



America and International Cooperation: What Role for a League of Democracies?

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Key Points

- **Proponents of a league or concert of democracies share several assumptions.** They agree that in a world of new transnational threats such as catastrophic terrorism, deadly infectious disease, and global warming, the United States needs robust, sustained international cooperation to make itself secure and prosperous. They dismiss the effectiveness of the United Nations in responding to these threats and attribute failures either to the universal nature of the United Nations, where all 192 member states are equal and therefore prone to deadlock, or to the disproportionate role given to key authoritarian states, especially Russia and China. And while they may differ on the exact functions of the league or concert, they agree that one of its key roles will be to legitimate the use of force by states.
- **The United States does need greater cooperation to counter transnational threats, but a concert/league is unlikely to elicit that cooperation and indeed, will endanger existing cooperation.** International institutions are not as weak as proponents of a league or concert contend: in some areas, cooperation is good between democratic and authoritarian states; in other areas, democracies themselves are responsible for inadequate cooperation.
- **To elicit greater cooperation in addressing transnational threats, US foreign policy and its leadership style must change.** A key problem over the last eight years has been the United States: on many issues it has been at odds with the rest of the world, including its close allies. To obtain the cooperation it needs for its security and prosperity, the United States must create new relationships with the major and rising powers and rebuild trust and confidence.
- **What is needed is not an organization that will divide the world into democracies and nondemocracies, but a new institution that will help the United States, and major and rising powers cooperate on shared transnational threats.** This new institution would replace the current Group of Eight (G-8) with a new Group of Sixteen (G-16) that would include Brazil, China, India, South Africa, Mexico (the "Outreach 5") and Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt, which are key Muslim majority states. A G-16 could act as a pre-negotiating forum, a place where the smallest possible grouping of necessary stakeholders can meet to forge agreements on the parameters of responses to major global challenges. Its convening power, the collective weight of its economies and diplomatic and military capacities, and its combined populations would create an unparalleled platform to catalyze and mobilize effective international action: in essence a steering mechanism to navigate the turbulence of transnational threats and the changing distribution of power among key states in the international system.

Democracies and Global Cooperation: League, Concert, or Non Sequitur?

In his foreign policy stump speech, Senator John McCain has put forward a bold idea for a new international institution: a league of democracies. Senator McCain argues that because of authoritarian powers such as Russia and China, the United Nations is failing to produce the cooperation that the United States needs today. The obvious antidote is an alternative organization, the league, which excludes the authoritarian states and admits only democracies. The league, McCain contends, will heal all or most of what ails us:

It could act where the UN fails to act, to relieve human suffering in places like Darfur. It could join to fight the AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa and fashion better policies to confront the crisis of our environment. It could provide unimpeded market access to those who share the values of economic and political freedom, an advantage no state-based system could attain. It could bring concerted pressure to bear on tyrants in Burma or Zimbabwe, with or without Moscow's and Beijing's approval. It could unite to impose sanctions on Iran and thwart its nuclear ambitions. It could provide support to struggling democracies in Ukraine and Serbia and help countries like Thailand back on the path to democracy.¹

Powerful stuff, that democracy.

So powerful, in fact, that the vision of democratic states aligned in common purpose to cooperate against today's threats finds support across the American political spectrum. Two prominent academics, John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, first suggested the idea of a concert of democracies as a means of strengthening the reform of the United Nations, and if such reform were to fail, as a possible alternative to the United Nations.² Central to their case for a concert is the argument that it could be an alternative source of legitimation for the use of force.³ Their case was picked up and furthered by two supporters of Barack Obama, James Lindsay and Ivo Daalder, and endorsed by Anthony Lake, one of Obama's top foreign policy advisers.⁴

These rather unconventional bedfellows have several common assumptions. First, they agree that in a world of new transnational threats such as catastrophic terrorism, deadly infectious disease,

and global warming, the United States needs robust, sustained international cooperation to make itself secure and prosperous.⁵ Second, they dismiss the effectiveness of the UN in responding to these threats,⁶ and third, they attribute that failure either to the universal nature of the United Nations—where all 192 member states are equal and therefore prone to deadlock—or to the disproportionate role given to key authoritarian states, especially Russia and China.

