

Beyond Procedure: Assessing Institutional Design and Effectiveness in Global Security Dialogues

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Introduction

The contemporary international security landscape is defined by a stark paradox². Never before has the global order possessed such a dense architecture of multilateral forums designed to maintain peace and facilitate dialogue. Yet, this institutional proliferation has failed to arrest a sharp resurgence in organized violence, whose frequency and intensity have definitively reversed the post-Cold War trend of decline³. As illustrated in Figure 1, while fatalities decreased in 2023, the years 2021 through 2023 constitute the deadliest period for organized violence since the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

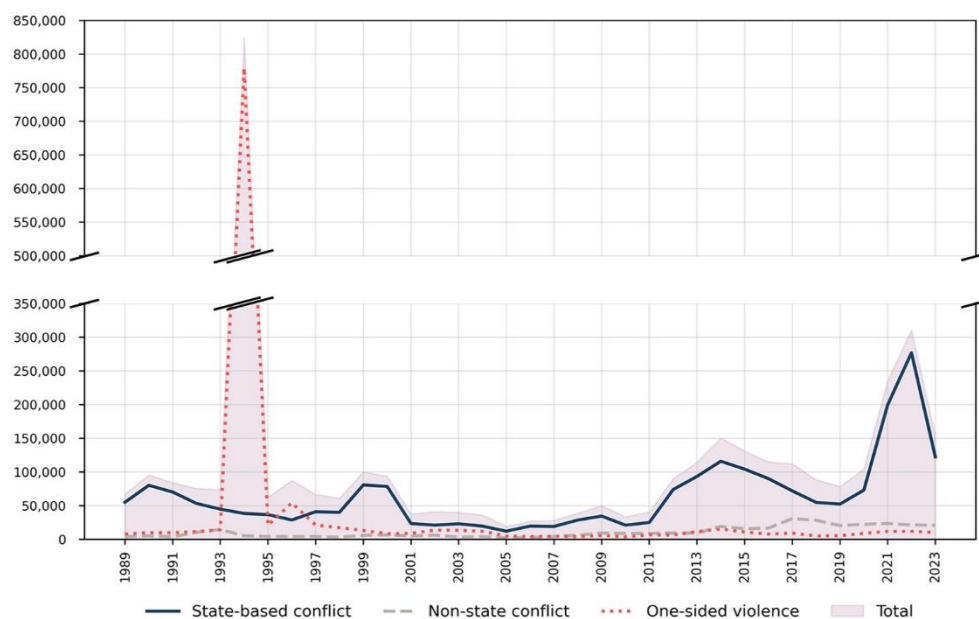


Figure 1: Davies, S., Engström, G., Pettersson, T., & Öberg, M. (2024). Organized violence 1989–2023, and the prevalence of organized crime groups. *Journal of Peace Research*, 61(4), 673–693.

Moreover, the article shows that recent data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) reveals that the number of active state-based conflicts reached an all-time high of 59 in 2023,

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² Oliver P. Richmond et al., 'The International Dynamics of Counter-Peace', *European Journal of International Relations* 30, no. 1 (2024): 126–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661231168772>.

³ Shawn Davies et al., 'Organized Violence 1989–2023, and the Prevalence of Organized Crime Groups', *Journal of Peace Research* 61, no. 4 (2024): 673–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433241262912>.

directly challenging the liberal expectation that dense diplomatic networks would inevitably dampen geopolitical volatility.

The landscape of security governance encompasses a diverse array of venues. Despite their structural differences, these forums increasingly face a convergent critique: they function primarily as “talk shops”. They excel at what can be termed “procedural performativity”, the visible rituals of holding high-level meetings, issuing carefully worded *communiqués*, and adhering to diplomatic protocol, but frequently fail at the substantive output of conflict resolution or enforcement. Scholars of diplomatic practice argue that these forums often succumb to a “logic of habit”, where the maintenance of the diplomatic venue itself becomes the primary objective, superseding the resolution of the conflicts on the agenda⁴.

To understand this failure, it is necessary to define the scope of inquiry. This paper uses the term “Global Security Dialogues” to encompass a broad spectrum of institutional engagements. At one end are formal, treaty-based organizations with theoretical enforcement power, exemplified by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).



Source: UN Photo/Loey Felipe A wide view of the UN Security Council meets on the situation in the Middle East.

At the other end are “Track 1.5” forums such as the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, which lack binding authority but serve as crucial, informal barometers of geopolitical intent. In between lie regional bodies such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which attempt to bridge the gap through confidence-building measures. This analysis focuses specifically on the UNSC and the ARF, employing a “Most Different Systems Design” (MDSD)⁵ approach to demonstrate that despite their structural polarity, binding versus non-binding, global versus regional, both are equally susceptible to the trap of procedural ritualism.

⁴ Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316534564>.

