



Shifting Dynamics: The International Order in a Post-Pandemic World

1st - 2nd of December | 2020

COVID-19:

An Impasse or an Opportunity for a
Sustainable Global Order?

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COVID-19: An Impasse or an Opportunity for a Sustainable Global Order?



- The need for the reform of multilateral institutions, such as the UN, is well known, yet the work that numerous global institutions around the world have done in response to the pandemic needs to be appreciated.
- In the post-pandemic period, there may be greater action on climate change, greater investments in green recovery (or energy transition) than perhaps would have been expected in the political reality of 2019.
- Bilateralism but also unilateralism has been advancing to the detriment of multilateralism across the world where in all sectors of international relations, the art of diplomacy in the form of consensus seeking has diminished.
- Under President Trump, the challenges facing multilateralism can be described as an “experiment of how the world operates when the most powerful country in the world doesn’t tie itself to the global system”.
- The unfolding geopolitical drama associated with the rise of China raises questions about just how far international cooperation and multilateralism can be maintained and enhanced given starkly different modes and values of governance.

Summary of the Session

The panel entitled: “COVID-19: An Impasse or an Opportunity for a Sustainable Global Order?” focussed on issues related to international cooperation, multilateralism, unilateralism, and various forms of inequality and polarisation in the international arena, highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Former Austrian Foreign Minister Ms. Karin Kneissl emphasised the need for greater multilateral action and a healthier art of diplomacy. Ms. Kneissl noted a general shift away from multilateralism towards unilateralism in diplomacy, highlighting the need to reverse that trend.

The work of various multinational organisations such as the OECD, the WHO, UNDP and so on, which have perhaps not had their fair share of positive media attention, were highlighted by Mr. Masamichi Kono, Deputy Secretary General of the OECD and Mr. Steiner, Administrator of the UNDP. Mr. Kono stressed the work the OECD did with non-member states, and that the OECD would spare no effort to ensure that vaccines are affordable and that there is equitable access for all people. Mr. Steiner acknowledged calls for reform of the UN, but also vouched for the work of UNICEF,

the World Food Program, UN aid, UNFPA, and the World Health Organisation, all of which represent the “backbone of a global community in free fall”.

As highlighted by Professor Ikenberry, with the election of Joe Biden, hopes have been pinned on a reorientation of the US toward a multilateral mindset, given the fact that institutions such as the UN, if they need to be reformed, need to change by the action of various Member States themselves. The rise of China was also discussed here as part of an emerging geopolitical drama, raising questions about the extent to which multilateralism and cooperation can be maintained or enhanced given the stark differences in values.

Both Former Brazilian Foreign Minister Mr. Celso Amorim and Somali Minister Gamal Mohammed Hassan highlighted the need for a greater and more effective voice for developing countries in multilateral institutions such as the UN. Mr. Amorim identified the need to reform the UN Security Council, whilst Minister Hassan noted that although the aid of multilateral institutions is indispensable, a greater perceptibility of upper-tier management to the needs on the ground may help foster a more intimate understanding the requirements of developing countries.

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Gamal Mohammed Hassan's Highlights



Minister of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, Somalia

Ambassador Gamal M. Hassan is the Minister of Planning, Investment and Economic Development of the Federal Government of Somalia and a member of the Federal Parliament. Prior to this, he served as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Somalia to the Republic of Kenya. In 2016, Ambassador Hassan was concurrently appointed as the Ambassador to the Republic of Seychelles, Union of the Comoros, and the Republic of Mauritius. Before joining government, he served as a Political Specialist to the US Special Representative for Somalia (SRS) on political affairs and related democracy, governance, and human rights issues. He has also worked for the Government of Canada and Carleton University in Ottawa. Ambassador Hassan studied at Carleton and Moi Universities where he obtained a BA in Political Science and MA in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy respectively.

