**The distinction between “real” and “fake” multilateralism based on cognition and practice**

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[Abstract] The dispute between true and false multilateralism has become one of the key issues in the global diplomatic field in 2021. China adheres to true multilateralism and systematically promotes the great cause of building a community with a shared future for mankind; the United States attempts to use false multilateralism as a tool to maintain hegemony, which has triggered widespread controversy around the world over the true connotation and practice of multilateralism. True multilateralism respects the international order arrangement with the United Nations at its core, emphasizes the adherence to the international legal system that is generally accepted and recognized by all parties, avoids the situation where individual or a few countries use multilateralism as a cover to impose order and rules of the nature of "gang rules and family rules" on most countries, strives to realize the democratization of international relations, and makes China's special contribution to the systematic promotion of the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

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**Multilateralism becomes one of the key issues in global diplomacy in 2021**

On September 21, 2021, President Xi Jinping attended the general debate of the 76th United Nations General Assembly via video and delivered a speech entitled "Strengthen Confidence, Overcome Difficulties and Build a Better World Together", clearly pointing out that "we must improve global governance and practice true multilateralism". "True multilateralism" has become a high-frequency word used by Chinese leaders in diplomatic occasions in 2021. In September 2021 alone, Chinese leaders repeatedly emphasized the concept of "true multilateralism" at the 21st Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the 13th BRICS Summit, the opening ceremony of the plenary session of the 6th Eastern Economic Forum, and a phone call with Italian Prime Minister Draghi. On December 10, 2021, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended the opening ceremony of the 2021 International Situation and China's Diplomacy Seminar and delivered a keynote speech, summarizing "Faced with the contest between true and false multilateralism, we hold high the torch of true multilateralism and resolutely safeguard the authority of the United Nations and the stability of the international order" as an important aspect of China's diplomacy in 2021. It is obvious that "upholding true multilateralism" has become one of the key concepts of China's foreign strategy in 2021, guiding China to move forward firmly towards the great cause of systematically building a community with a shared future for mankind.

China not only adheres to multilateralism, but also repeatedly emphasizes that there is a debate about the "authenticity" of multilateralism. This stems from one of the significant changes in the international situation in 2021: the new US administration has launched a special wave of offensives around the world under the guise of so-called "multilateralism."

Since the 2020 US presidential election, the new US government has held high the banner of so-called "multilateralism", taking "multilateralism" as the biggest feature of its diplomatic strategy, and has set off a wave of "multilateralism" around the world. On the one hand, objectively speaking, from the standpoint of the US national interests, this is a major adjustment and correction to the previous US government's erroneous strategy of pursuing US national interests to the extreme in a naked unilateralist way, which has created magical realist consequences. On the other hand, this is also a new strategic attempt by the establishment elites who dominate the current US government to deal with the so-called strategic challengers in their eyes: by giving full play to the comparative advantages of the United States and the West in the global public opinion-communication field, monopolizing the right to define "multilateralism", labeling the "gang house rules" of the United States and the West as "multilateralism", and labeling the strategic opponents identified by the United States as "threats to multilateralism" in the cognitive field, so as to re-occupy the so-called moral high ground in the increasingly heated strategic game between major powers, and then increase the bargaining chips of the strategic game, and inject new chips into winning the strategic game between major powers at a lower cost.

Because of the above background, multilateralism was originally just a common concept in international relations theory, and its core connotation is that two or more countries carry out various activities through communication and consultation. However, multilateralism has become a symbolic term that has attracted the attention of all parties. Around topics such as what is true multilateralism, how to practice true multilateralism, and what positive impacts practicing multilateralism can bring, all parties have not only launched a fierce contest at the discourse level, but also launched a deep-level game at the practical level. To a considerable extent, the contest and game around multilateralism has become one of the core focuses of the strategic game of major powers in the world today in the projection of discourse and cognitive system.