⁵ Carsten Ankar, ‘The Most-Similar and Most-Different Systems Design in Comparative Policy Analysis’, in *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Comparative Policy Analysis* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788111195.00008>.

The central contention of this research is that the paralysis afflicting these bodies is not merely a product of sapped political will among leaders, but a foreseeable consequence of their 20th-century institutional design. This study argues that the very mechanisms designed to ensure broad legitimacy, such as universal membership or consensus voting, create specific “design trade-offs” that prioritize process (maintaining the appearance of consensus) over output (the actual resolution of crises), effectively insulating these forums from taking decisive action⁶.

Consequently, this paper investigates the extent to which this trade-off between inclusivity (legitimacy) and exclusivity (efficiency) traps these bodies in “procedural ritualism”, and examines how the rise of flexible “minilateralism” may offer a pathway toward tangible security outcomes. To address this, the analysis first establishes a theoretical framework contrasting Rational Choice Institutionalism with realist critiques to explain the logic of inefficiency. This lens is then applied to the structural flaws of the UNSC and ARF, followed by an examination of “minilateralism” as a corrective to stagnation. The study concludes by proposing new metrics for effectiveness and targeted policy recommendations.

Theoretical Framework: Institutional Design and the Logic of Constraint

To diagnose the current paralysis of global security dialogues, one must move beyond the immediate political context to examine the theoretical logic underpinning their architecture. The “inefficiency” of a multilateral forum is rarely an accidental by product of bureaucracy; rather, it is often a deliberate outcome of specific design choices made by states to balance competing imperatives⁷. This section establishes the paper’s theoretical scaffolding by contrasting Rational Choice Institutionalism with Realist and Global South critiques. It further delineates the central “design trade-offs”, specifically between inclusivity and efficiency, that trap institutions in procedural ritualism.

The Rational Design of Inefficiency

Rational Choice Institutionalism (RCI) provides the foundational lens for understanding why states create institutions that appear functionally defective. RCI posits that states are rational, self-interested actors who design institutions to solve specific collective action problems, such as lowering transaction costs or reducing uncertainty. From this perspective, the structural features of a security dialogue, including its membership size and voting rules, are not arbitrary but are “rational” solutions to the specific problems states sought to address at the time of creation⁸.

⁶ Anu Bradford et al., ‘Unintended Agency Problems: How International Bureaucracies Are Built and Empowered’, SSRN Scholarly Paper no. 3333187 (Social Science Research Network, 10 February 2018), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3333187>.

⁷ Alexander Thompson and Daniel Verdier, ‘Multilateralism, Bilateralism, and Regime Design’, *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2014): 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12100>.

⁸ Adela Toscano-Valle et al., ‘Can the Rational Design of International Institutions Solve Cooperation Problems? Insights from a Systematic Literature Review’, *Sustainability* 14, no. 13 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14137866>.

A seminal contribution to this framework comes from Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal, who argue that states frequently design institutions with restrictive rules to protect their sovereignty⁹. In their analysis of “Rational Design”, they suggest that what observers critique as “inefficiency”, such as the veto power in the UNSC or the consensus requirement in ASEAN, is actually a “control mechanism”. States willingly accept the cost of gridlock to ensure that the institution cannot be weaponized against their vital national interests. Thus, procedural ritualism is often a feature, not a bug: it is the price paid to keep powerful or wary states at the negotiating table.

The Realist Critique: Institutions as Power Structures

In contrast to the functionalist logic of RCI, Structural Realism offers a more skeptical view of institutional effectiveness. John Mearsheimer, in his influential critique *The False Promise of International Institutions*, argues that institutions have no independent agency; they are merely arenas where the distribution of world power is reflected and reinforced¹⁰.

For Realists, the design of global security dialogues is intended to “lock in” the power hierarchies that existed at their founding. The Permanent Five (P5) architecture within the UN Security Council, for instance, freezes the geopolitical reality of 1945, rendering the institution incapable of adapting to the multipolar reality of the 21st century¹¹. Consequently, when Great Power interests diverge, the institution does not mediate the conflict; it becomes paralyzed by it. This perspective suggests that “procedural ritualism” is the only outcome available when the underlying power dynamics prevent substantive action.

The Global South Perspective: Norm Subsidiarity

Crucially, this analysis must account for the agency of the “Global South”¹². While this term encompasses a highly heterogeneous array of nations rather than a unified geopolitical bloc, these states are frequently reduced in mainstream theory to passive “rule-takers” rather than active “rule-makers”. Expanding the theoretical scope beyond Western-centric models, the “Global IR” framework offered by scholars like Amitav Acharya provides critical insight for countries like Bangladesh.

⁹ Barbara Koremenos et al., ‘The Rational Design of International Institutions’, *International Organization* 55, no. 4 (2001): 761–99, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081801317193592>.

¹⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, ‘The False Promise of International Institutions’, in *International Organization* (Routledge, 2009).

