Forum: The G20 and Global Governance: An Exchange

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The Group of Twenty (G20) advanced and emerging economies was established in 1999, in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, to promote global financial stability. It was only in response to the global financial crisis of 2008, however, that the G20 emerged as a major player on the world stage. With the potential to alter the international order almost by stealth, the role of the G20 in multilateral diplomacy merits deeper examination than it appears to be receiving. Survival invited David Shorr, a program officer at the Stanley Foundation, and Thomas Wright, executive director of studies at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, to explore these issues in an exchange of letters, which we present here.

* * *

Dear David,

A couple of years ago, experts in multilateralism were engaged in a vigorous debate about the Concert of Democracies. Many people, you included, raised thoughtful objections to the concert, primarily on the basis that it would represent forum shopping and an end-run around the United Nations and it would alienate Beijing at a time when the United States needed China as a partner to tackle global problems.

Since then, the concert has been almost forgotten, and meanwhile we have seen the most significant transformation of the international order...
in decades with the emergence of the G20. The trigger, of course, was the international financial crisis of 2008. Unlike proposals for the Concert of Democracies, Western experts have welcomed the rise of the G20 and treated it relatively uncritically.

The G20 has been formally assigned duties for the management of the global economy, although there are those who would like to see it venture into other issues, such as international security. I write this letter chiefly because I think we are on the verge of ushering in a transformation of the architecture of the international order without having subjected this institution to any sort of rigorous vetting. In particular, I am concerned that continuing along this path will accentuate, rather than ease, the crisis of multilateralism, whereby the institutions available to us are unable to generate the levels of international cooperation required to effectively tackle international threats and challenges. I would like to highlight three potential problems for your consideration.

**Legitimacy**

Traditionally, the United States has supported two types of international organisations. The first is open to all countries (either universally or regionally) to join if they fulfil certain requirements. The United Nations is the most obvious example, but others include the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, the IMF, the OSCE, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The second type is based on values, of which NATO and the original G7 are the leading examples.

The G20 is the first organisation created with the backing of the United States that divides the world into countries that matter and those that don’t. Membership is arbitrary – there are no criteria, for example, by which Canada or Argentina qualify for membership, while Spain, the world’s ninth largest economy, is left out. The Spanish tend to just show up, however, whenever the G20 meets.

We have just experienced the most severe financial crisis in over 70 years. As we rebuild the global economic order, it is important that the institutions governing it are legitimate. We could have decided just to reform the IMF and introduce voting changes to reflect the rising power of Asian economies.
Instead, we have created an institution that deliberately excludes the vast majority of world states. Worse, Western states will be heavily implicated in the decision about who is in and who is out. What happens when the states on the outside complain vigorously about the actions of the states on the inside? I would put it to you that a reliance on the G20 may give rise to a grand narrative of a global economic apartheid or imperialism from the ‘G172’ that would dwarf the criticisms of the late 1990s.

**The lack of defined limits for the G20**

The G20 has responsibility for the global economy, but there is no guarantee that it will not expand its scope. I can easily imagine a situation where a G20 meeting coincides with an international security crisis. In such a scenario, will the crisis be on the agenda of the leaders’ meeting or will they ignore the elephant in the living room? If they address the crisis there is no going back; the G20, almost absent-mindedly, will become a major decision forum for international security.

Countries like India may actually prefer the G20 to the UN Security Council because they are represented at the G20 but not on the council. Over time, some countries may argue that the G20 is more legitimate than the Security Council. Challenging the council was a central, although in my opinion exaggerated, objection to the Concert of Democracies, but little has been said of a similar risk here.

Now, the Security Council has come in for its fair share of criticism over the years, but the irony here is that it is actually more effective from an American perspective than the G20. The Security Council has 15 members and only five have a veto. While the veto-wielding powers have permanent membership, all other countries are entitled to stand for election for a two-year term. The G20, on the other hand, has more members (apparently varying from meeting to meeting) and while no rules have been worked out for a veto, it is likely that all countries will be treated equally. In other words, it is quite possible that the G20 may constitute a greater barrier to agreement on the use of direct action in the face of aggression or massive human-rights abuses than the Security Council. Aren’t new institutions meant to be an improvement in terms of increasing net cooperation?
China and Russia as potential spoilers
The underlying premise of the G20 is that all of its members generally want the same thing from the global order. It is a partnership to tackle shared problems. Unfortunately, recent developments have cast doubt on this premise.

