

Preface

The global community faces challenges that are more complex than ever. Climate change, terrorism, the rise of artificial intelligence—in none of these areas will it be possible to find answers and solutions as a single nation state. At the same time, we seem to be witnessing a comeback of “nation first” and unilateral decision-making.

The current narrative is that the hegemon, the United States (US), is in a state of decline, while the new great power of China is rising and the old American arch enemy Russia is re-emerging on the world stage after almost 30 years of living in the shadow. The world is in turmoil, traditional patterns of international cooperation are being questioned, the big powers are guided by self-interest and no single force can control them—neither the United Nations Security Council nor other countries. States are falling back to a time when they argued from a position of strength, used force to impose their will and ignored the mutual benefits of collaborative actions within the international community. For many observers, especially in the non-Western world, the liberal world order which has shaped the international system for years is not serving its purpose anymore, and the election of Donald Trump as the US President and guardian of this system is the final symbol of this demise.

Is this really the case? How much of this narrative withstands a reality check? Are we really living at this critical junction of time when the world will be dominated by a new superpower, or is our international system just evolving and morphing? Without a doubt, changes are taking place and many of the existing multilateral mechanisms are being questioned regarding their efficiency and whether they are still timely. It is also no secret that these multilateral tools will need to be reformed in order for them to stay relevant, yet change is inevitable and often only reflects processes that are happening elsewhere anyway.

In this book, experts from Europe, Asia and North America will shed light on the current developments in the international order. The papers analyse patterns and different forms of multilateralism. We look at key countries influencing the world order and put these states as well as their behaviour into context. The experts also discuss whether the world actually sees a change within multilateralism, transitioning from a global stage to a more efficient regional or thematic definition of multilateral collaboration. Finally, we will examine “multilateralism at work” between Europe and Asia in selected

policy fields that are by now traditional examples of transnational challenges requiring multilateral solutions—migration, climate change, security, and economics.

Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large Tommy Koh, who has vast experience in multilateral cooperation in different areas and in several regions of the world, sets the tone for this publication in his foreword: This book aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on the future of multilateralism and provide pragmatic insights beyond the at times heated discussion and dark scenarios.

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