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QUESTIONING MULTILATERALISM: CONCEPTUAL RE-EVALUATION AND THE DECLINE IN THE WESTERN MULTILATERAL ORDER

ÇOKTARAFLILIĞI SORGULAMA: KAVRAMSAL YENİDEN DEĞERLENDİRME VE BATI ÇOKTARAFLI DÜZENİNDE GERİLEME

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ABSTRACT

The Western multilateral order (WMO), which was established under the leadership of the US after the Second World War, and remained unrivaled with the collapse of the USSR, has recently entered a multidimensional crisis process. This situation aggravates doubts about the future of the WMO and the development of alternative international order scenarios both in academic and political communities. This study aims to develop a theoretical conceptual basis for understanding the crisis in question. The study suggests that in order to understand the crisis in the WMO, it was necessary to focus on the concept of multilateralism that formed its basis. In this context, the study develops Ruggie's definition of multilateralism, arguing that the definition should be expanded, especially in the context of power relations, and that multilateralism should be evaluated as a combination of power, interest, and identity elements. The three-pillar multilateral model developed in the theoretical section is then applied to the case of the decline of the WMO. It is argued that the decline of the WMO rests upon the

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change in the distribution of power in the international system and the differentiation of both identities and interests of the members in the order.

Keywords: Multilateralism, Western Multilateral Order, Social Constructivism, Change.

ÖZ

İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası ABD önderliğinde kurulan ve Sovyetlerin çöküşü ile birlikte rakipsiz kalan Batı Çoktaraflı Düzeni (BÇD) son günlerde çok boyutlu bir kriz sürecinin içerisine girmiştir. Bu durum akademik ve politik topluluklar içerisinde BÇD'nin geleceği ve alternatif düzenlerin gelişimi hakkında tartışmaların ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Bu makale söz konusu krizin anlaşılabilmesi için teorik bir çerçeve sunma amacındadır. Çalışma, BÇD'nin içerisinde yer aldığı krizi anlayabilmek için düzenin merkezinde yer alan çoktaraflılık kavramına odaklanılması gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Bu kapsamda çalışma Ruggie'nin çok taraflılık tanımının özellikle güç ilişkileri bağlamında geliştirilmesinin gerektiğini ve çok taraflılığın güç, çıkar ve kimlik unsurlarının bir bileşimi olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Teorik bölümde geliştirilen üç sütunlu model BÇD'nin gerilemesi örnek olayına uygulanmaktadır. BÇD'nin içerisinde yer aldığı krizin uluslararası sistemdeki güç değişimine ve düzenin üyelerinin kimlik ve çıkar farklılaşmalarına dayandığı savunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çoktaraflılık, Batı Çok Taraflı Düzeni, Sosyal İnşacılık, Değişim.

INTRODUCTION

Is the world moving towards "Westlessness"? (MSR, 2020). Nowadays a growing literature pivots around this question and a myriad of scholars both from the West and the rest of the world are in consensus that there is at least a decline in the power of the West. Indeed, their inability to solve recurring economic crises that have undermined the stability of the international economy, their indifference to problems such as the Russian annexation of Crimea or the Syrian Crisis, and their inability to achieve desired results in issues such as Iraq,

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Libya and Iran demonstrate that the Western powers are no longer able to manipulate international politics as they wish. Even the founders of the order have been questioning its fundamental values today. For instance, within the "America First" doctrine, the Trump administration prioritizes the recovery of US supremacy by demonstrating a great willingness to change or modify the Western multilateral order (WMO) (Cooley et al., 2019: 690; Fischer, 2020).

The inefficacy of the Western powers raises fundamental questions about the future of the current international order mostly led by the Western powers via a myriad of different multilateral arrangements, since the end of the Second World War. Thus, it is claimed by many authors that the current order is in a deep crises and in an important transformation process (see: Mearshemeir, 2019; Wade, 2011; Hampson and Heinbecker, 2011; Patrick, 2015; Ikenberry, 2015). Unsurprisingly, this issue has been one of the most important agenda items in the international relations literature for a long time, and valuable works have been revealed about the different dimensions of this issue. These studies, which mainly try to explain the crisis in question, have different focal points. In this context, a group of studies focusing on power relations argue that the current crisis is based on a structural change in the power distribution of the international system. These studies, which are based on the thesis that American power has weakened and different power centers have emerged, argue that the crisis stems from the transition from unipolarity to multipolarity (See: Zakaria, 2008; Alcaro et.al. 2016; Layne, 2018; Alcaro, 2018). On the other hand, another group of studies focusing on interest relations links the current crisis to the change and divergences in the interests of Transatlantic actors under renewed conditions. In this context, the international order established after the Second World War was based on a mutual-interest bargain between the US and its traditional allies. While the US assumed the security of its allies, its allies accepted its leadership and supported it both in diplomatic and economic terms (see: Ikenberry, 2002). The US' pursuit of new interests with the desire to maintain its "lonely superpower" position damaged this mutual relationship and the interests of the allies began to diverge (See: Joffe, 2002; Peterson and Steffenson, 2009; Conley, 2019). Still, another group of studies focusing on the identity issue concentrates on the claim that a crisis caused by the differentiation of the identities that Transatlantic actors care about has triggered the current WMO crisis. These studies also argue that the international order created after the Second World War was built on the common values and norms adopted by the US and its allies, but with the new conditions that emerged after the Cold War, these values and norms were questioned and new identity perceptions emerged (see: Lucarelli, 2006; Borg, 2021).

