The Impact of Multilateralism on India

Asoke Kumar Mukerji [*]

Multilateralism directly impacts on the process of transforming India into a world power. It upholds the principle of international cooperation for peace, security, and sustainable development. Today, over 40 percent of India's GDP is contributed by her international trade,[1] directly impacting on the employment and prosperity of a vast number of its citizens. India's destiny is linked with the continuation of effective international cooperation. It must, therefore, play a leadership role in upholding the principle of international cooperation, which is under severe challenge today from unilateral measures being taken by the major powers.

This paper looks at the topic from three perspectives. First, how is multilateralism relevant for the transformation of India? Second, is India able to participate on an equal basis in the decision-making process on multilateral issues which have a direct impact on India's core national interests? Third, how can India enhance her contribution to the principle of international cooperation which sustains multilateralism?

Relevance for the Transformation of India

At one level, when the question is asked as to how multilateralism impacts India, the immediate answer can be found in the aspects of our day-to-day lives. For example, food, health, education, and decent work are considered essential ingredients of our human existence.

In each of these areas, India has partnered with multilateral structures under the United Nations (UN) to help meet the aspirations of its people. The success of India's Green Revolution owes a great deal to the support of the

[*]**The Author,** Ambassador Asoke Kumar Mukerji was, till recently Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The success of India's eradication of polio owes a great deal to the support of the World Health Organization (WHO). The focus on providing universal primary education and protecting India's rich cultural heritage has been supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). India's success in nutrition, symbolised by the White Revolution has been supported by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). India's focus on decent work is supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO).[2]

International cooperation is crucial for implementing the multilateral sustainable development objectives contained in Agenda 2030, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[3] As an active participant in the discussions and negotiation of the SDGs, India has aligned her own national development targets with these goals. The most visible impact of this alignment can be seen in the SDG India Dashboard innovated by NITI Aayog, the government's nodal point for Agenda 2030. According to the SDG Index, the frontrunner states of India in implementing the SDGs so far are Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Chandigarh, and Puducherry.[4]

Two areas have been prioritised for international cooperation in implementing Agenda 2030. These are financial flows and the transfer of appropriate technologies for sustainable development. Both these priorities were negotiated by India and several other developing countries participating at the Conference on Financing for Development held in Addis Ababa in July 2015, before Agenda 2030 was adopted. They form an integral part of the means of the implementation of Agenda 2030.[5]

The convergence between Agenda 2030's multilateral objectives and India's nationally formulated schemes was catalysed by the general elections in India in 2014, which provided a political framework for the national development policy in the country.

Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas - which was the dominant theme of the campaign for inclusive development in the 2014 general elections - has been integrated as SDG 1, the over-reaching goal for poverty eradication. The National Food Security Mission aligns with SDG 2 for food security; Health Insurance schemes with SDG 3 for good health and well-being; the National Education Mission with SDG 4 for quality education; *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* with SDG 5 on gender equality; *Swachh Bharat* with SDG 6 for sanitation and clean water; the target of 175 GW of renewable energy by 2022 with SDG 7 on clean energy; the MNREGA scheme and Skill India with SDG 8 on

decent work for all; Make in India, Start Up India, and Digital India with SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; *Jan Dhan Yojna* with SDG 10 to reduce inequalities; the Smart Cities Mission with SDG 11 for sustainable cities and communities; the International Day of Yoga with SDG 3 on global health and SDG 12 for responsible consumption and production; the International Solar Alliance with SDG 13 on climate action; the Blue Economy of India's Indian Ocean policy (SAGAR) with SDG 14 for the oceans; and the *Krishi Vikas* and *Fasal Bima Yojna* with SDG 15 on agriculture and life on land.

This positive impact of multilateralism on India is an example of how the socio-economic pillar of the multilateral system has benefited the country. The primary objective of India's implementation of her nationally set targets for sustainable development is to use Agenda 2030 to lift almost 270 million Indians above the poverty line[6] by December 2030.

India's Participation in Multilateral Decision-making

India's ability to align her national development priorities with the multilateral framework of Agenda 2030 was made possible because of the procedures and practice of the UN General Assembly on decision-making. The General Assembly's rules of procedure on decision-making are based on the principle of one-country one-vote contained in Article 18 of the UN Charter.[7] All subsidiary bodies of the UN General Assembly, like the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Human Rights Council (HRC), follow the same rules of procedure. In case there is no consensus on deciding on an issue, these rules specifically provide for majority voting.

