ARTICLE

From Border Walls to Corridors: An Analysis of Connectivity in a Changing Multilateral World Order

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has witnessed the construction of new border walls in an increasing speed against the unprecedented risks emerging from porous borders such as refugees, terrorists, and smugglers, weakening the borderless world discourse of globalization. In today's world, six out of every ten people live behind border walls. Meanwhile, paradoxically, connectivity deepens in the world at all levels of international society through various means of information networks, financial flows, and logistic networks. Moreover, despite connectivity being an underdeveloped concept in International Relations, it has become an essential feature of the changing world system as seen in various strategies followed by the U.S., China, and the EU. Between the two trends of connection and disconnection, this study analyzes connectivity within the conceptual frameworks of multiplexity, interlocking regional worlds, and the Three World system developed to understand the changing world system. The common theme in these world order narratives reveals that multilateralism is a dynamic concept that requires to be assessed according to the new ways of cooperation in today's world between different actors on various issue areas. In this context, this paper will argue that looking at connectivity from a new multilateralism perspective makes a cautious optimistic contribution to the debates of "multilateralism in crisis" which intensified as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war, the Gaza conflict, and the depreciating legitimacy of prevailing institutions in the current world order.

Keywords

Connectivity, multilateralism, infrastructure alliances, changing world order

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has witnessed the construction of new border walls in an increasing speed against the unprecedented risks emerging from porous borders such as refugees, terrorists, and smugglers which have weakened the borderless world discourse of globalization. As of 2018, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 63 new physical walls have been constructed worldwide. In today's world, six out of every ten people live behind border walls.[1] Meanwhile, paradoxically, connectivity deepens in the world at all levels of international society through various means of information networks, financial flows, and logistic networks. Parag Khanna underlines that in contrast to the 250,000 kilometers of international borders worldwide, 64 million kilometers of highways, 1.2 million kilometers of railways, two million kilometers of pipelines, and 745,000 million kilometers of internet cables bring populations and economic centers together.[2] What unites these networks is infrastructure which is the basis of connectivity today. Hence, from this point of view, borders are not only sites of tensions, but also gateways to learning.[3] Khanna claims that the true political map of the world includes not just states but megacities, highways, railways, pipelines, internet cables, and other symbols of our emerging global network civilization which makes connectivity the new paradigm of global organization.[4]

Although human interactions and connectivity are as old as each other, what is new is the emergence of connectivity as a strategy with geopolitical implications and its becoming a tool of diplomatic influence.[5] The global political agenda today is replete with many "connectivity strategies" pursued, for example, by the U.S., India, China, and the EU. However, despite the term's popularity, it is a buzzword that is rarely defined with sufficient precision. Moreover, there is a debate whether connectivity will be a source of conflict or cooperation in the changing world order. Some argue that redrawing geopolitical boundaries to connect and divide regions through trade corridors and supply chains carries the risk of security problems.[6] On the other hand, others contend that in the age of connectivity, connectivity projects are also multilateral cooperation agendas, revitalizing multilateralism which is the best way to coordinate the various existing bilateral and regional efforts for enhancing connectivity.

This paper aims to analyze the interplay of connectivity with multilateralism. In this context, it asks whether there is any chance for connectivity to revitalize multilateralism. In order to answer this question, first, the article examines

connectivity from an analytical framework, and second, with the help of the recent analyses of the changing world order by Acharya, Ikenberry, and Onar and Kavalski, it evaluates how connectivity empowers multilateralism. The paper argues that connectivity in today's world has the potential to make a cautious optimistic contribution to the debates of "multilateralism in crisis" which have intensified as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war, the Gaza conflict, and the depreciating legitimacy of prevailing institutions in the current world order.[7]

Between Walls and Networks: An Analytical Framework for Understanding Connectivity

The term "connectivity" has been used in the computing field since the late 20th century and simply meant "a state or a capacity of being connected."[8] The term has also been used in fields such as economics, finance, energy policy, and infrastructure development to describe the increasing interconnectedness of actors in the globalized world, from individuals to states, forming increasingly complex networks.[9] Despite the fact that "connectivity" as a term has been used for a long time, in the early 21st century, the intensity, scale, and impact of connectivity changed. According to the World Economic Forum, connectivity is now the driving force of globalization, which lost its speed after COVID-19. The "purpose-led globalization" supporting "sustainability and common purpose and cause for the global good" is strengthened by connectivity initiatives.[10]

Since the beginning of 2013 with the announcement of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the world has witnessed the proliferation of various connectivity projects.

