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Diplomatic Strategies of Major Powers: Competing Patterns of International Relations?

The Cases of the United States of America, China and the European Union

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Abstract

This paper explores the diplomatic strategies of three major international actors – the United States (US), China and the European Union (EU) – in order to better understand current patterns of international relations. Relevant factors are identified in order to categorise strategies as "unilateral", "bilateral", "multilateral" or "pluralistic". Applying an actor-centred perspective, the paper argues that the mixture of an actor's diplomatic strategies remains rather stable over time. At the same time, the analysis shows that very different strategic considerations can lead to the same outcome, such as active participation in the multilateral framework of the United Nations.

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1. Introduction: Conceptualising Diplomatic Strategies

This paper explores the diplomatic strategies of three major international actors – the United States (US), China and the European Union (EU) – in order to better understand current patterns of international relations. In particular, the analysis investigates the – at first glance – counterintuitive working thesis that, despite regular adaptations and re-formulations of strategic concepts, the actual mixture of these and other actors'[1] diplomatic strategies remains rather stable over time, displaying only minor shifts within the overall balance. Thus, it is assumed that a competition of strategies typically takes place both *between* and *within* international actors. In this context, special attention will be paid to the underlying motivations and structural constraints that account for an actor's choice of diplomatic strategies. Crucially, as the analysis will show, very different strategic considerations can lead to the same outcome, such as active participation in the multilateral framework of the United Nations.

This joint working paper has been written in the context of the MERCURY collaborative research project, carried out in the seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission.[2] The paper builds upon the conceptual work of Caroline Bouchard and John Peterson in the first MERCURY working paper "Conceptualising Multilateralism" (Bouchard and Peterson 2009). While Bouchard and Peterson concentrate on the variety of specific forms, models and cases of multilateralism, this paper aims at moving beyond the exclusive focus on multilateralism and investigates also alternative approaches to foreign policy.

The analysis starts from the basic assumption that diplomatic action – both by nation states and by international organisations[3] – generates different, sometimes overlapping or even competing patterns of international relations. For the purpose of this paper, "patterns" are

[1] Note that we use the term 'actors' rather than states, since the EU is not a state.
[2] For further information on MERCURY visit the project website: http://www.mercury-fp7.net.
[3] Notwithstanding the particularities – some would say structural shortcomings – of the EU as a foreign policy actor, the paper starts from the assumption that the Union does act in its own right at the international level. Thus, like state actors, the EU "has developed a dense web of relations with states, regions and international organizations" (Jørgensen 2006b: 509, see also Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008, Marsh and Mackenstein 2005). On the discussion of the EU's actorness in the field of foreign policy, see Allen and Smith 1990, Tonra and Christiansen 2004, Bretherton and Vogler 2006.

understood as characteristic forms of interaction. In this context, the paper explores the central research question how can major actor strategies be categorised and how have they been applied over time?

Specifically, by analysing the diplomatic action of these three actors using a bottom-up approach, relevant factors will be identified which allow us to categorise strategies as "unilateral", "bilateral", "multilateral" and – in the case of China – "pluralistic". There are two main reasons why we have chosen an actor-centred perspective for this paper. First, international actors typically pursue different strategies – or "mode[s] of diplomacy" (Jørgensen 2006a: 201) – at the same time in order to achieve their foreign policy goals (see Martin 1992: 765; Reus-Smit 2004: 141-142). For example, while the European Union (EU) is widely perceived as a "champion of multilateralism" (Lucarelli 2007: 12), the EU traditionally also relies on a broad range of bilateral arrangements.[4] Thus, detailed analysis of a single actor's approach – as opposed to an analysis focusing mainly at the systemic level – sheds light on specific constellations of factors which influence the respective actor's choice of varying strategies. As Pollack (2003: 117) has underlined, "we should expect to see states supporting multilateral rules and institutions selectively across issue-areas, favouring binding rules and strong institutions in some issue-areas but opposing them in others, as a reflection of their issue-specific preferences about economics, security, the environment".

The second reason for choosing an actor-centred perspective is that these patterns do not only co-exist, but they are interdependent and even compete with each other. In particular, the literature points to the fact that if at a given moment major actors increasingly opt for unilateral or bilateral strategies in a certain policy field, multilateral arrangements in this field are weakened. The current reluctance of Russia to join the World Trade Organisation, i.e. the Russian reluctance to engage in a multilateral approach towards trade, can serve as an illustrative example. Moreover, US-American "exceptionalism" with regard to international treaties – in terms of opt-out clauses, veto rights and other special conditions – has been described as "uniquely damaging to international comity" (Chayes 2008: 48).

The paper proceeds as follows: first, the main analytical concepts, namely unilateralism, bilateralism, multilateralism and pluralism, will be defined. It is argued that while the concepts of "unilateralism" and "multilateralism" have been increasingly used both in the political and in academic debates, they often lack analytical clarity. Therefore, this paper reviews existing conceptualisations, identifies core characteristics and links up with MERCURY's working definition of multilateralism. In this context, a special feature is the term "pluralism". Pluralism

[4] For example, as outlined in the European Security Strategy of 2003, the EU seeks to establish exclusive bilateral partnerships with strategic partners such as Brazil, Russia or India (see European Council 2003: 14).

is introduced as a distinct diplomatic meta-strategy in order to grasp specific aspects of the Chinese approach to international relations.

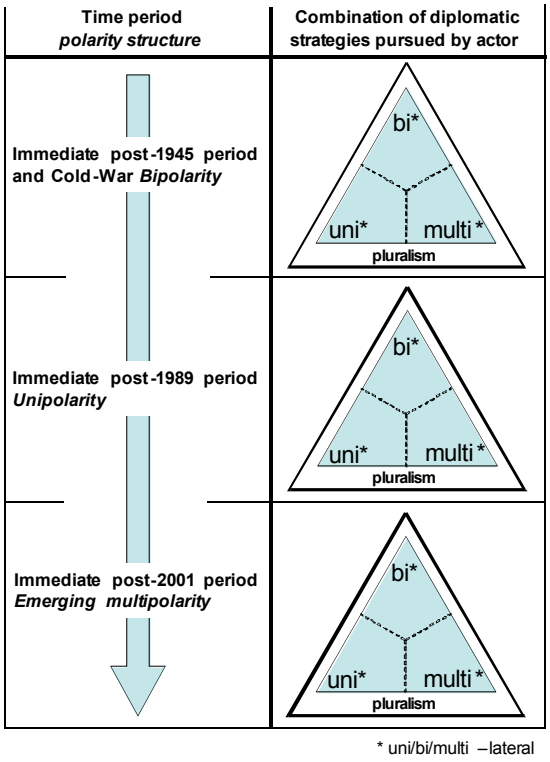
Second, three case studies will illustrate the validity of these concepts in view of the diplomatic action of the three actors. The choice of the cases cover the world's sole superpower after the end of the Cold War (US), a rising global power (China) and a major non-state power with an increasing impact on international relations (EU). The analysis is carried out from a dynamic perspective: that is, changes at the systemic and actor level will be taken into account. It is structured into three main periods, which are characterised by different polarity structures: (1) the post-1945 period and the following period of the Cold War (bipolarity), (2) the post-1989 period (unipolarity) and (3) the post-2001 period (emerging multipolarity).[5]

The first two periods have been chosen in view of the all-encompassing changes of the international order triggered by the end of World War II (1945) and the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), respectively. The year 2001 has been chosen as the starting point of the third, ongoing period. Roughly a decade after 1989, 2001 represented an important milestone for all three cases under scrutiny, though for different reasons. In the United States, then President George W. Bush came to power and heralded a time of demonstrative US unilateralism – which has been followed by a renewed emphasis on US multilateralism by the Obama administration since 2009, at least at the rhetorical level. China, in turn, after a period of adaptation with regard to "Western" multilateral organisations, then started pursuing a more strategic, China-dominated multilateral approach. The creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001 highlights this new development. Finally, the year 2001, following the Intergovernmental Conference on the Nice Treaty concluded in December 2000, marks the intensification of (a) the European Union's preparation for the enlargements of 2004/2007 and (b) negotiation of a series of institutional reforms in the field of EU external action.

Third and finally, the findings of the three case studies will be summarised and tentatively compared over time in order to assess more generally current patterns of international relations.

[5] See Graph 1: "Polarity structure and diplomatic strategies: Towards a periodisation".

Graph 1: Polarity structure and diplomatic strategies: Towards a periodisation[6]



Source: own presentation (Jean Monnet Chair)

Domestic Factors and the Structure of the International System

For the purpose of this paper, nation states and the EU are conceptualised as rationalist, goal-seeking actors (see Snidal 2002: 74-75). Their preferences for unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral institutions are considered to be derived from their respective substantive preferences regarding certain policy outcomes (see Pollack 2003: 117). It is argued that preferences can be explained by referring to internal factors such as the political system, the executive, the level of military power, and the political culture (see Jørgensen 2006a: 210). As for external factors, it is assumed that the global distribution of power provides both incentives and constraints. This means that "identities, preferences, beliefs, and behaviour of microunits are given a structural determination" (Caporaso 1993: 75). The respective polarity structure of the world order represents the overarching opportunity structure to which all international actors are exposed (see Cox 1992: 161). In this context, we ask how far an actor's pursuit of a certain diplomatic strategy is (a) supported, (b) inhibited or (c) unaffected by the polarity structure of the international system at a given moment in time (see Jørgensen 2006b: 515-516). For example, "the [Common Foreign and Security Policy of the

[6] This graph provides a basic grid for the visualisation of the combination of diplomatic strategies during the three time periods as defined for the purpose of this paper (see above). In the conclusion, the key findings of the three case studies will be presented on the basis of this grid.

EU] can be seen as a response to the fundamental change from Cold War conditions (bipolarity) to post-Cold War realities, i.e. unipolarity or emerging multipolarity" (Jørgensen 2006b: 516).[7]

Given the paper's empirical focus, we deliberately avoid any attempt to determine *theoretically* the relative weight of the analysed factors. Instead, we generally refer to the current debate on the sources of multilateral action (and, consequently, non-multilateral action), which emphasises the need to take into account both domestic *and* systemic factors to fully understand an actor's (non-)support for multilateralism (see Jørgensen 2006a; Pollack 2003: 118; Carlsnaes 2002: 342-343).[8]

Unilateral, Bilateral, Multilateral and Pluralistic Strategies

In the conduct of their foreign policy, international actors make use of "several types of foreign policy strategy: unilateral, bilateral and multilateral" (Jørgensen 2009: 1). While a basic, quantitative definition of these strategies simply refers to the number of actors involved (one; two; three or more) (see Caporaso 1993: 55), there are also qualitative characteristics (see Annex 1: Overview over quantitative and qualitative characteristics of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral diplomatic strategies).