Consider the case of Russia. In his recent book on the financial crisis, *On the Brink*, Hank Paulson, the former US Treasury Secretary, claims that in 2008 Russia proposed to China that the two countries sell bonds in Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae to force a US government bailout of the mortgage finance companies. Luckily, China refused to go along with the plan, but if true the claim is still extraordinary and disturbing: in 2008 Russia sought to subvert the global economy instead of saving it.

Over the past 12 months, China has taken a hard line at the Copenhagen summit on climate change, is suspected of involvement in major cyber attacks, continues to resist tougher sanctions on Iran, and has adopted a generally more assertive line internationally. While we hope China will work to strengthen the international order, we must consider the possibility that it will use its influence in international institutions as a spoiler instead of a partner.

Again, I have seen little from advocates of the G20 about how to handle the risk that Russian and Chinese preferences may be fundamentally at odds with those of western powers.

A few suggestions
I look forward to hearing your thoughts on these problems but I would also like to offer some constructive ideas for moving forward.

- To tackle the legitimacy problem, elected members of the UN Security Council should also be members of the G20 for the duration of their term.
- The IMF and the World Bank should remain the primary forums for managing the global economy and the United States should push for reform of these institutions, particularly the IMF.
- The G20 should not deal with matters of international security save for the case of an unexpected major crisis on the eve of a
summit, and in that case an international security role should not be formalised.

- In the spirit of having a variety of multilateral forums, the United States should explore setting up a Concert of Democracies to provide another option in case members of the G20 seek to play a spoiler role.

Best, Tom

* * *

Dear Tom,

I certainly agree with you on the need for more public debate on the desirability of powerful nations combining into leadership clubs like the G20. The growing role of the G groupings (or ‘the Gs’) is indeed a significant development in contemporary international politics, but not as transformational or threatening as you portray. On the contrary, these diplomatic forums could be just the right tonic for the international system. I don’t anticipate that they will add to the legitimacy deficit, and I hope that they will help shrink the deficit in problem-solving cooperation and action.

A key predicate for twenty-first century multilateralism is that it takes all kinds. As an important piece of that heterogeneity, loosely structured sets of meetings such as the Gs will work alongside permanent treaty-based institutions such as the UN and the international financial institutions. Multilateral effectiveness will depend, to a great extent, on exploiting the comparative advantages of the various instruments.

And as you remind us, alliances and other bodies based on affinity and values are also essential. It is true that formal international organisations have the legitimacy of fixed decision rules and that liberal values lend legitimacy for certain issue baskets, as well as a strong glue for solidarity among like-minded nations. Yet I don’t see why combining nations on other grounds, such as economic or political power, lies outside the bounds of legitimacy.
The connection between legitimacy and values of course resurrects the Concert of Democracies debate. I wouldn’t deny that democratic nations have a unique role, indeed obligation, to promote the empowerment of citizens globally, as well as other common causes. The problem with the values–legitimacy link lies in the implication of a world community with two classes of nations.

There was a strand of the debate a few years ago that highlights the issue. I found it perplexing when the proponents of democratic solidarity argued that undemocratic regimes had no legitimacy to contribute in decisions of collective action. When the votes in the UN Security Council or General Assembly are totted up, the votes of the autocrats supposedly could be discounted in terms of aggregate legitimacy. No doubt there are issues and instances for which the stances of repressive governments should be viewed with cynicism. On the other hand, I think legitimacy can actually be enhanced when authoritarians help affirm, say, norms of international security such as nuclear non-proliferation.

**The collective power of the powerful**

Even more than such broad and diverse coalitions, however, the current international agenda needs the collective action of pivotal powers, which brings us back to the G20 and the other Gs. Emphasising leadership clubs is simply a logical extension of the idea that many contemporary problems can only be resolved with the involvement of the nations with the most leverage over that problem. The most frequently cited example is the necessity of Chinese and Indian commitment and action to deal effectively with global warming. Indeed, if I had to identify the most fundamental problem of the international system today, I would point to the need for closer alignment and more decisive action by powerful nations. With that concern about greater cooperation on the basis of shared stakes in sustainable peace and prosperity, leadership clubs seem like a natural place to look for, well, leadership.

