



The  
Stanley  
Foundation

# policy dialogue brief

Critical thinking from Stanley Foundation Conferences

53rd Strategy for  
Peace Conference

Sponsored by  
The Stanley  
Foundation

October 17-19, 2012  
Airlie Center,  
Warrenton, Virginia

This brief summarizes the primary findings of the conference as interpreted by rapporteur Emily O'Brien, roundtable organizer David Shorr, and chair Bruce Jones. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this brief. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

## Domestic Constraints on Global Cooperation

### Meeting Summary Note

As part of the 53rd Strategy for Peace Conference, the Stanley Foundation convened experts from Brazil, India, and the United States to discuss the domestic determinants of international cooperation. Analysts and practitioners—especially in Washington and other Western capitals—often lack an adequate understanding of the domestic contexts of the emerging powers and constraints on their governments' policymaking. To a lesser extent, this is a mirrored problem. Participants at this conference homed in on the policy areas of food security, energy security and climate change, and nuclear proliferation in search of more comprehensive and holistic approaches to current major collective action problems.

Throughout the conference, participants focused on the limited capacity of formal and informal institutions to achieve progress on the interrelated challenges of food and energy security as well as preservation of the nonproliferation regime. They noted robust cooperation on some issues, yet serious constraints and difficulties in other areas. The constraints go beyond the classic "two-level game" of international and domestic politics to include the interplay of different levels of domestic governance and the variety of stake-holding constituencies.

Many participants harbored doubts that there is sufficient will among the emerging and established powers to address the shortcomings of the existing international architecture. In some issue areas, domestic constraints on policymaking may block any possibility of constructive cooperation. But as summarized below, the conference discussion yielded a number of ideas for how these challenges might be surmounted, particularly on sustainability and energy security.

### The Interplay Between Domestic Politics and Multilateral Cooperation

Different types of domestic constraints affect policy decisions. These include institutional constraints, such as the difficult process of treaty ratification in the US Senate or the overlap of ministries dealing with nearly any given issue area in Indian governance. Public opinion often poses constraints. The growing role of the private sector in the emerging powers has created new internal dynamics. Participants highlighted an interesting and delicate problem for international proponents of cooperation: trying to strengthen the hand of local groups inclined to be supportive without meddling in domestic politics.

A key distinction for these questions is between traditional political and security affairs generally considered the domain of “high politics”—a realm in which senior executive branch officials tend to have broad discretion—contrasted with “low politics” issues, for which domestic constraints are stricter. Key emerging issue areas like energy and food security lie in the sphere of low politics. In such areas of policy there are constituencies of interested parties and contentious domestic politics, usually because some domestic actors stand to win from certain policies while others stand to lose. This two-level policy game means that policymakers and experts must weigh the domestic payoffs and coalitions necessary to underpin any international cooperation.

Comparing the domestic politics of the United States, India, and Brazil, a given issue will fall differently along the spectrum between high and low politics, that is, how much autonomy and room for creativity an executive has varies. To the extent that cooperation on food security issues, for instance, might focus on agricultural subsidies affecting farm interests, a US administration would have very limited discretion. Brazilian officials thus may be better placed to assume a leadership role, though they would confront their own issues in the area of bio-fuels as a driver of high commodity prices.

Participants noted that domestic politics aren’t necessarily inimical to international cooperation. For example, Indian subsidies have eroded the nation’s fiscal position, prompting it to adopt policies that have made it more open to the global economy. Domestic constraints can thus be both drivers and inhibitors of multilateral cooperation.

### Food Security

The domestic political sensitivities around food security can run quite high, either with policies shaped by farm interests or sometimes framed as a matter of national security. The bigger global picture is that more than a billion people suffer from malnutrition. To reduce that overall number, there are steps governments can take, and the essence of the multilateral agenda is the identifiable opportunities whereby international cooperation can improve food security prospects for the world’s malnourished. In a globalized market, part of the challenge is to address the significant negative externalities created when states pursue their own

perceived interests at the expense of food security elsewhere—sometimes without even, ultimately, strengthening the position of their own country.

The extensive agricultural subsidies in developed nations—in effect, rents paid to powerful political interests—are responsible for a variety of distortions in global commodities markets, usually especially harmful to developing countries. But rather than fixing the structural problem, and glaring gap in trade liberalization, the developed world prefers to respond to crisis situations with food aid. Framed thus as a humanitarian problem, the consequences of developed countries’ policies are conveniently ignored, and food insecurity is dealt with by seeking to avert symptomatic worst outcomes like famine and near-famine.