First, a unilateralist strategy is defined as a "go-it-alone approach" (van Oudenaren 2003: 33) of a certain actor without prior consultation with other actors. While co-operation with other actors is not completely excluded in the context of unilateral action, this co-operation takes place *ad hoc* and remains essentially limited to requests for support.

Second, a bilateral strategy is characterised by a – sometimes asymmetric – focus on the goals of two actors (see Wilkinson 2000: 32). For the purpose of this paper, it is important to stress that these actors can be nation states but also international organisations such as the EU. For example, if the European Union enters into a contractual relationship with a third country in the area of international trade, these relations are also "bilateral".[9]

[7] On the historical evolution of the international order and its connection to patterns of multilateral co-operation, see Bouchard and Peterson 2009: 8-12.

[8] Obviously, different theoretical schools would not only stress the relevance of either domestic (liberal approaches) or structural factors (neo-realism), but they would also assess the relevance of given factors within these two broad categories differently (for example, military power as a central factor for rationalist approaches versus political culture as a central factor for constructivist approaches). In this context, see especially Ikenberry (2003: 535) who identifies four major sources of multilateralism: (1) the international system's structural features (complex interdependence; unipolarity; the rise of non-state violent collective action), (2) the independent influence of pre-existing multilateral institutions, (3) the domestic level (American identity; domestic fiscal and manpower costs, election cycles), and (4) agentic sources (ideologies of foreign policy elites; nongovernmental organizations; the manoeuvering of elites over treaty conditions and ratifications).

[9] Inter-regionalism, or the relationship between two regional entities such as the EU or ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), represents a sub-class of bilateral relations (see Camroux 2009).

Third, a multilateral strategy is defined as an actor's support and use of multilateral institutions in order to achieve its foreign policy goals. There are many different understandings of multilateralism. Jørgensen (2009: 3) basically distinguishes a "discourse of administrative and political practice"[10] on the one hand and "discourses of theory" on the other hand, the latter being based on "analytical rather than ideological qualities".[11] Regarding theory-based definitions, political science literature typically refers to the work of Robert Keohane and John Ruggie. Keohane (2006: 56) focuses mainly on institutional characteristics, thereby conceiving of multilateralism as

> institutionalized collective action by an inclusively determined set of independent states. Truly multilateral organizations are open to all states meeting specific criteria. The rules of multilateral organizations are publicly known and persist over a substantial period of time.

In contrast, Ruggie has developed a "more demanding" (Jørgensen 2009: 3), norm-based definition of multilateralism. Thus, he states that "multilateralism is a form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct" (Ruggie 1993: 11). From this perspective, the institution of multilateralism is generally regarded as a "deep organizing principle of international life" (Caporaso 1993: 53). More specifically, it is distinguished from other forms of international relations by three properties: (a) indivisibility among the members of a collectivity, (b) generalised principles of conduct, and (c) diffuse reciprocity, meaning a rough equivalence of benefits for the members of a multilateral institution in the aggregate and over time (see Ruggie 1993: 11; Caporaso 1993: 53; Martin 1992: 767). In contrast, bilateralism is characterised by a "specific reciprocity" (Wilkinson 2000: 40). This means that, from a single actor's perspective, the costs and benefits of a given policy action are more clearly defined in a bilateral than in a multilateral setting.

Drawing on these established concepts, the MERCURY project proposes the following working definition: *multilateralism is three or more actors engaging in voluntary and (more or less) institutionalised co-operation governed by norms and principles, with rules that apply (more or less) equally to all.*[12] First, the definition is not restricted to states, but includes also other actors such as the European Union. Second, a multilateral arrangement implies a minimum of institutionalisation. Following Smith (2004: 26, emphasis added),

[10] Jørgensen (2009: 3) mentions the example of the European Commission which uses the term "multilateral" almost exclusively for UN-related activities.
[11] For a comprehensive overview of definitions and understandings of multilateralism, see Bouchard and Peterson 2009. On the debate on the normative implications of the concepts of uni-, bi- and multilateralism, see Wilkinson 2000: 32, Laatikainen and Smith 2006: 7, van Oudenaren 2003: 39.
[12] See also the first MERCURY working paper, Ibid.: 7.

institutionalisation implies that "certain behaviors of a set of actors *persist over time*" and that these actors adapt together in the face of internal and external challenges. Moreover, institutionalised co-operation requires the existence of agreed-upon norms which tend to become increasingly formalised and more binding over time (see Smith 2004: 27; Stone Sweet et al. 2001: 7). Consequently, the proposed definition excludes highly informal and irregular meetings of contact groups from the realm of multilateralism.[13] Third, taking up Ruggie's idea of "generalised principles of conduct", it is postulated that generally, the members of a multilateral arrangement dispose of the same rights within that arrangement. Thus, phenomena such as empires with their characteristic structures of subordination are excluded by this definition. In sum, while the MERCURY definition of multilateralism refers to both quantitative and selected qualitative criteria, it is however less demanding than Ruggie's concept and classifies a broader range of phenomena as "multilateralism".[14]

Finally, this paper links the notion of pluralism to the analysis of diplomatic action. In the field of political philosophy, the concept of pluralism emphasises the (cultural) diversity of social groups which make up a social system. At the international level, the concept is mainly used by scholars working on issues related to the development and the characteristics of international society (see Hurrell 2002: 139). Yet, the basic (normative) idea of respect for diversity can also be transferred to the analysis of diplomacy. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, pluralism is understood as a diplomatic approach which stresses the sovereignty of the actor and the *freedom of choice with regard to the range of possible diplomatic strategies*. This means that a pluralistic approach does not favour any basic diplomatic strategy – unilateralism, bilateralism and multilateralism – over another, but values a case-by-case, sovereign decision-taking capability as a guiding principle in the first place.

Building on these concepts, the analysis will point to similarities, differences and varying connotations of diplomatic strategy in the context of the three case studies.

[13] At a lower level of abstraction, the literature also refers to more tangible indicators of institutionalisation at the international level such as the existence of an international secretariat in order to support the co-operation of a certain set of actors, voting procedures and the production of formal output such as summit conclusions (see Ruggie 1993: 13).

[14] On the discussion which types of international regimes and organisations fulfil Ruggie's criteria for multilateralism see ibid.: 12-14.

2. Selective Power-Based Unilateralism: The Case of the United States

As one of the world's great powers, the approach of the United States (US) to international politics has always been intensively debated and variously labelled: "optimistic internationalism following World War II" (Chayes 2008: 47), "selective multilateralism" (Chayes 2008: 47), "American exceptionalism" (Luck 2003), "unilateral hegemony" (Pedersen 2002: 682), "new unilateralism" (Krauthammer 2001), "aggressive unilateralism" (Pollack 2003: 119), and, most recently, "a new global multilateralism after the end of the Bush era" (Schwarz 2009, own translation). In line with a recent body of literature (see Mastanduno 2005; Foot et al. 2003a), the following section claims that despite observers' desire for clear-cut labels, the US diplomatic approach has been essentially pragmatic and selective over time and across issue areas, rather than principled. References to relevant cases will be illustrative rather than exhaustive. Nevertheless, we argue that this overview helps to identify major periodic trends and especially the characteristic recourse to a mix of different diplomatic strategies at all times.

As outlined, the empirical evidence will be categorised into three main periods: (1) the post-1945 period and the following period of the Cold War, (2) the post-1989 period, and (3) the post-2001 period. This basic periodisation allows us to structure the analysis across our three main case studies. However, the current intense political and academic debate on whether we currently face a unipolar or (emerging) multipolar world order accentuates the methodological difficulties when trying to establish causal connections based *exclusively* on polarity as an explanatory factor for foreign policy behaviour. Thus, many scholars have pointed to the situation after the end of the Cold War when the US represented the sole remaining superpower in a – at least temporarily – unipolar system, a situation which "[has increased] the temptation for it to act unilaterally" (Foot et al. 2003b: 2). Yet, as Mastanduno (205: 322, emphasis added) has underlined, the new strategic environment after the end of the Cold War "led US policy makers to pursue *different* institutional strategies in Europe and in Asia" (see also Ikenberry 2003: 534, 544). In Europe, in line with its "Eurocentric multilateralism" (Haglund 2003: 220), the US has focused on the transformation of NATO, including the adaptation to out-of-area deployment and its Eastern enlargement. Thus, in the field of security policy, the US concentrated on institutionalised multilateral co-operation.[15] In East Asia, both the Clinton and Bush administrations have sought to maintain and establish

[15] *Nota bene:* While Article V of the NATO Treaty was invoked for the first time ever after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002 was not carried out in the NATO framework (see Mastanduno 2005: 329). Thus, the US attempts to reform NATO in the aftermath of the Cold War should not be equated with relying on this multilateral institution at the operational level.

bilateral partnerships with regional powers such as Japan, China and India (see Mastanduno 2005: 322).

Moreover, one cannot only observe the use of different diplomatic strategies *at the same time*, but also comparatively rapid *changes* regarding the US diplomatic approach, due to a complex interplay of domestic factors. The following assessment by Foot, MacFarlane and Mastanduno (2003b: 1) on US attitudes towards multilateral organisations illustrates in particular the range of positions covered within only one decade:

> [The 1990s] began with US officials promoting a renewed and more prominent role for the United Nations […]. It ended with an increasingly assertive US Congress refusing to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and calling into question the US commitment to other multilateral initiatives.

Domestic Factors: Political System and Culture

Here, we concentrate on two basic domestic factors impacting on diplomatic choices: the US political system and the political culture, namely core values to which the US adheres also internationally (see Foot et al. 2003b: 8-11). The US political system features the executive and US Congress sharing decision-making authority on US foreign policy. While the respective US administration defines the guidelines for US behaviour at the international level, it has to accommodate an increasingly assertive Congress (see Foot et al. 2003b: 9). In particular, the Senate has to approve international treaties by a two-thirds majority.[16] Moreover, a proliferation of foreign affairs-related committees and subcommittees,[17] combined with a general reluctance to engage in across-the-board action, has made the US Congress a constraining factor especially with regard to multilaterally-oriented US presidents (see Foot et al. 2003b: 9; Lyman 2002: 84-88).