- ” “This pandemic told us that unless you we come together globally, unless we come together and form the institutions that we all belong to, it would be very difficult to do things silos. Whether you are a very rich country or a very poor country, we are in the same boat. These organisations that we created are instruments to enhance global partnership and enhance multilateralism. So we're looking at this as an opportunity, but we also need to be mindful of the real work that needs to be done after 2020.”
- ” “As you know, most of the top performing economies in the world were in Africa before the pandemic hit, although the loss of human lives were not as severe as many parts of the world. But the socioeconomic impact can be felt and seen clearly across Africa, and that had an impact on trade in Africa.”
- ” “Having said that, we have to mention the entire African free trade agreement that most of the countries now I think of signed and deposited the ratification instruments with the African Union. We are not, we're looking at trading amongst each other, but we're not doing it at the expense of the global trade.”
- ” “I think the call for reform of international institutions has been reverberating across the globe, the developing world. Having said that, there's no sense [in moving] from multilateralism to unilateralism. We have seen what's happening now in many parts of the world, populism and the change of critical policies, the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Club, from the climate change conference.”
- ” “What's really undeniable and that the pandemic has exposed now is the fact that these multinational institutions will only be, or would be, more responsive to the needs of the low income countries when more of their top management and the decision makers have a more intimate understanding of the situation on the ground.”
- ” “As a Somali coming from Somalia, I think we can see that here on the ground in Somalia that we have very strong leadership with the UN and many other institutions. But sometimes it takes a while to have the real impact of these institutions on the people. When a crisis like this pandemic or poverty or a famine or drought or issues like the climate change related issues take place. So it's really important to consider the voice of the developing world when making these tough decisions.”
- ” “When it comes to the Security Council, calls for reforms have been happening, African countries and many of the developing countries have voiced their concerns over the setup and the structure of the Security Council and many other institutions. Case in point is the WTO, the Director General position. We know there's there was an issue there when the final candidate that won the nomination was former Nigerian Minister of Finance and we had some countries trying to block that. A real change is needed now in those multinational organisations, but, that cannot be substituted for unilateralism and countries going bilaterally. We need the system, but we need to reform it.”

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Celso Amorim's Highlights



Former Foreign and Defence Minister, Brazil

Celso Amorim, a career diplomat, is the longest serving foreign minister of Brazil to date (1993-1994 and 2003-2010). He also served as Minister of Defence (2011-2014). Amorim remains active in academic life and as a public figure, having written a number of books and articles on matters ranging from foreign policy to culture. One of his latest work, *Acting Globally, Memoirs of Brazil's Assertive Foreign Policy* was published by Hamilton Books with endorsements by Kofi Annan and Noam Chomsky. Amorim was a Visiting Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School in 2011 and 2015 and a Distinguished Fellow at King's College. He has participated with several think tanks, committees and panels on themes of global interest. He was named as one of *Foreign Policy Magazine's* 100 Top Global Thinkers in 2010 (ranked as number six). In 2009, *Foreign Policy Magazine* referred to him as the "world best foreign minister".

- ” “The novelty about a new Marshall Plan is that it will be a Merkel Plan or it will be Xi Jinping Plan, it will not be a Biden Plan, that that’s something we know for sure. So the world is changing in a very important and structural way. In Latin America, for instance, the big protests against the excesses of globalisation and neoliberalism in Chile started before the pandemic. But all these things now come together. And the pandemic is a big catalyser. And we have I mean, I don’t like this question of opportunities because the pandemic is bad, so it’s bad and we have to deal with something that is bad, but having said that, we have to use this moment in order to try to make the world more able to respond to big global changes.”
- ” “We don’t want hegemony from any country. I don’t want a world under United States hegemony, but I don’t want a world of hegemony under Chinese hegemony either. I want a world which is balanced in which Africa, Latin America, Europe, all of us can also have our say and influence in the world.”
- ” “Even if I compare the other governments that I served as an ambassador or in regions I served as a career diplomat in the past, never, even during the military dictatorship, Brazil had such an abnormal government, which is a poor imitation of Trumpism.”
- ” “[...]the worst thing about Trump for Latin America at least, is the example. So, I hope the fact that he was defeated, not that I have fantastic hopes about Biden, but I hope we’re coming to more normal times and that will also bring Latin America and Brazil to more normal times and in more normal times, it means also more attachment to multilateral, more attached to the Latin American integration, more attachment to the idea of multipolarity as a basis for multilateralism.”
- ” “For me, the OECD is not multilateralism. It’s good that it exists. It’s okay that there are members and its members can discuss many things. I was there many times. As mentioned, Brazil has a kind of special relationship. I hope Brazil doesn’t become a member, by the way. I mean, so I hope that we see the bureaucracy of the OECD, which is slow enough, so that we have a change in government in Brazil and Brazil doesn’t need to become a member.”
- ” “You have to be a bit utopian in order to make change happen. And I think we need to change the Security Council. We need to have a body more or less along the lines of the G20, maybe with some improvement, more African presence, less European presence in a way, and so that it can be more representative. This representation can also help in questions like climate change and questions like the global health. It can’t go to the Security Council because in the Security Council, everything is seen under the light of peace and security.”
- ” “[...] maybe we need a new process, a San Francisco process to discuss deeply all the bodies of the United Nations, not just perfunctory reform here and there to make better the administration here and there. I think it’s a deep reform[...] I agree with Professor Ikenberry; it’s very important that the United States, the most powerful, still most powerful country in the world, goes back to the multilateral system.”

