

# Written evidence submitted by The Foreign Policy Centre (MUL0018)

## Introduction

1. The Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) is an independent and non-partisan international affairs think tank based in the United Kingdom. The FPC publishes independent research and provides an open and accessible space for the exchange of ideas, knowledge and experience, so that the voices of experts and advocates can be heard and acted upon.
2. The FPC has published a range of articles by academics, practitioners and experts relating to the topic of multilateralism and the role of the UK in key multilateral institutions. In 2020, the FPC submitted evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) inquiry into the 'UK's role in strengthening multilateral organisations.'<sup>1</sup> This submission is not a comprehensive analysis of all the issues facing multilateralism today, but seeks to present relevant insights from FPC publications since 2020, as well as from discussions with FPC contributors and senior advisors held in February 2024.

## Summary

3. Multilateralism today faces real challenges. There is a perception that multilateral institutions have failed in the face of recent global crises, with the response to Russia's full-scale invasion into Ukraine in February 2022 having had a significant impact on how the multilateral system is currently viewed. There is arguably a deepening divide between countries in the Global North and Global South and this influences the way in which different countries have sought to engage with multilateral institutions. Beyond traditional multilateral structures, there has been an emergence, and development, of minilaterals, with differing assessments about their significance, impact and value. The ways in which multilateral engagement can increasingly take place outside of formal institutions, for example through the annual G20 Forum, is also noted. Amid the challenges, there is a prevailing view that multilateral institutions have clear and important value; and there remain ways in which they can be strengthened in a changing world. To note, this submission also includes a short annex which explores opportunities for, and likelihood of, UN Security Council reform. The recommendations included below are made based on the arguments and analysis presented by FPC contributors.

## Recommendations

4. The recommendations included in the FAC's 2021 report on this topic – 'In the Room: the UK's role in multilateral diplomacy' – continue to hold resonance today.<sup>2</sup> As such, the below recommendations have been grouped under the three main areas identified by the FAC in 2021, in which the UK Government should act:

### 4.1 Further to the 2021 FAC recommendation that *"The Government should, wherever possible, seek to use multilateral organisations to pursue its foreign policy objectives,"* this should include:

- Investing in strengthening and developing existing multilateral structures and organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> FPC evidence to Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry in 2020: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/9771/pdf/>

<sup>2</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee publication: [Report: In the room: the UK's role in multilateral diplomacy - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

- Exploring opportunities for reform of multilateral institutions, while remaining focused on how existing structures could firstly be strengthened and opportunities to deliver positive practical outcomes through existing fora can be realised.
- Promoting the inclusion of new states in multilateral models.
- Utilising minilaterals or other regional interest groups whilst working were possible to prevent ‘fractionalism’ of, or ‘factionalism’ in, the multilateral system.

**4.2 Further to the 2021 FAC recommendation that “*Engagement with these bodies ... should include publicly calling out states who are abusing or undermining the system, publicly voting against attempts by such states to secure key leadership positions for their nationals,*” this should include:**

- Considering the impact at the multilateral level during development of domestic policies to ensure the UK’s credibility and ability to exercise maximum diplomatic leverage at the multilateral level.
- Taking more action to prevent kleptocratic elites in authoritarian states from misusing our legal and financial systems to service their corrupt wealth, which helps export their influence abroad.
- Mapping the most vulnerable multilateral institutions by publishing an authoritative scorecard and seeking ways to hold violators of multilateral principles accountable. This could potentially be done by the UK Parliament, through the Foreign Affairs Select Committee or an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG).

**4.3 Further to the 2021 FAC recommendation that “*To counter influence [of state actors with alternative understandings of individual rights], we recommend that the FCDO mobilises its soft power and convening resources to work with broad groups of like-minded states within multilateral organisations,*” this should include:**

- A cohesive, and effectively resourced, strategy for mobilising the UK’s soft power within its foreign policy.
- Promoting, and continuing to support, already-established mechanisms for cooperation, for example the Media Freedom Coalition jointly established in 2019 by the UK and Canada.
- In addition, examining the potential scope for closer collaboration with legislatures around the world.

**Perceptions that multilateralism has failed in the face of recent global crises**

5. Since 2020, a proliferation of health, security and economic threats have driven instability globally, with rising inequalities contributing to setbacks in the humanitarian development agendas.<sup>3</sup> During these times of acute crises, key multilateral institutions are perceived to have failed to respond effectively, leading to a decline in confidence in their utility. In particular, the response of multilateral organisations to Russia’s full-scale escalation of its illegal invasion of Ukraine, which started in 2014, as well as to other recent conflicts has furthered the perception that these institutions are limited in their ability to fulfil their intended functions.
6. Last year, Oksana Antonenko, Visiting Fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at EUI and a member of FPC’s Advisory Council, described how multilateral organisations were “paralysed by

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<sup>3</sup> Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024

renewed confrontation between Russia and the democratic ‘West’” and had no means to “contain, let alone resolve” the conflict, regardless of the impact it was having around the world.<sup>4</sup>

7. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been able to continue a lot of its business during this time, including the regular renewal of UN Peace Keeping Operations.<sup>5</sup> However, the significant barriers faced at the UNSC when members attempted to act in light of a proliferation of violent conflict has furthered perceptions of the institution’s weakness.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Russia and China are increasingly acting in cooperation at the UNSC to block effective action to assist Ukraine.<sup>7</sup>
8. The war against Ukraine has to some extent, however, accelerated trends already underway for a number of years. In a recent article for the FPC, Dr Sasikumar Sundaram, Lecturer at the Department of International Politics at City, University of London, argued that the response to the invasion confirmed a perception of double standards among states in the Global South. For a number of states, so-called “Western hypocrisy toward upholding the norms of sovereignty, human rights, and the rule of law is not new,” however in the instance of Ukraine it was held up to view more clearly.<sup>8</sup> While the US, UK and Europe “stood together as democracies” dedicated in their opposition to the “bewildering reality of global disorder brought by the Russian invasion,” for countries in the Global South, the war in Ukraine presented a similarly threatening challenge but for very different reasons.<sup>9</sup> For these states, the threat came from the acute impact the war has had on “food insecurity, rising energy prices, and a supply chain crisis.”<sup>10</sup> (This aspect is examined more in the section on *‘Diverging approaches towards multilateralism between the Global North and Global South,’* below).
9. Challenges facing multilateral institutions today certainly go beyond the security agenda, and the ripple effects of conflict. The inability of the World Health Organisation to “ensure equal and fair global distribution of COVID vaccines” is another factor said to have contributed to growing questions about whether the “limits to global governance” had been reached.<sup>11</sup> Frustration has similarly been furthered when, despite annual United National Climate Change COP conferences, the organisation remains seemingly powerless to contain the deepening climate crisis.<sup>12</sup>

### **Abiding Challenges for Multilateralism**

10. The challenges facing multilateralism, and driving reduced confidence in the multilateral system, are not only related to recent events. An ongoing threat to the multilateral system stems from authoritarian states, which must be recognised and addressed if multilateral organisations are to evolve to mitigate “the volatility in the international system.”<sup>13</sup> Thomas E. Garrett, Secretary General of the Community of

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<sup>4</sup> Oksana Antonenko for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/whither-g20-the-future-of-multilateralism-and-global-governance-reforms/>

<sup>5</sup> Stefan Wolff in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>6</sup> Further information on proposals to expand the United Nations Security Council can be found in the Annex at the end of this document

<sup>7</sup> Oksana Antonenko in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>8</sup> Dr Sasikumar Sundaram for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/two-years-on-the-ongoing-war-in-ukraine-is-further-highlighting-the-global-north-and-global-south-divide/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Oksana Antonenko for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/whither-g20-the-future-of-multilateralism-and-global-governance-reforms/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Democracies, has argued this will have to include recognising that “issues such as food insecurity or declining adherence to a norms-based human rights framework are not occurring organically or due to time – these and similar issues are direct consequences of an assault on the international system by authoritarian states: China, Russia, and their allies.”<sup>14</sup> The desire of these countries is not said to be a “reform of the system” but instead “to replace it with principles such as might makes right, or a hyper-sovereignty which cloaks human rights abuses.”<sup>15</sup>

11. Anna Chernova, Senior Research Fellow at the Foreign Policy Centre, has argued that regional alliances in Europe, Eurasia, Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are increasingly plagued by “hegemons with authoritarian tendencies” (including but not limited to states like Azerbaijan, Turkey, India, Saudi Arabia and UAE), states which effectively export repression through “soft power” networks and economic dimensions - across their regional spheres of influences and the global institutions where they may have influence.<sup>16</sup> The threat of ‘caviar diplomacy’ which deeply impacted the Council of Europe can be another mechanism through which multilateral institutions become vulnerable to “political capture” by malign states.<sup>17</sup> As well as not doing more to call out such behaviour taking place inside of multilateral institutions, writing in 2020, FPC’s Director Susan Coughtrie argued that the UK should also take more action to prevent kleptocratic elites in authoritarian states from misusing our legal and financial systems to service their corrupt wealth, which helps entrench their power at home, including through repression of independent media and civil society, and export their influence abroad.<sup>18</sup>
12. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) provides another example of the challenges multilateral institutions can face, often as a result of the actions of some of its member countries. In the current geopolitical context, and as the only “security focused inter-governmental body to include both western powers and Russia,” the OSCE holds a unique position.<sup>19</sup> Yet Antonenko noted that Russia repeatedly exploits OSCE’s unanimity-based decision making to block policies and institutions which are critical for supporting democratic elections, media freedom and minority rights.<sup>20</sup> Writing about ‘institutional crisis’ at the OSCE in 2020, Chernova highlighted that UN human rights officials found that it was “OSCE participating states with some of the worst human dimension track records that led the organisation into this deliberate and institutional crisis, undermining its leadership and business continuity.”<sup>21</sup> Going further, Chernova argued that “Moscow and others, whose values are not aligned with the UK, are taking advantage of the vacuum and crisis of confidence (of the West) in multilateral institutions like the OSCE – leaving these institutions open to political capture.”<sup>22</sup> Similar points were