Since the beginning of 2013 with the announcement of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the world has witnessed the proliferation of various connectivity projects. The BRI is the first major institution of what is known as an era of "infrastructure alliances," which requires attempts of both economy and diplomacy.[11] On its tenth anniversary, China's president Xi Jinping summarized the project with these words: "covering the land, the ocean, the sky and the internet, this network has boosted the flow of goods, capital, technologies and human resources among countries involved."[12] More than 140 countries are affiliated with the initiative and China has spent more than US$350 billion for

the project.[13] In the latter half of the 2010s, the U.S. and its allies launched several alternative initiatives as a response to China's infrastructure initiatives and trade routes such as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) initiative.[14] Japan, for instance, put forward its own "Quality Infrastructure Investment" concept in 2016.[15] In 2021, the Global Gateway Initiative was announced as the EU's large-scale investment plan to support infrastructure development worldwide.[16] The latter focuses on physical infrastructure to strengthen digital, transport, and energy networks. Additionally, it seeks to establish the ideal framework for bettering trade and investment conditions by integrating supply chains, standardizing financial services, and bringing regulatory systems closer together.[17] Russia also proposed its own connectivity vision with the officially announcement of the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) in 2016 at the time of Beijing's acting as an "organiser of the Eurasian space" with the BRI. Moscow's initiative "envisions a network of connections between key Asian powers—Russia, China, India—and regional organisations, from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRI to ASEAN".[18] With this vision it aims "to find a new role for Russia among connectivity initiatives and regional projects" in the Russian Far East (RFE), Central Asia, and within the so-called Greater Eurasia and hence "to ensure symbolic status equality with China and counter connectivity frames promoted by the USA, such as the Indo-Pacific Region."[19] Nonetheless, the war in Ukraine has significantly hindered Russia's connectivity plans.

The concept covers hard connectivity (physical links such as infrastructure projects); soft connectivity (institutional linkages, people-to-people, or digital connectivity); land, sea, air, cyber, and educational connections; and customs cooperation and trade facilitation links.

Economic corridors linking economic hubs, key economic players, and resources became important functions of these connectivity initiatives.[20] For instance, the G20 Summit in New Delhi in 2023 added a new dimension to this aspect of connectivity. India, along with the U.S., Saudi Arabia, the UAE, France, Germany, Italy, and the EU laid the foundation for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) with a joint declaration.[21] The EU, under the Global Gateway Project, announced two initiatives focusing on energy, climate, and digital connectivity in the Central Asia region.[22] In addition to the projects of the great powers and the EU, connectivity is also on the agenda put forward in major regional

cooperation schemes by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Plus Three (10 ASEAN Member States plus China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the U.S.-led Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).[23] Connectivity has been on the agenda of ASEAN for a long time. The most recent manifestation of this, namely the "Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025", indicates sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence, and people mobility as five areas of ASEAN connectivity.[24] In this context, starting from the mid-2010s, connectivity has become popular in global politics. Yet, there is no agreed definition of connectivity and the debate on whether it is just an abstract buzzword or a distinct category has led to the concept remaining academically underdeveloped.[25]

Connectivity was comprehensively defined for the first time at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 2017. The forum defined connectivity as "bringing countries, people, and societies closer together." The concept covers hard connectivity (physical links such as infrastructure projects); soft connectivity (institutional linkages, people-to-people, or digital connectivity); land, sea, air, cyber, and educational connections; and customs cooperation and trade facilitation links. It is underlined that enhanced economic, political-security, and sociocultural ties between Asia and Europe will help narrow development and capacities gap.[26] For ASEM, connectivity activities should have values and principles such as "result-oriented, support of free and open trade, market principles, multi-dimensionality, inclusiveness, fairness, openness, transparency, financial viability, cost-effectiveness and mutual benefits." In the ASEM context of connectivity, sustainability is prioritized and it is underlined that connectivity should contribute to "the materialisation of the principles, goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."[27]

