

## Unilateralism vs. Multilateralism

The case for Multilateralism	The case for Unilateralism
<p>Multilateralism guarantees the support of the international community. This makes international perceptions of action much more favorable. The increased good-will makes the present action easier, and could well spill over into future benefits in other areas. If a state proves itself to be a team player, willing to compromise to accommodate other states, then these other states will be prepared to compromise to suit that state in the future.</p>	<p>This need only be a concern for weak countries. Those countries that are strong enough to act alone do not need to worry about nebulous and unreliable ‘goodwill.’ Moreover, if the action is taken in the name of universal principles, like “freedom” and “justice” then people in other countries will in time come to see the error of their ways in opposing the action in the first place. If a state has the strength to act alone, and is convinced of the righteousness of its cause, it should not hesitate to act.</p>
<p>Unilateralism is destabilizing; if a country fights wars solely on a domestic whim, unconstrained by consultation or discussion with allies, it is likely to act disproportionately, high-handedly and counter-productively. It is also a terrible precedent to set for other states to follow: international relations could deteriorate if norms of cooperation are not nurtured. Chaos and anarchy would be the result if states decided to act alone.</p>	<p>Unilateralism does not entail an absence of consultation and discussion with allies and other interested states. It merely reserves the right, when discussion and consultation has not secured international support, to take action alone. Some acts, like waging a war to defend one’s own nation or free another from oppression, are too important to be discarded just because no other country is willing to share the burden.</p>
<p>Even if successful military action could be conducted unilaterally, it is likely that the problems of post-war reconstruction will be sufficiently costly and complicated to necessitate a multilateral solution. It will be much harder to form a coalition of international support for reconstruction if ties of cooperation and consultation were undermined by a unilateral war.</p>	<p>Military action can bring great benefits to states. Having been freed from dictatorship, people can freely contribute to their country’s economy and bring prosperity for themselves and their families. Many such countries have natural resources which are attractive to companies from any state, thus many states could have a direct financial interest in supporting post-war reconstruction even when they did not support the original war. And in cases with no such benefits, simple humanitarian spirit should compel these states to aid reconstruction. Ultimately, unilateralists should be prepared to extend their unilateralism to reconstruction as well as war.</p>

<p>Multilateralism guarantees a coalition of wisdom and interests. This ensures a balanced understanding of the issue and leads to clear objectives for action. This ultimately leads to a greater likelihood of success. It is arrogant and dangerous for countries to assume that they alone understand the problem, and they alone have the 'might' and the 'right' to solve it.</p>	<p>Too much talk can impede action. Too many points of view can cloud the issue. Whilst cooperation with other countries should be pursued as far as possible, no concessions can be offered that compromise key objectives, and unlimited time for negotiation cannot be afforded. One should not let threats get bigger and more unmanageable whilst one forlornly tries to form a coalition of the willing; when necessary, one simply must be prepared to act alone.</p>
<p>Many international problems cannot be addressed by one state acting alone, no matter how powerful it is. Problems such as global warming and pollution, poverty and malnutrition, disease epidemics and barriers to trade require multilateral solutions. Unless countries act together for their mutual benefit in these areas no progress will be possible, but multilateral cooperation cannot be restricted to these 'soft' areas of policy. If countries act unilaterally on other issues, then all their dealings will be characterized by suspicion and hostility, and progress will halt.</p>	<p>Multilateral bodies only move as quickly as their least constructive members will allow. Worse, the consensus they reach may in fact be wrong or unrealistic, providing no real solution and creating other problems in the long term. Sometimes unilateral action by one state can provide leadership, behind which other, like-minded states can gather. Even if different states adopt different approaches, this policy competition can be productive, showing which ideas are most deserving of wider adoption.</p>
<p>The purpose and strength of The United Nations is that it constrains countries within a multilateral system. This limits states' freedom of action to do whatever they wish, but it also protects sovereignty by insisting that states can act as they wish providing they do not threaten others; they are constrained only by agreements they freely make. Over time this has built confidence and understanding between the great powers, and helped keep global peace for nearly sixty years. Unilateral action undermines these principles, risking dangerous competition between the great powers, and encouraging outside intervention in the affairs of the smaller states.</p>	<p>Multilateralism undermines sovereignty by limiting the freedom of action of governments, and so can deny a people the rights of democratic decision and self determination. Most importantly, in the post-Cold War, post-9/11 world, a nation and its leaders must have the right to define what constitutes a threat, and what form self-defense should take, without reference to other nations. If a government has an electoral mandate for action, then it should be able to do as it wishes, without allowing other states a veto over its decisions. This is particularly true when so many multilateral organizations give equal voting weight and even veto powers to undemocratic nations.</p>