Nor has the food security agenda adapted to new consumption patterns associated with the growth of the emerging powers or changing supply patterns. Beyond their own domestic policies, states are going abroad to bolster their food security. For example, an increasing sense of vulnerability in some powerful nations has led them to make large purchases of foreign acreage, particularly in Africa.

For Brazil’s part, it has made a claim to leadership on food security, especially in its social policies. Brazilian experts describe Brazil as sharing its experiences as a developing country, rather than presenting itself as a model, and offering assistance on how other countries can replicate its successes around sustainability and human security. Brazilians have pursued such South-South cooperation quite vigorously. Brazil has also put a priority on addressing the distorting effects of food subsidies in the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Food security is not only a human security issue but a political issue as well. The dynamic in India is different from that in Brazil. India’s public food distribution system has for many years been closely intertwined with other social and economic systems—for instance, at a bureaucratic level, since the same identity card is used in India for voting as well as obtaining food and gas. In Indian politics, food security is treated as a national security interest, with a focus on “food self-sufficiency.” But despite that rubric, much of the world’s food-insecure population lives in

India. Rhetoric and political symbolism aside, food export bans such as those in India do not, in fact, help ensure food security. Political interference in India's agricultural market has only fostered inefficiencies. And India is hardly alone in falling into this trap.

Wariness of economic sanctions can also reinforce self-sufficiency instincts. Many governments factor in the possibility, however remote, of being the future target of sanctions. This is another interesting interconnection between international politics and domestic policymaking.

The very concept of self-sufficiency is anathema in a globalized marketplace. Despite domestic political concerns that integrating into the global economy could severely disrupt entire economic sectors, if not national economies themselves, the dynamic of globalization tends to intrude and require recalibrated policies. For example, in India, the movement of rural poor into urban centers places great strain on urban infrastructure, raising related food security issues. Part of the challenge is a balancing act. While opening India's domestic market would undercut many farmers, easing export restrictions could also open export markets for Indian agricultural products.

### Energy Security and Climate Change

There are important interlinkages between food and energy security, as there are with both issue areas and climate change. Energy is treated as a strategic national interest, and predicted energy supply trends for the United States, Brazil, and India are bound to set them on very different policy trajectories.

Brazil views itself as having a clean-energy matrix compared with other countries. But the exploration and extraction of its recently discovered presalt oil could shift Brazil's energy mix and also turn it into a net energy exporter. Participants emphasized the numerous major challenges this will present. Brazil will need to manage its mineral wealth in a way that yields intergenerational equity. The exports will bring a massive influx of currency, and Brazil must guard against Dutch disease and other so-called resource curses. There is also a risk of labor dislocation if the changes prompt large migration toward one sector of the economy.

In India, economic development will continue as the main driver of energy policy. India defines energy security as access to a reliable and affordable supply of energy. Its commitment to providing affordable energy creates challenges. The domestic subsidization of energy creates considerable market distortions. Since coal will remain the mainstay of India's energy mix, the question of how to pass cleaner technologies on to developing countries is high on the climate change agenda. Shifting to a different energy mix would entail high costs for new infrastructure.

In the bigger climate change picture, the post-Kyoto, post-Copenhagen effort has various components: national commitments to emission reductions, collective commitment to a global target, and climate financing, to name a few. Still, they do not yet add up to a response commensurate to the problem. Multilateral discussions on climate change have been too focused on placing blame and dodging responsibility or difficult action. Unproductive rhetoric has left little room for substantive negotiations; posturing for domestic audiences has come at the expense of opportunities for meaningful engagement.

While the effects of climate change are globally distributed, the impact is not spread evenly, and developing and least-developed countries will be hit hardest. One key challenge is to alert domestic audiences and civil society actors to the potential costs of climate change—economic, social, and security. With so much focus on difficulties involved in reducing emissions, a crucial point is being lost: the steep cost of inaction.

Despite the problems in the global climate talks, there are examples of successful multilateral and bilateral mechanisms, such as agreements on information sharing and energy efficiency. Focusing on this sort of narrow policy innovation, as opposed to overarching solutions, could be a fruitful avenue that isn't bogged down by the same rhetoric and politics. The US-India energy dialogue is an example, with its focus on energy efficiency and clean coal. The sectoral approach may be a useful framework in this regard. City partnerships on climate and sustainability issues have also been quite constructive. There is potential for the G-20 process to provide useful impetus on climate, and using an existing mechanism this way might be easier than trying to erect new multilateral architecture.

