

## Book Review

# Multilateral Diplomacy: Theory and Practice of Regional and International Organizations

Reviewed by **Bagher Asadi\***

**Amb. M. Javad Zarif (PhD)\*\***, **Amb. S. M. Kazem Sajjadpour (PhD)\*\*\***, *Multilateral Diplomacy: Theory and Practice of Regional and International Organizations* (2009), School of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran (in Persian), 3 Volumes, vi + 720 pages (Vol. I & II), Annexes to p. 971, English-Persian Glossary to p. 1022, Selected Bibliography (Persian and English) to p. 1041 (Vol. III).

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A 3-volume work on the theory and practice of multilateral diplomacy, written by two senior career diplomats – both accomplished academics in their own right – speaks for itself. It's a huge, serious work of research, based on over two decades of teaching and complemented with the accumulated wisdom and discretion of long years of practical diplomatic experience and actual, active engagement in multilateral processes. I have found introducing the work to non-Iranian readers quite a challenge; there is so much information and analysis on so many issues in the first two volumes that can hardly be captured in a short narrative. That I will not even attempt at; instead I just suffice to present the crux of the work, and also, being a career multilateral diplomat myself, highlight the significance of the objective-realist outlook espoused by the authors – even if between the lines.

A mere look at the titles of the 14 chapters of the book – let alone the detailed subtitles – reflects the expanse of the terrain covered. The first 8 chapters (Volume I) deal with the concept of multilateral diplomacy; its historical origins and development over time; the nexus between multilateral diplomacy and international law; culture and functions of multilateral diplomacy; participants in multilateral diplomacy; and how decisions are made.

Volume II, consisting of 6 chapters, deals first with multilateral diplomacy in the United Nations as the global, universal body (chapter 9) and then with the multilateral institutions outside the UN (chapter 10). The remaining four chapters in the volume take up the discussion of the four major current areas of UN multilateral work: peace and security; armaments; environment and development; and human rights.

Volume III consists of a compendium of UN documents, starting with the Charter, and also inclusive of the Rules of Procedure and Agenda of the General Assembly (GA); GA subsidiary bodies; subsidiary bodies of the Security Council



and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); functions and responsibilities in the UN Secretariat; subsidiary bodies/agencies of the UN; acronyms of international organizations; English-Persian Glossary; and Selected Bibliography (in Persian and English). As indicated in the book's Preface, the authors, utilizing their practical and field experience, have also undertaken to translate anew the UN Charter, the GA Rules of Procedure and the Agenda of a recent GA Session.

The authors' rather brief preface to their quite voluminous work lays out the problematique in very clear terms. They begin with a word on the historical continuum stretching over the past two centuries during which regional and international institutions and organizations and multilateral diplomacy have gradually – and increasingly – become part and parcel of the everyday life of almost everybody across the globe, touching, somehow, albeit to differing degrees, both developed and developing societies. Hence, the almost daily coverage of news pieces related to the work and activities of the UN or a plethora of other regional and sub-regional organizations and institutions. Similarly, multilateral diplomacy and institutions have come to occupy an important position as a key subject in international relations in both academia and governmental/state circles – and in more recent times – non-governmental circles/organizations.

Alluding to the emergence and articulation over time of traditional and modern outlooks on the status, role and relevance of multilateral diplomacy and its related institutions, and also to the importance myriad actors -- both state and non-state – pay to this track of diplomacy, the authors concede that notwithstanding there exists little agreement – much less consensus – among the States Members of the UN or theorists/academics on the foundational framework, mandate, and functions of this diplomacy or its institutions. In this vein, they draw attention to the rather prevalent outlook among the developing countries considering multilateral institutions as the long arm of the powerful countries; or the outlook on the part of some powerful countries looking at these institutions as a “nuisance” and impediment on the way of the unbridled exercise of their political, economic and military prowess. Simultaneously, in their view, a group of theorists/analysts consider international organizations as a mere symbol and subject of power and judging an analytical approach to them frivolous, even misleading, while another group – along with a large number of ordinary people and politicians – view



international institutions/organizations as independent actors worthy of serious analysis and interaction towards realization of one's expectations.

