middle powers navigate club governance structures like the G20, by analysing their priorities, conflicting interests, and status-seeking strategies.

An interesting observation within the G20 structure is the focus of all rising powers on South-South Development Cooperation (SSDC) as a means of distinguishing themselves from traditional donor nations (Kloke-Lesch et al.,, 2012). This distinctive focus on SSDC reveals interesting variations in the strategies of these rising powers, and further insight can be gleaned from a detailed investigation of these variations. With the rise of platforms like the G20, the role of middle powers has gained further prominence. In the constellation of the G20, there exists a unique subset of nations – Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea,

Turkey, and Australia – that have come together to form the MIKTA group.

Often, it is expected that middle powers align themselves with great powers like the United States or concentrate their resources on select multilateral initiatives (Ravenhill, 1998). Scholars who favor this behavioral approach are primarily concerned with the pragmatic question of how middle powers actually behave, as opposed to how they ought to behave. This focus has given rise to empirical studies examining the strategies middle powers utilize to exert influence over international outcomes (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993).

Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal (1993) identified a recurring pattern in middle power behavior. They posit that entrepreneurial middle powers can act as catalysts for diplomatic initiatives. Furthermore, these nations may serve as facilitators, setting the agenda and assembling issue-specific coalitions in support of their initiatives. A notable example of this would be efforts made by certain nations in support of trade liberalization during the 1990s. This strategic approach is crucial for middle powers, which lack the inherent sources of power possessed by great powers. Finally, such states may adopt managerial roles, aiding in the construction of institutions, whether they be formal organizations or regimes, or contributing to the development of norms and conventions.

In the field of international relations, a prevalent understanding of middle powers is largely shaped by their exhibited behaviors. That is to say, their inclination to adopt multilateral approaches towards resolving international problems, broker compromises in the face of

international disputes, and uphold the principles of 'good international citizenship' in their diplomatic operations (Jordaan, 2003). Due to their relatively weaker position within the international hierarchy, middle powers tend to resort to the tools of soft power, leveraging their technical expertise and entrepreneurial capacities to influence outcomes (Nye, 2004). It is generally observed that such states are likely to align with the leading positions of major powers, or alternatively, concentrate their resources on a limited array of multilateral endeavors (Cooper, Higgott & Nossal, 1993).

This behavioral perspective shifts the focus from the normative question of how middle powers ought to behave, towards an empirical examination of how they indeed act within the international arena. Scholars like Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal have identified a distinct pattern in middle power behavior, categorizing their role into three primary functions (Cooper, Higgott & Nossal, 1993). Initially, they suggest that middle powers can act as catalysts, sparking diplomatic initiatives through their entrepreneurial aptitude. Secondly, middle powers can assume the role of facilitators, helping set agendas and construct issue-specific coalitions in support of these initiatives. This is analogous to middle powers' efforts in championing causes like trade liberalisation in the past decades. These strategies are central to middle powers since they lack the structural resources of power that are typical of major powers. Finally, such states often transition into managers, contributing to the establishment and development of institutions, be they

formal organizations, regimes, or the cultivation of norms and conventions.

In the context of the G20 framework, this nuanced understanding of middle powers provides a critical lens through which we can understand and evaluate their evolving role and contributions within this international forum.

A considerable part of our current understanding of middle power strategies is derived from empirical studies conducted during the aftermath of the Cold War, preceding the existence of the G20. During this period, the United States held a dominant position, which enabled middle powers to balance their roles as supporters of the United States in key economic and security domains, while also championing niche causes, such as the campaign against land mines. With the emergence of the BRICS nations, however, the international dynamics are transforming, creating the potential for a decreased influence of middle powers in international affairs.

Nevertheless, the advent of the G20 has provided several smaller nations, including middle power countries, with an opportunity to participate in key global governance reform discussions. In the light of the changing power distribution in the international system, a growing body of work has examined the behaviour of middle powers in this altered context (Ravenhill, 2010; Soeya, 2011). While these studies have contributed to our understanding of middle power behaviour within the G20 framework, there remains a notable scarcity of empirical work in this field.

There is a clear need for a more comprehensive investigation into how well our current comprehension of

middle power behaviour aligns with the actions of these countries within the G20 context. As one of the most recent and prominent international forums, the G20 presents a unique opportunity to understand not only the behaviour of middle powers, but also their preferences, strategies, and how they manage the competing global governance claims of both established and emerging powers.

The potential for semi-peripheral nations to take up the mantle of global governance and stewardship is a concept that must be judiciously assessed. Embedded within the consistent surge of middle power activism, there exists a vibrant thread of aspiration. This concept is reminiscent of the notion of exemplary international citizenship, yet it is paradoxically interwoven with elements of opportunism and strategic non-involvement (Cooper, 2015). Regardless, the genuine consciousness exhibited by recognized middle powers in embracing this responsibility cannot be entirely disregarded.

The main focal point of international relations has been the delicate balance between the rights and obligations of major powers. However, this equilibrium is not exclusive to them. Middle powers, akin to their greater counterparts, can be perceived as embracing the duty that emanates from administrative responsibilities (Evans, 1994).

Yet, the reigning modality is a paradigm marked by a subtle, pragmatic approach. This approach usually exhibits a tendency towards quiet diplomacy with few exceptions. Faced with the demands in the early years of the 21st century to democratize the global governance system, middle powers discerned that the fruits of such a reform

process would largely benefit the emerging major powers (Moravcsik, 2008). This development could potentially lead to a diminution of their established status and benefits. To an extent, this realization arguably reinforced a pragmatic approach to safeguard vested interests. It must be acknowledged that highlighting the pragmatic foundations of traditional middle power diplomacy does not serve to camouflage an inherent dissatisfaction with the prevailing strategy.

The 21st-century dynamics between superpowers and middle powers have undergone a fundamental transformation, imposing a sense of irregularity and unease on the traditional diplomacies of middle powers (Holbraad, 1984). There has been a notable shift in middle power activity, with traditional arenas such as the United Nations, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and International Financial Institutions, no longer offering these nations a favored status. This shift is particularly palpable in the International Monetary Fund, where traditional middle powers, notably in Europe, are under pressure to realign their voting power, shares, and leadership of established constituency groups (Dell, 2015).

These changes raise the question of how middle powers can adapt and maintain their influence within international institutions like the G20, where major and emerging powers dominate. A comprehensive exploration of these dynamics and the future trajectory of middle power activism in this changing international context will undoubtedly be a valuable contribution to international relations discourse.

The advent of MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey, and Australia) signified a substantial shift in the dynamics of ad hoc diplomatic design. This group's formation marked the initiation of a dedicated forum for these middle powers, reshaping the existing international diplomatic structure (Armstrong, 2014). Nevertheless, a consolidated consensus on the normative element to highlight remains elusive, leading to the forum's existential justification appearing as a nebulous aggregation of domestic attributes and shared global objectives.

Primarily, these shared domestic traits embody a collective allegiance to democracy. However, it should be noted that the democratic ethos of these nations is faced with contextual challenges in certain instances (He, 2017). Moreover, these countries also share global objectives, emphasizing broader global governance, especially in the G20 context (Stuenkel, 2013).

Despite representing an evolution from the loosely coordinated activities of preceding times, MIKTA currently lacks a comprehensively articulated collective directive. This lack extends to the development of a shared sense of solidarity (Kim & Kim, 2015). Despite these challenges, it's notable that middle powers have thus far refrained from gravitating towards the formation of a caucus. This restraint may reflect the diverse nature of these countries, signaling the respect for their heterogeneity.

The nations comprising MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey, and Australia) represent a crucial component of the modern international diplomatic system. Despite welcoming their ascension to influential positions in global governance, each nation has pursued

distinct, nuanced agendas reflecting their specific domestic and international concerns (Armstrong, 2014).

For instance, the Republic of Korea played a pivotal role in widening the global discourse beyond the financial crisis. It fervently advocated for an agenda premised on the concept of self-sustaining growth, extending the conversation towards encompassing broader international development (Park, 2012). On a similar note, Mexico exhibited ambition in expanding the scope of international attention. It accentuated issues such as 'green growth' and youth employment, demonstrating its commitment to sustainable development and social justice (Hochstetler & Milkoreit, 2014).

The competencies necessary for successful middle power diplomacy, such as building consensus, problem-solving, and engagement in multilateral diplomacy, are currently either being employed in a more constrained manner or facing depreciation in terms of comparative advantage (Ungerer, 2007). The case of MIKTA offers a rich example in this regard. As a collective of middle power nations, MIKTA celebrated its elevation to the G20 leadership level. Yet, several of its member states simultaneously curtailed the G20's ambitions, particularly in relation to proposals for extensive banking regulations (Higgott, 2014). This tendency underscores a predilection for a pragmatic approach that accentuates competitive advantage, revealing a consistent proclivity towards ad hoc over collective behavior throughout the years.

Examining the interactions between states in the realm of international relations, the role of middle powers stands out as a crucial and compelling study area. The concept of

a middle power is multifaceted and extends beyond merely numerical rankings or raw power capabilities; it implies a specific set of behaviours, practices, and commitments to the international system (Chapnick, 1999). This academic discourse presents an evaluation of the MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia) as an epitome of collaborative behaviours exhibited by middle powers, underlining their commitment to the international system and the promotion of equilibrium within it.

The cooperation amongst the MIKTA countries provides a prime example of middle power diplomacy in action, using the power of multilateral collaboration to increase their collective influence on the global stage (Prys, 2010). The formation of MIKTA in 2013 was a strategic alignment by the five countries, seeking to leverage their collective bargaining power to effectively address both regional and global challenges (Higgott & Nossal, 2008).

The approach of these nations towards multilateral organizations reveals an unwavering commitment to the principles of multilateralism, reinforcing the values of international cooperation, mutual respect, and dialogue (Kim, 2014). Such behavior offers an implicit rejection of the notion that a state should only commit to a multilateral organization when it appears beneficial or during times of crisis. It projects an image of steadfast dedication to multilateralism that leads other states to trust their commitments and anticipate their actions within the constraints and spirit of the multilateral organizations (Cox, 2007).

One of the fundamental choices these countries face is whether to use their G20 membership to extend their

global influence or to concentrate on bolstering their regional standing. This binary decision is not unique but seems ubiquitous across all MIKTA nations, each striving to balance these two spheres of influence (Murray, 2017).

Mexico, for instance, has made efforts to expand its network of alliances beyond the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It has been instrumental in creating other regional organizations such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Pacific Alliance, alongside Chile, Colombia, and Peru, thus indicating its preference for diversifying its commitments and institutional affiliations (Vadell, 2016).

Simultaneously, Indonesia and Korea have maintained their traditional institutional affiliations with The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEAN plus 3 respectively (Emmers, 2014). These relationships have been augmented by other initiatives such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative, particularly pertinent for Korea (Kim, 2016).

In the same vein, Turkey has broadened its international outlook, emphasizing its engagement with the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), thus expanding its diplomatic footprint across the regional and global spectrum (Larrabee, 2007).

Embracing a strategy of prudence does not necessarily shield an entity from potential risks. A well-reasoned comparison can be made to the BRICS nations, where a step-by-step methodology has served to alleviate collective action pressures, thereby fostering trust-building among member nations (Stuenkel, 2013). Such a tactic encourages

the nurturing of a particular 'club culture,' underpinned by efforts to minimize disparities and maximize areas of shared interest (Armijo, 2007). By maintaining a muted presence and typically holding meetings on the sidelines of annual United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) openings or the G20, MIKTA has been able to quietly participate in the global debate (Bishop, 2014).

However, it is vital to note that this discreet approach could increasingly become a challenge in the face of changing global contexts. The world is currently experiencing significant shifts due to factors such as the ongoing pandemic and shifting geopolitical dynamics (Shambaugh, 2020). Given this turbulent context, MIKTA's ability to maintain a low-key approach could be increasingly tested. If MIKTA continues to exhibit relative inactivity as a result of its restrained modus operandi, it runs the risk of becoming a target for criticism. This criticism might stem from perceptions that the organization is not actively contributing to resolving global issues, despite its unique position as a collaborative entity composed of middle powers (Cooper, 2017).

The role of middle powers extends beyond a normative framework to encompass a functional dimension, wherein these nations undertake a wide array of routine responsibilities concerning the global system (Cooper, 1997). This notion of 'followership' should not be conflated with passive acquiescence; rather, it denotes a considerable emphasis on proficiency across diverse issue areas (Long & Ungerer, 2016). Key strategies for the execution of these responsibilities are often rooted in technical expertise and entrepreneurial initiatives (Cooper & Mo, 2013).

Nevertheless, akin to the normative component, the ability of middle powers to effectively perform this managerial role appears to have significantly diminished. This decline can be attributed to a variety of factors, including structural impediments that have surfaced, undermining traditional middle powers' capabilities. One could posit that MIKTA countries, as middle powers, face similar challenges.

Structural impediments could include the shifting dynamics of the global order and the complexities introduced by the digital age (He, 2018). As these middle powers grapple with these challenges, the value of MIKTA as an example of cooperative behaviour among middle powers is thrown into sharper relief. Yet, MIKTA's ability to navigate these issues and maintain its functional role will ultimately determine its value within the international system.

Building upon these notions, one might argue that the evolving global landscape necessitates a comprehensive reassessment of the middle power's role. There is a compelling case to suggest that these nations ought to prioritize the development of strategic partnerships and alliances as a means to augment their influence and sustain their relevance within the global system (Long & Ungerer, 2016). This strategy may entail refining their diplomatic acumen, employing strategic negotiation tactics, and leveraging soft power more effectively to safeguard their interests amidst a changing world order (Nye, 2004). As the geopolitical landscape undergoes transformation, the ability of middle powers to adapt their diplomatic strategies

will be critical to their effectiveness in preserving global order and stability (Cooper & Mo, 2013).

Adding to this scholarly discourse, middle powers, represented by MIKTA, often attract criticism for serving predominantly as discussion platforms without the follow-through of substantive action (Bishop, 2014). Further contention is their tendency to prioritize regional issues, which are of specific interest to individual member nations, over global concerns (Jordaan, 2003). This approach risks casting MIKTA merely as a platform of convenience, utilized for directing attention towards isolated issues of interest to individual members, rather than addressing collective concerns.

A potential area of concern is the potential lack of collective consensus within MIKTA on pressing global issues, such as the reform of International Financial Institutions or matters pertaining to human rights (Cooper, 2017). Failure to achieve agreement on these significant matters could suggest an inability of MIKTA to establish a viable club culture underpinned by shared ideational or normative values (Bishop, 2014). Moreover, by operating predominantly as a dialogue process or consultative mechanism over an extended duration, MIKTA risks being perceived as merely a construct of foreign ministries. This perspective could foster limiting perceptions concerning divergent national interests and bureaucratic ownership, which could potentially obstruct wider cooperation (Cooper & Mo, 2013).

An emergent question pertains to whether MIKTA can establish a significant niche for itself, serving as its unique identifier within the international system. One possible

direction is its adoption of a functional approach towards the distribution of global public goods (Cooper, 2017). In contrast to the G7 or BRICS nations, MIKTA does not evoke substantial apprehension about undertaking collective actions that may challenge or impose discipline on the global status quo (Armijo, 2007). However, an exclusive pursuit of this functional approach could risk diminishing rather than bolstering the 'brand' of middle power diplomacy that has been carefully built over preceding eras.

Historically, the first wave of middle power diplomacy sought to manage the system, while the second wave was characterised by emotive engagement and occasional challenges to great powers on specific issues (Cooper, 1997). In contrast, the current MIKTA approach seems to lack the ambition and emotive thrust that underscored these past initiatives, raising questions about its capacity to exert influence and initiate change on the global stage.

The identity of middle powers within the MIKTA framework appears to be less tethered to their historical roles in technically-oriented coalitions, and more linked to their crucial positions within the G20 (Cooper, 2013). It is this G20 membership that appears to serve as the catalyst for collective ideation and potentially operational activities (Cooper & Mo, 2013). An earnest examination of MIKTA's relevance and the potential risks it confronts is likely still in its nascent stages and yet to fully manifest.

The G20's role extends beyond its well-recognized functions in economic governance. This is particularly pertinent in the current era, where the United States no longer wields unchallenged authority over the rest of the world, specifically in relation to China and the BRICS nations

(Armijo, 2007). As a central institution in global affairs, the G20 may well evolve to become the barometer of the global system's capacity to address issues encompassing both deadlock and crisis management (Pauly, 2017).

Thus, the role and influence of MIKTA, within the G20 framework, present valuable insights into the cooperative behaviour of middle powers and the evolving nature of their diplomacy within a shifting geopolitical landscape.

The middle powers, as entities with a substantial interest in the effective functioning of both the system at large and the G20, could increasingly come to be identified by their roles as entrepreneurs and system stabilisers under progressively uncertain and stressful global conditions (Cooper, 2017). The manifestation of this role could be individual or collective, and it is likely to determine the utility of the middle power model in the future.

Consistent with historical precedents, it is of utmost importance to convince the powers beyond the G20 of the universal benefits that a balanced global order provides (Pauly, 2017). Equally critical is the effective management and restraint of potentially detrimental actions by great powers, both established and emergent (Bishop, 2014). The middle powers, represented by MIKTA, thus play a vital role in ensuring a balanced, fair, and functional global system, both through MIKTA and G20 context.

