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Rivalry and Partnership—The Struggle for a New Global Governance Leadership

On January 14 and 15, 2011, experts in global governance gathered at Princeton University for a workshop on “Rivalry and Partnership—The Struggle for a New Global Governance Leadership.” The workshop, the follow-up of a similar meeting in January 2010 about “New Foundations for Global Governance,” was cosponsored by Princeton’s Project on the Future of Multilateralism, the Council on Foreign Relations’ International Institutions and Global Governance program, The Stanley Foundation, and the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto.

This year’s workshop, comprised of five panels, focused on the wide array of global governance challenges and opportunities confronting the international community as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. Participants reviewed the events, institutions, and analysis of global governance in order to identify the next stages of the scholarly and political agenda. Six main themes emerged in workshop discussions: (1) the future of US leadership; (2) integrating emerging powers; (3) normative diversity; (4) global governance architecture; (5) assessing the G-20; and (6) the legitimacy challenge.

The Future of US Leadership

Throughout the workshop, participants wrestled with the implications of diminished American influence for global governance. Although many shared one participant’s “conditional pessimism about the continued applicability of US leadership,” others saw the United States’ position as more tenuous.

To assess the severity of America’s decline as a predominant power, participants sought historical reference points. Setting the stage, one presenter offered a definition of hegemony: “the position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others.” Most participants viewed this concept of hegemony as unrealistic: if the United States had ever enjoyed this degree of leverage, it was only for a brief period after the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, from World War II onward, the aspiration toward hegemony shaped American foreign policy, and the United States did enjoy great influence. Using one participant’s astronomical metaphor, in the post-1945 world, the United States was the sun at the center of the geopolitical solar system: “wielder of power, economic engine, and bastion of free-world ideology.”

This brief summarizes the primary findings of the conference as interpreted by the rapporteur, Rebecca R. Friedman. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this brief. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

Today, most participants agreed, the United States has less power and influence—at least in relative terms. But if the United States is no longer the sun, it remains unclear how the solar system is currently arranged. The current era is more globally competitive, characterized by more states vying for influence than in the last century. Even so, none of the emerging powers has offered a positive, alternative vision of world order. Thus even if the United States does not have the majority say in world affairs, it retains a plurality: many states still orient their strategies around the actions of the United States.

The United States thus needs rejuvenation and resocialization in terms of its international role. One participant likened the United States to General Motors: it is well-branded and has immense capacity, but is underperforming and in need of a revamp. The United States is bumping up against the limits to its military strength, economic power, and moral leadership—it will have to tackle its own problems, particularly its economic woes, in order to maintain or bolster its influence. Participants expressed varying degrees of skepticism about Washington’s ability to accomplish a renewal on the requisite scale, particularly given the current divisiveness of American domestic politics. With or without a rejuvenation, the United States must do better at playing by the rules of an international order that it was instrumental in creating but has not always respected. As one speaker said, “gravity now affects America.” Several participants expressed concern that the Obama administration has not been sufficiently realistic about the implications of American decline, and has oriented its strategy around an overly optimistic assessment of the potential for international cooperation in a “multipartner world.”

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It is not a foregone conclusion, though, that the United States *should* maintain the level of relative power it possessed at its late-20th-century zenith. As one speaker pointed out, the United States has a long historical experience of coping when it was not running the show. Whether the United States can and should be the “indispensable nation”—stepping in to solve problems that no other state has the appetite or ability to address—in an era of transnational challenges was the subject of some debate. Several participants agreed that the United States plays an important role in insisting something be done about international crises, but it must become more selective in its prioritization of issues and more willing to allow other states to take the lead. As a benefit, such an approach discourages other states from free-riding on the United States’ diplomatic and military exertions.

Participants diverged over the fate of the liberal international order in a post-American world. One speaker affirmed the ongoing need for the United States to “backstop” the international order so that it is “robust and cannot be eroded.” Another suggested the key for the United States to keep the existing global governance architecture largely intact—with its underlying western norms and alignment with US interests—will be a strategy of opening itself to greater influence on the part of rising powers. Still another interlocutor made an important distinction between material power distribution and political structure: because global governance is not reducible to the United States alone, the structure could evolve to reflect changing power distributions but maintain liberal characteristics. Others were far more pessimistic, arguing that new powers will bring a normative divergence that is bound to undermine the liberal democratic order.