In order to grasp the complexity of the concept of connectivity, Gaens et al. provide a two-dimensional analytical framework which consists of six spheres (or fields of connectivity) and six logics (different ways of connecting). Both the activities of state actors and non-state actors of transnational and multinational corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and individual citizens and consumers are included in this framework. Gaens et al. categorize six fields of connectivity as "material infrastructures, economic transactions, institutional frameworks of governance, knowledge exchange, socio-cultural exchange, and security." The material and human dimensions of the interactions of connectivity take place in these fields.[28]

Material infrastructures, the primary of the six fields of connectivity, include the physical connections of "energy and transport networks, e.g. aviation and train connections and the corresponding regulations of these, and digital infrastructures that make the flow of information, ideas, and capital possible."[29] The second sphere is all economic transactions, covering the economic linkages that in the future will evolve into "conscious policies and practices" to create connectivity initiatives. The global and regional regimes created by "norms and rule production of the world" are included in the third sphere of connectivity, namely the institutional frameworks of governance. Investment and trade treaties are also a part of this sphere. The fourth sphere covers knowledge exchange including research diplomacy, expertise, data, and information sharing. This is an important area of connectivity in today's world whose importance was tested during the COVID-19 vaccine development. The fifth sphere is the people-to-people interactions which constitute sociocultural exchange, and the framework's final sphere is security. Various activities from "joint operations to patrol the high seas through traditional alliance building all the way to using hybrid tools to influence political decision-making in other countries" are evaluated within this category. Within these fields of connectivity, the framework focuses on six different ways of connecting, or "logics of connectivity," which are listed as cooperation, copying, cushioning, contestation, containment, and coercion. Compared with traditional alliance-building, the "infrastructure alliances" of connectivity change more dynamically and constantly. At the same time, due to the involvement of different actors in the process such as state, civic, and business actors, there are various logics of action.[30] Despite the existence of different fields and ways of connectivity, three important components associated with the concept differentiate it from other types of interconnectedness: agency, intentionality, and imagined futures.

Agency is the first attribute of connectivity. Connectivity today is a strategy which is different from "connections that are built randomly or opportunistically."[31] Therefore, agency is central to the production of connectivity and disconnectivity, although connectivity activities may produce unintended consequences in the form of positive or negative externalities. A state's decision to connect itself with others is embodied in the investments in infrastructure which actually realize that connection both in physical and non-physical terms.[32] Intentionality is the second attribute of connectivity initiatives. Connectivity requires some degree of strategic intentionality on the part of the actors engaged in the processes of connection or disconnection.[33] States and non-state actors connect and disconnect themselves in line with their strategic interests. Hence,

connectivity is defined as implementing strategic intent through investments in infrastructure while strategic and sustainable investment in infrastructure have become the core of international politics.[34] In addition to agency and intentionality, the various forms of intentional connectivity generally involve an element of imagined futures.[35] Thus, it is argued that connectivity initiatives such as creating transnational corridors are long-term investments, the impacts of which will be measured in long periods of time like decades. China, for instance, has determined the completion date of the BRI as 2049, signaling that "it is thinking about grand strategy and international order-building in the long term."[36] The Chinese concept of connectivity is inclusive and does not seek to exclude anyone on ideological or other grounds. On the other hand, the EU and the U.S. have different visions of connectivity than China. The EU's principles of understanding the connectivity concept involve "democratic values, adherence to international law and standards, ensuring a high level of human rights, transparency, financial and environmental sustainability, partnership, resilience and encouraging private sector investment."[37] These different norms and principles expose the great powers' visions of world order which are reflected in these projects.