The practice of the UN General Assembly on decision-making has been deeply influenced by political developments after the UN Charter was adopted in 1945. In August 1947, India became independent of colonial rule, setting in motion a global movement of decolonisation. Between 1947 and 1960, the admission of these newly independent countries into the UN was often blocked by the major powers in the UN Security Council, which is given a role by the UN Charter to recommend applications of countries for membership.

To overcome this situation, the General Assembly unanimously adopted its historic Decolonization Resolution on 14 December 1960.[8] The impact of the Decolonization Resolution was to put two issues relevant to developing countries like India on the agenda of the UN General Assembly. The first was to reform the provisions of the UN Charter and expand the membership of

the UN Security Council, which is designated as the multilateral structure with the "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security."[9] The other was to focus on the work of the multilateral structures on assisting newly independent countries to accelerate their socio-economic development, with a priority on the eradication of poverty.

India became an active supporter of the demand to put development issues as a priority on the UN General Assembly's agenda. Swelled by the numbers of newly admitted developing country members, the Group of 77 (G-77) developing countries was created in the UN in 1964.[10] India became the first Chair of the G-77 in 1970. The member states in the UN General Assembly authorised the creation of a dedicated multilateral platform to meet their aspirations. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) was established on 22 November 1965.[11] The UNDP is a major partner in implementing Agenda 2030 in all UN member-states, including India. Today, as many as 134 out of 193 member-states of the UN General Assembly belong to the G-77 grouping. The significance of the impact of the G-77 on decision-making in the UN General Assembly was demonstrated by the unanimous adoption of Agenda 2030 by the Assembly in September 2015.

However, when looking at India's participation in multilateral decisions on maintaining international peace and security, the picture is not so positive. Decisions on substantive issues taken by the UN Security Council are dependent on the concurrence of all the five self-declared permanent members, viz. China, France, Russia, the UK, and the USA.[12] Member-states of the UN have agreed to accept and carry out decisions of the Security Council,[13] which makes such decisions binding on the multilateral system. Therefore, for India to play an equitable role in decision-making by the UN Security Council, she must be represented in the Security Council with equal rights and privileges as the existing five permanent members.

The importance of decisions taken by the Security Council on issues of sustainable development has been highlighted by the world leaders themselves. In the Preamble to Agenda 2030, world leaders emphasised that there "can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development."[14] World leaders have also mandated early reform of the UN Security Council.[15]

When the UN General Assembly voted to adopt its resolution amending the UN Charter to expand the membership of the UNSC from 11 to 15 in 1963, the decision added four more non-permanent members to the Council, mostly representing newly independent developing countries.[16] There were

expectations that the greater representation of newly independent developing countries would be reflected in decisions taken by the Council. This has not happened, even though as many as 119 member-states, most of them developing countries, have been elected by rotation as non-permanent members of the Security Council till today.

India took the initiative to raise the issue of equal participation in decision-making in the UN Security Council in the UN General Assembly. On 14 November 1979, India's Permanent Representative, Brajesh Mishra, led a successful effort of 10 developing countries to seek greater equity and representation in the UNSC by putting this issue on the agenda of the UNGA.[17] However, the influence of their veto power has ensured that the five permanent members and their supporters in the General Assembly continue to find procedural ways to block the implementation of the mandate for reform given in 2005.

That this has happened despite the General Assembly's creation of an inter-governmental negotiation process in 2007;[18] the identification of five specific areas of reform, including the question of the veto in 2008;[19] and the adoption of a 122 member-state written document in 2015[20] to catalyse the text of a General Assembly resolution on amending the UN Charter is a matter of serious concern for India.

Existing issues on the agenda of the Security Council where India's core national interests are involved, and on which decisions are taken without the equal participation of India, include countering terrorism directed against India; the situation in the Af-Pak region from where foot soldiers of terrorism are incubated to launch attacks on India; the deployment of thousands of Indian troops for peacekeeping missions in places like the Golan Heights, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo; uncertainties regarding the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran and its impact on India's energy security and connectivity priorities; the volatile conflict in Yemen which represents a direct threat to the free flow of navigation in the sea-lanes of communication in the western Indo-Pacific; and the confrontation between the current major veto-wielding powers in the Council which impacts directly on India's transformation.

Will the General Assembly allow negotiations on the mandated reforms of the Security Council to be deadlocked for much longer?[21] The prevailing sentiment of a large majority of member-states in the UN General Assembly would suggest that the procedural deadlock can be overcome. In November 2017, for example, the majority sentiment in the General Assembly prevailed

over the entrenched vested interests of the Security Council's permanent members during the elections to the International Court of Justice, Dalveer Bhandari of India.[22] It is now for India to take the lead in the UN General Assembly negotiations by tabling the text of a draft resolution to amend the UN Charter for bringing about Security Council reforms. This would complete the process begun by India in November 1979. It would also ensure India's participation on an equal basis in Security Council decisions on issues related to the transformation of India.