Although the operational flexibility and organizational fluidity of the G20 have been perceived as potential weaknesses, these qualities can also be conceptualized as sources of strength. The evolution of the group has emphasized the network characteristics of the G20, even

as the efficacy of the club culture has been diminished. This broadening of the G20's membership – a phenomenon termed 'stretching out' – underlines a pivotal question about the future direction of the G20 (Alexandroff & Kirton, 2010).

On one hand, there is a prevailing perception of the G20 transitioning towards a minimalist scenario where the forum becomes a platform for bilateral meetings and transactional agreements among leaders. In stark contrast to this vision, there is a counter-image of the G20 solidifying its status as an expanded summit process. The expectation for the G20 to spearhead a broadening and deepening of the agenda is unequivocally present.

Participants from within and beyond the inner circle continue to engage actively, demonstrating no reluctance to participate. Even as the intensity of the G20's initial activities has diminished, recognition of the G20's hub status within the architecture of global governance has proliferated (Hajnal, 2014). Therefore, the G20's future trajectory will be determined by a balance between these conflicting dynamics and the evolving demands of global governance.

Conclusions to Chapter II

As we conclude Chapter II, it becomes evident that middle powers play a crucial role in shaping regional responses to global challenges. These states, while not the most powerful actors on the global stage, wield significant influence and can drive regional cooperation towards

addressing global issues. The geographic location of these middle powers, as well as their cultural, economic, and political contexts, are integral to understanding their distinct approaches to international relations and the strategies they employ to exert influence at the regional level.

The generational differences between middle powers, as outlined in the North vs. South analysis, further underscore the complexities of defining and understanding middle powers. Traditional middle powers in the North, such as Canada and Australia, may differ significantly in their priorities, capabilities, and strategies from emerging middle powers in the South. These variations can be seen in their approach to international law, norms, and institutions, which further contribute to the complexity and dynamism of international relations.

South-South cooperation represents an emerging alternative to the Eurocentric international order, offering a fresh perspective on global governance. This form of cooperation enables middle powers from the Global South to forge partnerships based on shared development goals and common challenges, thus broadening the scope of international cooperation beyond traditional North-South dynamics.

The assumption of the G20 presidency by countries like India and Indonesia provides a distinctive vantage point to understand the evolving dynamics of global governance. These rising powers' experiences present unique challenges and opportunities, offering insight into the contemporary global governance landscape.

India's presidency of the G20 in 2022 came at a critical juncture. While its ascendancy symbolized the shifting power dynamics within the global economic order, the presidency also brought with it considerable challenges. Given India's developmental priorities and its increasing global stature, the country faced the dual task of aligning the G20 agenda with its national objectives and catering to broader international expectations (Ullah & Ferdous, 2022). Additionally, amidst increasing geopolitical tensions and the ongoing global health crisis, India's role as G20 president required deft diplomacy and strategic vision to maintain the G20's relevance and effectiveness.

Indonesia's assumption of the G20 presidency in 2023 presents similar challenges and opportunities. As a middle power, Indonesia has the potential to leverage its G20 leadership to address both global and regional concerns. Among the challenges Indonesia faces include managing disparate national interests within the G20, navigating the global response to climate change, and addressing post-pandemic economic recovery.

In conclusion, the role of middle powers within the G20 and their engagement in global governance, particularly in economic diplomacy, have been subjected to considerable examination. Emerging from the height of the economic crisis in 2008, the majority of middle power diplomacy efforts were focused on economic issues. However, a series of events and crises over the past years has led to a discernible shift from economics to security.

The Trump presidency represented a significant turning point in global politics, with the United States taking an increasingly unilateral approach to global

governance, disrupting traditional alliances and exacerbating U.S.-China tensions Hurrell, 2022). This geopolitical climate necessitated a recalibration of middle powers' diplomatic strategies as they sought to navigate these increasingly volatile dynamics.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the importance of non-economic dimensions of global governance (Smith, 2022). As middle powers grappled with the global health crisis, the focus of their diplomatic efforts expanded to include public health and associated social issues, highlighting the necessity for a more holistic approach to global governance.

The war in Ukraine added another layer of complexity to the changing geopolitical landscape, raising serious security concerns and further shifting the focus of middle power diplomacy from economics to security (Walker, 2023). The conflict has brought attention to the necessity for concerted diplomatic efforts to maintain peace and security in the face of escalating global tensions.

These events underline the evolving nature of middle power diplomacy and the changing global governance landscape. Understanding the theory of middle power engagement is, therefore, only one piece of the puzzle. As we move forward, it is crucial to understand the practice of middle power diplomacy in an increasingly complex and interdependent world, a topic that will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter III

Middle Power Diplomacy in 21st Century: from contested to resilient multilateralism

The chapter focuses on the practice of middle power diplomacy, highlighting the growing divergence between traditional or 'Northern' middle powers and emerging or 'Southern' middle powers. There is a burgeoning interest in examining the role and influence of these powers, particularly in light of shifts in global power dynamics.

Middle power diplomacy can be broadly conceptualized as a range of global and regional initiatives undertaken independently by middle powers, without the immediate support of hegemonic states (Adler-Nissen, 2014). These initiatives have proven instrumental in shaping international politics and have often pioneered novel approaches to global governance and peacebuilding.

The 21st century presents an array of challenges and opportunities for middle powers. Amidst the ascendance of dynamic rising states and the proliferation of influential non-state actors, middle powers have been subjected to

scrutiny. Critics have argued their waning influence, citing the rise of new power clusters like BRICS and MIKTA as evidence of this decline (Schiavon & Dominguez, 2016; Parlar Dal & Kursun, 2016).

Nonetheless, the evolving global power landscape offers middle powers opportunities for creative engagement and cooperation. For instance, the G20's formation opened up avenues for middle powers to navigate and shape global politics more directly. This shift towards informalism offers a space where middle powers can exert their influence beyond traditional power structures (Cooper, 2017).

Emerging powers like the BRICS have utilized these platforms to enhance their global status and reshape the global order, thereby challenging conventional norms of global governance. This transformation from an understated diplomatic forum to a high-profile summit process underpins the growing assertion of middle powers in international politics (Armijo & Roberts, 2014).

The role of middle powers in the global political sphere holds a unique position of bridging the gap between major powers and smaller states. With the capacity to exert regional influence and concurrently navigate global diplomatic affairs, middle powers are poised to maneuver within complex regional-global intersections. The critical question is how these nations balance these dual roles and how their regional and global identities intersect, influence, and inform one another.

In the face of the 21st century's dynamic geopolitics, a renewed focus has been cast upon the diplomatic practices of middle powers. The emerging group of dynamic states and increasingly influential non-state actors present an

interesting paradox. They have simultaneously propelled the perception of declining influence of traditional middle powers and unveiled opportunities for increased coherence and unity through initiatives such as MIKTA (Schiavon & Dominguez, 2016; Parlar Dal & Kursun, 2016).

In a world trending towards multipolarity, where power gravitates around a few dominant poles, middle powers could potentially find their influence marginalized. However, under an alternative assumption of an increasingly diffused power landscape, the role of middle powers could be augmented. This depends on their ability to skillfully traverse an institutional environment showing both concentration and fragmentation (Cooper, 2013).

The ascendancy of informalism in global politics brings to the forefront a wider range of actors. It expands representation beyond the traditional Western elite, previously encapsulated within G7, and allows middle powers a more direct route to influence global politics. The establishment of the G20 marks a turning point, opening up avenues for diplomatic practices previously relegated to the periphery.

Conceptually, groupings like BRICS and MIKTA serve as benchmarks for how inclusive informalism will be, evolving from understated diplomatic forums to high-profile summit processes. The transformation of BRICS, in particular, has not been solely a reaction to perceived systemic inequities. It has also been driven by its members' self-perception as emerging powers that warrant increased recognition within the global system (Armijo & Roberts, 2014).

The value of cultivating a collective middle power identity, despite variations among individual middle power states, is significant. A shared middle power role acts as a connecting thread that binds both traditional and non-traditional middle powers in global governance structures, particularly informal institutions such as MIKTA. This role, located between the G7 and the rising powers of BRICS in the context of the G20, elucidates the potential for middle powers to leverage diplomatic space, balancing opportunities against structural constraints.

However, MIKTA's makeup tests the bounds of the traditional conception of middle powers. Although all MIKTA members are analytically classified as middle powers, the framing's interpretation varies significantly and often contradictorily among member states. On one hand, Mexico and Turkey are perceived as middle powers based on a bridging role linked to their physical or geographical location (Barratta, 2008). On the other, countries such as Turkey, South Korea, Indonesia, and Mexico are typically categorized as non-traditional middle powers, distinct from the traditional middle power cohort situated in the global North (Destradi, 2010).

This middle power identity is not a rigid label but a flexible construct that accommodates additional classifications. These countries often possess regional roles characterized by distinctive normative attributes. Ambivalence towards fully embracing the middle power identity appears common amongst non-traditional middle powers, suggesting an ongoing evolution and adaptation of the concept within contemporary geopolitics (Chapnick, 1999; Destradi, 2010).

Middle powers' inclusion in the G20 signifies a marked departure from previous norms, as these countries have traditionally been excluded from elite global summitry. Their ability to leverage their elevated status and establish independent forums, such as MIKTA, represents a progression in terms of the legitimacy and potentially the efficiency of global governance (Cooper & Mo, 2013). In contrast to the rising global informalism, an alternative approach emphasizes the renewed role of regional organizations.

For Mexico, this path manifests in a focus on North America and the Americas, primarily through the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Pacific Alliance, in conjunction with Chile, Colombia, and Peru (Bulmer-Thomas, 2014). For Indonesia and South Korea, core regional ties remain with ASEAN and ASEAN+3, complemented by additional initiatives, including the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative for South Korea (Hemmings, 2016). Australia has showcased intermittent leadership in the regional context, notably with the ambitious Asia Pacific Community initiative (White, 2008).

Turkey embarked on a proactive strategy to extend regional ties during the first decade of the 2000s. Despite escalating tensions and uncertainties with the European Union in recent years, the EU remains Turkey's primary institutional link to its European neighborhood. Concurrently, albeit with limited success, Turkey has sought to intensify regional cooperation efforts through the South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) (Oğuzlu, 2008).

Beyond their immediate region, middle powers have strived to cultivate sectoral cooperation, especially with regional international organizations, by adopting the status of a permanent observer or signing cooperation and mutual assistance agreements.

However, these middle power states appear constrained in their capacity to expand their influence beyond their immediate neighborhoods without incurring significant risks. Their ambition to attain a global footprint is hindered by both symbolic and material barriers. The principal concerns for each country typically relate to localized issues. These can include migration for Mexico, security and domestic democracy-related problems for Turkey, fostering ASEAN community values in the case of Indonesia, navigating the relationship between China and the United States for Australia, and addressing peninsular issues alongside the North Korean nuclear threat in the case of South Korea (Heine & Thakur, 2011).

In most non-traditional middle power cases, domestic constituencies appear to prefer the regional approach. This clear preference illuminates the contested nature of middle powers, caught at the intersection of regional and global interests and obligations.

From both theoretical and pragmatic perspectives, middle power multilateralism, however, is understood implicitly as a "collective international role". This conception stems from the notion that middle powers can only exert substantial influence in international affairs when acting collectively with other entities, and their collective actions predominantly occur within multilateral forums. Therefore, this fundamental characteristic of

middle powers necessitates a deeper exploration of middle power multilateralism across diverse contexts.

Despite the significance of middle power multilateralism, only a handful of studies delve into its complexities. One seminal work, co-authored by Andrew F. Cooper, identified three distinct waves of middle power diplomacy (Cooper & Parlar Dal, 2016). The first wave emerged in the immediate aftermath of World War II, during which middle power multilateralism was formed through the United Nations and its related bodies, with traditional middle powers such as Canada and Australia taking the lead. The second wave witnessed the ad hoc activism of a number of emerging middle powers within specific issue areas. More recently, contemporary middle power multilateralism has begun to gain traction within informal organizations such as the G20 and through initiatives such as BRICS and MIKTA.

However, the current international milieu necessitates a more systematic analysis, as multilateralism now follows a dual and somewhat contradictory path. On the one hand, it has become increasingly informal. As Richard N. Haass suggests, "in this era of international relations, we may need to start thinking less about formal international treaties and agreements and much more about what you might describe as coordinated national policies" (Haass, 2009).

Secondly, the prevalence of rising populist and nationalist tendencies in recent years has contributed to a progressive weakening of US-led multilateralism. Despite the multipolar management of the global political economy via intricate power-sharing arrangements, the

United States' retreat from various multilateral fronts, the surge of pronounced protectionist/isolationist tendencies under President Trump's administration, along with a rise in nationalism and bilateralism in several other Western capitals, appear to have undermined the efficiency of multilateralism.

In this era of uncertainty, where multilateralism adopts new forms and 'multi-bi' practices become commonplace, middle powers appear to face challenges. These include engaging with the United States, previously the champion of global governance, and bridging the North-South divide as intermediaries.

In the current international climate, middle powers seem to have a limited capacity to enact collective actions with some of their allies, particularly the United States. In the context of an evolving international political landscape that potentially curtails their "collective international role" in multilateral forums, middle powers continue to possess several strategic advantages that could afford them greater diplomatic latitude. Despite some setbacks to their anticipated roles as middle powers, their distinctive form of multilateralism can be evaluated based on four fundamental characteristics. These traits enable such states to form coalitions, encourage collaboration, and promote the collective good in an international system absent a dominating hegemon:

1. A pronounced desire to contribute to global governance: Middle powers exhibit a strong commitment towards contributing to the functioning and enhancement of global governance structures (Ravenhill, 1998). They are often willing

to invest in international institutions, recognising the value they hold in addressing global challenges and ensuring world order.

2. Increased efforts to seek reforms and upgrade status in the global governance system: Middle powers frequently advocate for a more equitable distribution of power within the global governance framework (Jordaan, 2003). These states strive to increase their international stature by influencing reforms and enhancing their status within the global system.

3. Normative and ideational commitments to solving global problems: Middle powers typically espouse strong normative and ideational commitments towards resolving international issues (Cooper, 2011). They often endeavour to bridge gaps between the Global North and South, attempting to promote consensus and facilitate problem-solving on global issues.

4. Strong alignment with (or bridging between) the North and the South: Middle powers often occupy a unique position in international politics, effectively serving as bridges between developed and developing nations (Browning, 2017). This allows them to create dialogues, form alliances, and mediate between diverse interests and perspectives.

In terms of contributing to global governance, it can be posited that with the perceived waning influence of the United States and other major powers on a variety of global issues, middle powers have been able to expand their negotiating capabilities and enhance their individual

contributions to global governance. A salient example of the influence of middle powers in global governance is their longstanding and substantial impact on the structuring of the international trade regime.

Further, as a second key strength, contemporary middle powers have been increasingly vocal in demanding substantial reforms and enhanced status within existing multilateral institutions. They have also shown readiness to actively participate in new multilateral forums using informal and flexible decision-making mechanisms when their demands remain unaddressed (Cooper & Mo, 2013). This suggests that some middle powers, particularly the non-traditional ones, pursue an assertive foreign policy behaviour as part of their strategy to legitimise their standing in response to both international and domestic audiences.

As a third asset, middle powers, both traditional and emerging, hold strong normative and ideational commitments towards finding solutions to problems related to global governance. However, it must be noted that these commitments can sometimes be more rhetoric-based than action-oriented (Neack, 2013).

Lastly, middle powers, particularly non-traditional ones, possess the capacity and capability to act as bridge builders between the developed and developing worlds. This role enables them to carefully balance relations with these two disparate fronts, thereby ensuring that they maintain an influential position in global diplomacy.

Central to the discourse on middle power diplomacy is the query regarding the anticipated variations in the multilateralism of middle powers and the possible

incongruence between their rhetoric on multilateralism and their practices. Middle powers, in the course of establishing their unique middle power diplomacy via distinctive global governance strategies, have faced a myriad of challenges. These difficulties, to a certain extent, have hindered them from executing their intermediary and managerial roles in global affairs effectively.

Among these challenges, four are of paramount importance: (1) the emergence of a disparity between expectations and practice, (2) overreaching their capacities in promoting policies, (3) the existence of an imbalance between regional and global orientations, and (4) limited influence when confronted with the politics of great powers.

In the first instance, the expectations-practice gap refers to the divergence between the rhetoric of middle powers about their role in global governance and their actual implementation of these roles (Ungerer, 2007). This gap often surfaces due to constraints at domestic, regional, or international levels that limit the ability of middle powers to fully actualize their projected foreign policy objectives.

Secondly, middle powers sometimes overreach, or "punch over their weight," when pushing for specific policies. This overreaching can result in diplomatic over-extension and strain their resources, thereby undermining their overall effectiveness (Soeya, 1998).

Thirdly, the existence of an imbalance between regional and global orientations refers to the tendency of middle powers to prioritize regional issues over global ones, which might limit their ability to exert influence at a global level (Browning, 2017).