Integrating Emerging Powers

As they gain influence, emerging powers such as China, Brazil, India, and South Africa will naturally have a greater say in global governance. The critical question is whether these states are stakeholders in the status quo or more interested in

reshaping it. Most workshop participants agreed that emerging powers have benefited greatly from existing arrangements and, therefore, have little interest in upending them. One speaker pointed to Japan as precedent: although it was not present at the creation of international institutions, it became imbedded in the system and profited from operating within the world market, thereby boosting its political stake in supporting the status quo. Other participants, though, pointed to emerging nations' different ideas, for instance, about the appropriate state-market balance—a divergence that will affect the global economy over time.

Emerging powers have a long way to go before they take up the mantle of global governance leadership. One speaker explained that these states want to be powers first and governors next. Illustrating this point, a participant recalled Mexico's discomfort at having to take a position on the 2003 UN Security Council Iraq War resolution: Mexico ran for a Security Council seat in order to be important, not to make war and peace decisions. Underlying this dynamic is a disjuncture between national aspirations and the responsibilities of global governance—emerging states have limited capacity for cooperation across the broad agenda of energy and climate policy, legal enforcement, and military force. Further, given their ongoing internal challenges of domestic stability and rapid economic development, they are inclined to direct their resources inward.

But even if emerging powers are stakeholders in the international system, will they be “responsible stakeholders”? Emerging powers seem uninterested in stewardship as such; their behavior reflects particular interests and priorities. In some cases, the result may be free-riding, and continuing to draw benefit from a system that they do not help maintain. With established powers like the United States prepared to uphold the system, emerging powers can shirk the burden. But as western material and ideological primacy erodes, it is unclear whether new powers will step up to the plate.

As several participants reminded the group, emerging powers are not monolithic—rather than characterizing them with a broad brush, it is important to understand their particular perceptions and approaches. Yet even such a picture at the state level is not adequate; one interlocutor said: “If you want to understand what drives emerging states' foreign policy and how to inspire responsible leadership, you need to identify the societal drivers of government policy.”

China, as the most influential emerging power, was a major focus of discussion. If the United States is General Motors, China is Google. Its meteoric rise and still-latent potential is the primary source of American fears of decline. At the same time, Chinese strategic miscalculation could drive other Asian nations into the arms of the United States, and thereby bolster Washington's position. Workshop participants disagreed over the degree of geopolitical competition they foresee between the United States and China in the coming decades. Some saw a contest over naval hegemony in the South China Sea as highly likely and troubling (even the “biggest geopolitical flashpoint of the coming decade”), whereas others predicted that it would remain a lower-profile irritant. In any case, China is, as one speaker put it, “both friend and foe” (yi di yi you - 亦敌亦友) to the United States and there will be a high premium on G-2 cooperation. Indeed, one benefit of the G-20 is the way it situates the G-2 relationship within a larger multilateral framework.

China is committed, it appears, to a “going-out” policy of economic, diplomatic, and military partnerships to maintain stability and ensure continued access to resources it needs for economic growth. In the process, one speaker noted,

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“China has shaped the world”—especially African and Southeast Asian economies that have benefited from Chinese infrastructure building, industrial training, and medical care.

Whether China becomes the “responsible stakeholder” the United States seeks depends on the future direction of Chinese foreign policy. In the words of one participant, China “is not the best global actor it could be.” While China often expresses a willingness to “do the right thing” on issues like environmental protection or corruption, it has a limited institutional capacity to follow through. The key driver for China to develop this capacity quickly would be domestic demands for better governance. Indeed, the Chinese populace—particularly as it is empowered by the Internet—is one of three main determinants of the future of Chinese foreign policy. The second is the ongoing debate among Chinese elite over whether to be more geopolitically aggressive or cooperative. The third is the upcoming 2012 leadership succession, which could either make an enormous difference—or no difference at all—to China’s foreign policy.