These studies seem to be quite successful in evaluating the crisis in the WMO, which is becoming more evident day by day, in its different dimensions.

However, the majority of these studies generally focuses on revealing the practical dimensions of the crisis and do not sufficiently concentrate upon its conceptualization, which is important in the context of the development of the discipline. In this context, this study aims to contribute to the construction of the conceptual infrastructure of the crisis. The study basically argues that by revising Ruggie's concept of multilateralism, a conceptual ground can be created where the power, identity and interest dimensions of the crisis can be evaluated together.

In order to evaluate that argument, the study is divided into two main sections. In the theoretical section, first, the definition of the concept of multilateralism is analyzed. Although Ruggie's definition of multilateralism, which is frequently cited in the literature, is adopted within the scope of the study, it is claimed that the definition, which rests upon mostly ideational factors such as identity and interest should be expanded, especially in the context of power relations that mostly consist of the material dimension of any multilateral arrangement. Therefore, it is argued that the foundation, endurance, and change of multilateral arrangements should be evaluated on power, identity, and interest elements that constitute the three main pillars of multilateralism. Again, in this section, it is highlighted that the change in the balance of power, the identity crisis, and the conflict of interest can disrupt the harmony of multilateral structures together or separately and cause these structures to weaken. In the light of these theoretical implications, the second part of the study analyzes the underlying causes of the crisis in the Western multilateral order. In this section it is firstly argued that the current WMO is based on a combination of common interest, common identity, and a certain level of power distribution. Later, it will be claimed that the main reasons underlying the crisis of the WMO are the changes in the distribution of power within and outside the order, weakening of the common identity offered by the order, and the increasing differentiation of the interests of the parties over the past decades.

1. MULTILATERALISM: FOUNDATION, ENDURANCE, AND CHANGE

The concept of multilateralism is associated with formal international organizations such as the United Nations or the European Union. On the contrary, multilateralism is a comprehensive concept and an institutional form that consists of not only formal organizations, but also different kinds of institutional arrangements at different levels. Therefore, to understand the role and the importance of the concept it should be evaluated from a broader point of view (Newman, 2006: 163). This comprehensive view is provided by Ruggie, in his well-known work. Ruggie defines the concept as,

> "*an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of "generalized" principles of conduct – that is, principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of actions, without regard to the particularistic interest of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in a specific occurrence*" (Ruggie, 1992: 571).

By underscoring its institutional characteristics Ruggie manages to define the qualitative dimension of multilateralism well and describe the concept as a specific pattern of relationships between international actors. Yet, by only concentrating upon "*generalized principles of conduct*" and "*the particularistic interest of the parties",* it should be noted that Ruggie's definition focuses upon mostly ideational factors. Thus, Ruggie's definition does not say anything about resources or material factors, another important component of any social structure.[1] So, it is necessary to analyze the concept of multilateralism through its material basis which consists of power relations among actors and also through its ideational basis which consists of the principles of conduct (*rules*)[2], and members' interests.

As the material dimension of social structure, resources create the basis and physical conditions necessary for their foundation. Physical capacity is essential for the actor to fulfill the requirements of the multilateral relationship. The physical capacity of the actors has important consequences for the functioning of a multilateral arrangement. Although, as Kratochwill highlights, being recognized as "*a coequal partner*" is among the major claims for a multilateral arrangement (Kratochwill, 2006: 141), the different material capacity levels of the actors cause strong actors to stand out more than others. In general, strong states are expected to undertake leadership missions such as meeting the formation and transaction costs of multilateral arrangements and mobilizing actors. However, in order for multilateralism not to turn into an imperialist form in which one actor dominates the others, there should be a certain level of power distribution among its members.

Nevertheless, the relationship between multilateralism and actors' relative power implies that there is always tension within multilateral arrangements stemming from the changes within the power relations. As observed by Martin, changes in power configuration can trigger a change in the structure of the multilateral order (Martin, 1993: 93). This tension which can pave the way for a

[1] For Giddens (1979), all social structures consist of resources "*as the 'bases' or 'vehicles' of power……drawn upon by parties to interaction*" (p.69) and of rules which "*generate practices*" (p.67). Rules and resources together are "*drawn upon in the production and the reproduction of social action*" and also are "*the means of reproduction*" (Giddens, 1984: 19).