Lastly, the relatively weak leverage of middle powers in the face of great power politics often results in their marginalization in global decision-making processes, thereby limiting their ability to shape global norms and rules (Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014).

The first challenge in the field of middle power diplomacy pertains to these powers' struggle to strike a fine balance between their global roles, as envisaged in the wider international community, and their actual performance. Conventionally, the term "middle power" carries a positive connotation, which inevitably elevates the anticipations about the potential roles these states may undertake in global governance (Cooper, 1997). Thus, the challenge arises when there is a discrepancy between these expectations and their actual capacity or willingness to fulfil these roles.

The second challenge manifests when middle powers endeavour to assert influence beyond their capacity – a phenomenon often described as "punching above their weight" – particularly in collective engagement with global issues alongside major powers. Owing to their constrained status in prominent international organizations such as the United Nations, middle powers may find themselves incapable of fulfilling the promises they have made to their domestic and international audiences (Cooper & Mo, 2013).

Furthermore, certain circumstances, particularly the emergence of significant crises or conflicts within their respective regions, may shift the focus of middle powers more towards regional affairs rather than global ones. This shift can potentially lead to their becoming passive players

on the global stage, thereby undermining their capacity to influence international affairs (Ravenhill, 1998).

As essential regional actors in their respective regions, middle powers often play an indispensable role in regional conflict management. Given their immediate geographic proximity, they are typically most affected by ongoing regional crises (Ungerer, 2007). However, if middle powers are to fulfill their global and collective roles effectively, they must strike a balance between their regional and global responsibilities.

In concluding, a noteworthy challenge faced by middle powers – both traditional and emerging – is the expectation that they will adopt intermediary policies that, in principle, do not jeopardize the interests and priorities of either the great/major powers or small powers. In reality, despite the apparent increase in their material, behavioral, and ideational powers in recent years, middle powers generally have limited leverage when dealing with great powers (Jordaan, 2003).

Their inherent weakness stems from their relative lack of material, ideational, and behavioral power. In terms of behavioral power, middle powers have developed sophisticated tools that render them unique and indispensable in resolving some global problems (Cooper, 1997). However, their role and influence remain contingent upon their ability to navigate the larger geopolitical dynamics shaped by the great powers.

The role of influential "club" groupings such as the G20 is under increasing scrutiny from a wide array of social forces who expect them to confront systemic challenges ranging from environmental to economic

(Cooper & Antkiewicz, 2008). Critically, these crises encompass threats posed by potentially catastrophic global climate change and the reassessment of the advantages of international trade flows.

Critics argue that a key failing of the G20 is its seeming incapacity or lack of will to address these systemic challenges robustly (Hajnal, 2016). This sentiment is compounded by a backlash against a prevailing ethos that advocates for cooperative internationalism over the sovereignty of individual nation-states, thus challenging the precepts of rules-based multilateralism.

In some significant G20 nations, public opinion and governments exhibit growing discomfort with economic globalization and international solidarity (Hurrell & Sengupta, 2012). This sentiment is often driven by widening socio-economic inequalities within countries and the ensuing populist pressures. As a result, these political dynamics add a layer of complexity to the already challenging task of effective middle power diplomacy.

The rise of nationalistic sentiments, embodied in slogans such as 'my country first,' within key G20 states has led critics to contest the capacity of this international group to champion the broader, global common good (Lucey & Rehrl, 2017). The legitimacy of the G20 is under siege not just from external entities, non-member states affected by the systemic implications of G20 policy decisions, but also from within its own ranks (Hajnal, 2016).

The ramifications of these criticisms extend beyond the mere political sphere, stirring societal backlash that threatens the very raison d'etre of the G20. This societal discontent might also compromise governments' motivation

to endorse cooperative ventures in the future (Cooper, 2013). Hence, such an environment further compounds the complexities faced by middle powers, challenging their ability to exercise influence within multilateral forums.

Middle-power diplomacy has seen significant evolution in its collaborative activity, particularly in the post-Cold War era. This period has allowed middle powers an expanded scope of maneuverability, enabling them to broaden their range of activities (Cooper, 1997). Rather than deriving from structural forms of power, the leadership and initiative-taking of middle powers stem from their innovative use of diplomatic talents, imbuing their diplomacy with the capacity to cultivate consensus and cooperation on an issue-specific basis (Chapnick, 1999). This process is invariably differentiated and carries a significant temporal aspect.

Reevaluating the concept of middle-power behavior necessitates addressing several key questions, the first of which concerns the composition of this category of states. The initial wave of new middle powers comprised countries associated with the non-aligned movement, such as India, Brazil, Yugoslavia, and Indonesia (Neack, 2003). India, in particular, was adept at merging traditional middle-power diplomacy features with a critical perspective towards the international system's structure.

The international landscape has been shaped by a series of complex and significant challenges in recent years. The escalating confrontation between the United States and China has been a key feature, with both economic and strategic repercussions, causing concerns for middle powers who often have to navigate the rivalry between

these superpowers (Goh, 2014). Additionally, the foreign policy approach of the Trump administration in the United States, characterized by a form of unilateralism and a marked skepticism towards multilateralism, has tested the diplomatic strategies of middle powers (Patrick, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the situation, demonstrating the interdependence and vulnerability of the global community, and revealing limitations of existing global governance structures (Hurrell, 2020). Finally, the war in Ukraine, with its potential for escalation, provides yet another significant geopolitical challenge for middle powers, necessitating careful and strategic diplomatic action.

However, within these challenges, there are also opportunities for middle power diplomacy. The tension between the US and China, for instance, can allow middle powers to assert themselves as independent, principled actors, navigating a path between the two major powers and possibly mediating their conflict. The Trump administration's foreign policy stance can stimulate middle powers to lead the preservation and reform of multilateral institutions, thereby solidifying their place in the international order. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of international cooperation and could drive middle powers to spearhead global efforts in managing public health crises. Finally, any conflicts offer a platform for middle powers to demonstrate their ability to mediate and manage crises, contributing to peace-building and stability efforts.

Multilateralism: hallmark of middle-power diplomacy

The potential significance of middle power diplomacy in the international arena may, at first, seem counterintuitive or even perplexing. On the surface, middle powers are innately restrained in their global influence, as their capacity to guide international affairs is distinctly less robust compared to their great power counterparts. However, a reconsideration of the role of middle powers is both timely and crucial due to two interconnected developments of the present era.

Firstly, a myriad of escalating global challenges have made their mark on the fabric of the twenty-first century. The cataclysmic COVID-19 pandemic stands as the most recent manifestation of these global predicaments, coupled with the intensifying implications of climate change and the enduring ramifications of the global financial crisis and the war on terror. The common thread linking these concerns is the prevailing inability to adapt to and navigate the complex intricacies and interdependencies of the twenty-first century. As articulated by Park (2020, p. 8), "Globalization may have brought human lives closer together, but we do not yet seem to know how to live so close to one another."

Thus, the role of middle powers within multilateral diplomacy becomes crucial. Their ability to build coalitions, mediate between larger powers, and promote norms and values on the global stage can significantly influence the direction of international affairs. It is the multilateral aspect of their diplomatic efforts that allows these states to punch

above their weight, yielding a more profound impact on the global stage than their relative power might suggest.

Moreover, the multilateral approach facilitates the building of bridges between diverse entities, thus enabling a more robust, coordinated response to global challenges. It brings to light the value of cooperation, consensus-building, and mutual respect, virtues that are indispensable in our intricately interconnected world.

The resurgence of great power politics further compounds these global challenges. The process of global integration, rather paradoxically, has led to a resurgence of geopolitical divisions. This is contrary to post-Cold War visions of an 'end of history' and the formation of a universal liberal order as posited by Fukuyama (1989). The aspiration of converting the USSR via shock therapy or China through market reforms into liberal democracies has proven overly ambitious. Economic liberalism has not inevitably led to political liberalism, despite their close association in Western thought. Instead, the process of economic integration appears to coincide with widening political divisions, with geopolitical fault-lines reminiscent of the old First and Second World rivalries re-emerging in regions such as Ukraine, Syria, and the South China Sea.

The intersection of global challenges and the revival of great power politics precipitates collective action dilemmas within the context of post-Cold War globalization. The scope of existential threats has broadened beyond nuclear warfare to encompass issues such as climate change, global health, finance, trade, migration, and inequality. These systemic threats necessitate enhanced cooperation

and collective action to ensure the continuation of co-existence in the 21st century (Fennell, 2022).

As countries recalibrate their geopolitical risks and trajectories in the face of escalating uncertainties, it becomes crucial to explore alternative strategies, frameworks, and contingency plans to galvanize global action. This exploration underscores the importance of middle powers in multilateral diplomacy. Their ability to build coalitions, mediate between larger powers, and promote global norms and values demonstrates the essential role of the multilateral dimension of middle power diplomacy (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993).

International relations as a field of study continues to bear a strong imprint of Eurocentric worldviews and US-centric perspectives, as highlighted by Goh (2019). Against this backdrop, Park's proposition of 'resilient multilateralism' offers a novel strategic approach. This strategy emphasizes context specificity, complementarity, consensus building, and non-confrontation, thereby embracing global complexity and expanding the ambit of multilateral options.

Correspondingly, contemporary scholarship has started to integrate geoeconomic considerations with more explicit geopolitical concerns, elucidating the consequential tensions experienced by middle powers in the current diplomatic landscape. These powers are increasingly finding themselves navigating a diplomatic bind in the face of escalating great power tensions.

Within this evolving policy milieu, a consistent argument has emerged regarding the necessity for middle powers to provide a stabilizing influence amidst volatility

and to sustain international cooperation and security. In the face of global challenges such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, this shift towards the involvement of middle powers reflects a growing acknowledgment of the declining unipolarity and the imperative to engage with an increasingly multipolar world order.

This trend underscores the vital importance of middle powers in multilateral diplomacy. Their capacity to build coalitions, mediate between larger powers, and promote global norms and values substantiates the crucial role they play in shaping international relations (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993).

In light of the various policy regimes reviewed, there is potential to amalgamate insights to formulate a novel, hybrid strategy termed "resilient multilateralism" (Park., 2020). This concept emphasizes the systemic relationships underpinning global action and mirrors contemporary interdisciplinary endeavors to grapple with the complexity and interconnectivity characteristic of modern life.

Spurred by discussions around environmental sustainability, resilience, originally a concept used in fields ranging from psychology to ecology and disaster management, is increasingly applied within the purview of international relations (Bourbeau, 2018). Resilience has also gained traction amongst policymakers, notably in Europe, as a framing device for policy development (Paul & Roos, 2019; Tocci, 2020). In this context, resilience encompasses a multitude of policy priorities from economic security and statecraft to climate change and global governance.

When applied to the conduct of middle powers, resilient multilateralism necessitates a perceptual shift. Rather than concentrating on individual actors and the constraints imposed by great powers, the attention is redirected towards the arenas and modes of interaction that shape international relations. In acknowledging the systemic contexts and constraints of post-Cold War globalization, resilient multilateralism leverages academic and policy antecedents to distil four principles derived from previous case studies.

The first principle prioritizes the significance of context specificity as the foundation for policy deliberations. Recognizing that policy design constraints are dynamic across time and place, context-specificity advocates for adaptive policy initiatives, echoing the EU's approach to policy experimentation. This contrasts sharply with static, universal policy regimes such as the Washington Consensus, which tend to be the prerogative of great powers. However, context specificity necessitates continuous monitoring and recalibration.

The principle of context specificity assumes primary importance as the underpinning for policy considerations. Acknowledging the variability of policy design constraints across different places and times, context-specificity privileges adaptable policy initiatives, as exemplified by the EU's policy experimentation. This principle contrasts with rigid, universal policy paradigms like the Washington Consensus, which typically fall under the purview of great powers. Nonetheless, context specificity mandates regular experimentation and adjustments. Consequently, the rather 'ad hoc' approach of South-South Cooperation

(SSC), borrowing Keohane's (1990) terminology, presents viable avenues for testing and preliminary investment in potential coalitions or partnerships (Keohane, 1990).

The second principle involves embracing complementarity for the execution of context-specific policies. This necessitates diversification across multilateral methodologies and partners, both middle and great powers. Depending on the resources of middle powers and their geopolitical proximity to spheres of great power influence, this balance may fluctuate. However, such a diversified strategy confers flexibility and ambiguity, allowing for adaptation in accordance with geopolitical shifts. As Kissinger (2012) articulated, "Ambiguity is sometimes the lifeblood of diplomacy." This diversification could engender diplomatic ambiguity to preserve room for collective action (Kissinger, 2012).

The third principle underscores the importance of consensus building. This strategy follows logically from the pursuit of a more dynamic policy arena. While interaction with great powers in bilateral settings may limit the ability to dictate engagement terms, consensus building opens up the possibility of shaping the very platform upon which all powers engage. In this context, middle powers have a comparative advantage in shaping global norms due to their sheer numbers.

The fourth principle promotes a non-confrontational stance towards great power relations. In connection with consensus building that targets the global playing field, past experience from the New International Economic Order (NIEO) cautions against directly challenging great powers. Despite the formation of coalitions, inherent coordination

challenges persist. Once again, the utility of SSC as a mode within resilient multilateralism is underscored; its capacity for network building yields benefits for consensus building and non-confrontation.

Collectively, these four principles of resilient multilateralism aim to maximize policy space for collective action under contemporary circumstances. This embraces complexity and strives for a more dynamic global arena, which leverages the strengths of middle powers such as agility and numerical advantage. This approach requires a departure from global system building and places emphasis on pragmatism, flexibility, and context specificity.

Resilient multilateralism, like any policy strategy, is not exempt from certain weaknesses. Firstly, it is worth noting that resilient multilateralism pertinently applies to states transitioning away from a unipolar order. The associated trade-offs and risks can differ substantially between a firmly established unipolar order and transitioning, albeit unstable, alternatives. For instance, in the context of a functional unipolar order, the benefits of allying with a great power may be elevated. Conversely, abstention from allying may bear economic and security costs outside of the unipolar umbrella.

Under these circumstances, a decision to opt for a "join great powers" scenario might present a suboptimal yet stable equilibrium, rendering resilient multilateralism unnecessary. Furthermore, the viability of resilient multilateralism may be undermined in the face of divide-and-conquer strategies targeting middle powers. While increased multipolarity might mitigate such risks, resilient

multilateralism still requires the challenging feat of collective action.

Secondly, resilient multilateralism's efficacy hinges on the generation of collective strength through concerted action. As the prisoner's dilemma illustrates, diplomatic ambiguity becomes less sustainable if all countries choose to align with a great power. This requires at least a degree of collective action and ambiguous players for resilient multilateralism to gain initial traction – a form of "activation energy," if you will. However, if international relations are mandated unilaterally or bifurcated into separate spheres (e.g., the iron curtain), resilient multilateralism can be curtailed, particularly if great powers obstruct the emergence of a critical mass of ambiguous middle powers.

Thirdly, the execution of resilient multilateralism may incur prohibitive costs for some middle powers. Its multi-faceted strategy imposes considerable operational burdens. In this regard, the United Nations (UN) can be highlighted for its continued importance as an inclusive forum, especially in the context of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and selected specialized agencies. However, the role of the UN, as an intergovernmental organization, is to support – not replace – state functions. Therefore, in the absence of sufficient economic resources and political will, the implementation of resilient multilateralism may prove challenging.

There are additional aspects that could further enrich the understanding and application of resilient multilateralism, one of which involves considering the internal diversity of middle powers. This does not suggest reverting to the binary categorizations of middle/small

power or developed/developing states. Instead, the subdivision of middle powers into semi-periphery and periphery may offer a more fitting representation of the systemic approach embedded in resilient multilateralism. Figure 5, while preliminary, presents such a possibility, resonating with the South-South Cooperation's (SSC) initiative of de-emphasizing great powers.

A second aspect worth contemplating is the potential of SSC to stimulate middle power-led multilateralisms. Considering the significant preconditions and costs associated with resilient multilateralism, the lower-profile SSC could provide a valuable adjunct. This could be particularly true if they form part of a less costly, lower-energy segment of a middle power strategy portfolio. However, this mechanism calls for a careful reevaluation of the underlying assumptions of SSC in light of uneven power dynamics within and beyond middle powers.

In conclusion, resilient multilateralism should be perceived as a tentative and specific response to current global challenges. Its pathway towards global action necessitates active coordination, including the reconciliation of domestic and foreign policies of states, akin to the concept of governance ambidexterity (Kim & Lim, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2020). The model acknowledges the potential inevitability of great power politics (e.g., Che, 2021) but simultaneously emphasizes the urgency of exploring avenues for middle power global action. Irrespective of the constraints and unpredictability, international arenas are neither static nor devoid of opportunities for change.

In concluding this chapter, the theory of resilient multilateralism proves instrumental in enhancing our

comprehension of the practical facets of middle power diplomacy and activism. Nevertheless, this exploration diverges from Park's proposed division of middle powers into semi-periphery and periphery states. We find it more beneficial to partition middle powers into two distinctive groups: those 'emphasizing great power,' and those 'without an emphasis on great power.'

The first category comprises classic middle powers – predominantly Western democracies – which continue to accentuate the role of the United States in their multilateral diplomacy. This group can also be identified as 'regime supporters' given their affinity for the current power dynamics.