As for political culture, there is a set of core beliefs which have underpinned US policy-making since the beginning of the 20th century: exceptionalism and leadership, democracy, as well as freedom and liberty. These ideas and values are traditionally shared by all political schools in principle, although their weighting and concrete application differ from one administration to the other.

Dating back to colonial times and the American Revolution, and articulated for the first time by Alexis de Tocqueville in his work “De la démocratie en Amérique” (1835 and 1840), the conviction that the US is a country with an extraordinary role in history – a sense of spiritual

[16] See article II, section 2 US Constitution.
[17] On the extension of responsibilities for US foreign policy outside the traditional foreign policy bureaucracy as a result of globalisation and the blurred line between foreign and domestic issues see Lyman 2002: 75-80.

and political destiny – is a key element of the American belief system (see Madsen 1998). However, the underlying assumption of an "almost chosen nation" (Abraham Lincoln) exists in two main interpretations: one strand, linked to the notion of "isolationism", views the US as an exemplary nation, the other strand in line with the ideas of "internationalism" as a missionary nation. The exceptionality of missionary America is connected to the extraordinary power position of the US in the international system and results in a quasi-natural leadership role in world affairs.

Complementary to the beliefs of exceptionalism and leadership, the notions of democracy and freedom and liberty serve as fundamental values in US foreign policy. As Ikenberry (2009: 5) has outlined, from Roosevelt and Truman to Kennedy and Reagan to Clinton, US administrations "have made the championing of democracy and freedom a centerpiece of their foreign policy". While Wilson entered World War I by proclaiming to "make the world safe for democracy", Clinton set the "enlargement of the democratic world" (Ikenberry 2009: 6) as one of America's primary goals after the end of the Cold War (see also Hamilton 2008: 86f). The beliefs of freedom and liberty also include explicitly the fundamental rights of peoples and individuals to live freely as described in Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and as later enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Given the strong permeation of the beliefs of freedom and liberty in all US external policies, an "open […] international trading and financial order" and a "global economic system resting primarily on the free participation of independent states" (Hamilton 2008: 88) completes the American idea of a liberal order.

Historical Development: from the Second World War to the end of the Cold War

In the immediate period after the Second World War, the United States shaped the international order by leading various multilateral initiatives in the policy fields of security and economy. Specifically, the US strongly supported the creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. Already the year before, in an effort to rebuild the international economic system, the US promoted the Bretton Woods Agreements which became operational in 1945. In the same vein, the US supported the establishment of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947. In 1949, in view of the perceived Soviet threat, the US decided with its Western allies to create the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).[18]

Yet, from the late 1960s onwards, the United States partly retreated from its leadership role in the build-up of multilateral arrangements (see Keohane 1984: 15). In this context, 15 August 1971 can be considered as a defining moment: on this date, to reduce constraints on

[18] For a detailed analysis of the origins of American multilateralism, see Patrick 2009.

US investment and spending policies, President Richard Nixon unilaterally removed the gold backing from the US dollar – a cornerstone of the Bretton Woods system. As Pollack (2003: 116) has underlined, since the 1980s, the US has "becom[e] increasingly suspicious of the multilateral institutions it helped to establish during its period of post-war hegemony". Trade policy under the Ronald Reagan administration (1981-1989) is a case in point. Dissatisfied with the trade-facilitating effects of the GATT rules, Reagan pursued an aggressively unilateral approach in market-opening negotiations, legally based on section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 (see Elliott and Hufbauer 2002: 400-402). While the US was at the same time also engaged in multilateral trade negotiations, namely in the Uruguay round launched in 1986, the perception of the US at the international level was nevertheless that its foreign policy was dominated by its unilateralism (see Foot et al. 2003b: 13).

The one-term presidency of George Bush (senior) from 1989 to 1993 marks the transition from Cold War bipolarity to a unipolar system in which the US assumed an unparalleled power position. The coming to power of the Democrat Bill Clinton as US President in 1993 was regarded as a watershed for the US diplomatic approach and marked a renewal of US multilateralism. Thus, Madeleine Albright, first UN Ambassador and then Secretary of State under Clinton, coined the term "assertive multilateralism". Essentially, this approach sought the improvement and increased deployment of UN peacekeeping forces – not least in order to spread costs in the framework of international security policy (see Sewall 2002: 195-196). In general, Clinton declared that "those in my country or elsewhere who believe we can do without the United Nations, or impose our will upon it, misread history and misunderstand the future"[19]. Clinton also supported trade liberalisation efforts at global level, namely in the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) established in 1994, as well as at regional level, in the framework of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum (APEC) (see Foot et al. 2003b: 3).

However, "a significant gap between rhetoric and reality" (Taylor 2008: 3) characterised the Clinton administration's support for multilateral policy-making. For example, Clinton – as his predecessors – further fostered *bilateral* (security) partnerships in the Asia-Pacific area (see Taylor 2008: 3).[20] Moreover, in seeking to strengthen UN peacekeeping, Clinton faced significant opposition from Congress, which feared a general increase of US military commitments. As a result, Sewall (2002: 191) concludes that Clinton had to withdraw his announced support to the UN, rely more on regional organisations such as NATO, thereby

[19] See United Nations General Assembly, Fifty-fifth session, 3rd plenary meeting, 6 September 2000. Doc. A/55/PV.3. New York.

[20] In the framework of the so-called "San Francisco System", originally set up in the 1950s, the US has created a regional bilateral defence network including Australia/New Zealand, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand. Recently, the US has also increased its bilateral defence relations with Singapore (see Tow 1999: 6).

effectively weakening the UN politically and economically. Accordingly, the literature has underlined the decisive role of the US Congress and the dynamics of partisan politics when the Senate rejected the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1999 (see Foot et al. 2003b: 9; Graham Jr. and LaVera 2002).[21]

Overall, since World War II three international treaties have been rejected by the US Senate, all of them multilateral in nature, i.e. involving three or more parties.[22] From 1980-99, the United States concluded 415 treaties, more than a third of them being multilateral.[23] While the Senate has to approve by a two-thirds vote international *treaties* (see above), there is also another category of international agreements in US domestic law: so-called "executive agreements". Crucially, executive agreements are not submitted to the Senate despite the fact that they are binding and considered to be "treaties" in international law terminology. A major reason for relying on the legal instrument of executive agreements has been the growing international co-operation of the United States in the 20th century within a variety of (new) policy fields. The resulting workload could be more easily met by using simplified procedures of concluding an executive agreement as opposed to concluding a treaty. For example, the US Congress has authorised the executive branch to conclude international agreements in policy fields such as foreign aid, agriculture and trade. In the second half of the 20th century, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of executive agreements: in 1989, the United States was a party to 890 treaties and 5117 agreements. As a general rule, the most important international commitments have to be agreed in the form of treaties. In this context, the State Department has developed a list of criteria – such as 'the degree of commitment or risk for the entire Nation' or whether state laws are affected – in order to determine whether the form of an agreement or of a treaty is appropriate. Yet, the interpretation of these criteria has not always been clear and therefore represents a source of conflict in terms of US inter-institutional relations. For the purpose of this paper, it is important to note that there might well be an international or multilateral engagement of the United States at treaty level (or rather: executive agreement level) even if a majority of the Senate is *not* in favour of a specific international policy initiative.

[21] For the general state of ratification, see the CTBTO website http://www.ctbto.org/member-states/?no_cache=1&Fsize=kuyzyweqhcib. On 24 September 2009, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution No. 1887 on disarmament and non-proliferation. The resolution was strongly supported by US President Barack Obama; however, he faces strong opposition in the Pentagon and the US Congress (see http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/24/nuclear-weapons-un-security-council, accessed 25.09.09).

[22] Apart from the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (rejected in 1999), these were the Law of the Sea Convention (1960) and the Montreal Aviation Protocols (1983). For details, see the website of the US Senate, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Treaties.htm#5 (accessed 25.09.09).

[23] 155 of 415 treaties, i.e. 37 percent, were multilateral. All facts and figures in the remainder of this paragraph are based on the 2001 study of the Congressional Research Service "Treaties and other international agreements: The role of the United States Senate". The study has not been updated since 2001 (email conversation with the US Senate Historical Office, 10.11.09).

Post-11 September 2001

In the year of the inauguration of George W. Bush as 43th President of the United States, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 had a strong impact on US perceptions of threat and vulnerability. Within months, the events of 9-11 led to such outspoken unilateralism on the US side that "many in European diplomatic circles [were shocked]" (Peterson and Pollack 2003: 8). In October 2001, a US-led military campaign was launched in Afghanistan ("Operation Enduring Freedom"), which was not backed by an authorisation of the UN Security Council.[24] Furthermore, the annual State of the Union speech delivered by George W. Bush on 29 January 2002 exemplified divergence between the US government and many of its allies, both with regard to the *analysis* of the terrorist threat as well as the *measures* to be taken. Essentially, Bush linked "the war on terrorism with the previous United States campaign against rogue states, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the resulting need for Ballistic Missile Defence" (Peel 2002: 23). Particularly controversial was the fact that Bush identified Iraq as part of the so-called "axis of evil": states supporting international terrorism and developing weapons of mass destruction. Consequently, the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003 – equally non-mandated by the United Nations and carried out by an ad-hoc "coalition of the willing" (Bush 2002) – was widely perceived as an act of a "new brand of headstrong American unilateralism" (Peterson and Pollack 2003: 8; see also Pollack 2003: 123).

As for international environmental policy, by March 2001 Bush had already underlined his unwillingness to commit to multilateral rules by announcing that his administration would not implement the Kyoto Treaty on global warming.[25] The withdrawal from the Kyoto Treaty can be seen as a particular striking example of American exceptionalism, but still not an exclusive characteristic of a unilaterally-oriented President like George W. Bush. In fact, unilateralism represents an underlying trend in US foreign policy since the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, the US approach to international agreements has been characterised by "rejection, non-ratification, ratification with reservations" (Price 2005, cited in Bouchard and Peterson 2009).