Having laid out this broad panoramic view in just two short paragraphs, the authors then turn to their book's mission. "This book tries to present a realistic picture of both theoretical and practical aspects of multilateral diplomacy in international institutions and organizations, and also tries to answer the key question of how to make sense of multilateral diplomacy – in both aspects – in international relations." They further go on to describe their objective in the book as "an effort to help understand the nature, process of evolution, the practice, as well as the impact and effect of regional and international organizations." In order to highlight the balance in their approach to the *métier* at hand, it is underlined in very clear terms that the book "is the outcome of more than two decades of the field experience of the authors in multilateral diplomacy along with long years of research in and teaching of the subject at Master's and Doctoral levels."

As indicated early on, reviewing the detailed discussions of a book of this huge size – the first two volumes, to be exact – proves challenging for any reviewer, especially for a career diplomat with a non-academic, non-theoretical, policy-oriented predisposition. It is interesting and highly informative to see the authors start with the concept of multilateral diplomacy and describe in painstaking detail (in 30 pages in Chapter 1, under seven sub-titles), as befits a run-of-the-mill textbook, how the concept has evolved over time. That's a pretty routine approach and can be found quite easily in the rich existing literature – especially in English. What I find of particular interest is the clearly realistic outlook that permeates through the chapter – and in fact throughout the book – which is captured in a few bullets at the end of the chapter. The crux of the message is that multilateral diplomacy has been developed and articulated mainly in order to respond to the extra-territorial and international challenges facing states [nation-states]/countries/societies, and more importantly, "that no state [nation-state] can on its own and independently respond to all the challenges in this domain nor can it utilize all potential opportunities." I believe this is clear enough a potent message for our times and all societies – on both sides of what I term as the development divide - even if the need and the urgency in the developing South is much more pronounced, acute, and even burning in so many places. The emphasis on the two



aspects involved; challenge and opportunity, surely represents the objectivity that runs through the analysis and bespeaks of the deep theoretical knowledge as well as the practical experience and engagement.

The same approach can be seen in Chapter 2 where the historical evolution of multilateral diplomacy has been discussed – starting with an allusion to early attempts in 13<sup>th</sup> Century Europe on and around the necessity of multilateral cooperation, especially on how to resolve and preferably prevent military conflict and war. The discussion then continues with the emergence of the Westphalian concepts of *nation-state* and *sovereignty* (1648), which have come to shape and dominate international discourse and relations ever since. The Chapter reviews developments in multilateral diplomacy – and the related coalitions, institutions and organizations – from then onwards in relative brevity until the establishment of the League of Nations (1919) and in more detail since the creation of the United Nations (1945) up to almost two years ago (2008), with special emphasis on peace and security, and also with an eye to the growing international appreciation of the need for cooperation/coordination in economic and social fields arising from rapid industrial and technological advancements. The wisdom of the discussion, as encapsulated in the Chapter’s summary, informs us that the process of development of multilateral diplomacy has been slow and gradual but cumulative, and that it has been anchored on the central concept and principle of “*sovereignty*”, and also that its development has been closely tied with the growing realization in the international community of the necessity of regulating the relations between and among countries/nation-states in various fields and areas. While touching on the development of multilateral institutions and organizations outside of the UN family which, in the authors’ view, help to make this track of diplomacy more and more global, the Chapter ends with another important note - “Multilateralism is on the rise not only as an important reality but also as a political imperative towards gaining legitimacy in today’s world.” I really doubt that anybody with a reasonably realistic and objective understanding of our world today and *au courant* with the pace of developments can in all fairness disagree with this judgment.

