

The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism

EDITED BY

I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval

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International Cooperation: The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism

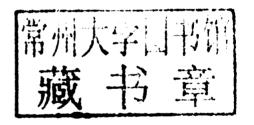
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International Cooperation: The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism

A number of new approaches to the subject of international cooperation were developed in the 1980s. As a result, further questions have arisen, particularly with regard to the methods and limits of cooperation and the relationship between cooperation and the debate over multilateralism. *International Cooperation* considers these questions, identifies further areas for research, and pushes the analysis of this fundamental concept in international relations in new directions. Its two parts address the historic roots and modern development of the notion of cooperation, and the strategies used to achieve it, with a conclusion that reaches beyond international relations into new disciplinary avenues. This edited collection incorporates historical research, social and economic analysis, and political and evolutionary game theory.

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To the late Saadia Touval, warm friend, close colleague, twin

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1 Introduction: return to the theories of cooperation

I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval

Cooperation among states is much more common than war. Yet there is much less conceptualization about cooperation than there is about the causes of and behavior in war, and the study of international cooperation – attempts to understand the phenomenon – has produced much debate. "Conflict seems very natural, and it is easy to understand, . . . Cooperation, however, appears as a phenomenon that requires subtle explanations" (Hammerstein 2003, pp. 1–2).

Cooperation is defined here as a situation where parties agree to work together to produce new gains for each of the participants unavailable to them by unilateral action, at some cost. Its constituent elements are working together, agreement to do so (not just coincidence), cost, and new gains for all parties. (This definition is not too far from, but a bit more specific than, *Webster's*: "an association of parties for their common benefit; collective action in pursuit of common well-being." Cf. Smith 2003; Clements and Stephens 1995; Dugatkin 1997). By "gains" we mean not only material gains, but also perception of progress toward goals, such as improved security, status, or freedom of action for oneself and the imposition of constraints on other actors, and so on. Thus, cooperation is used here to mean more than simply the opposite or absence of conflict, as some binary codings indicate. It is a conscious, specific, positive action.

Some definitions require that at least one party in the cooperating group be worse off, at least in the short run, by cooperating than by not cooperating (Bowles and Gintis 2003; Richerson et al. 2003), but this definition is illogical. The party in question would only cooperate if its calculations are other than material and/or short run; it must get either (non-material) satisfaction or long-run gains of some sort to make cooperation worthwhile. The opposite of this condition of cost without gain is the free-rider problem of gain without cost. But this in its turn depends on the establishment of cooperation by those who both pay and gain.

Conflicts in meaning

But differences in the use of the term in reference to the dynamics of cooperation and its reflection in multilateralism still abound, and are reflected in some of the following chapters. Both terms – "cooperation" and "multilateral" – carry pairs of meanings in popular usage, developing different implications from different meanings. They raise new questions and suggest areas for further inquiry.

Cooperation sometimes refers to actors' strategy aimed at resolving particular issues, and sometimes to a pattern of interactions – in other words, to a relationship, as explored in the chapters by Doran and Hampson. The first, resolving specific issues, can take place between states that are antagonistic, even hostile to each other. Like the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War or Israel and Hizbollah in their prisoner exchange, antagonists, even enemies, cooperate on occasions to resolve specific concerns, without addressing the broader conflict – in other words, to manage but not to resolve their conflict (George, Farley, and Dallin 1988; Kanet and Kolodziej 1991). Descriptions of strategies available to competing players in various game theory models often use the term "cooperation" in the same sense of agreement to resolve particular issues.

The second meaning of the term, describing a relationship, refers not only to specific interactions but also implies a desire on the part of the actors to maintain and foster those interactions through joint problem solving. It also implies a certain basic empathy between them, and a mutual sense that each party's well-being depends on the well-being of the other. It does not preclude occasional conflict, or competition between the parties. But it presupposes a security community, where a resort to violence and war is unthinkable (e.g. United States–Britain, United States–Canada, the European Union, NATO).

"Multilateral," too, has two forms, developed in the following chapters. One is the noun, "multilateralism", in the sense of a diplomatic strategy employed by states in order to coordinate policy among three or more actors or cooperation in its second meaning (Ruggie 1993). It is sometimes described as a pattern of behavior that contributes to world peace, and therefore is intrinsically moral. The other, "multilateral" as an adjective, without the "ism", is often used to refer to an ad hoc tactic (or strategy) adopted by a state or group of states in pursuit of a defined objective, in the first definition of cooperation. Such a strategy may be aimed at resolving or reducing conflict among the participating parties, but it may also be used to compete against others who are excluded from the group, to put pressure on them, even to fight them.

Multilateralism as a foreign policy principle has been attributed by Ruggie and Ikenberry to the United States in certain historical periods, primarily the latter half of the twentieth century, as discussed in the Larson and Shevchenko chapter. The other, a multilateral strategy, has been attributed to coalitions, such as military alliances and trade blocs, and to great power concerts, as discussed in the chapter by Zartman. The first is inclusive, and tends toward universal membership; the second is exclusive. It is sometimes called "minilateralism," "plurilateralism," or "bilateralism" – a strategy of coordinating with single or small numbers of partners, through separate arrangements with each of them, as Touval notes. Since mutilateral strategies are exclusive, they can have contradictory purposes – multilateral cooperation to act and multilateral cooperation to block action. Hampson and Doran in their chapters refer to further variations in the meaning of the term.

Such different meanings attached to terms can hinder communication and hamper effective research. Mere recognition that terms can mean different things is a step forward. Rather than invent new terms, the following discussion will explore differences while trying to keep the different uses and their implications explicit.

Conflict and cooperation

While there is conflict without cooperation, it appears that there is no cooperation without conflict. Cooperation is dependent on these being conflict to overcome. Indeed, attempts at cooperation may create conflict (to be overcome), since the parties' attempt to work together brings out differing interests to be tailored to fit – the costs of cooperation. By "conflict" we do not mean war or violence, but rather perceptions of incompatibilities. Cooperating nations generally perceive both common and conflicting interests. They may thus disagree about some of their goals, their respective contributions, the burdens they carry, and the benefits they derive in the common enterprise. This produces a rich field for inquiry on why states cooperate, how they arrive at cooperation, how they practice cooperation, and how cooperation is sustained.

If so, then the first step in understanding cooperation is to take stock of the current understanding of "conflict." While the term is frequently used as shorthand for "violent conflict," the violent form of conflict cannot be understood without addressing first its broader form, which is simply an incompatibility of goals (Bernard 1949; 1957, p. 38; Coser 1956, p. 8). Of course, incompatibility is scarcely significant if it is taken lying down; it is when value incompatibility leads to some escalation of action or conflict behavior that it becomes an object of concern, both practical and