It is hard to dispute that the United States needs greater international cooperation to protect itself from transnational threats. Having said that, however, it is hard to see the logic chain between America's need for greater global cooperation and the proposed solution of a league/concert of democracies. The proponents suggest several different roles for the league/concert:

- To legitimize the international use of force by states.
- To assist democracies in constructing common interests and pursuing them globally.
- To get reform of the United Nations.
- To act independently of the United Nations.

These are enough significantly different functions to imagine that support for a league/concert might depend on what it is expected to do. For the most part, however, proponents have bunched these functions together, *intensifying* the opposition to the concept. Some might support the league/concert were it only a device to help democracies find and pursue shared interests, but will run and hide if it is a potential competitor to the United Nations. As much as some backers of the league have insisted that it will not be a competitor to the United Nations, its embrace by many neoconservatives does little to calm worries.⁷

Who will be part of the league/concert? Here, its proponents have been vague. Daalder and Lindsay mention that it would have approximately 60 democracies; McCain mentions 100. It is unclear by what standards a country qualifies as a democracy. Even among 60, let alone 100 countries, democratic performance on key measures such as electoral pluralism, political participation, and civil liberties differs dramatically.

What of its decision making rules? Again, proponents have been silent, but this is a crucial issue, especially if the institution will be passing judg-

ment on use of force. Given the disdain that proponents have for consensus rules, one would assume that a majority or supermajority could decide for the institution. (After all, a vote to authorize force in the Security Council needs to overcome just five vetoes; would a vote in the league/concert have to overcome 60 to 100?) Moreover, to the extent that a league or concert of democracies operated on democratic principles, it would enhance its legitimacy. Are sovereign states today, especially democracies that clearly base their own legitimacy on their responsiveness to their own citizens, ready to accept majority judgments on something so essential to international order such as use of force? These difficult questions have yet to be answered, but will likely affect the ardor of would-be supporters.

The Debate So Far

The proposal has been attacked on several grounds:

- This is a made-in-America idea that has few takers in other democracies, especially in the developing world.⁸
- Democracies always disagree about their interests and would not be able to cohere into a unified alliance; even their shared values cannot contain important differences on questions of humanitarian intervention.⁹
- There already exists a similar organization, the Community of Democracies, which has been disappointing.¹⁰
- This risks a new Cold War between democratic and nondemocratic states at a time when most transnational problems require the cooperation of important authoritarian states.¹¹
- This risks turning China from a partner in addressing global threats to an adversary.¹²
- This will undermine the United Nations.¹³

These are sensible objections, although some of them contradict each other; if there is no support for the proposal and democracies cannot come together on key interests and values, it is hard to see how it will start a new Cold War between democracies and authoritarians. Of course, then, it is also hard to see how it would produce the cooperation the United States needs.

Proponents retort:

- We need greater cooperation against today's threats, and our current arrangements are insufficient.

- Maybe other democracies don't want it, but there's no harm in asking.¹⁴
- This will be different from the Community of Democracies because our standards of membership will be higher.¹⁵
- It will not replace the United Nations, but strengthen it by giving the democracies inside it a louder voice.¹⁶
- The reason for creating a new institution for democracies is precisely because institutions help states construct shared interests.¹⁷

Opponents fire back:

- There is harm in pursuing such an international arrangement because it will cause the president to lose focus and spend an enormous amount of diplomatic energy and attention, with little likelihood to show for it.¹⁸
- Any alternative to the United Nations that believes it too possesses the legitimacy to authorize the use of force will undermine the United Nations.¹⁹
- Any use of force by a self-selecting group of democratic states will not generate legitimacy beyond that group.²⁰

What we have not heard yet is a discussion of the premise of the league/concert: the United States needs greater international cooperation that current institutions are incapable of providing.