¹¹ Ministry of EU Affairs and Sefer Yilmaz, ‘UN SECURITY COUNCIL: The “Frozen” Victory of the Great Powers’, *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, no. 29 (October 2019): 62–78, <https://doi.org/10.24193/csqr.29.5>.

¹² It is imperative to note that the “Global South” is not a monolithic geopolitical bloc or a formal alliance. Transcending the rigid North-South geographic bisection of the historical ‘Brandt Line’ (1980), it operates today as a loose analytical construct used to group a vast and diverse array of nations across Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania. These states exhibit profound differences in economic power (e.g., India vs. LDCs), political systems, and strategic interests. However, the term remains analytically useful to describe a shared structural position: historically, these nations have been on the periphery of the global decision-making architecture established in 1945. Thus, while they do not possess “unity” in policy, they often share a “solidarity of exclusion” regarding international institutional design. See: Sebastian Haug, “The ‘Global South’ as a Relational Category”, *Third World Quarterly*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1948831>.

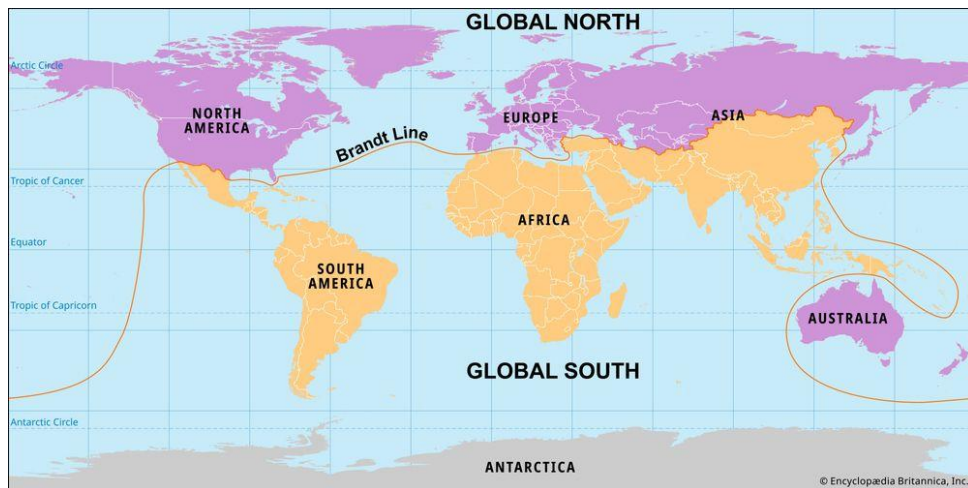


Figure 2: Kenny, Miles. "Global North and Global South". *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.* October 29, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Global-North-and-Global-South>.

Acharya challenges the Realist assumption that non-Great Powers are merely pawns. Instead, he argues that when non-Western states find themselves excluded or marginalized by global institutional designs (which are often perceived as tools of Western hegemony), they do not simply exit the system¹³. Instead, they engage in “norm subsidiarity”. This process involves the creation of regional rules that uphold global principles in theory, but interpret them locally to protect autonomy from external dominance.

From this vantage point, the “inefficiency” of Global South-led forums, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), is not a failure of capacity, but a success of “defensive institutionalism”¹⁴. The strict adherence to non-interference, consensus decision-making, and the rejection of binding enforcement mechanisms are calculated design choices. They serve as a structural shield, protecting smaller states from the “liberal interventionism” of the West or the coercive pressure of rising powers. For a state like Bangladesh, participating in a “talk shop” that guarantees non-interference is often strategically preferable to joining an “efficient” alliance that might compromise its sovereignty. Thus, what looks like procedural paralysis to a Western observer is, to the Global South, a necessary firewall for regime security.

The Architecture of Paralysis: Core Design Trade-offs

Synthesizing these theories reveals that states do not design institutions in a vacuum; rather, they navigate a series of fundamental design trade-offs. The “paralysis” of a forum is often the calculated result of prioritizing one value over another.

¹³ Amitav Acharya, ‘Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World’, *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2011): 95–123, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2010.00637.x>.

¹⁴ Kevin Gray and Barry K. Gills, ‘South–South Cooperation and the Rise of the Global South’, *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2016): 557–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1128817>.

