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978-0-521-13865-9 - International Cooperation: The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism

Edited by I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval

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1 Introduction: return to the theories of cooperation

I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval

Cooperation among states is much more common than war. Yet there is much less conceptualization about cooperation than there is about the causes of and behavior in war, and the study of international cooperation – attempts to understand the phenomenon – has produced much debate. “Conflict seems very natural, and it is easy to understand, . . . Cooperation, however, appears as a phenomenon that requires subtle explanations” (Hammerstein 2003, pp. 1–2).

Cooperation is defined here as a situation where parties agree to work together to produce new gains for each of the participants unavailable to them by unilateral action, at some cost. Its constituent elements are working together, agreement to do so (not just coincidence), cost, and new gains for all parties. (This definition is not too far from, but a bit more specific than, *Webster's*: “an association of parties for their common benefit; collective action in pursuit of common well-being.” Cf. Smith 2003; Clements and Stephens 1995; Dugatkin 1997). By “gains” we mean not only material gains, but also perception of progress toward goals, such as improved security, status, or freedom of action for oneself and the imposition of constraints on other actors, and so on. Thus, cooperation is used here to mean more than simply the opposite or absence of conflict, as some binary codings indicate. It is a conscious, specific, positive action.

Some definitions require that at least one party in the cooperating group be worse off, at least in the short run, by cooperating than by not cooperating (Bowles and Gintis 2003; Richerson et al. 2003), but this definition is illogical. The party in question would only cooperate if its calculations are other than material and/or short run; it must get either (non-material) satisfaction or long-run gains of some sort to make cooperation worthwhile. The opposite of this condition of cost without gain is the free-rider problem of gain without cost. But this in its turn depends on the establishment of cooperation by those who both pay and gain.

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But differences in the use of the term in reference to the dynamics of cooperation and its reflection in multilateralism still abound, and are reflected in some of the following chapters. Both terms – “cooperation” and “multilateral” – carry pairs of meanings in popular usage, developing different implications from different meanings. They raise new questions and suggest areas for further inquiry.

Cooperation sometimes refers to actors’ strategy aimed at resolving particular issues, and sometimes to a pattern of interactions – in other words, to a relationship, as explored in the chapters by Doran and Hampson. The first, resolving specific issues, can take place between states that are antagonistic, even hostile to each other. Like the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War or Israel and Hizbollah in their prisoner exchange, antagonists, even enemies, cooperate on occasions to resolve specific concerns, without addressing the broader conflict – in other words, to manage but not to resolve their conflict (George, Farley, and Dallin 1988; Kanet and Kolodziej 1991). Descriptions of strategies available to competing players in various game theory models often use the term “cooperation” in the same sense of agreement to resolve particular issues.

The second meaning of the term, describing a relationship, refers not only to specific interactions but also implies a desire on the part of the actors to maintain and foster those interactions through joint problem solving. It also implies a certain basic empathy between them, and a mutual sense that each party’s well-being depends on the well-being of the other. It does not preclude occasional conflict, or competition between the parties. But it presupposes a security community, where a resort to violence and war is unthinkable (e.g. United States–Britain, United States–Canada, the European Union, NATO).

“Multilateral,” too, has two forms, developed in the following chapters. One is the noun, “multilateralism”, in the sense of a diplomatic strategy employed by states in order to coordinate policy among three or more actors or cooperation in its second meaning (Ruggie 1993). It is sometimes described as a pattern of behavior that contributes to world peace, and therefore is intrinsically moral. The other, “multilateral” as an adjective, without the “ism”, is often used to refer to an ad hoc tactic (or strategy) adopted by a state or group of states in pursuit of a defined objective, in the first definition of cooperation. Such a strategy may be aimed at resolving or reducing conflict among the participating parties, but it may also be used to compete against others who are excluded from the group, to put pressure on them, even to fight them.

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Multilateralism as a foreign policy principle has been attributed by Ruggie and Ikenberry to the United States in certain historical periods, primarily the latter half of the twentieth century, as discussed in the Larson and Shevchenko chapter. The other, a multilateral strategy, has been attributed to coalitions, such as military alliances and trade blocs, and to great power concerts, as discussed in the chapter by Zartman. The first is inclusive, and tends toward universal membership; the second is exclusive. It is sometimes called “minilateralism,” “plurilateralism,” or “bilateralism” – a strategy of coordinating with single or small numbers of partners, through separate arrangements with each of them, as Touval notes. Since multilateral strategies are exclusive, they can have contradictory purposes – multilateral cooperation to act and multilateral cooperation to block action. Hampson and Doran in their chapters refer to further variations in the meaning of the term.

