

# Foreword

Speaking before the forty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 21, 1987, Ronald Reagan put forth his vision of the world's future, laying out what he characterized as his "fantasy": "In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all the members of humanity...I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world." Although the international scene has changed markedly since Reagan made this remark, he expresses a simple truth about the human condition: man is often so focused on his own self-interests he forgets mankind's common interests. This truth informs the core of this illuminating volume, *Beyond the National Interest: The Future of UN Peacekeeping and Multilateralism in an Era of U.S. Primacy*.

Author and scholar Jean-Marc Coicaud broadly examines a singularly pressing question about the state of global affairs that is inextricably connected to this truth: what happened to international peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions? More specifically, how does one explain the continued adherence to narrow national interests among democratic countries in the face of compelling needs to intervene in and manage the profusion of international crises? Such questions are particularly vexing today when considering the growing number of conflicts and looming humanitarian disasters around the world. Although local communities and strong nations shape a response to a domestic crisis—based on bonds emanating from civil society, governmental agencies, and a common sense of identity—the international community's bonds are far more tenuous. Indeed, the established democracies of the West have found it difficult to live up to a central tenet of modern democratic culture: the extension and promotion of progress and human rights through internationalism and moral activism.

Coicaud provides a robust exploration of these and related issues, offering original and keen insights into the limitations of the United Nations as a peacekeeping organization and the mixed results of the West's peacekeeping activities in the immediate post–Cold War period. He states, for example, that the multilateralism witnessed during this period, such as in the form of UN and NATO peacekeeping operations, was *à la carte* and selective. This multilateralism was based more often on the national interests of Security Council members than on any real sense of internationalism or moral activism.

Perhaps the volume's most significant and relevant findings lie in response to the prescriptive question he asks in its concluding chapter: how can the international community enhance its sense of solidarity and responsibility—and amplify the international rule of law—so that early and effective multilateral peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions might be encouraged in the future? In response to this question, Coicaud makes a number of highly informed recommendations, many of which relate directly to the United States. As he argues, “The difficulty for U.S. multilateral relations is that the superpower status of America generates a disequilibrium that encourages the United States to focus on national interest at the expense of the socially principled dimension of multilateralism.” With this understanding—and with the understanding that morality has never trumped the national interest as the animating force of any Western democracy's foreign policy—he appeals for a reframing and reformulating of the U.S. national interest to make it more inclusive.

While such an appeal may have the veneer of utopianism, it is an imminently pragmatic one that should resonate with realists and liberal institutionalists. After all, when accounting for the world's new threats and challenges—the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the growing spread of deadly pathogens, and the rising number of virulent societies—the United States has a vested national interest in the internal affairs of most every country, however remote from its borders or traditional spheres of influence. These factors provide ample motivation for the development of positive international bonds. Indeed, given the many troubled societies around the globe, the United States' response to them in concert with other Western countries would go beyond a sense of noblesse oblige to a recognition of national interest. Its effort to right these societies would be an effort to protect itself—the defining element of all national interests—in an increasingly globalized and dangerous world.

With its unsparing account of UN Security Council decision making in multilateral peace operations and its astute lessons and recommenda-

tions for projecting international solidarity and responsibility, *Beyond the National Interest* will be read and debated by students, scholars, and policy-makers alike. Recent USIP volumes that explore related themes include Michael J. Matheson's *Council Unbound: The Growth of UN Decision Making on Conflict and Postconflict Issues after the Cold War*, Teresa Whitfield's *Friends Indeed? The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict*, and the Institute's congressionally mandated United Nations Task Force report, *American Interests and UN Reform*. As *Beyond the National Interest* and these volumes attest, today the greatest hope for moral leadership and multilateral action in the international realm—that is, for uniting all of humanity behind a shared conception of global interest, as Reagan's "fantasy" would have it—resides with the democratic power of the United States and with the world's broader community of democracies.

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