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MULTILATERALISM—DIPLOMATIC AND OTHERWISE

INIS L. CLAUDE, JR.

"Multilateral diplomacy", like many other terms current in the literature of international relations, tends to serve less as a topic for careful study than as a symbol, evoking generalized reactions of approval or disapproval, confidence or anxiety. In the mind of the public, the mention of those two words today calls up a picture of a big, noisy international conference, complete with committees and chairmen, agenda and rules of procedure, debates and votes, rostrum and gallery, earphones for simultaneous translation and microphones and cameras for world-wide transmission of the proceedings.

This image of multilateral diplomacy does not affect all men alike, nor have reactions to it remained fixed during the last generation. The Wilsonian vision of a world forum in which the conscience of mankind could be mobilized to promote international justice, decency, and peace has been largely displaced by the reaction typified by Sir Harold Nicolson when he alleges that public international conferences "tend to promote rather than allay suspicion, and to create those very states of uncertainty which it is the purpose of good diplomatic method to prevent".¹ Multilateral diplomacy has come to suggest propaganda and insult, not the wholesome ventilation of differences among nations. On the basis of recent

experience, we are inclined to make multilateral diplomacy the symbol of a vituperative, publicity-ridden assembly which provides the worst possible setting for the bargaining, the maneuvering, and the compromising which we associate with effective diplomacy.

The sober recognition of the demerits of what passes as multilateral diplomacy poses the temptation to fasten an uncritical and wistful gaze upon the more intimate, closed diplomacy of an earlier day. There is a danger that the old diplomacy may become invested with an idealized glow, stemming from a nostalgia which is forgetful of the fact that the old system produced failures giving adequate motivation for reasonable men to undertake the development of more satisfactory ways of conducting relations among states. If we are dealing in images, we would do well to recognize that mixed emotions ought to be engendered by both the assembly hall of "multilateral diplomacy" and the green-baize table of traditional diplomacy.

However, the urgent need is to develop a discriminating analysis of the functional significance of multilateral techniques in international relations which can counter the massive reactions of approval or disapproval which the term "multilateral diplomacy" tends to engender. What *is* multilateral diplomacy? Is it simply

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¹ Harold Nicolson, *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method*, New York, Macmillan, 1954, p. 89.

diplomacy, with a larger cast of characters, with the organization and techniques which are necessitated by the larger cast, and with the lack of privacy which is inevitable in such a situation? I think not. I suspect that the beginning of wisdom in this matter is the recognition of the fallacy in the proposition that multilateral diplomacy is merely diplomacy on a large scale and with the door open.

The truth is that the term, multilateral diplomacy, is commonly used to connote a wide variety of activities, which are more consistently multilateral than diplomatic in character. The techniques of multilateralism are sometimes turned to the problem of achieving the settlement of specific disputes, or the diminution of tensions in particular situations; in such cases, multilateral diplomacy is a term of literal description. But multilateralism is also applied to such matters as mobilizing the collective condemnation of a state whose behavior is alleged to fall below acceptable international standards, organizing a general colloquium on the problems of the global situation and on national policies for dealing with those problems, drafting conventions of the sort which have come to be known as "international legislation", and formulating arrangements for the establishment of international organizations and the initiation of international programs. Activities of this type are perhaps better understood if they are not labeled "diplomatic". Of course, every student of international relations is free to invest the term, "diplomacy", with whatever meaning or meanings he wishes; I have no license to establish the "true" definition of diplomacy. But the point is that no valid generalization can be made concerning the appropriateness or usefulness of multilateralism in diplomacy if the latter term

is taken to include too broad a range of interstate relationships. I propose to set out with the assumption that the diplomatic process is most clearly in operation when states are negotiating with each other to achieve peaceful settlement of a dispute or agreement on a matter of mutual concern, and when such negotiations have the fundamental quality of a *bargaining* session, involving the necessity of reciprocal concession to produce an agreed result. Admittedly, this formula does not serve as a basis for making absolute distinctions between what is diplomatic in character and what is not. It may, however, contribute to the possibility of reaching a proper evaluation of what is called multilateral diplomacy, by facilitating an analysis which distinguishes the more diplomatic from the less diplomatic functions of multilateralism.