**The essence of today's multilateralism dispute is the dispute over the guiding principles of the international order.**

As for the actual use of the term multilateralism in the context of the current strategic game among major powers, what all parties are actually referring to during the discussion is the international order; the dispute over multilateralism in today's world is essentially a dispute over the guiding principles of the international order.

The hegemonic power and its core allies attempt to give legitimacy to a certain pattern of the international system that was established and dominated by the United States and Western countries and once held an overwhelming advantage for a period of time by highlighting and frequently using the term "multilateralism", and define the emerging powers in their eyes as challengers to this pattern. To put it bluntly, a simple summary of history and practice shows that what the hegemonic power and its core allies care about is never the principle of multilateralism, but a specific pattern of power distribution and the way of distributing interests under this pattern. "Multilateralism" is just a layer of cosmetic packaging used to cover the real goals pursued by the hegemonic power and its core allies. From the presidential national security strategy reports issued by successive US governments since the Cold War, it can be clearly seen that the goal the United States pursues is to maintain its overwhelming hegemonic advantage and realize its freedom of action in the international system; the way to achieve this goal, according to the calculation of costs and benefits, as well as specific scenarios, can be achieved through unilateralism, alliances, and multilateral actions under the United Nations framework when there is no way around it. Although researchers in the United States and the West have constructed different explanatory frameworks, in practice, every US government since 1992 will unscrupulously abandon the principle of multilateralism when necessary and take unilateral actions with a significant hegemonic color.

The Clinton administration used the NATO framework to coerce and then ignored the UN Security Council to launch the Kosovo War, creating a humanitarian disaster in the name of "humanitarian intervention to protect human rights"; the Bush administration threw off the UN Security Council's authorization to build a "volunteer alliance", pieced together and even created excuses such as "washing powder" evidence, launched the Iraq War, and unilaterally withdrew from the US-Russia anti-missile agreement; the Obama administration used the name of "freedom of navigation" to carry out substantive "freedom to run rampant" operations, and while not ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, it arrogantly demanded that other countries implement the convention in the United States' mind according to the United States' definition, understanding and standards; it used the American version of the "multi-stakeholder principle" to build the so-called global cyberspace governance order, and continued to promote unrestrained, borderless and bottom-line-less cyberspace governance. The global cyberspace monitoring project "PRISM" eavesdropped on the mobile phone communications of the then leader of Germany, a strategic ally; the Trump administration, under the principle of "maximum pressure", frequently "withdraws from the group", implements "one-dimensional long-arm jurisdiction" across borders without any basis in international law, and even blatantly engages in political kidnapping; while the Biden administration hypocritically touts the so-called "multilateralism", it unscrupulously replicates the stale strategy of confrontation between ideological camps during the Cold War, uses "multilateralism" to wrap up the continuously strengthened military alliance strategy of keeping each other warm, and constantly tries to sever the institutional arrangements of multilateralism that were once led by the United States but can no longer be continuously controlled and managed by American hegemony at the regional and global levels, pushing the falsity and hypocrisy of American hegemony to a new historic height.

A large amount of practice and iron-clad facts constantly remind the world that the true principles of multilateralism and the real pursuits of hegemonic countries are incompatible; hegemonic countries abuse the name of multilateralism to pursue their own absolute interests, making the true principles of multilateralism face unprecedented severe threats and challenges.

