

Keynote Speech

# Cooperation, Coexistence, and Contested Pluralism in Global Politics

LUCKHURST, Jonathan

Professor  
SIPS/SUPRI/Soka University

The paper examines how *contested pluralism* influences global and global-regional politics. This indicates the albeit contested practices of growing inclusion of previously excluded or marginalized actors in world politics, especially those from the Global South and outside of the Group of Seven (G7). Contested pluralism influences the form and content of contemporary global governance, in particular, constituting increasingly disputed and potentially fragmenting organizational settings and fora, as well as contending networks, policy beliefs, and practices. This has key consequences for international cooperation, coexistence, and interdependence.

The analysis incorporates evidence from theoretical, historical, and contemporary empirical research, particularly on shifting global governance authority in the twenty-first century (Luckhurst 2016; 2017). This is linked to core themes of Peace Forum 2023, including assessing the consequences of contested pluralism for East Asian interdependence. Recent shifts in global governance authority, which are coextensive with contested pluralism, influenced authority relations in world politics and Asia. Contested global political pluralism has important repercussions for East Asian economic and security relations, on issues such as economic development, infrastructure, trade, digital technologies, supply chains, and climate cooperation.

The first section of the paper indicates how global governance scholars built on earlier research on international regimes and interdependence, by analyzing the complex interlinkages between global governance issue-areas and the transnational governance networks involved. This research ‘sacrifices’ the parsimony of state-centric and siloed policy analysis for greater empirical density, more effectively indicating the complexity of global politics. The second section

analyzes the consequences of a perceived ‘polycrisis’ and heightened uncertainty in global politics, especially for global and East Asian multilateralism. The final section assesses how contested pluralism in global governance influences shifting authority in East Asian relations. The paper concludes that multilateralism and networked governance practices augment the scope for global and East Asian cooperation and coexistence, which might reduce strategic tensions despite or even due to contested pluralism.

### **From interdependence to contested pluralism**

There have been growing concerns among officials and experts about the global economic consequences of strategic tensions, particularly between G7 members and the Chinese and Russian governments. This has led practitioners and scholars to question whether global governance cooperation and forms of interdependence could be destabilized by economic decoupling, deglobalization, and “de-risking” of production supply-chains (G7 2023, 1), thus bringing into question the durability of interdependence and globalization. Contested pluralism constitutes additional challenges for these processes of world politics.

Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye’s (1977) *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* examined important issues of power in relation to interdependence, the ideal-type of complex interdependence, and dynamics of change in international regimes. The book left some analytical gaps, as the authors themselves noted 10 years later – for example, failing to assess the influence of domestic actors on state interest-formation (Keohane & Nye 1987, 740). Keohane and Nye’s (1977) analysis also remained too state-centric, despite their willingness sometimes to discuss the influence of non-state actors. Their (Keohane & Nye 1987, 752) research on international regimes focused on aspects of interdependence within particular issue-areas. Global governance scholars often examine, instead, *transversal* or cross-cutting interlinkages across policy issue-areas and governance networks, in their efforts to overcome siloed approaches to policymaking (see Bastos Lima et al. 2017; Florini & Sovacool 2011; Kirton & Warren 2020; Luckhurst et al. 2020).

New analytical lenses and tools are necessary to understand such dynamics, integrating more insights and evidence from the Global South and beyond the transatlantic region. The present analysis builds on recent developments in social constructivism, practice theory, relational theory, network theory, and sociological insights – contrary to the broadly state-centric, rational-actor, and materialist arguments from Keohane and Nye. This constitutes a relational, processual, and practice-focused approach to gauging the consequences of contested pluralism in world politics, including for cooperation and coexistence in global regions such as East Asia. The paper incorporates empirical evidence from public sources, participant-observation research, semi-structured interviews, and informal discussions with diplomats, officials, experts, civil-society advocates, and politicians from Group of Twenty (G20) members and other states.

This transversal and multistakeholder focus, which is common among global governance

scholars, ‘sacrifices’ the parsimony of state-centric and siloed policy analysis for greater empirical density. This approach more effectively indicates the complexity of global politics. Analysis of transversal interlinkages in global governance indicates how network-relational processes of world politics influence global and global-regional cooperation and coexistence, partly through contested practices of pluralism. Growing pluralism is evident in global governance authority shifts since the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2008-09, for example with the recent expansion of the G20 to include the African Union (AU) as a new member, the culmination of Global South advocacy on this over several years. Earlier evidence of increasing pluralism included the shift to a new G20 consensus on ‘macroprudential’ financial regulation and on sustainable development since the GFC (see Baker 2013; Luckhurst 2016; 2017), plus the voice and vote-quota reforms at the Bretton Woods institutions. The delay in implementation of the latter reforms of the International Monetary Fund agreed in 2010, due to U.S. Congressional politics preventing ratification for five years, was criticized even by American allies in the Global South.<sup>1</sup> The American and European duopoly on the leadership positions at the Bretton Woods institutions also rankles with many officials, experts, and critics in the Global South.