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The discussion also focused on Brazil—another member of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), and a democracy. Though its global aspirations are as yet ambiguous, Brazil is actively seeking a leadership role in Latin America. One speaker explained that from the Brazilian perspective, regional integration ranks as a high priority for the investment of Brazil’s political and diplomatic energy. Brazil also has significant interests in Africa, where its development projects play an important role. Still, another speaker noted, Brazil is a participant in every new international institutional arrangement, perhaps hedging its bets for the future. And, under President Lula da Silva, Brazil adopted a more assertive foreign policy stance, for example working in parallel to the United States and tandem with Turkey to propose a nuclear agreement with Iran, which was summarily rejected by the UN Security Council. Overall, participants agreed that Brazil is increasingly willing to stand up to the United States on specific issues—based on a view that one participant described as seeing the United States as “derelict in its responsibilities for managing global public goods and order”—yet Brasilia does not want to challenge the United States’ international position.

Normative Diversity

The 21st-century international order will be characterized by the intensive interaction of multiple national and regional power centers. As this interaction intensifies, the normative perspectives associated with each node will also interact—and likely clash. Throughout the workshop, participants debated the degree of commonality that is extant, possible, or desirable.

Implicit in any discussion of emerging powers as responsible leaders is the question of who will define the norms of “responsibility.” Participants offered differing assessments of the normative common ground between emerging and established powers, but identified three areas of potential normative gaps: the balance between states and markets, sovereignty, and sources of domestic legitimacy.

Among those who downplayed normative divergence, one speaker saw no evidence of divergence beyond minor, short-term differences, but instead perceived remarkable normative consensus, particularly in the context of the financial crisis. Another viewed this consensus as based in the growth of shared scientifically-based knowledge about how the world works, which diminishes disagreement about problems’ causes and optimal responses.

Several participants were more pessimistic, expressing doubt that aspirant powers will sign onto the existing western *acquis communautaire*. Fissures in values will emerge, they predicted, on the three aforementioned issues, particularly the western notion of contingent sovereignty that undergirds norms like the responsibility to protect, separation of church and state, and norms governing the Internet. For much of the developing world, the norm of international intervention on a spectrum of issues—from pandemics to macroeconomic policy to failed states—is an echo of imperialism rather than reinforcement of the international order. While divergences are not yet glaringly obvious, they argued, fissures are bound to emerge as rising powers develop their strategies. And even in instances where there are common interests, there could still be differences in priorities; hence, what consensus does emerge will be shallow and therefore a weak foundation for cooperation.

Normative diversity itself is more complex than the west versus the rest, and fissures have increasingly emerged within the west. Europe is no longer seen as a default partner of the United States. The United States and Europe have deeply different views about the multilateral order, and European Union politics have renationalized. Moreover, the rise of players aside from Washington’s traditional transatlantic allies erodes the currency of democracy as the organizing principle for the global order. Several speakers discouraged the United States from continuing to use democracy for a main basis of global cooperation because of its contentiousness. Democracy’s superiority as a model is viewed with growing skepticism (particularly given political paralysis in Washington) and, empirically, democracies don’t necessarily agree on how to respond to international challenges. One speaker argued that the United States should apply a different standard, responsible governance, as the litmus test of legitimacy.

Striking a more sanguine tone, one speaker reminded the group that diversity of norms may be a good thing. He questioned why US norms are beneficial to the international community when the “end result is the global financial crisis.” A few other participants echoed this sentiment in stressing the cost of the financial crisis to American credibility.

However one assesses the current degree of normative divergence, participants agreed that any possible narrowing will depend on the development of new shared understandings among states. As one speaker suggested, the United States must “more extensively cultivate conversations with other countries about the nature of the world, the contours of where we are, and how we are enmeshed in a web of interactions.”

Global Governance Architecture

In today’s world, the architecture of global governance is comprised of:

- Formal international institutions (such as the UN and Bretton Woods Institutions).
- Regional organizations (like the African Union and Organization of American States).
- Informal institutions (the G-20 and Group of Eight [G-8] for example).
- Initiatives focused on particular problems (such as the Proliferation Security Initiative).

Participants stressed the cost of the financial crisis to American credibility.