In contrast, the second category encompasses emerging middle powers that do not place an emphasis on any particular great power. This group includes states from the Global South and democratic nations seeking to reform the prevailing system. These powers can be labeled as 'challengers,' not in an aggressive sense, but in their intent to effect change.

Each group manifests distinct diplomatic policies in response to recent crises, further underscoring their divergences. This particular dynamic is crucial as it illustrates how these two different types of middle powers navigate and negotiate their spaces in the international arena. These contrasting strategies reflect the evolving nature of multilateralism and the roles that middle powers can play within it, adding complexity and nuance to our understanding of global politics.

In the ensuing chapter, we will delve deeper into the specific policies adopted by these two groups in response to

recent crises, aiming to further elucidate the intricacies of their respective diplomatic strategies and their implications for the current and future state of global governance. This deepened insight will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the functional adaptability of middle powers and the potential for reshaping the contemporary international system.

Middle Power Democracies: learning to lead without the US

Middle powers democracies encompass a diverse array of nations, but traditional allies of the United States, such as Canada, the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK), Japan, South Korea, and Australia, uniformly espouse a fundamental commitment to a rules-based order and multilateralism as the foundational principles governing international affairs (Hurrell, 2018; Baumann, Rittberger, & Wagner, 2001). They share a preference for this established structure as it promotes an environment conducive to stable international relations, functional global commerce, and safeguards smaller nations from coercion by more powerful states.

In more recent years, however, with the erosion of the international order and escalating rivalry between the United States and China during the Trump administration, the focus of middle power diplomacy was redefined (Hurrell, 2018). The diplomatic efforts of middle powers

were then redirected towards consolidating the rules-based order and promoting multilateralism, independently of both the United States and China. In the face of these geopolitical tensions, the strategic positioning of middle powers, leveraging their diplomatic potential to uphold international norms, becomes even more critical (Destradi, 2017).

The robust international rules, norms, and institutions under this framework act as a bulwark against the unpredictable tides of international politics and help maintain stability and practicability in international affairs (Ruggie, 1992). These mechanisms ensure the free flow and openness of global commerce, which is vital for economic prosperity, and act as protective layers for smaller states, deterring them from being subjugated by larger, more potent nations (Ikenberry, 2011).

This reality elucidates the apprehension that many small and mid-sized powers in Europe and Asia harbour regarding any shift from a rules-based order towards a more power-oriented, zero-sum structure of international relations. This potential shift would increase the probability of authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China establishing spheres of influence or blatantly violating international law with relative impunity (Destradi, 2017; Walt, 2018). Such a shift would not only jeopardize the stability of international relations but could also threaten the sovereignty of smaller nations, making the sustenance of a rules-based order an existential imperative for these countries.

The United States' traditional allies experienced a sense of unease with the advent of the "America First"

foreign policy under President Donald Trump's administration, which prioritized national sovereignty over multilateral cooperation and preferred transactional relationships over robust alliances (Patrick, 2020). This departure from the traditional U.S. foreign policy led these allies to explore alternative strategies to preserve their interests and uphold international norms. These strategies were centered around enhancing their autonomy, diversifying their partnerships, and investing more resources in strengthening ties among themselves (Carafano, 2021).

This dual approach served a twofold purpose. It conveyed a clear message to Washington about their discontent with the new American foreign policy, and it was also a concerted attempt to fortify multilateralism in a period marked by skepticism and, at times, open hostility from the United States towards this concept (Patrick, 2020). Concurrently, China was actively attempting to destabilize multilateralism in various ways, further increasing the imperative for these middle power initiatives (Economy, 2018).

The contemporary middle power diplomacy efforts can be contextualized around four central themes: a) the preservation of multilateralism, b) diversification of security partnerships, c) navigating the US-China tensions, and d) response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Cooper, 2020).

In the face of President Trump's recurrent criticism of multilateralism, middle powers felt compelled to launch initiatives aimed at reinforcing the infrastructure that enables global cooperation and coordination on critical issues such as trade, climate change, economics, and

nonproliferation (Bouchard & Peterson, 2014). A notable example is the reaction following the United States' withdrawal from the Paris climate accords. In response, several middle powers, seeking to fill the gap left by U.S. disengagement, doubled down on their own climate commitments and bolstered cooperation among themselves (Hale, 2017).

The 'America First' policy of the Trump administration caused traditional allies of the United States to reassess their diplomatic strategies, thus contributing to an active period of middle power diplomacy. France, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), and the European Union (EU) worked to uphold the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear agreement with Iran, even after Trump's unilateral withdrawal and his recurrent attempts to subvert it. This middle power initiative sought to preserve the integrity of an agreement fundamental to nuclear nonproliferation and regional stability.

Concurrently, in response to the United States' withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Japan took the lead to rescue the agreement. Japan swiftly spearheaded an initiative that resulted in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) among the remaining ten TPP countries (Urata, 2018). This act underscored the dedication of middle powers to upholding multilateral trade agreements in the face of the 'America First' policy.

The Trump administration's economic nationalism served as a catalyst for middle powers to defend the multilateral trading system. Amid significant pressure from both China and the United States on the World Trade

Organization (WTO), Canada led an initiative known as the Ottawa Group. This group, which included Australia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and the EU (excluding the United States), proposed pragmatic reform ideas to bolster the WTO. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the group has expanded its reform work in areas of public health, transparency, and digital governance (Song & Agarwal, 2023).

In addition, in response to US efforts to obstruct the appointments of judges to the WTO appellate court, a group of countries, including EU members, Japan, and Australia, sought to bypass the United States. They established an interim dispute settlement mechanism, which remarkably even received endorsement from China (Mavroidis, 2022). This maneuver was another example of middle powers adapting their diplomatic strategies in an effort to uphold the rule-based international order.

Increasing trade ties among individual middle powers are becoming more pronounced outside of the conventional platform provided by the World Trade Organization (WTO). A particularly noteworthy example is the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, which established the world's most extensive free trade zone, accounting for nearly one-third of the global GDP (Kawasaki, 2019). Two critical factors that expedited these negotiations were the unilateral tariffs imposed by Trump's administration on both the EU and Japan, and the US withdrawal from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations (Akman, 2020).

The EU has been particularly proactive in its efforts to establish new bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements with other partners, as it has concluded trade deals with Canada, Mexico, the Mercosur trade bloc in Latin America, Singapore, and Vietnam (De Bièvre & Poletti, 2020). These deals potentially pave the way for a more extensive EU-ASEAN mega trade deal in the future. Negotiations with Australia and New Zealand have also been initiated (Jallat, 2020).

Moreover, middle power diplomacy has been used to consolidate common approaches to emerging issues related to technology. For example, France and Canada initiated the Global Partnership for Artificial Intelligence (AI) during the G7 meeting in Biarritz in 2019. This initiative aimed to foster responsible AI use based on respect for human rights (Bryson & Winfield, 2020). Even though the United States was initially the only G7 member not participating, it announced its support in May 2020, and the partnership was formally launched on June 15, 2020, including Australia, Canada, Mexico, and Singapore.

In the 2019 G20 meeting held in Osaka, Japan pioneered the Free Trade and Data Free Flow with Trust initiative. This initiative aimed to foster global governance on cross-border data flows, an issue Japan has discussed with the EU, among others (Meltzer, 2019). Moreover, France has championed the "Paris call" for worldwide cooperation on cybersecurity, a call supported by approximately 78 countries (excluding the United States and China) and roughly 650 companies. These initiatives illustrate middle powers' proactive engagement in shaping international norms and rules, particularly within the digital realm.

Furthermore, middle powers have undertaken new diplomatic ventures to bolster existing multilateral agreements and institutions. An exemplary initiative is the Alliance for Multilateralism. This initiative was jointly inaugurated by France and Germany during the 2019 UN General Assembly. The alliance calls for an effective rules-based multilateral order that includes humanitarian concerns, cybersecurity, climate change, and other transnational issues. The alliance's most significant accomplishment to date is its contribution to establishing an international legal convention regulating the use of lethal autonomous weapons.

The alliance also advocates for the reinforcement of international humanitarian law, the battle against impunity for human rights violators, and the promotion of global public health cooperation, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly 60 countries and the EU actively participate in this framework, demonstrating the convening power of Germany and France, and their shared interests with other small and medium-sized states (Bow & Lane, 2020). However, the non-participation of the United States, Russia, and China is noteworthy. Despite not being designed as an anti-Trump alliance, the alliance was explicitly created to compensate for the perceived absence of US international leadership during the Trump administration.

Middle powers, particularly the traditional allies of the US, have sought to balance the encouragement of US engagement through burden-sharing with their quest for self-sufficiency by diversifying their security relationships. For example, US allies in Europe and Canada have recently

amplified their leadership within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Smith, 2020). Simultaneously, security and defense cooperation outside the NATO framework have rapidly evolved within the European Union (EU), with initiatives such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defense Fund.

Groups of individual European states have also engaged in defense cooperation, exemplified by the French-led European Intervention Initiative, a consortium of European militaries most capable and willing to engage in collective action. These initiatives are not designed to replace NATO; rather, they aim to foster stronger European strategic autonomy and mitigate overreliance on Washington.

The increasing regional ties among middle powers are not intended to supersede the United States or to strategically contain China. Instead, they are designed to augment relations with Washington and advocate for a more multidimensional regional order in the Indo-Pacific, which is less dominated by US-China competition (Abbondanza, 2022). These regional ties coexist with expanding bilateral and minilateral regional security cooperation involving the United States, such as the evolving Quadrilateral framework between the United States, Australia, India, and Japan.

Beyond these intraregional partnerships, instances of emerging security relationships between like-minded European and Asian middle powers are also apparent. The United Kingdom and France, in particular, have amplified their respective security roles in the Indo-Pacific (Beeson & Lee-Brown, 2021). France has broadened its security

ambitions in the region, including the enhancement of its defense partnerships with Japan, Australia, and India. Macron has even proposed a new Canberra-New Delhi-Paris axis to address regional security issues in the Indo-Pacific (Szilágyi, 2022).

Following Brexit, the United Kingdom has similarly invested in building out its strategic ties in the region, with a particular focus on Australia and Japan. These developments further illustrate the active role of middle powers in global diplomacy, emphasizing the sustenance of the rules-based order through strategic partnerships.

Other European nations, such as Germany and the Netherlands, have also demonstrated interest in strengthening their presence in the Indo-Pacific region (Hakata & Cannon, 2021). In tandem, the European Union (EU) is working to enhance its security and diplomatic role in Asia (Wagner & Anh, 2020).

Like-minded democratic allies of the US in Europe and Asia are becoming increasingly concerned about China's rise and its global dissemination of authoritarian governance and state capitalist economic model (Pei, 2020). Simultaneously, the escalating US-China tensions have caused unease among these countries. The confrontational approach toward Beijing adopted by the Trump administration, coupled with its emphasis on "decoupling" from China, did not receive full support from these middle powers.

In response, these middle powers have endeavored to maintain engagement with both the US and China where possible. They are also taking new initiatives to strengthen multilateral cooperation and collaboratively address

challenges emerging from China's global rise. For instance, to counteract the Trump administration's attempts to undermine the World Trade Organization (WTO), the EU and Japan formed a trilateral arrangement with the Trump administration to address Chinese industrial subsidies violating WTO provisions (Plummer, 2019).

However, the approach of the EU and Japan significantly differed from that of the US. They sought to build coalitions of nations to rectify issues within the WTO rather than attempting to intimidate China or unilaterally threatening to withdraw.

In contrast to the US's largely negative perspective of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), middle powers such as Europe and Japan have adopted a more pragmatic stance. These middle powers are striving to shape global connectivity norms, provide alternative investments, and, in certain cases, cooperate with China on joint projects (Mohan, 2018). For instance, China's Pelješac bridge project in Croatia was backed by EU Cohesion Funds.

Japan, in cooperation with Australia, has also supported the US's Blue Dot Network, which provides principles for quality infrastructure investment (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Furthermore, the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have signed a joint statement to enhance cooperation on infrastructure connectivity.

During the Trump administration, the EU and Japan worked collectively, in cooperation with the United States, to address economic and security concerns related to China, such as the security of 5G and the screening of foreign investments. Notwithstanding, they also pursued

engagement with Beijing on trade issues. Ignoring a request for consultation from the incoming Biden national security team, the EU in December 2020, reached an agreement with China on a Comprehensive Agreement on Investments, after seven years of negotiations. Similarly, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and other nations entered into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with China in November 2020.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effectiveness of middle power diplomacy was significant. Following President Trump's threat to halt US funding to the WHO in April 2020, the EU took a decisive step. In a display of global leadership that would have been nearly inconceivable a decade ago, the European Commission, in collaboration with the UK, Canada, Japan, and others – but without the United States and with only marginal Chinese involvement – convened a pledging conference on May 4, 2020. This event raised 7.4 billion euros for the development of a coronavirus vaccine. Interestingly, this initiative included both public and private healthcare actors like the WHO and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, manifesting an innovative, multilateral approach.

These initiatives illustrate the willingness of middle powers to step up and lead global responses, especially during times when larger powers, such as the United States and China, have pulled back from their traditional roles. The European Commission, for instance, has sought to position itself in a more "geopolitical" role, and the initiatives undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic are reflective of this ambition.

In the context of the global crisis, middle powers have shown noteworthy adaptive maneuvers and have come forward in diverse ways. New Zealand exemplifies one such bold approach, displaying a strong stance in favor of Taiwan's inclusion in the World Health Organization in May, despite the intense resistance from China (Smith & Lee, 2023). Middle powers have, thus, attempted to utilize the existing international multilateral channels to orchestrate a harmonized response to the initial stages of the international pandemic.

French President Emmanuel Macron has been a forerunner in advocating for a more significant role of G7 and G20 in this regard (Hofmann, 2023). A symbolic gesture of unity was displayed through the proposition of a resolution in the United Nations Security Council by France and Tunisia, calling for a global ceasefire during the pandemic. After a prolonged period of deliberation, the resolution was ultimately passed on July 1, 2020.

Beyond these institutional bodies, a group of 13 countries – Canada, France, Germany, South Korea, and the UK among them – issued a joint declaration in the initial phase of the pandemic in April 2020. This declaration urged for a global, coordinated response and marked the commencement of the Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 (Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19, 2020). An analogous joint statement was put forth by the Alliance for Multilateralism, spearheaded by Germany and France, along with 22 other countries (Alliance for Multilateralism, 2020).

Intriguingly, some elements from these joint statements found their way into the World Health Assembly

resolution, such as the idea of the coronavirus vaccine being a "global public good." Future plans for this alliance include deliberations on the reform of WHO, supply chain issues, and equitable distribution of the vaccine, engaging not just foreign ministers but also health ministers, economic ministers, and other key national officials. Thus, middle power diplomacy in this era of US-China tensions showcases their proactive role in shaping the international response to crises.

The myriad of examples discussed above indicates a compelling tendency among middle powers to collectively champion multilateral solutions during the coronavirus pandemic, especially during a time of perceived leadership vacuum from either the United States or China. Intriguingly, as the United States grapples with managing the virus domestically, a number of countries in Europe and Asia, such as Germany, South Korea, and New Zealand, have comparatively weathered the pandemic more successfully, subsequently enhancing their international reputation to lead during this global public health crisis (Smith & Lee, 2023; Hofmann, 2023).

The construct of Middle Power Diplomacy during the Trump era entails the harmonization of interests among like-minded democratic middle powers. This cohesion underpins their initiatives to fortify multilateralism and shoulder international responsibilities, often independently of the United States, notably amid the coronavirus pandemic and escalating US-China tensions (Washington Quarterly, 2021). Despite some significant accomplishments, the performance of middle power diplomacy presents a mixed

record, making any assertion of a 'middle power moment' premature at this stage.

Future prospects for middle power diplomacy should be approached with tempered expectations, unless these burgeoning partnerships and networks manage to surmount principal challenges and obstacles. One of the primary challenges is that, although middle powers generally align in their international perspectives, their consensus has its bounds. Even within a group of democratic countries with a similar inclination towards multilateralism – Canada, Germany, France, Australia, Japan, and South Korea for example – critical differences are evident, particularly in regards to their stance on China (Brown & Foot, 2023). The recent shift towards a stricter stance on China within Europe might assist in bridging the divide with more hardline countries such as Australia (Brown & Foot, 2023).

Climate change represents another contentious issue, with the divergence in commitment levels among middle powers being quite stark. Specifically, Australia's tepid commitment to the Paris agreement starkly contrasts with the high priority Europeans accord to the issue (Chubb, 2020). Interactions between potential partners may also be hindered due to weak bilateral relations or historical legacies, as is evident in the strained relations between individual middle states like Japan and South Korea, and the enduring colonial echoes between the UK and India (Smith, 2020; Gorvett, 2021).

In the face of mounting global challenges, democracy finds itself on a defensive footing. Democratically elected governments around the world are grappling with the

ascendancy of authoritarian regimes. Compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, these pressures have amplified the risks of democratic backsliding (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, 2020). Addressing these international challenges is further complicated by domestic tensions within democracies, where populations express growing dissatisfaction over perceived inadequacies in addressing socio-economic inequalities and racial injustices (Putnam, 2020).