If this premise is correct, then it is incumbent on critics of the league to offer an alternative. It's not enough to say that this is a potential drain of time and attention. This is true of any attempt to fix the international architecture, which is hard work that does not yield payoffs until sometime in the future. America's current foreign policy predicament is that it needs international institutions and wants them to be better, but those institutions are weak because the United States did not invest the time, attention, and resources years ago to improve them.

As will become clear from my analysis, the United States does need a new institution to tackle global transnational threats, but not a league or concert of democracies.

A Primer on Global Cooperation Against Transnational Threats

To arrive at a US grand strategy, the American debate must first rest on accurate conceptions of

the global security system. In this regard, there are seven misconceptions driving the current Washington debate about the need for revitalized multilateral cooperation between democracies to battle both traditional threats and new, “non-traditional,” transnational threats in the present global system. These misconceptions are as follows:

1. The primary problem or blockage resides with the United Nations.
2. Multilateral cooperation in battling transnational threats is largely dismal, with few real accomplishments to date.
3. Global and regional problems can be solved most effectively by concentrating on cooperation among democratic states alone.
4. Democracies and authoritarian states do not (and generally cannot) cooperate effectively with each other.
5. Cooperation on solving common global threats or problems has been stifled, especially or primarily by authoritarian regimes.
6. US policy goals and tactics are not a primary cause of the current multilateral malaise.
7. There is a distinct lack of viable venues outside the UN for the legitimization of the use of force.

To answer each of these misconceptions or assumptions in turn:

1. *The league is aimed directly at the United Nations, but the United Nations is not central to the fight against many transnational threats. Where the United Nations is involved, the league/concert proponents are too quick to dismiss its performance.*

Proponents of the league all set their sights on the United Nations, usually dwelling on two issues—its ineffectiveness in supplying humanitarian military intervention in cases of mass atrocity such as Darfur, and its quiescence in the face of gross human rights violations by some of the worst regimes, for example, Zimbabwe and Myanmar. Fair enough: the United Nations has dithered in these cases, and it is important to explain why.

Having said that, however, the United Nations is not the key actor in responding to the transnational threats to which the proponents of the league allude. It is a minor player against terrorism. It is a cheerleader for addressing climate change, but few serious analysts believe that the most difficult issues will be negotiated in the General Assembly.

It rallies support for global public health and the fight against deadly infectious disease, but the focal point for international cooperation is the World Health Organization (WHO). In the fight against nuclear proliferation, the real action is in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and only every once in a while, the Security Council. In development, the United Nations is a minor player compared to the World Bank.

Its one undisputed contribution to international security cooperation is mediation and implementation of peace agreements in civil wars. Darfur gets the headlines; the other 18 peacekeeping missions with over 100,000 peacekeepers deployed are ignored.²¹ As has been documented repeatedly, since 1992 there has been almost a 40 percent reduction in the numbers of civil wars in the world; both the intensity and lethality of civil wars have dropped as well.²² More civil wars have ended through negotiation and mediation in the last 17 years than in the previous 200. The United Nations has played a role in most of those settlements. Last year only the United States deployed more troops into the field than the United Nations. The UN may have weaknesses in its peace operations, but tough outside evaluators rate them both effective and cost-efficient.²³

The sweeping condemnation of UN peacekeeping by league proponents seems rooted in the UN’s failures in the first years of the 1990s, especially in Bosnia. Of course, it was the European democracies that chose to deal with Bosnia by sending peacekeepers into a hot war, with a limited mandate to deliver humanitarian aid. The *first* failure of Bosnia was not the UN’s, but the decision by key member states to send peacekeepers to stop aggression, atrocity, and ethnic cleansing; that those member states were all democracies and some of America’s closest allies suggests that this is a problem that runs much deeper than regime type.

2. *The record of global cooperation varies by issue area, with high levels of cooperation against some transnational threats and low levels of cooperation against others.*

International cooperation is probably the highest in global public health. The National Institute of Health’s evaluation of international response to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

argues that the responses of WHO and its Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) were excellent.²⁴ GOARN pushed China from evasion to cooperation, coordinated 11 national laboratories to diagnose the disease in thirty days, issued strong public travel warnings, and was instrumental in stopping the disease in less than four months. Most analysts agree that international cooperation has been even better in containing Avian flu and preparing for the next influenza pandemic.