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Karin Kneissl's Highlights



Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Austria

Karin Kneissl served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria from December of 2017 to June of 2019. Kneissl joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1990, serving in Paris and Madrid, as well as the ministry's legal office. In 1998 she left the foreign service to work as an analyst. Since then, she has authored several books on geopolitics and the Middle East and has lectured at various top universities. Kneissl also regularly contributes to *Russia Today*, *Cicero*, and several other media outlets. She studied law and Arabic at the University of Vienna and was granted a scholarship for the Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1988, where she completed her thesis research. Kneissl has also studied in Amman and Washington DC and is also a graduate of ENA.

” Ever since 2004, ever since the Doha Round talks and that break down, bilateralism has been moving on to the detriment of multilateralism. It started with trade agreements and it has ended up in all different fora of diplomacy.”

” The problem with today's craft of diplomacy, [...], is about seeking consensus. It's about not polarising and we are today, unfortunately, in all sectors of international relations, not only in positions of right or wrong, it's about good and bad. It's a highly polarised world. And in such a climate, it has become very difficult to bridge rifts and to talk to each other.”

” Having been a career diplomat, having stepped out for 20 years and coming back in particular to the European Union way of decision shaping and decision making, I was deeply intrigued and irritated by the fact that we do not use proper tools of diplomacy anymore, which is time, building of trust, and really talking to each other and putting oneself into the position of the other.”

” What we have seen over the last 20 years, unfortunately, is the rise in unilateral position pronunciation [...] We make our unilateral positioning via a press communique. Why a tweet? Why a post? And the bilateral or even the multilateral decision shaping is losing ground. It has been eroded.”

” The fundamental issue for the European Union now, apart from solving this very important issue of can we pass a budget next week, is how to run such force majeure, which in the end is not really force majeure because when you go to the various imminent threats to global security, whether it was the Davos forum that has

been discussing it or other international organisations, the pandemic was always among the top issues next to climate change, next to global inequality, income gap, etc. These are the three main threats to global security.”

” It [Brexit] is the issue of the day, of the next decade, and the self-questioning, of self-reflection by member states of the European Union is something that should have started at the latest in June 2016, when the Brexit referendum resulted in the in the no vote, in the Leave vote. But instead of really taking up that issue and reflecting on what went wrong, [...], the analysis was a pure domestic British discussion. It should have happened also with some sort of self-criticism by others.”

” Vaccination rates are very low inside EU countries. The lowest rates you have are in Germany and Austria. Take the regular influenza vaccination, only six percent of Austrians take this vaccination. About 60 percent do it in France because there has been a rise in certain government obligations. But when I come back to the German speaking world, and also reflecting on some Scandinavian EU member states, it's not only about alternative energy in our countries, it's also about alternative medicine. There's a very strong criticism of conventional medicine and talking about vaccination. It's a very conventional medicine, if I may say, but it's a very effective one. And there's a tremendous hope now linked to vaccination. But there's also at the same time a very strong debate, a very strong rejection of any kind of government prescribed vaccination.”