Chapter 3 undertakes to look at various theories and schools of thought that have tried during the past several centuries, particularly in the course of the 20th Century, to explain and analyze the rationale behind the conduct of states [nation-



states] and multilateral institutions. Leaving the 30-page-long theoretical discussion to the curiosity of the interested readers, I turn instead to the summary which, as in the previous chapters, represents the authors' findings and judgment. While considering each of the competing schools of thought and theories incapable, in the final analysis, of explaining fully multilateral institutions, the authors are of the view that each contains elements serving the purpose, and more importantly, a full and comprehensive picture of these institutions hinges upon an optimal utilization of all theories/outlooks. In a comparative sense, however, they tend to give institutionalism, the theory of International Regimes, and constructivism a higher internal capability of explaining multilateral diplomacy and the developments of its related institutions. The final reckoning, in the authors' judgment, is that: "Due to the ineffectiveness of unilateralist approaches and policies, international actors have no other choice but to resort to multilateral diplomacy and its related institutions in order to forestall the unilateralist actions of others and gain legitimacy for their own actions."

In Chapter 4 the authors take up the nexus between multilateral diplomacy and international law, which, in their estimation, is close and in fact, inseparable. They emphasize quite early on that the concept and principle of "*sovereignty*," while lying at the very foundation of multilateral diplomacy, has been significantly influenced by it. The chapter discusses in relative detail changes over time in the concept of "*sovereignty*," especially from the vantage point of the concept of "*non-interference*;" that is, how the original seemingly absolute and inviolable sovereignty has gradually come to be increasingly constrained, first in its external dimension (most notably in the area of waging war, even legitimate self-defense) and in more recent times, also in its domestic purview – as best reflected in the field of human rights where treatment – or mistreatment for that matter – of citizens within the national territory is no longer a matter of national sovereignty but part and parcel of collective international responsibility. The chapter's summary also informs us that development and articulation of international law has been possible only through multilateral diplomacy and its well-organized institutions, processes, procedures and mechanisms, and its further development will also continue to need and rely on this track of diplomacy and its institutions. The authors caution, however, that notwithstanding this intimate liaison, "*power and legitimacy* tend to have an



undeniable reciprocal influence on the articulation and implementation of international regulations.” And also that “Multilateral institutions play a key role in the process of norm-setting and rule-making in international law through their decisions, commentaries and interactions.”

Having dealt in the first four chapters with the historical development of multilateral diplomacy and its relations with international law, the authors turn in Chapters 5 through 8 to how multilateral diplomacy works in action; how various actors interact with each other in action, how decisions (in the proper sense of the word) are made, and how they are implemented. Chapter 5 deals with the functions of multilateral diplomacy and the authorities and responsibilities of the actors involved. While the terms of reference and authorities and responsibilities of each multilateral institution is clearly defined in its constituting document – and also traceable in its past conduct and record – the parameters of its conduct in actuality, including in decision-making and implementation, are constrained by such factors as the sources of finance, human resources, as well as the executing arm/agency. Notwithstanding such real and serious constraints, the authors still credit multilateral institutions with such significant functions as creation and dissemination of expert knowledge and outreach; norm-setting; rule-making; rule-monitoring [monitoring of States’ compliance with international commitments]; distribution of financial resources and extension of technical assistance; and settlement of disputes among States in various political, economic, legal, and trade fields and even between States and their citizens.

Chapter six looks into the structure of decision-making in multilateral diplomacy as the second important factor in this process; the key question being how decisions are made. Based on earlier discussions in the book establishing that multilateral diplomacy requires an interactive environment and a set of legal and agreed procedures, the chapter proceeds to lay out in detail these procedures and regulations. It is reckoned that the manner in which multilateral institutions are established tends to have a significant impact on their susceptibility to power relations in the outside world, particularly that the establishment of each institution is the final outcome of a collective decision on the part of States within the framework of multilateral diplomacy. Various forms of the establishment of multilateral institutions; various structures of decision-making bodies; subsidiary



bodies, including ad hoc bodies; the secretariat, its composition, duties, and management; and agenda and agenda-setting; are, *inter alia*, discussed in relative detail in the Chapter, both in the UN and such another institution as the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The Chapter's summary also emphasizes the significance of structure in the analysis of decision-making in multilateral institutions, which is, by definition intergovernmental in nature and is based on the principle of equal sovereignty of States. It is also reckoned that the secretariat, while serving to convene and organize meetings and also to pursue and monitor the implementation of decisions, does, as a matter of fact, play a very important role in affecting the process and content of decisions made, and of course in monitoring of implementation.