Equally revealing is the US position on the International Criminal Court (ICC), which came into being in July 2002 in order to deal with "the most serious crimes of concern to the

[24] In December 2001, the UN Security Council authorised the establishment of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan (see Resolution No. 1386 (2001)).
[25] See "Anger at US Climate Retreat", http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/1248278.stm (accessed 8.10.09). The Kyoto Treaty had been signed in 1998 by the Clinton administration but it was never submitted to the Senate for ratification (see Jacobson 2002: 417).

international community as a whole" (art. 5, Rome Statute) such as the crime of genocide and crimes against humanity. The ICC represents another prime example of US exceptionalism. After long negotiations on the Rome Statute of the ICC, during which the US delegation unsuccessfully sought partial opt-outs and reservations for American soldiers (see Bouchard and Peterson 2009: 14; Brown 2002), US President Bill Clinton finally signed the Statute on 31 December 2000. President Bush, however, officially "unsigned" the ICC Statute in May 2002 – an unprecedented action in US foreign policy, as Karns (2008: 3) has underlined.[26]

Yet, some authors claim that unilateralism under the Bush administration should not be overstated. Mastanduno (2005: 329) summarises that "US officials frequently resorted to unilateralism prior to 11 September, and after 11 September unilateral initiatives continued to co-exist with bilateral and multilateral actors". Leffler and Legro (2008: 3-4) argue that "in its second term, the Bush administration itself appears to have backed away in practice from the defining traits of its doctrine, such as preventive action, unilateralism, and aggressive democratization" (see also Gordon 2006).

Interim Conclusion and Outlook

In sum, over the past decades, US diplomatic approaches have been characterised by "mixed messages" (Karns 2008: 9) or "ambivalent engagement" (Patrick and Forman 2002). Depending on the overall polarity structure as well as on the respective administration in power, one may either speak of "selective multilateralism" (Chayes 2008: 47), or, as the other side of the same coin, of "selective unilateralism". As we have shown, unilateral – or at least non-multilateral – approaches prevail in the area of security policy. In the areas of trade and finances, though, the economic gains of multilateral arrangements seem to generally attract the engagement of the sole superpower across time periods (see Ikenberry 2003: 544).

Crucially, the unique military and economic power position of the United States has provided the country with a considerable freedom of choice of diplomatic strategies:

> The United States picks and chooses from a range of possible approaches, depending on the issue, its interests, and changing international and domestic conditions. […] US hegemony affords it broad discretion to use unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral means to obtain its objectives. Hegemony provides it with the privilege of instrumental multilateralism. (Foot et al. 2003a: 266)

[26] Some authors refer to the ICC as an example of a "new" form of multilateralism which is – compared to previous multilateral initiatives – more legally binding in character, and at the same time less flexible in terms of escape clauses and veto rights for powerful states (see Ikenberry 2003: 543-544). From this perspective, the ICC can be seen as a particularly demanding form of multilateralism for the US.

At the time of writing (winter 2009-10), it might be too early to assess the US foreign policy under the 44th US President Barack Obama. On the one hand, recent developments indicate that the proportion of (institutionalised) multilateralism will grow and the proportion of unilateralism is likely to diminish. Thus, at the rhetorical level, the new administration has early on emphasised its willingness to rely strongly on multilateral approaches (see Schwarz 2009: 45-47).[27] Moreover, as Karns has pointed out in 2008, there is "a broad need for U.S. foreign policy […] to be more oriented toward multilateralism than it has been in recent years" (Karns 2008: 3), simply because an increasing number of global issues require multilateral solutions. In her analysis of US-American exceptionalism, Chayes even comes to the conclusion that "American treaty behaviour threatens national security" (Chayes 2008: 45) because it has severely undermined American credibility and legitimacy at the international level.

On the other hand, however, Kupchan and Trubowitz (2007: 8) insist that the "Bush administration's brand of international engagement, far from being an aberration, represents a turning point in the historical trajectory of U.S. foreign policy". Thus, they claim that the "liberal internationalist compact [based on bipartisanship] that guided the United States for much of the second half of the twentieth century [has unravelled]" because "[s]ince the demise of the Soviet Union, U.S. primacy has reduced the incentives for Republicans and Democrats alike to adhere to the liberal institutionalist compact." (Kupchan and Trubowitz 2007: 8-9). They further expect that in a polarised America, future US presidents will have to "rely more on pragmatic partnerships, flexible concerts, and task-specific coalitions" (Kupchan and Trubowitz 2007: 42).

Looking ahead, it will be particularly interesting to observe the US approach to questions which appeared only recently on the political agenda such as international environmental policy and human rights protection beyond the principle of non-interference in a state's internal affairs. Assuming that President Obama is significantly more inclined towards multilateral initiatives, it remains nevertheless to be seen how far he will be able to actually lead the US to become an active supporter, for example, of the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court. Domestic political forces might force him to adopt a very selective approach towards multilateralism, while embracing bilateral partnerships and also unilateral acts.

[27] The fact that Barack Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2009 in part because of his efforts to shift the tone in international affairs indicates that he has been strongly identified with a renewal of US multilateralism by external actors. The Nobel Prize Committee explicitly stated in its announcement that "[m]ultilateral diplomacy has regained a central position, with emphasis on the role that the United Nations and other international institutions can play." http://edition.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/10/09/us.nobel.presidents/index.html (accessed 9.10.09).

3. Harmonious Sovereignty-Based Pluralism: The Case of China

China is a civilisational sovereign state: that is, it is birthplace to a distinctive civilisation and it instinctively and fervently guards its sovereignty. China is embracing globalisation in today's world while recovering part of its lost gravity in international political economy. In this context, we could identify sovereignty, globalisation and the traditional Chinese world view as the three main sources shaping the Chinese approach to international affairs, which could be further categorized as *Harmonious Sovereignty-based Pluralism.* Sovereignty anchors China into the modern international state system, while harmonious pluralism envisages a balance between the sovereign state system and the globalisation process by borrowing from principles from the traditional Chinese world view. At the core of this approach, defensive unilateralism, purposeful bilateralism, strategic and pragmatic multilateralism work together in order to mediate China's encounters with the rest of the world.

Sovereignty, Globalisation and Historical China

Historically, China was mostly successful in maintaining a unified nation with a vast population and territory while building a China-centered world order in Asia. In the 20th century, the world witnessed the transformation of China from a civilisational state to a modern sovereignty state. By doing so, China rejected its pre-modern form of state and associated culturalism, accepting the loss of its pre-eminence in the Asian international system, and embracing nationalism, sovereignty and socialism, all ideas developed in the West.

Sovereignty provided China with guarantees in the form of international law, which allowed it to claim its domestic authority and external independence. China could therefore reject any foreign interference or domination while enjoying equality in state-to-state relations. Sovereignty guarded China's internal development and external engagement over the last 60 years.

Since the late 1970s, China has adopted a new export-oriented development model, which has integrated China closely into the global economy. With its full participation in global production networks, China itself has become a new engine of the globalisation process. As a globalising state, China has to consider its interests in regional and global governance to ensure that a stable international political environment and an open international economic system can be maintained, thereby facilitating China's development. To achieve that, China has decided to participate in various multilateral regimes that are vital for the functioning of the international system, like the UN, World Bank, IMF, WTO, APEC, and so on. In doing so,

China has exposed itself to international rules and norms which have eroded its original absolute view of sovereignty.

How can China mediate the two different organizing principle of world affairs, sovereignty on the one hand, and globalisation on the other? To answer that question, it seems increasingly important for us to recall China's historical approach in dealing with the outside world. This approach is particularly important as China has recovered much of its gravity in Asia and in the world.

To some extent, we could label the traditional Chinese world view as "Order in Diversity". For Chinese thinkers, like those Confucius masters and dynastic rulers, an ideal world order is first of all one of unity. More than 2000 years ago, asked by a king about how to stabilise All-under-Heaven,[28] Mencius simply replied: "through unity".[29] A divided China always resulted in chaos and war, thus order is perceived as the first virtue that a unified state can offer. Secondly, a world order of peace and harmony rested on universal recognition and acceptance of social and political hierarchy, but a moral example should be provided by those at the apex of the hierarchy. Thirdly, the Chinese emphasis on unity is also based on diversity. As Confucius said, benevolent people "establish others in seeking to establish themselves and promote others in seeking to get there themselves".[30] Confucian harmony is like the harmony of the various ingredients that a good cook produces in a dish, in which the distinctness of each particular ingredient is preserved (see Nuyen 2003: 83). This attitude is further reflected in the Confucian golden rule of means, which advises that one "not impose upon others what you yourself do not want."[31] Rather than arguing for the imposition of one's rule or culture onto others, Confucian tradition advocates leading by example, not through domination or force.

If we take out the political hierarchy element, and bring in the concept of sovereignty, "Order in Diversity" could be reinvented as Harmonious Sovereignty-based Pluralism (HSPB), which could help us describe and envisage China's current diplomatic strategy. By looking at the rhetoric and practice of Chinese diplomacy, HSPB starts from the core concept of sovereignty, which calls for non-interference in each other's domestic affairs, mutual respect, and voluntary cooperation through the consent of states involved. In other words, sovereignty

[28] 'Tianxia' or 'all under heaven' is essentially an ancient Chinese world view, reflecting a tradition of cosmic universalism. The term equates to universal recognition and acceptance of social and political hierarchy, shaped by the provision of moral example by those at the apex of the hierarchy, and emulated by those who are subordinates. See the MERCURY online glossary, http://www.mercury-fp7.net/index.php?id=10204&no_cache=1#c821 (accessed 10.02.10).
[29] *Mencius*,1A :6, translated by D.C. Lau, revised edition, (Penguin Books Ltd., 2004), p.8.
[30] *The Analects of Confucious*, 6 :30, translated by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Random House Publishing Group, 1998), p.110
[31] *The Analects of Confucious*, 12 :7, translated by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Random House Publishing Group, 1998), p.153.

creates as well as preserves international pluralism, where states are allowed to develop their own ways of political, economic and social systems, defining their own independent foreign policies, and resisting the temptation to set up a universal empire or force any convergence of values and norms against the will of other nations.

Nevertheless, the sovereign state system has generated two world wars, and the globalisation process also calls for forms of global governance to prevent the disruption of today's international system. In that sense, HSPB shares the overarching traditional Chinese focus on peace and order, which on the one hand could let every state and individual to prosper without the disruption of military conflicts. On the other hand, it promotes the development of international norms and institutions to govern the interdependent world.