[2] As will be mentioned below the rules would be analyzed in relation with the term of identity, therefore instead of rules, the theoretical model of the study would involve the identity as an explaining factor.

crisis if deepened can emerge in several ways. First of all, the fundamental actor that undertakes the main burden of the arrangement and over whom the arrangement is constructed can either have a more powerful position than it has before or basically lose its power in time. While in the first scenario the concerns of the leading power about the usefulness of the multilateral relationship would undermine its value (Newman, 2007: 17), in the second scenario, the questions of "who will take the lead and the main transaction costs" arise among other partners. Another possibility of change would occur with the rise of any other actor besides the leading one in the multilateral arrangement. This would create an internal leadership competition or a revision of the current arrangement according to the new power configuration (Nexon and Neumann, 2018: 664). Lastly, the rise of new actors out of the existing multilateral order which demonstrates the possibility of a new and probably more advantageous multilateral arrangement would beget an external leadership competition. In general, the rising powers try to revise the institutional structure of the existing multilateral arrangement in accordance with their own interests or to destroy its dominance with a new arrangement they have created.

While the material dimension of multilateralism depends upon the capabilities of its members, the ideational dimension stems from its institutional feature, which is identified in Ruggie's aforementioned definition. The main feature that distinguishes a multilateral relationship from other temporary multi-actor one is its institutional structure. As mentioned above Ruggie explains that institutional structure on the basis of "generalized principles of conduct" and "particularistic interests of the parties" (interests). "The generalized principle of conduct" creates the rules of multilateral regulation. However, it would be insufficient to define rules as only prohibitions that actors must obey. As highlighted by Giddens (1984: 18), "the rules relate on the one hand to the constitution of meaning, and on the other to the sanctioning of modes of social conduct". In other words, the rules not only determine which behaviors the actors can or cannot exhibit, but also, more importantly and primarily, determine which actors must comply with these rules. Thus, as Jepperson and others (1996) have observed, rules within an institutional setting produce an identity. Ruggie's concept of indivisibility can be thought of as part of the identity formed by multilateral arrangements. As mentioned by Ruggie, indivisibility is "a social construction", but it is a necessary condition of building multilateral relations. By indivisibility, it is accepted that both positive and negative outcomes of the multilateral relation would affect every actor in the same manner. Therefore, the indivisibility of results of the multilateral relationship, or in other words "one for all, all for one" understanding should create a "we-ness" feeling and also a certain "identity" for the members of the arrangement. The identity created by the multilateral arrangement is often

strengthened with the existing common values of potential members. Commonalities such as language, religion, race, and history empower the resilience of multilateral regulation by making identity gain a deeper and more complex meaning. Also, there should be a generalized trust between potential actors, which should be evaluated as a strong ideational factor bringing actors closer and also keeping them together. As observed by Rathbun (2011: 253), "*qualitative multilateralism demands a lot of trust*" between potential members. The main element that holds the parties together is the belief that all members will fulfill the requirements of multilateralism. The basic emotion that provides this belief is trust. As Böller (2020: 304) underlines, trust can be based not only on the common interests of the actors (strategic trust), but also on the shared values of the actors (moral trust), in other words, a sense of we-feeling or a common identity.

Identities created by multilateralism, stir up limitations over the actors' behaviors. Members of any multilateral arrangement should be selective in their behaviors and should behave in accordance with the identities and rules it generates. Even, in areas outside of the multilateral arrangement, members may have to act in an appropriate way to its identity. Thus, there is an invisible but strong relation between the multilateral arrangement and all foreign policy behaviors of its members. Actors should accept those limitations in the first place in order to have the privileges offered by the multilateral arrangement (Lazarou, Edwards, Hill and Smith, 2010: 10). For that reason, in a successful multilateral arrangement, members are sensitive to following its rules and fulfilling the requirements of its identity. Nevertheless, breaking rules or contravening the requirements of the identity would unsettle the arrangement and create an internal crisis.

Another component of multilateralism is its utilitarian dimension, which is also the answer to why actors build that kind of relations. Multilateralism by definition consists of "cooperation" between actors involved (Caporaso, 1992: 603) and rationally should create incentives for the members. However, as Ruggie states in his definition, for the multilateral arrangement to survive, it is vital for the members to follow "generalized principles of conduct" even if their "particularistic interests" are at stake. Ruggie overcomes this paradox with Keohane's concept of "*diffuse reciprocity*". "Reciprocity" here, means all actors in a multilateral relation should gain something from this relationship. Yet reciprocity should be *diffuse* because multilateral relations would consist of ignoring short-term interests to achieve long-term interests. For this reason, actors in multilateral relationships should believe that even if today they renounce some gains, they would have more in the future (Bouchard and Peterson, 2010: 8). Therefore, in order to build a successful multilateral order,

the current interests of the actors as well as their future expectations must converge. In other words, besides common interests, actors should have a common vision for the future.