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas E. Garrett for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>17</sup> Anna Chernova for FPC: [Global Britain in 2030: Multilateralism and the importance of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\) - The Foreign Policy Centre \(fpc.org.uk\)](#); [Caviar Diplomacy: How Azerbaijan Silenced the Council of Europe, European Stability Initiative, 24 May 2012, www.esiweb.org/publications/; caviar-diplomacy-how-azerbaijan-silenced-council-europe.](#)

<sup>18</sup> Susan Coughtrie for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/the-uk-as-a-key-nexus-for-protecting-media-freedom-and-preventing-corruption-globally/>

<sup>19</sup> Anna Chernova for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/global-britain-in-2030-multilateralism-and-the-importance-of-the-organization-for-security-and-co-operation-in-europe-osce/>

<sup>20</sup> Oksana Antonenko in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>21</sup> Anna Chernova for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/global-britain-in-2030-multilateralism-and-the-importance-of-the-organization-for-security-and-co-operation-in-europe-osce/> ; <https://twitter.com/AgnesCallamard/status/1281685028796346369?s=20>

<sup>22</sup> Anna Chernova for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/global-britain-in-2030-multilateralism-and-the-importance-of-the-organization-for-security-and-co-operation-in-europe-osce/>

raised in FPC's 2020 written evidence to the last FAC inquiry, including by Craig Oliphant, FPC Senior Advisor.<sup>23</sup>

13. Chernova, in conversation with FPC in February 2024, noted that authoritarian participating states of the OSCE have continued to abuse consensus mechanisms, deliberately paralysing the work of key institutions and field operations, especially targeting the OSCE's monitoring capacities (reducing its relevance, and increasing the space for disinformation – including deliberately undermining confidence of the Global South in regional institutions trying to hold power to account).<sup>24</sup>
14. The confirmation of Malta as the OSCE's Chairpersonship-in-Office (CiO) in December 2023, following extended and fractious discussions, was a positive step for the organisation.<sup>25</sup> However, as Stefan Wolff, Professor of International Security at the University of Birmingham, noted in an article for the FPC, a chair will not assure the ongoing functioning of the OSCE and key organisational challenges remain.<sup>26</sup> Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has been the primary focus for the OSCE, however tension and conflict is spread throughout the region. Furthermore, Antonenko argued that due to the unanimity rule, OSCE has not been effective in managing any conflicts among its member states, be it conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan or between Russia and Ukraine.<sup>27</sup>
15. Fred Carver, a Managing Director of Strategy for Humanity, writing last year as part of a FPC series on the G20, emphasised the importance of understanding that the "reasons non-G20 members and the Global South think the multilateral system lacks credibility are often different to the reasons the West thinks the multilateral system lacks credibility."<sup>28</sup> Carver argued that while "many western critics are concerned that the multilateral system is no longer able to maintain the post-war liberal order," those in the Global South "tend to be more concerned with hypocrisy and inconsistency in the application of the rules of that order."<sup>29</sup>

### **Diverging approaches towards multilateralism between the Global North and Global South**

16. A deepening divide between countries in the Global North and the Global South is seen to have driven diverging approaches towards the multilateral system. Distrust between countries operating within multilateral institutions has also arguably contributed to a perception, particularly among countries in the Global South, that investment in these institutions is not worthwhile, because they do not serve their needs nor advance their interests.
17. Chernova has argued that countries such as Russia and India, where democracy and human rights have been backsliding rapidly, often deliberately undermine credibility of international institutions and civil

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[security-and-co-operation-in-europe-osce/](#)

<sup>23</sup> FPC evidence to Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry in 2020: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/9771/pdf/>

<sup>24</sup> Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>25</sup> Stefan Wolff for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/the-challenges-facing-maltas-chairpersonship-of-the-osce/> ; <https://www.osce.org/chairpersonship/559671>

<sup>26</sup> Stefan Wolff for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/the-challenges-facing-maltas-chairpersonship-of-the-osce/>

<sup>27</sup> Oksana Antonenko in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>28</sup> G20 India 2023: Insights from FPC Fellows and Friends: [G20 India 2023: Insights from FPC Fellows & Friends - The Foreign Policy Centre](#) ; Fred Carver for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>29</sup> Fred Carver for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

society stakeholders operating within these multilateral frameworks – in order to shore up authoritarian rule domestically, and avoid accountability to national and regional stakeholders.<sup>30</sup> Those seeking to strengthen the multilateral system may have to adapt accordingly to navigate this changing landscape.

