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Like-Minded and Capable Democracies

A New Framework for Advancing a Liberal World Order

Ash Jain

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Introduction

In recent years, enhancing cooperation with major world powers has been an important U.S. policy objective. The consolidation of the Group of Twenty (G20) as the world's premier forum for the global economy reflects a common interest among its members in greater economic coordination. Although they differ on a substantial set of issues, from the role of the state to agricultural subsidies to currency valuation, major powers, including Russia, China, India, and others, have accepted a wide range of norms and practices relating to global trade and finance and have a significant stake in maintaining economic cooperation with the West.

When it comes to political and security challenges, however, the situation is qualitatively different. Russia and China are fundamentally opposed to the expansion of many of the liberal norms and principles long championed by the West. Though they have found areas in which to work together, these states often reject U.S.-led efforts to cooperate on issues related to expanding democracy, preventing violence against civilians, and influencing the behavior of outlier regimes. At the same time, with their traditions of nonalignment and continuing emphasis on the protection of national sovereignty, rising democracies—such as India, Brazil, and South Africa—remain ambivalent about supporting Western initiatives to advance these norms.

Given the diverging views of major world powers, achieving consensus at the United Nations (UN) and other inclusive institutions on important political and security challenges will be difficult. Instead, the United States will need to look to its like-minded partners for greater cooperation. The United States and its democratic allies in Europe and Asia share a common worldview and possess a preponderance of power that provide tremendous sources of leverage in the international system. But they are missing a crucial element for success: a collective institutional vehicle for strategic collaboration.

To fill this void, a new multilateral framework is required. In contrast to a concert of democracies or a global North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), such a framework, to be successful, would need to be limited to a small number of strategically like-minded and highly capable states. A new “Democracies 10,” or “D10,” that includes the United States and its major transatlantic and transpacific partners—the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan, Australia, and South Korea, as well as the European Union (EU)—could offer real potential. By enhancing strategic consultation, policy coordination, and joint crisis response across a range of global challenges, the D10 would constitute a powerful and compelling mechanism to advance a liberal international order.

The Future of Great Power Cooperation

With the rise of emerging powers, the future of multilateral cooperation has been subject to broad debate. Many analysts believe that increasing political and ideological diversity among major powers will make cooperation more difficult.¹ Others are more sanguine, envisioning a future in which emerging powers accept rather than contest the basic rules and principles of the liberal international order.² The most likely scenario may involve both sets of dynamics playing out simultaneously. Shared interests in expanding global trade and prosperity could incentivize cooperation on economic issues, while fundamentally differing conceptions of sovereignty, democracy, and legitimate state behavior are likely to undermine consensus on political and security issues.

POTENTIAL ECONOMIC CONVERGENCE

In the economic realm, the ideological divide that once characterized the international system no longer exists. Since the 1980s, Russia and China have consciously transitioned to market economies that rely on global trade for expanding economic growth. While both countries maintain a heavy-handed state role, they, along with India, Brazil, and other emerging powers, have accepted a wide range of norms and practices relating to trade liberalization, transparency, and dispute resolution that have been hallmarks of an open, liberal order.

By deciding to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), for example, Russia and China have committed to bring their trade practices into compliance with international standards. Russia's entry into accession talks with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and China's interest in joining a recently concluded international agreement on procurement standards reflects a further willingness to accept the requirements of an open and transparent economic order.³ At the same time, India, Brazil, and South Africa—also WTO members—have joined Russia and China in committing to safeguard the “rule-based multilateral trading system” and pledging to “resist all forms of trade protectionism and disguised restrictions on trade.”⁴

The consolidation of the G20 as the world's premier leaders' summit for the global economy reflects this common interest in greater economic coordination. Although major issues—from agricultural subsidies to financial regulation—remain unresolved, when faced with a financial crisis, the G20 was able to agree upon significant measures, including, for example, the establishment of the Financial Stability Board to strengthen and harmonize national banking regulation, as well as the adoption of new capital requirement rules for banks under Basel III.

No doubt, substantial policy differences among major powers continue to complicate efforts to forge agreements on a host of vexing issues. As Ian Bremmer, the author of *Every Nation for Itself: Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*, notes, conflicts over trade liberalization have pitted the United States, the European Union, China, Brazil, India, and other emerging powers against one another as each government looks to protect its own workers and industries. The United States and China re-

main at odds over freely floating currencies, agricultural subsidies, and the privatization of state industries, and a global agreement on climate change remains out of reach.

Still, given their dependence on international trade and investment, China, Russia, and other major powers have a vested interest in, and a strong incentive to sustain, the liberal economic order that has been in place since the end of World War II. Through continued engagement at the G20 and other inclusive institutions, meaningful economic cooperation among great powers—while uneven and complicated—may be within reach.

DEEPENING POLITICAL DIVERGENCE

The situation is qualitatively different when it comes to political and security cooperation, where major powers—particularly Russia and China—are at odds with the West over fundamental objectives relating to the expansion of a liberal international order. To be sure, neither Russia nor China is a revisionist power, and neither is seeking to undermine the Westphalian system of state sovereignty or reorganize global institutions in which they have privileged status. They have collaborated with Western powers to address threats emanating from nonstate actors, including terrorism, piracy, drugs, and organized crime, while supporting multilateral initiatives to secure loose nuclear materials and establish UN peacekeeping missions to mitigate conflicts in fragile states, particularly in Africa. Russia has also assisted at times with U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, recently allowing NATO, for example, to access a military base on its territory for resupply.