During President Donald Trump's administration, the United States, traditionally seen as a global beacon for democracy, was perceived as retreating from its leadership role in promoting democratic values globally. This left a vacuum, creating both uncertainty and opportunities for other democratic actors.

Middle-power democracies harbor expectations that the Biden administration will herald a return to the United States' more traditional leadership role in democracy support (Ikenberry, 2021). There is indeed a desire within the new administration to revitalize democratic institutions both domestically and internationally. However, the depletion of key sectors of the diplomatic corps and bureaucratic structures over the past four years poses formidable challenges (Lindsay, 2020).

Middle-power democracies – those countries which, irrespective of their geopolitical clout, have embedded democracy support as a consistent element of their foreign policy – will play an indispensable role in the reconstruction and modernization of democracy support strategies and policies. Despite having pioneered new initiatives and employed diplomatic tools to enhance their impact in

recent years, these nations have generally underperformed relative to their collective potential.

Some of these states have demonstrated innovation and resilience in the face of shifting global dynamics, but on a collective level, they have yet to fully leverage their influence. The pressing need for a reimagined and more effective approach to supporting democracy underscores the importance of middle powers in the current geopolitical landscape. It is incumbent upon these states to step up and leverage their collective diplomatic weight to advocate for and fortify democratic norms in these challenging times. They may yet have the capacity to reshape the landscape of global democracy support (Cooper, 2017).

Despite a transition in U.S. presidential leadership, systemic shortcomings within its democratic model have been exposed to an extent that they are likely to significantly impede its ability to advocate for and implement democracy support globally. Moreover, policy reversal is not an immediate process. Institutions that have been hollowed out will take time to regenerate (Lindsay, 2020). Furthermore, U.S. hegemony – in terms of economic, military, or political power – is not as definitive as it once was during its heyday of global democratic leadership (Nye, 2015).

Given this, it is imperative that other pro-democracy actors assert themselves. In particular, middle-power democracies – nations with a substantial commitment to, experience in, and capacity for bolstering democracy beyond their borders – will play a pivotal role. Throughout the politically tumultuous years of the Trump administration, it was reasonable that many middle-power democracies adopted a cautious stance on international democracy

issues. However, the time has come for these nations to seize the initiative and demonstrate their commitment to the prospect of a more democratic twenty-first century.

The Chinese Communist Party's International Department has significantly broadened its training of foreign politicians and political parties, showcasing how a non-democratic country can achieve substantial, rapid economic progress and providing guidance on party-building methods (Shambaugh, 2013). This party-to-party aid, designed to counter traditional Western democracy support, presents an appealing narrative to many states and ruling parties seeking to justify their governance models to their citizens.

Simultaneously, China's growing propensity and capacity to exact substantial retribution for even minor perceived infringements of its sovereignty have led to widespread reluctance among many countries to confront it on issues of democracy and rights (Feldstein, 2020).

For many international advocates of democracy, the challenge posed by China revives concerns that hark back to Cold War-era tensions between geostrategic imperatives and democratic goals. Certain European and Asian democracies, such as Germany and Japan, find themselves in a difficult position, torn between countering Chinese policies that undermine democracy and their wish to maintain their support for democracy and rights, devoid of geopolitical baggage (Nossel, 2020).

The escalating tensions and security issues associated with great-power rivalry in recent years have underscored the tendency of democracies to place greater value on maintaining amicable relationships

with strategically useful allies, rather than promoting democracy. Under such geopolitical strain, democracies, including the United States, are more inclined to align with non-democratic nations or overlook democratic regressions to accomplish their geostrategic objectives, compared to the less geopolitically tense early post-Cold War period (Nye, 2004).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced additional challenges to the already overwhelmed field of democracy support. Several authoritarian or authoritarian-leaning governments have capitalized on the public health crisis as a pretext to impose fresh restrictions on political and civic liberties, intensifying the global trend towards authoritarianism (Shahbaz & Funk, 2021).

Authoritarian powers, with China at the forefront, are attempting to manipulate the crisis to bolster their narratives on the superiority of authoritarianism over democracy. Focused on managing the pandemic domestically, some established democracies are left with diminished capacity to advocate for democracy internationally. Some, such as the United States, have been so unprepared in their responses that it has undermined the appeal of democratic governance itself. Persistent political polarization has further weakened the allure of the United States' democratic model (Helleiner & Pickel, 2005).

Furthermore, many traditional forms of democracy assistance and pro-democracy diplomacy have been hindered by travel restrictions and domestic lockdowns. The ensuing global economic crisis has also curtailed

both domestic and international resources available for democracy support. Some foreign aid funds have been redirected towards immediate medical aid and poverty alleviation efforts (Sachs, 2020).

Secondly, the lack of consistent discussion formats and coordination mechanisms renders middle power diplomacy largely sporadic and situational. While issue-based coalitions offer flexibility, their primarily reactive nature is not optimal for proactive international engagement (Lang, 2019). Crucial players like Australia, South Korea, and India are excluded from existing multilateral coordination platforms, such as the G7, thereby limiting their potential influence (Pempel, 2021).

Instead of adhering to a restrictive engagement strategy, middle powers should actively engage with regional swing states like Indonesia, Mexico, and Brazil, along with democratic members of the G7 to form agile and adaptable issue-specific coalitions with other states and non-state actors. Although the incipient Alliance for Multilateralism shows promise, it is predominantly driven by Berlin and Paris, with only tepid interest from other parties (Alliance for Multilateralism, 2020). Absent more formal working methods and regular convening formats, middle power diplomacy risks remaining largely spontaneous and reactive.

Thirdly, domestic political dynamics can potentially hinder middle powers' capacity or interest to serve as influential norm entrepreneurs on the international stage. For instance, countries like Italy and Australia have grappled with ephemeral government coalitions and domestic political turbulence in recent years (Campbell,

2021; Tavares de Almeida, 2020). The coronavirus pandemic threatens to exacerbate such issues, making countries more inward-focused or diverted.

Lastly, the surge in unrestricted great power rivalry, while serving as a motivation for middle power action, could render international relations more transactional and less norms-based. This shift may reduce the space for like-minded middle powers to effectively undertake diplomatic initiatives with other global partners, unless handled adeptly (Acharya, 2020).

As revealed during the pandemic, the idea that middle powers could potentially bridge the leadership gap between the US and China appears somewhat far-fetched, particularly if the United States chooses to undermine these efforts directly (Bennett, 2020). Consequently, middle powers must persist in fostering innovation and fostering unique diplomatic strategies. The active incorporation of non-governmental and private sector actors in these efforts is crucial. The EU's global vaccine conference exemplifies this type of effective cooperation.

Middle-power democracies exhibit numerous constraints in their international democracy engagement. Only a handful among them, notably France and the United Kingdom, possess substantial hard power and diplomatic heft to independently shape the course of events in other countries. The majority of middle-power democracies recognize that their individual actions may have minimal impact when imposing diplomatic or economic sanctions against another state.

While nearly all middle-power democracies maintain robust bilateral initiatives that demonstrate

agility and innovation, they typically steer clear of direct confrontations. They often hold the belief, or rationalization, that more assertive strategies to instigate political change in other nations are counterproductive. Most middle-power democracies complement their bilateral policies by investing significant efforts into multilateral initiatives, which can augment their influence.

The necessity to harmonize their individual policies to facilitate coordination often results in their actions being more deliberative, cautious, and dispersed than those of a major power, such as the United States. Consequently, the strategies of middle-power democracies in multilateral diplomacy necessitate a careful balancing act: remaining influential while being cognizant of their limitations. This dynamic underscores the complex landscape of international diplomacy, emphasizing the distinct role of middle powers in shaping global governance and their unique strategies for fostering political change.

When a nation exhibits bravery in defending democratic values, it necessitates the assurance that other democratic states will align with it in support. In some instances, this may require rhetorical endorsement and the safety of collective numbers. In other circumstances, such as when a country faces trade sanctions or energy supply cuts due to its pro-democracy actions, it may necessitate tangible assistance.

While the possibility of a collective defense agreement akin to NATO is unlikely, there is an imperative need for a more distinct sense of ideological and tangible solidarity. This is crucial for middle powers to feel secure enough to

advocate for democracy, even in anticipation of inevitable retaliation from authoritarian regimes.

The more explicit these principles of solidarity and tangible support can be articulated, the greater their potential deterrent effect can become, possibly decreasing the likelihood of their being challenged. Several instances of failed attempts by authoritarian regimes to isolate democratic countries with the intent of subduing them may suffice to deter future attempts. Conversely, if authoritarian regimes observe that democracies withdraw from allies and principles merely due to fear of retaliation, threats of retaliation will become increasingly effective tools for these authoritarian regimes.

The mentioned areas are not only escalating in international significance but are also those in which the United States has taken a more passive role, allowing certain middle-power democracies to take the lead. For instance, the United Kingdom has assumed a leadership position in combating corruption. Similarly, Canada and Sweden have been at the forefront of addressing issues of injustice and inclusion through their feminist foreign and development policies.

Australia took the initiative to investigate the origins and handling of the pandemic, while South Korea launched the United Nation's inaugural group of friends on COVID-19 and global health security (Choe, 2020). In the digital domain, the European Commission has presented a myriad of policy proposals related to internet companies' operations in Europe, political advertising rules on social media, platform conduct concerning disinformation, and

stricter regulations on the sales and export of surveillance technology.

The European Union's recent surveillance export controls are promising, and it has also launched initiatives such as the Digital Services Act, the European Democracy Action Plan, and regulations on artificial intelligence – all of which will influence the interaction between technology and democratic rights.

Addressing these auxiliary issues offers another advantage. A significant determinant of the global resurgence of democracy will be whether democratic governments can demonstrate their capability to tackle substantial economic and social challenges that concern their citizens. Citizens of middle-power democracies may more readily comprehend and accept why their post-pandemic, resource-constrained governments are addressing issues like climate change and surveillance, which affect their well-being.

When the goals of democracy policy are delineated in this manner, it accentuates the need for a connection between foreign and domestic policy agendas in supporting democracy. Advocates of democracy must ensure that domestic policies do not contradict democratic objectives overseas. For instance, the United Kingdom's efforts to combat kleptocracy abroad must be balanced with regulating its own financial and property markets to prevent aiding money laundering (Sharman, 2017). Similarly, its work on promoting media freedom overseas requires reconsideration of its domestic libel laws, which could potentially be manipulated to suppress democratic activism in other countries (Mullis & Scott, 2012).

Middle-power democracies may find it necessary to explore the establishment of new institutional connections and cultivate relationships between domestic and foreign democratic activists to create a coherent blend of domestic and foreign policy changes.

It should not be a prerequisite for middle powers to resolve their democratic deficits before engaging in democratic initiatives in other countries – these issues are typically too profound or contentious to be swiftly resolved. Rather, simultaneous efforts at home and abroad should be seen as a strength: a necessary progression towards a more cohesive, shared democracy agenda. Democracies actively addressing their shortcomings can add humility and credibility to their efforts to strengthen democracy globally. This can aid middle-power democracies (and a more self-aware United States) to engage with countries they are collaborating with on democratic issues, rather than acting from an assumed position of omniscient power.

Agile and informal assemblies of middle-power democracies could potentially enhance their impact by jointly operating within existing international institutions such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and regional bodies. While some of these middle powers may be encumbered with historical, colonial, and geopolitical baggage, they can generally act in these multilateral forums with a greater assumption of goodwill and are less likely to face skepticism that their actions serve a geopolitical, strategic purpose, as is often the case with the United States (Jordaan, 2003).

Akin to how the G7 previously enabled smaller countries to leverage bloc voting to advance their priorities,

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a collective of democracies, independent from U.S. leadership, could wield substantial influence (Lopes, 2015). Importantly, it would be imperative that this cooperation among middle-power democracies is not perceived merely as an extension of the existing collaboration between countries such as Australia, Canada, and European states. Instead, it should serve as a framework for integrating a broader array of partners from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The coherence and coordination offered by such a bloc could counter efforts by countries like China or Russia, aiming to co-opt multilateral institutions for non-democratic purposes, without provoking excessive resistance against any one country (Mansfield & Solingen, 2020). Moreover, these multilateral forums are often where decisions on interrelated issues such as human rights and technological regulation are made.

Middle powers should aim to leverage their already successful response to the coronavirus pandemic by intensifying efforts to lead in global public health (Lee & Baumgartner, 2020). Their relative success in managing the pandemic domestically can serve as a model for others and enhance their international legitimacy at a time when the United States is grappling with its domestic outbreak (Lieberman & Singham, 2020). However, for middle power diplomacy to achieve broader success, it must transition from rhetoric to actionable outcomes.

Beyond typical diplomatic statements, the most convincing way to demonstrate the value of multilateral cooperation is through tangible results rather than abstract ideals (Mearsheimer, 2019). Middle powers must

be prepared to adopt a more transactional approach when pursuing cooperation with potential global partners, to prevent their influence from diminishing in an increasingly competitive world (Lang, 2019). These strategies might include collaborating on more challenging security issues, like joint maritime security and freedom of navigation efforts in the Indo-Pacific, or supporting one another when faced with economic coercion by China.

Moreover, middle powers must recognize the necessity to rectify existing deficiencies and modernize the multilateral system to increase transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of multilateral institutions (Chapnick & Kukucha, 2020). Recent European endeavors to engage the United States on WHO reforms illustrate a more pragmatic understanding of multilateralism than in the past (Hoffmann & Patel, 2020).

By staunchly defending rules-based multilateralism, middle powers can potentially offer a diplomatic alternative to the US-China global competition paradigm that could also appeal to other international actors (Lang, 2019). However, this requires building effective coalitions and seeking alliances with other partners on specific issues like cybersecurity, standard-setting for emerging technologies such as AI, human rights, supply chain diversification, climate change, and global health security (Carin & Smith, 2020).

Biden's "free world" agenda and vision for a global summit for democracies could hold significant relevance, as could the proposed D10 format for multilateral cooperation (Beauchamp, 2020). These selective coalitions of like-minded states could potentially circumvent the skepticism about

cumbersome and ineffective multilateralism that prevailed in the United States, even during the Obama era (Patrick, 2012).

Simultaneously, considering the absence of a resounding victory for Biden in the November 2020 presidential election and the subsequent instability, sustaining middle power ties may prove valuable as a safeguard against a potential resurgence of Trump's "America First" foreign policy post-Biden (Wright, 2020). Trust in the United States has eroded following the tumultuous Trump presidency. Hence, middle power partners will remain cautious of potential US attempts to use them as mere tools in its competition against China, albeit likely conducted with more diplomatic finesse under the Biden administration (Selden, 2021).

Understandably, some middle powers may choose to maintain a degree of autonomy from Washington. This is evident in the European Union (EU) case, which has further committed to "strategic autonomy" even after the transition from Trump to Biden (Shapiro, 2021). Prominent European leaders like Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Emmanuel Macron have exhibited hesitance in choosing sides with the United States against China (Patel, 2021). However, some Asian middle power partners, such as Australia and Japan, may display more willingness to join a US-led coalition against China, leading to potential internal divisions among middle powers (Hemmings & Fey, 2020).

Though the Biden administration should take initiative in forming effective coalitions with like-minded global partners on key issues such as technology, supply

chains, and the reform of multilateral institutions (Ikenberry, 2020), this does not necessarily imply that the United States must always occupy the driving seat or that US leadership alone is adequate. Interestingly, a step back, allowing others to take the lead, could actually benefit the United States by encouraging greater burden sharing among allies and facilitating other global partners to align with diplomatic initiatives (Kupchan, 2021).

In light of the enduring democratic recession and a surge in authoritarian tendencies precipitated by the global pandemic, the international community advocating for democracy requires revitalization, innovative thinking, and fresh leadership. Although the United States, with the advent of the Biden administration, is gradually reinstating its position in this field, this reconstruction will demand time, particularly considering the considerable domestic democratic challenges it faces, and its relative loss of global influence over the past two decades (Diamond, 2020).

All factions within the larger pro-democracy field, whether governmental or non-governmental, Western or non-Western, must contribute towards the rejuvenation of international support for democratic norms and practices. In this endeavor, middle-power democracies have significant contributions to make and their involvement is integral to this equation.

Despite the earnest commitment of these middle-power democracies to democracy support, and their dedication of substantial diplomatic and assistance resources to this effort, their collective impact has so far been less than the aggregate of their individual actions (Cooper & Mo, 2013).

Their efforts could yield more significant outcomes if they improve their coordination and focus their leadership on a set of coherent, priority areas where their comparative advantages are evident. Furthermore, by demonstrating greater solidarity among themselves, these democracies could make it more challenging for authoritarian regimes to isolate and penalize them for their pro-democracy initiatives.

Challenging the system through middle power activism: case of Turkey

With the unfolding geopolitical dynamics in the contemporary international system, Turkey's role and potential contributions as a middle power have become particularly significant. Its adept maneuvering, coupled with a strategic approach toward leveraging its unique geopolitical positioning, signify Turkey's growing prominence in international politics. The nuanced interplay of power dynamics, coupled with the unique attributes of Turkey's status, provide fertile ground for further scholarly exploration of proactive middle power diplomacy.