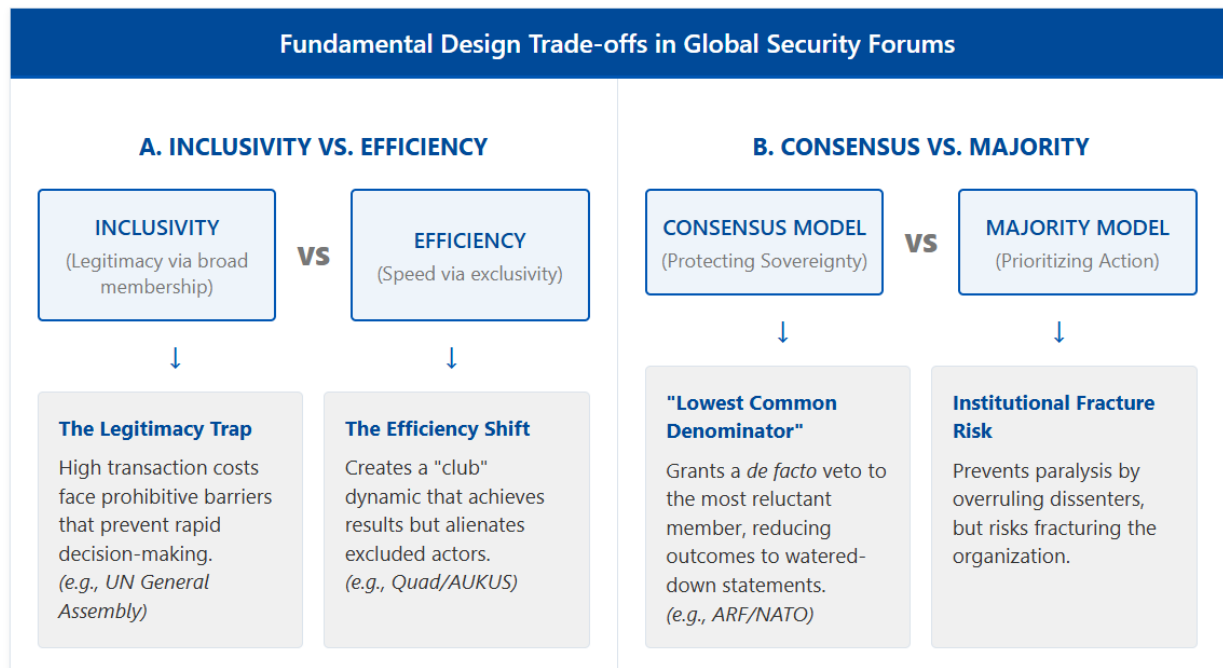


Figure: Alice Daversin (2025)

As illustrated in Figure 1, states must navigate two fundamental trade-offs: the tension between Inclusivity and Efficiency, and the conflict between Consensus and Majority decision-making. The former suggests that universal legitimacy comes at the cost of operational speed, driving the recent shift toward exclusive “minilateralism”¹⁵. The latter highlights how consensus models protect sovereignty but frequently reduce outcomes to the “lowest common denominator”.

This theoretical framework provides the necessary context for analyzing the specific failures of the UN Security Council and the ARF in the subsequent section.

The Trap of Procedure: Analyzing Structural Flaws

Moving from theory to empirics, this section analyzes how design trade-offs precipitate “procedural ritualism”, a condition where diplomatic maintenance displaces conflict resolution. This systemic failure is examined through two contrasting archetypes: the “hard institutionalism” of the UNSC and the “soft institutionalism” of the ARF.

The Crisis of Hard Institutionalism: From Paralysis to Vulnerability

The UNSC represents the pinnacle of “hard institutionalism”, possessing the unique legal authority under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to authorize the use of force and impose binding sanctions. However, its efficacy is frequently nullified by the tactical application of the P5 veto.

¹⁵ Stewart Patrick, ‘The New “New Multilateralism”: Minilateral Cooperation, but at What Cost?’, *Global Summitry* 1, no. 2 (2015): 115–34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/global/guv008>.

This reduces the Council to a “feudal” system where Great Powers act as gatekeepers, permitting collective security only when their geopolitical interests converge¹⁶.



Source: Post factum - Current non-permanent members of the UN Security Council

When they diverge, the institution retreats into mechanisms like “Emergency Special Sessions” under the “Uniting for Peace” resolution, creating an illusion of motion and generating volume (condemnations, reports, and open debates), while lacking the legal transmission belt to convert it into strategic outcomes¹⁷.

This architecture is not an accidental dysfunction but a fundamental legacy of hegemonic design. The Council’s architecture was established primarily to prevent conflict between the P5, rather than to provide universal security guarantees for the periphery. Consequently, when major power interests deadlock, the resulting “protection gap” leaves small and medium-sized states exposed, forcing them to navigate crises without the shield of international law¹⁸.

This structural abandonment manifests with equal severity across both traditional and non-traditional security domains. Within the domain of traditional security, the Rohingya crisis serves as a paradigmatic example of this failure. Despite the displacement of over one million refugees into Bangladesh fleeing ethnic cleansing in 2017, the UNSC failed to pass a binding resolution against Myanmar, largely due to the protective diplomatic cover provided by P5 members China and Russia¹⁹. Concurrently, the failure is equally acute regarding the existential

¹⁶ David L. Bosco, *Five to Rule Them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Gabriel Anich Sfeir, ‘A New Life for Uniting for Peace?’, *Revista Tribuna Internacional* 12, no. 23 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-482X.2023.70300>.