Critics of multilateral diplomacy tend in fact to adopt, consciously or not, a definition of the diplomatic process not unlike the one suggested above. Most of the standard criticisms of multilateral diplomacy are applicable primarily if not exclusively to cases in which the problem is that of obtaining the peaceful settlement of a dispute. States A and B are locked in a quarrel; a mutually acceptable compromise must be found; a bargain must be struck. Here, clearly, is a situation in which a big, well-publicized international conference may do more harm than good; open debate may produce rigidity, arouse passion, and inhibit concession. The attractiveness of quiet consultation and private bargaining is very great in such a situation.

This is not to say that multilateralism has no proper or useful role in cases of this kind. But the question is, *what* role does it have? And the fact is that this question has too often been wrongly

answered. It seems to me that an international assembly has two major functions which can properly and usefully be exercised in disputes between states: 1) it can and should express the determination that disputes must be settled without recourse to violence; 2) it can and should make available to the disputants a suitable assortment of instruments for facilitating peaceful settlement. Pressure to settle and assistance in settlement: these are the vital contributions of multilateralism to diplomacy.

The first point expresses the basic justification for multilateral intervention. There are no longer any private disputes in the international sphere; a conflict between two states is everybody's business, because everybody's welfare, everybody's civilization, everybody's survival is involved in the maintenance of the peace of the world. This point was made in the Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes formulated at the Hague Conference of 1899, with its recognition of the friendly right of any state to remind disputants of the urgency of achieving pacific settlement,² and it cannot be made too often. Collective pressure upon quarreling states to recognize and respect their responsibility for preserving the peace is of the utmost importance.

The second point has both positive and negative implications. Positively, it reflects the unchallengeable fact that facilities, procedures, and personnel provided by an international agency may supply the indispensable ingredient of diplomatic success. Such devices as the rapporteur of the League era or the independent

mediator of the UN period, the commission of inquiry and conciliation, and the international team, military or nonmilitary, for observation and supervision of truce agreements have proved their value in the promotion of pacific settlement, and they have higher potentialities which can be realized if care and skill are invested in their future development.³ Negatively, the point suggests that a multilateral assembly should not itself undertake to serve as an agency of conciliation. This is the critical mistake, so often made, which accounts in large measure for the low repute into which multilateral diplomacy has fallen. Such a body as the General Assembly of the UN can serve diplomacy well as the creator and sponsor of specialized bodies and intimate procedures for mediation, but if the nations undertake to use it as a peace conference, they are likely to make it resemble a battlefield.

It is a fact of life that states are disinclined to confine international assemblies to the role of insisting upon and providing facilities for peaceful settlement. States involved in disputes normally succumb to the temptation to use multilateral forums for the purpose of enlisting support for their positions. Thus, we frequently find the General Assembly serving as a forum in which disputants struggle to achieve the mobilization of multilateral disapproval of each other's policies and actions. I do not deny that there are occasions when collective condemnation of a party to a dispute is morally and legally justified, nor that there are times when such condemnation may constitute or lead to effective action in

² Article 3.

³ See Leland M. Goodrich and Anne P. Simons, *The United Nations and the Maintenance of International Peace and Security*, Washington, The Brookings Institution, 1955, Part Three; James M. Hyde, "The Development of Procedures for the Peaceful Adjustment of

Disputes," Commission to Study the Organization of Peace, *Charter Review Conference: Ninth Report and Papers Presented to the Commission*, New York, 1955, p. 153-166; Paul Mohn, "Problems of Truce Supervision," *International Conciliation*, February 1952 (No. 478).

restraint of antisocial international behavior. But the resort to collective pressure of this sort can seldom serve as a useful preliminary to diplomatic negotiation. Collective insistence upon the avoidance or cessation of military action may be essential to preserve the possibility of peaceful settlement, but multilateral endorsement of the case of one party to a dispute as against the other is likely in most instances to inhibit rather than to facilitate conciliatory processes, and thus should be characterized as an *alternative* to diplomatic negotiation. Resort to this alternative should be controlled by a fine sense of discrimination—a sense which statesmen embroiled in a dispute are unlikely to exhibit. The invocation by a government of multilateral curses upon its opponent is not so much the exercise of multilateral diplomacy as an indication of refusal to engage in diplomacy of any sort. In ideal, the world forum should encourage and facilitate diplomatic negotiation; in practice, it all too often provides an opportunity for the evasion of diplomatic negotiation.