However, Russia and China remain fundamentally opposed to the expansion of many of the liberal norms and principles long championed by the West—particularly when they require involvement in the internal affairs of other states. Concerned about the legitimacy of their own autocratic regimes, Russia and China have sought to counter what they view as a U.S.-led effort to constrain their influence and reshape the global environment at their expense. These diverging perspectives are evident in at least four major policy areas: the expansion of democracy, the prevention of violence against civilians, the treatment of rogue regimes, and the establishment of “privileged” spheres of influence.

First, Russia and China have sought to frustrate U.S. attempts to expand democracy, particularly in countries ruled by anti-Western regimes. At the United Nations, for example, Russia and China jointly vetoed Security Council resolutions calling for democratic change in Myanmar and imposing sanctions against the government of Zimbabwe for orchestrating political violence.⁵ More recently, Russia and China voted against a UN General Assembly resolution to condemn North Korea and Iran for human rights violations.⁶ Russia has sought to reverse the democratic color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan by bolstering pro-Kremlin politicians, and has joined China in criticizing Western attempts to promote democracy from Syria to Belarus.⁷

Second, Russia and China have rejected Western efforts to intervene against governments perpetrating violence against their own civilians. Despite vague statements of support for the “responsibility to protect” doctrine, both countries have vociferously defended the sanctity of national sovereignty against any outside interference, even where governments are engaged in wide-scale violence against civilians.⁸ They threatened to veto U.S.-backed Security Council resolutions that would have authorized the use of force in Kosovo and imposed sanctions against Sudan for mass atrocities.⁹ More recently, after abstaining on a UN Security Council resolution authorizing all necessary means to protect civilians in Libya, Russia and China harshly condemned NATO’s military actions to help remove Muammar al-Qaddafi from power. And on Syria, the two countries have now vetoed three

successive UN Security Council resolutions that sought to condemn and impose sanctions against the Bashar al-Assad regime for atrocities against its people.

Third, Russia and China have opposed Western efforts to isolate outlier regimes that have violated accepted norms of international behavior. With regard to Iran and North Korea, for example, though they have supported UN Security Council resolutions to persuade the two countries to abandon their nuclear programs, Russia and China have continually sought to water down the scale and scope of economic and military sanctions.¹⁰ They have also insisted on maintaining and even expanding trade and economic ties.¹¹ After the 2010 North Korean artillery attack against South Korea, China refused to support a UN condemnation of Pyongyang. And while the United States and its allies have imposed arms embargoes and sanctions on other troublesome regimes, from Sudan to Zimbabwe to Venezuela, Russia and China have continued to supply them arms and worked to prevent their diplomatic and economic isolation.¹²

Finally, Russia and China diverge from Western powers in claiming the right to maintain what Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev has called “privileged” spheres of influence. Russia defended its 2008 military incursion in Georgia by insisting that geographic and historic interests provide special status there for Russia, and that the West has no right to interfere in matters affecting the country or any other states in Russia’s “near abroad.” Criticizing NATO as a “relic of the Cold War era,” Russian president Vladimir Putin has warned Georgia, Ukraine, and other former Soviet republics against joining the alliance.¹³ At the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Moscow now has veto power over the establishment of foreign military bases in member states, including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Similarly, China has made clear that it, too, has privileged status in its own neighborhood.¹⁴ It has long criticized U.S. political and military ties to Taiwan, and recently warned the United States against interfering in disputes with the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam over the resource-rich South China Sea, where Beijing claims “indisputable sovereignty.”¹⁵

CAUGHT IN BETWEEN

With Russia and China so often on a different page, the West has increasingly appealed to rising democracies—India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, Indonesia, and others—for support in expanding the norms of a liberal world order. But while they share some common values and objectives, these rising democracies have often been ambivalent about supporting Western-led actions to advance these objectives in the political and security realm, particularly when it requires using coercive diplomacy, economic sanctions or, especially, the use of force.

On democracy promotion, for example, rising democracies have often resisted Western efforts to isolate or pressure autocratic regimes. While it has pushed for the inclusion of democracy requirements at the Organization for American States, for instance, Brazil has abstained from supporting country-specific human rights resolutions at the United Nations.¹⁶ Likewise, India—though it is the second-largest contributor to the UN Democracy Fund—has often opposed sanctions against non-democracies and avoided taking a position on UN human rights resolutions.¹⁷ South Africa has been even more cautious about promoting democracy, voting against condemning Zimbabwe and Myanmar, for example, for human rights abuses at the UN Security Council.

Similarly, rising democracies have struggled on the issue of protecting civilians against violent atrocities. While broadly accepting the notion of a responsibility to protect, they have been reluctant

to support military intervention to prevent such violence. Regarding Libya, India, Brazil, and South Africa abstained at the UN Security Council on Resolution 1973 and later joined Russia and China in criticizing NATO's actions to bring down Qaddafi. More recently, though India and South Africa supported the latest U.S.-backed sanctions resolution against Syria, both have reiterated their strong opposition to any external intervention.¹⁸

Rising powers have also found it difficult to navigate when dealing with Iran and its nuclear program. They have joined the West in expressing concerns about Iran's nuclear activities, but have been hesitant to support its economic isolation and have expressed strong opposition to any potential military intervention. Though it voted against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), India has resisted U.S. pressure to curtail Iranian oil imports and has sought to expand rather than restrict trade links.¹⁹

Such hesitation to support Western-led initiatives reflects in part some real principled differences. Given their colonial legacies, rising democracies are deeply skeptical of international intervention, and often privilege national dignity, sovereign equality, and nondiscrimination over other concerns.²⁰ As reflected by their entrenched commitments to organizations like the Non Aligned Movement and the Group of Seventy-Seven (G77), these rising democracies continue to place a high priority on their traditions of nonalignment and noninterference.