The Gs have an added virtue in this regard. The lubricant needed to make intergovernmental cooperation run is that rare and ephemeral stuff: political will. Given the complexity of challenges like non-proliferation, global
economic growth and development, climate change and terrorism, as well as the diverse interests and perspectives at play, future progress will hinge on top-level political leaders providing impetus. And this is the essential nature of the Gs: that they revolve around meetings among policymakers at the highest level, particularly annual summit meetings of heads of state (which have actually been more than annual since the global economic downturn). Strictly speaking, the Gs represent nothing beyond those meetings and whatever policy advances emerge from them. But again, their lack of solid institutional structure is actually a strength, keeping the focus on the discussions of the ‘deciders’.

In your letter, you raise important concerns about the potential for the G20 to become a form of rogue multilateralism, presuming to make decisions on behalf of the world as a whole, trying to impose its will on the G172 that lack a seat at the high table. (This prediction seems to be at odds with your concern over possible Chinese–Russian obstructionism, but I suppose there could be self-arrogation on some issues and deadlock on others.) For me, the proper way to avert this danger is to have limits on the modes of action of the G20 that reflect its informality, as well as robust consultations with non-G20 countries. In other words, without decision rules or an international legal basis, the Gs should not be making decisions that overreach their exclusive club. Recently, I read a pretty good description along these lines in Bruce Jones, Carlos Pascual and Stephen John Stedman’s *Power and Responsibility* (Brookings Institution Press, 2009), saying that the Gs processes should be ‘a mode of institutionalised dialogue that can improve policy. Its mandate is to find a path toward consensus’ (p. 54).

I realise that the dynamics about which you warn have already surfaced on the G20’s financial reform agenda. I will only add that before we jump to conclusions of illegitimacy, let’s be sure to take stock of imperatives for action that may be at stake. As I say, I worry about paralysis, the health of the international order, and some very worrisome trend lines, just as much as I worry about legitimacy.

To respond to your other points, I see no reason why the leadership clubs should be restricted to the global economic agenda. I cannot think of a major set of issues, including international peace and security, that doesn’t suffer
from the same deficit of decisive action. The Gs pose no inherent threat to the UN Security Council because they indeed lack the Council’s legal basis, not to mention year-round sessions. And I’d certainly welcome mechanisms to link the two. Having said that, the so-called ‘variable geometry’ of different sets of countries for different policy areas makes a good deal of sense, and is reflected in the Major Economies Forum, formed to focus on climate change.

As to Chinese or Russian obstructionism, this danger is part of political reality and not dependent on a particular multilateral channel such as the G20. Established intergovernmental mechanisms offer plenty of outlets for mischief; I see leadership clubs as a chance (not a guarantee) to create the right kind of expectations of statesmanship.

Best, David

* * *

Dear David,

There is much that I agree with in your letter, but that is dwarfed by a larger concern about your approach to multilateralism. So, first, let me be clear about our agreement: the G20 has an important role to play in managing the global economy and I do not want to see it abolished. It was important to bring China and other emerging economies into the consultations following the international financial crisis, and this should continue.

I don’t want this to be exclusively, or even primarily, a debate on legitimacy so I’ll just comment briefly on that. There are no clear criteria for membership of the G20. It is not simply the world’s 20 largest economies. Saudi Arabia (the world’s 23rd largest economy), Argentina (30th), and South Africa (32nd) are formal members while Spain (9th), Netherlands (16th) Poland (18th) and Belgium (20th) are not. Invitations are issued arbitrarily, and there is no mechanism for objective adjustment. Needless to say, the rankings are different if we venture outside of GDP to security, which will raise problems if the agenda expands. Additionally, there appears to
be a mistaken assumption that a single country can represent a continent, but in international politics it is a country’s neighbours that are likely to be most opposed to their permanent membership of an exclusive international organisation like the G20 or the UN Security Council. For all of these reasons, the matter of membership selection should be addressed, preferably through objective criteria and a mechanism to elect a small number of term members.

Let’s move to the larger issue. Our problem is relatively simple: there is not enough international cooperation to effectively tackle a range of shared problems, including cyber security, climate change, nuclear proliferation, pandemic disease, and the international financial crisis. The question underpinning the general debate on multilateral reform is how to generate adequate levels of international cooperation. Broadly speaking, there are two alternatives on the table.