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Achim Steiner's Highlights



Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Achim Steiner became UNDP Administrator, following confirmation from the UN General Assembly, in 2017. He is also the Vice-Chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group. For nearly three decades, he has been a global leader in sustainable development, climate resilience and international cooperation. Prior to joining the UNDP, he was Director of the Oxford Martin School and Professorial Fellow of Balliol College, University of Oxford. He previously held other notable positions including, head of the United Nations Environment Programme, Director General of the UN Office at Nairobi, Director General of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and Secretary General of the World Commission on Dams. Mr. Steiner graduated in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (BA) from Worcester College, Oxford University and holds an MA from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

” I consider myself part of a generation of UN leaders who joined the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres precisely because we recognise, we embrace this notion that the UN has to evolve. Now, reform is often reduced to bureaucratic and administrative and organisational reforms.”

” I want to, first of all, simply say to anybody who is listening today, I am among those who would absolutely recognise the limitations, the deficiencies, the challenges we have. We are not machines. We are organisations composed of people governed by member states who often have very contrary views. It's a complex field in which to operate, but it's never an excuse not to rethink, revisit, and evolve the model.”

” I think we are in the midst of a terrible and sometimes terrifying struggle of how to balance the containment of a virus with that economic free fall that is happening across the world. And in many ways, what COVID-19 has done is that it has revealed a great deal.”

” I think it is out of that understanding and appreciation of inequality, of vulnerability, of unpreparedness, and also of a relationship between people and the planet, that I think there will be significant shifts towards a different kind of future.”

” I think it is fair to assume that we will see greater action on climate change, greater investments in green recovery than we perhaps would have expected in the political reality of 2019.”

” From the perspective of an economic development paradigm, I believe that there will be very significant

changes and history teaches us that out of deep crises usually come big transformations. One example being the United Nations as it now celebrates its 75th anniversary. It was born in the midst of the darkest moment of the 20th century.”

” So we do need to look forward. That is why I believe firmly that building forward better will become a guiding motto for, I think, virtually every citizen across the planet. But the risk is that we always go back to where we were before, and that remains a very real risk.”

” The political organs of the United Nations have been struggling because of the deep divisions that some countries have essentially brought into the fora of multilateral and collective ability to act. But it is UNICEF, the World Food Program, under UNDP, UN aid, UNFPA, the World Health Organisation. We were the backbone of a global community in free fall, in extreme distress. And with many countries basically not even having the basic means to protect themselves, we set up air bridges, our staff continue to work.”

” As my fellow panellists have already alluded to, multilateralism is a constantly evolving organism, and I think the reality is that we lived through many periods. Remember the Cold War, the Cuban missile crisis. I mean, there are periods in which polarisation, different views, the willingness or unwillingness of nations to work together through the United Nations platform, have been with us before. While President Trump was a particular voice, I think it is more the concern that a real world power of the significance and magnitude of the United States would continue to withdraw from the United Nations.”

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Masamichi Kono's Highlights



Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD

Masamichi Kono was appointed Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD in August 2017. He currently oversees initiatives on infrastructure and sustainable growth, and also represents the OECD at the Financial Stability Board. He has had a long career in the supervision and regulation of global financial services. Prior to his appointment at the OECD, he served as the Vice Minister for International Affairs of the Japanese Financial Services Agency. He also served as Chairman of the International Organisation of Securities Commissions Technical Committee from 2011 to 2012 and Chairman of the IOSCO Board from 2011 to 2013. He was also co-Chair of the Financial Stability Board Regional Consultative Group for Asia from 2013 to 2015, and Chairman of the IFRS Foundation Monitoring Board from 2013 to 2016. Mr. Kono was Secretary to the World Trade Organisation's Trade in Financial Services Committee from 1995 to 1999.

” “Our overall observation in this latest economic outlook is that it is for the first time actually since we entered this crisis that the outlook is looking brighter with vaccines in sight and there is strong and continuous policy support for its development and also for its distribution. I'm now looking at the leaders declaration of the G20 that was published in October. It is clearly stated here that we will spare no effort to ensure the vaccines are affordable and equitable access for all people and we have to mean this.”