In Chapter seven the third important factor in the analysis of decision-making in multilateral diplomacy; that is, actors of multilateral diplomacy and its related institutions, is discussed. The Chapter starts with a general – but extremely valid and helpful assertion – that numerous actors are involved in a multilateral decision - some official and others unofficial, some overtly and others not-so-overtly, and some directly and others indirectly – and also that the experience and capability of actors bear significantly in the process of decision-making and its final outcome. The Chapter begins its review of the repertory of actors with the representatives of States for the simple, abiding reason that multilateral institutions are intergovernmental in nature and are composed, first and foremost, of States [official representatives of governments in power]. The discussion then turns to the role of non-governmental actors - who have gradually come to play an increasingly important role in institutions and processes that still continue to preserve their essentially intergovernmental character – the secretariat, representatives of other international organizations [IOs], [independent] experts, and finally, politicians and personalities of world renown that serve to highlight multilateral causes and help shape world public opinion [opinion-makers]. The rather detailed discussion on the role of the secretariat and how it plays a very important role in the process of decision-making and in influencing the final outcome shows the authors' close, in-depth knowledge of the terrain under review. It shows the actual parameters of action, interaction and conduct within the framework of an officially neutral international bureaucracy which is composed in reality of the nationals of a large





number of countries, with different levels of personal competency, coming from different cultural and political backgrounds, and with real if undeclared political allegiance to one's national identity and even governance, different even conflicting [hidden] national agendas, and finally personal and departmental/organizational rivalry, jealousy, and turf-seeking.

In my view, the section on how representatives of States act – and interact – within the multilateral institution and in multilateral processes and negotiation, is particularly rich and insightful, and in fact represents one of the best parts of the book. The discussion reflects a very concrete finger-on-the pulse knowledge and familiarity that cannot but be rooted in close, direct personal experience and engagement. The detailed discussion under such sub-titles as the role of government; the role of representative; instructions from the capital; factors affecting the representative's power; the stature of the representative at home and at the international organization; personal capabilities of the representative; and coalition-making abilities, reflect in very lucid terms the rich experience lying behind the narrative. The discussion also reflects – indirectly at least – the actual constraints, even the real predicaments, of the representatives of States having to act and interact on daily basis in more often than not difficult situations and on thorny, contested even controversial issues while under strict and sometimes unclear and at times contradictory instructions from the capital. Having myself worked as a multilateral diplomat for over two decades – at times as a representative of State and at other times as an intergovernmental chairperson/ coordinator/ facilitator, I can fully understand, and of course, sympathize, with an inherently challenging position and situation that can at times turn into unenviable impossible positions. The discussion also brings to light the nuances involved in the *métier* of multilateral diplomacy and how a capable, seasoned – and if I may add, wise – diplomat can bring personal capability, hard-won experience, and discretion [underlined] against all odds to bear on the multilateral negotiation and help save the moment or even the day – which, I have to confess, would at times risk going out on a limb.

Chapter 8 of the book takes up the discussion of the fourth – and the last – factor in influencing the process and outcome of multilateral diplomacy; the element of culture. The chapter opens with a review of the established culture of



multilateral institutions, which is known and agreed upon, and is adequately reflected in the amply documented rules of procedure and relevant regulations. In the words of the authors, “this is the cumulative outcome of over 200 years of multilateral experience and practice, and very much similar in spirit to the established [Western] parliamentary system, albeit with some differences peculiar to the multilateral institution.” The written element – as embodied in the rules of procedure and other well-articulated, detailed regulations governing the conduct in and of the multilateral institution and the multilateral process [negotiation] - contain detailed guidelines on, *inter alia*, programme of work and how it is decided upon, how official and even unofficial and ad hoc meetings are organized and managed, how agendas are set and approved, how decisions are made, and no less important, how the myriad actors (discussed in Chapter 7) participate in the process. This section also contains an interesting sub-section on the forms decisions can take in a multilateral institution/process; resolution, decision, statement, declaration, communiqué, and also how a decision proper is acted upon; through consensus (as the preferred course of action) or voting. The chapter also discusses the conduct of actors as envisioned in the rules of procedure and other relevant regulations; such as making statements, exercising the “right of reply” or “point of order,” or how to present suggestions in the course of the meeting/session, and also how draft decisions/resolutions are prepared and submitted – whether by an individual (country) sponsor or by a group of like-minded co-sponsors – and how they are discussed and finally put to action.