Post-2008 global governance reforms have not brought parity between the Global North and South, but they partially shifted their relative influence. Officials from G20-member middle-income states such as Argentina and Brazil have increased opportunities to participate in dialogue and modify practices of global financial governance and in other policy fields, albeit with disparities in influence (Choer Moraes & Pérez Aznar 2022). The increasing Chinese sway in global and Asian-regional governance and multilateralism constitutes a clearly contested example of contemporary pluralism in global politics. Chinese influence has grown together with heightened security tensions, especially due to territorial disputes in East and Southeast Asia, with Xi Jinping’s administration more openly and militarily assertive than his predecessors in those international disputes.

Recent evidence of the difficulties caused by European reliance on Russian energy supplies, since the expansion of the conflict in Ukraine in February 2022, heightened awareness of the potential strategic implications for states and industries with a heavy dependence on Chinese production and supplies. This led to the recent shift to strategies of decoupling and de-risking from the Chinese economy, especially by G7 governments, while heightening contestation of global and Asian-regional pluralism, especially American official skepticism about the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Bergsten 2018). Economic sanctions imposed on Russia since February 2022 further indicate that interdependence is double-edged, with potential gains and losses for both the Russians and those imposing sanctions. Tensions and challenges to interdependence in the context of contested pluralism in global politics is not unprecedented; oil crises due to international security relations

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication during semi-structured interview with former Mexican G20 Sherpa, Lourdes Aranda Bezaury, July 2015.

were another example in the 1970s.

Contested pluralism is evidenced by other key issues in world politics. The politico-discursive contestation on core global governance issues in recent years includes criticisms from the Global South of the reserve-currency role of the U.S. dollar, especially due to negative international spillover effects from Federal Reserve interest-rate hikes to counter American inflation. There have been claims of a global “de-dollarization” trend as a consequence, though the U.S. dollar likely remains the leading global reserve currency for the foreseeable future (Gerding & Hartley 2023). Another recent example was the apparent contestation between the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), on which organization should lead the global tax reform agenda (Agyemang 2023). The prospective BRICS<sup>2</sup> expansion to include six new members could constitute a significant shift in informal global governance influence, though tensions between founding BRICS members the Chinese and Indian governments might undermine the potential for the BRICS to become an effective, anti-western diplomatic alliance. Nonetheless, the impending expansion of the BRICS could intensify contested pluralism in global politics, especially considering the inclusion of Iran among the new candidate members.

Another contemporary example of contested global political pluralism is the debate on the war in Ukraine, particularly a divergence of perspectives arguably indicative of a Global North–South divide. These differences prevent a consensus on the conflict at the UN or G20, despite the violation of the most basic principles of the UN Charter. The Indian G20 Presidency (G20 2023) managed to achieve a joint leaders’ declaration at their New Delhi summit in September 2023, which recognized the differences of perspective within the forum on the Ukraine conflict – overcoming prior doubts among observers and even Indian diplomatic sources that this would be achievable.<sup>3</sup> The G20 declaration was further indicative of contested pluralism in global politics, as despite the G7 preference to include a stronger condemnation of Russian actions – similar to that included in Bali G20 Summit declaration (G20 2022) of November 2022, the declaration was agreed without incorporating such direct condemnation. Indian diplomats, including G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant,<sup>4</sup> contended that the New Delhi declaration would not have been achievable with more direct criticism of Russian actions. The text was still implicitly critical of the war and Russian justifications for it, despite several media assessments that there was practically no criticism. Some insightful experts perceived the New Delhi declaration as evidence of the Indians’ growing diplomatic sway in international relations, plus the growing influence of

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2 The BRICS currently consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The BRICS announced the expansion of their forum to incorporate Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina, and the United Arab Emirates in 2024.

3 This was evident from public statements and the author’s personal communications with Indian diplomats.

4 Comments made by Amitabh Kant at the virtual Panel Discussion on the Outcome of the G20 New Delhi Summit, organized by the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) think tank on September 13, 2023.

the Global South in global governance (Atlantic Council Experts 2023; Bajpae 2023; Tiberghien & Alexandroff 2023).