In sharp contrast to the hegemony and its core allies, the emerging powers have a substantive preference for "real multilateralism", that is, maintaining and improving a benign international order based on multilateralism. Although it originated from the knowledge system dominated by the United States and the West, true multilateralism, that is, recognizing the legal equality of sovereign states and following this equality to build and develop an institutional arrangement that can accommodate the majority of countries rather than being absolutely monopolized by individual or a few countries, is not only in line with the national interests of emerging powers, but also objectively in line with the endogenous laws of global historical development. From an operational perspective, the emerging powers that have entered the rapid rise channel in the 21st century are actors that consciously seek to avoid the tragedy of great power politics, which is relatively rare in history. They seek to move smoothly to the center of the international stage in a rational and pragmatic way, and pursue a benign change in the international order in a constructive rather than destructive, inclusive rather than subversive way. This is a special preference jointly shaped by the current in-depth globalization process, the special historical background, unique cultural heritage, and self-selected domestic political system of emerging powers. It is substantially different from the so-called "challengers" that have emerged in the rise and fall of great powers under the dominance of the West since the 16th century. China, as an emerging power, fully understands and recognizes the objective advantages of the international order under the leadership of true multilateralism with the United Nations at its core in terms of both cognition and practice. In China's diplomatic discourse, multilateralism is everyone's business, discussed and promoted together, and everyone's rules are formulated and abided by together. The rules formulated by one or a few countries cannot be imposed on others, nor can individual countries, based on their so-called "power status", "set the pace" for the entire world.

Only by adhering to true multilateralism and opposing false multilateralism can we continuously promote the improvement of the international order in a positive direction that benefits the world and achieve constructive and steady changes. From the current objective international practice, as President Xi Jinping pointed out, there is only one system in the world, that is, the international system with the United Nations at its core; there is only one order, that is, the international order based on international law; there is only one set of principles, that is, the basic principles of international relations based on the UN Charter. What China needs to do is to promote global governance to uphold the principle of extensive consultation, joint construction and sharing, and continuously reform and improve in the direction of democratization of international relations.

**True multilateralism emphasizes achieving global security through collective security**

By combing through the academic research literature on multilateralism, we can find that the attention and recognition of multilateralism involves the core proposition of international relations, namely the issue of war and peace; the rise of multilateralism is closely related to the emergence and practice of the concept of "collective security". From a theoretical point of view, there are three different paths to achieve sustainable and lasting peace in a world composed of sovereign states: "hegemony", "alliance" and "collective security". The choice of these three paths is related to how to maintain national security and solve the key problems of survival and development in an international community composed of sovereign states with anarchy as its core.

"Hegemony" means the idea of ​​using the hegemonic country's own super strength and position of power to ensure its own overwhelming security; "alliance" means that several countries form cliques and then jointly deal with the external common threats they refer to by "holding together". Although there are extremely important, clear and significant differences between the two paths of "hegemony" and "alliance" in details, they also have a common feature, that is, these two ways to achieve security are at the expense of other actors in the same international system, especially the loss of security interests of other actors.

"Collective security" is a completely different solution. It is based on the principle of "all for one, one for all" and regards the entire human society as a secure whole. In a holistic way, it guarantees the survival of all actors and jointly responds to any sovereign state that may become a source of aggression. Obviously, the principle of "collective security" provides a feasible option to truly eliminate the security dilemma, at least in theory.

From a practical point of view, through a brief review of the history of international relations, we can find that the pursuit of security by the whole world has generally gone through a development process from individual self-help to alliance and mutual assistance to collective security. The rise of multilateralism and the final path of "collective security" have been widely accepted by all parties, and there is a very close relationship. In the early 20th century, in the practice after the end of the First World War, the principle of "collective security" was systematically experimented in the form of the League of Nations; subject to the limitations of a specific historical period, the League of Nations proved to be not a successful practice and failed to play a role in preventing war; in the middle of the 20th century, under the tragic impact of the Second World War, by learning from the lessons of the League of Nations, the United Nations has undergone substantial adjustments and reforms since its establishment. Although there may still be many defects and shortcomings, the overall structural design of the United Nations and the principle of collective security demonstrated through the United Nations Charter have indeed shown significant advantages in incremental improvement in maintaining security and stability.