18. Divisions have broader implications for the future of multilateralism. Writing in 2024, Dr Sundaram argued that, in the context of the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, leaders in some countries have utilised a perception of hypocrisy by states in the Global North to advance their own interests, namely to “drive their exclusionary nationalism, using the crisis to point out the unfolding of a global disorder.”<sup>31</sup> He added that Russia utilised the moment to “strategically reach out to the Global South, and declaim its association with the West.”<sup>32</sup>
19. While Russia likes to highlight that it has an ‘alternative’ agenda to the West in multilateral spaces, Chernova has argued that its economic model for example is, like China, as capitalist, if not more so, than the US. Therefore, it is not an alternative economic model; it is just a geographic shift, with less transparency and accountability from one hegemony to another. It’s an attempt to use Cold War legacies - making the Global South feel like a socialist alternative is being proposed - when in fact, hyper capitalism (and ‘traditional’ - aka patriarchal social norms) - without even the few checks and balances the West offers - is what Russia is exporting to multilateral institutions.<sup>33</sup>
20. The Foreign Affairs Committee recognised the threat from autocratic states, like Russia, in its 2021 ‘In the Room’ publication and highlighted the potential negative repercussions. The report noted that “autocracies seek to identify inconsistencies in the approaches of liberal democracies to international issues and exploit these to their advantage.”<sup>34</sup> While autocratic states appeared to have advanced their agendas in the intervening period, liberal democracies, like the UK, have been less successful, and cohesive, in their approach to push back.
21. While the UK was once viewed as a prominent force in multilateral institutions, it is no longer perceived as a leader. One reason for this shift is the increasing disparity between UK government domestic and foreign policy and the values it promotes at the multilateral level. Enyseh Teimory, Head of Policy at UNA-UK, highlighted in her article for FPC that a gap between UK policy and discourse undermines credibility to promote human rights and a rules-based order.<sup>35</sup> Dr Kate Ferguson, Co-Executive Director and Head of Research and Policy at Protection Approaches, also highlighted the disparity that can exist between the “assurances made on the global stage to prevent crises and protect people and how states like the UK implement and integrate their commitments through their national policy.”<sup>36</sup> Teimory explained that this gap has “undermined commitments to international treaties and weakened its perception in the eyes of the global community.”<sup>37</sup> She noted that the UK’s ongoing trade of weapons to

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<sup>30</sup> Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>31</sup> Dr Sasikumar Sundaram for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/two-years-on-the-ongoing-war-in-ukraine-is-further-highlighting-the-global-north-and-global-south-divide/>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee 2021 report, p.5: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6324/documents/69495/default/>

<sup>35</sup> Enyseh Teimory for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/recommitting-the-uk-to-multilateralism-through-the-united-nations/>

<sup>36</sup> Dr Kate Ferguson for FPC: [Putting atrocity prevention at the heart of British foreign policy - The Foreign Policy Centre \(fpc.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>37</sup> Enyseh Teimory for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/recommitting-the-uk-to-multilateralism-through-the-united-nations/> ; [Putting atrocity prevention at the heart of British foreign policy - The Foreign Policy Centre \(fpc.org.uk\)](#)

Saudi Arabia, and to Israel regardless of civil society objections, is an example of the UK reducing its credibility through national policymaking.<sup>38</sup>

22. The implications of the UK approach to trade with India were noted by Chernova in her article for the FPC's miniseries on the most recent G20 summit in Delhi. She argued that "the neoliberal and geopolitical nature of EU and UK approaches to India trade relations risks weakening public confidence in the primacy of human rights and the 'shared values' of democracy in international relations".<sup>39</sup> Chernova further noted in 2024 that, in the coming months, India will hold a key election, with civil society forces increasingly sceptical of the quality of the democratic process. This should be a concern for future UK (and EU) leaders seeking to form economy-driven (rather than broader values-driven) alliances with this important regional hegemon.<sup>40</sup> As Britain continues to navigate new trade relationships post-Brexit, considerations should be made regarding the wider implications that economic development could have for the UK's standing on the international stage.
23. In February 2024, Craig Oliphant, FPC Senior Advisor, commented that "more and more, given everything that has unfolded in European and global security, we are all in the era of new shifting coalitions of the willing and the role of minilateralism is in the ascendancy."<sup>41</sup> Dr Sundaram also writing for FPC in 2024, noted that for countries – like Russia and China - looking to reach out to their counterparts in the Global South, many are now "working within new coalitions and blocs"; with Global South countries "have become emboldened and fastidious about speaking truth to power."<sup>42</sup>

### **The Emergence of Minilaterals**

24. Increased attention has been paid to minilateral organisations, such as BRICs and the G7, in recent years and there have been diverging views as to whether minilaterals are effective examples of regional or interest-based cooperation, or if they ultimately have limited impact.
25. The most recent BRICS meeting in South Africa in August 2023 received international attention and paved the way for existing members to expand the bloc by inviting Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to join.<sup>43</sup> Five of these countries have now become members, with Argentina's new government withdrawing in 2023 following initial support.<sup>44</sup> Prior to the BRICS summit in Johannesburg, as many as 40 countries had expressed their interest in membership of the grouping, highlighting the significance that the bloc can have.<sup>45</sup> Despite high levels of interest and participation, observers noted