### **‘Polycrisis’ and uncertainty in global politics**

This paper engages with key arguments from global governance scholarship, including James Rosenau’s (1990; 1997) pioneering analysis of the consequences of growing turbulence in world politics in the 1990s, with increased uncertainty in that transformative decade of international relations. The present constitutes another period of perceived heightened uncertainty, with much discussion of a worldwide “polycrisis” (Tooze 2022) due to concurrent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the growing sense of a global climate emergency. Some key assumptions and practices of the post-Cold War era have seemingly ended, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine.

Keohane (2002, 265) and others (Nelson and Katzenstein 2014; Taleb 2007; Widmaier et al. 2007), deploying various theoretical lenses, have argued periods of apparent uncertainty are particularly propitious to the types of challenges to governance orthodoxy constituted through contested political pluralism in recent years. The present author’s research also indicates the potential political consequences of crises and uncertainty, for example how the GFC contributed to destabilizing authority relations and dislodging conventional economic policy practices – especially in aspects of financial regulation, capital controls, development strategies, and the role of markets and the state in the economy (Luckhurst 2016, 64-74). Political contestation due to perceptions of crisis, or even *polycrisis*, has important consequences for global and East Asian cooperation, coexistence, and interdependence. There are significant implications from Chinese and Indian policymakers, for example, as well as others from the Global South gaining greater influence in world politics and Asian regional relations.

An historical perspective is useful for assessing the continual shifts in global authority relations and politics, including the consequences of periods of heightened awareness of uncertainty and growing contestation of influential political or economic beliefs. Understanding that uncertainty is intrinsic to world affairs indicates the basic contingency of global politics and international relations, even during times of perceived stability. The period since the GFC, however, has been particularly indicative of crisis-induced uncertainty in world politics.

This heightened sense of uncertainty, partly due to contested global political pluralism, influences cooperation and coexistence in East Asia in important ways. The crisis narrative and substantive crisis effects from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, such as global inflationary pressures and energy- and food- supply shocks, as well as global heating due to the climate crisis, exacerbate global and global-regional political challenges and concerns about security issues destabilizing East Asian relations. The growing influence of populist politicians since the GFC has increased global political uncertainty. The presidency of Donald Trump brought concerns about declining American leadership and engagement in East Asia – partly

evidenced by his withdrawal from the original Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement in 2017. The potential for Trump to return to the White House in January 2025, as the likely Republican Party candidate for the presidency in 2024, could bring further shifts in U.S. foreign policy that would substantially influence security and economic relations in East Asia and elsewhere. In this sense, contested global political pluralism does not just indicate the ‘rise’ of erstwhile marginalized voices from the Global South, but also of dissonant voices in the Global North.

### **Contested global pluralism and global-regional authority shifts**

Contested global political pluralism has significant consequences for global-regional authority relations in East Asia. The heightened sense of uncertainty and shifting global and global-regional authority, especially in a context of perceived polycrisis or multiple contemporaneous crises, constitute what positivist scholars would conceive as important variables in foreign policy decision-making. There is greater potential for increased mistrust between erstwhile alliance partners, as well as in dealings with adversaries and other interlocutors, as assumptions about past behavior no longer guide expectations about the future (Keohane 2002, 265). Some constructivists and poststructuralists would put it differently, by emphasizing the linkage between such moments of contingency and the *repoliticization* of formerly taken-for-granted background knowledge as no longer constitutive of conventional wisdom (de Goede, 2004; Edkins, 1999; Hopf 2010; Widmaier et al. 2007).

The aforementioned point about foreign policy decision-making indicates the influence of uncertainty and contested global pluralism on inter-state relations. There are also important consequences for the authority of transnational governance networks, regional intergovernmental fora and their secretariats or staff, plus individual policy actors in the increasingly contested post-GFC context of global and Asian politics. The destabilization of conventional policy and political assumptions due to repoliticization and contested global political pluralism has brought significant challenges, particularly from recent populism. One could additionally conceive of potential benefits, as it also constitutes opportunities for improvements in global and global-regional governance, due to the augmented potential to contest and supplant ineffective practices with alternatives.

There is substantial evidence that authority shifts in global governance contributed to greater influence from East and Southeast Asian policymakers in multilateral fora and global governance, as noted earlier. The South Korean government’s influence on the G20’s sustainable development agenda, since its 2010 G20 presidency, is another example. There is further evidence of Asian economic development strategies influencing post-GFC global governance, most obviously from China but also India, Bangladesh, and elsewhere (Luckhurst 2017, 163-170). The heightened contemporary sense of uncertainty, partly due to contested global political pluralism, influences cooperation and coexistence in East Asia in important ways. It indicates the potential for alternative and contested organizational strategies for East Asian regionalism,



including Chinese-led multilateral projects such as the AIIB and the BRI. The growing Chinese influence in global governance, along with Indian influence, underpins the shifting global governance authority between the Global North and South. Despite perceptions of increased competition between China and the United States, these Chinese projects broadly constitute forms of “cooperative decentralization” rather than conflictual relations with the Bretton Woods institutions (Helleiner 2016), despite American government concerns.