¹⁸ Sundaresh Menon, ‘The Rule of Law, the International Legal Order, and the Foreign Policy of Small States’, *Asian Journal of International Law* 10, no. 1 (2020): 50–67, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2044251319000262>.

¹⁹ Ehteshamul Haque and Tariquil Islam, ‘Bangladesh’s Endeavors for Rohingya Repatriation and Challenges; A Critical Analysis’, *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 76 (April 2023): 80–93, <https://doi.org/10.51290/dpusbe.1199769>.

threat of the climate emergency. Southeast Asian and Pacific Island nations face imminent danger from rising sea levels and extreme weather events; yet, despite bearing minimal historical responsibility for global carbon emissions, they encounter a multilateral system that frequently marginalizes climate security or remains gridlocked over financing mechanisms²⁰.

This dynamic reveals the paradox of the UNSC, which attempts to marry the efficiency of an exclusive power club with the rigid constraints of consensus decision-making. By granting a veto to the P5, the structure inevitably succumbs to the ‘lowest common denominator’ trap: when the central architects of international order are immobilized by geopolitical deadlock, the peripheral states relying on their protection are effectively stripped of collective security guarantees, leaving them exposed to unchecked coercion and systemic volatility.

The “Talk Shop” Dilemma: The Limits of Soft Institutionalism

At the opposite end of the spectrum lies the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)²¹, the embodiment of “Soft Institutionalism”. Formed to manage security in the Asia-Pacific through dialogue rather than enforcement, the ARF operates on the “ASEAN Way”, a diplomatic culture emphasizing non-interference, informality, and consensus²².



Source: ASEAN Regional Forum, Gal ROMA, AFP²³

²⁰ Alistair D. B. Cook, ‘Climate Change in the Asia-Pacific Security Architecture – the Case of ASEAN’, *Third World Quarterly* 45, no. 14 (2024): 2065–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2024.2388291>.

²¹ The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) currently comprises 27 participants: the 10 ASEAN member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam); 10 ASEAN Dialogue Partners (Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States); and 7 other regional members (Bangladesh, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste).

²² Ralf Emmers and See Seng Tan, ‘The ASEAN Regional Forum and Preventive Diplomacy: Built to Fail?’, *Asian Security* 7, no. 1 (2011): 44–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2011.548211>.

²³ AFP, ‘US Pushes Asian Nations on North Korea’, *Digital Journal*, 6 August 2017, <https://www.digitaljournal.com/world/us-pushes-asian-nations-on-north-korea/article/499332>.

While this model has proven excellent for socialization, successfully integrating former rivals like China, Vietnam, and the United States into a common diplomatic habit, it is structurally incapable of preventive diplomacy. The ARF's original 1995 Concept Paper envisioned a linear evolution through three stages: (1) Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), (2) Preventive Diplomacy, (3) Conflict Resolution. Decades later, the forum remains arrested at Stage 1.

The requirement for consensus acts as a 'lowest common denominator' trap. In disputes such as those in the South China Sea, the insistence on non-interference means that the very security issues the forum was designed to address are often excluded from the formal agenda to avoid offending member states. The result is a "Talk Shop" where process becomes the product. Ministers gather, photos are taken, and Chairman's Statements are meticulously drafted to say nothing controversial. While the ARF has successfully prevented the worsening of relations through constant contact, its design renders it allergic to the actual resolution of conflict, leaving the region's hardest security questions unanswered²⁴.

The Shift: Minilateralism and "Ad-Hoc" Security

The structural paralysis of universalist bodies like the UNSC and the consensus-bound inertia of the ARF have not arrested the demand for security cooperation; rather, they have displaced it. In response to the "traps" of institutional design, major powers are increasingly abandoning broad, rigid architectures in favor of "minilateralism", a strategic turn toward smaller, exclusive, and purpose-built coalitions. This shift represents a deliberate prioritization of operational efficiency over universal legitimacy, effectively bypassing the veto players and "lowest common denominator" outcomes that plague traditional multilateralism.

The Logic of Exclusion: Efficiency Through Alignment

The ascendancy of minilateralism is driven by the realist calculation that smaller groups of "like-minded" states can achieve strategic convergence more rapidly than inclusive forums. By restricting membership to actors with aligned threat perceptions and capabilities, these coalitions eliminate the "spoiler" problem inherent in larger bodies²⁵. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, exemplifies this functionalist logic. Unlike the ARF, which is hamstrung by the institutional requirement to accommodate conflicting claims, the Quad operates as a flexible diplomatic network free from obstructionist vetoes²⁶. Similarly, AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) represents a sharpening of this trend into "hard" security technology transfer²⁷.