Behind such normative resistance, however, lies a more calculated strategy of *realpolitik*. Rising democracies would prefer to maintain cooperative relationships not only with the West, but also with China, Russia, Iran, and other influential states, and are keen to avoid any actions that could jeopardize trade and economic relations with countries that supply important resources—especially in major sectors such as energy. Over time, efforts to integrate rising democracies into the West could lead to greater cooperation. But, for now, they appear inclined to “free ride on the contributions of established nations” and have demonstrated that they cannot be relied upon to support Western-led policy initiatives on important political and security concerns.²¹

The Like-Minded Alternative

Given the diverging views of major world powers, cooperation at the United Nations and other inclusive institutions on important global challenges will be difficult to achieve. Though such cooperation would be advantageous, its absence is not a prerequisite to effective multilateral action. By working closely with its long-standing allies—both European and Asian—the United States has demonstrated that it can act assertively across a range of issues, from promoting democracy and human rights to preventing terrorism and nuclear proliferation. These allies share a like-minded worldview and possess a preponderance of power that has given them tremendous leverage in advancing the norms of a liberal world order. But they are missing a crucial element for success: a collective institutional vehicle for strategic coordination.

SHARED VALUES AND INTERESTS

For more than sixty years, the United States and Europe have embraced a common worldview that has encouraged policy convergence on major strategic challenges. This worldview is built on shared concepts of universal human rights, the rule of law, market economics, and a values-based international order. The basic strategic preferences of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and other European allies are largely aligned with those of the United States—both “in terms of how they diagnose threats and challenges and how they believe they should be addressed.”²²

This shared outlook is reflected in European strategies and policies. Like the United States, the EU “believes that democracy and human rights are universal values that should be vigorously promoted around the world” and that all countries have a “shared responsibility to protect against genocide.”²³ The most recent U.S.-EU summit declaration outlines a common perspective on global challenges, expressing “deep concern” over Iran’s nuclear program, calling upon Syria “to end violence immediately” and looking to Ukraine to “make good on commitments to uphold democratic values and the rule of law.”²⁴ In the past two years, European powers have joined the United States in condemning North Korea for its recent nuclear test, imposing new oil sanctions against Iran, and deploying military force to bring down Qaddafi.

This shared worldview is not limited to Europe. Several countries in the Asia-Pacific—most notably Japan, Australia, and South Korea—have expressed a similar commitment to preserving a liberal international order. Australia—allied with the United States since World War II—has long been at the forefront of international efforts to advance democracy and prevent violence against civilians, as reflected most recently in its call on Syrian president Assad to step aside. As one of the largest troop contributors to Afghanistan, South Korea has also maintained a commitment to “promoting and protecting freedom, democracy, and human rights worldwide,” and Japan has consistently supported Western policies to contain North Korea and prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.²⁵

This legacy of cooperation has been tested at times—with Iraq perhaps serving as the most pointed example in recent years. Such major policy disagreements between the United States and its like-

minded allies, however, are relatively rare and tend to be narrower in scope than is the case with others. Although France and Germany opposed the U.S.-led military intervention to remove Saddam Hussein, their disagreement on Iraq did not relate to normative concerns as to whether Hussein should have been permitted to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD), or if Iraqi national sovereignty should have been considered inviolable. Rather, they focused on conflicting assessments of intelligence and capabilities—whether or not Iraq possessed WMD and whether the aftermath of an intervention could be successfully managed. By contrast, Russian and Chinese objections to U.S. intervention were based largely on differences over values—reflecting the two states’ firmly rooted opposition to the deployment of Western military power, concerns over regime change, and disregard for the promotion of democracy.

Moreover, a shared commitment to core values has allowed the like-minded to quickly move past their differences—ensuring that they did not spill over to other issues. Despite their differences over Iraq, Germany and France remained committed to ongoing military operations in Afghanistan and subsequently supported U.S. reconstruction and democracy-building efforts in Iraq. More recently, after parting with other Western powers on a UN Security Council resolution to impose a no-fly zone over Libya, Germany ultimately supported the ensuing NATO military operation there.

PREPONDERANCE OF POWER

In addition to shared values, the United States and its Western allies have maintained a preponderance of power in the international system. With all the focus on rising powers, one might overlook the fact that the United States remains the world’s leading economic power and is expected to remain so for another two decades. In combination with the EU, the transatlantic partnership has a combined GDP of \$33 trillion, and together provides nearly 80 percent of official developmental aid worldwide.²⁶ In the security realm, Western power is even more pronounced. The United States and its closest allies dwarf other major powers on defense spending, with more than six times the resources committed annually than Russia and China combined.²⁷

China continues to sustain its impressive economic growth, and Russia—with its nuclear and conventional capabilities—remains a formidable military power. But even as it deals with mounting fiscal challenges, no other country “will match the United States’ combination of wealth, size, technological capacity, and productivity in the foreseeable future.”²⁸ Furthermore, as scholar Joseph S. Nye Jr. puts it, “military power is largely unipolar, and the United States is likely to retain primacy for quite some time.”²⁹ And largely because of the power position the United States and West continue to occupy, there is little prospect that a counterbalancing coalition of states will emerge to challenge them anytime soon.³⁰

This military and economic superiority provides the United States and its like-minded allies with a tremendous source of leverage and freedom of action in addressing global challenges. With this preponderance of power, the West has demonstrated that when it comes together in a strategic and focused way, it can act effectively to advance liberal norms.