Participants expressed considerable uncertainty about how these elements will coalesce, viewing the current period as an era of systemic transition. Indeed, as one speaker suggested, “we don’t even know who the emerging powers are yet.” Perhaps the defining feature of an age of diffuse power is an unprecedented premium on consent. Whereas coercion and war were effective in the past, global governance today is not possible without the consent of an enlarged group of key actors. To some workshop participants, this dynamic suggested a return to multipolarity—though of a different character than pre-World War I Europe. Others saw a hybrid structure with multipolar and unipolar elements: a more plural world combining hierarchical, even somewhat hegemonic, characteristics. Practically speaking, a more plural world could mean the terms of multilateral cooperation will be less *à la charte* (or within formal, treaty-based international organizations) and more *à la carte* (based on opportunistic coalitions depending on shared interests on a given issue). One speaker made a case for emphasizing spheres where cooperation is already deep and rich—namely, transnational security issues, where emerging powers such as India and China have demonstrated their willingness to cooperate. In building complex networks of cooperative, issue-based alliances, bilateral relations will also remain important.

One participant predicted a ‘new look for global architecture’ where universal bodies and informal groupings like the G-20 coexist.

As one speaker suggested, the result may be a “new look for global architecture” where universal multilateral bodies and informal groupings like the G-20 coexist. Others questioned a top-down view of global governance, suggesting instead that governance will come from a range of institutions and initiatives. Beyond analyzing the evolution of the international order, participants examined the viability of the current system, with speakers diverging in their assessments. A number of different metrics were suggested as a basis for evaluation: the strength of key norms of governance (multilateral regimes such as nonproliferation and climate change), the frequency of crises and adequacy of the responses, gauging the shifts in power the G-20 confronts, as well as state-by-state analysis of the preferences of rising powers. One speaker highlighted noncompliance with UN Security Council resolutions in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo as evidence that the post-World War II system is not working well.

Others suggested evaluating effectiveness based on whether the supply of global governance meets demand. One speaker took stock of all the ways in which international politics are going well: the United States has peaceful or, at least, decent relations with every great power, there are fewer interstate and civil wars, the United States is spending less on its military and getting more for it, forty countries back the US-led mission in Afghanistan (comparing favorably to Cold War-era interventions), there are more democracies, global health has made progress, trade has increased, and governments informally cooperate through network diplomacy to solve problems (as with the financial crisis). This leaves the toughest problems of global warming, small-scale nonstate violence, the Middle East peace process, intellectual property, and North Korea. Serious as these problems may be, they do not represent compelling and urgent demands for political leaders. The participant predicted that they would be dealt with by domestic, rather than international, solutions over the long term. “It’s hard to imagine these as issues where the primary problem is that we don’t have the right institutional situation to deal with it,” he contended.

Others disagreed with this rosy assessment, pointing toward a problematic gap between demand for international cooperation and meager supply. The nonproliferation regime is under severe strain; climate change is not an immediate crisis but has consequences that will become central to political life; there has been no progress

on the trade system because of the stalled Doha round of talks; and there is an endemic discrepancy between economic growth and distribution of wealth, which will only worsen with global population growth disproportionately at the poorer end of the spectrum.

While several participants acknowledged flaws in the United Nations—the bedrock of the post-World War II order—the workshop did not dwell extensively on reform. A few participants questioned the continued utility of the United Nations, particularly absent reform; others affirmed the necessity of the United Nations as the central global governing body. UN Security Council reform may be essential, but questions remain over the size of a possible expansion, whether new members would occupy a separate category, and which countries would be included. The United States is ambivalent about Security Council enlargement though, according to one speaker, reforming the Council now is essential to ensure that this body—in which the United States has veto power—remains relevant.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), one participant suggested, should also be considered part of the global governance architecture. NATO is increasingly global, with an ambitious strategic concept and partners around the world; further, NATO is the only organization with robust hard security capacity. As an alliance of democracies, its effectiveness and legitimacy rest on solid ground, although NATO has shown a willingness to partner with nondemocratic countries when strategically expedient. Several other speakers disputed NATO's role in global governance, noting an uneven record in Afghanistan and the limited political appetite for large-scale defense commitments in some NATO member countries. Setting aside capacity questions, many non-NATO countries are resistant to the use of NATO forces—which is less of a problem for the United Nations, whose universal membership makes it a more welcome aegis for intervention.