It should be pointed out that, judging from the international practice of the United States and its military allies, there is such a deceptive practice: using the rhetoric of "collective security" to package a military alliance consisting of two or more countries, and calling this military-political alliance that is clearly directed at a third party a product of a certain "collective security" principle. The iconic features are the North Atlantic Treaty Organization established by the United States in Western Europe and the Japan-US military alliance system established in East Asia. The texts of these two alliances both use the term "collective security", but in terms of their functions, it can be clearly found that both have significant external orientation, that is, the goal of building an alliance is to target third parties other than the alliance members. In the post-Cold War world, these third parties focus on China and Russia, two countries that have been clearly defined as strategic competitors by the United States since 2017. Obviously, the multilateralism pursued by the United States is a completely false multilateralism. In essence, it is a military-political alliance system that lags behind the needs of the times, and it poses a direct impact and challenge to the strategic mutual trust and stability between major powers, as well as the prosperity and development of the international community.

**The preference for genuine and fake multilateralism has led to two contrasting practices in the post-Cold War world**

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, and the disintegration of the bipolar structure, in the following 30 years, the core test mark faced by "multilateralism" as a strategic concept in international practice is how the major countries with relative power advantages in the international system treat and understand the orderly arrangements of the international community with the United Nations at its core. Overall, two iconic practices have been formed.

One practice is to treat the international order in a selective manner, purely out of the interests of itself or a few allies, with a relatively pure instrumental rationality, and to formulate a foreign strategy with significant double or even multiple standards. The instrumental rationality here is the so-called "use it when you want to use it, and don't use it when you don't want to use it", and never truly abide by the UN Charter with sovereign equality as its core principle. Since the 1990s, this choice has dominated the foreign strategy of the US government in different periods. During the Clinton administration, the so-called humanitarian military intervention was promoted under the framework of the "democratic peace theory" with "human rights above sovereignty" as the core concept; during the Bush administration, under the strategic guidance of the war on terror, the United Nations was abandoned and more naked military intervention was carried out in the form of the so-called "coalition of volunteers"; during the Obama administration, the form was more restrained than that of the Bush administration, but it continued to insist on large-scale tampering with "multilateralism" on the track of multiple standards, using gorgeous rhetoric such as "Internet freedom" to strengthen the military alliance system and seek effective ways to consolidate hegemony at low cost; during the Trump administration, the proposition of "unilateralism" was reflected in an unprecedented naked mode, and "withdrawing from the group at the slightest disagreement" became a hallmark of the US diplomatic strategy during this period; although Biden raised the banner of "America's return to multilateralism" at the beginning of his term, people soon discovered that the multilateralism advocated by the Biden administration is a hypocritical and false multilateralism. It is using "multilateralism" as a label to re-strengthen the "pseudo-multilateralism" of the military alliance system led by the United States in the special period when the 21st century has entered the second decade and human society is facing the unprecedented threat of the new crown pneumonia epidemic.

In practice, the above-mentioned pseudo-multilateralism practices, which are dressed in the guise of "collective security" and multilateralism, have continuously encountered various disastrous failures in the post-Cold War world. The most typical case in 2021 is the "Kabul moment" when the United States withdrew from Afghanistan: it took 20 years and cost $2 trillion, but in the last week of the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, the American regime that it had worked so hard to support melted rapidly at a speed that shocked the world, like a snowdrift with boiling water splashed on it, proving that the United States, which advocates pseudo-multilateralism, cannot bring real peace and prosperity. Before and after this, the more than 2,000 pages of investigation documents of the special prosecutor for Afghanistan affairs set up by the United States showed that the United States' huge military intervention, anti-terrorism operations, and national reconstruction operations were full of mistakes and absurdities. Not only did it make a joke of the US military guarding the poppy fields, but it was also full of typical cases of embezzlement of public funds and corruption in other countries. For example, it cost $80 million to build a wool weaving production base to solve the employment problem of local women, of which $6 million was used to import 9 rams from Italy to improve the local breed. The investigation results showed that the $80 million was spent, but all project construction basically remained at the PPT presentation stage. Not to mention the woolen blankets, not even a sheep was found. Of course, the most bizarre thing is that no one has taken responsibility for this. No wonder Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, defined the US actions in Afghanistan as "large-scale transnational money laundering operations." Obviously, this practice of magical realism is using irrefutable facts to prove that the so-called multilateralism led by the United States has been bankrupt in both theory and practice.