BUT NO INSTITUTIONAL VEHICLE

During the Cold War, the United States and its allies organized themselves to collectively address the most important challenges facing the liberal world order. Through the establishment of NATO, they

worked to unify and strengthen their military capabilities and coordinate political strategies to contain the Soviet Union and the expansion of communism. Later, the Group of Seven (G7), which was formed to promote economic cooperation among “advanced industrial democracies,” also served as a venue for joint consultation on political issues ranging from the threat of communists in Italy and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to the fall of the Berlin Wall.³¹ Both provided valuable platforms for like-minded coordination that ultimately helped the West prevail in its struggle against communism.

Today, the threats to a liberal world order are much more diffuse. They include outlier regimes seeking to acquire nuclear weapons; Islamic extremists attacking the West and western interests while forcing radical ideologies on their own people; dictators trampling on human rights and committing violent atrocities; and great power autocracies seeking to extend spheres of influence. Effective multilateral cooperation remains essential to addressing these challenges. Yet the like-minded lack a collective institutional entity through which they can collaborate in the face of these challenges.

Where does the United States turn, for example, to initiate a discussion among its closest European and Asian allies on promoting human rights in North Korea, addressing Russia’s crackdown on foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or maintaining an arms embargo on China? If these allies want to jointly analyze options to stop the violence in Syria or prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, through what mechanism should they engage? With the Security Council so often ineffectual, the United States has struggled to find an alternative venue to coordinate with its like-minded partners on important political and security challenges, sometimes looking to NATO or the Group of Eight (G8), and other times forming new ad hoc coalitions or contact groups. But none of these venues are appropriately situated to play an effective role.

As a “unique community of values,” NATO has long served to promote cooperation among allies. Its New Strategic Concept has expanded its scope to encompass threats related to weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, piracy, and cyberattacks.³² But the alliance lacks the ability to serve as a broader venue for like-minded coordination. Its mandate remains limited to defense and security cooperation, whereas current threats and challenges often require a wider set of coordinated foreign policy actions, including those related to sanctions, foreign assistance, and public diplomacy. At the same time, other important political challenges, such as the promotion of democracy, human rights, and transnational justice, remain largely outside of NATO’s purview. And despite outreach to new global partners, including those in Asia, NATO remains a regional organization whose formal membership is limited to countries in Europe and North America, and whose activities beyond the European continent continue to be seen “as more the exception than the rule.”³³

The G8 has also sought to remain relevant as a forum for consultation among mostly like-minded states.³⁴ Over the years, the G8 has taken on a broad array of security issues, including nuclear safety, illicit finance, drug trafficking, and most recently food security. Through the Deauville partnership, it has also launched assistance programs to support political transitions in the Middle East. But the presence of Russia has rendered the G8 ineffective as a forum for consultation on the most critical foreign policy challenges—including Iran, Syria, and North Korea—as well as on issues related to Russia itself. Given Russia’s divergent views, the G8 cannot be expected to serve as a meaningful venue for collaboration on such challenges.

Other multilateral venues have promoted cooperation between the United States and its allies. The U.S.-EU summit, the permanent three (P3) contact group at the UN Security Council (the United States, the United Kingdom, and France), and, occasionally, the Quad (with the addition of Germany), for example, serve to align policy positions and amplify U.S. engagement with Europe. The

U.S.-Japan-Australia trilateral, the U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral, the Australia-U.S. ministerial consultations, and other bilateral dialogues facilitate ongoing consultation with Asia-Pacific allies. But while useful, such regional venues lack the ability to promote broader synergies among allies that a more inclusive venue would provide.

With few other options, the United States has relied increasingly on ad hoc coalitions and contact groups. The Proliferation Security Initiative, the Friends of Syria, and the working group on Iran sanctions, for example, provide mechanisms to facilitate cooperation among groups of states that are like-minded on particular issues.³⁵ But although they offer flexibility and a narrowly tailored approach, ad hoc coalitions tends to encourage tactical cooperation on isolated issues, rather than strategic assessment and coordination across a range of policy challenges. Such coalitions also require a greater commitment of effort and diplomatic resources to sustain.

Forging a New “D10”

With UN and other inclusive institutions often stalemated, and existing mechanisms for consultation with the like-minded regionally oriented, tactically focused, or too broadly constituted, the United States and its allies lack an effective venue to collectively address today’s challenges. To fill this void, a new strategic framework is required—one that brings together America’s closest allies in a standing entity focused on advancing the norms and principles of a liberal world order.

LIKE-MINDED AND HIGHLY CAPABLE

Which states would be included in such an entity? Two criteria should guide participation. The first is strategic like-mindedness—that is, states that share a common worldview, not only in terms of how they perceive current threats and challenges, but also in their commitment to shared values—democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—and to preserving and advancing a liberal world order. The second is a demonstrated capacity to act on an international scale. This would focus on states that have the economic and military assets, soft power resources, and diplomatic influence that provide them with the capability to act in addressing threats to global security and promoting international norms.

