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The post-World War II order was for the most part one of bipolarity mixed with pockets of multilateralism. Multilateralism thrived both regionally and globally. It was exemplified by such organizations such as ASEAN, European Union, the United Nations and World Trade Organization. It was also a period in which a “Third World” existed and thrived, by virtue of the vacuum left by the super-powers and the need created by the leaders and nations that did not wish to belong to either camp.

The end of the Cold War brought about what I would describe as the loss of Cold War order and discipline. It had both good and bad aspects--dispersal of power and influence, unabashed pursuit of national interest, and diminished emphasis on common goods and multilateralism. It also brought about the demise of a working order, a phenomenon that a recent book by an intelligent author characterized as a “world in disarray.”

Today we are seeing disruptions and changes in our way of life at an unprecedented rate and at all different levels. Much of this has to do with things that we associate with globalization—free trade, advanced technology, and instantaneous digital communication methods.

Many experts once thought that these changes represented a march toward progress, giving opportunities to grow and prosper. But, in the midst of growing nationalist movements around the world, we also witness that there are large groups of people who feel negatively affected by the changes. The backlash against globalization and “elite politics” has brought about weakening of multilateralism, and rising conflict among nations and divisions within them between globalists and nationalists.

Looking back, multilateral institutions in the post-World War II period owe their creation and growth to three factors: 1) The recognition, by the



dominant power and the lesser powers alike, of their shared interest in achieving common goals through multilateralism; 2) A degree of idealism for such objectives as peace and human well-being that multilateral institutions could contribute to; and 3) the acknowledgment of the existence of common public goods such as financial stability, environmental protection, or freedom of the seas.

In the post-World War II period, multilateralism and its growth were possible because a bargain was made between the dominant power, the United States, and other countries, which included both the middle powers and the smaller powers. In such a bargain, the dominant state reduces its enforcement costs and the weaker states gain opportunities to work and help influence the leading state.

In the United States today, the Trump Administration is avowedly skeptical of the utility of multilateralism. It pulled the United States out of TPP, revised NAFTA, plans to reduce financial contribution to the United Nations, and seems to be equivocal about NATO. In fact, in his speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations held in September this year, President Trump declared that he does not recognize, much less support globalism. In Europe, ultra-conservative and nationalist political forces seem to be in the ascendency. In the summit of G-20 and G-8 held over the past couple of years, Mr. Trump managed to create a “Club of One” in the world community, pretty much isolating the United States in the global gatherings.

In spite of the return of the Democratic Party as the majority party in the House of recent U.S. Congressional elections, it will take time, if ever, for the United States to come back as the champion of global multilateralism.

Even during the turn of the century two decades ago, when the United


States seemed to enjoy what amounted to rising unipolarity, the incentives for multilateralism were maintained. The Bush administration sometimes resorted to unilateralism, but did not threaten the maintenance of multipolar arrangements in both security and economic spheres.

So, what will be the consequences of the weakening, if not abandoning, of multilateralism? For the United States, moving away from multilateralism and insistence on unilateralism and bilateralism will bring about its own isolation and strengthen the coalitions of rival states or its competitors' positions.

Other states will also have much to lose in terms of their immediate security and economic interests, not to speak of idealism and global public goods. One of the challenges that "globalists" like ourselves is to find a way of updating the rules for multilateral cooperation."

It seems that, of the rules that are being contested, three areas or items stand out. They are: 1) arresting global warming and dealing with its effects on man-kind; 2) integration of rising powers into world order; and 3) safeguarding access to the open global commons such as the maritime, air space, outer space and cyberspace domains. Some experts argue that the survival of humanity depends on whether we can deal with the global warming problem in short order, like within the next few years.

The second question, of integrating rising powers into the world order, not only involves addressing the stratified structure of the UN Security Council, which is related to the veto power and the permanent membership of the "P5" countries, it also involves adjusting the rules to account for the redistribution of power and roles of various states and institutions in global economics. The third question, of access to the open global commons, involves adjusting to rapid technological innovation. In the midst of great change, we should encourage world leaders not to move away from



multilateralism, but to find creative and comprehensive solutions to economic, social, and political problems through cooperation in multilateral contexts.

I read an article written by Rochel Nuwer, with the title “How Western civilization could collapse?” Although it has “Western civilization” in the title, the article actually talks about world civilization as a whole.

According to the article, there are four ways in which world civilization can collapse, in as early as half a century. One way is by ecological strain and economic stratification. The ecological category is the more widely understood and recognized path to potential doom, especially in terms of depletion of natural resources such as ground water, soil, fisheries and forests – all of which could be worsened by climate change that some major governments today do not acknowledge.

The second way comes when elites or big powers push society and the world toward instability and eventual collapse by hoarding huge quantities of wealth and resources, and leaving little or none for commoners and weaker countries. The third way of collapse is when the world cannot rise to the occasion of solving the climate problem during this century, simply because it is more expensive in the short term to solve the problem than it is to just keep acting as usual. “The climate problem will get worse and worse because we won’t be able to live up to what we’ve promised to do in the Paris Agreement and elsewhere.”

Finally, we can enter into a danger zone through the increasing occurrence of “nonlinearities,” or sudden, unexpected changes in the world’s order, war between major powers, or regional conflicts.

However, let’s not lose heart. Human and world civilization is not a lost cause. Using reason and science to guide decisions, paired with leadership

and good will, human society should prevent its down-fall and instead should progress to higher levels of well-being and development. Am I overly optimistic? Let us hope not.