Despite being negotiated in the World Health Assembly, a universal forum of democratic and nondemocratic states, 192 countries agreed to far-reaching revisions in the International Health Regulations in 2005. Many of the revisions impose intrusive obligations on sovereign states in terms of reporting deadly disease, accepting outside health investigation and response, and assisting countries in distress.

On some issues cooperation is not optimum, but better than analysts presume. As mentioned above, the last eighteen years have seen a sea change in how international actors respond to civil war, with mediation being the norm and peacekeepers often being deployed to implement agreements. Robust cooperation in the toughest cases remains elusive, but overall cooperative efforts to manage civil war have systematically reduced the frequency and lethality of those wars in the last twenty years.

On proliferation of nuclear weapons, the record of international cooperation is more troubling. The key bargain that was supposed to motivate cooperation has broken down; the United States and the other nuclear weapon states have done little to fulfill their obligations of working towards nuclear disarmament. American pursuit of a bilateral nuclear deal with India, a nonsignatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), casts further cooperation in doubt.

What about international cooperation in the face of NPT violations by North Korea and Iran? In the case of the former, key states—China, South Korea and Russia—were never going to cooperate solely in a policy of sanctions and threats. As long as that was the basis of American policy—as it was between 2002 and 2007—international cooperation was not forthcoming. Since the United States engaged North Korea as part of the

Six-Party talks in 2007, it has received excellent cooperation from China and South Korea.

Iran is a tougher case. Key states, such as Russia, China, and India have business and energy dealings with the regime. They have been skeptical of an American-led strategy that relied solely on sanctions, for fear that road could be used by the United States to justify an attack against Iran. Nonetheless, the IAEA governing board did vote in February 2006 to report Iran to the Security Council. (Interestingly, China, Russia, and Egypt—all authoritarian states—voted affirmatively; South Africa and Indonesia, key democratic states in the developing world, abstained). When the United States chose a mixed strategy that combined diplomatic incentives with sanctions, cooperation from China and Russia increased.

What of humanitarian disasters and rapacious governments? The legitimacy of intervention in situations of mass atrocity is at an all-time high and has been codified by the General Assembly of the United Nations in what is known as “the Responsibility to Protect.” But while humanitarian intervention may be more legitimate today, it is not any more practical or prudent. It is easy but simplistic to blame Russia and China.

Military intervention in an ongoing civil war is difficult, nasty business that seldom finds takers. We are learning this lesson now in Afghanistan, where the intervention is legitimated by Security Council resolution and carried out by NATO, the world’s strongest military alliance, consisting solely of democratic states. In Darfur there are few takers for robust military action, and this is as true of democracies as nondemocracies. In the absence of direct military force to stop the killing, governments have pursued an alternative strategy – a negotiated settlement that will provide a necessary political framework for peacekeepers to help keep the peace. In contrast to popular perceptions, China supports a settlement and has used its influence to persuade Sudan to negotiate. In the absence of such a settlement the United States and the European Union (EU) have pushed for the use of peacekeepers as *a substitute for* a political framework. The parallels to the 1990s and Bosnia and UNPROFOR are clear, where in the absence of states being willing to take forceful action to stop the violence, the states deploy peacekeepers to protect victims and deliver humanitarian aid. This is a doctrinal failure, but

one that comes from an unwillingness of governments to do more.

Arguably the least amount of cooperation is not in the field of humanitarian intervention, but in climate change. The clock is ticking, yet we lack any agreement or serious framework for responding to the problem. The failure of American policy to treat global warming as a serious problem surely accounts for much of this dismal level of cooperation.