The contention set forth is that the roles traditionally ascribed to middle powers as 'stabilisers' and 'supporters of the system' – as often characterised in the cases of Australia and Canada – may not necessarily be applicable to certain emergent middle powers, especially those hailing from the Global South.

Turkey's foreign policy has demonstrated a gradual and discernible shift towards the adoption of coercive diplomacy. This exceptional activation of middle power status coincides with an estrangement from traditional Western allies and a rapprochement with non-Western powers. According to President Erdoğan's perspective, membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation presents an appealing alternative to the prospect of European Union (EU) membership.

However, it's essential to note that the Turkish government continues to maintain transactional relations with Western powers, independent of shared norms and values. Despite recent political tensions and an evident deficit in mutual trust, the EU retains its position as Turkey's chief trading partner and primary source of foreign direct investment. Moreover, regardless of noticeable shifts towards Russia, Turkey displays no signs of intending to exit the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The absence of a consistent foreign policy strategy leaves Turkey in an ambivalent position. As it endeavors to counterbalance global powers against each other, the country's foreign policy appears precarious and without a firm anchorage. Consequently, Turkey finds itself at the epicenter of great power rivalries, lacking robust protective measures. Historically recognized as a Western-anchored middle power that practised cautious activism, Turkey has evolved into a more interventionist actor, as evidenced through its assertive military engagement and adoption of coercive diplomacy (Subaşat, 2014; Öniş & Kutlay, 2017).

Located in a geographically pivotal position, Turkey has found itself deeply impacted by global power shifts

and ensuing regional geopolitical chaos, including power vacuums. Consequently, the country faces a dilemma: to maintain its traditional allegiances with Western powers or to realign itself with non-Western global forces, such as Russia and China.

The rise of emerging middle powers is often facilitated by the creation and diffusion of indigenous military technologies both domestically and within their respective regions. A salient case study can be drawn from Turkey's burgeoning status as a significant drone power. The country's engagement in drone warfare has greatly elevated the international prominence of its rapidly expanding defense sector and has invigorated its middle power activism.

Ankara has managed to accrue substantial technical and military advantages in regional disputes, effectively exceeding its traditional warfare capabilities in the Middle East, North Africa, the Caucasus, and across the Black and Mediterranean seas. This advanced military technology has allowed Turkey to establish itself as an alternate source for arms sales and foster new alliances within its immediate vicinity. Turkish drones have been exported to a diverse range of countries, including Qatar, Azerbaijan, Poland, and Libya.

Domestically, Turkey's burgeoning competencies in drone-based middle power have fueled national self-assurance and enhanced governmental support. Large-scale drone production has propelled Turkey to a prominent position in the global drone market. The successful deployment of Turkish drones, both within and beyond the nation's borders, has been widely publicized

through government-controlled media channels. This publicity has engendered nationalist sentiments and fostered public interest in various technofests organized across Turkey, where drones are showcased as symbols of national pride.

The incorporation of drones has also fortified Turkey's military capacity, enabling it to extend its reach into challenging terrains in the country's south-east and in northern Iraq for effective cross-border operations. The public, including opposition parties, widely support the drone-aided counter-terrorism operations in Iraq and Syria, thereby ensuring border security and restoring public confidence in the government.

Furthermore, Turkey's adept use of drones to flex its military muscles abroad has increased the demand from various countries for combat-proven drones. This demand situates Turkey as a viable alternate source of military technology, thereby strengthening the government's capacity to challenge and negotiate global power dynamics.

Moreover, Turkey has seen a significantly pronounced authoritarian populist turn in its politics compared to several other states, a fact that has been documented in scholarly discourse (Öniş, 2015; Somer, 2016). According to a 2021 report by the V-Dem Institute, Turkey emerged as one of the top three 'autocratising countries' in the world over the course of the previous decade. This concurrent transformation in external and domestic arenas has stimulated a gradual yet path-dependent alteration in Turkey's foreign policy behaviour throughout the 2010s, growing progressively assertive, unilateralist, and anti-Western.

Uniquely positioned as a middle power, Turkey possesses military capabilities that are traditionally strong and have been rapidly expanding in recent years, thus setting the stage for a coercive shift in its foreign policy behaviour (Bağcı & Kurç, 2017; Kurç, 2017). Turkey's historical legacy, combined with contemporary manifestations of 'neo-Ottoman' sentiments, expands its perceived national role beyond the confines of a conventional middle power (Hintz, 2018).

The active involvement of such an unusual middle power as Turkey has bolstered the fortunes of an authoritarian populist government, predominantly through the amplification of nationalist sentiment and exploitation of short-term political gains. Thus, the concept of middle power activism, particularly as observed in Turkey, can shed light on multilateral diplomacy strategies that carry wider implications for the global political landscape.

In the realm of international relations, status holds a pivotal role as it is primarily conceived as the set of collective beliefs about a state's standing and the ranking it receives on attributes deemed valuable. Renshon (2017, p. 33) posits that status is comprised of three principal attributes: positional, perceptual, and social. While the positional aspect refers to a state's place in a hierarchical order, the perceptual attribute pertains to the way a state is viewed by others, and the social dimension entails the state's engagement in a social network or organization.

Moreover, Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth explore the manifestation of status in the international political arena, highlighting its visibility in two distinct yet interconnected ways. The first is through membership in an exclusive

grouping of actors, and the second pertains to a state's relative standing within such a group. To fully comprehend the intricacies of status, it is proposed that it be examined on three conceptual grounds – collective, subjective, and relative. The collective dimension pertains to shared beliefs among states, the subjective attribute emphasizes perception and feelings, and the relative facet emphasizes the comparisons made among states.

Focusing on Turkey's role in this framework, Emel (2019) presents an intriguing argument. She argues that Turkey is in pursuit of greater power, aiming to establish itself as a key player in the international arena. Turkey's geopolitical positioning, straddling both Europe and Asia, endows it with a unique potential to leverage its status as a middle power. This status permits Turkey to navigate the complexities of global politics in a manner that reflects its national interests and simultaneously acknowledges the broader global context in which it operates.

Turkey's quest for higher standing is intricately woven into the fabric of its foreign policy strategies, illustrating its conscious effort to bolster its international image. The country's strategies reveal a potent combination of Realpolitik, with its pragmatic approach to international relations, along with the normative ideals of liberal internationalism. These twin elements imbue Turkey's foreign policy approach with both a practical and an ethical dimension, enabling it to effectively navigate the ebbs and flows of global politics.

In the domain of foreign policy expectations, Turkey's anticipations from the G20 can be encapsulated around two primary objectives: the pursuit of status within elite

circles and an active participation in global governance. The aspiration for middle power status within the G20 aligns closely with Turkey's strategies aimed at augmenting its social status, mobility, competition, and creativity (Cooper, 2015).

However, contrasted with its social mobility strategy deployed against the European Union in the initial decade of the 2000s, Turkey's social mobility within the G20 remains relatively restrained and moderate. Its social competition strategy also maintains a relatively low profile, especially against its middle power counterparts.

It is noteworthy that despite expressing an eagerness to introduce new policy dimensions to the group and enhance its prestige in rhetoric, Turkey does not pursue a robust social creativity strategy at a practical level. Regarding its active involvement in global governance, Turkey, akin to its ascending middle power counterparts in the G20, advocates for reform in international institutions favoring rising powers, and upholds policies based on liberal internationalism, free trade, and good governance in the evolving international system.

It is crucial to underline that Turkey's role expectations within the G20 framework are considerably elevated in this sphere, as manifested in its chosen status strategies. Among the triad of status strategies, Turkey is particularly poised to successfully incorporate social creativity, given its apparent inclusion of emergent policy priorities concerning global security, migration, and peacebuilding-peace-making within its G20 engagement (Wade, 2011).

The Turkish scenario demonstrates that Turkey's status politics have been significantly influenced by the

national role conceptions of Turkish leaders, their role expectations, and other actors' anticipations regarding their country's distinct position and role performance. In this context, the existence of pronounced role conceptions and role expectations concerning a state's particular positions and behaviors can affect whether a state is deemed a weak or strong status-seeking country within international organizations. Similarly, weak role performance also provides insights into the conditions under which Turkey's pursuit of status triggers geopolitical rivalry and material power competition (Volgy, Corbetta, Grant, & Baird, 2011).

Comparatively, other G20 member states such as Russia and China engage in robust status competition politics, with the intention of strengthening their cooperation through the development of specific areas of niche diplomacy. In contrast, Turkey does not engage in equally strong or ambitious status competition politics within its G20 peer group.

For instance, social competition between Russia and China in Central Asia fosters cooperation in certain domains while simultaneously encouraging each to bolster their status within their unique niche areas. Russia assumes responsibility for hard power-related issues in the region, whereas China manifests as an infrastructure and trading powerhouse. Nevertheless, when it comes to social mobility and social creativity, Turkey seems to display more ambition as a status-seeking country compared to its engagement in social competition.

This last observation can be attributed to the absence of a strong conceptualization of the middle power role among Turkish state elites, and their possession of a prominent

role conception which positions Turkey alongside regional great powers rather than middle powers, not just within the G20, but in other formal or informal international organizations as well.

Turkey's policies that seek to enhance its status as an emerging middle power display a proclivity towards strategies of social mobility and social creativity, rather than those of social competition. This tendency is since the state's elite hold high-status aspirations for their country that transcend the conventional role conceptions and expectations of a middle-sized country. Turkey's enduring demand for entry into the European Union (EU) is a fitting example of the country's status-relevant mobility strategies.

Central Asia after Great Game – can Kazakhstan fill the power vacuum?

The geopolitical landscape and experience of Kazakhstan poses an intriguing theoretical conundrum. Characterized as a secondary power, Kazakhstan holds a position of moderate regional influence and has achieved an equivalent level of international recognition, navigating its relationships with neighboring Great Powers without succumbing to client state status. The nation shares a border with China, and while engaging in healthy trade and diplomatic relations, it remains free from China's domination. Similarly, it lies adjacent to Russia, and

despite the considerable ethnic Russian population within its borders, it is not under Russian control (Anceschi, 2010).

Notably, Kazakhstan has managed to affirm its sovereignty while concurrently maintaining positive relations with Russia, demonstrating a complex, nuanced balance in its foreign policy. This situation is particularly significant as it exemplifies Kazakhstan's strategic diplomacy and its astute approach to maintaining independence whilst nurturing relations with global powerhouses (Kassenova, 2008).

Kazakhstan has pursued a distinct foreign policy strategy known as "multivectorism". This term is defined as a policy that pragmatically develops foreign relations based on non-ideological grounds (Nazarbayev, 2017). Expounding on this strategy's objectives, President Nazarbayev underscored that multivectorism is intended to foster friendly and predictable relations with all states that significantly contribute to global affairs and are of substantive interest to Kazakhstan. This strategy essentially entails establishing and cultivating mutually advantageous cooperation with all countries (Bratersky & Toloraya, 2012).

In practical terms, multivectorism operates as a form of relational power, enabling a less powerful state to alleviate dependence dilemmas while engaging in asymmetrical relationships (Sullivan, 2019). As noted by Cooley (2012), Kazakhstan, among other Central Asian states, has leveraged the rivalries between Russia, China, and the United States to advance its own interests, exploiting the competition among these Great Powers to gain increased

benefits, assistance, and superior contractual terms. Thus, through the strategic application of multivectorism, Kazakhstan has adeptly navigated its complex geopolitical landscape (Cooley, 2012).

Kazakhstan's seemingly strategic and rational approach to multivectorism, particularly its interaction with Great Powers, makes realism a plausible theoretical starting point for analysis. According to balance of power theory, states form alliances to shield themselves from a potentially dominant hegemon's superior capabilities (Waltz, 1979). Conversely, bandwagoning is a strategy that involves alignment with the stronger power (Schweller, 1994). Walt (1987) posits that balancing is the more common strategy, asserting that states only resort to bandwagoning when they are weak, have no other available allies, and believe appeasing the rising hegemon is feasible.

However, this binary understanding of balancing and bandwagoning does not fully explain Kazakhstan's multifaceted foreign policy strategy, which encompasses elements of both strategies. The country interacts with three different Great Powers – China, Russia, and the United States – and occasionally engages with the European Union on economic matters. This simultaneous engagement contradicts traditional realist predictions. As such, the "simplistic dichotomy" of balancing or bandwagoning falls short in accounting for the complexity of Kazakhstan's foreign policy approach and its strategic predilections (Bobo, 2017).

The strategy of multivectorism encompasses several elements, one of which is a robust assertion and

safeguarding of state sovereignty to avoid succumbing to the status of any of the Great Powers' client state. Interestingly, while Kazakhstan proactively engages with these influential powers, it does not aspire to construct a Central Asian equivalent of the European Union (EU) (Li, 2020).

To maintain a precarious balance of preserving state sovereignty while fostering positive relationships with Russia, China, the United States, and the EU, Kazakhstan has employed a variety of mechanisms. Given their geographical proximity to Kazakhstan, Russia and China inevitably warrant the most immediate attention. Nevertheless, the substantial influence of the EU and the US – especially in the realms of security and trade – necessitates careful navigation (Anceschi, 2020).

A pivotal mechanism in this intricate balancing act has been the cultivation of regional institutions and the application of multilateral approaches to regional challenges. This approach serves to integrate the Great Powers into an ongoing, regularized, and mutually beneficial engagement with Central Asia (Tsygankov, 2013).

The government of Kazakhstan promotes a unique perception of its identity as a Eurasian state, an identity that strongly asserts its sovereignty and is founded on a historical narrative independent of Russia. This concept of a 'Eurasian' identity, embraced early in the post-Soviet period, allows Kazakhstan to acknowledge both its closeness to and distinction from Russia (Laruelle, 2008).

While Kazakhstan's multilateral diplomatic endeavors could be perceived as a manifestation of its aspiration to be a responsible global citizen, it is evident that there is more

at stake in its diplomatic engagements than merely good citizenship. As we will illustrate subsequently, Kazakhstan envisages its diplomatic undertakings as a tool to cultivate an intricate network of enduring relations with regional states and Great Powers. This network serves to avert regional conflict that could jeopardize its sovereignty and security. Consequently, these diplomatic 'enmeshments' both assert Kazakhstani sovereignty and strive to foster numerous, interconnected links with other nations.

When scrutinizing these engagements, it is insightful to consider the novelty of witnessing this caliber of diplomatic activity from a Central Asian state. As we understand it here, 'enmeshment' is not indicative of a Central Asian supranational initiative; rather, it reflects a Kazakhstani foreign policy strategy predicated on the preservation of sovereignty and the autonomy of the state (Kembayev, 2018).

Regionally, Kazakhstan has assumed a significant role in organizations that operate in political, economic, and cultural domains. For instance, it has fortified its ties with Europe through its membership in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and lobbied the United States and European members intensively, achieving a significant milestone by becoming the first Central Asian and former Soviet state to secure the rotating chair of the organization in 2010. The Kazakhstani government perceived this leadership role in the OSCE as an affirmation of its international legitimacy and a successful demonstration of its multivector approach to foreign policy (Anceschi, 2010).

In response to the OSCE's announcement of this appointment, the Kazakhstani foreign minister emphasized that "since the first days of independence, Kazakhstan has consciously chosen balanced approaches in foreign policy, and the strategy of multilateral partnership became its core... Kazakhstan has proven itself as a proponent of active participation in resolving issues of international security" (Ioffe, 2010).

During its tenure as OSCE chair, Kazakhstan hosted the first OSCE summit in over a decade and facilitated the adoption of the Astana Commemorative Declaration, a document reiterating support for the OSCE's principles. Miroslav Lajčák, the 2019 OSCE chairperson-in-office, recently acknowledged Kazakhstan's ongoing invaluable contribution to the OSCE, remarking that "thanks to its balanced and pragmatic domestic and foreign policy, Kazakhstan is a reliable and trustworthy partner of the organization" (Lajčák, 2019).

In addition to its commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, Kazakhstan's significant diplomatic efforts in the realm of international peace and security are further evidenced by its role in hosting peace negotiations pertaining to the Syrian conflict. In 2015, Kazakhstan initiated the Astana Process, a platform providing an international forum for dialogue attended by various countries, including Iran, Russia, and Turkey, alongside the Syrian government and opposition (Mamedova, 2018). President Nazarbayev underlined the importance of this initiative in his 2018 national address, stating that, "The Astana Process on Syria is nearly the only effective working format of talks on a peaceful settlement and recovery of

this country from the crisis!" (Nazarbayev, 2018). Though not a direct participant in these negotiations, Kazakhstan's role as the host significantly enhanced its international visibility and reputation.

Kazakhstan's regional and international diplomatic endeavors underscore its capability to engage in effective diplomacy both within its region and on the global stage, thereby leading, convening, and participating in multilateral interactions on par with the Great Powers. These efforts intricately weave the Great Powers into a comprehensive network of political and economic affiliations (Kembayev, 2020). In comparison to states of similar development level and size, Kazakhstan's substantial role in regional and international organizations is relatively exceptional.