The multilateral arrangements create distinct advantages for large and small states. From a rational point of view, the fundamental advantage of multilateralism for large states is the burden-sharing (Corbetta and Dixon, 2004: 8; Milner and Tingley, 2012: 317; Tago, 2005: 588). Despite the fact that the large part of the burden is always undertaken by the large states, multilateral arrangements always create a cost-sharing mechanism either financially or operationally. This utilitarian dimension of the multilateral arrangements also allows larger states to use them as "*instruments of blame avoidance*" and to thereby share the responsibility of failures (Hampson, 2010: 72). Another important advantage is legitimacy. In the current international society multilateral action is seen as more legitimate than a unilateral one (Corbetta and Dixon, 2004: 8; Stein, 2008: 47-49; Tago, 2005: 589). Furthermore, by defining them as actors with their constitutive rules, multilateral arrangements offer small states a seat at the table while larger states are discussing global issues (Doran, 2010: 41-42). Moreover, the regulatory rules of the arrangements create a normative framework that binds the larger states as well. Thus, with the help of those arrangements the small states have a chance to limit the actions of the larger one (Ikenberry, 2007: 24; Holloway, 2000: 364). Also, the institutional character of the arrangements would create a more stable and safer environment for the small states (Morrison, 2018:28). Therefore, multilateralism is seen as the "weapon of the weak" that allows weak states to convince the powerful ones of their policy preferences (Kagan, 2002: 5).

In addition, multilateral arrangements always create several difficulties. First of all, even there is a cooperative relation under the title of the multilateral arrangement, there is always the tension of convincing "all" participants for a particular policy (Doran, 2010: 40-41). Within the normative framework of the multilateral arrangement, the more-powerful states accept limitations over their policy choices (Ikenberry, 2007: 22). For minor powers, meanwhile, multilateral arrangements create a foreign policy role by defining new identities for them. Likewise, becoming a part of a multilateral arrangement always comes with a price, like lowering tariffs or sending forces for peacekeeping operations (Doran, 2010: 40-41). The major disadvantage of multilateralism for both large and small states is the sovereignty-transfer issue. Despite the fact that there is a vast literature about the large states' control over the multilateral arrangements, still, it is commonly accepted that there is always a "*leeway*" that these institutions would act out of the control of any state (Milner and Tingley, 2012: 319).

Generally, interests are the basic rationalization elements of multilateral arrangements, since decision-makers convince their domestic constituencies by advocating their potential adoption to the country. Nevertheless, members would naturally question the benefits of multilateral arrangements if they believe they gain nothing. Therefore, if members' expectations are not satisfied or an internal conflict over individual interests occurs, the multilateral arrangements can face a crisis.

In summary, multilateralism and multilateral arrangements are among the important elements that regulate current international policy. Multilateralism in relations between actors includes elements beyond its lexical meaning. For a multilateral arrangement to be established, and survive, there must be a certain balance of power, identity, and interest among its members. Otherwise, the harmony of the arrangement will be disrupted and a process that can end up with its disappearance may occur.

2. THE FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF THE WESTERN MULTILATERAL ORDER

While the controversy about multilateralism is generally focused on the Western multilateral order (WMO) established after the Second World War, it should be kept in mind that the WMO is just one instance of multilateral arrangements. As shown by many scholars, multilateral institutions such as international norms and rules are essential structures needed to sustain relations among actors in the international system. The distinct point about the WMO is the establishment of formal organizations which gives a permanent body to the multilateral institutions. Also, rather than a result of an evolutionary aggregation process, the WMO was a deliberate engineering envisagement designed by the US decision-makers as the central structure of the American hegemonic order (Ruggie, 1992: 586). Yet, it would be a mistake to assume the foundation of the WMO as just only the result of US efforts and power, since there also were suitable conditions in terms of identity and interest to build a robust multilateral order. As observed by Risse, "*the transatlantic order is viewed as a particular social structure based on interests, institutions, norms, and collective identities*" (Risse, 2008: 266).

From the power perspective, the WMO depended on the supremacy and exceptionalism of the US. In fact, one of the essential characteristics of the WMO is its egalitarianism claim. Unlike bilateral relations and other old discriminatory arrangements endemic to past Western multilateral institutions, WMO was long-negotiated and carefully designed to create a structure that would enable every actor to have a "say". This egalitarianism claim was so deep and well-established that many realist scholars criticize those multilateral

arrangements for not representing the current distribution of power in the international system (Kahler, 1992: 682). Yet, egalitarianism can be a key factor in the success of these arrangements, since it is the major line that distinguishes multilateralism from imperial design. As mentioned before, to have a successful multilateral arrangement there should be a power configuration between members at a certain level. Despite the fact that after the Second World War, many traditional European states lost their power status, the US decision-makers kept seeing them as "great powers" (Hemmer and Katzenstein, 2002: 584). Moreover, as observed by Weber, there was a deep faith among US decision-makers that it was better to have a multipolar world than a bipolar one and for that reason, they were willing to assist the European powers to recover their "great power" status (Weber, 1993: 239-242). However, despite the egalitarianism claim, the US had with its huge military capacity including nuclear weapons and a healthy economy an indisputable leading role after the Second World War. In fact, the organizational structures of formal organizations such as the UN, IMF, and World Bank were largely shaped by US decision-makers.