3. *Today's problems cannot be addressed without the systematic engagement of nondemocratic states.*

Slowing climate change, tackling the problems associated with terrorism, and slowing the spread of deadly infectious disease cannot be managed short of working with major powers that would be marginalized through the creation of a league/concert of democracies. It's hard to see any prospect of walking back North Korea's nuclearization without close cooperation from China. Any framework for addressing global warming will have to include the active participation of China. Deadly infectious disease and pandemics need the cooperation of all member states, not just 60 or 100 democracies. Nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament requires the support and participation of Russia. Global cooperation against terrorism needs the participation and inclusion of key authoritarian Middle-East states. American and European sanctions and incentives towards Iran for its nuclear activities have proven insufficient; in the absence of concerted action with China and Russia, it is hard to imagine how the crisis will be resolved.

4. *In some issue areas there is good cooperation between democratic and authoritarian states.*

A closer look at global cooperation shows that many governments are able to put aside differences in regime type to make progress in solving global transnational threats. As mentioned above, the international health regulations, which mandate intrusive international inspection and place obligations on all governments in the case of deadly infectious disease, are universal. In the response to SARS most analysts agree that the responses of Vietnam and Singapore were sharper and quicker than that of Canada. China dragged

its feet in the first months of the SARS crisis but then acted with focus and strong leadership to contain the epidemic. Its cooperation in the battle against the Avian flu has not been questioned.

The NPT includes 188 members. One hundred and twenty-five countries, including many non-democracies, have signed the Additional Protocol that allows much more intrusive inspections by the IAEA. The case of North Korea shows that China and Russia are prepared to cooperate with the United States against proliferation violators, as long as the policy is a serious one based on diplomatic engagement and judicious use of incentives, and not just sanctions and threats of regime change.

On the use of UN mediators in civil wars and the deployment of peacekeepers to implement those agreements, cooperation between authoritarian and democratic states has been pretty strong. Since 1989, the UN Security Council, despite potential vetoes by Russia and China, has approved and deployed 51 peacekeeping missions. Many of those soldiers do not come from democracies; among the top 20 troop contributing countries are Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Jordan, Ethiopia, China, and Morocco. The missions and budgets are approved by the Security Council, which has two permanent members that are not democracies and usually several non-permanent members that are not democracies.

All of this raises the question of whether we would expect this level of cooperation in a world explicitly organized into democratic and non-democratic camps. In peacekeeping, for example, should we assume that a league or concert will make equal or better contributions to what the United Nations produces?

Two defenders of the league, Lindsey and Daalder, argue that the league/concert will not reduce cooperation from China, Russia, or other authoritarian states, because they are realist states driven by their national interests to cooperate when it is in their favor. Democracies will act on values; authoritarian states will act on rational calculation of interest. But this is intellectual sleight of hand. They defend the league for its power to help democratic states construct common interests and shared responsibilities. But to the extent that a league helped democracies construct common interests, strategies, and

purpose, we should expect a similar institution would help authoritarian states do the same. For the sake of consistency, we should predict that if a league will help democracies see beyond limited short-term interests and construct shared interests and positions, then a league of authoritarian states would do the same for the Russias or Chinas of the world, with a resulting dramatic drop in global cooperation.

5. *In some issue areas lack of cooperation is more attributable to democracies, not authoritarian states.*

The flip side of cooperation between democracies and authoritarian states are instances of a lack of cooperation among democratic states. Russia and China have exerted more pressure on Iran than South Africa and Indonesia, which are key democracies in the developing world. In battles over reform of the United Nations in 2005, India played a mostly hostile role (as did the United States). India was the last holdout to endorse the principle of responsibility to protect in cases of massive civil violence. South Africa has been Robert Mugabe's staunchest ally in Zimbabwe. The Doha round of trade negotiations has been stymied by positions of the EU and United States on agricultural subsidies. On Iraq, the US invasion was opposed by states like France, Germany, Mexico, and Chile.

6. *From an American perspective, international cooperation looks worse than it is because US positions on most global issues over the last eight years have been outside the mainstream.*

Many American foreign policy elites assume that the United States needs international cooperation for its safety and prosperity and judge that it is not getting that cooperation from current international institutions. They then jump to the conclusion that it is the fault of the institutions (because of a few authoritarian countries) and that if there were other institutions that excluded the authoritarians, the United States would get more cooperation.