Assessing the Group of Twenty (G-20)

As the most significant development in global governance since the end of the Cold War, the evolution of the G-20 will be a bellwether for the international order. Whereas the G-20's coordinated response to the global financial crisis in 2008 and 2009 caused great optimism about its contribution, the group's disappointing performance in 2010 inspired greater skepticism. Participants questioned whether the G-20 would be able to transcend its roots as a financially focused “crisis committee” to become a “steering committee” of global political leadership, though some contended the G-20 has already made this transition.

According to one participant, a G-20 with a broader agenda would nourish global governance in three ways: modeling a more fluid multilateral dynamic with shifting coalitions; offering a forum for established and emerging powers to determine what responsibilities go with power and status; and augmenting formal institutions with a flexible prenegotiation venue to develop ideas and reforms to be followed through in other settings. Indeed, we have already seen the G-20 function as a venue for shifting coalitions among members based on national interests.

Focusing on the G-20's recent record, participants discussed the main factors in its effectiveness. Most agreed that evaluating effectiveness is very difficult, and the G-20's record is mixed. As one speaker explained, the G-20 is still a “work in progress.” Several participants cautioned of the need to judge the G-20 against realistic expectations rather than “journalistic” expectations. Seen realistically, the G-20's project of macroeconomic policy coordination is exceptionally difficult—perhaps impossible absent a crisis—because states tend to see economic policy as a domestic prerogative. The G-20 is also subject to a selection bias

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whereby it only gets the most intractable issues—those that could not be solved elsewhere. Insofar as these issues must be discussed, though, the G-20 seems to be the best available venue because it brings together the systemically significant economies without the bureaucratic baggage of the United Nations and international financial institutions.

Two speakers offered quantitative assessments of the G-20's performance. One speaker compared the G-20 with the G-8—finding that G-8 surpasses the G-20 on measures of deliberation, accountability, and delivery. Conversely, the G-20 outscores the G-8 on direction-setting. It was also noted that the G-20's agenda has been expanding while the G-8's has contracted. While the G-8 has decreased engagement with international institutions, the G-20 has enhanced its inter-IGO (intergovernmental organization) engagement. Most importantly, the G-20's average compliance with commitments is substantially lower than the G-8.

The issue of compliance is particularly important for understanding the value—and therefore the worthiness of investment—in institutions like the G-8 and G-20. According to one speaker, high compliance rates are associated with short (about one-year) timetables and links to core international organizations (although references to non-core international organizations tend to decrease compliance rates). Another interlocutor contended that the G-20 would function best if an independent arbiter (such as the IMF) assesses compliance. Compliance is difficult to measure, however, because of ambiguities associated with the letter, as opposed to the spirit, of the law and exigent circumstances, as opposed to willful noncompliance. For these reasons, finding meaningful metrics is not straightforward. Measuring compliance also raises a debate about overpromising: although it is disingenuous to commit to a goal that is clearly unrealistic, it may be better to partially fulfill an ambitious goal than to completely fulfill a modest one.

The most recent G-20 summit in Seoul, Republic of Korea, achieved limited success. Its headline achievements were an agreement on Basel III, IMF reform, and indicative guidelines. Some participants lauded these as major successes—one going as far as calling the indicative guidelines commitment a “massive and substantial” accomplishment. Others, however, questioned their true impact, for example calling Basel III a “relatively modest agreement” that will likely be outmoded by the time it comes into effect. Another speaker called Seoul an “unfinished success” leaving room for further progress. It is unfair to measure success based on whether a summit “saves the world every six months,” he stated. Separate from the substantive agreements reached in Seoul, the contentious currency dispute over Chinese valuation of the renminbi and quantitative easing by the US Federal Reserve left a bitter aftertaste. Procedurally, Seoul represented a success in terms of the host's outreach to the wider UN membership and, some participants felt, in further institutionalizing the G-20.