Applying these criteria, the forum proposed here would encompass America’s closest transatlantic and transpacific strategic partners. From Europe, such a group could include the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy. From the Asia-Pacific region, it could include Japan, Australia, and South Korea, and from North America, Canada and the United States. With the addition of the EU, the resulting D10 would bring together a powerful and compelling group of like-minded states that account for more than 60 percent of global GDP and more than three-fourths of the world’s military expenditures.³⁶

While other states, particularly in Europe, might arguably meet these criteria, such a framework would need to be narrowly constituted in order to maximize its effectiveness. The larger the group, the more formal its proceedings and the more difficult and time consuming it could become to forge consensus. The inclusion of the EU provides a way to bring in other capable European states while keeping the size of the group small. The ten participants proposed here would represent a geographically diverse group of like-minded partners that are all members of the G20 and play an influential role on global issues.

ADVANCING A LIBERAL WORLD ORDER

What would the D10 do? To succeed, such a framework must have a clearly defined purpose that reflects the commitment of participating states. The D10’s primary mission—indeed, its *raison d’être*—would be to promote strategic cooperation on global political and security issues and ad-

vance the norms and values of a liberal international order. In pursuit of these objectives, the D10 would serve three primary functions: strategic consultation, policy coordination, and crisis response.

Strategic consultation. First, the D10 would offer a standing framework for consultation at the strategic level, allowing the like-minded to collaborate on analyzing global challenges and defining strategies for advancing a rule-based international order—countering terrorism, preventing nuclear proliferation, promoting democracy and human rights, protecting civilians against state violence, and defending the global commons. The D10 could focus on production of a joint security strategy setting forth a consensus view on strategic priorities and longer-term objectives—outlining ways the like-minded can better align resources, allocate responsibilities, and address gaps in capabilities in order to achieve these objectives.

Among the range of challenges that could benefit from such collective analysis are China’s activities in the South China Sea, and more broadly its role as a rising global power; the future of political Islam in the wake of the Arab Spring, the promotion of democracy in an increasingly difficult Russia, and the protection of Internet freedom.

Policy coordination. The D10’s second function would be to facilitate policy coordination on specific political and security challenges. Among trusted allies, participants could share relevant intelligence and sensitive information, discuss the merits of various policy options, and, work to coordinate diplomatic actions on such challenges. The D10 could also serve as a core group for broader ad hoc coalitions of like-minded states (e.g., Friends of Syria) and a platform to quietly align positions and shape agendas in other multilateral venues, such as the UN, the Six Party Talks on North Korea, and the P5+1 talks on Iran.

On Iran, for example, the D10 could coordinate efforts not only with regard to economic sanctions, but also serve to integrate the often stovepiped elements related to broader policy objectives, such as countering Iran’s support for terrorism and promoting democratic reform. The framework could also help improve policy coordination on issues such as supporting the Syrian opposition, encouraging political reform in Myanmar, providing foreign assistance for Pakistan and Egypt, and maintaining an arms embargo on China.

Crisis response. Finally, the D10 could provide a venue to formulate collective responses to future political or security crises. In the wake of a new North Korean provocation in East Asia or an Iranian escalation against Western interests in the Persian Gulf, for example, the like-minded could come together through this venue to forge a rapid and unified response to address such a crisis. Similarly, the D10 could help coordinate efforts to address natural disasters and other humanitarian catastrophes—jointly deploying civilian and military assets while reaching out to include other willing states where possible.

Where the use of force may be required, the D10 could be of particular value. If the United States and its allies find it necessary to intervene militarily in a future conflict—Syria, for instance—but cannot obtain Security Council authorization, it could work through the D10 as an alternative venue for joint action. Though it would not carry the same legal or political weight as a Security Council action, a decision by a multilateral body made up of established democratic powers would provide at least some greater sense of perceived legitimacy. Any decision to use force could then be implemented through NATO or a separately formed coalition of the willing.

The D10’s effectiveness across these functions will rest on its ability to reach agreement on shared strategies and policies. Though even the like-minded will not always see eye to eye, given their shared worldviews and history of cooperation, they are liable to come together on at least some meaningful

set of issues and would benefit from working through a common framework. Moreover, the very existence of a standing forum for like-minded consultation could help limit the scope and frequency of such disagreements by facilitating deeper exploration of differences and encouraging compromise for the sake of unity.

Together, this narrowly constituted group of democracies would provide a robust mechanism for cooperation on global political and security challenges. The shared worldviews among like-minded powers could translate into more strategic and cohesive policy actions, better coordinated and effective sanctions, and potentially greater legitimacy in pursuing the use of force when necessary. It could also promote synergies across various policy issues and provide a platform to better leverage the influence and capabilities of the United States' closest allies.³⁷

BUILDING ON PREVIOUS CONSTRUCTS

Recognizing the need for new institutions to address current challenges, other frameworks to expand cooperation among democracies have been proposed in recent years. The D10 shares common elements with two notable proposals—a concert of democracies and a global NATO.³⁸

A “concert” or “league” of democracies—a construct that had garnered the support of several future Obama administration officials, as well as Republican senator John McCain—would bring together the world’s democratic states into a single institution.³⁹ Like the D10, such a venue would enhance cooperation and promote democratic values. However, given that many rising democracies are not yet prepared to side with the West in such a visible manner, such a concert faces real obstacles—at least in the short term.⁴⁰ The D10 would not preclude formation of a concert of democracies, and could in fact serve as a building block toward it. Over time, as states like Brazil, India, Turkey, and South Africa become more like-minded and capable, they could be invited to join an expanded D10 framework that might eventually resemble something closer to a true concert of democracies. But in the meantime, the D10 would reach out to rising democracies to promote cooperation on specific areas of shared concern.