The way we are connected in today's world has created "weaponized interdependence" which describes how actors, mainly states, make strategic use of economic interdependencies and networks over which they have control

As a response to China's BRI and other large-scale Chinese investments in infrastructure projects in Asia and Europe and besides the many regional organizations, infrastructure alliances were created by the U.S., Japan, India, Russia, and the EU, leading to the connectivity race becoming a great power competition.[38] In other words, infrastructure corridors are becoming "a core feature of the emerging great power contest over the shape and form of international order."[39]

Connectivity Is What States Make of It

The current debate in global politics is about whether this great power contest in the age of connectivity brings peace or conflict. Khanna argues,

> [T]he nature of geopolitical competition is evolving from war over territory to war over connectivity. Competing over connectivity plays

> out as a tug-of-war over global supply chains, energy markets, industrial production, and the valuable flows of finance, technology, knowledge, and talent. Tug-of-war represents the shift from a war between systems (capitalism versus communism) to a war within one collective supply chain system. While military warfare is a regular threat, tug-of-war is a perpetual reality – to be won by economic master planning rather than military doctrine.[40]

Hence the competition for connectivity is about a new kind of geopolitics in which the "geo," and hence the "political space," have been substantially redefined. In a world order in transition, the new geopolitical game of connection carries political risk and can be unsettling.[41] Yet, the understanding of connectivity as a source of conflict or cooperation depends on what states make of it in the first place.

A pessimistic perspective sees "connectivity wars" as manifesting themselves in "geoeconomic warfare, the weaponisation of international institutions, and infrastructure competition."[42] The building of infrastructures is often securitized and linked to development cooperation. For instance, China's BRI investments in Central Asia or Europe have political and security implications. In many parts of the world, development assistance—an essential kind of connectivity—has grown more securitized and is now a crucial part of the geostrategic deployment of economic power.[43] In the case of the BRI, concerns regarding "debt trap diplomacy," the sustainability of Chinese financing, and the overall socioeconomic and environmental effects of BRI projects have led to the decline of interest and support for the project on the part of receiving countries.[44]

Another "dark side of connectivity" related with creating conflict relates to the potential consequences of dependence. The way we are connected in today's world has created "weaponized interdependence" which describes how actors, mainly states, make strategic use of economic interdependencies and networks over which they have control. Asymmetrical power relations in global networks, specifically in securing access or control over markets through infrastructure policy, carry the risk of "weaponization," referring to all processes through which states may seize transnational infrastructures and use them against others.[45] In this context, global networks, such as financial, commercial, infrastructural, digital, etc., may become sources of conflict due to increasing interdependencies among states.[46] Moreover, it is argued that the "age of connectivity" can also be an "age of bypassing" because while infrastructure

projects and economic cooperation corridors promote connectivity and trade, they also exclude certain countries or regions. Those left outside the supply chains or disconnected may become more dependent on others.[47]

In the "rise of the others" period, the West is losing its power in terms of both its institutions and its capacity to set the agenda, and the power and leadership to ensure order and the common good in the fields of economy and security are not concentrated in the hands of a few states or a group of great powers, but are distributed among many actors.

On the other hand, optimistic views look at connectivity initiatives as potential sources of multilateral cooperation. Khanna asserts that "the supply chain world is a post-ideological landscape since it's all business, all the time." He discusses that today it is not ideology but "the promise of privileged access to resources and infrastructure that shapes geo-strategic maneuvering."[48] Although the weaponization debate takes our attention to the processes with which infrastructure policy initiatives are put into practice geoeconomically, the state is taken as a unitary actor in this perspective. Therefore, this view fails to look at the role of competition within the state apparatuses, the limitations of state control over national businesses, and the civil society actors such as trade unions. Yet, infrastructures are "an end of both statist and private action." Moreover, the productive function of infrastructures in realizing public wealth and private profits is also neglected.[49] Highlighting this point, Khanna asserts that Saudi Arabia's willingness to create a "land bridge" stretching from Jebel Ali in the UAE or Mina Salman in Bahrain to Israel's Haifa Port to lessen the logistic costs from geopolitical shocks due to the Red Sea maritime terrorism illustrates how connectivity creates cooperation between states.[50] From this view, "more belts more roads" is what the world needs today to meet supply shocks in the age of uncertainty.[51]

There is a grain of truth in this view: as the world population expands, the global need for infrastructure investment requires US$94 trillion by 2040 since urbanization and economic development cannot be provided by the 14% of global GDP spared for infrastructure. Moreover, connectivity initiatives are closely related with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN.[52] Meeting the SDGs increases the need for global infrastructure by a further US$3.5 trillion, growing the gap to approximately US$18 trillion

and investment requirement to 3.7% of global GDP.[53] Infrastructure plays a significant role in the recovery after the pandemic and in fostering long-term green, resilient, and inclusive development, particularly in the low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where the demand for investment is highly critical.[54] Hence, value chains, telecommunications, and even people-to-people connectivity can all be mobilized for the economic growth and advantages of LMICs. But the question is "whether connectivity can also be created in a consensus between the great powers themselves, if they adopt connectivity schemes that are not mutually exclusive, and thus do not force other states to choose between one or the other."[55] Is there any chance that connectivity initiatives will revitalize multilateralism? The next section answers this question.