” “At the OECD our ministers actually agreed for the first time in four years to actually work towards this goal of building back better and enabling a global, strong, resilient, inclusive and sustainable recovery from COVID-19, and that we should work together in areas, for example, such as science and technology.”

” “The OECD works much more with our non-members than before and perhaps it is not well known, but China, India, Brazil all come to our committees to join the discussions. We also have joint work programmes with many countries including Indonesia. Regarding the reference to Brazil, the country is now applying for membership with the OECD and with China and we continue to engage and they take part in some of the key committees that we have.”

” “We do acknowledge that while the pandemic is the first fully global crisis since World War Two, international cooperation has been weakened in recent years and we must find ways to restore and reinforce international cooperation in all areas, not just health care, but

all across our economic policies and in terms of development finance, and so on. But there are signs of hope.”

” “Our members are key in actually making those standards and policy guidance and recommendations strong and also, of course, all in support of multilateralism. And so, of course, they are bilateral, plurilateral and regional initiatives.”

” “[...] we would really want to call on countries to strengthen our multilateral framework and to build on what we actually have built over the years with a lot of effort and make this recovery really, as I mentioned, strong, resilient, inclusive, and sustainable.”

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John G. Ikenberry's Highlights



Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University

John Ikenberry is the Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University. He also serves as a global eminence scholar at Kyung Hee University in Seoul and a fellow at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has been both a visiting fellow at All Souls College and visiting professor at Balliol College at Oxford University. Ikenberry is the author of eight books, including his most recent work, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism in the Making of Modern World Order*. Some of his other books include *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American System* and *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*. He has also authored over 130 journal articles, essays, and book chapters. He has served as a member of the Policy Planning Staff, an advisor to the State Department, and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force on U.S.-European relations.

”There’s a lot at stake. It’s not just power politics. It’s also about values and what kind of international order we want to give to our children and grandchildren. And that struggle, you might say, for the world, for how we build a better world could be a kind of motivation, as it was in the 1950s and 60s for competitive race to the top as opposed to racing to the bottom.”

”I think for the United States, there’s a sense that the US over these four years has become less influential, less respected, less vital to problem solving. I do also think that President-elect Biden knows that. [He] is a, if you say, a kind of true believer in the longer term American approach to international relations that we trace back to the dark days of World War Two, of building and putting its weight behind building international institutions, seeing its own national interest advanced through commitments with other countries, alliances, multilateral institutions doing well by doing good, and that overall seventy five year playbook I think is needed more than ever.”

”I don’t think that Trump was necessary. I think that, in fact, he’s taken us as a country and as a global system down a very dangerous road. As you just mentioned, the US has under his watch, pulled out of international institutions, made itself less of a leader in all the different zones of international cooperation, arms control, environment, human rights, economic relations. So I think we have seen in some sense an experiment of how the world operates when the most powerful country in the world doesn’t tie itself to the global system.”

”My fervent hope is that the new administration will redouble an American interest in diplomacy, multilateralism, cooperative security, global problem

solving. If you look finally at the world today, beyond COVID, you see really an emerging geopolitical drama unfolding with the rise of China, and the United States cares a lot about that.”

”China is rising, but also putting before the international system illiberal authoritarianism and drifting towards more kind of neo-totalitarian kinds of domestic political values. So, there’s a challenge there.”

”The second global crisis is the crisis of modernity. We’ve entered the Anthropocene era. This is global warming. This is the pandemic. This is the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. And this is a global problem that will require global solutions. It will require a stronger United Nations, more multilateralism, and it will require China and the United States as the two largest countries that emit 27% of carbon into the atmosphere. The US emits 15 percent of the global total. That’s 42 percent. The US and China have to work together on global warming. I think there is an opening that the Biden administration can help trigger.”

”So there’s the power crisis, there is the modernity crisis, but there’s also a crisis of liberal democracy. The liberal democracies who have been at the centre of the international order for one hundred years are not doing so well. And this is not a problem that relates to China. It’s a problem of how we build and rebuild our liberal democratic societies.”

”We’ve got to be able to envisage a future where it’s going to be both competition and cooperation, it’s going to be global, but it’s also going to be sub-global. And that’s just the world we’re going to have to evolve into I think.”



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