The remedy for this situation is probably not to be found in any alteration of the legal and mechanical structures of multilateralism. The task of maximizing the contribution of multilateralism to the success of diplomacy is essentially that of ensuring that the world forum will be dominated and directed by statesmen who are concerned to use it for the purpose of upholding the world's interest in the achievement of peaceful settlement, rather than by disputants who are concerned to use it for the purpose of promoting political triumph over their rivals. This objective can be realized only if the great majority of states develop and maintain

a vigorous political determination to realize it. If such determination is lacking, disputants will be quick to exploit international machinery for purposes which have little in common with multilateral diplomacy, as I conceive it.

A major aspect of contemporary multilateralism is the general forum on the state of the world and the policies of the nations which is best exemplified by the so-called "general debate" at the annual sessions of the UN General Assembly. It must be emphasized that it may be dangerously misleading to characterize this kind of performance as multilateral diplomacy, for such a characterization invites the application of wholly inappropriate standards of evaluation. This is multilateral, but not multilateral diplomacy. It is not a substitute for diplomacy, its functions are not those of diplomacy, and it ought not to be judged by the criteria of diplomatic achievement. I suspect that Lester Pearson was on the right track when he described this role of the UN as "essentially parliamentary".⁴ This characterization is safe for public consumption only if one makes it clear that he is not talking in terms of the unsophisticated notion that parliaments are simply places where laws are made. The general international debate is parliamentary, not, of course, in the legislative sense, but in the sense that a major part of its value, to quote Pearson, "lies precisely in the ability to mobilize and focus opinions, to encourage the formulation, expression, and dramatic confrontation, of major viewpoints".⁵

While the general debate is not, I suggest, a diplomatic enterprise, it may have great influence upon the quality of diplomacy. For it is the function of this brand

⁴ Lester B. Pearson, *Democracy in World Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1955, p. 65.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

of multilateral activity to help establish the context within which diplomacy is to operate. At its best, the general debate is an exercise which Abraham Feller aptly described as "the world . . . looking at its problems in the round".⁶ It involves the laying out, for all to see, of the problems which lie between humanity and the goal of a decent, orderly, secure world—the problems with which realistic foreign policy must be concerned. It is a collective introduction of the responsible or irresponsible leaders of governments to the facts of international life—to the ambitions and anxieties, the demands and expectations, the passions and sensitivities, which they can ignore only at their peril, and mankind's peril. It is an exposé of the world's dangers and the world's opportunities. The debate affords vital information about the prospects for a foreign policy, the nature of competing foreign policies, the extent and intensity of opposition, the degree of tolerance or acquiescence, the breadth and depth of the support which may be anticipated. Finally, the collective consultation of the nations provides an opportunity for the crystallization of whatever standards of international behavior the world may be capable of agreeing upon at any given time.⁷ These are useful, if not, indeed, indispensable, functions for a world which can no longer afford the tragic mistakes which may result from blind, ignorant, or obtuse diplomacy.

Up to this point, I have suggested that the proper role of multilateral institutions in relation to diplomacy is to dramatize the insistent requirement of the international community that disputes be settled by diplomatic rather than military methods, to provide instruments and proce-

dures for promoting the achievement of diplomatic agreement, and to formulate the broad outlines of the political setting within which the diplomatic process must function.