²⁴ See Seng Tan, 'A Tale of Two Institutions: The ARF, ADMM-Plus and Security Regionalism in the Asia Pacific', *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2017): 259–64.

²⁵ Patrick, 'The New "New Multilateralism"'.

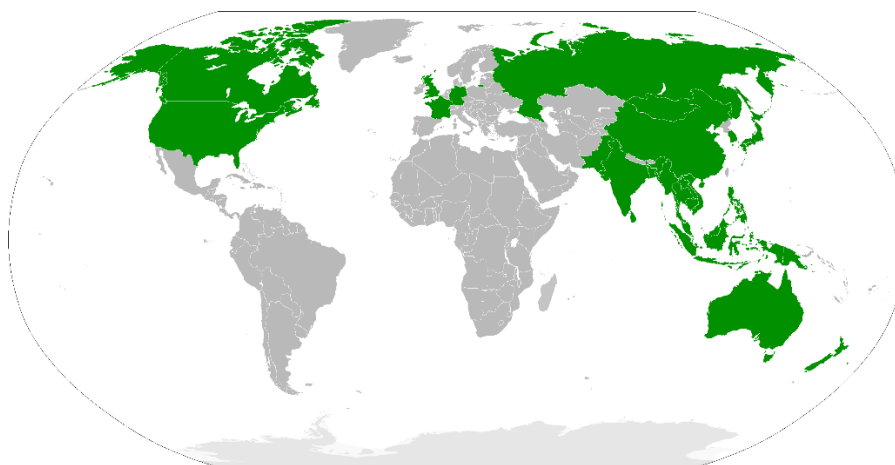
²⁶ Andrew F. Cooper and Brendon J. Cannon, 'Contested Informality in Regional Institutional Design: A Comparative Analysis of ASEAN and the Quad', *Global Policy* 15, no. 1 (2024): 40–52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13335>.

²⁷ Lai-Ha Chan and Maria Rost Rublee, 'The Promise of AUKUS: Implications of Its Minilateral Institutional Form', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 78, no. 6 (2024): 848–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2024.2421369>.

By limiting participation to a tight trilateral core, the pact navigates highly sensitive nuclear propulsion sharing that would be impossible within a broader alliance structure like NATO. In these arrangements, the exclusionary design is not a flaw but the primary mechanism of efficacy; it trades the “legitimacy trap” of the UN for the agility of a “coalition of the willing”.

The Shangri-La Dialogue: The Utility of Informality

Parallel to the rise of minilateral coalitions is the growing reliance on “Track 1.5” diplomacy, best illustrated by the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) in Singapore²⁸.



Source: "Shangri-La Dialogue member countries" by LinasD, via Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

While not a formal decision-making body, the SLD has emerged as the *de facto* premier defense summit for the Asia-Pacific, precisely because its design circumvents the stifling protocols of official statecraft. As a hybrid forum convened by a think tank but attended by defense ministers and military chiefs, it operates in a gray zone between official policy and academic debate.

This unique structural design allows for a frankness often absent in the scripted environment of the ARF. Without the burden of negotiating a binding consensus statement, leaders can engage in direct “speech acts” that clarify red lines rather than obscure them. For instance, the SLD has frequently served as the venue for high-stakes public confrontations between U.S. and Chinese defense officials regarding Taiwan²⁹. While critics might dismiss this as theatrical, such transparency performs a vital stability function: it reduces uncertainty by allowing rivals to signal intent clearly, unencumbered by the diplomatic euphemisms required in formal treaty organizations. Thus, the “ad-hoc” nature of the SLD complements the rigid machinery of the state, providing a safety valve where the “hard” conversations that are impossible in the ARF can take place.

²⁸ Anna Longhini and Erin Zimmerman, ‘Regional Security Dialogues in Europe and in Asia: The Role of Track 1.5 Forums in the Practice of International Security’, *European Journal of International Security* 6, no. 4 (2021): 481–502, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2021.14>.

²⁹ ‘Explore Pacific Forum’s Insightful Indo-Pacific Analysis’, *Pacific Forum*, n.d., accessed 24 December 2025, <https://pacforum.org/publications/pacnet-49-pete-hegseths-surprisingly-unsurprising-message-at-the-shangri-la-dialogue/>.

Ultimately, this shift toward minilateralism and informal dialogue signals a transformation in global governance from a unified architecture to a “regime complex”, a patchwork of overlapping, loosely connected institutions. While this fragmentation resolves the immediate problem of inaction, it risks solidifying the very geopolitical fault lines institutions were meant to bridge. By retreating into exclusive clubs like the Quad or AUKUS, major powers may achieve tactical efficiency, but they do so at the cost of the broad, normative legitimacy that only inclusive forums can provide³⁰.