The D10 also has much in common with proposals for a “global NATO.” Such proposals have called for expanding NATO to include other major democratic allies such as Australia and Japan, or even to “any democratic state willing and able to contribute” to an alliance whose mission would encompass global challenges.⁴¹ Given the desire by many in Europe to keep NATO primarily focused on transatlantic security cooperation, however, the prospects for a global NATO are uncertain. Still, as NATO continues to expand its global partnerships and takes on a broader array of international challenges, the D10 could provide a useful leadership role—serving in effect as a steering committee to help define alliance priorities and actions.

Table 1. World's Leading Economic Powers (ranked by GDP)

Country	Rank/GDP	
United States	1	\$15.1 trillion
China	2	7.2 trillion
Japan	3	5.9 trillion
Germany	4	3.6 trillion
France	5	2.8 trillion
Brazil	6	2.5 trillion
United Kingdom	7	2.4 trillion
Italy	8	2.2 trillion
Russia	9	1.9 trillion
Canada	10	1.7 trillion
India	11	1.7 trillion
Spain	12	1.5 trillion
Australia	13	1.5 trillion
Mexico	14	1.5 trillion
South Korea	15	1.1 trillion
EU Aggregate	–	17.5 trillion

Source: IMF (2011)⁴³.

Table 2. World's Leading Military Powers (ranked by military expenditure)

Country	Rank/Expenditure	
United States	1	\$711 billion
China	2	129 billion
Russia	3	72 billion
United Kingdom	4	63 billion
France	5	63 billion
Japan	6	59 billion
Saudi Arabia	7	48 billion
India	8	47 billion
Germany	9	47 billion
Brazil	10	35 billion
Italy	11	35 billion
South Korea	12	31 billion
Australia	13	27 billion
Canada	14	25 billion
Turkey	15	18 billion
EU Aggregate	–	281 billion

Source: SIPRI (2011)⁴².

Table 3. The D10: Like-Minded and Highly Capable Democracies

Country	Military Expenditure Rank	GDP Rank
United States	1	1
United Kingdom	4	7
France	5	5
Japan	6	3
Germany	9	4
Italy	11	8
South Korea	12	15
Australia	13	13
Canada	14	10
European Union	–	–

Source: IMF (2011), SIPRI (2011).

Potential Drawbacks

A new forum to promote cooperation among like-minded democracies offers real potential. But there are legitimate concerns about such a framework that require careful consideration.

THE WEST VERSUS THE REST

Among the most compelling concerns about establishing a new forum of like-minded allies is that even if it succeeds in enhancing cooperation among them, it may come at the cost of encouraging a “West versus the Rest” dynamic that could exacerbate current tensions and further polarize the international community. If perceived as an effort to marginalize Russia or China, such a forum could further inhibit cooperation with these states and make consensus through multilateral institutions even more difficult to achieve. Similarly, if taken as a repudiation of Western efforts to deepen engagement with rising democracies, it could push these democracies to collaborate more closely with Russia and China—eventually leading to the formation of a divisive new anti-Western bloc.⁴⁴

With so much invested in recent years in encouraging emerging powers to become responsible stakeholders, such concerns must be seriously considered. However, by taking steps to reassure other major powers that the D10 is not intended to shift away from continued engagement with them, these outcomes can be avoided. The establishment of the G20 has provided greater political space to pursue such a framework. The United States and its allies would need to continue to highlight the importance of the G20 and the UN Security Council as venues for great power cooperation while calling attention to the recently expanded high-level bilateral strategic dialogues with China, India, Brazil, and other emerging powers. Such measures could go a long way in guarding against perceptions that the West is attempting to revive a new Cold War–like dynamic in the international system.

Given the existing plurality of multilateral venues, some in which they participate and some in which they do not, it seems unlikely in any case that Russia, China, or other major powers would be surprised by—or overly concerned with—a new forum where a group of like-minded states might gather to consult from time to time. As political theorist Francis Fukuyama has noted, we are now in an era of multi-multilateralism, and there is already a vast array of overlapping forums for multilateral engagement—both among and between major powers.⁴⁵ Russia engages with the West at the G8 and NATO-Russian Council, while pursuing anti-Western positions at the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Rising democracies engage with the West at the G20 and Major Economies Forum, engage separately with Russia and China at the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) summits, and caucus among themselves through IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) meetings and the G77. Aware that the United States already coordinates with its closest allies through a variety of other venues, other major powers are unlikely to be fazed by the addition of another consultative framework among the like-minded.

Moreover, even if it were to raise the ire of Moscow or Beijing, it is doubtful that a new D10 would alter the dynamic of their relationships with the West in any meaningful way. Though they share a desire to prevent the expansion of many Western norms, neither power is eager to allow disagreements on political and security issues to spill over into new trade or economic disputes or lead toward any kind of direct or indirect military confrontation. Nor are Russia and China likely to curtail cooperation with the West on other issues that they deem important to their interests (e.g., piracy or counterterrorism) simply because the West has now added a new venue for consultation.