These efforts originated from an imperative for state survival and have proven to be highly beneficial over time (Sharipova & Arystan, 2019). In light of the annexation of Crimea, state survival has resurfaced as a significant concern for Kazakhstan, particularly affecting its relations with Russia. Multivectorism as a foreign policy strategy has safeguarded state survival through the firm assertion of state identity and the cultivation of multifaceted relationships with regional and Great Powers alike (Kaliyeva, 2022). As Kaliyeva asserts, a multivector foreign policy has equipped Kazakhstan to address survival challenges while maintaining its dignity and initiating ambitious projects such as its campaign to enter the top 50 most competitive countries in the world.

The recent souring of relations between the Russian Federation and the West poses a challenge to Astana's preferred multivector foreign policy, thereby complicating

Kazakhstan's ability to balance the competing interests of Great Powers. In essence, Kazakhstan's multivectorism is becoming increasingly reactive, with Astana taking a cautious stance in international disputes involving Russia (Schroeder, 2019).

Despite being a unitary state, the Nazarbayev administration acknowledges that ongoing peace and prosperity hinge on the Kazakhstani government's capacity to facilitate harmonious multiethnic relations. Ethnic Russians make up nearly a quarter of the country's population, with a Slavic majority residing in most administrative districts of the North Kazakhstan, Kostanay, and Akmola regions, as well as along the eastern borders of the East Kazakhstan and Pavlodar regions (Morozov, 2015).

In order to augment the ethnic Russians' sense of belonging within the current system, the Kazakhstani government recognizes both Kazakh and Russian as official languages and treats them as equal under the law. The Nazarbayev administration has also set up an institution known as the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, which assists the government in policy formulation and elects several members to serve in the Majlis. This further cements Kazakhstan's status as a peaceful multiethnic state.

Kazakhstan has indeed demonstrated an admirable approach to its proactive multivector foreign policy. The country has successfully leveraged its position as a developing nation within the international system by disarming and becoming an advocate for nuclear non-proliferation, inviting foreign corporations to

participate in the development of its oil and gas industry, and ensuring the interests of ethnic minorities are respected. These efforts under the Nazarbayev administration have sought to optimize Kazakhstan's international standing while balancing the competing interests of major global powers (Mankoff, 2012).

Recently, however, a series of unfortunate events on the international stage, especially involving Russia's use of military power and the resultant deterioration in relations among Great Powers, have overshadowed Kazakhstan's proactive foreign policy. The nation finds itself having to react and adapt to these changing circumstances, a development that poses new challenges to its multivector strategy (Schroeder, 2019).

In the autumn of 2013, Russian President Putin penned an open letter to the United States in The New York Times, cautioning against military intervention in Syria subsequent to an alleged chemical weapons attack by governmental forces (Putin, 2013). This marked a significant chapter in Russia's diplomatic involvement, with the country taking a decisive role in preventing a proposed US-led offensive. Russia achieved this through convincing the Assad administration to relinquish control over its chemical weapons caches.

Nevertheless, by 2015, Russia's role had shifted from mediator to active participant, deploying thousands of soldiers and primarily employing airpower to buttress the beleaguered Syrian government. This military support significantly weakened various opposition forces (Katz, 2015).

In the early days of 2017, the stage was primed for delegations from Moscow, Ankara, Tehran, Damascus, and Syrian opposition forces (excluding entities such as the Kurdish YPG, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL, and Al-Qaeda affiliates) to convene in Astana, Kazakhstan. The main objective of these talks was the establishment of a lasting ceasefire (Barnard & Saad, 2017).

The initial round of discussions held at the Rixos President Hotel from January 23 to 24 failed to produce any significant results. However, they did culminate in Russia, Turkey, and Iran affirming their support for Syria's "sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity" and agreeing to uphold a "partial cease-fire," though no enforcement mechanism was established (Barnard & Saad, 2017).

Following the 2017 Astana talks, subsequent rounds of discussions took place with Russia, Turkey, and Iran, the key sponsors of the negotiations, consenting to the formulation of "de-escalation zones". However, this proposal was rebuffed by the Syrian opposition, leaving numerous critical questions pertaining to the establishment, maintenance, and securitization of these zones unresolved (Barnard & Gladstone, 2017).

The importance of Kazakhstan's role as a mediator in these complex geopolitical contexts, lies in demonstrating the potential for multivector diplomacy to offer meaningful contributions to regional peace processes.

Undeniably, multivectorism emerges as the optimal foreign policy for Kazakhstan, vital in securing the country's stability, developmental progress, and sovereignty.

However, considering the current global geopolitical scenario – marked by escalating tensions among major powers and the potential waning of Western interest in Central Asia – it becomes crucial for Astana to reassess and revamp its foreign policy (Ismagambetov, 2017).

One viable approach would be for Kazakhstan to cultivate a robust framework for ongoing cooperation with Western nations while spearheading political and economic reforms within the Central Asian republics. This could be achieved notably through platforms such as the C5+1, enabling Kazakhstan to transition from a reactive to a proactive stance in its foreign policy (Mankoff, 2017).

Nonetheless, to ensure a balanced relationship among the Great Powers, it would be essential for Kazakhstan to sustain formal economic, political, and military ties with Russia and China. This is crucial given that "Russia's demonstrated use of coercion as a tool for achieving its foreign policy objectives makes multi-vectoring even more appealing, while simultaneously increasing its associated risks" (Holmquist, 2015).

Kazakhstan's successful navigation in this complex geopolitical landscape relies on Astana's capacity to carefully triangulate among the Great Powers. This could be accomplished by partaking in competing regional initiatives and adopting a more proactive role in catalyzing regional development. Consequently, Astana should advocate a foreign policy grounded in proactive multivectorism, aspiring to rekindle the spirited Great Power competition indispensable for the doctrine of multivectorism (Holmquist, 2015).

In conclusion, as the era of the Great Game in Central Asia drew to a close, the implementation of a multivector policy became increasingly complex. Despite Kazakhstan's early aspirations in the 2000s to rise as a regional and potential middle power, external circumstances have played a considerable role in shaping this possibility.

Notably, Central Asia stands out as one of the rare regions devoid of a middle power, with a significant portion of Africa being another such region. This lack of a middle power leaves the area particularly susceptible to the influences of major powers, compounded further by the geographical proximity of Russia and China.

The involvement of middle powers in this region could serve to alleviate this vulnerability, fostering a balance of power and contributing to regional stability. It is imperative that these middle powers actively engage and establish cooperative alliances to maintain regional equilibrium and counterbalance the dominant influence of major powers.

Moreover, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations should persist in striving to upgrade their status from mere players in the geopolitical game to influential stakeholders. This necessitates a proactive approach, characterized by engagement with global partners on a range of issues including regional security, economic cooperation, and sustainable development.

Given the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of Central Asia, this region demands and deserves more attention from the global community. In turn, Central Asian nations need to harness their potential and work towards shaping their destiny, rather than being mere pawns in a larger geopolitical chessboard.

Conclusions to Chapter III

As we draw the conclusions for this chapter, it becomes increasingly clear that the role and the influence of middle powers within the international system cannot be downplayed. Often positioned as managers, middle powers contribute to maintaining the equilibrium in international relations, preserving order and balance through their diplomatic activities (Cooper, 1997). While this role is not typically encapsulated in conventional academic discourse, the essential understanding is that middle powers' affiliation with multilateral organizations reflects a steadfast commitment to international engagement, as opposed to an opportunistic or sporadic interaction.

The academic conception of 'middle powers' serves to demarcate a unique group within the international community, distinguished by their specific foreign policy practices. While the term 'middle power' is fraught with elasticity, inconsistency, and subjectivity (Cooper, 2011), a key defining trait is their propensity towards multilateral diplomacy and active involvement in global initiatives. It's an undisputed fact that middle powers' commitment to multilateral solutions to global challenges is a distinguishing characteristic of their conduct, even as the term 'middle power' encompasses a broad and diverse range of states.

The ascension of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States brought about a shift in the traditional dynamics of international relations, particularly for those democratic middle powers closely aligned with the United States. The "America First" policy, marked by skepticism

towards multilateral institutions and a propensity for unilateral action, created an unprecedented divergence in the international policy objectives between the United States and its democratic middle power allies.

Under the Trump administration, democratic middle powers witnessed a United States that appeared to be withdrawing from its traditional role as the leading advocate for democracy and human rights. This disconcerting shift, combined with an increasing emphasis on national interests and the skepticism towards multilateral cooperation, signaled a seismic shift in U.S. foreign policy. These developments instigated democratic middle powers to rethink their dependence on the United States and prompted them to seek alternative pathways to advance their diplomatic agendas.

The Trump presidency, despite its potential negative impact on democratic norms, inadvertently underscored the necessity for greater cooperation among democratic middle powers. This era illuminated the vulnerabilities inherent in the over-reliance on a single great power for the preservation of shared democratic values. Consequently, it catalyzed a newfound realization amongst democratic middle powers regarding the critical need for cooperative action independent of the United States.

Democratic middle powers such as Canada, Australia, and the member states of the European Union began to assert a more independent stance on various global issues. They stepped up to fill the leadership vacuum left by the United States, particularly in areas where U.S. engagement was lacking or counterproductive. Multilateral engagements, such as the Paris Climate Accord and the

Iran nuclear deal, witnessed the increased proactive participation of these democratic middle powers despite the U.S. withdrawal.

The newfound resilience and independence of democratic middle powers were not merely reactionary but also strategic. These nations recognized the value of their collective agency and influence in shaping international norms and policies. They saw the potential to foster a more balanced and inclusive global order that could withstand shifts in great power politics.

Recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic fluctuations, and climate change, have highlighted the roles and responsibilities of middle powers within the international system. This critical juncture has also emphasized the differential dynamics inherent within different forms of middle power cooperations and their interactions with great powers.

Middle power cooperation has seen a rise, particularly in the face of these global challenges. However, it's essential to distinguish between 'true' middle power cooperations, like MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, Australia), and cooperations that include great powers, such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) or SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation).

Cooperations involving great powers certainly yield benefits for middle powers involved, most notably in terms of resources and funds. For instance, BRICS nations have established the New Development Bank, which has been instrumental in providing financial resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in member countries. Simultaneously, the inclusion of middle

powers in these organizations provides great powers with a regional representation that bolsters their global influence.

Despite these advantages, cooperations among 'true' middle powers often yield even more substantial benefits. These middle power coalitions have a unique ability to pool their resources, share experiences, and develop joint solutions to tackle pressing global challenges. The absence of great powers within these coalitions avoids the risk of domination and ensures a more egalitarian distribution of responsibilities and benefits among member states.

The MIKTA coalition offers a prime example of the successful application of 'true' middle power cooperation. Here, we see an absence of great power influence, a convergence of democratic values, and a shared commitment to effective multilateralism. The group has worked collaboratively on issues such as climate change, economic development, and pandemic response, leveraging their collective diplomatic clout to influence international policy and promote shared interests.

Consequently, it can be argued that 'true' middle power coalitions, while often overlooked in favor of larger, more high-profile groups, offer a more effective and equitable platform for middle powers to exert influence on the global stage. They harness the collective strength of middle powers and serve as crucial actors in addressing global crises and shaping international norms.

The prominent example of such approach is Turkey. Turkey's geopolitical position, with its strategic location at the intersection of Europe and Asia, has long been an asset for its global engagement. Coupled with this are the nation's persistent aspirations to be recognized

as a significant international actor, which has led to an increasing emphasis on its status as a middle power and projected through its active involvement in middle power cooperation.

One of the clearest manifestations of Turkey's middle power diplomacy can be seen in its active involvement in the MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, Australia) coalition. As part of this middle power grouping, Turkey has been able to promote its interests, values, and perspectives at an international level, enhancing its diplomatic reach and influence. Through these multilateral engagements, Turkey has been able to voice its stance on various global issues, from sustainable development to conflict resolution, thereby asserting its role as an active and constructive international player.

Simultaneously, Turkey's strategic location at the crossroads of a particularly tumultuous region, the Near and Middle East, has positioned it as a vital hub and mediator. This geopolitical significance has offered Turkey various asymmetric opportunities. A case in point is its rapid emergence as a global leader in drone technology, defying traditional power hierarchies in the field of military technology. With the indigenous development and successful deployment of armed drones, Turkey has established itself as a pioneer in this domain, leveraging its newfound prowess to exert influence and shift power dynamics at both regional and global levels.

Furthermore, Turkey's proactive engagement with all powers involved in its surrounding region – including the European Union, Russia, and the United States – is indicative of its unique middle power diplomacy. Balancing

its relationships with these various powers allows Turkey to maintain a flexible and pragmatic foreign policy approach, all the while retaining its autonomy and expanding its influence.

In conclusion, Turkey's diplomatic positioning as a middle power, facilitated by strategic middle power cooperation and its unique geographical location, offers it multiple opportunities for asserting its global influence. Through a blend of regional mediation, technological advancements, and multilateral engagements, Turkey exemplifies how middle powers can harness their unique attributes to project their influence on the global stage.

On the other side of coin is Central Asia, traditionally recognized as a region of strategic interest for the world's major powers, continues to grapple with the complexities of proximity to powerful neighbors such as China and Russia. Historically, the 'Great Game', a term coined to represent the strategic rivalry and diplomatic maneuvering between the British Empire and the Russian Empire in Central Asia during the 19th and early 20th centuries, evolved into a geopolitical confrontation between the USA, Russia, and China in the region during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The region's wealth of natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, has also contributed to making it a hotbed of great power competition.

Amidst this dynamic environment, Kazakhstan, the largest and most economically potent country in the region, has been making efforts to establish itself as a regional and possibly a middle power. The country's potential for middle power status is not merely a factor of its considerable resource wealth and geographical size,

but also its strategic location, straddling the heartland of Eurasia and acting as a vital node in the new Silk Road Economic Belt initiated by China.

However, the heightened attention from the great powers has paradoxically limited the scope for regional cooperation and has posed significant challenges to Kazakhstan's aspirations. This has been particularly evident in recent years as the United States and the European Union have somewhat distanced themselves from the region, leading to an increased influence of Russia and China.

Consequently, Kazakhstan finds itself in a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, it must manage its relations with its powerful neighbors to ensure its sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the other hand, it must endeavor to cultivate broader international relationships to bolster its aspirations for greater autonomy and influence. In this context, middle power cooperation presents a valuable opportunity for Kazakhstan to engage more broadly and diversify its external relations.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan's role as a regional power is of considerable importance to the other Central Asian countries. It acts as a 'living wall', buffering them from the direct influence of great powers. This crucial role underlines the need for further engagement from other middle powers and greater international attention to the region. A collaborative middle power approach could potentially facilitate greater regional unity, foster cooperative security, and contribute to the development of a more balanced and diversified international order in Central Asia.

Conclusions

With the dawn of this fresh epoch of global political instability, the urgency for capable international governance – adept at adjusting to the fluid dynamics of global power – becomes paramount. The demand extends beyond mere reform; these institutions must fundamentally metamorphose to curtail escalating power struggles, thereby buttressing their legitimacy and potency within the international arena.

At their core, international organizations serve as conduits for cooperation and dialogue among nations. Nonetheless, they can also precipitate contention, providing a platform for articulating alternative perspectives and brokering shifts in power dynamics. Herein, middle powers and burgeoning economies frequently assume a pivotal role, endeavoring to bridge the chasm between the entrenched great powers and the developing world.

In effect, the continual evolution of the international order is inextricably intertwined with the transformative narratives of these middle powers and emerging economies. Their strategic maneuvers, both regionally and globally, reflect their adaptive strategies in navigating the complexities of global governance. Their increasing assertiveness, coupled with strategic alliances and multilateral collaborations, signals a critical shift in the dynamics of global power.

In the intricate dynamics of international politics, a peculiar paradox often surfaces, predominantly affecting the central players – the great powers. Possessing a disproportionate degree of influence and resources, these entities are intrinsically primed to be the pivotal instigators of change. They have the capability to mould international norms, spur transformative initiatives, and delineate the course of global policies. However, the irony resides in their deep-rooted investment in the system that endows them with the means to exercise such dominance.

The existing international order – characterized by norms, treaties, alliances, and institutions – essentially functions as a medium for the projection of the influence of these great powers. It operates as the stage where their political, economic, and military prowess is acknowledged and implemented. The more extensive a power's investment in this system, the more effective it becomes in asserting its interests and preserving its hegemonic status. Thus, the system evolves into a double-edged sword. It provides the instruments for control and manipulation, but simultaneously, it ties the hands of the wielder to its preservation.

This engenders a profound paradox for the great powers. Their potential to propel systemic change is hampered by their very dependency on the existing system. Their continued dominance hinges on the status quo, which is frequently discordant with the radical change they could potentially champion and enforce.

In the face of calls for systemic reform in international governance or global financial architecture, these powers find themselves ensnared in a conundrum. They possess

the capacity to advocate for reform, but doing so might risk upsetting the dynamics that favour them. Likewise, responding to calls for enhanced multilateralism or democratization of international institutions leaves these powers treading a tightrope between placating demands for reform and safeguarding their vested interests.

The essence of this irony, therefore, resides in the delicate equilibrium between power and change. While great powers are optimally positioned to instigate systemic changes, they are simultaneously the most invested in preserving the structures that uphold their privileged position. It is this very investment that frequently culminates in a deadlock, with the potential for reform being undermined by the forces that hold the capacity to initiate it.