Now I turn to an area of activity which involves, and ought to involve, the operation of multilateralism as a central and not a peripheral factor: the formulation of what might be called legislative and constitutional treaties. In one sense, this is perhaps the most precisely "diplomatic" of the functional areas of multilateralism; the negotiation of treaties is, after all, a classic instance of diplomatic function. But in another sense, it is far removed from traditional concepts of the diplomatic process. Diplomacy is a term heavily weighted with such ideas as giving a *quid* and getting a *quo*, striking a bargain, arranging mutual concessions so as to satisfy both sides in a two-sided situation—and I have taken these ideas to be central to the meaning of diplomacy as the term is used in this article. It is arguable that what we have in the formulation of multilateral treaties is a quasi-legislative, rather than an expanded diplomatic, process. In stating this, I have reference not specifically to the legal quality of the anticipated result of the negotiation, but to the political quality of the negotiating process itself. With regard to what goes on in the multilateral negotiation of a convention, the analogy of a collective bargaining effort to agree upon a contract is less apt than the analogy of congressional maneuvering to synthesize numerous interests and viewpoints in a project for a governmental program or a public policy. The process of reaching multilateral agreement on a human rights treaty, or an international code for the

⁶ A. H. Feller, *United Nations and World Community*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1952, p. 119.

⁷ Inis L. Claude, Jr., *Swords Into Plowshares*, New York, Random House, 1956, p. 327-328.

regulation of air traffic, or a convention on copyrights, or the constitution of a new specialized agency is an exercise in accommodation calling for attitudes and skills which have long been associated more closely with the legislative than the diplomatic process. This is not to deny that dualities—tugs of war between two interested parties—arise in both types of negotiation, or that political compromise is an essential component of both processes. The differences are neither easily definable nor absolute in character, but I think there is a difference in kind which the working diplomat and the working congressional politician would be among the first to recognize. The shift from diplomacy to *multiplomacy*, if I may take a chance on incurring the wrath and contempt of the etymologists, is one which involves basic challenges to the traditional procedures of international negotiation.

One thing is clear: the standard criticisms of multilateral diplomacy are not generally pertinent to this zone of activity. The case against premature and excessive publicity applies most explicitly to a situation in which two states are in conflict over an issue. The ill-judged use or the politically motivated abuse of multilateralism in such a situation may so inhibit concession and counter-concession as to jam up the diplomatic works. But in the case of a quasi-legislative international endeavor, the general exposure of differences of view and the open exploration of possible points of agreement would seem to be not a dangerous but an essential procedure. This does not mean that private consultations can be dispensed with; it does mean that public confrontations must be regarded as an integral part of the process. The delicate bargaining of diplomacy cannot be carried out in the wide open spaces of the

multilateral arena; the hammering together of international public policy, as expressed in institutions and programs, cannot be carried out *except* in the wide open spaces of that arena. The multilateral arena obviously provides no guarantee that the latter process can be successfully carried forward, as any observer of human rights discussions in the UN must be aware. Nevertheless, it does provide the appropriate setting for the exploration of the possibilities of general agreement on issues of international public policy.

Certainly, there is logic in the proposition that the groundwork of a projected multilateral institution or the text of a projected multilateral treaty should be developed through a process involving all the states whose adherence to the final result is desired or expected. Who can challenge the propriety of multilateralism in the creation of the International Atomic Energy Agency or the drafting of the Covenants on Human Rights? In this realm the real danger is the possible narrowness, not the breadth, of multilateral participation. The refusal of essential states to participate may doom a project which makes sense only in terms of substantial universality. The deliberate exclusion of states whose adherence to the finished project is essential may reduce a negotiation to senseless futility. The time may not be far off when the United States may have to face the issue of how much sense it makes to conduct negotiations on disarmament in the enforced absence of a state, namely China, without whose adherence it would be folly to accept a general disarmament agreement. Perhaps we cannot afford to recognize China's government; can we afford *not* to recognize China's military power and potential? And if we rec-

ognize the indispensability of Chinese participation in a system of armament regulation and control, can we realistically evade the necessity of dealing China in, whenever, if ever, we get seriously down to the business of formulating a generally acceptable system?

