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# Policy Brief

#### S U M M A R Y

The rising number of global problems includes many grave challenges. The recent record of international response, however, offers guides to "dos and don'ts" that can help muster effective action. Although few such lessons are widely known, a study of the record across fields yields rich insights.

Essential for effective action are systems that constructively engage the multiplying number of state and nonstate players, that verify adherence to commitments, and that measure how well agreements—not just parties to them—are performing. Adequate funding for such activities—generally not forthcoming—is mandatory, as is support for poor nations that lack the capacity to participate.

American leadership has been critical to progress.
Recently, it has come into question. Even if the United States disagrees with certain multilateral approaches, however, it should pursue alternative remedies.

# Global Challenges: Beating the Odds

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The global to-do list has never been ▲ more daunting. New arteries for transport, trade, finance, and communications require constantly updated rules. Freer, faster movement across borders necessitates filters to separate terrorists from traders and levees to contain infectious disease, pollution, invasive species, and financial disruption. Once-sovereign responsibilities such as poverty, child labor, and human rights shift to become international moral concerns. Technologies of literally world-shaking power—capable of destroying humans en masse, altering Earth's ecology, or upsetting atmospheric stability—create a set of truly global issues.

In this hyperconnected world, individual states can only accomplish so much. Yet too often governments act together only haltingly, even when they agree on the urgency of a shared challenge. In a few cases, future historians may see in the glacial pace of diplomacy during the early twenty-first century not merely failures of collective action but symptoms of collective denial. Biological weapons proliferation, global warming, and rapidly accelerating biodiversity loss come to mind.

The international community needs to do better. Unquestionably, it can. The past century's crash course in cooperation produced many successes and lessons that governments can build on. The record shows a wide variety of options to alleviate problems. (For detailed examples, see the Carnegie Endowment's recent comprehensive volume Managing Global Issues: Lessons Learned.) Progress has come under binding as well as nonbinding regimes, through both comprehensive and step-bystep agreements. Universal pacts have worked in some cases, whereas in others only a few parties have initiated constructive action. A great deal has been learned, though very little gets communicated from one field to another.

Moreover, the information revolution has expanded the opportunities for citizens, experts, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and foundations to work with governments—and with each other—to solve problems. A recent explosion of activity by NGOs has energized volunteers in almost all countries to advance causes that range from banning landmines to protecting endangered species. Their



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presence has helped turn once-controversial concepts—such as the efficacy of microcredit, the empowerment of women, and the need for environmentally sustainable development—into conventional wisdom. NGOs helped propel giant pharmaceutical companies (such as Merck and Bristol-Myers) into a follow-the-leader pattern of drastic price cuts for AIDS drugs in poor countries. Some NGOs provide global services or public goods. Transparency International, for example, rates governments on the corruption they tolerate, and Conservation International buys species-rich land that governments might otherwise sell for logging.

Elsewhere, private experts are drafting and overseeing compliance with emerging international business standards in such fields as logging, apparel manufacturing, and coffee production. Giant energy companies (such as BP and Shell) have made voluntary commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, some more ambitious than the Kyoto Protocol. The celebrated (Princess Diana and Bono) have helped to highlight concerns landmines and debt relief—that might not otherwise have made it into prime time. The affluent (Bill Gates and George Soros) have marched into policy areas—infant health and democratization—where bureaucracies tread slowly if at all.

This expanding roster of players and the unconventional policy tools they wield is one of the generally hopeful changes on which governments can draw to add new approaches to those that have been tried before. Indeed, if governments spent more effort learning how to work with these new players and tools, they would find able partners to share the burden and heighten the effectiveness of government action.

#### **Balancing Acts**

With so many new players getting into the act, however, there is a fine line to navigate between healthy participation and three-ring circuses. In the United Nations, the membership increase of 370 percent since 1945 (190 nations belong today) is just the beginning.

Governments must now try to steer increasingly crowded meetings toward constructive outcomes, while responding to the demands of free agents—from Greenpeace to Exxon Mobil—for a place at the table.

Difficult though it can be to strike a working balance between participation and effectiveness, it can be done. Hundreds of diverse NGOs from scores of countries mounted the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Their remarkable unity around a common goal helped push Canada and a handful of other states—initially against the opposition of all the great powers—to yank the stalled landmine issue out of the U.N. Conference on Disarmament and into a new "Ottawa Process" for fast-track negotiation. The result was a treaty negotiated with an unprecedented level of government-civil society cooperation and coauthored by diplomats and activists in record time.