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<sup>38</sup> Enyseh Teimory for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/recommitting-the-uk-to-multilateralism-through-the-united-nations/>; UNA-UK statement on UK-Saudi relations, UNA-UK, 9 January 2019: <https://una.org.uk/news/una-uk-statement-uk-saudi-relations>; UK arms exports: statistics, House of Commons Library, 12 December 2023: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8310/>; Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>39</sup> Anna Chernova for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/the-uk-eu-at-the-g20-what-role-is-there-post-brexit-for-the-uk-in-the-european-communitys-engagement-with-india/>; PM meeting with Indian Prime Minister Modi: 16 November 2022, GOV.UK, 16 November 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-indian-prime-minister-modi-16-november-2022>

<sup>40</sup> Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>41</sup> Craig Oliphant in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>42</sup> Dr Sasikumar Sundaram for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/two-years-on-the-ongoing-war-in-ukraine-is-further-highlighting-the-global-north-and-global-south-divide/>

<sup>43</sup> USIP, What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc's Founding Members: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/what-brics-expansion-means-blocs-founding-members>

<sup>44</sup> BBC, Argentina pulls out of plans to join Brics bloc: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-67842992>

<sup>45</sup> USIP, What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc's Founding Members: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/what-brics->

however that the meeting in Johannesburg resulted in “no headway on pressing global problems (be it the war in Ukraine, the grain deal or climate change adaptation).”<sup>46</sup>

26. Inclusion in BRICS could be appealing for states, with Antonenko commenting that “membership offers emerging middle powers an opportunity to advance their multi-alignment strategy. They hope to secure additional aid and investment in exchange for indulging China’s and Russia’s geopolitical illusions that they are leading a ‘non-Western majority.’”<sup>47</sup> In follow-up conversation with FPC, Antonenko argued that this pragmatic approach is clearly illustrated by the fact that many existing (India, Brazil) and new (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE) BRICS members also maintain close political, economic and even security relations with the West, including the US. It is therefore wrong to view BRICS as a unified block with either shared values or shared geopolitical interests.<sup>48</sup> This point supports broader thinking about the role of minilateral organisations and how the UK and other countries could respond.
27. Minilaterals can also be seen as a potential vehicle for “forum shopping”, whereby authoritarian leaders prioritise their participation in meetings at which “they are admired or at least respected by other participants.”<sup>49</sup> This could explain President Xi Jinping’s participation at the most recent BRICS meeting in South Africa but his absence from the G20, during which he would have met “uncomfortable questions about China’s economy and its foreign policy from the US and its allies.”<sup>50</sup> Meetings at the minilateral level could thus be utilised as a means of avoiding multilateral forums in which a broader group of states can promote accountability and dialogue.
28. Contributors to the FPC have explored more broadly the notion of moving power from multilateral to regional forums, and whether this is the most effective means of global governance in different contexts. Carver, writing in 2023, noted his hesitancy, explaining that while regionalism can be an effective way in which power can be shifted to smaller states, it is not a cure-all.<sup>51</sup> He noted that regionalism is “most developed with respect to Africa” and in other regions may not function as effectively.<sup>52</sup> He stated that “smaller South Asian states, for example, might prefer to take their chances in New York than under an inevitably India dominated regional mechanism, and the very idea of pursuing subsidiarity in West Asia is exhausting.”<sup>53</sup> He went further to say that for “truly small states – as opposed to mid-tier powers with regional influence – it is often non-regional projects for transferring money and control at the UN (such as Bridgetown) that excite them”.<sup>54</sup> While regional-level engagement could be an opportunity, the approach is not a universally applicable alternative to inclusive multilateralism.
29. The G7 is one of the most prominent minilateral groupings which is said to have been revived following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and has “led the way in providing financial assistance to Kyiv and coordinating sanctions on Russia”.<sup>55</sup> However, it has also been noted that the G7 group alone will not be

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<sup>46</sup> Oksana Antonenko for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/whither-g20-the-future-of-multilateralism-and-global-governance-reforms/>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Oksana Antonenko in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>49</sup> Oksana Antonenko for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/whither-g20-the-future-of-multilateralism-and-global-governance-reforms/>

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Fred Carver for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Fred Carver for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>55</sup> Oksana Antonenko for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/whither-g20-the-future-of-multilateralism-and-global-governance-reforms/>



able to “secure a sustainable and just resolution of the conflict” and for this to take place other powers such as China and Turkey must be included as dialogue partners to force Russia to adopt a new approach.<sup>56</sup>

