

continue to be an imperative of world politics.⁵⁷

The third factor relates to the growth in transnational problems and challenges. Such problems and challenges have created unavoidable pressures for regional and global cooperation. In the words of an observer in reference to the transnational issue of the environment: "The ecosystem is no longer to be thought of as an inert, passive limit to human activity. It has to be thought of as a non-human, active force capable of dramatic interventions affecting human conditions and survival."⁵⁸ In other words, the ecosystem, like the global economy, requires some form of multilateral regulatory regimes to ensure not just the protection of that system but also human survival itself.

All these trends — according to institutionalists — point to a very clear conclusion, viz., that both narrow and broadened security issues and more generally international issues will have to be addressed in a cooperative multilateral fashion, not necessarily because public opinion favors it, but because the pressure of events requires it.

The "New" Multilateralism

The early part of the decade of the 1980s witnessed what has been described as a "crisis in multilateralism" -- a period in which there was seemingly a drift away from multilateral activity towards the ascendancy of unilateralism in world affairs. Underlying this drift were the actions of the US and some of the other powerful states who largely ignored the UN system as a vehicle for international action because it was deemed an unfriendly forum and a potential obstacle to their liberal notions of free trade, free-market, deregulation, and privatization. To make their point, some of these countries took certain actions, such as withdrawing from UN bodies (e.g. the US and the UK pull-out from UNESCO), deliberately attempting to weaken such bodies as ECOSOC, UNDP, UNCTAD, SUNFED), withholding financial contributions to the main budget of the UN, quibbling over their contributions to the peacekeeping and voluntary budgets of the organization, and pressing for certain types of reforms to the organization -- using the clout of financial withholding to force these organizational changes.⁵⁹

The counter-hegemonic reaction to the above moves was galvanized by UN member states from the Third World who, weakened by the reduced support of a collapsing USSR, pressed demands for a new international economic order (NIEO) and a new international information and communications order (NIICO).⁶⁰ The failure of the Third World states to get these two important changes adopted by the UN system was an indication of the limits imposed on the existing multilateral system by the existing power structure of the international system.

What is interesting about this crisis in multilateralism is that it exposed one of the main weaknesses of the liberal institutionalist and internationalist school -- its tendency to limit its focus to current events and a problem-solving epistemology with respect to the subject of multilateralism. The crisis of multilateralism was quickly forgotten in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the ushering in of a brief euphoric interlude in which the UN system seemed to be operating as its founding fathers had intended; at least in the area of international peace and security. Canadian officials, like most liberal institutionalists, began to see the prospect of a new golden age for multilateralism as the scope for multilateral diplomacy broadened as a result of a number of events, notably the end of the East-West ideological conflict, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the tearing down of the Berlin wall, the revulsion against