

Struggling for relevance in an era of changes: The Ukraine war and the UN's future role in peace and security crises

Hartmann, Kirsten

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Arbeitspapier / working paper

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Hartmann, K. (2024). *Struggling for relevance in an era of changes: The Ukraine war and the UN's future role in peace and security crises*. (BKHS Perspectives, 07/2024). Hamburg: Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-94468-8>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Basic Digital Peer Publishing-Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den DiPP-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a Basic Digital Peer Publishing Licence. For more information see:

<http://www.dipp.nrw.de/lizenzen/dppl/service/dppl/>

BKHS Perspectives



**Struggling for relevance in an era
of changes: The Ukraine war and the UN's
future role in peace and security crises**



Bundeskanzler
Helmut Schmidt
Stiftung

Key findings and recommendations

- #1** Although the UN system has been able to provide a diverse response to Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine, the 24 February 2022 invasion has added both to prior tensions among the broader UN membership as well as to the Security Council's increasing blockade in the context of a shifting global order. As the war in Ukraine goes on, experts expect it to further weaken the UN's capacity to act and its legitimacy among Member States and the public.
- #2** In future, the UN will most likely play a complementary role in global peace and security crises. Experts overwhelmingly predict a shift from large-scale and multidimensional to smaller, specialised and less intrusive peace operations. Critical reflections on the UN missions' future design as well as the UN's enhanced support to regional actors are needed. Further, Member States should bolster the UN peacebuilding architecture to assist national prevention and peacebuilding efforts.
- #3** More broadly, and in order to regain trust and credibility lost in recent years among the public and Member States, particularly in the Global South, the UN needs to recognise and respond to its challenged legitimacy, including by pursuing less intrusive ways of working and closer involving host states and populations. The UN should further leverage its bridge-building power to inclusively address cross-border challenges, such as the climate crisis. Member States, at the same time, should strengthen functioning parts of the UN system and hold themselves accountable: without more predictable funding and more influence for countries of the Global South, the UN's effectiveness and relevance in addressing current and future crises will continue to diminish.
- #4** At this year's UN Summit of the Future, Member States must go beyond mere lip service and re-commitments. States should build broad alliances and push visionary and actionable proposals to address global challenges, such as climate change, underlined with new (financial) commitments as well as concrete institutional reform, including of the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. It is crucial to meaningfully include civil society before, during and after the summit.

Struggling for relevance in an era of changes: The Ukraine war and the UN's future role in peace and security crises

Author: **Kirsten Hartmann**

Ever more traditional and “new” peace and security threats are confronting humanity, including armed conflicts, the effects of the climate emergency, or cyberthreats. In 2022, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine fed into this trend. While the ongoing war's effects differ around the globe, they have demonstrated the cross-border and interdependent nature of current challenges, which cannot be faced by single states alone. These increasingly interconnected “crisis landscapes”¹ require strengthened multilateral cooperation.

At the same time, however, the multilateral system, with the United Nations (UN) as its “nerve centre”², is in crisis. In a shifting world order, geopolitical tensions between major powers and growing frustration of countries of the Global South³ with ineffective and unrepresentative multilateral institutions, broken promises and double standards of Western states reinforce fragmentation and undermine trust in institutions and among states. This has stark consequences for the UN's conflict

resolution and peacebuilding efforts. While armed conflicts and military expenditure are increasing, arms control frameworks and crisis management tools are eroding. Peacebuilding, development and humanitarian budgets often fall short of rising demand. With the nature of conflicts changing and the liberal peacebuilding approach increasingly being contested, the UN's authority is questioned and its capacity to act curtailed.⁴

Considering the recent effects of the war against Ukraine on the UN system, this policy brief examines possible avenues for the UN's future role in dealing with peace and security crises. At a critical juncture for the UN and in the lead-up to its Summit of the Future in September – co-facilitated by Germany and Namibia and under the motto “Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow”⁵ – it offers policy recommendations on how the UN should adapt to a shifting environment to restore lost trust and effectively address current and emerging crises – and what (Western) Member States (MS) need to do in this regard.

1 Perthes, Volker (2017): “Krisenlandschaften”: Konfliktkonstellationen und Problemkomplexe internationaler Politik; Ausblick 2017. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, January 2017, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/ausblick-2017-krisenlandschaften> (accessed 18.10.2023).

2 United Nations (2023): A New Agenda for Peace. July 2023, <https://dppa.un.org/en/a-new-agenda-for-peace> (accessed 27.12.2023).

3 I refer to compound terms such as “Global South” or “the West”, even though they remain contested, there is no universally accepted definition or clear categorisation of countries and they do not reflect the heterogeneity within and differences between countries. I use more precise terms whenever possible.

4 A general shift towards stabilisation and counterterrorism approaches to address violent conflicts is also visible within the UN, challenging its traditional tools.

5 United Nations (n.d.): Summit of the Future. <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future> (accessed 09.04.2024).

Methodology

The qualitative analysis is based on two main sources of data. In addition to an extensive literature review on the topic, this policy brief draws on 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews with (former) employees of think tanks, international and non-governmental organisations, research institutions, as well as journalists and diplomats from August 2023 to January 2024. All interview data in this policy brief are anonymised and non-identifiable.