A more plausible hypothesis is that the United States is not getting sufficient cooperation from current institutions because its positions on key global issues are out of touch with those of most countries. For example, the US State Department tallies how often other countries vote with the

United States at the United Nations. In 2006, the last year recorded, the United States *voted* on average *with* the other members of the UN a little under a quarter of the time (23.6%). This is not just about the United States seldom voting with authoritarian states, such as Russia (20.5%), Egypt (7.4%), Pakistan (17.6%), or Cuba (13.3%). It is about a lack of common ground with democracies, such as India (15.9%) and South Africa (14.6%), and allies, such as Japan (42.9%) and Germany (42.7%). The United Kingdom and France voted with the United States only about half of the time; all of NATO voted on average with the United States a little over 40% of the time.²⁵

On what issues did we so disagree with the rest of the world?

The United States voted *in isolation* on resolutions concerning implementation of the declaration on the granting of independence; transparency and confidence building in outer space activities; trade in small arms; the rights of the child; the right to food; developments in the fields of information and telecommunications; environmental norms in arms control; peace through practical disarmament measures; towards an arms trade treaty; and the relationship between disarmament and development [emphasis added].²⁶

The year 2006 was not an exceptional year; we voted with others in similar percentages since 2003, down from about 31% in the first two years of the Bush administration. This is a sea change from the late 1990s when the United States voted with others from 41.8% in 2000 to a high of 49.4% in 1996. In those years, the United Kingdom voted with the United States eight out of ten times; Japan, seven out of ten times; South Africa, four out of ten times; and Egypt, four out of ten times.²⁷

The problem, then, is not a lack of international cooperation; it is a lack of US cooperation. Although these numbers above are indicative of disagreements in the United Nations, American positions on nonproliferation, disarmament, terrorism, and climate change have diminished cooperation in other international institutions.

7. *There are already alternative legitimizing venues for the use of force.*

Advocates for both the concert and league of democracies contend that a new venue is needed regarding the legitimation and the use of force. Frustrated by the Security Council's reluctance to authorize military force to exercise the responsibility to protect in cases of mass killing (Darfur), supporters of the league and concert imply that the bar to legitimate use of force has been set too high by those whose domestic legitimacy is inferior to that of the Western democracies.

Yet there are already alternative legitimating venues for the use of force: regional organizations. In different parts of the world, including Africa and Latin America, countries are reaching agreement in regional organizations about how sovereignty should be exercised responsibly and the right of regional organizations to intervene in the face of atrocities or state breakdown. As these trends take hold, regional authorization of the use of force will grow in legitimacy. There are several examples: the EU and NATO in Kosovo; the Organization of American States in Haiti, the Economic Community of West African States in Liberia and Sierra Leone; the EU in Albania; the Pacific Islands Forum in the Solomon Islands.

The NATO intervention in Kosovo is a telling example, for it was not democracy that gave it legitimacy. It came first from the fact that the relevant regional organization (EU) supported the intervention. Moreover, the legitimacy generated by the regional organization was supplemented by the legitimacy provided by key Muslim states such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Egypt, Kuwait, and the Gulf States, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which supported intervention on behalf of a country that is overwhelmingly Muslim.

The combination of these two factors supplied robust international legitimacy. A telling but little known fact about the Security Council and the intervention is that after NATO intervened, Russia, not believing that there is legitimacy beyond a Council resolution, demanded a Council vote to condemn NATO's use of force. The vote failed 12-3, with only China, Russia and Namibia in favor of condemnation. The two Muslim-majority countries on the Council, Malaysia and Gambia, voted against condemning the intervention.

It was noteworthy but little remarked that after Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008,

Russia sought to legitimate its use of force through a regional organization—the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, only to be rebuffed by all of its members, including China.

So What Does This All Mean for A League?