30. In the prevailing geopolitical context, minilaterals such as the Ramstein - or Ukraine Defence Contact – group or the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) can also be a valuable forum for ‘coalitions of the willing’ to explore how to address key threats.<sup>57</sup> Teimory also noted that involvement in “sub-UN coalitions” can be an impactful mechanism for greater UK power at the UN and for raising the aspirations and goals of other members.<sup>58</sup> Highlighting the true impact that these groups can have, Teimory said “we may not have had a Paris Climate Agreement worth the name without the ‘High Ambition Coalition’.<sup>59</sup> Carver also noted that The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT), which convenes “27 small and mid-sized countries” with the aim of enhancing the “Accountability, Coherence and Transparency of the UN Security Council” is another example of countries cooperating on the basis of shared interests.<sup>60</sup>
31. Chernova, in conversation with FPC, argued that greater attention should be paid to the governance structures of these groups, including their transparency and accountability mechanisms (i.e. civil society engagement).<sup>61</sup> She also stated that occasional informal and opaque gatherings around ad hoc issues can be valuable, but they are not a substitute for regional and/or global institutions with transparent and accountable governance structures that are (at least somewhat) responsive to the public (whose taxes pay for these formations and convenings).<sup>62</sup>
32. The UK has engaged in minilateral forums, a clear example of which is the UK relationship with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to cooperate on a range of economic, political and security, and socio-cultural issues.<sup>63</sup> However, Chernova, in conversation with FPC, noted that ASEAN has been criticised for its poor political leadership with regard to managing the situation in Myanmar, and the weak follow-up to initiatives such as the five-point consensus on Myanmar. Like the OSCE and other regional groups, ASEAN’s political cohesion and leadership are being tested on issues of conflict mediation and resolution.<sup>64</sup>
33. Nevertheless, Antonenko argued that, as the number of regional institutions, often led by rising middle powers, proliferates, the UK should seek to maintain dialogue with these entities and to avoid painting a non-Western initiative as geopolitical rivals or even as a threat.<sup>65</sup> Alternatively, Antonenko suggested that many of them should be leveraged by the West to influence Russia’s and China’s policies.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. ; additional comments made by Oksana Antonenko in February 2024

<sup>57</sup> Politico, The little-known group that’s saving Ukraine: <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/05/01/austin-defense-meetings-weapons-ukraine-00089946> ; CSIS The Joint Expeditionary Force: Global Britain in Northern Europe?: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/joint-expeditionary-force-global-britain-northern-europe>

<sup>58</sup> Enyseh Teimory for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/recommitting-the-uk-to-multilateralism-through-the-united-nations/>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. ; Climate Home News, Paris ‘high ambition coalition’ to tackle unfinished business: <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2016/07/22/paris-high-ambition-coalition-to-tackle-unfinished-business/#:~:text=Born%20at%20the%202015%20Paris,%2C%20Mexico%2C%20Canada%20and%20Brazil>

<sup>60</sup> Fred Carver in conversation with FPC, February 2024 ; Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/missions/mission-new-york/en/home/act-statements.html>

<sup>61</sup> Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> UK-ASEAN factsheet: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-asean-factsheet/uk-asean-factsheet--2>

<sup>64</sup> Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>65</sup> Oksana Antonenko in conversation with FPC, February 2024

## Multilateralism beyond formal institutions

34. While large multilateral organisations face significant challenges and minilateral groupings emerge, multilateral engagement also takes place outside of traditional institutional frameworks.
35. The G20 has developed as a space for cooperation between diverse countries and, as Garrett explained, is an example of cooperation between “the developing and developed world in partnership.”<sup>67</sup> This cooperation is beneficial for strengthening “credibility in the multilateral system, particularly with non-G20 members and the Global South.”<sup>68</sup> The recent inclusion of the African Union as a member was viewed as a positive move that supported this aim.<sup>69</sup>
36. The inclusion of “NGOs, civic activists, youth, women, think-tanks and businesses” is another impactful step that can counter growing divisions at the international level.<sup>70</sup> Going further, Antonenko noted that “legitimacy through diversity has become even more important today, when powerful states no longer agree on the same set of rules and norms underpinning the global order.”<sup>71</sup> Chernova has however caveated that inclusion of marginalised and often politically underrepresented groups (i.e. youth, women, minorities, displaced/refugees and migrants, rural communities, etc.) must be meaningful and transparent.<sup>72</sup>
37. This is particularly important when, as Chernova has said, with a global backsliding of democracy, human rights and women’s rights, increasing inequalities and restrictions on civic space, many of these groups rely on multilateral spaces to engage and/or challenge authoritarianism (at national, regional and global levels).<sup>73</sup> Chernova also added that elite-captured, authoritarian and nationalist states grouping together to protect interests of elites without public confidence (as they backslide democratically) further undermines both multilateralism and minilateralism.<sup>74</sup>
38. The UK has also been involved in minilateralism through its establishment, with Canada, of the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) in 2019.<sup>75</sup> The MFC is a partnership of 50 countries working together to advocate for media freedom and the safety of journalists. Writing for the FPC in 2021, then FPC Director Adam Hug and Devin O’Shaughnessy, a member of FPC’s Advisory Council, pointed to this cooperation as a “model to be built on for other bilateral and ‘minilateral’ initiatives to support open societies.”<sup>76</sup> An academic evaluation of the first two years of the MFC, published in February 2022 with the support of the FPC, highlighted concerns that the MFC was only partially achieving its objectives, requiring a ‘re-set’

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas E. Garrett for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>68</sup> FPC publication: *Multilateral Institutions for the 21st Century - The Foreign Policy Centre (fpc.org.uk)*

<sup>69</sup> Thomas E. Garrett for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>70</sup> Oksana Antonenko for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/whither-g20-the-future-of-multilateralism-and-global-governance-reforms/>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Anna Chernova in conversation with FPC in February 2024

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Adam Hug and Devin O’Shaughnessy for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/global-britain-for-an-open-world-conclusions-and-recommendations/>; Media Freedom Coalition: <https://mediafreedomcoalition.org/>

<sup>76</sup> Adam Hug and Devin O’Shaughnessy for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/global-britain-for-an-open-world-conclusions-and-recommendations/>

and 're-injection of energy and funds'.<sup>77</sup> Since then, the MFC has taken forward some of the evaluators' recommendations, but it is essential - as with any initiative to have the desired impact - for it to be sufficiently resourced, and its members, including the UK, to stay engaged in a consistent and committed manner.