Such different meanings attached to terms can hinder communication and hamper effective research. Mere recognition that terms can mean different things is a step forward. Rather than invent new terms, the following discussion will explore differences while trying to keep the different uses and their implications explicit.

Conflict and cooperation

While there is conflict without cooperation, it appears that there is no cooperation without conflict. Cooperation is dependent on these being conflict to overcome. Indeed, attempts at cooperation may create conflict (to be overcome), since the parties' attempt to work together brings out differing interests to be tailored to fit – the costs of cooperation. By “conflict” we do not mean war or violence, but rather perceptions of incompatibilities. Cooperating nations generally perceive both common and conflicting interests. They may thus disagree about some of their goals, their respective contributions, the burdens they carry, and the benefits they derive in the common enterprise. This produces a rich field for inquiry on why states cooperate, how they arrive at cooperation, how they practice cooperation, and how cooperation is sustained.

If so, then the first step in understanding cooperation is to take stock of the current understanding of “conflict.” While the term is frequently used as shorthand for “violent conflict,” the violent form of conflict cannot be understood without addressing first its broader form, which is simply an incompatibility of goals (Bernard 1949; 1957, p. 38; Coser 1956, p. 8). Of course, incompatibility is scarcely significant if it is taken lying down; it is when value incompatibility leads to some escalation of action or conflict behavior that it becomes an object of concern, both practical and

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analytical. A focused form of this notion sees frustration over the inability to attain blocked goals as the source of conflict, based on a clear understanding of the component incompatibilities.

However, recent studies have focused on the misperception and fear of conflict behavior as the basis of perceived incompatibilities, rather than on the substance of the incompatibilities themselves. Conflict comes from the security dilemma, where a party seeking to assure even minimal security is perceived as acting threateningly toward another party, who takes measures to assure its own security and thereby threatens the other even more (Jervis 1978; Posner 1993). The current focus of analysis is on information, bypassing the substance of the incompatibility. If parties could accurately communicate both their intentions and their capabilities, they would not venture into conflict, which would be either unnecessary or unwise (Fearon 1995).

On this basis cooperation is achieved by overcoming the tendency toward conflict, whether that tendency is based on objective incompatibilities or on erroneous information about them. However, the remedy is different in the two views of conflict sources. If the conflict lies in real goal incompatibility, that clash must be dealt with by lowering the incompatibility or at least its salience. Various means are available: one party can bow to the other, the two can negotiate concessions or compensation or can construct a new set of goals that reframes them in such a way that they become compatible or are subsumed under superordinate values, or, finally, the parties can agree that the incompatible goals are unimportant and table them without actually dropping them. More importantly, these means of reducing the conflict borne of incompatibilities can be exercised on a case-by-case basis or extended more lengthily and generically. Even ad hoc resolution builds norms and precedents that influence future cooperative settlements, whereas longer-term or more institutionalized measures and mechanisms address generic elements explicitly.

If unreliable information is the problem, the answer is easier in concept: get it right! But because it is suspicion about information that is the difficulty, more information is as suspect as less; cooperation comes with the installation of trust. (Yet mechanisms for inducing trust, such as provisions for verification and punishment or for third parties as trust-holders, usually require cooperation in order to produce cooperation: a circular argument.)

Nature and cooperation

The analytical questions then become, why, when and how do parties agree to pay the cost of working together to produce new gains? and how

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do they then apportion the gains so as to maintain their cooperation? A common reason for cooperation is interdependence. States are not politically or economically autarkic; they are not alone. They need the active or passive help of others in order to achieve their goals. They need others as allies to help assure their security, they need them for establishing rules of international behavior, they need them for commerce and as partners in managing international economic relations, and they need them to help protect from public bads such as environmental risks. Calculations of efficiency accompany the needs generated by interdependence: states may believe that it would cost them less to achieve their goals by cooperating with others than to act alone.