Connectivity and the Changing Multilateral World Order

In the 2000s, the multilateral world order was at the center of crisis debates as a result of two interrelated developments. The first was the shift in the balance of power in global politics and the resulting demands for change brought to the existing order by emerging powers. The second was the dissatisfaction with the structural inability of the institutions of the existing system to respond to many of the problems faced by the international community and to provide solutions. The inequality created by the neoliberal global economic order and the growing distrust in the system's institutions to fulfill their functions were exacerbated by the 2008 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and, most recently, the Russia-Ukraine War and Israel's brutal attacks on Gaza. The Russia-Ukraine War has created a rupture in the international order that will have long-term consequences. The different attitudes of various groups of countries towards this war also pose the problem of reaching a consensus on common norms for the future of the multilateral order.[56] Hence, it is clear that the global system is in a transition period in which it is being rebuilt on the basis of institutions, values, and principles. In this context, a struggle is becoming evident between the founders of the post-World War II order led by Western countries such as the U.S. and the EU, and the demands of rising powers led by China for an order based on different norms and principles. For example,

> Through its BRI and other infrastructure lending programs, China aims to transform global institutions and norms reflecting its values and interests

the debate on whether the economic development model created by China's rise in recent years, defined as the "Beijing Consensus," will be an alternative model to the Washington Consensus/Post-Washington Consensus shows this competition on the level of norms.

On the level of practice in global politics, it can also be asserted that multilateralism is currently being operationalized by actors outside the West to achieve their strategic objectives. As seen in the rise of informal organizations such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Türkiye, and Australia), states outside of the West have started to use multilateralism to pursue their strategic aims centered around South-South cooperation and development. As if to prove this point, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Li stated that with the expansion of the membership of BRICS, the organization should "turn itself into a new type of multilateral cooperation mechanism that is based on emerging markets and developing countries while staying open to the whole world."[57] Hence, in today's world, there are different methods for providing effective functioning of the multilateral system and in this context, discussions on the global agenda that multilateralism is at a crossroads have gained momentum.[58] This paper argues that connectivity projects have the potential to revitalize multilateralism within the framework of recent analyses of the changing world order by Acharya, Ikenberry, and Onar and Kavalski.

In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, the world order has been described with various concepts such as the "post-Western world order,"[59] the "rise of the rest,"[60] an "interdependent hegemonic world,"[61] "decentralized globalism,"[62] and the "age of anxiety."[63] The basic idea that these approaches have in common is that the dominant element in today's system is the uncertainty created by the transition process. In the "rise of the others" period, the West is losing its power in terms of both its institutions and its capacity to set the agenda, and the power and leadership to ensure order and the common good in the fields of economy and security are not concentrated in the hands of a few states or a group of great powers, but are distributed among many actors.[64] In this transition, middle powers have found room for maneuver in the system, and while finding opportunities to make their voices heard in existing institutions, they have also increased their quest for status within the G20 and created new informal formations like BRICS and MIKTA as stated above.[65] Although it is asserted that the rise of new great powers (especially China, but also others like India and Russia) and the "relative economic decline" of the U.S. and its

allies will lead to a multipolar world, it is claimed that describing the future world order as "multipolar" is misleading. Rather than multipolarity, Acharya claims that the term "multiplexity" is more useful for capturing the transition in the world order today since the term "polarity" does not "tell us much about other factors [that] are crucial to world order such as ideas, norms, leadership or patterns of interaction."[66]

The defining features of a multiplex world order are categorized under five points. First, although power inequalities and hierarchies remain, there is an absence of a global hegemon in the system. Second, in this system, we witness the proliferation of actors other than great powers such as international and regional bodies, corporations, and non-state actors. Third, in a multiplex order, there is a broader pattern of interdependence on investment flows, production networks, and supply chains. Fourth, the multiplex system has a dynamic and plural global governance architecture. And last, with different cultural, ideological, and political world views, the multiplex world order emphasizes "the existence of different pathways to stability, peace and prosperity."[67] In a multiplex world, "influence is achieved not so much through power but through a nation's interaction capacity."[68]

> Whether the competition of connectivity will lead to conflict or cooperation depends on what states make of it.