Meanwhile, from an identity perspective, the WMO offered an institutional identity consisting of human rights, democracy, rule of law, and economic liberalism (Allan et al., 2018: 9; Thimm, 2005: 4). These values, which are seen as the basic components of Western civilization in a process of accumulation that has been going on for centuries, have gained a formal character under the aegis of the multilateral organizations established after the Second World War (Thimm, 2005: 4; Koschut, 2016: 167-168). As Koschut observes, along with these core values, the foundation of strong multilateral arrangements such as the UN and NATO had made multilateralism and communication between the parties an important part of the WMO identity (Koschut, 2016: 168-171). Also, it is worth highlighting that another major factor that brought the Westerners together was mutual trust. There was a particularly strong faith among the US decision-makers over the trustworthiness of their potential allies (Rathbun, 2011: 245; Hemmer and Katzenstein, 2002: 588). Thus, core values, norms of multilateralism and communication, and mutual trust have formed the outlines of the identity that WMO has produced.

Lastly, from the interest perspective, the magnitude of a common threat and the economic destruction of the world wars brought together the Western states on the basis of common interests. Regarding security, the revisionist objectives of the Axis powers pushed the status-quo powers together against their common threat. With the same conviction after the war, the USSR's incompatible demands had been interpreted as aggression by the Westerners and that the Soviet threat pushed the Westerners closer (Weber, 1993: 242-247; Nau, 2008: 88, Ikenberry, 2005: 137). As for economic interests, the Bretton Woods

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meetings engendered a consensus on the interconnectedness of national economies via an international economy. In other words, states' national economies were interpreted as indivisible. Therefore, in order to prevent future economic disasters, it was necessary to build an international mechanism that would sustain the robust functioning of national economies (Ikenberry, 2005: 138). Thus, the WMO was primarily established upon the security and economic interests of its members (Kratochwill, 2006: 151). So, the WMO depends upon the mutual gains of both the US and its other members. The US opened its military and economic assets to the use of its allies and consented to limiting its power in return for their acquiesce to American-led order (Ikenberry, 2008: 10).

The WMO, founded on a specific configuration of the balance of power, common interest, and common identity, has gone through a period of maturation over time, like any successful social structure. Initially, the newly created institutions within the order were weak, commonalities that held members together, especially the common threat, were strong. Over time, as the institutional structure within the order has strengthened, some common elements that hold members together, such as common threat perceptions, have weakened (Nau, 2008: 96).

3. FUNDAMENTAL CRISES WITHIN THE WMO

Today, despite the fact that its strong institutional structure enables the WMO to prevail in international politics, there have been controversies in both political and academic environments about its decline (Fischer, 2020). Although it is not fair to claim that there is a definite break-up in the WMO, it is obvious that there is a certain discord within it. Transatlantic relations have reached an important turning point. As mentioned by Kupchan, "*mutual trust has eroded, institutionalized cooperation can no longer be taken for granted, and a shared Western identity has attenuated*" (Kupchan, 2008: 111). What is definite about the current multilateral order is that the concert of the order is not as robust as the one in the right after the Second World War. It can be argued that there are discords raging within the three distinct pillars of the multilateral order.

3.1. The Internal and External Challenges to the Balance of Power

The most controversial issue about the current WMO is its power dimension. As mentioned before, to have a stable multilateral arrangement there should be an appropriate power relationship between actors. It can be argued that the WMO has been under a two-fold pressure, both internal and external for a long time. To begin with, there have been huge changes in internal power configurations within the order since its foundation. During the Cold War, while the US' dominant role was secured, European powers managed to recover their war-torn economies and elevate their national power as well. Moreover, the

unprecedented success of the integration process strengthened European powers' positions vis-a-vis the US. Therefore, even during the Cold War, the balance of power in favor of the US started to change. The end of the Cold War which led to a deep transformation in the balance of power of the international structure inevitably influenced the WMO, too. It is commonly accepted that the US enjoyed a "unipolar moment" with the collapse of the USSR. During that period, "the lonely superpower" status relatively increased US supremacy, deepened its exceptionalism claim, and raised questions about the egalitarian dimension of the multilateral order (Patrick, 2009: 23). In addition, the US was willing to both deepen its dominant role in the order and widen its jurisdiction throughout the rest of the world (Lake, 2010: 472-475). Thus, the US tended to revise its relationship with old allies according to its new "lonely superpower" status (Ikenberry, 2008: 16). When the leading power tries to transform the multilateral order, the first resistance comes from within. Thus, especially the European powers, which surprisingly managed to create a more integrated union, were dissatisfied with the imperial ambitions of the US (Kupchan, 2008: 119).

While the September 11 attacks created a deep shock in the US, it did not create a major shift in US foreign policy. The real underlying cause of the shift to the revisionist policies in the US foreign policy was directly related to its superpower status. As observed by Jervis, the main threat against the hegemonic order comes from the places that the hegemon is unable to control. For that reason, the US always fears non-democratic regimes that it cannot control. Therefore, there has been a deep faith in the US administrations about the expansion of democracy, which would create a much safer order for the hegemon. For that reason, the US administrations were willing to transform the current order even with their military power (Jervis, 2006: 11-12). Thus, in order to secure its "lonely superpower" status, the US was willing to transform the multilateral order it created into an imperial design.