Another innovative model of participatory decision making is used by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which helps developing countries fund projects that benefit them and the global environment. The developing countries that make up half the GEF's members represent regional groups. If consensus is not reached, the GEF uses a double-weighted voting system requiring a 60 percent simple majority plus 60 percent of votes based on levels of financial contributions. The International Fund for Agricultural Development uses a highly respected system to engage NGOs in preparing agendas and position papers. The hybrid World Commission on Dams joined government, citizens, and industry in designing a series of standards for highly controversial big dam projects.

Just as democracies and markets depend on open information flows, effective and legitimate governance requires two-way communication between decision-making institutions and stakeholders. Institutions can use a variety of means to elicit feedback from those who lack voting privileges (for example, surveys, meetings, web sites, and public and private meetings). The International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO)—relatively recent converts to the new gospel of inviting outsiders in—are publishing considerably more operational information than even a few years ago and using a wider variety of techniques to find out what their nongovernmental constituents think.

Though such steps toward openness may seem to invite trouble, ignoring demands for transparency and broader participation in today's world is a sure recipe for eventual failure. Governments learned the risks of operating in cozy confidentiality the hard way in 1997, when protests helped scuttle the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. The World Bank and the WTO have felt the sting

detailed information allows an informed choice on whether to deploy incentives, assistance, time extensions, judicial proceedings, shaming, sanctions, or other means to promote compliance.

Though no single technique for performance review has been failure-proof, the use of uniform standards in reporting and evaluation has been notably successful. In the human rights field, where governments frequently assail criticism as political bias, officially appointed "thematic rapporteurs" use one yardstick to measure all states' behavior, thereby avoiding any suggestion of singling out any one state. Similarly, the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies recently created the Global Reporting

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of repeated angry demonstrations. By contrast, inclusive negotiations on the Montreal Protocol and Chemical Weapons Convention produced effective agreements embraced by key citizen groups and industry players alike.

#### **Promises to Keep**

Monitoring, assessing, and verifying adherence to commitments—whether to a binding agreement or a voluntary code—can do more than catch cheaters. It can also deter willful noncompliance by states that fear the political or economic repercussions of exposure. Reviews that track parties' performance also can help avoid unintentional failures by alerting parties to potential noncompliance before it occurs.

The most effective reviews are those that dig deep enough to reveal why parties are or are not living up to promises, differentiating among accidental noncompliance, purposeful dereliction, and simple incapacity. Only such Initiative to standardize the way companies tally their environmental and social accomplishments under the U.N. Global Compact.

In cases that require intrusive monitoring, assurances that sensitive information will be protected are crucial. One innovation used to verify the Chemical Weapons Convention—"managed access," in which inspectors and host-country representatives proceed step by step on the basis of on-site negotiations—protects confidentiality while still getting useful information. The involvement of independent experts to enhance the credibility of data collection and analysis has also been widely effective.

#### The Bottom Line

Even when such reviews give high scores for parties' follow-through, it may be too early to break out the champagne. Multilateral agreements can produce unanticipated consequences or become quickly outdated. The

#### Have Global Problems Gotten Better or Worse from 1990 to 2002?

#### SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT

Ozone depletion

#### **IMPROVEMENT**

- Chemical weapons proliferation
- Nuclear weapons proliferation
- Trade barriers facing rich countries
- Core labor rights
- Antipersonnel landmines

### ABOUT THE SAME OR MINIMAL IMPROVEMENT

- Poverty
- Trade barriers facing poor countries
- Corruption
- Preventing financial crises
- Refugee conditions
- Preventing deadly conflicts
- Money laundering
- Core human rights
- Preventable and infectious diseases
- Fissile and radioactive materials proliferation

#### **GETTING WORSE**

- Global warming
- Biological weapons proliferation
- Biodiversity and ecosystem loss
- Transnational crime
- Small arms proliferation
- AIDS

Sources: Managing Global Issues (Carnegie Endowment, 2001); AIDS Epidemic Update (UNAIDS, 2001); World Resources 2000–2001 (World Resources Institute, 2000); Human Development Report 2001 (UNDP, 2001); Freedom House Annual Survey of Freedom Country Scores, 1991–2000 (Freedom House); The State of the World Atlas (Penguin, 1995, 1999); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook, 2001; Deadly Arsenals (Carnegie Endowment, 2002); World Development Report 2001–2002 (Oxford University Press for World Bank, 2001); VERTIC data (www.vertic.org).

proliferation of official and unofficial problem solving may mean that small victories obscure larger defeats, producing a false sense of progress. For instance, voluntary reductions of greenhouse gas emissions by top companies may deserve applause, but such miniscule cuts can have little effect on the ominous buildup of atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Global challenges necessitate the invention of better yardsticks to measure how well agreements themselves—not just the parties to them—are alleviating the problems at hand. Such bottom-line accounting will identify serious shortcomings and may even generate the requisite will to do what is actually needed.