Russia and China are also likely to find it difficult to forge a more hard-edged anti-Western bloc.⁴⁶ Engaged in their own rivalry for geopolitical influence, the two powers “lack a long-term vision of the world” that could facilitate coalescence around a more unified effort in this regard. China has resisted Russia’s attempts, for example, to build the SCO into a quasi-military alliance that could counter NATO, seeing it instead as primarily a vehicle for expanding Chinese economic interests.⁴⁷ At the same time, rising democracies—eager to maintain their balanced diplomatic approach and cooperative relationships with all major powers—will be reluctant to bandwagon against the West in any new political bloc. The BRICS summits, for example, while highlighting statements of shared concerns in protecting sovereignty and noninterference, have been unable to translate these concerns into any common policy framework to address major challenges, such as Iran or Syria.

LACKING LEGITIMACY

Another concern is that by limiting its membership to such a small group of allies, the D10 will be perceived as lacking the legitimacy that other, more inclusive venues enjoy. It lacks the procedural legitimacy of the UN Security Council, which was established by a universally binding treaty that incorporates a mutually agreed-upon framework for rotating membership. It lacks the inclusive legitimacy of the G20, which establishes a geographically and economically diverse concert of great powers—North and South, East and West. It lacks even the more limited legitimacy of a proposed concert of democracies, which would at least be open to democratic states across the globe—large and small, established and rising, rich and poor.

The legitimacy of international institutions, however, is a fluid and multifaceted concept that does not depend solely on inclusiveness. Entities that have a logical rationale for membership—as the G20 does, for example, by bringing together states relevant and essential to achieve their purpose—have garnered sufficient acceptance to be perceived as legitimate actors within the scope of their mission. More important, entities that demonstrate effectiveness are more likely to be perceived as legitimate. NATO’s legitimacy to act in Afghanistan or Libya, for example, was based in large part on its proven capabilities and reputation for effective military intervention. The D10 has a logical basis for participation—highly capable states who share a similar perspective on advancing the norms of a liberal world order—and concerns over its legitimacy are likely to fade as soon as it proves capable of effectively advancing its mission.

WOULD ALLIES BE INTERESTED?

Another important question is whether a new framework restricted to a small group of like-minded states would appeal to those the United States seeks to involve. As suggested by their less-than-enthusiastic reaction to a proposed concert of democracies, some allies may prefer to work within

institutions that are more inclusive and focused on cooperation with emerging powers.⁴⁸ Others, particularly in Europe, might be wary of joining a U.S.-led framework that could lead to increased pressure on them to expand financial or military commitments overseas, or that could result in their influence vis-à-vis the United States being diminished.

The D10, however, would serve the interests of allies in ways that would likely outweigh these concerns. With some allies uneasy about a U.S. pivot to Asia and a strategy of engagement that often appears to prioritize relations with China and other major powers, such a framework could help reenergize the transatlantic strategic partnership by ensuring that Europe remains central to the management of the global system over the years ahead.⁴⁹ At the same time, it would bring Europe to the forefront of discussions on challenges related to China, North Korea, and Asia more broadly, while providing new opportunities for engagement with influential partners in the Asia-Pacific.

Similarly, the D10 could help enhance the global influence of Asia-Pacific allies and provide them with a platform to strategically engage on issues that have traditionally been the purview of the transatlantic alliance, including for example, challenges relating to Russia, Iran, and the Middle East. More broadly, it would provide allies in both Europe and Asia a valuable new conduit for consultation with the United States and a predictable opportunity to influence U.S. strategic decision-making at the front end—potentially steering Washington to act in ways more compatible with their own interests and those of a liberal international system that they support.

CONSTRAINING U.S. POWER

Another issue that may be of concern to some U.S. policymakers is that by creating an expectation of consensus among allies, the D10 could end up constraining U.S. freedom of action. Relatedly, such a framework might be taken as an attempt by the United States to shift the burden of responsibility for addressing international challenges to its allies. Given the manner in which the D10 would operate, however, such outcomes are unlikely to result.

The D10 would not entail any new mutually binding commitments—it would simply be a consultative forum—and participants would remain free to act unilaterally in pursuit of their interests when necessary, just as they could while working simultaneously through the G8 or NATO. Moreover, a new framework for like-minded consultation cannot be effective if it is used as a mechanism to try to shift the burdens of leadership to its allies. The United States remains the “indispensable power” and, as demonstrated most recently by the crises in Libya and Syria, effective coordination to address strategic challenges through multilateral venues such as the D10 will continue to depend on proactive American leadership.

Laying the Foundation: The Strategic Policy Planning Dialogue

What steps would be necessary to bring a new D10 to fruition? A recent initiative led by the United States and Canada that brought together a select group of like-minded democratic allies could serve as a foundation for the proposed framework. To move forward, the United States and its allies would need to raise the level of participation, clearly articulate its purpose and mission, and institutionalize consultation across diplomatic channels.

A FEASIBLE MODEL

In 2008, policy planning directors from a group of nine like-minded democratic states gathered in Toronto to launch a unique series of official dialogues on global security challenges. Participating nations were selected on the basis of shared values, a common strategic outlook, and a demonstrated capacity to act in the realm of security. Not coincidentally, the nine participating states included those proposed for the D10 (minus the EU): Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Subsequent meetings of the Strategic Policy Planning Dialogue (SPPD) took place annually in Washington and Seoul, providing an opportunity for policy planning directors to meet and discuss a range of long-term strategic challenges, from Afghanistan and North Korea to the security implications of climate change and the role of Russia and China in the international order.