Social scientists debate whether cooperation is innate or learned, whether it is genetic or social, related to fairness (“what’s best for all of us”) as opposed to justice (“what’s best for me, and what you deserve”), hence whether it is based in inherent tendencies toward unselfish or selfish behavior. Some scholars believe that states are defensive, self-identifying, and self-interested entities, whose leaders are responsible only for their population’s security and welfare, and are therefore in competitive or conflictual relation with other states. They must have done something, however, to overcome this natural condition of conflict and produce the prevailing cooperation. This action is extraordinarily successful, given the pervasiveness of cooperation over conflict, yet relatively little is known about it conceptually. This work aims at expanding that knowledge.

Notions of inherently selfish behavior or “cooperation for me” include elements of acquisition, effectiveness, and efficiency (Lax and Sebenius 1986). “Acquisition” refers to the need to create value where the desired ends are unavailable to the individual party. “Effectiveness” refers to the need to work with other parties to create that value and accomplish certain goals, when parties cannot achieve their ends unilaterally. “Efficiency” refers to the need to reduce costs – primarily transaction costs – in working with other parties, so that the wheel of concerted action does not need to be reinvented each time. These three needs – elusive ends, scarce means, reducible costs – drive parties to work together over a short or longer time, depending in turn on their estimates of the other parties’ proclivities to do the same thing.

Other scholars, however, question the view that interstate relations are characterized by a Hobbesian “state of nature” and are inherently conflictual. The notion of innate sociability runs through Grotius, Pufendorf, and Montesquieu to Adam Smith, where it forms the basis of mutual regulation and gains through trade, as Keller discusses in the next chapter. Notions of inherently unselfish behavior or “cooperation in me” include expectations such as requitement, reputation, and fairness (Vogel 2004;

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de Waal 1992; Sober and Wilson 1998). Requitement is the expectation of reciprocity, negative and/or positive, an inherent quality in social relations and in most ethical systems. Reputation refers to the expectations parties create about themselves, operating in two directions in support of cooperation: as images that parties tend for purposes of self-esteem, and as bases for others' actions. Fairness, a loose form of justice, involves the expectation and behavioral norm that parties are due to receive treatment corresponding to some universal notion of equality, either as numerical individuals or as deserving actors (Zartman et al. 1996; Albin 2001). These three qualities, and perhaps others in support, provide a network that lies at the base of claims of inherency in the tendency to cooperate.

Since the debate continues over whether cooperative behavior is innate or learned, the search for the etiology and the means of cooperation must take both into account. But the difference between the two assumptions is not as great as is often assumed. For those who see cooperation as innate it is the avoidance of conflict, whereas for those for whom it must be learned it is a defense against conflict. Either way, cooperation is the antidote to conflict. The two approaches differ, however, on the durability of cooperation.

Schools and cooperation

The key to cooperation is reciprocity, that is, an assurance of similar, beneficial return behavior in the future. Selfish states bury conflict if (as long as) the other party does so too, and unselfish states bury conflict because the other party does so too; again, the grave is shallower for the first than for the second. Thus the various schools of international relations (IR) differ only in their perspective: Realists take a short-term and Liberals a long-term view. The former believe that cooperation is not sustainable but occurs only on a momentary basis, as long as benefits are present and up to date. Parties have a tendency to cheat and free-ride as soon as they can gain greater benefits from doing so than from cooperating. Problems of information cannot be overcome reliably, since states will cheat when it is in their interest to do so; all that can be done is to understand when cheating is likely and to take appropriate safeguards. Indeed, Realism, by its short-term "rational" tendency to defect, actually reduces the benefits of cooperation, by enhancing fear of defection (Bowles and Gintis 2003, p. 433, implicitly equate Realists with sociopaths).

Liberals believe that states cooperate in the expectation of benefits from future cooperation, as well as current payoffs. In addition they hold that anticipated reciprocity provides benefits from reputation and relationship

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that are not only less precise but tie states into patterns of behavior. Information can play a role in sustaining this expectation, since the greater the reliable information on future reciprocity, the greater the chances of cooperation lasting. Since it is inefficient to negotiate the terms of reciprocity each time, states institutionalize their cooperation through regimes, laws, and organizations. Thus Realists take measures to guard against foreseeable defection, whereas Liberals emphasize measures to prolong foreseeable cooperation.