The first proposal, which you are advocating, is to convene the countries with ‘most leverage over a problem’. However, while the world’s major powers may share problems, they do not necessarily share the same assessment of the severity of the problem or how to tackle it. We know that multilateral cooperation only works when interests are shared (this is a key point made by Robert Keohane in After Hegemony), and the empirical evidence over the past year would suggest that the members of the G20 diverge significantly in how they define their interests, particularly on non-economic matters.

Unfortunately, there is no provision in your proposal for generating the required leverage to persuade these countries that cooperation is in their interest. I also worry that expanding the agenda of the G20 will actually provide others with additional leverage to create gridlock in the international system. For instance, the hurdle for acquiring G20 support on a security crisis is actually higher than that of the UN Security Council.

I would suggest a very different proposal, one specifically designed to increase American leverage in international organisations. The United States should deepen its cooperation with countries with similar interests (that is, those countries that share a common view about the severity of a problem and how to tackle it). This group of countries, which may vary from issue
to issue, can then negotiate collectively and in a respectful way with other countries that may have different interests.

Thus far, the Obama administration has been following your approach. In 2009, the president tried to move beyond cooperation with America’s treaty allies and reach out to other states, forming new partnerships, to tackle the international challenges of the twenty-first century. It was no accident, therefore, that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used the words ‘partner’ or ‘partnership’ 24 times in a major foreign policy address to the Council on Foreign Relations on 15 July 2009, but America’s allies only merited six mentions.

Building new partnerships is a welcome development but it is important that it is pursued in a way that produces the desired result of greater international cooperation. The empirical evidence of the past year suggests that China, in particular, has become more recalcitrant across a range of issues, including climate change, cyber security and nuclear proliferation. It is time to adjust the strategy. Deepening cooperation with countries with shared interests, especially US allies, would give the United States some badly needed leverage over potential spoilers, not just because it would be negotiating as part of a group but also because it would be apparent that the United States has other multilateral options in the case of gridlock.

One area ripe for such a move is in the field of cyber security. The free flow of information is vital to democracies. Although they disagree on many other issues, this distinguishes them from autocracies that tend to see the world’s information networks as a threat and a target. Working together, democracies could define what constitutes a cyber attack and draft a treaty on how to respond. They could then use their collective weight and leverage to negotiate with Russia and China, both of which see cyber attacks as a way to counter American military power, from a position of strength.

I’ll conclude with an observation on political leadership. In your letter you give the impression that putting the leaders in the room will cut through the red tape and obstructionism. I’m all for high-level buy-in but let’s not kid ourselves. China’s interests on cyber security, Iran and climate change will not converge with those of the United States merely because President Obama has a direct channel to President Hu Jintao. The problem is bigger
than a shortage of occasions for the world’s leaders to congregate and converse. You need an answer for how to generate cooperation if major powers just want to say no. Where’s the leverage going to come from? Unfortunately, an increasing reliance upon the G20 for non-economic issues, without the steps outlined above, is likely to make things worse, not better.

Best, Tom

* * *

Dear Tom,

In the end, our differences regarding the basics of the G20 may be quite slight. I recognise the problems with its composition – the undeniable arbitrariness, the glaring underrepresentation of Africa – and the desirability of criteria that are more objective. Count me sceptical about any major changes in how this grouping is configured for economic policy. On the other hand, if the principle of variable geometry gives rise to a differently comprised G grouping for political and security matters, selection of that group’s members might be done more rationally.

The two of us also agree on the definition of our problem: ‘insufficient international cooperation to effectively tackle a range of shared problems’. What could spur nations and their leaders to desperately needed collective action on climate change, non-proliferation and the global economy? Where can we find the glue for problem-solving international solidarity? As we have delved these questions, we can indeed see clear differences in our answers.

The nub of our dispute is those ‘shared problems’ that need to be tackled effectively. In what sense are they shared? As you argue, the world’s diverse nations lack the kind of shared interests that are the \textit{sine qua non} of collective action. Values and basic political orientation likewise are part of that national interest equation. In other words, twenty-first century global interdependence hasn’t really put all of us in the same boat. At any rate, it has not engendered a global togetherness strong enough that we can see it at work in nations’ calculations of their interests.
I view interdependence as a stronger force in international politics than your depiction, but whichever side we take on this question, we have to clarify our assumptions about the nature of international dissension at the same time as we identify the potential basis for unity. Differing perceptions of threat and priority certainly impede cooperation (most classically, the North–South divide over the relative emphasis on the agendas of international security or economic development). Then there are the divergent perspectives over, say, economic liberalisation or non-interference in domestic affairs. For an issue like climate change, with its economic stakes, the measures that might be adopted are bound to affect nations’ material well-being differently (how should the pain be allocated?). Add in the sort of political alignments and values that you highlighted, Tom, and you can explain 90% of the world’s protracted policy disputes.