The environmental field offers examples of sophisticated, institutionalized forms of effectiveness reviews that could be applied in other settings. The Montreal Protocol, for example, permits parties to modify their mutual obligations—without the need for reratification—in light of changes in scientific understanding. That latitude led parties to leap from a 50 to a 100 percent phaseout of ozone-depleting chemicals just a year after the treaty entered into force. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a multinational group of scientists, meets regularly to assess the state of scientific knowledge and—with varying effect—to advise governments that are parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, launched in 2001 by the United Nations, World Bank, and World Resources Institute, will provide the first glimpse of the condition of hundreds of critical ecosystems.

Finally, successful effectiveness reviews must address the overlap among issues. Linkages may not always be immediately apparent, but unless their existence is recognized, setbacks may outweigh sustained progress. Development is the cause of ecological harm. Or it is the cure. Or both. Freer trade and finance can lead to vast improvements in people's lives, but unfettered flows can also destroy wealth and natural resources. Creating vaccines for malaria is of limited

benefit if corrupt governments divert it or incapable ones fail to build a health care infrastructure that can deliver it. (See box at left.)

#### **Paying Up**

If knowledge is crucial, money matters even more. Without adequate resources, international organizations cannot collect impartial information, let alone analyze it. The WTO secretariat, for example, perceived by outsiders as a bureaucratic Godzilla, is actually a pitiful giant. It operates with an annual budget of only \$96 million (compared with the \$30 million budget of the U.S. Trade Representative), which allows it to handle only a fraction of the requests it receives to evaluate members' policies, much less to think through new issues.

More generally, it is difficult to make headway on most global issues when half the world is still living on less than \$2 a day. Poverty exacerbates most global concerns—from human health to environmental destruction—and the abyss that separates haves and have-nots also divides can-do signatories from others that, with the best will in the world, cannot come close to living up to their commitments.

Many governments lack the administrative, legal, judicial, and enforcement capacity to do what is required. They may lack the expertise to draft effective implementing legislation, or the administrative institutions or human resources to put new rules into practice. Many states that give pro forma support to the anti-money-laundering regime, for example, in fact exercise little or no control over their banking sectors.

At the other end of the spectrum, most rich countries talk the talk while trying to solve global issues on the cheap. International organizations charged with monitoring, analysis, assistance, and other implementation responsibilities are abysmally underfunded and overburdened. Too little support is available to boost poor countries' capacity to carry out agreements. And despite pledging themselves to lofty poverty-reduction goals, most countries have not tried to provide the assistance

required to meet them—falling far short of the sums needed, for example, to meet the Millennium Goals set in 2000 for 2015.

As the world's richest nation, the United States could potentially generate the will among industrial countries to release a flow of contributions proportionate to their means and equal to global needs. Yet since the 1960s, U.S. assistance (in inflation-adjusted dollars) has plummeted. The United States remains the largest development assistance funder; but even if it honors the pledge it made at the recent U.N. conference in Monterrey to increase aid by \$5 billion a year (beginning in 2004), it will still remain near the bottom among industrial democracies in per capita foreign assistance. It devotes just over one-tenth of one percent of its GDP to such spending—about \$35 per American annually. More than \$11 of that \$35 goes to

further liberalizing trade, assistance in the form of loans, grants, and private investment remains essential. To be sure, more aid should also be better aid, as the Bush administration argues—with an emphasis on effectiveness and an application of lessons from past successes and failures. Yet sufficient official development assistance, sustained for a long enough time, can have a dual payoff in strengthening both the recipients and the global regimes—from arms proliferation to trade—in which poor countries too often play marginal or negative roles. Reducing aid, or disbursing it in meager amounts, risks inflating local failures into wider threats.

#### **Reality Check**

The progress of international cooperation since World War II has been remarkable in the challenges tackled, the variety of partici-

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just three clients (Israel, Egypt, and Pakistan), and less than \$5 goes to help the world's poorest billion people.