Yet cooperation is more than just about defection and reciprocity, despite much of the current focus; it is about benefits – their creation and their allocation. The mechanisms by which cooperation is established carry high transaction costs; it is always quicker to act by oneself and, beyond that, costs rise in proportion to the number of parties, as discussed by Touval below. Theoretically, however, costs should fall in relation to the number of issues, since more issues provide more trade-offs and a greater chance to attain “comparative advantage” deals at the Nash Point according to Homans’ Maxim (1960) – “The more the items at stake can be divided into goods valued more by one party than they cost to the other and [the reverse], the greater the chances of a successful outcome.” These negotiations deal with the twin aspects of cooperation, value-making and value taking, referring to integrative and distributive negotiations. Cooperation, as noted, occurs to create beneficial outcomes that the parties cannot create alone, but it is also needed to allocate those benefits; there is always a distributive as well as an integrative aspect to cooperation.

Beyond creation and allocation of costs and benefits, cooperation is also about underlying or overarching values as an element that separates Realists from Liberals. For cooperation to be more than a single engagement, as Realists see it, it must rest on and contribute to a community of values, as Hampson discusses. Thus negotiations on cooperation relate not only to the specific stakes and measures of the encounter but also to the pact-building relationship and reiteration – that is, to shared decision-making.

These two aspects of cooperation can be dealt with instance by instance or on a more prolonged basis through the establishment of regimes, both through negotiation (Spector and Zartman 2003). The advantages of each are straightforward: successive, essentially ad hoc negotiations are less efficient, since the wheel of cooperation has to be reinvented each time, whereas regimes are established and corrected by negotiated principles that do not have to concern themselves with the immediate details of individual cases. Essentially, regimes establish formulas for cooperation, leaving the details to their application, while “reinvented” cooperation needs to negotiate both formula and details. In reality, the two necessarily

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overlap, since even ad hoc cooperation in an area not governed by previously negotiated regimes does not occur in a vacuum, but in a context of norms, expectations, and precedents that act as a proto-regime. The philosophy of multilateral cooperation, termed “multilateralism,” confers legitimacy as one of its benefits, more so than unilateralism or bilateralism, although it does so at the expense of efficiency and possibly even of effectiveness.

There is also an external problem to cooperation: how to legitimize it to those outside, whether those rejecting the action or those not invited to join it. Cooperation has an outside shell, involving cooperation with those who are not enemies but nonetheless are external to the cooperating core. It is in the interest of the cooperators not to arouse conflict with those left out, lest they make common cause with the conflictors. This area lies outside the normal conceptual concerns of cooperation but is of crucial importance to practitioners. Bilateral cooperation is also a means to deal with other states that are not involved in the core multilateral cooperative enterprise, but it may compound the problem. An alliance between two may be perceived by others as impacting on their security, bilateral trade affects the commercial prospects of others, and so on. This is why cooperation requires consideration of its wider impact, and why it often assumes multilateral form. Again, Liberals handle the problem better than Realists, who seem to assume conflict in any case. For Liberals, regimes and extended, forward-looking, even institutionalized cooperation sets the stage for at least substantive, if not procedural, inclusion of the outer shell, leaving them free to join later or to approve without direct involvement. Yet handling that gray area of cooperation, the subject of Zartman’s chapter, is a major practical as well as conceptual challenge.

As in so many aspects of international relations (and probably other) theory, error lies in an insistence on exclusivity. It is important both to prolong foreseeable cooperation and to protect against defection, since the latter fosters the former. Cooperation is not self-implementing; one has to work at it, because of the danger of conflict. Even the proponents of inherently unselfish behavior would agree. On this basis, this book turns toward an examination of ways of accomplishing these two goals of cooperation.

New understandings of cooperation

The contributions to this book address these questions, harking back to central issues in these debates and to the group of seminal works that launched the subject over a ten-year period beginning two decades ago (Axelrod 1984; Taylor 1987; Young 1989; Stein 1990; Stein and Pauly

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1993). As much as possible, this collection seeks to fill holes left by the initial studies, often where the holes were explicitly acknowledged.