Aside from the written element as just mentioned, the authors also discuss, in relative detail, the unwritten element – the oral culture - that is practically at work in the multilateral process. In their words, “The oral – unwritten - culture in multilateral diplomacy refers to unwritten personal and collective norms that are esteemed - and respected – by experienced, seasoned multilateral diplomats. They evaluate each other’s capability and experience on the basis of such criteria and norms.” The catalogue of norms and criteria the authors provide in this section include: legal sensitivity and reliance on documents (legal history); proficiency in languages (six UN official languages, the more languages you know the better); wide and easy access/good public relations (PR); engagement in unofficial liaison as distinct from official, diplomatic liaison relying on official correspondence and with



consideration for the proper rank; and the personal capability and competence of the multilateral diplomat. As for the latter, the authors emphasize the importance of such characteristics, *inter alia*, as : the capacity and capability to lead; diplomatic etiquette and outward expression of respect and courtesy even in addressing the representatives of an adversary; moderation in demeanor and in argumentation; expression of empathy for others and their particular situations; and the capability to draw on technical knowledge and expertise in advancing national [political] positions and priorities. Among the other characteristics catalogued by the authors in this section, I find the following of particular significance, which, I believe, reflect the authors' valuable personal experience and discretion: wider definition of national interest beyond the transient requirements of the moment and/or the rather limited, constrained official instructions from the capital; the capability for [wise, impassioned] calculation of the situation at hand and what it takes to defend and preferably promote national position/interest [especially under difficult circumstances and on tough, controversial issues]; and the "sense of mission" – that is, a successful multilateral diplomat is one who believes in the merits of multilateralism per se and is convinced of its usefulness towards the promotion of the national interests the diplomat in question is commissioned [and paid] to represent and defend.

This brings us to the end of volume I, in fact the end of the discussions on how multilateral diplomacy is conducted in action by various actors – especially diplomats representing States Members of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions. As indicated earlier, volume II consists of six chapters. Chapter 9 deals with the United Nations. It discusses in relative detail the significance of the Charter, and the structure, authorities and responsibilities, functions, and the subsidiary bodies of the UN's six main organs - General Assembly (GA), Security Council, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Secretariat, Guardianship Council, and the International Court of Justice. The chapter's summary, as in other chapters, presents, in brief, overarching words, the authors' quite clear judgment on the significance of the UN as the sole genuinely universal body, reckoned to be "the most effective multilateral institution in the history of diplomatic developments, particularly multilateral diplomacy." While noting that the Organization has been seized with the imperative of reform since its very inception, the authors credit it



with the flexibility to sustain itself through changing international circumstances such as the emergence of new world powers, the Cold War and its demise, decolonization and unilateralism, even if the on-going reform processes have failed to remedy its major shortcomings or meet the expectations of quite a substantial part of its universal membership. In the authors' reckoning, while ECOSOC continues to function without much meaningful change, the Security Council has gained a much stronger position through better adaptation with the changing circumstances – the end result being an expanded and more effective role in the field of peace and security as well as a host of other emerging issues [such as environment and human rights not traditionally deemed to belong to the realm of peace and security].