Looking ahead, workshop participants offered thoughts on the G-20's future agenda and effectiveness. One participant outlined the unresolved issues raised by the Seoul summit: continued debate about exchange rates; greater recognition of global governance shifts, particularly the implications of IMF reform; crisis response; macroeconomic policy; changes to the global safety net; development; financial sector reform; and G-20 institutional consolidation. Because the G-20 has no institutional capacity or constitutional authority, and because its relationship with high-capacity formal institutions is contentious, a more natural role will be as an incubator of consensus. Implementation and accountability functions will fall either to individual states, international organizations, or perhaps nongovernmental

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organizations. Whether the G-20 expands into security, climate change, and other issues remains an open question—though a few participants argued that, over time, such an expansion is inevitable given that the agenda is determined by the wishes of the leaders.

Three factors could shape the G-20's future effectiveness: shocks, leadership, and democracy. The G-20 has been most effective when responding to an economic shock—as with the 2008-09 summits in Washington, London, and Pittsburgh—but flounders without crisis-induced urgency. One participant challenged this narrative, though, arguing that Seoul occurred amidst Ireland's euro crisis and “struck out.” The casting of key players also matters: diplomatically experienced powers hosted those early G-20 summits with great success. It remains unclear whether less capable states will be able to host similarly successful summits. Finally, the issue of democracy. While the Seoul summit was the first one hosted by a non-G-8 state, Korea is democratic. If “democracy does matter in the design and outcomes of G-20 and G-8 governance,” as one speaker contended, what will happen when a country like Russia hosts?

According to one speaker, however, the G-20's potential effectiveness is greatly circumscribed: it will make a “modest contribution, which is useful, but not a panacea for global governance.” Instead, based on its comparative advantages, the G-20 should be an agenda-setting leadership forum in insulated technocratic areas where leaders matter, quickness counts, and globalization is involved. First, returning to the supply and demand trope, there are few areas where governments actively seek cooperation, and the lack of a forum like the G-20 is the primary impediment. Second, the G-20 has not shown an ability to solve basic problems of enforcement or credible commitment. Third, on many key policy issues, states lack domestic capacity to even implement agreements. Moreover, this speaker echoed others' skepticism that the G-20 would socialize emerging powers into responsible stakeholders, citing a lack of empirical evidence.

The Legitimacy Challenge

The legitimacy questions associated with the G-20 led to a discussion of legitimacy's essential underpinnings. As one participant described it, there are two forms of legitimacy: normative and sociological. Normative legitimacy derives from fixed moral criteria that confer authority; sociological legitimacy is bestowed through the consent of those who affirm an institution's authority. Whereas sociological legitimacy can be empirically verified by researching the degree of support it receives, normative legitimacy is more of a closed system, resting on its own claims and criteria. A number of factors were identified that can be used for either normative or sociological legitimacy: representativeness, membership, expertise, implementation/compliance, a reputation for success, transparency, and aggregated power of member governments. “Outsiders,” one speaker pointed out, may also confer sociological legitimacy. If outsiders feel compelled to cooperate with an institution, that indicates their belief that an organization is legitimate. At the same time, another speaker cautioned that outsiders who want to be insiders are not reliable judges of legitimacy. The global public and court of world opinion also play a role in conferring legitimacy.

Even when an institution has legitimacy, however, that is no guarantee of effectiveness. The Kyoto Protocol is widely believed to be legitimate (in the sociological sense) but has not been effective. Universality may produce legitimacy and, potentially, effectiveness in the sense that countries are more likely to accept scrutiny and rules of an institution of which they are members. Less clear is whether membership

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is fully effective in inspiring states to cooperate with an institution. Accountability is similarly ambiguous in its ability to elicit compliance. And, of course, effectiveness can develop its own momentum of sociological legitimacy; for as they say, “nothing succeeds like success.”

At a more practical level, a participant proposed four institutional reforms that could enhance G-20 legitimacy: giving G-20 consultations a set of mandates so they are no longer ad hoc; an explicit fixed pattern of coordination with multilateral organizations; specified representation formulas for the forum’s deliberations (as with the IMF); and ratification of informal institutions’ decisions by formal bodies.

The conference took full advantage of the participants’ collective wisdom by asking for their assessment of both the current state of the international system and the global governance challenges it confronts. While these analysts largely perceived the same trends, they had diverse views on whether the forces of change posed a threat to peace and stability. Either way, the discussion sparked some important conceptual distinctions and potentially fruitful lines of further inquiry.

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