Adding injury to indifference, U.S. and E.U. trade barriers harm poor countries far more deeply than parsimonious trickles of aid. Tariffs on agricultural produce and lowwage manufactured products from developing countries are about four times higher than those on goods from rich trading partners, whereas subsidies for domestic crops in rich countries run about \$350 billion a year—seven times the total of their combined foreign assistance. No wonder critics derided the European Union's Monterrey slogan "Everything But Arms" as "Everything But Farms" and lambasted U.S. president George W. Bush's May 2002 signing of the ten-year, \$190 billion farm subsidy bill.

Even if the Doha round of WTO negotiations succeeds in opening more markets and

pants involved, and the imaginative instruments developed to convert pledges into practice. The fact that American leadership spurred many of these gains raises a fundamental question: Has the United States changed its long-standing commitment to collective international action?

The question is not hypothetical. Since the end of the Cold War, America has dropped the ball on a mounting number of global issues. The problem is not simply, as is often charged, that the United States is too "unilateral"; its long tradition of exceptionalism in world affairs—justifying its right to act alone or to be choosy when it comes to multilateral commitments—has often served the global good. For instance, it can be argued that by pulling out of the International Labour Organisation (1977–1980), the United States exposed and purged the bias that had allowed Soviet and Eastern

#### U.S. Behavior on Global Issues: Patterns that Draw Criticism

From the Marshall Plan to winning the Cold War, the United States has provided an enormous number of international public goods. Recently, however, it has frequently found itself on the defensive for being the odd man out on global issues. Here is a list of key examples.

#### When the United States has done nothing and/or hindered effective action:

- Climate change: It renounced the Kyoto Protocol (2001) and failed to take serious domestic action, though its 5 percent of the world's population accounts for 25 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions.
- Small arms trafficking: It blocked or weakened key provisions of a draft U.N. agreement (2001) to curb illicit trade in small arms.
- **Tobacco:** It blocked or weakened key provisions of a draft Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (2001–2002).
- Population and women's reproductive health: A "gag rule" (1984–1992; 2001–present) cuts off U.S. assistance to foreign NGOs if they provide (even with non-U.S. funds) legal abortion services, counseling, or referrals.

#### When the United States has done less than its fair share:

- Development assistance: In gross terms, the United States is the largest development assistance funder; but it ranks last among all rich countries in contributions—giving less than a third of what Europe donates. (The United States gives 0.10 percent of GDP versus Europe's 0.33 percent, soon to become 0.39 percent. President Bush's pledge made at the recent U.N. aid conference in Monterrey would, if implemented, increase U.S. spending to 0.13 percent of GDP.)
- United Nations and international dues: As the largest U.N. debtor (owing \$1.35 billion in back dues), the United States precipitated several U.N. financial crises in the 1990s. The U.S. share of the U.N. core budget (22 percent) is less than the European Union's (37 percent); its share of U.N. funds and special program costs (17 percent) is substantially less than the European Union's (50 percent). U.S. contributions have declined as American wealth has risen (to \$283 million in 2002 from \$298 million in 1999).

## When the United States has played by its own rules and/or imposed its own rules (or rules it will not follow) on others:

- Trade: It has criticized developing countries' closed trading practices, but it has imposed steep tariffs on agriculture and textile products from poor countries (as have Canada, the European Union, and Japan). It defied WTO rules by increasing protectionist tariffs on steel (2002). It increased subsidies to U.S. farmers by 80 percent (2002).
- Chemical Weapons Convention: It ratified the convention only after asserting special rights (1997), including the right to refuse challenge inspections and prevent collected samples from leaving U.S. territory.

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European regimes to evade the organization's criticism. U.S. retaliation (under its 1988 Super 301 trade law) for trade practices that violated the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade helped to open markets and to generate the international will for fairer, supranational arrangements under the WTO. The nimble U.S. response to Mexico's 1994 economic crisis—a \$20 billion loan package that was quickly repaid—prevented wider contagion. There are dozens of other examples.

On too many current and pressing issues, however, the United States is not doing enough relative to other countries, is doing nothing, or is getting in the way of effective action. This behavior, which has grown pronounced since the end of the Cold War, has led to a spreading perception that America is only willing to act constructively—or at all—if its own short-term interests are served. (See box at left.)