Measuring Effectiveness: Beyond the Joint Statement

To accurately assess the utility of these security architectures, one must transcend the binary classification of success or failure and adopt a graduated scale of impact. Traditional evaluations often conflate activity with progress, assuming that the frequency of summits equates to the strengthening of security. However, a rigorous academic assessment requires a methodological distinction between procedural motion and strategic effect. This analysis proposes a four-part framework for measuring effectiveness, moving from superficial indicators to deep structural impacts.

The Implementation Gap: Output versus Outcome

The primary metric of effectiveness lies in the critical distinction between *output* and *outcome*. Output refers to the procedural byproducts of diplomacy: the number of meetings convened, the volume of working groups established, and the length of joint *communiqués* signed. Current forums, particularly the ARF and the UNSC, excel in this domain, generating a surplus of diplomatic artifacts. However, these are merely administrative indicators. The true metric of effectiveness is outcome: observable behavioral change in state conduct. The central research question is not whether a statement was signed, but whether a state halted a military deployment, reversed a distinct policy, or altered its strategic calculus in response to the institution’s pressure. A forum that produces high output but zero behavioral variance acts merely as a recording device for the status quo rather than an engine of security.

Agenda Setting and Normative Shifts

Effectiveness also manifests in the subtler power of agenda setting, the ability of an institution to force neglected issues onto the hierarchy of global priorities. This is particularly relevant for the Global South, where security concerns often diverge from major powers interests. A robust metric for this “soft” power is the tracking of specific terminology across longitudinal datasets of UN or regional resolutions³¹. For instance, the successful migration of “climate security” from a peripheral environmental concern to a core agenda item in defense dialogues indicates a normative shift. If a dialogue successfully reframes a local concern into a recognized

³⁰ Chan and Rublee, ‘The Promise of AUKUS’.

³¹ Sabrina B Arias, ‘The Textual Dynamics of International Policymaking: A New Corpus of UN Resolutions, 1946–2018’, *Journal of Peace Research* 62, no. 4 (2025): 1317–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433241280152>.

international norm, it has achieved a strategic effect, even in the absence of immediate enforcement mechanisms.

Crisis Management and Channel Resilience

In the absence of resolution, the effectiveness of a security forum can be measured by its resilience, specifically the durability of communication channels during kinetic conflict. This metric, often termed “crisis stability”, evaluates whether the institutional ties survive the outbreak of hostilities. The true test of a forum such as the Shangri-La Dialogue or the ARF is not whether it prevents all tension, but whether the military-to-military hotlines and backchannels established during peacetime remain functional during a crisis. If communication acts as a circuit breaker that prevents a skirmish from escalating into general war, the institution has demonstrated high effectiveness, regardless of its inability to solve the underlying political dispute.

Local Ownership as a Metric of Legitimacy

Finally, effectiveness must be weighed against the principle of local ownership, a critical determinant of long-term viability in the Global South. Solutions that are architected externally and imposed upon a region often suffer from a legitimacy deficit that renders them unsustainable. Therefore, an institution is effective only if its outcomes are internalized and implemented by regional actors. This “localization metric” asks whether the diplomatic breakthrough was a product of indigenous consensus-building or external coercion. In the context of the Asia-Pacific, security mechanisms that reflect the “ASEAN centrality”, prioritizing regional norms and pacing, consistently demonstrate higher rates of compliance than those perceived as instruments of external hegemonic management.

Methodological Limitations & Future Research

While this analysis provides a structured critique of institutional paralysis through the lens of the UNSC and ARF, it is subject to several methodological constraints that must be acknowledged to contextualize its findings.

First, the employment of a MDSD introduces an inherent selection bias³². By deliberately isolating the UNSC and ARF as archetypes of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ institutional failure, this study emphasizes dysfunction over functional competence. This focus risks obscuring the comparative resilience of governance bodies that operate primarily within technical domains. Organizations dedicated to functional cooperation, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), often maintain operational efficiency not because they are immune to politics, but because their institutional design allows them to compartmentalize technical standards separate from broader geopolitical friction³³. While not entirely insulated from sovereignty disputes,

³² Andrew Murray Faure, ‘Some Methodological Problems in Comparative Politics’, *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 6, no. 3 (1994): 307–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951692894006003003>.

³³ Tine Hanrieder, ‘The Path-Dependent Design of International Organizations: Federalism in the World Health Organization’, *European Journal of International Relations* 21, no. 1 (2015): 215–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066114530011>.

these bodies are often able to mitigate the paralysis that plagues explicit security forums. Consequently, the conclusions drawn here regarding the inevitability of gridlock may not be universally applicable across the entire spectrum of global governance, particularly in domains where the security dilemma is less acute.