### **Multilateral Forums: Still worthy of engagement and investment?**

39. Facing clear challenges within a volatile geopolitical context, questions are asked about whether multilateral institutions should be subject to a "comprehensive reform" or if it should be accepted that organisations will split "into like-minded mini-lateral clubs such as the G7 or BRICS".<sup>78</sup> However, reform or acceptance of a fundamental change in the structure of multilateral institutions are not the only options.
40. Despite the challenges, multilateral forums still provide a space for cooperation between states. While there are benefits of a minilateral approach, it should not be viewed as an alternative to inclusive multilateral cooperation, particularly when, as Teimory outlined, "it is vital that our global system reach out to include those who currently feel excluded by it."<sup>79</sup> Teimory stressed that the UK "recommits to multilateralism", supports the UN and is "willing to work with any and all in order to pursue a values driven foreign policy agenda."<sup>80</sup>
41. In his writing for the FPC, Carver highlighted a key benefit of multilateral, as opposed to minilateral, engagement, including for smaller states.<sup>81</sup> He shared that when it comes to multilateral institutions: "by providing a mechanism which is a) open to all and b) allows states to converse on terms closer to equality, global divergence can be limited, smaller states are better able to pool their impact and shape the agenda, and the outcomes have an unmatched legitimacy and credibility."<sup>82</sup> It is for these reasons that Garrett expressed his support for the UN system as a central forum for the important discussions of the challenges facing the world today.<sup>83</sup> As conflict and instability grow, this value should not be underestimated.
42. Garrett has highlighted that while democratic states do not all share the same views, there are more options for democracies to work together within the multilateral system than apart.<sup>84</sup> With this in mind, he has argued that democratic countries should approach the multilateral table in a unified manner, even if in ad hoc fashion according to specific issues.<sup>85</sup> This approach to multilateral engagement could act as a counter to splits toward interest-based or regional groups, by enabling countries to come together whilst also adopting policy positions that are aligned with their individual interests.

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<sup>77</sup> FPC Publication: <https://fpc.org.uk/publications/reset-required-evaluating-the-media-freedom-coalition-after-its-first-two-years/>

<sup>78</sup> Oksana Antonenko for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/whither-g20-the-future-of-multilateralism-and-global-governance-reforms/>

<sup>79</sup> Enyseh Teimory for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/recommitting-the-uk-to-multilateralism-through-the-united-nations/>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Fred Carver for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. ; Minilateralism, Foreign Policy, 21 June 2009: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/21/minilateralism/>

<sup>83</sup> Thomas E. Garrett, in conversation with FPC in February 2024.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas E. Garrett, in conversation with FPC in February 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

43. Carver has also noted that, beyond political positioning at the UN, different states have found opportunities for cooperation on issues of mutual concern; agreement on the High Seas Treaty is evidence of this.<sup>86</sup> Cooperation can also develop around areas of shared self-interest. While some states, for example Russia and the UK, may not cooperate at the official level, Carver points to the shared position that they take to ensure that their power within the “process of appointing senior UN officials” is not jeopardised.<sup>87</sup>
44. Carver suggested caution for those who promote broad reform of the multilateral system in order to improve its effectiveness; instead highlighting the ways in which faith in the multilateral system could be improved by actively pursuing results that will in turn increase confidence.<sup>88</sup> He said “Doubtless the multilateral system is outdated, but I fear many of the attempts to change that structure amount to hoping that a different shaped cup will change the taste of the liquid. So, while many people including myself have made policy suggestions which would help to renew the multilateral system; I think political capital is better invested directly in attempting to achieve political outcomes than in pushing for structural changes, few of which thread the needle between cosmetic and impractical.”<sup>89</sup>
45. Building on the notion of practical political solutions, writing for the FPC, Garrett emphasised that to address the limits of multilateral organisations, democratic countries should “unite at every global decision-making forum, to work as a bloc across traditional regional groupings, offering the solutions that self-correcting representative political systems provide.”<sup>90</sup>
46. Dr Sundaram has argued that because threats to multilateralism can be a result of internal and external influences, the “multilateral principles in international politics” should be reconfigured.<sup>91</sup> He has put that external “threats to multilateralism arise from secretive bilateral agreements on trade and security, blocs, and (autocratic) coalitions of states for short-term interests.”<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile, internally, threats “arise from poor executive leadership...and the slowness of the legal and judicial instruments”.<sup>93</sup> This is significant because, as Dr Sundaram explained, it shows that “neither the executive nor the judiciary are helpful in saving multilateral principles, let alone redesigning them for our times.”<sup>94</sup> Therefore if there were to be reform of multilateralism, we should look much more closely at the role of, and cooperation between, national parliaments or assemblies.