Furthermore, the order envisaged by HSPB is one of harmony out of pluralism. If ancient China or the Roman empire was able to dominate their part of world with the backing of enormous material power, even the United States of today as a sole superpower could not manage to build a new world empire. From the Chinese perspective, the time of empire is over, and the time of a world government is yet to come. Therefore, if there is a world order, it will be based on collective will from all the states and other actors and it will inevitably seek harmony in pluralism.

HSPB in the 1990s: Bilateral Partnership

During the early years of the post-Cold War era, the West, led by the United States, the world's only and "lonely superpower" (Huntington 1999), was the dominating force. Without the Soviet Union as a rival, the West did not need China's strategic cooperation and it jointly pressed China on political transformation at home. In that context, China's diplomacy was devoted to safeguarding its sovereignty and improving its relations with key states in the world through bilateral partnership. At this stage of China's HSPB, defensive unilateralism and pragmatic multilateralism played minor roles. Such strategic thinking found expression in the speech by the then foreign minister, Mr. Qian Qichen, to the UN General Assembly in 1990:

> A new political order should, in China's view, include the following points: first, every country is entitled to choose its own political economic and social systems in accordance with its own national conditions. Secondly, all countries, and especially the big powers, must strictly abide by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Thirdly, all countries should respect one another, seek common ground while putting aside their differences, live together in amity, treat each other as equals, and carry on mutually beneficial co-operation. Fourthly, international disputes should be settled on a fair basis through peaceful means without resort to the threat or use of force. Lastly, all

> countries, big or small, strong or weak, are entitled to take part in the discussion and management of world affairs on an equal footing.[32]

Bilateralism usually means the consensual handling of bilateral relations between two sovereign states. Equal sovereign states are the central actors in the relationship, and any conduct of the relationship needs consensual will from both sides. Therefore bilateralism fits well with the Chinese pluralist view of international relations. Nevertheless, bilateralism also frees states from multilateral rules and the demands of diffuse reciprocity; it allows states to obtain benefits from their relationships with weaker states.

Chinese bilateralism under HSPB reveals certain distinctive features. First, Chinese bilateralism aims to establish constructive partnership with other states. Since the mid-1990s, China's key diplomatic strategy has been to forge partnerships with all major states, neighbouring states and developing states. By 2008, China had established various partnership relationships with about 40 states and 3 regional blocs around the world, through official communiqués or statements.[33] In terms of the level of cooperation, these partnership relations could range from neighbourhood partnerships (as with Mongolia), cooperative partnerships (as with Ukraine), to strategic partnerships (as with Brazil), comprehensive strategic partnerships (with France, UK and the EU), and finally to the (most intensive of all) China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination.

Second, China's partnership diplomacy forms a core component of China's post-Cold War diplomatic strategy. Through these bilateral partnerships, China secures a favourable context for the development of bilateral economic relations, which is vital for China's economic development and for containing the Taiwan independence movement. Moreover, constructing partnerships helps forge positive mutual identification, and gets away from such negative identification as "enemy" or "competitor". Therefore, weaving a network of bilateral partnerships serves as an effective path to China's development and peaceful rise.

Third, to forge bilateral partnerships, China has been willing to define and redefine its national interests by taking into other states' core interests. Except core interests, such as opposing separatism in Taiwan and Tibet and maintaining its political system, China has been in a process of constant redefinition of its national interests. For example, before the 1980s, China stayed away from the GATT, the predecessor of the WTO. The GATT was seen in China as a "rich man's club", with its imbedded liberal norms. It was viewed as alien

[32] Statement delivered by Mr. Qian Qichen, Foreign Minister of China, to the forty-fifth session of General Assembly of the United Nations, New York, September 28, 1990. A/45/PV.12

[33] Authors' calculation based on information available from the official website of China's Foreign Affairs Ministry, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/.

to China's identity as a developing nation bent on challenging the liberal order. However, as China embarked on the road of reform and opening up, in November 1982 it sent an observer to the 38th General Assembly of the contracting parties of the GATT. In July 1986, China presented its initial application to "rejoin" the GATT. After 15 years of protracted accession negotiation, China joined the WTO in 2001. During this period, a further "sea change had occurred in China's attitude towards multilateral institutions and towards WTO membership. The simple urge to maximise the gains of trade through membership in the GATT had morphed into a comprehensive effort to 'link up the rails' (jiegui) with the global economic system and to incorporate those norms within the domestic economic system" (Paltiel 2007: 135-136).

Alastair Iain Johnston also traced changing Chinese attitudes towards the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and other international institutions between 1980 and 2000 (see Johnston 2008). With these changes of Chinese positions, China demonstrated its willingness and capacity to adapt itself in its relations with major stakeholders in the international system. It sought to ensure that its bilateral relationship with other states could be mutually beneficial, producing a win-win partnership.

China's defensive unilateralism is employed with the main purpose of deterring foreign infringement of its sovereignty. If China believes that its sovereignty is encroached by foreign powers, for example through foreign arms sales to Taiwan or foreign support to Taiwan's independence, China would react unilaterally, if bilateral diplomacy failed to solve the disputes. In 1992, after the French government decided to sell 60 Mirage 2000 fighter planes to Taiwan, China forced France to close its General Consulate in Guangzhou. Except for defensive purposes, China's position has been to refrain from pursuing offensive unilateralism to push or safeguard its national interests in other states. Thus, since the end of the Cold War, China has not made a single show of unilateral military force outside its borders.

Compared to unilateralism, multilateralism is viewed generally as a more constructive and peaceful means to deal with most international issues. In the era of globalisation, a growing number of issues become regional, global or involve multiple stakeholders, thus requiring multilateral solutions. Rising demand for multilateralism poses challenges to the traditional diplomatic strategies of sovereign states. Unilateralism and even bilateralism become insufficient or obsolete in view of the need for global governance. Therefore, the Chinese HSPB also envisages a multilateral component, which aims to establish multilateral rules and

norms through the consent of the relevant states and based on the respect for each state's sovereignty.

Practical multilateralism was the defining feature of China's multilateralism in the 1990s. China made efforts to gain membership in existing multilateral institutions that were mainly founded by Western powers in the past, such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO, and accepted the norms and rules created by these institutions. Chinese participation in these multilateral settings was seen as essential for China to regain international recognition and support for its economic development, even if their rules were set by other states and are not always favorable to China and other developing states.

HSPB in the 21st Century: More Multilateralism but Not a Multilateralist Turn

If multilateralism played a marginal role in China's diplomatic practices in the past, multilateralism is considered by some scholars as a major new trend in the 21st century.[34] While China continues to be one of the strongest upholders of state sovereignty in the world, China's world view has become more multilateral with the emergence of new thinking about a "harmonious world". The new vision rejected the Confucian idea of hierarchy, but – other than that – it still looked very Confucian. In 2007, Chinese president Hu Jingtao elaborated the new vision in one major speech in October 2007:

> All countries should uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, observe international law and universally recognized norms of international relations, and promote democracy, harmony, collaboration and win-win solutions in international relations. Politically, all countries should respect each other and conduct consultations on an equal footing in a common endeavour to promote democracy in international relations. Economically, they should cooperate with each other; draw on each other's strengths and work together to advance economic globalization in the direction of balanced development, shared benefits and win-win progress. Culturally, they should learn from each other in the spirit of seeking common ground while shelving differences, respect the diversity of the world, and make joint efforts to advance human civilization. In the area of security, they should trust each other, strengthen cooperation, settle international disputes by peaceful means rather than by war, and work together to safeguard peace and stability in the world. On environmental issues, they should assist and cooperate with each other in conservation efforts to take good care of the Earth, the only home of human beings.[35]

[34] For example, Hughes argues that "regional multilateralism presents an effective way to protect China's core national interests. This trend has been strengthened by developments since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States" (Hughes 2005: 127). See also Wang 2001, Yang 2008, and Wu 2008.

[35] Hu Jintao, Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on Oct. 15, 2007, http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/229611.htm

By the end of 2004, China was party to 267 multilateral treaties or agreements of a treaty nature. In terms of participation in international organisations, based on the *Yearbook of International Organizations 2002-2003,* a group of Chinese scholars calculated that China had joined 40 out of 67 total world-wide intergovernmental organisations, with a participating rate of 61.19%, ranking globally at 26th, only behind India, Brazil and Egypt among developing countries, and with just five memberships fewer than the United States (see Li and Wang 2007).

Johnston's earlier study indicated that China had dramatically increased its participation rate from almost zero in the mid-1960s to a level of over-involvement in international organisations for its level of development. In terms of compliance, Johnston also argued that, "in sum, on a number of international normative questions, China appears to be conforming more with an extant international community, such as it is, than it has in the past" (Johnston 2003: 22). China now increasingly contributes to UN-led peace-keeping forces to keep regional stability in Haiti, Sudan and the Middle East (see Gill and Huang 2009).

Having joined most of these existing institutions, China's multilateral diplomacy began to develop a strategic dimension after the end of the 20th century. On one hand, China started to initiate new multilateral institutions, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation which was established to promote mutual trust and cooperation in 2001 between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as well as the Six-party talks over the North Korean nuclear issue, and the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area. All are firmly based on the equality of member states, with consensus as the general rule of decision-making. Such strategic regionalism is seen as a major platform to reconcile the different interests of states in the region, and to seek through consensus joint solutions to common problems. By initiating and supporting these institutions, China also secures its own interests and status in the region.

On the other hand, strategic multilateralism aims to reform existing international institutions. For example, China does not intend to join the Group of 8 since it believes that the G8 cannot deal with developing countries in a spirit of equality and cannot promote equality between sovereign states, large or small, another goal of Chinese diplomacy (see Wang 2008: 61). However, China actively supported the convening of Group of 20 meetings, where developing states are better represented, to address the global financial crisis. China has voiced its support for including more developing states in the UN Security Council, and demanded greater voice for developing states in the World Bank and the IMF. Although China never hides its intention to reform these institutions, China adopts a gradual and non-

confrontational approach, hoping that the desired reform will come through the consent of all stakeholders.

Nevertheless, China's new multilateral diplomacy does not represent a full multilateralist turn. Bilateralism continues to form the core of the Chinese HSPB through the expanding and strengthening of its bilateral partnerships, such as the new US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue mechanism, and similar arrangements between China and the EU as well as between China and Japan. According to the strategic layout of Chinese diplomacy formulated in 2004, "major powers are the key; peripheries are the primary; developing countries are the basis; and multilateralism is an important arena". It implies that, "China's relations with major powers, with peripheries and with developing countries are the core component of China's foreign relations", while "the multilateralism will reconcile the three relationships and integrate the bilateral relations and the issues both regional and global" (Yang 2009: 7). As China is increasingly being accepted by the major players in the world, China's use of defensive unilateralism has been less frequent than before. But as China's postponing of the EU-China summit in December 2008 in reaction to the announced meeting between French president Sarkozy and the Tibetan exile leader Dalai Lama indicated, unilateralism continues to find its place in the more self-confident diplomacy of China.