Chapter 10 addresses the growth and development of other multilateral institutions outside of the UN family, which in the authors' view, is reflective of the inexorable process of the growing need on the part of States/countries and the international community to cooperate and coordinate towards meeting new and emerging challenges and gain collective legitimacy. In contrast with the UN as the universal multilateral body, the dominant feature of these new institutions is their limited membership; whether they represent geographical/regional, economic, military or even ideological groupings. Despite obvious major differences between the UN and these [somewhat] smaller institutions with inevitably more limited mandate, functions, reach, and impact, and their nominal independence from the UN and its family, the authors deem it necessary to underline an important factor of relatedness; that is, commitment to the principles of the UN Charter – and also specific provisions for cooperation with the UN and its agencies – have been enshrined in the constituting document of almost all these non-UN institutions. If nothing else, this points to the highly-and-widely-respected global position and stature of the UN – as an archetypical model - as well as the need on the part of these other institutions to gain international legitimacy. While alluding that the catalogue of multilateral governmental institutions runs close to seven thousand, the Chapter merely suffices to [briefly] look into such supra-regional institutions as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM); Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); League of Arab States; North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); Group of 8 (G8); Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); Asia-Pacific Economic



Cooperation (APEC); and such regional groupings as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN); Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO); South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); African Union (AU); South African Development Community (SADC); European Union (EU); Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); Organization of American States (OAS); Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR); and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In a final reckoning, the authors credit the wide gamut of these organizations/institutions with the promotion of [regional or supra-regional] cooperation and integration, most prominently in the economic field but also in other fields. In their estimation, the European Union (EU) is considered as the most successful example of such institutions, which has developed a well-organized, complex structure and also come to act as a serious international player.

The remaining four chapters in the book [chapters 11-14, volume II], as indicated earlier, take up the discussion of the four major areas of the UN current work and activities - peace and security, armaments, environment and development, and human rights. I have chosen to be quite brief in looking at these four chapters – much briefer than has been the case with the other ten chapters - if for no other reason that the bulk of the material covered in the chapters are found easily and in abundance in the voluminous and substantial existing literature (inclusive of the UN documents) on the Charter, the structure, functions, and activities of the UN and its main six pillars, as well as on the activities of the UN specialized agencies, regional commissions, the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank, IMF, and WTO), the UN-related conventions and protocols, and finally, the major UN conferences/summits and their outcomes. Each chapter lays out in relative detail the foundational framework as well as the legal history the UN work in these four areas, as well as the changes over time in the structure and policies/measures of the Organization in addressing each area and rising to the challenge of changing times and circumstances.

The thread that links the substance of the functions/policies/activities covered in these four chapters, as underlined by the authors in the summary to Chapter 11, revolves around the principle of the provision/preservation of



international peace and security, as enshrined in the UN Charter. “In fact, the very *raison d’être* of the United Nations has been defined on and around this concept, and more importantly, has transformed on that basis. In other words, the provision of international peace and security has been the most fundamental purpose and objective of the UN and has defined its operational trajectory.” Having reviewed the changes in the UN’s approach and policies towards the execution of this overarching principle, the authors underline that “Preservation of international peace and security has come to include, on the one hand, reducing the pretexts for reducing conflict through disarmament and arms control, and on the other, through promotion of social and economic development.” Notwithstanding the negative influence of politics proper on the social and economic activities of the UN, the authors believe that these policies and activities – far from being satisfactory to the developing world as the bigger part of the international community – should not be underestimated, let alone ignored. In their estimation, the UN policies and activities in these fields have, among others, helped to raise international sensitivities, achieved substantial success in norm-setting, rule-making, and also extension of technical and financial assistance on almost a global scale. In their view, “shaping a global culture” in this regard can – and should – be considered a major UN success.

In turning to how multilateral diplomacy has approached the question of human rights – “as an intrinsically complex area involving myriad legal, political, religious, social, and even sovereignty-related aspects and issues” – the authors, as in the case of other areas of the UN work, opt for an objective approach. While discussing the historical background of the development of the concept of human rights – international human rights – the question they raise and try to answer is: how multilateral diplomacy – to be more precise, the UN and its ever-expanding and sizeable human rights machinery (1945 onwards) – have fared in rising to the challenge of pervasive and consistent violations of human rights in various parts of the world. It is underlined, however, that many aspects of the human rights question are not addressed in the chapter. The focus, instead, is on how multilateral diplomacy has in action served the objective of the promotion of human rights discourse and culture (the three generations of human rights), and in a more concrete sense, how it has helped promote the actual implementation of human rights on a regional and global scale – the machinery, mechanisms, and procedures.