The external pressure over the WMO comes from the rising powers. Today, scholars are nearly at a consensus on the claim that we are at least on the brink of a multipolar world (Newman, 2006: 174; Wade, 2011: 351-352). Many states, such as China, India, Brazil, Russia, and others, which were once in the lower leagues managed to ascend to a higher status, such that today it is hardly possible to ignore their impact on international politics. As discussed in the theoretical section, as outsiders of the WMO, they succeeded in presenting the possibility to create alternatives to that order. It is clear that the rising powers are changing the current power distribution in the international system. This change has been directly reflected in the WMO. Although they are also its members, many rising powers assume that the WMO serves the hegemony of Westerners or the US. Thus, as mentioned in the theoretical section, the rising powers

demand modification at the best, or total destruction of the current multilateral order. Thus, as formulated by Wade, the rise of new powers might cause "*multipolarity without multilateralism*" (Wade, 2011:349). Moreover, since their influence over international politics is growing accordingly with their growing power, they claim that the current multilateral order's legitimacy is diminishing in as much as the lack of their voice in its foundation (Hampson and Heinbecker, 2011: 299, Patrick, 2015: 119: Ikenberry, 2015: 409). In other words, as put by Rüland, the rising powers' main objective "*is thus the creation of an institutional order which is more amenable to their aspirations and in which their own role as 'rule takers' changes to one of 'rule challengers' and eventually 'rule makers'*" (Rüland, 2012: 257).

The key question here is about the decline of US power. This question is important since the US' material power is always the main initiator of the multilateral order established in the post-war period. On the other hand, it is a very tough question because defining a concrete decline in any state's power is always a controversial issue. In the case of the US, by looking at defense spending it is not possible to say that there is a decline in the US power. For instance, the US, which ranked first in the world defense budget ranking in 2019, had a larger budget than the total defense expenditures of the ten countries that followed it at the top of the list (SIPRI, 2020).

Nevertheless, as far as economics are concerned, studies forecast that China will surpass the US (The Economist, 2015). From the purview of soft power, American culture and its ideological manifestations such as individualism, democracy, and human rights still dominate its alternatives. However, political and economic failures such as the Iraqi invasion in 2003 and the global financial crisis started in New York in 2008 weakened the US' soft power (Patrick, 2015: 119) and increased anti-Americanism throughout the world. Thus, while the decline in material power is a controversial issue, as Risse observed "*the US is less capable of its considerable military and economic power into influence and exercising its much-needed leadership in world affairs*" (Risse, 2008: 290).

3.2. The Erosion of Trust and "We-ness" Feeling

Besides power relations, there are also fundamental antagonisms in the ideational dimensions of the WMO. It is observed that conflicts of identity and interests among the members of the order are gradually increasing. As mentioned before, the formation of multilateral arrangements is based on the common identity and interests of potential members built on the principles of "indivisibility" and "diffuse reciprocity". Therefore, ideational disagreements within the WMO are directly related to the identity and interest definitions of the members.

The most obvious change in identity is based on the change in the power distribution of the actors. As observed by social constructivists, identities change according to the changes in institutions. Therefore, the change in the balance of power of the international system triggered a change in the identities of the actors. During the process of the construction of the WMO, the leading actor namely the US was one of the superpowers and the rest of the members were like-minded minor powers. With the collapse of the USSR, the US became "the lonely superpower", and many of the members became middle or major powers. Thus, the identity distribution of the Western camp after the Cold War is different from the one during the Cold War.

The loneliness in superpower status gives the US an opportunity to pursue unilateral policies (Stein, 2008: 29-30; Holloway, 2000: 376), therefore in the post-Cold War period, the US has developed a "unilateral disengagement" policy. Within this policy the US has tended to decrease its support to the multilateral arrangements, to modify them in favor of its interests, or to create alternative multilateral arrangements (Newman, 2007: 30). This has led to different interpretations of multilateralism, which is one of the main components of the WMO identity, between the United States and its allies. On the one hand, rather than completely abandoning the WMO, the George W. Bush administration developed a multilateralism in "American style" (Kagan, 2002) or in other words a "pseudo-multilateralism" (Newman, 2007: 42) which was in the search of multilateral support for its unilateral policies. On the other hand, with the unprecedented success of the regional integration, the Europeans slipped to a more multilateralist point (Hampson, 2010: 74). Thus, while other members became more committed to the multilateral identity of WMO, the US began to move away from it.

That identity conflict materialized with the US-led Iraqi operation which is seen as a turning point in the relations between the US and its allies (Newman, 2006: 160; Ikenberry, 2008: 7; Nau, 2008: 97). While the US administration believed that Saddam's Iraq was one of the major threats against international peace and security, its allies did not have the same opinions. Moreover, surprisingly France and Germany were the leading actors that blocked the US' attempt to legalize Iraq operation in the United Nations Security Council. The Iraqi operation has revealed the differences between the perspectives of the US and its allies regarding the proper methods in regulating the international order (Stein, 2008: 60).