4. Constrained Norm-Based Multilateralism – The Case of the European Union

Unlike the United States and China, the European Union[36] (EU) is not a state. The unique institutional, political and legal character of the European Union thus influences its relations with other actors of the international community. Unlike states, the EU possesses neither full international personality nor complete capacity to act externally. The Union is based on the principle on conferred powers: that is, it can act only in domains defined (explicitly or implicitly) in the founding treaties (EC/EU primary law). Further, in most areas that fall within the external competence of the EU, the member states can also act autonomously and their activity is limited only by competing EU activity or by general principle of loyal cooperation.[37] Therefore, the freedom of choice of different external strategies is limited by the EU Treaties themselves – and the Treaty reform(s) can be interpreted as a measure to enlarge the manoeuvering space for choice.

Despite its limited external competence, the EU is very active in the international domain. The EU is a member of various international organisations, it is a party to both bilateral and multilateral international treaties, and it produces a significant amount of international ”soft-law“. In addition to its treaty-making activities, the EU – namely the Council presidency and the post-Lisbon High Representative and her European External Action Service – organises regular diplomatic meetings with both non-EU states, groups of non-EU states, and other international actors. For instance, the Portuguese presidency (July–December 2007) organised 34 bilateral meetings and 28 meetings of a multilateral character. The Slovenian presidency in the first half of 2008 organised 41 bilateral and 24 multilateral meetings, and Czech diplomats (co-)chaired on behalf of the EU 44 bilateral and 23 multilateral meetings and summits during the Czech presidency in the second half of 2009.[38]

[36] For purposes of this study, the difference between the EU and the European Community (EC) – that is, the first pillar of the Union before the Lisbon Treaty abolished the pillar structure on 1 December 2009 – is disregarded unless explicitly mentioned. As a non-state and treaty-based international actor, the specific powers conferred upon the EU by its Treaties are particularly important, and thus we make frequent references to them in the text that follows.

[37] According article 10 TEC (Nice version), member states shall take all appropriate measures, whether general or particular, to ensure fulfillment of the obligations arising out of this Treaty or resulting from action taken by the institutions of the Community. They shall facilitate the achievement of the Community's tasks. They shall abstain from any measure which could jeopardize the attainment of the objectives of this Treaty.” The principle of loyal cooperation is explicitly formulated for the EC only but the European Court of Justice expanded its application also in the EU domain (ECJ judgment in Pupino case, C-105/03).

[38] Data based on the presidency programs and press releases of the presidency states. A useful overview of the EU's foreign activities is also provided by the Annual Review special edition of Journal of Common Market Studies.

Inter-Institutional Competition and EU Policy-Making

The position of the EU in the external domain is blurred by the Union's institutional architecture. The positions of the key EU institutions (the Presidency/Council, the Commission, the European Parliament and the new post-Lisbon institutions) frequently collide and/or compete in external policy. The preferences of the institutions for a particular diplomatic style of the EU (unilateral, bilateral or multilateral) are not stable but depend primarily on the issue in question, the external partner concerned, and inter-institutional competition within the EU. For instance, the European Parliament can oppose EU bilateral action (see for example EP opposition to the bilateral EU-US agreement on the exchange of the passenger data) and support an external cooperation project opposed by the Council (see the EP's supportive position regarding EU cooperation with Syria). The coherence of EC/EU external action and the dynamics of inter-institutional competition also depend on the domain concerned. In "Community" (that is, within the former 1st pillar of the EU) policies such as external trade, environmental policy or transport, more elaborated decision-making processes and sanction mechanisms existed for violation of the EU common rules than in the domain of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (the former 2nd pillar) or judicial and police cooperation in criminal law policy (the former 3rd pillar). The Lisbon Treaty aims to reduce the heterogeneity of EU competence and its institutional framework in different areas of international cooperation, not least by introducing a "High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy". Compared to the High Representative under the Nice Treaty, the incumbent of the new post gains additional competences, notably the right of initiative and the right to chair the Foreign Affairs Council. Moreover, the new High Representative is double-hatted, exercising simultaneously the function of a Vice-President of the European Commission (see Whitman and Juncos 2009).

However, many aspects of the post-Lisbon institutional architecture are still unclear. The list includes the relationship between the permanent chairman of the European Council and the High Representative, relations between the High Representative and the rotating presidency, and the format of the European External Action Service (see Kaczynski and Broin 2009). Moreover, even the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, does not eliminate completely the differences between the Common Foreign and Security Policy domain and the other EU external action domains (such as external trade, visa and immigration policy, development policy or environmental and climate issues).[39]

[39] Even though the Lisbon Treaty abolishes the "pillar system" of the EU, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (the former 2nd pillar) will be continue to be treated differently – for instance, EU legislative activity is not permitted in this context and the scope of the judicial control by the European Court of Justice will be severely restricted.

Therefore, the EU position in choosing between unilateralism, bilateralism and multilateralism is even more complex than in the case of state entities, such as the United States or China. In addition of the three above-mentioned strategies, the EU frequently pursues a fourth "strategy". This fourth option is *non-activity of the EU* in favour of a "decentralisation" of EU external activities into external (diplomatic) activities of individual member states. Several factors can motivate a "non-activity" strategy. The "non-activity" option can be chosen because of the legal and/or institutional limitations of the EU,[40] by the decision of the EU not to formulate any common position,[41] or by a simple paralysis of the EU decision-making.[42]

The EU's Supportive and Yet Selective Approach to Multilateralism

With these limitations in mind, one can focus on mapping of the "preferred" diplomatic style of the EU in its external relations. Seeing that the whole internal policy-making process of the EU corresponds to the MERCURY definition of the multilateralism as used in this paper, we can concur with Jørgensen's (2009: 1) view that "the EU has multilateral genes and aims at projecting its own multilateral foundation". The Nice-version of the EU Treaties mentions the notion of multilateralism, albeit only indirectly, by references to the promotion of the international cooperation and the respect for the principles of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act.[43] In 2003, the European Council adopted the European Security Strategy, which supports "effective multilateralism" at the international level. The Lisbon-version of the EU Treaty, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, elaborates the role of the multilateralism in the EU external relations even further and declares that

> [t]he Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world….., respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law. The Union shall seek to develop relations and build partnerships with third countries, and international, regional or global organisations which share the principles referred to in the first subparagraph. It shall *promote multilateral solutions to common problems*, in particular in the framework of the United Nations.[44]

[40] For instance, the direct participation of the EU in international multilateral fora is further limited by the fact that many international organisations do not permit membership of non-state bodies such as the EU. The most typical example is obviously the United Nations but the EU is also excluded from other organizations, such as the Council of Europe or the International Labour Organisation. For a detailed overview see Govaere et al. 2004.

[41] For instance, the EU's position regarding the (non)recognition of the independence of Kosovo in 2008 was that each member state should decide "in compliance with national practice and international law". The EU non-position resulted from a situation in which a majority of EU states had recognised the independence of Kosovo but several EU states (Spain, Slovakia, Greece, Romania, Cyprus) still opposed it.

[42] The most (in)famous example of this last category of (non)activity was the behaviour of the EU during the Iraqi crisis in 2003. Then, the EU was unable to formulate any common position and the stalemate resulted in actions of individual member states and (in)famous split into the "old" and "new" Europe camps.

[43] Article 11 par. 1 TEU.

[44] Article 21(1) TEU Lisbon, emphasis added.

The multilateral strategy of the EU thus can serve a dual objective. First, it can be used internally to limit member state capacity to by-pass the EU level by individual (bilateral or multilateral) negotiation with third parties. Second, it can be used externally to strengthen different forms of global cooperation which include the EU – such as the G20 format – in contrast to other forms of bilateral co-operation such as the G2 (US-China) forum which excludes the EU.

More specifically, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development are mentioned as international bodies with which the EU "shall establish all appropriate forms of cooperation".[45] Further references to multilateral cooperation are made in the context of the EU development policy [46] and humanitarian aid.[47] The institutional changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in the EU external action (permanent chairman of the European Council, High Representative, and the planned External Action Service) may reduce the possibility of the "non-activity" scenario but they seem to be "neutral" regarding the EU preference for multilateral or bilateral strategies of EU external action.

In recent years, the EU has been a key global supporter of several multilateral cooperation projects with global aspirations, such as the International Criminal Court or the Kyoto (and post-Kyoto) process. However, the multilateral strategy has not had a monopolist or even dominant position in the external relations of the EU. The EU interacts both on a bilateral basis and within multilateral frameworks with its important strategic partners such as the United States, China, Japan or India, as well as with its neighbours. The programme of the Czech presidency of 2009 clearly demonstrated this trend: different forms of multilateral cooperation were mentioned 21 times and examples of bilateral cooperation occurred 23 times (Czech Republic 2009). For instance, in the section on the Common Commercial Policy, both the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Eastern Partnership were mentioned and the Czech presidency declared that it "support(ed) the most extensive application of the multilateral trade system possible". Bilateral relations with third countries, including the formation of free trade zones, were described as "a convenient supplement to multilateral negotiations on the liberalisation of trade" and the programme explicitly referred to trade relations with the US, Canada and Korea (Czech Republic 2009: 27).

The fact that EU support for multilateral cooperation is not unconditional can also be demonstrated in several cases, when the Union (or its institutions) was ready to explicitly

[45] Art. 220 par. 1 TFEU Lisbon.
[46] Art. 208 par. 2 and art. 211 TFEU Lisbon.
[47] Art. 214 par. 7 TFEU Lisbon.

reject a multilateral cooperation framework for the sake of the Union's internal rules and principles. The most commented upon example was the Yusuf and Kadi cases[48] when the EU (specifically, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) as the final arbiter) ultimately refused to apply UN rules on freezing assets of individuals and organisations suspected of being affiliated to terrorist organisations. In the ECJ's opinion, the sanction mechanism, as applied in the EU,[49] did not correspond to the Union's human rights standards. The fact that the sanction regime was triggered by a UN decision was only of marginal importance. The ECJ ruling was commented as "an unfortunate turn towards introspection by the ECJ and an uninspiring example of unilateralism by the Union itself" but also as "a plea for constructive dialogue between the Union institutions and the United Nations" (Dougan 2009:176-177). The ruling, however, can also be read as the expression of the substantial attention the EU gives to its internal values (fair trial, judicial protection and protection of property in this case) and global aspirations given to them.