Climate issues lay at the heart of tensions last spring over two world leader summits, the G-20 and the United Nations' Rio+20 conference. The Rio+20 conference came together despite pressures from some governments that wanted to postpone the summit to keep focus on the Eurozone crisis. Yet the Brazilians saw the meeting as important for Brazil's leadership role on the sustainable development agenda. Proposals to reconcile economic growth and social inclusion, such as the idea of Sustainable Development Goals, could set an agenda for the next 15 to 20 years. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process and the sustainable development discussion are viewed by some as proceeding too separately when they should work in tandem.

This raises concerns among countries that fear that a focus on a sustainability agenda could detract from a focus on poverty reduction. In the view of some, policies that sought to implement greener approaches would ultimately be detrimental in the short run for living standards in India and other emerging and developing countries. Whether there is a way to pursue a sustainability agenda in developing countries in a manner that is not too expensive is open for debate. Meanwhile, developed countries continue to feel the effects of the recent financial crisis, and have fewer resources to commit to mitigation. Mitigation itself is challenging. Effective use of alternative energy will require the creation of an alternative society that is wholly less dependent on energy resources; a lifestyle of fossil fuels can't be replaced with the same lifestyle fueled by renewables.

Bringing alternative energy up to scale has also proved difficult. A carbon tax in the United States could have the effect of dramatically increasing the market for renewables, but it is a political non-starter. Another challenge is to put renewable energy systems in place alongside conventional systems, which can often be cost prohibitive. Still, there are notable exceptions, for example, transportation infrastructure in countries like Brazil and India.

Major shifts in the patterns of supply and demand also have an impact on climate change. Brazil's pre-salt oil discoveries will force the country to take a fresh look at the links between energy and climate policy. As these energy supplies are developed, the

pressures and incentives could cut against Brazil's current emphasis on climate and sustainability.

All this suggests that emissions reductions will likely result from discrete, targeted policies, rather than comprehensive multilateral agreement. The media attention focused on the formal intergovernmental framework for climate change remains highly useful to heighten awareness and concern, although many key policies will likely be implemented in other, generally less formal, settings. Civil society thus has a significant role to play in shaping debate. Building common awareness around climate change must happen from the ground up, with deep engagement and commitment by domestic groups.

Meanwhile, the escalating effects of climate change are intensifying the challenges. Climate change has already started driving extreme weather events with greater frequency. In Bangladesh, extreme weather is pushing migration into India, putting pressure on urbanization trends in that country and forcing Indian policymakers to grapple with potential impacts on the social and fiscal infrastructure. Climate change may intensify scarcity pressures and resource competition. These pressures may draw much-needed attention to climate change issues and raise consciousness among civil society about its potential impacts. It may ultimately be climate change's direct effects that shift domestic attitudes around the issue.

### **Nonproliferation**

Much of the conference discussion on nuclear non-proliferation focused on the international politics and diplomacy surrounding Iran's nuclear program, with its high stakes and sensitivity. National perspectives of Indian, Brazilian, and American policymakers and experts reflect not only domestic politics but also strategic postures and regional geopolitics. For instance, the value Brazil places on its own nuclear energy program shapes Brazilian attitudes toward the rights of other states to access nuclear energy.

The intense push by the US administration to pressure Iran has spurred debate over the intent of Iran's nuclear program, the use of sanctions, and the potential threat of regime change. The question of Iranian policymakers' having an operative consensus to pursue weaponization lies at the heart of

the matter and is unclear. While hawkish analysts and politicians, including some in the US Congress, view the intention to weaponize as self-evident, the very point of the diplomatic effort is to give Iran a chance to prove it is not headed down that path.

One criticism participants expressed regarding US strategy toward Iran is that by overhyping the danger of Iran going nuclear, Washington has actually created perverse incentives for the Iranian regime to do just that. According to this view, the option of building a weapon has become a more important political issue in Iran owing to the international attention. Moreover, Iranian leaders wanting to retain power can use a perceived threat from the United States and others to mobilize nationalist public sentiment.

There is also concern that regime change might be the real ulterior aim of US strategy toward Iran—or could become so. The damage that the 2003 US invasion of Iraq has done to US credibility continues to color international views of US policy. There is broad international support for the US goal of preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, but the Iraq experience has made others wary of Washington's true intentions. While the administration has been fairly effective in providing reassurance, the Libya intervention and the perception that NATO and its partners exceeded the UN mandate has somewhat strained US relations with India and Brazil.

While the United States has steered most international efforts on Iran, Brazil and Turkey made an attempt at mediation in 2010 that was scuttled by Washington. The leaders of Turkey and Brazil got involved after receiving encouragement from the Obama administration. Yet when the administration saw the resulting deal with Iran as inadequate and threatening to the coalition it had built for sanctions, it reversed itself and dismissed the Turkish-Brazilian effort as counterproductive, prompting understandable resentment. The episode raises serious questions about whether—despite rhetoric in Washington about rising powers and “responsible stakeholdership”—the United States is genuinely interested in expanded leadership on the issue.