If this primer on international cooperation is correct, the United States does need more effective, sustained international cooperation, and does need stronger international institutions. But those institutions are not as weak as proponents of a league or concert contend, which is why we do not need an alternative organization, but a true enabler and force multiplier within existing organizations. Such a force multiplier could partially come from democracies working together, but only partially, as most problems of global cooperation need the active participation and burden sharing of non-democratic states. Moreover, there is the credibility of purpose issue raised above: erstwhile democracies might accept a league if it were truly meant to enable greater cooperation within the United Nations and existing international rule of law. But many simply believe that this is an American ruse to bypass the UN and international law to fit American interests. Within Europe the proposal breeds much cynicism that this is but one more example of the United States trying to subvert international rule of law. The credibility problem is exacerbated because of America's record on issues demanding greater cooperation; the United States often holds outlying positions, appears out of touch, and is unwilling to bargain.

Moving Forward Toward an Effective, Principled, and Sustainable Solution for Multilateral Security Cooperation

It's hard to see any institution generating more effective global cooperation without a change in America's leadership style and foreign policy. This is a necessary condition for effective international problem solving against transnational threats.

That said, there is the need for an institution that would forge patterns of cooperation between the major and rising powers, helping them to identify shared interests, reach common understandings, and build trust. Such an institution would best be created by replacing the current G-8 with a new G-16 that would include Brazil, China, India, South Africa, Mexico (the "Outreach 5") and Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt, key Muslim majority states.

A G-16 will not magically solve global problems. It can, however, be a prenegotiating forum, a place where the smallest possible grouping of necessary stakeholders can meet to forge agreements on the parameters of responses to major global challenges, and the strategies for their implementation. It can be a mechanism for building knowledge, trust, and patterns of cooperative behavior among the most powerful states. In addition, it can be a device by which leading states encourage one another to take responsibility not only for the global impacts of their national actions but also for their global role in tackling common problems.

Such an institution could not take decisions for the rest of the world; it could, however, be a force for making the UN and other multilateral and regional bodies more effective. Policy discussions among 16 nations have much greater potential to be productive than a dialogue among 60 to 100 disparate democracies or 192 member states in the United Nations. Moreover, given that these are the most powerful states in the international system, their ability to create shared threat perceptions could both make the work of the Security Council more effective, and indeed, make its reform more likely and desirable.

The G-16's convening power, the collective weight of its economies and diplomatic and military capacities, and its combined populations would create an unparalleled platform to catalyze and mobilize effective international action. It could be a mechanism to navigate the turbulence of diffuse power, transnational threats, and the changing distribution of power among key states.

Conclusion

Proposals for a league/concert of democracies derive from the assumption that the world would be much safer and more prosperous if it consisted solely of liberal democracies. Undoubtedly this is so; democracies historically do not go to war with each other; their interests in free trade and economic growth foster easier economic cooperation; and shared values in promoting liberty, freedom and human rights create greater amity and genuine friendships among people.

It would be folly, however, to base American foreign policy and strategies for international order on this ideal because democracies alone will not provide the international cooperation essential for countering transnational threats. Security, prosperity, stopping deadly infectious disease,

and solving global warming require cooperation with nondemocracies.

Proponents of the league or concert write off current international institutions, many of which function on the basis of universal membership. Given that international institutions are broken, they argue, there is little cost in trying to replace them with something radically different. A closer look suggests the costs would be formidable. The sweeping condemnation of the performance of international institutions drastically undervalues the amount of international cooperation that exists today and that can be built upon for better global problem solving.

The key challenge is not to find a way for 60 to 100 democracies to construct a shared identity and common interests; it is to find a way to bring old and new sources of power to bear on the problems of the 21st century. An institution that allows the 16 major and rising powers to reach common ground on shared interests has a far greater chance of producing greater global cooperation against today's transnational threats.

Endnotes

- ¹ John McCain, "Senator McCain Addresses the Hoover Institution," May 1, 2007, can be downloaded at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/13252/>
- ² G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, Co-Directors, *Forging A World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century: Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security* (Princeton: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, September 27, 2006).
- ³ Ibid. p. 26.
- ⁴ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, "Democracies of the World, Unite," *The American Interest*, Jan/Feb 2007; see also the comments by Anthony Lake in that issue, pp. 18-19.
- ⁵ Senator McCain's list of what the league will do, cited at the beginning of this essay, includes the challenges of disease, climate change, and civil war. Anthony Lake argues that "crises in Iran, North Korea, Iraq, and Darfur, not to mention the pressing need for more efficient peacekeeping operations, the rising temperatures of our seas and multiple other transnational threats demonstrate... the inability of international institutions designed in the middle of the 20th century to cope with the problems of the 21st" (p. 19); Daalder and Lindsay cite terrorism,

deadly infectious disease, and global warming as crises demanding greater international cooperation.