Combining Multi-, Bi- and Unilateral Strategies: EU Enlargement, Eastern Partnership and EU-US Relations

The EU enlargement talks of 1998-2002, the Eastern partnership project of 2009 and EU-US relations provide examples where a combination of different strategies (multilateral, bilateral and unilateral) are combined within a specific policy framework.

Formally, the enlargement negotiations of 1998-2002, which resulted in the "big-bang" EU enlargement of 2004, were based on a strictly bilateral basis between the EU and individual candidate states.[50] In practice however, elements of multilateralism emerged during the accession negotiations. While the non-member states applied for membership at different times, the actual accession talks started with groups of candidate states at the same moment (for example, the Luxembourg group, the Helsinki group). During the negotiation process, the candidate states were compared and "benchmarked" against each other. The final round of the accession talks in Copenhagen in 2002 was the culmination of this multilateral strategy, where candidate states cooperated occasionally but also competed during the finalisation of the accession treaty (see Ludlow 2004).

The Eastern Partnership, as the most recent EU initiative regarding its eastern neighbours (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), provides another example of

[48] C-402/05 P and C-415/05 P.
[49] The UN sanction regime, based on a Security Council resolution, was not applicable directly in the EU. It was the Council of the EU which adopted a directly applicable EC regulation transposing the UN resolution.
[50] From a strictly legal point of view, the EU was not a party in the negotiation. On the EU side, the accession treaties were concluded by the member states only. However, the member states formulated their common negotiation positions and expressed them by the presidency and the other EU institutions which were directly involved in the negotiation (European Commission) or post-negotiation (European Parliament) process.

the fusion of multilateral, bilateral and unilateral strategies by the EU. The very concept of the Eastern Partnership is multilateral (Council 2009: 8-10) but the most practical impacts of the cooperation (visa facilitation, trade liberalisation) will be negotiated in the framework of bilateral agreements between the EU and individual non-member states. The process leading to the Eastern Partnership also included unilateral steps by the Union, such as the relaxation of the EU sanctions against leaders of the Belarus regime.[51] The EU's cooperation with neighbours that have aspirations for EU accession also demonstrates the "export of acquis" (Petrov 2008) into non-member states, which are required to accept a significant segment of the acquis of the EU within the cooperation process. In this context, the terms "enhanced bilateralism" and "enhanced multilateralism" are sometimes used to describe the intensity and the asymmetric character of the cooperation and to distinguish it from participation in "ordinary" international organisations or treaties (Lazowski 2008:1436-1437).

The role of the Russian Federation, which is not directly involved in the Eastern Partnership, complements our analysis of competing diplomatic strategies of the EU towards Eastern Europe. Russia systematically refuses to be part of any broader interregional multilateral regime with the EU and requires either a special (bilateral) regime with the Union or specific bilateral relations with selected EU states. Therefore, the options open to the EU in choosing its strategy towards Russia does not seem to be a choice between bilateral and multilateral frameworks of cooperation. Instead, the EU attention is primarily consumed by efforts to formulate and maintain a uniform EU position at all.[52]

EU-US relations are based on a network of partially overlapping regimes including multilateral cooperation (WTO), bilateral cooperation regimes (Transatlantic Open Sky Agreement[53], or the Passenger Name Record (PNR) Agreement) and the European Union's unilateral steps aimed directly at the US (visa liberalisation for US citizens) or which seek to influence US interests (EU policy towards Cuba). Two elements of the EU's strategies towards the US are worth particular attention. The first is the European Union's attempts to invite the US into multilateral projects in which the EU has a leading position at present – the most typical cases are the International Criminal Court mechanism and the (post)Kyoto process.

The second and even more interesting case is the European Union's efforts to monopolise the cooperation channels with the US and to control those bilateral relations between individual member states and the US, in ways that could influence the European Union's

[51] The most commented EU unilateral step was the lifting of the entrance ban for Alexander Lukashenko.
[52] Regarding the heterogeneity of the positions towards Russia among the EU member states, see Leonard and Popescu 2007.
[53] The role of Canada in the agreement can be ignored for the purposes of this study.

interests. The dominance of the EU negotiation channel is rather clear in the WTO context (Breuss 2005, McGuire and Smith 2008: 67-94) but more blurred in the external aspects of several EU sectoral policies (transport, environment, internal security). For instance, the European Commission successfully annulled several bilateral agreements between individual EU states and the United States that partially liberalised air transport between the EU and the EU state concerned ("Open Skies Agreements"). In the Commission's opinion these bilateral agreements could have jeopardised the EU's efforts to conclude a broader Open Skies Agreement between the US and the entire European Union.[54]

The Chronology of EU External Strategies

If we examine the chronology of the EU external strategies, the position of the EU is relatively stable. Taking a long-term perspective, although a gradual expansion of the EU external competences can be identified, there are no significant changes in the *mixture* of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral strategies. In all phases of its development (as defined for the purpose of this study; that is, pre-1989, post-1989, post-2001), the EU used a balanced combination of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral strategies. The consequence of the bipolar character of the pre-1989 global regime for the European Community was not the EC's adherence to a specific diplomatic style but simply restraint (absence of the EC activity) from areas (typically external security) that were dominated by global bipolarity. In remaining domains, such as external trade, the EC both entered in international organisations or other multilateral structures (such as EU-ACP cooperation), concluded bilateral agreements, and imposed unilateral sanctions against non-member entities (for instance, the planned trade sanctions against New Zealand after the Rainbow Warrior affair).[55]

The end of the Cold War and the tendency towards a unipolar global regime after 1989 enhanced the general expansion of EU external activities, which materialised both in the framework of multilateral cooperation (WTO, European Economic Area), bilateral relations (EU-Turkey) or a combination of both (enlargement talks, or the Barcelona process). After 2001, the multilateral activities of the EU seem to have further expanded. However, the major reason behind the more visible use of a multilateral strategy by the European Union was the enlargement(s) of 2004/2007, which reduced the number of "external" partners for EU bilateral relations since some former external actors, such as the candidate countries, became full EU members after 2004/2007. At the same time, more attention was given to

[54] For a broader picture, see Holdgaard 2003.

[55] After the Greenpeace's ship Rainbow Warrior had been sunk in Auckland by two agents of the French intelligence service in 1985, the New Zealand authorities arrested the culprits. As an element of pressure for their release, the French Republic threatened to impose sanctions against the import of the agricultural products originating in New Zealand to the European (Economic) Community.

multilateral projects by other global actors, such as the United States under the Obama administration.

The impact of the enlargements of 2004 and 2007 on the EU's bilateralism and multilateralism is even more ambiguous when we concentrate on the new EU member states. In some areas, the new member states are perceived as opponents of the formation of the common EU position at the international scene – for instance, regarding EU-US relations. The new member states are described as searching for a privileged transatlantic partnership for the sake of (or regardless of) the possibility that this behaviour may endanger the unity of the EU position (consider the examples of visa policy, radar and, to some extent, the Iraq crisis). In other foreign policy areas, such as energy policy or the EU's relationship with Russia, the new member states act as promoters of coherent EU external action and criticise the autonomous external activities of EU member states as jeopardising the efficiency of the EU external action (see Edwards 2006).

As we have mentioned, the objectives of the Lisbon Treaty include making EU external action more efficient, more coherent and more transparent from the external perspective. The Lisbon Treaty intended to achieve these objectives by the expansion of EU external competence, the reduction of unanimity in decision-making, and by the establishment of several new bodies with job-descriptions involving (primarily or partially) the external representation of the EU. The first experience of the post-Lisbon EU in the global arena, however, has clearly demonstrated the survival of the "non-activity" scenario of the EU as outlined above. This scenario can be seen as competing with the other three strategies – unilateralism, bilateralism and multilateralism – in various contexts. For example, the EU has been virtual invisible in terms of unilateral action in the Haiti post-earthquake crisis, in contrast to visibility of the US and individual EU states. Moreover, Obama's absence at the May 2010 EU-US summit due to institutional tensions between the permanent president of the European Council and the rotating Spanish Council presidency can be regarded as a failure of EU bilateral action. Finally, the low profile of the EU at the Copenhagen 2009 climate summit illustrates that even the proclaimed support of "effective multilateralism" does not always determine EU policy-making – at least seen from outside.