Criticisms of US tactics are also common. Some observers view sanctions as wholly ineffective, and there is also the question of whether sanctions have a bigger impact on the Iranian government or on

Iranian citizens. Brazilian policymakers and experts in particular do not view the US strategy as combining sanctions effectively with other tools, particularly negotiations. According to such critics, a policy of engagement would be more effective and strengthen the hand of internal Iranian forces that favor better relations with the West.

The counterpoint to this critique offers a different interpretation of the harsh outside pressure being placed on Iran. It is possible to distinguish between pursuing regime change as an aim versus prompting concern over the regime's vulnerability. The self-preservation instinct and a desire to alleviate stresses may be what ultimately drive the Iranian regime to make a deal. The threat of force, then, may be a useful part of the toolbox according to this logic.

Indeed, there is an argument for giving US Iran policy a mixed grade. While a peaceful settlement has not been reached, there has been success in putting Iran under intense pressure to change its behavior. India, for example, has reduced the amount of oil it imports from Iran. Indian companies want to be able to invest in the United States, so neither private nor state-owned companies want to risk being sanctioned and prohibited from doing so. India's geostrategic interests also prompt it to align closely with the United States. Not only is Iran in India's general neighborhood, but the rivalry with Pakistan also gives India a strong interest in keeping Iran a nonweapon state. Yet as skeptics of US policy point out, Iranian leaders may feel backed into a corner with no alternatives, which leaves no room for a successful outcome.

Broadly speaking, participants noted that if a country is determined to proliferate, the historical record indicates there is little chance of stopping it. Heavily sanctioned countries still have succeeded in building weapons. Instances of reversal have typically occurred after a change in regime or the offer of a major incentive. Sanctions and even the use of force, as with the 1981 Osirak strike, do not have good track records of effectiveness.

Moreover, nonproliferation is too often viewed in isolation. States seek nuclear arms because they perceive a threat. Better assessment of this “demand side” could help establish effective approaches to nonproliferation.

## Conclusions

Depending on the issue and interests, domestic politics can constrain or enable international cooperation. Understanding these dynamics has important implications for the modes by which cooperation should be pursued: power-to-power bilateral cooperation; South-to-South bilateral cooperation; the G-20 leaders' level; or rising-power forums such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa). Policymakers and experts alike would be well served to deepen their knowledge of the domestic politics of the world's key powers.

For that matter, different multilateral forums serve different purposes and offer varying modes of cooperative action. Take the relatively new and interrelated forums of BRICS and IBSA for instance. Despite their common status as rising powers, members have not found it easy to reach an agreement on a particular issue, yet the consultations provide opportunities for policymakers to deepen their understanding of one another's perspectives. And it is interesting to contrast the BRICS process with IBSA—where India, Brazil, and South Africa meet without China or Russia and focus on economic development and South-South cooperation. This may create an opportunity for the United States to engage more deeply with IBSA, a proposition far more likely than similar engagement with BRICS.

There is sometimes the perception that developing countries lack motivation to deepen dialogue between the established and emerging powers and tackle issues like climate change. Emerging powers, however, have a considerable stake not only in finding cooperative solutions but in spurring further reform of international institutions to make them more equitably representative. Skepticism persists, though, about whether the emerging powers have a positive reform agenda and a meaningful commitment of funds and energy to reflect new leadership roles.

Participants also noted how differently agreements reached in various international bodies—the International Monetary Fund, United Nations Security Council, BRICS, and G-20 among them—reverberate in domestic politics. In India, for example, actions by the International Monetary Fund

have high salience, while the G-20 meetings also draw substantial attention. That said, Indian observers view informal forums like the G-20 as way stations pending eventual reform of formal institutions. In the Brazilian context, it is commonly argued that the Security Council would be perceived as more legitimate if Brazil had a permanent seat.

At the other end of the spectrum are the multilateral venues with high legitimacy. Certain forums for international cooperation—and the agreements reached there—can actually give executives more leverage domestically. Participants raised the possibility of cooperation by bringing together “coalitions of the concerned,” which focus on sets of nations with strongly shared interests or perspectives, and presumably more conducive domestic politics. Building these types of coalitions may be less politically fraught than even inclusive forums like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This may allow coalitions to break down bigger problems into more manageable pieces.

One multilateral institution was cited as especially well positioned in relation to domestic politics. The WTO's adjudication mechanism is particularly effective as a deliberate adjudicator whose rulings are generally issued after public opinion and nationalistic passions have cooled down. By way of contrast, Security Council decisions can be dramatic and fast-moving, which in a case like the Libya intervention led to some governments backing off from their support because of domestic pressure.