What is even more ironic is that after suffering continuous setbacks, the United States and the West have further intensified their struggle for the discourse power of "multilateralism" in the field of communication, insisting that as long as they continue to label Western actions as "multilateralism", the West can continue to monopolize the discourse power of "multilateralism". Whether it is towards China, Russia, or countries such as Kazakhstan, the United States and its core allies insist on using this wrong way to recognize and understand "multilateralism", bringing more uncertainty and risks to the world.

Another practice is true multilateralism, which insists on defending the core framework of international multilateralism with the United Nations at its core, following the guidance of the UN Charter, and following the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, so as to put true multilateralism into practice. The Chinese government has always been a practitioner and defender of true multilateralism. China not only resolutely fights back against the damage to national security and development interests caused by unilateralism and hegemonism based on its own national interests, but also resists the pressure of hegemonic countries to invite China to join the so-called club, insisting that the spirit of true multilateralism must be upheld, and "everyone sits down together to discuss and solve" to solve the many problems facing the world today. This practice, from a global perspective, is determined by the current background of human society.

After the end of the Cold War in 1991, the structural demand inherent in the market economy promoted the practice of rapid and highly developed global economic integration, creating a deeply nested and interdependent global system that transcends traditional geographical boundaries. Although, since 2017, this global system has encountered different degrees of resistance in developed countries, the real reason for the emergence of this so-called "anti-globalization" or "anti-globalization" is not that there is a problem with globalization, but that the distribution of costs and benefits in the process of globalization has problems within European and American countries. Some politicians, represented by Trump, the then Republican presidential candidate who emerged as a dark horse in 2016, turned this problem into a bargaining chip for domestic politics and carried out large-scale domestic political mobilization. Overall, whether it is China's experience and practice or the objective data of global economic and trade activities, it shows that the global integration of goods production, service provision and value creation is an unstoppable historical trend. Even Trump, who often uses "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) as his slogan, had his entire set of presidential campaign materials custom-made and imported from Yiwu Small Commodities Market in Zhejiang, China. Some American netizens therefore jokingly pointed out that "MAGA is made in China."

In the field of global governance, whether it is the continuous increase in carbon dioxide emissions and global extreme climate since the 1990s, or the COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019 and continues to this day, all point out the necessity and urgency of adhering to true multilateralism. Human beings living on the earth face these global risks that transcend national borders. No country can truly be immune to them. Returning to the state of "harming neighbors" and "sweeping the snow in front of one's own door" is a wrong choice with no chance of success. China not only continues to explain the accurate connotation of "true multilateralism", but also continuously promotes its practice with irrefutable actions. In the field of climate change, in November 2021, China put aside past grievances and jointly issued with the United States the "Glasgow Joint Declaration on Strengthening Climate Action in the 2020s", pledging to strengthen climate cooperation and defend the achievements of the Paris Agreement, thus preventing the Glasgow Conference from "reducing to empty talk" and demonstrating its solid responsibility as a responsible major country to the community with a shared future for mankind; in the process of fighting the new crown pneumonia epidemic, China has continued to make contributions. Bruce Aylward, senior adviser to the Director-General of the World Health Organization, stated on January 6, 2022 that through the organization and its partners, According to the "COVID-19 Vaccine Implementation Plan", China has currently delivered more than 180 million doses of Sinopharm and Sinovac COVID-19 vaccines to 49 countries and regions, accounting for nearly 20% of the total vaccines delivered through the plan; on January 9, 2022, Guo Xuejun, Deputy Director of the International Economic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said in an interview with Xinhua News Agency that as of now, China has provided 500 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines and concentrates to more than 100 countries and international organizations around the world, equivalent to one-sixth of the current global COVID-19 vaccine production. It is the country that has provided the largest number of vaccines to developing countries, and its vaccine cooperation partners are all over the world.