India's Contribution to the Future of Multilateralism

In the broader context of the challenges confronting multilateralism, India can contribute to strengthening the principle of international cooperation as the mainstay of multilateralism in the 21st century. The current polarisation between the major powers in the Security Council has been driven by a transactional approach to make their domestic priorities prevail over multilateral structures and policies. The best illustration of this is the decision by the USA to abrogate its commitment made in the UN Security Council to endorse the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action negotiated by the major powers with Iran, and instead resort to the use of unilateral measures based on the extra-territorial application of US domestic laws to address concerns on Iran.[23] Many member-states of the UN, including India,[24] have publicly stated they would not apply US domestic laws in their foreign policy towards Iran.

Such challenges to international cooperation by unilateralism are not new. Almost a century ago, the League of Nations had created an framework to sustain international cooperation, and overcome such challenges. The objective was to promote "the intellectual work and international relationships between scientists, researchers, teachers, artists and members of intellectual professions" in order to achieve "international understanding between states as a means to preserve peace."[25]

Eminent Indians like Professor D.N. Banerjee, Professor Jagadish Chandra Bose and Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan were participants with Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Paul Valery, Henri Bergson, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Mann, and Gilbert Murray, among others, in the League's International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. The Committee, established in 1922, led to the International Institute on Intellectual Cooperation, funded and housed by France, which became the forerunner of UNESCO in 1946.

When the UN was established in 1945, the idea of "promoting international cooperation" was enshrined in Article 13 of the UN Charter. In 1960, the UN General Assembly focused on this issue and adopted Resolution 1495 which reaffirmed its conviction that "the strength of the United Nations rests on the co-operation of its Members States, which should be forthcoming in full measure so that the Organization becomes a more effective instrument in safeguarding peace and for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples".[26] In 1963, the UN General Assembly[27] declared 1965, the 20th anniversary of the United Nations, as the "International Co-operation Year". This provided the opportunity to member-states to conduct activities to focus on the importance of the principle of international cooperation established more than fifty years ago.

Given the importance of upholding the principle of international cooperation in multilateral relations, and India's specific national interest in this subject, the time has come for India to take the lead in the UN General Assembly on this issue in the forthcoming 75th anniversary of the United Nations, which will begin with the UN General Assembly session in September 2020. The focus of such an initiative, tabled under Article 13 of the UN Charter,[28] would draw on the rich discussions held over the past century in multilateral structures on the intellectual framework of international cooperation. India's contribution must draw on the deep wellsprings of our civilisational heritage, and the philosophy of the Vedanta, which emphasises the importance of cooperation between nations as an extension of the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* or "the world is one family." This will be a major contribution by India to making multilateralism relevant for the 21st century.

As India's initiative in 2014 for the United Nations General Assembly to declare an International Day of Yoga[29] showed, there is a huge reservoir of positive sentiment in the international community towards making international cooperation a living reality. An initiative by India to restore focus on the value of the ideas of international cooperation that have created and sustained multilateralism is bound to succeed.

Notes :

1   "India Trade Statistics, World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), The World Bank and UNCTAD,"Accessed at https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/IND

2   International Labour Organization. India has been designated one of the 10 permanent government members out of 28 governmental seats in the ILO's Governing Body as a "country of chief industrial importance" since 1922; accessed at https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/governing-body/lang—en/index.htm

[3] "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", United Nations, 25 September 2015, accessed at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

[4] NITI Aayog, Government of India, SDG Index, State/UT ranking, accessed at https://sdgindiaindex.socialcops.com/YuJbcq9d44/state-ut-ranking/basic#3/23.00/81.26

[5] Note 2, Paragraph 40.