There are serious difficulties involved in reaching agreement on significant matters when negotiations are conducted on the scale of unlimited multilateralism. Hence, there is a persistent tendency to try to escape this hard reality by setting up artificially restrictive boundaries of multilateralism. For better or worse, this effort is seldom successful today. The great powers met at Dumbarton Oaks to formulate the UN Charter; the San Francisco Conference turned into an exercise in multilateral negotiation, not a ceremony of acceptance by multilateral acclamation. The UN has created two bodies of carefully balanced and limited multilateral membership, the Trusteeship Council and the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories, for dealing with colonial matters; these matters tend in practice to be pulled into the unlimited multilateralism of the General Assembly. After abortive efforts to negotiate with the Soviet Union on the creation of an International Atomic Energy Agency, the United States attempted to confine the preparation of the charter of that agency to a hand-picked group of states, a highly selective multilateral commission excluding what Americans might regard as "troublesome elements"; this scheme was resisted and frustrated in the General Assembly.⁸ The western powers summoned Egypt in 1956 to bring its Suez policy before a conference whose

multilateral dimensions were determined by themselves; Egypt refused to buy their brand of multilateralism. One can only conclude that the difficulties of all-out multilateralism must be faced, not evaded.

It would be unrealistic to allow preoccupation with the problems of this sort of multilateral activity to blot out the significant progress which has been made in the development of the structures, the techniques, and the political habits which are essential to the effective conduct of large-scale international consultation and negotiation. The first half of the twentieth century has been a period of remarkable inventiveness in the sphere of international organization. The nations have acquired a great variety of new equipment, ranging from the institution of an international secretariat to the system of simultaneous translation, and from rules of international parliamentary procedure to the ability to absorb undiplomatic language in international debate. National legislative bodies might well be envious of the elaborate mechanisms which have been developed in certain international organizations to assist delegates in producing intelligently formulated drafts for multilateral acceptance. For instance, the process used by the International Labor Organization for the preparation of conventions or recommendations involves staff research studies of the problems under consideration, collection and dissemination of comments by governments, preparatory technical conferences when appropriate, and a "double discussion" procedure requiring consideration of drafts at two successive annual sessions of the International Labor Conference.⁹ Somewhat

⁸ See General Assembly Resolution 912 (X), Section II, December 3, 1955.

⁹ See Part II, Section E, of the Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference. *Constitution of*

the International Labour Organisation and Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1955.

similarly, such agencies as the International Civil Aviation Organization and the World Health Organization routinely utilize the services of expert bodies in the preparation of technical regulations and standards which are to become a part of the growing body of international administrative law. Owing in large measure to such developments as these, the big international conference has become a feasible thing, a normal thing, and a more and more effective instrument for handling some of the business of international relations.

Nevertheless, it remains true that there are difficulties and frustrations to be encountered in the multilateral conference chamber. There is a limit to what can be accomplished there. How can these problems be overcome? How can this limit be transcended?

One of the favorite answers of our time is the proposition that this quasi-legislative process should be allowed to produce a legislative result; let the majority not only out-vote the minority, but bind the minority in so doing. The multilateral conference ought to be transformed, in limited degree at least, into an international legislature. This suggestion seems to me to raise more problems than it solves. Although some international agencies have in fact acquired certain very modest installments of legislative capacity, I do not think that we stand on the threshold of a global legislature. Moreover, I think that this suggestion reflects an exaggerated view both of the fitness of the units of international society to be legislated *for*, and of the practicability and appropriateness of the legislative method for the ordering of relations among the constituent units of any pluralistic society.

¹⁰ E. B. White, *The Wild Flag*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1946, p. 24-27, 144, 148.

The experience of a national community such as the United States indicates that the necessity of negotiating agreement among the significant units of a society is never eliminated by the development of a theoretical capacity to impose legislative enactments upon them. The politics of accommodation is here to stay, at all levels of human society.

I suspect that the most fruitful approach to the development of a global order is not to nourish the vision of a world in which "law" has supplanted "politics",¹⁰ but rather to seek means for the improvement of the international political process. We suffer from a qualitative deficiency, not a quantitative excess, of politics in international relations. Politics, conceived as a matter of arranging consent, is an essential function in the ordering of any social grouping. Internationalists would do well to devote less time to bemoaning the necessity of promoting agreement and voluntary cooperation among states and more to the imaginative consideration of ways and means for meeting that necessity.¹¹

I would suggest that the most pressing requirement for the improvement of the multilateral conference as an instrument for conducting international business is the development of internationally-oriented leadership. The quasi-legislative process ought to operate under quasi-executive leadership. The agencies of international organization are still too nearly exclusively the domain of national statesmanship, too dependent upon the initiative of men who, by the nature of their positions, tend to be fundamentally spokesmen for a narrow national interest and viewpoint. Given the meaningfulness of the national state as the basic unit

¹¹ See the thoughtful analysis of this problem in A. Loveday, *Reflections on International Administration*, London, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 230-234.

of today's world, it is necessary and proper that state-oriented men should *dispose*; given the reality of the ties of interdependence which unite the nations in a common destiny, it is necessary and proper that world-oriented men should *propose*.