The successful establishment of this framework and its continuity from the Bush administration into the Obama administration demonstrates that it is feasible—even with today’s emphasis on greater cooperation with emerging powers—to launch a new mechanism for coordination among traditional allies. Given their shared strategic outlook, participants were able to engage in open and fruitful discussions on policy issues in ways that would not have been possible with the presence of other major powers. While some allies were more enthusiastic than others about the construct, once a decision was made to proceed, all nine chose to participate.

The launching of the SPPD suggests several important considerations. First, to serve as an effective venue for strategic collaboration, such a framework must be reinforced at more senior levels and integrated across policymaking channels. Some participants felt that a dialogue limited to policy planning directors lent itself to a more academic exchange of views and little opportunity for operationalizing policy recommendations. Second, the ability to sustain such a framework and produce successful outcomes will greatly depend on U.S. leadership. Allies were looking to the United States to assume a coordinating role and provide overall strategic direction to make the meetings worthwhile. Finally, any new forum for consultation among the like-minded must have a clearly defined purpose and mission.

MOVING FORWARD

With the SPPD as a foundation, establishing the D10 as a sustained and meaningful framework will require moving forward in three potentially overlapping phases. The first phase would involve convening senior-level participants—most effectively, foreign ministers—to articulate and endorse the purpose and mission of the new D10. Such a meeting could be organized without great fanfare—perhaps on the margins of a future gathering, such as a NATO foreign ministers’ meeting or the opening session of the UN General Assembly—but would serve to launch the D10 as an official framework for diplomatic coordination.

The second phase would focus on collaboration at the strategic level. A meeting of D10 foreign ministers and/or national security advisers, perhaps jointly with policy planning directors, could focus on setting strategic goals and preparing a new joint security strategy. Subsequent D10 strategic planning meetings could be scheduled at regular intervals to assess these goals and update recommendations on allocating resources to address new challenges.

In the third phase, to enhance policy coordination on specific issues, the United States and its partners would convene meetings of the D10 across a wide range of diplomatic platforms. For example, the D10 political directors could meet to discuss the challenges in Syria and/or Iran, or D10 advisers on Afghanistan and Pakistan could meet to discuss the challenges relating to the war in Afghanistan. Such meetings could be scheduled to ensure that their outcomes are able to feed into the interagency decision-making channels in each member country. Prior to consideration of an issue at a National Security Council principals’ or deputies’ committee meeting, for example, a D10 meeting could be held to facilitate consultation and elicit the views of allies—before actual decisions are made.

The D10 would not require a secretariat, a permanent staff, or an actual physical location. Instead, like the G8 and G20, states could rotate hosting meetings. Moreover, while summit meetings of D10 leaders could be scheduled from time to time if deemed useful, such meetings would not be essential to the success of this framework. The goal would be to avoid an emphasis on high-publicity leaders’ summits and joint communiqués, focusing instead on facilitating behind-the-scenes strategic and policy coordination across diplomatic channels, with foreign ministers providing overall guidance and direction.

A Holistic Strategy for Engagement

When Canadian prime minister Paul Martin proposed the idea of a G20 leaders' summit, he made clear that a mechanism for great power cooperation should not come at the expense of coordination in other venues. Rather, he suggested that "traditional alliances and clubs still make a lot of sense in the areas where their reach matches their ambitions."⁵⁰ While it may seem anachronistic to refocus on engagement with long-standing allies, it is an approach grounded in the reality of today's world—a world that may end up converging around a set of global economic norms, but one that remains stridently divided on many political and security issues that are at the core of a liberal world order.

A new D10 would constitute an integral part of a holistic strategy for U.S. engagement with other major powers. The United States would continue to cooperate with major powers to expand economic coordination at the G20. It would continue to engage with Russia and China at the UN Security Council to seek cooperation on issues of common concern. It would seek to strengthen ties with rising democracies and encourage their strategic orientation toward the West. But it would add a new framework aimed at deepening strategic cooperation with like-minded allies to advance the norms and principles of a liberal international system.

The D10 is of course not a panacea. Despite their shared worldviews, its participants will not always agree. Although they maintain a preponderance of power in the international system, there are limits to the capabilities of D10 members, and influencing the outcomes of many issues may be beyond their collective reach. Its effectiveness will largely depend on the willingness and ability of the United States to maintain a robust global leadership role. Nevertheless, by providing a platform for strategic consultation, policy coordination, and joint crisis response, the D10 can fill the current institutional vacuum and provide a powerful complement to the G20—allowing the United States and its like-minded allies to best organize for the challenges of today's world.

Endnotes

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About the Author

Ash Jain, a former member of the State Department’s policy planning staff, is a nonresident fellow with the German Marshall Fund of the United States and a consultant with the Eurasia Group. He is also serving as executive director for the Project for a United and Strong America—a task force of bipartisan foreign policy experts outlining a blueprint for a new national security strategy. Jain previously served as a visiting fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, an adviser with the White House Office of Global Communications, and counsel with the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs. His published articles and commentary have appeared in various news outlets, including the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Hill*, Fox News, BBC, Canadian Broadcasting, Australian Broadcasting, and FRANCE 24. Jain has a BA in political science from the University of Michigan and a JD/MS in foreign service from Georgetown University.