Looking at the international diversity-and-divergence side of the ledger, I almost want to throw up my hands and concede that only nations that are sufficiently like-minded will ever come together to do anything. But even granting the difficulties involved, I still argue that bridging these divides is both possible and necessary. The same country that you spotlight as an obstruction, China, also offers the clearest proof of the possibility of change, of significant shifts in the calculation of policy and interests. Setting aside the sweeping changes over a period of decades, just take China’s handling of epidemic outbreaks. Prior to the 2002–03 SARS outbreak, how would we have viewed Chinese interests with regard to openness on public health? Eight years later, China offers important leadership on international public health. For that matter, was WTO accession an obvious call, from the interests perspective?

Obviously there were particular incentives and disincentives at work in these cases. And I don’t claim Chinese cooperation is just around the corner on the whole panoply of issues. My argument is merely that this is not the time to circle the like-minded wagons.

Shared consequences, shared interests
Turning now to the come-together side of the ledger, do diverse nations share the problems of the world in ways that will lead them to share in
the solutions? Fundamentally, sharing a problem means experiencing its effects. If this were a sufficient impetus to collective action, however, then we would see the varying threat perceptions and other obstacles I listed giving way to determined action.

I’d describe the stakes (stakes being another candidate for what nations share) a bit differently. The world community will share the consequences of inadequate cooperation, and the more powerful, globalised or strategically located a nation is, the higher its stakes. Pick any major problem on the agenda, and the trajectory without an infusion of international leadership and cooperation could lead to a dire foreseeable future: nuclear arms races in Northeast Asia and the Middle East, a generation of children in extreme poverty whose development was stunted by malnutrition, a climate-change tipping point of greenhouse gases, mounting bitterness over the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, mounting suspicion that globalisation is rigged for the benefit of the few. Inertia is not a great option.

The question of the twenty-first century is whether the world will be shaped by the entropy of disorder or the social contract of a rules-based order (my favourite articulation of this view, as well as pivotal powers’ shared interest in a peaceful, prosperous order, is Richard N. Haass’s The Opportunity). For instance, the real challenge of the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programmes isn’t merely their immediate regional effects, it’s their implications for the maintenance of the non-proliferation norm. As we acknowledged in our definition of the problem, not enough of the world’s nations are demonstrating their awareness of the trend lines I describe or their sense of themselves as stakeholders. My argument about the potential for cooperation among the un-likeminded is based on a prediction that such awareness will heighten and spread.

Your last letter stressed my emphasis on nations with leverage over problems. At one level, this makes me sound like more of a believer in ad hoc multilateralism than I am. I don’t propose that leverage should be the organising principle of multilateralism; that would be too unstructured as a basis for cooperation. At another level, though, the focus on leverage is the proper frame for contemporary strategic thought, because effectively tack-
ling shared problems truly is the rub for the future of the planet. I have my doubts about whether like-mindedness can get the job done.

Best, David

* * *

Dear David,

Interdependence doesn’t necessarily lead to greater cooperation, particularly if it involves geopolitical competitors. Instead, it is perfectly plausible that it may increase the sense of mutual vulnerability, thus heightening wariness and suspicion on both sides. During the Cold War, Western countries were economically and politically independent but they were also geopolitical allies who, for the most part, trusted one another. The fates of China and the United States are linked in many ways, particularly economically, but they do not trust each other. And truth be told, they’re right not to do so. The Chinese Communist Party is rightly concerned that, in the long run, the United States would like to see it pass from the corridors of power and give way to a democratic China. The United States is rightly concerned that China may use its rising power in ways that disrupt the post-war equilibrium in East Asia. And these are not the only reasonable suspicions out there.