We have made some progress in the development of openings for international statesmanship, particularly in the office of the Secretary-General in the League and the UN and the corresponding position in the specialized agencies, and, most recently, in the North Atlantic Organization. The position of the independent commissioner, originated in the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community and imitated in the structural designs for Euratom and Euro-market, provides a major opportunity for the emergence of leadership on a higher level than that of national interest. Similarly, the device of the permanent chairman, as it applies to the Councils of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization, offers significant possibilities for development.

In practice, a few outstanding individuals have undertaken imaginatively and adventurously to develop the potentialities of those offices. The list of international officials who have undertaken to push beyond the limits of administrative functions to make creative contributions to world order must certainly include such names as Albert Thomas, Trygve Lie, Dag Hammarskjöld, Brock Chisholm, David Morse, and Jean Monnet.¹² Opportunities for statesmanlike service to the global community have come to, and been

grasped by, such men as Count Bernadotte, Ralph Bunche, Frank Graham, and General E. L. M. Burns. Nor should it be assumed that the pioneering development of international leadership has been restricted to secretariat officials and other formally "internationalized" individuals. The League period provided occasional examples of national statesmen, most frequently representing small states, who found it possible to give loyal service to the interests of their nations and yet to transcend their national status in becoming spokesmen for an international point of view; Nansen was not less "Nansen of Norway" in becoming Nansen of the World. The names of Paul-Henri Spaak and Lester B. Pearson come to mind when one surveys the decade after World War II for evidence of the continuing development of international statesmanship among governmental leaders. Significant beginnings have been made in exploiting the possibilities of the two functions which I would regard as the major tasks of international leadership: the provision of disinterested mediatorial assistance to participants in disputes, and the provision of independent initiative, reflecting concern for the general welfare of mankind, in the formulation and execution of international programs and policies. Moreover, this sort of leadership has on occasion been welcomed, honored, and even requested by national statesmen, individually and collectively.¹³

However, the role of the spokesman for the international interest is still too marginal, too exceptional, too poorly defined, too grudgingly accepted. The prospects for the increasing usefulness of multi-

¹² E. J. Phelan, *Yes and Albert Thomas*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1949; Stephen M. Schwebel, *The Secretary-General of the United Nations*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952; Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace*, New York, Macmillan, 1954; Elmore Jackson, "The Developing Role of the Secretary-Gen-

eral," *International Organization*, Summer 1957 (Vol. XI, No. 3), p. 431-445; A. S. Bokhari, "Parliaments, Priests and Prophets," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1957 (Vol. 35, No. 3), p. 405-411.

¹³ Jackson, *op. cit.*; William R. Frye, *A United Nations Peace Force*, New York, Oceana Publications, 1957.

lateral institutions are tied up with the possibility of giving ever larger scope to international statesmanship.

In summary, the usefulness of the modern multilateral technique varies with the uses to which it is put. The injection of multilateralism directly into the contention between quarreling states is a risky business, subject to serious abuse. It is likely to create impediments to successful negotiation unless it is controlled with a careful regard for the delicacy of conciliatory possibilities which is all too rarely dominant in international political assemblies. In this sense, the critic of multilateral diplomacy is justified in deploring

the trend toward the big, wide-open international debate.

But the management of international affairs involves a broad range of activities to which the principle of multilateralism is entirely appropriate and, in fact, increasingly indispensable. It is important that the world should learn to avoid the misuse of multilateralism which unleashes a bull in the diplomatic china shop. It is equally important that the world should continue the encouraging progress that it has made in developing multilateral contributions to the accomplishment of tasks that are vital to all who live in the age of interdependence.