Even though the US was not alone in this operation which should be considered as an instance of multilateral use of force, it directly challenged fundamental principles of the WMO. For example, the pre-emptive strike doctrine defended by the US after the September 11 attacks directly challenged

the use of force regulations in the UN Charter (Newman, 2006: 174-175). By damaging the basic rules of the WMO, the US did not act in accordance with the identity of the order in question. While the US presented itself as the "guardian of the universe", its allies label it as the "arrogant hegemon" (Kupchan, 2008; 123). Additionally, the US' unilateral behavior violates the rule-based character of multilateralism. It gives the US the ability to act by ignoring the considerations of others. So, the predictability of behaviors enabled by multilateralism wanes, which undermines its durability.

Undoubtedly, the Iraq operation was not the only unilateral policy of the US that attracted the reaction of its allies. In addition, withdrawals of the Bush administration from the Kyoto protocol and the Trump administration's both from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Iran nuclear deal clearly demonstrate the US administration's adverse view of multilateral arrangements that do not serve its direct interests. Therefore, the US' unilateral disengagement policy directly shook the confidence of its allies, which would be seen as an essential factor of any multilateral arrangement (Brattberg and Whineray, 2020: 2). It is possible to observe the "erosion of trust" between the parties at both the political elite and society levels. At the elite level, French president Macron's remarks about NATO's current situation are a prime example. In an interview given after the US announced its decision to withdraw its troops from Syria, Macron stated that with this unilateral decision, the US ignored the security of its allies and NATO was in the process of "brain death". Expressing that he is not sure whether NATO's Article 5 is still valid or not, Macron has clearly expressed his mistrust towards the US with these words (Erlanger, 2019). German Chancellor Angela Merkel also expressed her distrust of the US with the words "*we Europeans must really take our destiny into our own hands*" (NBCnews, 2017). Similarly, from time to time, US political elites have expressed distrust of their allies. For example, in one of his interviews, Trump described the EU as a trade "foe" and stated that they did not fulfill their responsibilities required for the alliance (CBS News, 2018).

A similar problem of trust is seen at the society level. A recent study conducted within the scope of PEW surveys measuring social trends around the world has clearly revealed the erosion of trust towards the US. In the study conducted in 13 countries, which traditionally have close relations with the US, it was observed that there were significant decreases in the rate of those who sympathize with the US in all societies.[3] For example, in the United Kingdom, its closest ally, the proportion of those who view the United States favorably has dropped from 82% in 2000 to 41% in 2020. For the same period, the rates of

[3]All countries covered by the study are Japan, South Korea, Italy, Australia, France, United Kingdom, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, and Belgium.

Germany decreased from 78% to 26%, and that of France from 62% to 31% (Wike et al.,2020). This situation clearly reveals to what extent trust in the US has weakened among its allies.

As mentioned before, there are a number of common values on which the WMO common identity was built. Even though the political principles, such as the rule of law, democracy, and individual liberty have been guaranteed within robust institutionalized political systems in the Western region, there is a certain backlash from these values today. The rise of nationalism related to terrorist attacks and refugee flow coming from the non-Western world have caused thickening up conservative parties such as neo-conservatives in the US (Kupchan, 2008: 119), and populist right party Vox in Spain (MSC, 2020: 8) which are ontologically against the liberal internationalist ideals.

Accordingly, the identity conflict created by changing perceptions of evolving power distribution, the erosion of trust between the parties, and the attenuation of common values, weaken the WMO common identity. This situation also affects the sense of "we"ness in the order and causes a decrease in the members' sensitivity regarding the responsibilities and limits of the common identity in question. Therefore, it becomes inevitable for the members to act according to their self-identity rather than a weakening common identity.

3.3. Divergence in Interests

In addition to the weakening of the common identity, another factor that puts the ideational dimension of the WMO into the crisis is the common interests. As mentioned before, in the multilateral order, the parties come together in order to gain common interests or at least gain something in the medium term, if not today (diffuse reciprocity). However, the change of interests overtime, or the non-realization of expectations based on interests, causes the multilateral order to be questioned.

In this context, with the collapse of the common threat, namely the USSR, the interests of the "lonely superpower" and its allies began to dissociate (Kupchan, 2008: 118; Ikenberry, 2003: 538). Obviously, the elimination of the primary motivation of the allies to act jointly (the Soviet threat) has paved the way for them to follow different paths when they deem necessary (Brenner, 1995: 12). While, as a lonely superpower, the US' primary objective is to expand its hegemony all over the world, with force when necessary and become the "master" of the whole world, its allies, especially the major European powers, focused on regional issues. In addition, different security concerns caused differentiation in the priority lists of the security agendas. Again, the Iraqi operation demonstrated that the US' and its allies' security perceptions diverged dramatically and their security was no longer indivisible (Kupchan, 2008, 120-

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121; Nau, 2008: 98). The divergence of security interests of WMO members, which started with the collapse of Soviet Russia and later deepened with the Iraq War, has entered a new phase with the rise of China. While China's ambition to become a hegemon does not directly affect the security of other members of the WMO, it threatens the US's global dominance. Therefore, with its Asia-Pacific strategy, the US focused on Asia, pushing Europe's security to the second plan (Rossbach, 2019: 33).