[6] "India's Poverty Profile" , Snapshot 2012, The World Bank, 27 May 2016, accessed at http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2016/05/27/india-s-poverty-profile

[7] United Nations, UN Charter, Article 18, accessed at https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/

[8] United Nations, UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960, accessed at https://www.un.org/en/decolonization/declaration.shtml

[9] See Note 7, Article 24.1

[10] The Group of 77 at the United Nations, accessed at https://www.g77.org/doc/

[11] "Consolidation of the Special Fund and the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance in a United Nations Development Programme", United Nations, UN General Assembly Resolution 2029, 22 November 1965, accessed at https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/217/92/PDF/NR021792.pdf?OpenElement

[12] See Note 7, Article 27.3

[13] See Note 7, Article 25

[14] Refer Note 2, Preamble

[15] United Nations, UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/1, 16 September 2005, paragraph 153, accessed at http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_60_1.pdf

[16] UNGA Resolution 1991 (XVIII), 17 December 1963, accessed at https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/186/66/IMG/NR018666.pdf?OpenElement

[17] "Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council", United Nations Document No. A/34/246 dated 14 November 1979, submitted by Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Guyana, India, Maldives, Nepal, Nigeria and Sri Lanka to the UN Secretary General, accessed at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/34/246

[18] India led the creation of a group of developing countries which tabled a draft resolution for inter-governmental negotiations to bring discussions on the reforms of the Security Council into a negotiating platform. The draft resolution carried the number A/61/L.69/Rev.1. In order to avoid a vote on the resolution, the General Assembly unanimously agreed to create an Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) platform for Security Council reform. The group participates in the General Assembly inter-governmental negotiations

on Security Council reform under the "L-69" designation. See http://www.un.org/en/ga/
search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/61/L.69/REV.1&Lang=E

[19] The General Assembly unanimously agreed to adopt a decision on 5 interlinked areas for
reforming the Security Council. These 5 areas are categories of membership; the question
of the veto; regional representation; the size of an enlarged Security Council and the
working methods of the Council; and the relationship between the Council and the
General Assembly. See "Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the
Membership of the Security Council and Related Matters", UNGA Decision 62/557, 15
September 2008, available at http://www.centerforunreform.org/sites/default/files/
62%3A557.pdf

[20] India was one of the leaders of the group of 122 member-states of the UN General
Assembly which provided written proposals on each of the 5 areas identified in 2008 for
UN Security Council reforms. The group included two permanent members, France and
the UK. The President of the General Assembly, Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa of
Uganda, representing the African Group, tabled this document as an annexure to his
proposal for the IGN to converge on a text of a UN General Assembly resolution to
reform the Security Council. The President of the General Assembly's decision was
adopted unanimously, including by permanent members like China. See Press Release
by the United Nations, "General Assembly adopts, without vote, 'landmark' decision
on advancing efforts to reform, increase membership of Security Council", available at
http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11679.doc.htm

[21] Among the permanent members openly blocking Security Council reforms is China,
which has called for "comprehensive consensus" to adopt a UN General Assembly
resolution to amend the UN Charter and reform the Security Council. This was conveyed
by China's Foreign Minister to the President of the UN General Assembly on 1 March
2019. See http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/01/c_137861341.htm.

The Chinese position goes against the unanimous decision of the UN General Assembly
(which China is party to) that only a two-thirds majority is required for the General
Assembly to adopt decisions on Security Council reforms. See UN GA Document GA/
9511, 23 November 1998: "Affirmative votes from two-thirds of its members will be
required for decisions on Security Council reform",. accessed at https://www.un.org/
press/en/1998/19981123.ga9511.html

[22] Arun M. Sukumar, "The Significance of Dalveer Bhandari's, and India's, recent election
to the ICJ", Lawfare Institute and Brookings, 13 December 2017, accessed at https://
www.lawfareblog.com/significance-dalveer-bhandaris-and-indias-recent-election-icj

[23] "President Donald J. Trump is ending United States participation in an Unacceptable
Iran Deal", The White House, USA, Fact Sheet, 8 May 2018, accessed at https://
www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-
states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/

[24] Annual Press Conference by EAM on completion of 4 years of the government, Ministry
of External Affairs, India, 28 May 2018, accessed at https://www.mea.gov.in/media-

briefings.htm?dtl/29927/Annual_Press_Conference_by_EAM_on_completion_of_4 _Years_ of_ Government_Translation_May_28_2018

[25] "The League of Nations: Intellectual Cooperation United Nations Research Guides", accessed at https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lonintellectualcooperation/ICIC

[26] United Nations, UN General Assembly Resolution 1495 (XV), 17 October 1960, accessed at https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/152/69/IMG/ NR015269.pdf?OpenElement

[27] United Nations, UN General Assembly Resolution 1907 (XVIII), 21 November 1963, accessed at https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/ 1907%20(XVIII)

[28] See Note 7, Article 13.

[29] "International Day of Yoga – History and Relevance", Press Information Bureau, India, accessed at http://pibarchive.nic.in/yogaday2018/bgrel.aspx

✹ ✹ ✹