One group of essays deals with the various ambiguities and implications inherent in the meanings of cooperation itself. The historic basis of the debate is developed by Alexis Keller, following on the philosophical side of the argument developed by Taylor in 1987. He shows how an alternative understanding of interstate relations, contrasted to the post-Westphalian view of formal and hierarchical legal relations – law – grew up grounded in commerce as cooperation. The approach replaced the model of international anarchy with a model of the market, which, though self-ordered, implies norms of cooperation and specific actions to maintain it. Charles Doran discusses the question of how many it takes to cooperate. Both bilateral and multilateral arrangements take a state – particularly a hegemonic state – away from unconstrained unilateralism but with very different implications, the two being conflicting alternatives to each other. Cooperation provides resources, legitimacy, and approval, to create value or benefits. It raises problems, however, over the allocation of those benefits and the appropriate size to claim that legitimacy, as well as problems arising from transaction time.

Fen Osler Hampson develops further subdivisions with the typology of multilateral cooperation. In a second level of debate beyond the initial questions about cooperation itself, institutionalized cooperation raises procedural questions about the allocation of role as well as substantive questions about the allocation of payoffs and benefits. Saadia Touval examines many of these characteristics from the angle of multilateral negotiation, in both symmetrical and asymmetrical situations, a subject left over from Young's study of regime formation. Multilateral cooperation requires negotiation because parties have to come together to establish the norms and principles they wish to institute and to coordinate their policies. However, cooperation among unequal parties can work two ways – to lock in norms and principles that either assure the compliance of the weaker parties and/or promise the compliance of the stronger party were it later to lose its hegemony.

A second group of essays addresses strategies of cooperation and their implications. P. Terrence Hopmann examines structural and motivational factors that lead to negotiation and cooperation; negotiation as a cooperative process that creates the terms of a more prolonged cooperation has not received the attention its importance merits from theorization over international politics. Focusing on the process of negotiating cooperation, he reaches beyond the Realist–Liberal debate to link cooperation to the constructivist approach and to IR theory more broadly. Picking up on the game theoretic images in the previous chapter, Joshua Goldstein

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develops the unsung side of the classical dilemmas, the Chicken Dilemma Game (CDG) discussed by Taylor (1987), which receives less attention than its Prisoner (PDG) cousin. Yet CDG is a much more frequent image of interstate problems of cooperation, its two equilibria posing a coordination rather than a collaboration problem. While double defection – the Prisoner’s second worst, but the Chicken’s worst, outcome – is avoided, it takes strategies of creativity to arrive at cooperation. Chicken shows the perception of the situation that pushes the parties to create a new game reflecting such strategies. Allison Stanger, starting off from Axelrod’s 1984 study on the evolution of cooperation, examines the impact of past experience upon learning to cooperate through interaction. To the Shadow of the Future, she adds the Shadow of the Past and to these “vertical shadows” she adds the “horizontal shadows” of current relations. Taking up a topic that Stein (1990, pp. 188–98) left as context-dependent, I. William Zartman examines the relation between cooperation and two different types of conflict management – cooperation as a strategy of dealing with conflict with another party, and cooperation as a strategy for managers of conflict among third parties. While the first represents a major shift in policy, it is found that it depends on the second, termed the “playback effect” or the “alliance dilemma” (Stein 1990, p. 188) and not just on estimates of success and of cost-benefits.

At the end, two contributions use specific case studies to examine the role of asymmetry in multilateral cooperation. Deborah Larson and Alexi Shevchenko employ social psychology to look at asymmetrical cooperation in a hegemonic system, by examining ways by which the United States can persuade states that are not allies to cooperate. By addressing status concerns, the greater power can lessen the attraction of competition and conflict strategies and attitudes on the part of second-level powers. This means avoiding conflict and competition strategies on the part of the hegemon, and making cooperation rather than convergence a basis of policy. The analysis focuses on functional identity enhancement as a basis for building cooperation in place of conflict. Jean-Claude Berthélemy examines the effects of asymmetric cooperation through the angle of development aid policies. Allocation favors the stronger party’s proximate interests in bilateral aid relations, and tends to be more altruistic (i.e., favoring more distant interests) in the case of multilateral aid. But since the chosen recipients of self-interested bilateral cooperation tend to be open economies that are favored by the underlying trade linkages between the two sides, the ostensibly one-sided interest is rebalanced. On the other hand, weaker economies, which cannot attract self-interested bilateral cooperation, benefit from multilateral cooperation, however asymmetrical.