Another important issue that shrinks the WMO is burden-sharing. As mentioned above, the cooperation offered by the multilateral arrangements comes with a price. The transaction costs of these arrangements should be undertaken by members. Yet, as seen in NATO or UN cases, there is not an equal burden-sharing between states. Generally, major states or "superpowers" assume more costs than the minor states. Moreover, there are always free-riders that put nothing but try to gain something from the multilateral arrangement. While major states tend to allow a moderate number of free-riders in order to increase the legitimacy of multilateral arrangements (Singer, Walsh and Wilkening, 2004: 7), in the long run, they shrink the stability of the order. Burden-sharing is the primary concern of current US administrations since the US has always overtaken the greatest portion of the costs in the WMO (Patrick, 2009: 27). For example, the Trump administration insistently reminds that the US allies should take more responsibility (Böller, 2020: 308-309). The decrease in the US economic power accelerated controversies about burden-sharing.

Besides divergence in interests, another essential point that weakens the WMO and paves the way for a crisis is the disappointment of expectations it offers. For instance, the central pillar of the WMO has been "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" highlighted in the preamble of the UN Charter. Nonetheless, the collective security system of the UN, could not produce necessary solutions to both traditional and new challenges towards international peace and security, for that reason, multilateralism has been exposed to criticism especially by the US administrations towards the end of the 1990s (Krause, 2004: 43; Lazaraou, et.al, 2010: 11; Corbetta and Dixon, 2004: 5). Similarly, WMO's silence in the face of important security problems such as the US invasion of Iraq, Russia's annexation of Crimea, the Syrian and Yemen civil wars, and its failure to eradicate the reality of war, demonstrate that it has failed to achieve its primary objective.

The disappearance of the common threat, which was the main motivation for the members to come together, the lack of willingness of some members to cover the costs of WMO institutions, and the failure of WMO institutions to demonstrate the expected success cause the interests of WMO members to drift away from each other. Under these circumstances, members have strong doubts

that the WMO will bring them a return in the future. For this reason, members tend to act according to their own individual interests, instead of the common interests of the WMO.

4. CONCLUSION

Multilateral institutions, which constitute the backbone of the Western order created after the Second World War, have managed to continue their existence despite the political and economic crises they have experienced. Undoubtedly, these institutions and the WMO have played a key role in the Western hegemony over the rest of the world. However, increasing problems among its members and the strengthening of actors outside it have been weakening the WMO day by day. In order to reveal the causes of this weakening and to obtain sound predictions about its possible consequences, it is necessary to conceptualize this crisis within a holistic perspective.

Thus, in order to comprehend the current problems of multilateral arrangements, it is vital to understand the elements on which these structures are built. Like all other social structures, multilateral arrangements are made up of resources (material factors) and rules (ideational factors). Power and power relations, which are the basic elements of material factors, identity, and interests, which are the basic components of ideational factors, are of key importance in the formation, endurance, and change of multilateral arrangements. A robust multilateral arrangement is based on a certain balance of power among its members, on common identities and interests that are compatible with the current identities and interests of its members. For this reason, significant changes that affect the balance of power on which multilateral arrangements are based; foreign policy movements incompatible with the identity generated by the arrangement, and deep divergence and conflicts in the interests of the members cause the multilateral structure to enter into crisis and to decline.

The harmony of power, identity, and interest in the WMO, which has preserved its existence since its establishment and strengthened its influence in international politics, faces a multidimensional crisis. The decline in US power causes an internal crisis with the strengthening of its traditional allies and an external crisis with the pressure of non-Western rising powers. The unilateral aggressive policies of the US conflict with the identity developed by the WMO based upon rule of law, human rights, and democracy and create an identity crisis. Finally, the elimination of the common threat, which is the main common interest that brings the WMO members together, has caused them to follow foreign policies that prioritize their self-interests and to enter into a conflict of interest.

The multidimensional crisis of the WMO raises the question of whether the world is moving towards a "Westlessness" direction. One way or another, the crises mentioned above clearly demonstrated that the WMO is in a fundamental turning point. At this point, the WMO will either maintain its current structure despite all the problems or enter a transformation process. If the transformation path is preferred, as a result of these crises, the order may totally disintegrate; it may experience an adaptation process based on a different balance among the existing members, or it may turn into a different order with the participation of new members. The increasing criticism of Western governments towards the WMO and the separation of the United Kingdom from the EU can be interpreted as strong signs of disintegration. However, it does not seem possible for the WMO, which is based on centuries-old accumulation and has the highest level of institutionalization in the international system, to dissolve easily in a short time.

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