If such disengagement and occasional obstructionism persist, both U.S. security interests and the effectiveness of global problem solving will suffer. The United States risks the loss of its legacy: decades of hard-won credibility and goodwill. It will need those assets to win and to keep friends, to persuade them to help it in times of need, to shape coalitions, to claim benevolence when acting unilaterally, and to ward off potential resentment, anger, and misunderstandings about its intentions as the world's overwhelming power. On a global scale, U.S. actions threaten to undermine the international rule of law and widen the already destabilizing divide between rich and poor nations.

Even if the United States disagrees with a particular multilateral approach, it has multiple choices for responsible action. If it fears that sending substantially more aid to poor governments to buy medicines will only line the pockets of the corrupt, it can legislate tax breaks or other incentives for pharmaceutical companies that provide crucial drugs at or below cost. It could join other countries in establishing an international fund to purchase AIDS vaccines—once they are developed—for needy states. It could also contribute far more generously than it has to the new

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, which vets thousands of programs and selects the most promising ones.

If the Bush administration finds certain provisions of the Kyoto Protocol unacceptable, it can instead take credible action at home. At a minimum, a mandate that polluters register how much carbon dioxide they emit could bring informed public pressure to bear in favor of cleaner, more efficient energy technologies. A domestic system that set a reasonable cap on emissions—and allowed companies enough flexibility to achieve cost-effective reductions—would jump-start the private investment and innovation that will be required over the long term to slow climate change.

Having abandoned negotiations on a long-overdue monitoring and verification mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention, the Bush administration should at least approach the problem from a different angle. If America pooled its resources with those of others, it could steer former Soviet bioweapons scientists into productive employment before Iranian, Iraqi, or Libyan intelligence recruits them. Or the United States could help to create a powerful international network to pinpoint disease outbreaks that would immensely aid in distinguishing terrorist from natural origins.

These are but a few examples. In every case, the primary test should not be the number of multilateral treaties signed, but a pragmatic evaluation of the effect of U.S. involvement or indifference. Are U.S. contributions proportionate to U.S. wealth and/or to its share in creating the problem? Does the U.S. government demand of others what it is unwilling to do itself? Is it building or undermining the trust required for successful cooperation in its own interest? Is it easing or obstructing others' efforts to move ahead? As frames of reference, such questions move beyond the sterile debate on the virtues of unilateral versus multilateral action as the model for the U.S. role abroad.

Even as short-term directions for U.S. policy remain unclear, however, one near certainty is that a growing move from geograph-

- Nuclear weapons policy and proliferation: It withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty to proceed with a U.S. national missile defense system (2002). It asserted its right to develop a new generation of nuclear weapons.
- War crimes: It "un-signed" the Rome Treaty establishing the International Criminal Court (2002) and announced that the court should not expect U.S. cooperation.
- Extraterritorial jurisdiction: It has imposed unilateral, secondary sanctions that penalize foreign actors doing business with states that it wants to punish—for example, the Helms-Burton Cuba Sanctions Act (1996) and the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (1996).
- Landmines: It rejected a 1997 convention banning antipersonnel landmines, claiming the need for mines in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. It has, however, spent more than \$500 million since 1993 to support mine removal and no longer exports antipersonnel landmines.

## When the United States has shaped popular agreements, and then abandoned them:

- Biological Weapons Convention Protocol: After six years of negotiation, it blocked a proposed monitoring and verification system for the 1972 treaty banning germ warfare, leading 90 participating countries to postpone further action until November 2003.
- Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty: After 40 years of negotiations and a U.S. push to complete a test ban treaty, the United States signed this treaty in 1996—but the Senate rejected it in 1999.
- **Biodiversity Convention:** It helped shape and then signed the convention (1993), but the Senate still has not joined 168 countries in ratifying it.
- U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea: After achieving hard-won negotiating victories over decades, it signed the convention (1994) but still has not joined 133 countries in ratifying it.
- Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change: It obtained numerous negotiating concessions, including parties' rights to use market-oriented mechanisms (such as emissions trading), but it then opposed the treaty in 2001 (in a 178–1 vote) without proposing a viable alternative.

ically based alliances to broadly transnational, multi-actor cooperation will shape the future. Collaboration is not a luxury for use only on less important issues or in the right technical or functional settings. It is, instead, a necessary survival tool to manage new challenges in a rapidly changing global setting.

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DEADLY ARSENALS: TRACKING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. Joseph Cirincione, Jon B, Wolfsthal, and Miriam Rajkumar (2002).

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THE THIRD FORCE: THE RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY. Ann M. Florini, ed. (2000).

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