Augmented Asian influence in global politics constituted opportunities as well as significant challenges for East Asian cooperation and coexistence. There remains a broad consensus on core aspects of sustainable development, despite the existence of contentious regional economic, territorial, and security issues. Climate cooperation might also constitute an issue-area of regional cooperation, while the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remains a key interlocutor and facilitator of regional multilateral cooperation – its ‘ASEAN way’ approach to cooperation and consensus-building is sometimes criticized (Nischalke 2000), but the forum continues to facilitate regional cooperation in a period of growing dissensus in world politics. The tendency to perceive recent trends of decentralizing authority in global and global-regional governance through a ‘geopolitical’ lens of conflict is arguably indicative of a deficiency in aspects of mainstream IR scholarship. Amitav Acharya’s (2014, 105) concept of a “multiplex world” of parallel, sometimes complementary, forms of multilateralism more accurately fits the current context.

Global North–South tensions could potentially undermine East Asian cooperation and coexistence, though there is some recent evidence that the G7, collectively, is beginning to take seriously the concerns of the Global South – whether genuine attempts to understand their priorities, or instrumental attempts to engage strategically with the South in a context of increased international tensions with the Chinese and Russian governments. Regardless of the motives, the apparent willingness of the G7 and some other high-income liberal democracies seriously to engage on Global South priorities could contribute to improving cooperation and coexistence in East Asia and even globally, if the G20 and other multilateral fora become a focus for what might be termed ‘competitive benevolence.’ One recent example was the collective G7 shift to acceptance of the AU’s inclusion in the G20. Other aspects of G7 attempts to engage with the Global South include comments from President Joseph Biden (2022) on the need to reform and expand the UN Security Council. This could augment the Biden Administration’s reputation in the Global South at the expense of Russian and Chinese influence, as neither of the latter have been supportive of Security Council reform. The G7 and other high-income liberal democracies could also increase their influence and authority in the Global South and East Asia, by implementing their commitments to the UN’s Loss and Damage Fund on climate financing, plus taking other measures to mitigate the costs of economic and climate transitions in middle- and low- income states.

Multilateralism and networked governance practices sometimes augment the scope for

global and East Asian cooperation and coexistence, with potential spillover effects that reduce strategic tensions despite or even due to contested pluralism. The G20 and other global governance fora and institutions, such as the G7, BRICS, OECD, UN, and World Health Organization, engage with heterogeneous and transnational global governance networks. These outreach engagement activities often constitute relations between the Global North and South, linking “professional ecologies” (Seabrooke 2014) or backgrounds by including private, intergovernmental, supranational, state, semi-state, and civil society actors in the deliberations and development of global governance and policy practices, through workshops, expert working groups, and other meetings. These transnational networks include network-relational dynamics with potential benefits for Asian regional relations, providing opportunities to reduce international tensions and enhance cooperation and coexistence, including through processes of “reciprocal socialization” (Luckhurst 2019; Pu 2012; Terhalle 2011; Ye 2023; also see Acharya 2004).

## **Conclusion**

Global and Asian cooperation and coexistence are influenced by contested political pluralism, but while the latter brings significant challenges, it does not prevent multilateralism and global governance processes. The Bali and New Delhi G20 summit declarations and continuing work of international organizations that include strategic competitors, despite recent international security tensions, underscores this – with evidence of continuing dialogue and financing for global climate and development goals, plus cooperation on global financial and tax regulations and on other policy areas.

A relational analysis of global governance networks is useful for understanding how reciprocal socialization and transnational networks reinforce global and global-regional multilateralism. The current heightened sense of uncertainty and crisis constitute key challenges for global and East Asian coexistence and cooperation, but uncertainty is endogenous to world politics rather than an exogenous or temporary factor. Contemporary contested global political pluralism destabilizes existing authority relations, but heightened contestation could engender benevolent competition and even encourage competitive cooperation – for example, implementation of G20 or UN agreements for strategic reputational and practical gains.

Interdependence, like cooperation and coexistence, is a configuration of relational processes that are constituted through global and Asian-regional politics. There is existing evidence and the potential for further decreases in aspects of interdependence, globally and in East Asia. Declining economic ties between some states would likely be offset by increasing interdependence elsewhere, including new production supply-chains and trade relations between other states. Contested pluralism in global politics could continue to influence such economic shifts, as well as global governance and Asian-regional multilateralism, for the foreseeable future; notwithstanding, there remains substantial scope for forms of cooperation, coexistence, and



interdependence.

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