More and more facts have proved that adhering to true multilateralism is becoming a significant consensus among emerging powers represented by China. Continuing to provide public goods for the world on the multilateral platform with the United Nations at its core and promoting the benign reform of the global order are injecting more and more constructive factors into the world. For China, in the process of building a community with a shared future for mankind, China has formed effective practices with unique characteristics.

**Based on the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, China has formed a unique practice of defending true multilateralism.**

Overall, China's insistence on defending true multilateralism forms a stark contrast to the false multilateralism adhered to by some hegemonic countries and their few core allies.

True multilateralism insists on resolving security and development issues that affect all countries within the framework of the United Nations based on universally accepted principles of international law. False multilateralism is always ready to conduct military interventions that violate the United Nations collective security principles through military alliances under the name of "collective security"; within the United Nations platform, it constantly attempts to distort the United Nations Charter, hijack the United Nations decision-making process, and use the name of the United Nations Security Council to whitewash the humanitarian disasters caused by hegemonic military intervention. True multilateralism insists on using multilateral platforms such as the WTO to resolve bilateral or multilateral economic and trade issues on the basis of equality and full respect through dispute settlement mechanisms. False multilateralism is not only ready to use domestic policy tools to bypass the WTO trade dispute settlement mechanism to engage in economic and trade bullying with unilateral pressure, but also can take the approach of brazenly paralyzing multilateral mechanisms to seize the absolute benefits of hegemony when its own selfish desires cannot be satisfied. True multilateralism insists on resolving important global governance issues represented by climate change through equal consultations and full consideration of the reasonable concerns of all parties. False multilateralism attempts to organize various forms of gangs and groups within the framework of multilateralism, insert private goods that ignore basic facts, and interfere with rather than promote the benign solution of global governance issues marked by responding to extreme climate change. True multilateralism insists on starting from the standpoint of a community with a shared future for mankind, actively leading the great struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic in a responsible manner, and consciously and proactively providing the world with the maximum public goods including COVID-19 vaccines and protective items, and contributing to the early resolution of the major threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. False multilateralism continues to insist on self-centered calculations at a historic moment when mankind is facing the major threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. It not only hoards vaccines and blocks the fair distribution of related goods, resources and capabilities around the world, but also spreads false information about the COVID-19 pandemic around the world based on narrow calculations of domestic politics, creating division rather than unity at a critical moment in the fight against the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing suspicion rather than trust.

Obviously, the adherence to and promotion of true multilateralism is the inevitable result of China's continuous development and improvement of its major power diplomacy strategy with Chinese characteristics in the 21st century, based on its own understanding and the needs of world development, and based on the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind. In the 100 years since its founding, the Communist Party of China has led the Chinese people to achieve a historic leap. In this leap, China, as the world's largest developing country, has deeply felt that "what kind of world to build and how to build this world" is an eternal proposition of human society, and China must make its due contribution to this. From President Xi Jinping's speech at the Moscow Institute of International Relations on March 23, 2013, pointing out that "in this world, the degree of interconnection and interdependence among countries has deepened unprecedentedly. Human beings live in the same global village and in the same time and space where history and reality meet, and are increasingly becoming a community with a shared future in which you are in me and I am in you", to his speech at the general debate of the 70th United Nations General Assembly at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in 2015, he elaborated on the scientific connotation of a community with a shared future for mankind, namely "establishing a partnership of equality, mutual consultation and mutual understanding", "creating a security pattern of fairness, justice, common construction and sharing", and "seeking openness, innovation, From "building an inclusive and mutually beneficial development prospect", "promoting harmonious and diverse, inclusive and eclectic civilization exchanges", to "building an ecological system that respects nature and promotes green development", to attending the high-level meeting on "Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland on January 18, 2017, to explaining the motivation, vision and implementation path of the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, the continuous construction and improvement of a community with a shared future for mankind has become a strategic goal pursued by China in the process of realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Adhering to and improving true multilateralism has naturally become a diplomatic strategy necessary to promote the goal of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

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