5.Conclusion

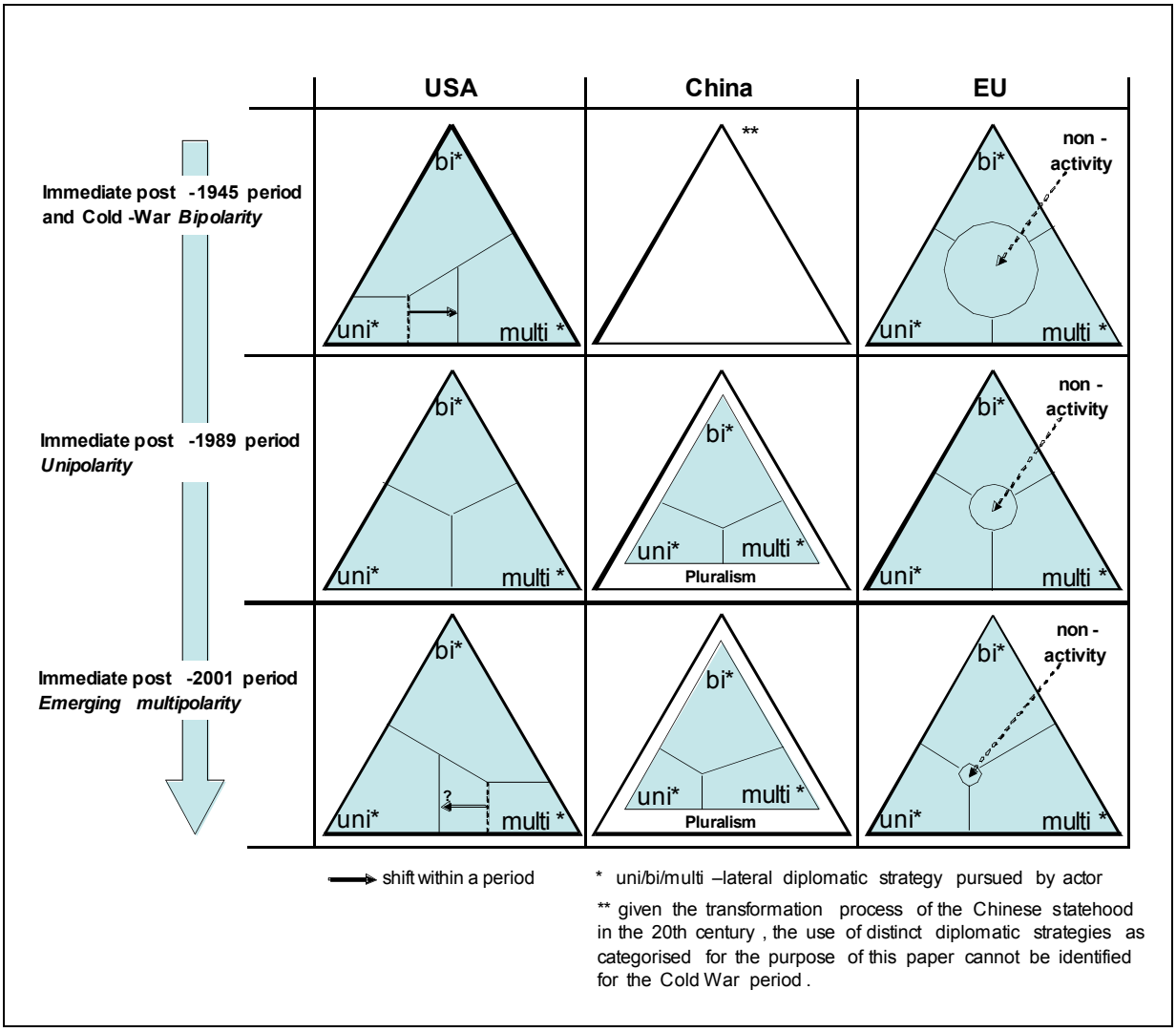
This paper has analysed the diplomatic strategies of three major international actors – the US, China and the European Union – in order to better understand current patterns of international relations. The analysis has focused on four main approaches: uni-, bi- and multilateralism and the meta-strategy of "pluralism", the latter stressing freedom of choice in considering possible diplomatic strategies. In particular, we have explored the working thesis that, despite regular adaptations and re-formulations of strategic concepts, the mixture of an actor's diplomatic strategies remains rather stable over time.

Overall, our evidence has confirmed that the actual mixture of the diplomatic strategies of the US, China and the EU/EC has remained remarkably stable since the post-1945 period. Over recent decades, the US, China and the EU have always resorted to a variety of strategies, depending on the geographic and issue area. For example, over time, the US has displayed a certain *Eurocentric* multilateralism and a preference for unilateral approaches in the field of security policy. For the EU, the European Security Strategy of 2003 represents a characteristic mixture of strategies: the very document which postulates the EU's approach of "effective multilateralism" also underlines the persistent importance of bilateral strategic partnerships.

Comparing diplomatic actions of the US, China and the EU in more detail, both similarities and differences can be identified. Crucially, at first sight, all three actors share a significant amount of similarity in their choice of diplomatic strategies. Despite major differences in terms of foreign policy goals, capabilities and political systems, the US, China and the EU have, for example, participated in the same multilateral forums such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organisation. This observation, however, has to be qualified. The respective *connotations and underlying motivations* related to certain strategies differ significantly from one actor to the other. For example, after the Cold War, China mainly pursued a form of *practical* multilateralism, accepting only reluctantly liberal, 'Western' norms in the context of multilateral trade arrangements such as the GATT/WTO. Recently, however, it has also developed a form of *strategic* multilateralism, specifically regionalism, creating new multilateral institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation where China is in the position to frame the rules of the game. In sum, as illustrated by the term "pluralism", the Chinese government has emphasised its freedom of choosing diplomatic strategies on a case-by-case basis, thereby safeguarding its national sovereignty. In contrast, the EU officially proclaims being first and foremost a strong supporter of multilateralism, despite persistent structural shortcomings which often inhibit multilateral action at the international

level. As for the US, its political and military power has allowed the country to pursue foreign policy goals through various strategies, including a level of unilateral action hardly available to any other international actor.

Graph 2: Comparing the use of diplomatic strategies by the US, China and the EU since 1945



Source: own presentation (Jean Monnet Chair)

Summing up the central findings of the **US case study**, the period immediately after the Second World War was characterised by various US initiatives for the creation of major multilateral organisations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Similar global initiatives were not launched during the Cold War period. Since the 1980s, the US has even been increasingly perceived as relying less on multi-, and more on bi- and even unilateral strategies. Clearly, the perception of strong American unilateralism peaked during the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009), when the US invaded Iraq, withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol and unsigned the Rome Statute of the

International Criminal Court. On a rhetorical level, the Obama administration seems to be determined to revive multilateral policy-making under US leadership; at the implementation level, however, it faces significant opposition, namely from the US Congress. In general, non-multilateral approaches prevail in the area of security policy, while in the areas of trade and finance, the US has been more inclined to search for economic and political gains through multilateral arrangements.

Crucially, in recent decades, the US has pursued an overall *pragmatic* diplomatic approach, relying always on a mixture of uni-, bi- and multilateral strategies. Its unique power position – before and after the end of the Cold War – has always allowed America to pick and choose from these strategies. Thus, while the analysis allows certain nuances via the notion of either "selective multilateralism" (for the post-1945 period) or "selective unilateralism" (namely for the presidency of Bush Jr.), these labels should not be interpreted as implying an exclusive approach for a given period.

Unlike the European Union, **China's** pluralistic diplomacy is still highly based on the principle of sovereignty. It regards bilateralism as the central diplomatic approach. Its embrace of multilateralism is selective, either from pragmatic or strategic reasoning. Unlike the United States, China attaches greater emphasis to non-interference in domestic affairs, and thus refrains from engaging in offensive unilateralism. On the other hand, over the last three decades, China has shown its greater interest in multilateralism. In that sense, some convergence has emerged between the three actors, particularly since the new Obama administration came into power. While multilateralism has not yet replaced bilateralism as the central strategy in China's diplomacy, a contest of different kinds of multilateralism is on the rise among the three actors. With its growing economic and political power, China is pushing for reforms of key international regimes, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, aiming to persuade the Western powers to give up some of their disproportionate rule-making powers to newly emerging powers such as China.

In contrast to China's centralised (foreign) policy-making, the **European Union** typically faces not only conflicts among its member states, but also significant inter-institutional struggles in defining its foreign policy goals and the diplomatic strategies in order to pursue these goals. Thus, from the EU perspective, the formulation of a coherent EU external position represents the primary objective and the choice of the external strategy is only a secondary goal. When there is no consensus, *non*-activity of the EU becomes an option. However, especially since the end of the Cold War, the external competences and the related institutional structures of the Union have been significantly extended. As a result, the

amount of non-activity has been continuously reduced (with the split of the EU over the Iraq crisis in 2003 being a noteworthy exemption). Crucially, while the Lisbon Treaty further strengthens the EU institutional set-up in the field of external action (namely by introducing a double-hatted High Representative), procedural differences between the Common Foreign and Security Policy on the one hand and other external action domains such as trade, visa and immigration policy, development and environmental policy on the other hand have not been eliminated by the new treaty. The Lisbon Treaty has the potential to reduce inter-institutional tensions but is not a panacea, as demonstrated in the first months of 2010. In general, a balance between multilateral, bilateral and unilateral strategies has remained stable in the course of time. Multilateralism represents the formally preferred option (as defined explicitly in the Lisbon Treaty), but the final choice of the strategy depends on a variety of other factors, such as the willingness of the respective external partner. To illustrate, Russia and its reluctance to be integrated in any kind of (regional) multilateral regime is a case in point. Moreover, the multilateral framework of cooperation does not usually prevent the EU from seeking bilateral cooperation within the multilateral regime. Finally, when analysing the EU's external action, the difference between the symmetric and the asymmetric character of the respective action seems to be more relevant than the differences between unilateral, bilateral or multilateral strategies. In this context, the terms "enhanced bilateralism" and "enhanced multilateralism" have emerged as descriptions of cooperation based on an intensive integration requiring the non-EU state to apply a significant segment of the *acquis communautaire*, for example in the framework of the Eastern Partnership initiative.

Finally, three more general conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the case studies. The first refers to the issue of terminology. While the case studies have revealed distinct leitmotifs such as "harmonious pluralism" (for China) or "effective multilateralism" (for the EU), a pronounced pragmatism or selective approach seems to be a common feature of all three actors under scrutiny. Thus, to be provocative, one could claim that the United States and the EU have also pursued a pluralistic foreign policy approach. This explains why, since World War II, the international system as such has not been characterised by a single dominant diplomatic mode of action at any moment in time.

In turn, second, one might conclude that choice of diplomatic strategy is based on *policy*-specific considerations and cost-benefit calculations, and rather than on ideological proclamations. Thus, even an actor with multilateral genes such as the European Union relies on the well-proven mix of diplomatic strategies in order to pursue its interests at the international level.

The third, more general conclusion refers to the impact of the polarity structure on an actor's use of uni-, bi- or multilateral strategies. On the one hand, it is noticeable that during the bipolar period, multilateral action was largely limited to regional approaches. The build-up of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation represents a case in point. On the other hand, the evidence has shown that there is no unequivocal link between a certain type of the polarity structure, based on the distribution of power, and a predominant strategy or a specific combination of strategies. Thus, the unipolar world order after the end of the Cold War has not automatically led to a reinforced, let alone exclusive, unilateralism of the remaining superpower: the United States. Yet, it is striking that under the condition of (emerging) multipolarity at the beginning of the 21st century, a general trend towards multilateralisation can be observed. From the perspective of the United States, this can be explained by the fact that its relative decline of power renders the country more dependent on co-operation with (multiple) external actors, and last but not least on the legitimisation of global multilateral settings such as the United Nations. From the perspective of the rest of the world, including China and the EU, the reluctant position of the United States does not necessarily block the pursuit of multilateral initiatives such as the establishment of the International Criminal Court or the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol anymore.

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