Acharya et al. offer "interaction capacity-based multiplexity" as a new concept to frame the new world order.[69] They establish their argument on the term "interaction capacity" which was first developed by Buzan and Little referring to the "physical and organizational capability of a system to move ideas, goods, people, money and armed forces across the system."[70] The indicators of interaction capacity include the level of transportation, communication, and organization capability in the system. The key defining measure of multiplexity is the interaction of states rather than the key economic or military power measures traditionally used to discuss multipolarity. Multiplexity views global interdependence as increasingly multi-issue in nature. In this context, it is suggested that connectivity projects can be analyzed from the perspective of the interaction capacity of actors in the system. Khanna underlines that connectivity not only changes the role of borders, but also the pathways through which power is projected. Transportation routes, energy grids, financial networks, and internet servers are part of the functional geographical map. Khanna argues that

the most connected power rather than the largest one in the system will survive because in today's world, the competition to establish physical and financial connections to the most significant raw material, advanced technology, and rapidly expanding markets worldwide is becoming more significant.[71]

Yet, the race to increase the interaction capacities of actors in the system does not necessarily lead to confrontation since in a multiplex world within cultural, ideological, and political diversity, "there are different pathways to stability, peace, and prosperity."[72] Global cooperation in the multiplex world is more pluralized, with bilateral, pluriteral, and especially regional arrangements that are not necessarily part of the UN system.[73] For instance, BRICS is a forum for economic cooperation in the Global South without being a part of the UN or the World Bank. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) created by the initiation of China including all major European economies (such as Germany, the UK, and France), and the BRICS New Development Bank, established in 2014, are examples of how this new way of global cooperation may be reflected in enduring institutions which greatly contribute to financing SDGs.[74] Hence, within this framework, it can be asserted that different connectivity projects created by China, the EU, the U.S., and many regional organizations can coexist and contribute to the new way of cooperation in the transitioning world order.

Like Acharya, Ikenberry believes that "the idea of polarity does not fully capture the dynamics" of the emerging world system.[75] He describes the emerging world order as a "Three Worlds system." The Ukraine war, which triggered a global debate over the fundamental rules and institutions of order, led to the Three Worlds, namely the global West led by the U.S. and Europe, the global East led by China and Russia, and the global South, an amorphous grouping of non-Western developing states led by India, Brazil, and others.[76] The Three Worlds are defined "as loose coalitions seeking to shape global rules and institutions."[77] Each grouping shares "a range of more-or-less consistent convictions about what constitutes a desirable and legitimate international order." Ikenberry underlines that these Three Worlds are "informal, constructed and evolving global factions" rather than rigid blocs.[78] He argues that the Three Worlds System is a durable form of global order since "each of these groupings carries with it deeply held political ideas and projects, rooted in its global position and developmental circumstances, that will not disappear any time soon."[79] Therefore, although there is a competition, "no one will win" and this creates "a certain irreducible political and ideological pluralism."[80] Moreover, the struggle between these blocs is a creative struggle because the global West

and global East will compete for the support and cooperation of the global South. Clean energy, development aid, peacemaking leadership, the championing of multilateral rules, and inclusive governance are promoted as a result of this creative struggle. Connectivity projects may also be the sites of this new creative struggle. For instance, China's leadership of the global East is based on power, geography, and ideas. Through its BRI and other infrastructure lending programs, China aims to transform global institutions and norms reflecting its values and interests. In this struggle, the global West is no longer in the position of the "world's geopolitical and ideological colossus."[81] When analyzed from the perspective of the Three Worlds System, it can be asserted that connectivity initiatives may reinforce geopolitical competition but also have the potential to contribute to multilateral cooperation. Gaens et.al also discuss that "in order to understand the ongoing shifts in global order dynamics, it is useful to think of the world in terms of geographically undetermined regional constructs that are increasingly shaped by various forms of connectivity."[82]