In addressing the challenges that the human rights machinery – particularly the Human Rights Commission - has faced over time and how the UN has responded to such challenges, the authors take stock of the recent developments since the establishment of the Human Rights Council (2006). Given the rather pervasive, traditional criticisms of “politicization,” “selectivity,” and “double standards” in the actual conduct of the Human Rights Commission in approaching violations of human rights in different parts of the world and in different countries, the authors consider the Council’s innovative mechanism of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) a welcome development. In their final reckoning, the authors emphasize that as a result of the emergence of such concepts in international law as “individual criminal responsibility” and the “responsibility to protect” since the 1990s and the related establishment of such bodies as the International Criminal Court (ICC), along with the collective efforts of the international community to counter cases of massive violation, “human rights has gradually developed into a highly influential factor in international peace and security and has effectively rattled the traditional inviolability and absolute immunity of national sovereignty.” They further continue that “As a cumulative result of regional and international endeavors in such fields as norm-setting and executive measures and also change in the number of actors and stakeholders, globalization, revolution in communications and in shaping public opinion, and no less important, the increasing significance of the individual as an independent actor, human rights has come to gain an increasing importance in international relations, and equally important, it has somehow interlinked with the domestic, regional and international legitimacy of States. And that is why all States pursue the question of human rights with a high degree of sensitivity in order to preserve their domestic, regional and international legitimacy.”

This concludes my overall review of a 3-volume book, which as I underlined in the opening paragraph, is a rich compendium of scholarly research, and the accumulated wisdom and discretion of direct multilateral experience and personal engagement. I have tried to churn out, to the degree possible in a few short pages, the crux of the authors’ argument in defense of “multilateral diplomacy” and its huge merits in our world today – and by extension, the world of tomorrow which I tend to presume to be much more complex and challenging than is currently conceivable. The book fills a palpable lacunae in the existing literature in Persian in



this field. Most of the credible, well-researched serious literature on multilateral diplomacy, especially the UN, has been traditionally authored by academics without much direct field experience. I am sure the book under review will serve to educate and enlighten a wide range of readers – undergraduate and graduate students and also professors in such fields as political science, international relations, international law and diplomacy, and also general readers with amateurish interest in foreign policy and world politics. However, I believe young – and even not-so-young – diplomats in the foreign service already engaged in multilateral work or those aspiring to become multilateral diplomats will find the work a treasure. The amount of wisdom and discretion that has found its way in various parts of the book, especially where the multilateral diplomat – whether an ambassador and head of mission or a mere representative/delegate of junior or even senior rank – goes into action and has to grapple with difficult, thorny and controversial issues and situations, is indeed substantial and profound. To a multilateral diplomat myself, this is *deja vue*, reminiscing of all kinds of moments and situations – the juicy, personal details of which can be related only in a post-retirement memoirs and certainly in less challenging times.

And as a final reflection on a well-researched work peppered with diplomatic nuance and finesse in celebration – and dedicated to the cause – of cherished multilateralism beyond sheer illusion and far removed from debilitating cynicism, I would like to repeat, once more, the oft-quoted statement that if we did not have the United Nations – with all its problems and manifest anomalies and shortcomings – *we had to create one*. Dr. Zarif and Dr. Sajjadpour have given the Iranians – and in fact the Persian readers anywhere – a huge scholarly work with a rather simple central message: *we are better off with the UN and multilateral diplomacy than without them*. All it takes is to engage and interact; neither the unilateralism of the powerful nor the self-inflicted isolationism of the weak or the not-so-powerful is the solution or the cure. And my very last words would be to add: *Three cheers for them and for multilateral diplomacy – multilateralism – which I have no doubt will ensure a better future for all of us in our common refuge, endangered as it is by both natural disasters and individual-collective human failings and even lunacy*.