Shifts in domestic circumstances and domestic politics can likewise shift the prospects for cooperation. On food security, current agricultural subsidies in countries like the United States will be more difficult to continue in an era of austerity. There are indications that the politics of the US farm bill have already started to shift. Optimally, these fresh policy debates may address some of the negative externalities of food subsidies, a dynamic that the US administration should seek to leverage internationally. If it becomes an issue that the US Congress is forced to grapple with, this provides an opportunity for commensurate movement on multilateral agreements.

Innovating new multilateral frameworks more closely matched to the interests at play might be

one way to address major current collective action problems and boost cooperation. A framework might be built to combine the issues of sustainability, economic growth, and social inclusion. Such a regime would have to offer incentives, for example, of sufficient magnitude to bring green technologies to economic scale. Bottom-up frameworks could also play a role, as with work on sustainable energy for all in the margins of Rio+20. Not to say that new top-level frameworks would be easy to put into practice. The tradeoffs between sustainability and economic growth are especially difficult to navigate.

Based on these discussions, a set of areas for deepened research include:

- Exploring ways to integrate sustainability, economic growth, and equality into an agenda with the kind of cooperative mechanisms that have been successful in forums such as the WTO's dispute-settlement mechanism. Alongside this, bottom-up mobilization and public awareness efforts must be augmented, potentially building on the theme of "sustainable energy for all" that emerged in the margins of Rio+20.
- Evaluating potential deconfliction tools to address the security implications and national interest sensitivities provoked by perceived scarcity of food and energy resources.
- Assessing methods to narrow the gulf separating multilateral institutions and domestic publics, particularly in the context of multiple-level games. Similarly, domestic public/political communication must become better aligned with the shared international challenges of our interdependent age.

## Participants

---

### Roundtable Organizer

**David Shorr**, Program Officer, The Stanley Foundation

### Chair

**Bruce Jones**, Director, Center on International Cooperation, New York University; Senior Fellow and Director, Managing Global Order Project, The Brookings Institution

### Rapporteur

**Emily O'Brien**, Senior Program Officer, Managing Global Order, Center on International Cooperation, New York University

### Participants

**João Augusto de Castro Neves**, Analyst, Latin America, Eurasia Group

**Adriana de Queiroz**, Executive Coordinator, Brazilian Center for International Relations

**Gilberto M. Jannuzzi**, Executive Director, International Energy Initiative, Brazil

**Daniel Kliman**, Transatlantic Fellow, Asia Program, The German Marshall Fund of the United States

**Georges Landau**, Professor of International Cooperation, School of Economics and International Relations, FAAP, São Paulo, Brazil

**Tanvi Madan**, Fellow, Foreign Policy, and Director, The India Project, The Brookings Institution

**Lydia Powell**, Head and Senior Fellow, ORF Centre for Resources Management, Observer Research Foundation

**Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan**, Senior Fellow in Security Studies, Observer Research Foundation

**Antonio Jorge Ramalho**, Special Advisor to the Minister of Defense, Ministry of Defense, and Professor of International Relations, Institute of International Relations, University of Brasilia

**WPS Sidhu**, Senior Fellow, Center on International Cooperation, New York University

**Stephen Stedman**, Freeman Spogli Senior Fellow, Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law and Freeman Spogli Institute, Stanford University

**JP Vicente**, Director and Head of Marketing, Credit Suisse, New York

**Thomas Wright**, Fellow, Managing Global Order, The Brookings Institution

Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Participants attended as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.

## The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation is a nonpartisan, private operating foundation that seeks a secure peace with freedom and justice, built on world citizenship and effective global governance. It brings fresh voices and original ideas to debates on global and regional problems. The foundation advocates principled multilateralism—an approach that emphasizes working respectfully across differences to create fair, just, and lasting solutions.

The Stanley Foundation's work recognizes the essential roles of the policy community, media professionals, and the involved public in building sustainable peace. Its work aims to connect people from different backgrounds, often producing clarifying insights and innova-

tive solutions. The foundation frequently collaborates with other organizations. It does not make grants.

The Stanley Foundation encourages use of this report for educational purposes. Any part of the material may be duplicated with proper acknowledgement. Additional copies are available. Stanley Foundation reports, publications, programs, and a wealth of other information are available on the Web at [www.stanleyfoundation.org](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org).

The Stanley Foundation  
209 Iowa Avenue  
Muscatine, IA 52761 USA  
563-264-1500  
563-264-0864 fax  
[info@stanleyfoundation.org](mailto:info@stanleyfoundation.org)