## **Annex: Note on Expanding the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**

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<sup>86</sup> Fred Carver for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>; Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, United Nations Treaty Collection, 19 June 2023: [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XXI-10&chapter=21&clang=en#EndDec](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXI-10&chapter=21&clang=en#EndDec); High seas treaty: historic deal to protect international waters finally reached at UN, The Guardian, 5 March 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/mar/05/high-seas-treaty-agreement-to-protect-international-waters-finally-reached-at-un>

<sup>87</sup> Fred Carver for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>; P5 Frenemies, Blue Smoke, 19 July 2023: <https://bluesmoke.blog/2023/07/19/p5-frenemies/>

<sup>88</sup> Fred Carver for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas E. Garrett for FPC: <https://fpc.org.uk/multilateral-institutions-for-the-21st-century/>

<sup>91</sup> Dr Sasikumar Sundaram in conversation with FPC, February 2024.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Dr Sasikumar Sundaram in conversation with FPC, February 2024.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

47. Suggestions to reform the UNSC have been made since the first days of the UN.<sup>95</sup> The key proposals are the 2005 Annan plans; Plan A would involve 6 new permanent members and 3 new elected members, whereas Plan B would see 8 new members in a semi-permanent category operating on 4-year infinitely renewable terms, with 1 new elected member.<sup>96</sup>
48. Carver has argued that while much has been made recently about the UK advocating for Germany, Brazil, India, Japan and an African nation to be made permanent members of the Security Council, it should be noted however that this is a position that has been unchanged since 2008.<sup>97</sup> Renewed interest in the proposal is a result of indication by President Biden, in his 2022 UN General Assembly speech, that the US is willing to assess UNSC reform.<sup>98</sup>
49. Carver noted that reform of the UNSC is a vital moral issue for many countries in the Global South. He has written that it is important for the UK to “acknowledge the legitimate grievance the rest of the world has with regards to the makeup and power vested in the Security Council.”<sup>99</sup> Despite the UK’s support and possibility of US enthusiasm, Carver underlines that reform of the Security Council is a “total non-starter” as it would require the agreement of all five permanent Security Council members, with the US, Russia and China not having common ground with respect to anything other than the status quo.<sup>100</sup> He noted that the most credible recent proposal is from Liechtenstein.<sup>101</sup> While, in his view, it will still not be possible to deliver, the UK could “earn good will with the Global South” by voicing its support for the plan.<sup>102</sup> Carver shared that this decision “would not necessarily require abandoning the UK’s well established previous position on Security Council reform as it could take the form of welcoming the Liechtenstein proposal as an interim step towards an eventual change in the Security Council’s permanent membership”.<sup>103</sup> These points should be considered when examining the potential impact of the UK position and what may lie ahead.

*This submission was prepared by Alice Copland, FPC Policy and Parliamentary Affairs Manager, with support from FPC Director Susan Coughtrie. It was drafted with inputs from Craig Oliphant (FPC Senior Advisor, former head of the FCO’s Eastern Research Group and Senior Advisor of the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities), Anna Chernova (FPC Senior Research Fellow), Professor Stefan Wolff (FPC Senior Research Fellow and Professor of International Security at the University of Birmingham), Oksana Antonenko (member of the FPC Advisory Council and Visiting Fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at EUJ) as well as Enyseh Teimory (Head of Policy at United Nations Association-UK), Fred Carver (a Managing Director of Strategy for Humanity), Dr Sasikumar Sundaram (Lecturer at the Department of International Politics at City, University of London) and Thomas Garrett (Secretary General of the Community of Democracies). The views expressed in the submission are those of the authors as cited.*

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<sup>95</sup> Fred Carver in conversation with FPC, February 2024.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. ; With call for action, not more words, Annan outlines plan for radical UN reform, United Nations, UN News, 21 March 2005 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2005/03/132432>

<sup>97</sup> Fred Carver in conversation with FPC, February 2024 ; Joint UK-France Summit Declaration, Number10.gov.uk, 27 March 2008: <https://web.archive.org/web/20080909001137/http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page15144>

<sup>98</sup> Fred Carver in conversation with FPC, February 2024 ; Remarks by President Biden Before the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, White House, 21 September 2022: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/09/21/remarks-by-president-biden-before-the-77th-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly/>

<sup>99</sup> Renewing the UN system: Taking stock after 75 years, UNA-UK: [https://una.org.uk/sites/default/files/Final%20-%20Renewal%20of%20the%20UN%20system%20\\_2.pdf](https://una.org.uk/sites/default/files/Final%20-%20Renewal%20of%20the%20UN%20system%20_2.pdf)

<sup>100</sup> Fred Carver in conversation with FPC, February 2024

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. ; Tweet shared with FPC by Fred Carver, 24 January 2024: [https://twitter.com/maya\\_ungar/status/1750286277562224831](https://twitter.com/maya_ungar/status/1750286277562224831)

<sup>102</sup> Fred Carver in conversation with FPC, February 2024.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

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