Second, assessing the efficacy of preventive diplomacy presents a fundamental epistemological challenge: the counterfactual problem³⁴. In security studies, success is often defined by non-events, wars that did not start or escalations that were contained. It is methodologically difficult to isolate the independent variable of a specific summit or dialogue as the causal factor for peace. For instance, while the ARF is criticized for its lack of tangible resolutions, it is empirically impossible to prove definitively whether regional stability in the Asia-Pacific has been maintained because of its confidence-building measures or despite its inertia³⁵. This “negative proof” problem complicates any absolute judgment of institutional utility, suggesting that the “socialization” value of these forums may be underestimated simply because its primary output is the invisible absence of conflict.

Third, the shift toward “Track 1.5” diplomacy and closed-door minilateralism introduces significant opacity. Unlike formal UN proceedings, which produce public records and voting tallies, the most substantive strategic bargaining in informal settings occurs in “sidebar” meetings and private bilateral sessions³⁶. These critical interactions are shielded from public scrutiny, creating a data gap that limits empirical verification. This lack of transparency restricts the ability to trace the direct causal link between informal dialogue and policy shifts.

To address these limitations, future scholarship could expand the comparative scope beyond the Indo-Pacific. Further analysis might examine how ad-hoc coalitions within the African Union (AU) or Organization of American States (OAS) ecosystems interact with established statutory frameworks. Specifically, it remains to be seen whether the drive for operational efficiency is modifying historical preferences for broad consensus or if these dynamics differ significantly from those in Asia. Such research would help clarify the extent to which institutional fragmentation is a global or localized phenomenon.

Recommendations & Conclusion

The analysis of the UNSC and the ARF reveals a critical disconnect between the architecture of global governance and the kinetic realities of modern conflict. If international institutions are to escape the trap of “procedural ritualism”, they must undergo specific structural adaptations that prioritize functional utility over performative consensus.

³⁴ ‘Preventing Violent Conflicts: A Strategy for Preventive Diplomacy’, *Choice Reviews Online* 34, no. 04 (1996): 34-2425-34-2425, <https://doi.org/10.5860/CHOICE.34-2425>.

³⁵ Afri Emilia Br Sembiring et al., ‘The Implementation of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) in the South China Sea for Regional Stability through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)’, *Jurnal Pertahanan: Media Informasi Tentang Kajian Dan Strategi Pertahanan Yang Mengedepankan Identity, Nasionalism Dan Integrity* 10, no. 2 (2024): 308–20, <https://doi.org/10.33172/jp.v10i2.19559>.

³⁶ Tianhan Gui, ‘Behind Closed Doors: Informal Influence on United Nations Staffing and Pathologies of International Bureaucracies’, *Global Policy* 15, no. 4 (2024): 615–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13370>.

At the level of global governance, the most urgent imperative is to circumvent the paralysis of the P5 veto without dismantling the Charter itself. The adoption of a “Consensus Minus X” decision-making model offers a viable pathway for reform. This mechanism would prevent a single Permanent Member from blocking resolutions specifically related to mass atrocities or humanitarian catastrophes. By codifying a “Responsibility Not to Veto” in cases of genocide, a proposal previously championed by France and Mexico³⁷, the Council could restore its legitimacy as a protector of civilians while retaining the Great Power equilibrium for standard geopolitical issues. Such a procedural shift is essential to prevent the recurrence of the systemic inaction witnessed during conflicts and crisis such as the Syrian and Rohingya ones.

Regionally, forums like the ARF must address the discontinuity inherent in their rotating chairmanship models. Currently, the annual turnover of leadership creates a “start-stop” dynamic where long-term security initiatives lose momentum with every administrative change. To counter this, regional bodies could institutionalize a “Troika” mechanism, empowering the immediate past, present, and future chairs to manage the agenda collectively. This reform would ensure institutional memory and sustained diplomatic pressure on protracted issues, such as the crisis in Myanmar, preventing them from slipping off the agenda due to the political whims of a single incoming chair.

For small and medium-sized powers, the era of relying solely on static, block-based voting is fading. To navigate the “protection gap” left by Great Power gridlock, smaller states must pivot toward “issue-based coalitions”. Rather than seeking broad ideological alignment, vulnerable nations could forge agile, temporary alliances centered on specific existential threats, such as climate justice or refugee burden-sharing. This strategic agility allows smaller actors to aggregate their diplomatic weight and bypass the inertia of larger, fossilized blocs.

Ultimately, the study of institutional design confirms that form influences function. The trade-offs between inclusivity and efficiency, or consensus and action, are not merely theoretical abstractions but the defining constraints of global security. While diplomatic procedure provides the necessary “skeleton” of international order, structuring the interactions between states, it remains inert without the “muscle” of enforcement mechanisms. As the global order fractures into competitive minilateralism, institutions that fail to develop this muscle risk becoming historical artifacts, relics of a liberal idealism that can no longer function in a resurgent realist world.

³⁷ Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, ‘The Responsibility Not to Veto: A Genealogy’, *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 24, no. 3 (2018): 331–49, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02403003>.