It is also true to say that China and the United States see the world differently. As Matthew Kroenig pointed out in The New Republic on 9 February, China is not as worried by the Iranian pursuit of a nuclear-weapons capability because it is likely to complicate America’s interests in the Middle East while not impinging upon China’s national security interests. There is nothing morally wrong, or right, about the Chinese perspective. It is just the way it is. But it is also something that we would be naive to think can be swept away by some face-to-face diplomacy.

In your last letter you say that without universal cooperation bad things will happen. ‘Inertia’, you write, with considerable understatement, ‘is not a great option’. You acknowledge that your entire case that the ‘un-like-
minded’ will cooperate is based on a prediction that the awareness of the costs of a lack of cooperation ‘will heighten and spread’. But where is your sense of history? Countries have refused to cooperate before and terrible things have followed. Sometimes this was because regimes deliberately sought to upset the status quo for their own benefit. On other occasions, and more tragically, they pursued their own interest in reasonable ways but still ended up walking into catastrophe. Frequently, the costs of failure were predictable and predicted but were borne nevertheless.

I agree with you that the United States should engage emerging powers and never suggested anything else. The difference between us is whether this is the only thing the United States should do or one of several things. For me, the United States should not put all of its eggs in the one basket of multilateralism with autocracies. The natural constraints on such pursuits are too strong to rely upon their success. It should also hedge against failure of more inclusive forums by deepening cooperation with likeminded countries, particularly democracies. Such a step may lead to advances in cooperation on issues like cyber security that would not be forthcoming in the G20. However, it would also provide these states with the leverage that comes from collective bargaining. Moreover, China and Russia would have a reason to ensure that more inclusive institutions worked effectively because they would know that the United States has other options.

One final point: the WTO, which you mentioned in your last letter, is a good example of what I’m talking about. China only joined the WTO in 2001 after negotiating with its member states and agreeing to comply with WTO provisions. Ratification of Russian membership is still pending. If the United States were to have waited on agreement with China and Russia before establishing the WTO, we might still be waiting. As you implied in your letters, waiting is not something we can afford. By all means let’s use the G20 when appropriate but let’s be prudent and also follow other leads.

Best, Tom

* * *
Dear Tom,

I think we both recognise the same divergences in the perspectives of the established industrial powers compared with the BRICs. But where you foresee emerging powers stubbornly resisting moves to strengthen the rules-based international order, I still see them as necessary partners.

It’s not that I want to abandon the Western community of nations that share liberal values. Your proposal for the development of new norms for free, private, and secure use of the Internet is eminently sensible. I see no reason, though, to conclude that the rising powers’ interests put them fundamentally at odds with the West’s aims.

In fact, I think that collective effort by likeminded democracies to continue seeking these new powers’ support is a worthy project. The United States and major NATO allies have grown more closely aligned with regard to Iran, and that has helped keep pressure on China and Russia. (Now that I think of it, the P5+1 grouping for nuclear negotiations with Iran is a cross between the UN Security Council and a G-like leadership club.)

The challenge of Iran’s nuclear programme has come up in our correspondence because it is indeed a test for many of the issues in which we’re interested. Unlike you, and many others, I have not concluded that China and Russia are bound to oppose tougher UN sanctions. As I write this in mid-February, Moscow continues to publicly warn Tehran that sanctions will be the price of continued defiance. Discomfort over being the outlier among permanent Security Council members may itself be enough to impel China to go along, but the current diplomatic focus on China’s energy-supply sources is quite interesting. While China is concerned about interruption of the oil it imports from Iran, Western diplomats are asking Beijing to consider the other 90% of its imported petroleum. In other words, if a nuclear-armed Iran leads to heightened conflict and instability in the Middle East, that could mean much greater disruption in China’s energy supply.

And therein lies the difference in your and my views of national interests. You have reminded us of history’s march of folly, the many times when short-sighted calculations have led nations to misjudge their full and true self-interests, with tragic consequences. Soon we’ll know whether Chinese
leaders were persuaded of their long-term interests in Iran as a non-nuclear-weapon state. My essential point is that such considerations, such shared stakes in the rules-based order, will grow more prominent in multilateral diplomacy.

I don’t put as much stock as you think I do in the power of face-to-face diplomacy to resolve differences. More important, in my view, are the expectations, policy agendas and sense of stakes that multilateral forums can build. And yes, I do expect that, if we do things right, this dynamic will generate positive pressure and affect how nations view their interests.

Best, David