- ⁶ This is uniform across the proponents, see Daalder and Lindsay, pp. 7-9; Ikenberry and Slaughter, pp. 23-25.
- ⁷ For example, the remarks by Charles Krauthammer: “What I like about it, it’s got a hidden agenda. It looks as if it’s all about listening and joining with allies, all the kind of stuff you’d hear a John Kerry say, except that the idea here, which McCain can’t say, but I can, is to essentially kill the UN,” quoted in Thomas Carothers, “A League of their Own,” *Foreign Policy*, July/Aug 2008, p. 48.
- ⁸ Carothers, “A League of their Own;” Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy* (New York, Times Books 2007), pp.335; David Hannay, “The Next US President should forget the League of Democracies,” *CER Bulletin*, Issue 61, Aug/Sept 2008; Shashi Tharoor, “This mini-league of nations would cause only division,” *The Guardian*, May 27, 2008; Gideon Rachman, “Why McCain’s Big Idea is a Bad Idea,” *Financial Times*, May 5, 2008. For a project that I’ve been working on for two years on international cooperation against transnational threats, foreign officials and policy analysts, some among America’s closest allies have repeatedly characterized the concert/league as a disaster waiting to happen. Tellingly, in my search of articles on the proposal, I have found eight published objections by non-Americans—Robert Skidelsky, David Hannay, Gideon Rachman, Shashi Tharoor, Evgeny Primakov, Francois Heisbourg, Christoph Bertram, and Ralf Beste—and only one article in support—Timothy Garton Ash, “This marks the beginning of an end...,” *The Guardian*, Nov. 9, 2006.
- ⁹ Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy*, p. 335.
- ¹⁰ David Yang, “Democracies of the World Unite, The Debate Continues,” *The American Interest*, March/April 2007, p. 134
- ¹¹ Skidelsky, “A League of Democracies?”
- ¹² Tharoor, “This Mini-League of Nations,” and Rachman, “Why McCain’s Big Idea is a Bad Idea.”
- ¹³ Carothers, “A League of Their Own.”
- ¹⁴ Robert Kagan, “The Case for a League of Democracies,” *Financial Times*, May 13, 2008.
- ¹⁵ Daalder and Lindsay, “Democracies of the World Unite.”
- ¹⁶ G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, Co-Directors, *Forging A World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century: Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security* (Princeton: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, September 27, 2006).
- ¹⁷ Daalder and Lindsay, “the Concert, by constructing a common identity among liberal democracies, will change how democracies interact and thereby facilitate their cooperation,” *The American Interest*, March/April 2007, p. 138;
- ¹⁸ Bruce Jentleson, “Democracies of the World, Unite: The Debate Continues,” *The American Interest*, March/April 2007.
- ¹⁹ Carothers, “A League of their Own,”
- ²⁰ Matthew Yglesias, *Heads in the Sand: How the Republicans Screw Up Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Screws Up the Democrats* (New York: Wiley, 2008).
- ²¹ For those who want a sense of where UN peacekeepers are deployed see the Center on International Cooperation, *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations, 2008* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008).
- ²² Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- ²³ See the testimony of James Dobbins of the Rand Corporation to Congress, “A Comparative Evaluation of United Nations Peacekeeping,” June 13, 2007.
- ²⁴ Stacey Knobler, et al., eds., *Learning from SARS: Preparing for the Next Disease Outbreak, Workshop Summary* (Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2004).
- ²⁵ US State Department, Bureau of International Organization, *Voting Practices in the United Nations, 2007*.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ US State Department, Bureau of International Organization, *Voting Practices in the United Nations, 2001*.

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