The paradox of the great powers, therefore, stems from their fundamental dilemma: whether to commence transformative changes that could potentially destabilize their hegemony, or to maintain the status quo that secures their dominance but could potentially lead to systemic redundancy. This ironic predicament naturally raises the question: Should they instigate these changes, or is there an alternative that doesn't result in systemic inertia?

Arguably, the most feasible solution to this conundrum is a gradual but decisive transformation. While immediate and drastic overhauls could undoubtedly shake the power structures, a series of calculated, progressive modifications could strike a balance between the necessity for change and the stability of power dynamics. This approach necessitates a reframing of conventional perspectives on power and influence, shifting from domination towards stewardship.

As stewards, great powers could transition to becoming architects of change rather than its impediments, guiding the system's evolution to reflect the changing realities of global politics. They would strive to create an environment conducive to shared decision-making and more equitable power distribution, while concurrently ensuring the stability and integrity of the system that enables their influence.

This transformative shift from domination to stewardship could manifest in various ways. It might encompass more transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, increased recognition and accommodation of emerging powers, and proactive efforts to address systemic disparities. The objective wouldn't be to dismantle power structures, but rather to mould them into more adaptive, responsive, and representative frameworks.

In this ironic twist, by choosing to champion this shift, the great powers could indeed be securing their own relevance in the evolving international order. The alternative – clinging to outmoded structures of power – risks leading to redundancy and obsolescence. As the global political landscape continues to shift, so too must the actors that shape it. Therefore, the ironic solution to the paradox of the great powers may indeed be to embrace the very change they appear most poised to resist.

Nevertheless, the dispositions of great powers are often marked by an overt focus on maintaining the status quo rather than instigating significant changes within the operational frameworks of international institutions. This tendency towards the status quo primarily stems from their strategic interests in retaining their dominance

and influence within the global arena. As such, instead of investing in the transformation of institutional frameworks, great powers tend to consolidate their regional presence to compensate for any potential loss of influence within these institutions.

In the light of these dynamics, the strategies adopted by great powers often involve bolstering their regional footprints, especially when their global influence appears to waver or is under threat. Cognizant of the difficulties entailed in bringing about substantial changes in international organizations, these powers opt for strategies that amplify their regional presence and thus reinforce their overall influence in international affairs.

Within this context, it is notable that the contemporary landscape of multilateral regional cooperation is increasingly characterized by a dispersion of power. Great powers, through their concerted efforts to enhance their regional clout, are instrumental in this evolving paradigm. However, it is vital to acknowledge the concurrent rise of middle powers and their increasingly conspicuous role in addressing regional issues. Despite the attempts of great powers to retain their preponderant status, middle powers are progressively exerting influence, effectively contributing to a more complex and multipolar regional and global order.

This multiplicity of actors and the diffusion of power within the regional context indicate a shift from a traditionally unipolar or bipolar international system to a more complex and nuanced multilateral landscape. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is essential to analyse and predict the future trajectories of

international politics and the evolving role of international institutions therein.

In this era of escalating global challenges, spanning climate change, pandemics, economic disparity, nuclear proliferation, and the rising tide of cyber threats, it becomes increasingly apparent that these transboundary issues demand transnational solutions. These challenges defy the confines of national borders and mandate an unprecedented level of international cooperation. This narrative has spurred a burgeoning discourse focusing on the evolving roles of middle powers and regional cooperation in the navigation of these global complexities.

Middle powers, defined as nations that wield moderate influence on the international stage yet do not qualify as superpowers, are progressively assuming more pronounced roles within the global governance framework. With their unique positions, they can serve as mediators, creators of norms, and connectors between the global North and South, thereby actively contributing to the resolution of intricate global issues.

The imperative to thoroughly understand middle powers from a multifaceted perspective arises from their intricate roles in international politics. Middle powers are more than simply state actors sandwiched between great powers and minor powers; they are active contributors with distinctive roles and tactics in the global theater. Their identities are shaped by a mix of their historical imprints, regional contexts, economic interdependencies, and ideological underpinnings.

Middle powers hold a significant, yet often underappreciated, niche in the international system.

These nations are generally marked by their intermediate economic and military prowess, balanced geopolitical sway, and allegiance to multilateral diplomacy and international law.

Middle powers, acting as rational entities within the international system, interact with international institutions to further their national interests, mitigate uncertainty, and reap the benefits of cooperation. However, they are not just passive recipients; these middle powers are also subject to the normative influences of the institutions in which they participate. Institutions can thus shape middle powers' identities, interests, and behavioral norms. This dual dynamic fosters a more refined understanding of the reciprocal influences between middle powers and international organizations, factoring in both instrumental gains and normative effects.

Incorporating middle powers into international organizations is beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, middle powers, often occupying a unique position between the developed and developing world, can offer invaluable insights. Their balanced outlook on global challenges can help bridge the gap between the global North and South.

Secondly, middle powers wield considerable diplomatic and normative power. They can use this influence to champion specific principles and norms within international organizations, which could encompass advocacy for human rights, democracy, or environmental sustainability. Their influence can also extend to agenda-setting and steering conversations towards these important areas.

Finally, middle powers can facilitate changes within international organizations without formally altering their structures. Their diplomatic initiatives can subtly transform the cultures and practices of these institutions, enabling procedural alterations from within. Such changes can include promoting transparency in decision-making, fostering inclusivity, and advocating for better representation of various regions and interests. An exemplification of this is the MIKTA group of middle powers, comprising Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia, which has been pushing for reform in the United Nations' practices and procedures.

As was already mentioned, reforming international organizations represents a significant challenge in the realm of global governance. This is due, in large part, to the vested interests of great powers in maintaining the status quo, given that these existing structures often underpin their dominance. As such, any significant proposed reforms may face resistance from these powers who perceive a threat to their established privileges and power positions.

In contrast, middle powers typically face fewer constraints when it comes to reforming international organizations. They attract less attention and therefore are less likely to provoke strong opposition or engender geopolitical rivalries. Furthermore, because they lack the ability to dominate global governance structures, middle powers have less invested in preserving the status quo and are more open to changes that could make these institutions more representative, efficient, and effective.

This relative freedom allows middle powers to exploit opportunities to instigate or support reforms. This may

involve lobbying for procedural changes, promoting inclusivity, and pushing for greater transparency within these organizations. A case in point is the role of countries like Canada, Norway, and Australia in advocating for reforms within the United Nations system, including the Security Council.

However, it's important to note that while middle powers can capitalize on these opportunities, their capacity to drive substantial reforms should not be overestimated. Changes in international organizations usually require a wider consensus that encompasses both middle and great powers. Consequently, the effectiveness of middle powers in initiating and advancing reforms often relies on their diplomatic skills, strategic alliances, and the prevailing geopolitical context.

Middle powers have been influential in shaping and implementing humanitarian action. They often have the resources, credibility, and diplomatic capacity to advocate for and facilitate humanitarian efforts. Countries like Canada, Norway, and Sweden, for instance, have played significant roles in shaping global norms around humanitarian intervention and in mobilizing responses to humanitarian crises. By leveraging their institutional agency within international organizations, these middle powers can help to prioritize humanitarian action on the global agenda and coordinate effective responses.

Middle powers also have a long-standing tradition of acting as mediators in international disputes, using their 'in-between' status to bridge divides between conflicting parties. By providing impartial spaces for negotiation and

leveraging their diplomatic networks, middle powers can contribute to the maintenance of

Policy options that align with the inherent behavioral characteristics of middle powers typically stand the highest chance of success. These characteristics include modest ambitions, pursuit of stability and balance in the international system, a drive for international coalition-building by acting as intermediaries, resolution of global issues through multilateral efforts, resistance to significant alterations of the international system, attempts to mitigate security dilemmas of great powers through regional and cooperative bridging alignments, and a focus on issues of low politics. The majority of these strategies involve complex interactions due to their content or the need for multilateral action, which underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder diplomacy as an auxiliary layer to middle power foreign policies.

The non-confrontational demeanor of middle powers illustrates their lack of desire for domineering hegemonic roles, with a preference for stability and balance instead. This pursuit has led to orthodox or idealistic conceptualizations that depict middle powers as being 'trustworthy' or 'good international citizens', signifying a higher moral ground. Nonetheless, this attitude of middle powers leans more towards pragmatism than idealism.

At the international or regional level, middle powers typically strive for stability and balance of power via diplomatic cooperation, as these conditions afford them the greatest benefits. Their aversion to tensions and crises leads them to undertake efforts to constrain and manage such situations. This pragmatic approach is also reflected

in their understanding of international organizations and legal structures, emphasizing their commitment to maintaining stability and balance.

A distinction in modern diplomacy lies in the shift from traditional middle power diplomacy, where interactions occur primarily among state agencies, to a more inclusive approach that necessitates the participation of non-state actors. Contemporary diplomatic practices not only call for the incorporation of multilateral platforms but also require non-state actors' involvement. Consequently, non-state actors sharing similar interests and expectations can bolster the voice of middle powers in international and regional forums.

Despite the potential benefits of revising the international system, such as reducing the dominance of great powers and thereby providing middle powers with increased manoeuvring space, middle powers typically avoid pursuing such revisionism. They perceive these transformations as destabilizing factors and instead aspire to contribute to international stability through consensus-building measures.

Middle powers strive for a more inclusive global political landscape, characterized by reduced polarization, fewer crises, less coercion, and increased pluralistic participation from countries of diverse power and influence levels. In such an inclusive system of interactions, middle powers can more effectively fulfil their roles as intermediaries and conflict mediators.

Acting as a "go-between" allows middle powers to engage with great powers and tackle complex power alignments. As suggested by Spero (2009), this could

enable middle powers to influence and potentially alleviate security dilemmas of great powers through regional and cooperative bridging alignments. Such bridging embodies the attitude of a 'good international citizen' adopted by middle powers, serving to mitigate regional security dilemmas by aligning with all neighbouring states.

These state-to-state linkages foster closer relationships that aim to contain threatening alignments, rather than pitting countries against each other, resorting to neutrality, or distancing through non-alignment. Middle powers hold the potential to bridge the gap between changes in the material incentives of other powers and their influence on the fundamental causal mechanisms and concepts underpinning foreign policy decision-making. As Glaser posited, the efficacy of middle power bridging hinges on the premise that cooperative policies significantly influence international relations.

The policy options of middle powers are guided by a distinctive set of principles that promote consent, inclusion, mediation, and stabilization. Importantly, middle powers often adopt a non-aggressive stance in alliance-building measures, emphasizing moral values and epistemic notions over competitive ambitions. The lack of ambition that typically characterizes middle powers also reflects in their foreign policy focus. They primarily concentrate on low politics issues – issues not crucial for the state's survival but significant for its welfare. While middle powers cannot entirely extricate themselves from high politics issues, they usually refrain from spearheading them to avoid becoming casualties in the wrangling of great powers.

An illustrative example of the extent of middle powers' influence on international security is the structure of the United Nations Security Council, comprising both permanent and non-permanent members. Contrarily, low politics issues such as peace, environment, and human rights, tend to be less contentious. Given that there is generally more consensus among great powers regarding these issues, middle powers are less likely to be bypassed, purged, or victimized.

The aforementioned policy options pertaining to middle powers should not be viewed as definitively formulated theoretical constructs. Rather, the concept of a 'middle power' is inherently fluid and necessitates ongoing reconsideration in light of the ever-evolving dynamics of the international system. Middle powers find themselves in perpetual interaction with regional perceptions, economic development trends, and the policies of great powers.

Consequently, these policy options demand constant reassessment and reevaluation to accommodate possibilities for evolutionary change. This inherent fluidity makes the policy options of middle powers inherently unpredictable, as they are contingent upon a complex milieu of perceptions, reactions, and interests.

The ascendancy of informalism in global politics brings to the forefront a wider range of actors. It expands representation beyond the traditional Western elite, previously encapsulated within G7, and allows middle powers a more direct route to influence global politics. The establishment of the G20 marks a turning point, opening up avenues for diplomatic practices previously relegated to the periphery.

Conceptually, groupings like BRICS and MIKTA serve as benchmarks for how inclusive informalism will be, evolving from understated diplomatic forums to high-profile summit processes. The transformation of BRICS, in particular, has not been solely a reaction to perceived systemic inequities. It has also been driven by its members' self-perception as emerging powers that warrant increased recognition within the global system.

Despite some setbacks to their anticipated roles as middle powers, their distinctive form of multilateralism can be evaluated based on four fundamental characteristics. These traits enable such states to form coalitions, encourage collaboration, and promote the collective good in an international system absent a dominating hegemon:

1. A pronounced desire to contribute to global governance: Middle powers exhibit a strong commitment towards contributing to the functioning and enhancement of global governance structures. They are often willing to invest in international institutions, recognising the value they hold in addressing global challenges and ensuring world order.

2. Increased efforts to seek reforms and upgrade status in the global governance system: Middle powers frequently advocate for a more equitable distribution of power within the global governance framework. These states strive to increase their international stature by influencing reforms and enhancing their status within the global system.

3. Normative and ideational commitments to solving global problems: Middle powers typically espouse

strong normative and ideational commitments towards resolving international issues. They often endeavour to bridge gaps between the Global North and South, attempting to promote consensus and facilitate problem-solving on global issues.

4. Strong alignment with (or bridging between) the North and the South: Middle powers often occupy a unique position in international politics, effectively serving as bridges between developed and developing nations. This allows them to create dialogues, form alliances, and mediate between diverse interests and perspectives.

The role of influential "club" groupings such as the G20 is under increasing scrutiny from a wide array of social forces who expect them to confront systemic challenges ranging from environmental to economic. Critically, these crises encompass threats posed by potentially catastrophic global climate change and the reassessment of the advantages of international trade flows.

Critics argue that a key failing of the G20 is its seeming incapacity or lack of will to address these systemic challenges robustly. This sentiment is compounded by a backlash against a prevailing ethos that advocates for cooperative internationalism over the sovereignty of individual nation-states, thus challenging the precepts of rules-based multilateralism.

In some significant G20 nations, public opinion and governments exhibit growing discomfort with economic globalization and international solidarity. This sentiment is often driven by widening socio-economic inequalities within countries and the ensuing populist pressures. As a

result, these political dynamics add a layer of complexity to the already challenging task of effective middle power diplomacy.

The rise of nationalistic sentiments, embodied in slogans such as 'my country first,' within key G20 states has led critics to contest the capacity of this international group to champion the broader, global common good. The legitimacy of the G20 is under siege not just from external entities, non-member states affected by the systemic implications of G20 policy decisions, but also from within its own ranks.

The ramifications of these criticisms extend beyond the mere political sphere, stirring societal backlash that threatens the very raison d'etre of the G20. This societal discontent might also compromise governments' motivation to endorse cooperative ventures in the future. Hence, such an environment further compounds the complexities faced by middle powers, challenging their ability to exercise influence within multilateral forums.

In concluding, it is pertinent to recognize the vital role that middle powers play in the ever-evolving global order. They operate in a unique capacity, possessing neither the overwhelming force of great powers nor the relative obscurity of small nations. Through this unique position, middle powers act as a slow, but steady, force for reform within global institutions such as the United Nations. They do not seek to upend the current world order but aim to gradually shift the dynamics of these organizations, pushing for increased representation, equity, and responsiveness to a wider array of global issues.

On a regional level, the role of middle powers is even more pronounced. Acting as conductors, they navigate

the space between great powers and the rest of the region, forging relationships, building trust, and facilitating dialogue. Through regional organizations, middle powers can exert considerable influence, shaping policies and priorities that directly affect their regions.

Moreover, the act of cooperation between middle powers itself is a noteworthy phenomenon. Through frameworks such as the G20 or regional alliances like ASEAN and MIKTA, middle powers engage in diplomatic maneuvering, strategic dialogue, and collaborative action. These platforms offer middle powers the opportunity to assert their interests, contribute to decision-making processes, and engage with their peers on an equal footing.

Ultimately, the architecture of the future world order is dependent not just on the dynamics between great powers, but also on the effectiveness of middle power cooperation. The interplay between these factors – the rivalry of the great powers and the ability of middle powers to navigate this competition, as well as their capacity for collaboration and reform – will shape the contours of global governance in the decades to come.

This nuanced understanding of middle powers' role underscores their importance in the broader geopolitical landscape. Their strategic positioning, capacity for cooperation, and ability to effect gradual reform make middle powers vital actors in the emerging world order. As the global community grapples with complex, intertwined challenges, the role of middle powers will become increasingly important, meriting continued exploration and understanding in future research and discussions.

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MIRAS ZHIYENBAYEV

WIDENING
THE
SCOPE

HOW MIDDLE POWERS ARE CHANGING LIBERAL INSTITUTIONALISM

Miras Zhiyenbayev is Kazakh scholar, who has developed an extensive profile within the fields of international relations and international political economy. His current position is as the Lead Expert within the Department of European and American Studies at the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, a renowned think tank under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Zhiyenbayev's principal areas of academic expertise span the theory of international relations, the foreign policy of Kazakhstan, and comparative democratization studies.

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