With a different conceptualization of "interlocking regional worlds … a notion inspired by 'Afro-Eur-Asia' as a site that evokes multiple meanings," Onar and Kavalski underline "the diffusion of geoeconomic power to regional hubs across greater Eurasia in today's world."[83] This is also a reflection of a "structural shift from trans-Atlantic hegemony to multiple centers of gravity."[84] Onar and Kavalski assert that "transformative narratives and practices to promote new forms of connectivity that, for better and for worse, portend alternative ways of being in, reading, and shaping the world" can be interpreted as "exercises in world-making."[85] They include "large-scale connectivity platforms such as China's BRI, the Indo-Japanese 'Asia-Africa Growth Corridor,' Turkey's 'Middle Corridor,' the American 'Build Back Better World,' and the EU's 'Global Gateway'" within the sites of world-making. The regions these projects cover are microcosms of competing world orders. Onar and Kavalski claim that although connectivity may be used as a "weapon" in the world-making projects across and beyond Afro-Eur-Asia, there are opportunities for mutual empowerment. Hence, the "international system [is] characterized not only by crises and uncertainties, but also by opportunities to reimagine IR in terms of relational transformation."[86] As in the multiplex world order narrative, in the "interlocking regional worlds" narrative too there are different pathways to stability, peace, and prosperity. This perspective captures "the globe as a pluriversal space where multiple realities can and do coexist."[87] Within this framework, even though connectivity projects cannot be created between the great powers themselves, "various efforts of constructing regionalized spheres

of influence"[88] through connectivity may coexist without necessarily leading to conflicts.

Conclusion

In his prominent book Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization, Parag Khanna writes that "connectivity is destiny" in today's world since global transportation, communications, and energy infrastructures make the famous adage "geography is destiny" old-fashioned.[89] While on the surface of the planet walls are being built from Asia to Europe, "humanity is re-engineering the planet" with a greater volume of lines connecting people than dividing them. Hence, connectivity is seen as a driver of the deep shift in the global system, replacing the old Westphalian world of borders with a more complex "supply chain world."[90] Between the connections and disconnections witnessed in the current world system, this paper has shown that connectivity as a different form of interconnectedness in the 21st century with the traits of agency, intentionality, and imagined futures is becoming a diplomatic tool of states. With the help of the "interaction capacity-based multiplex world order" proposed by Acharya et al., it is suggested that various connectivity projects on the agenda of global politics can be read as actors' new ways of gaining influence in the changing world system. Whether the competition of connectivity will lead to conflict or cooperation depends on what states make of it. At this point, the paper argued that connectivity projects have the potential to revitalize multilateral cooperation within the framework of the world order narratives of "multiplexity" by Acharya, the "Three Worlds System" by Ikenberry, and the "interlocking regional worlds" by Onar and Kavalski.

The common point of the different analyses of the current world system by Acharya, Ikenberry, and Onar and Kavalski is that the world order in transition brings competition over the norms and principles on which the emerging new world order will be built. However, all three have underlined that this race will not necessarily lead to conflict. Different visions of order may coexist since peace, development, and stability do not emerge from a single source. This also makes multilateralism a dynamic concept which requires being assessed according to the new ways of cooperation in today's world between different actors on various issue areas. In other words, "multilateralism does not simply exist within a certain set of conditions to be practised by an unchanging set of actors in a fixed context." Conversely, "multilateralism has proven to be far more fluid and adaptive to actors' needs and to the changing international landscape."[91]

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has noted that the world is in a new "1945 moment" for building the system with an emphasis on "inclusive multilateralism".[92] Rather than focusing on "connectivity wars" projections in global politics, this paper, with a cautiously optimistic perspective, argued that the infrastructure alliances created under various connectivity strategies led by the U.S. and its allies, on the one hand, and by China, on the other, have the potential to create new sites of this inclusive multilateralism in a multiplex world.

Endnotes

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