THE UN SYSTEM'S RESPONSE TO THE RUSSIAN WAR AGAINST UKRAINE ...

Within the limits set by its MS, the UN system reacted “in a variety of ways and quite decisively”⁶ to the war against Ukraine. Despite its high activity, the UN Security Council (UNSC) was unable to halt Russia from invading or to respond to the war due to the Russian veto exercise.⁷ While the public focused on the UNSC’s gridlock and associated this with the institution’s overall failure and inability to act, experts stressed that the UN system in fact provided a solid response to the war. On a political level, for instance, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) publicly called out the Charter violation by Russia and (co-)negotiated the 2022–2023 Black Sea Grain Initiative. To circumvent the blockade, the UNSC – using the “Uniting for Peace” procedure for the first time in 40 years – referred the matter to the UN General Assembly (UNGA), which passed six (nonbinding) resolutions on Ukraine to date. Further, the Human Rights Council (HRC) created an Independent International Commission of Inquiry on

Ukraine that reported on violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, and corresponding war crimes, overwhelmingly carried out by Russian forces. At the legal level, the International Court of Justice and the UN-related International Criminal Court got active, with the latter issuing arrest warrants for the Russian president, among others. On a technical level, a variety of UN agencies, such as the UN Refugee Agency, the UN Development Programme or the World Health Organization (WHO), have been ensuring an important response to the situation in Ukraine. In 2022, for instance, the WHO provided over 8.4 million people in Ukraine with access to healthcare and urgently required treatment, medicines, vaccines and therapy.⁸

... AND THE EFFECTS OF THE UKRAINE WAR ON THE UN SYSTEM

The war against Ukraine was a crisis amplifier for several levels of the UN system. In the UNSC, the war exacerbated existing tensions between major powers. This impacted the work of the council differently over time. For the period shortly following the war – although it certainly distracted attention from other conflicts – experts noted a general functioning of the UNSC on other matters than Ukraine, such as agreeing on humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan on 17 March 2022.⁹ In 2022, the council also adopted only three resolutions less than in 2021. Nonetheless, experts stated that, in 2023, Russia acted more destructively, referring to its veto of the renewal of Syrian cross-border humanitarian aid on 11 July 2023 or withdrawing from the Black Sea Grain Deal. Overall, thus, Russia’s isolation and confrontations between

6 Interview with INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023.

7 While the UNSC held 50 meetings on Ukraine in 2022, it adopted only one presidential statement expressing its support for the UN Secretary-General's efforts in search of a peaceful solution; cf. Saad, Rodrigo (2023): The United Nations in Hindsight: The Security Council, One Year After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine. Just Security, 31.01.2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/84952/the-united-nations-in-hindsight-the-security-council-one-year-after-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/> (accessed 27.12.2023).

8 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-03 and INT-04, employees of an international organisation, 23.08.2023; INT-08, journalist, 01.09.2023; INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; United Nations Human Rights Council (n.d.): Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iicir-ukraine/index> (accessed 28.03.2024); World Health Organization (2023): WHO's response to the Ukraine crisis: annual report. WHO Regional Office for Europe, 13.03.2023, <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/366417/WHO-EURO-2023-5897-45662-68308-eng.pdf?sequence=9> (accessed 28.03.2024).

9 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024; Saad, Rodrigo (2023): The United Nations in Hindsight: The Security Council, One Year After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine. Just Security, 31.01.2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/84952/the-united-nations-in-hindsight-the-security-council-one-year-after-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/> (accessed 27.12.2023).

Russia and Western council members intensified due to the war.¹⁰ China – balancing an officially neutral stance on the Ukraine war with its support to Russia – has been active in the background to keep up some level of UN diplomacy¹¹, but its tensions with the United States (US) remain high. Generally, the council's gridlock over Ukraine resulted in MS and the public losing further trust in the UN's most powerful body and provided new momentum for longstanding UNSC reform calls, including from permanent council members such as the US. Nonetheless, their fast realisation seems unrealistic.¹²

The council divisions over Ukraine have affected other peace and security crises. The deteriorating working climate in the council is reflected in historically low numbers of presidential statements, less unanimous decisions, and more frequent technical rollovers of peace operation mandates.¹³ Given that operations' effectiveness is also influenced by the degree of coherent support for their role, abstentions due to political differences translate into fragile political backing and can have implications for missions, as visible in Mali.¹⁴ Experts noted how in the “most geopolitically loaded contexts”¹⁵ with high Russian interest, such as Mali, the intensified major power tensions after the Ukraine war blocked debates. The increased focus on the Russian Wagner Group in mission contexts such as the Central African Republic reinforced existing concerns. Yet, experts also emphasised that many frictions predate 2022 and the Ukraine war had spill-over effects on some, but

certainly not all contexts.¹⁶ The war affected also the availability of Russian provided goods and services, such as aircraft, in some UN peace and humanitarian operations – it remains to be seen how it will impact Russia's overall procurement relationship with the UN in the mid- to long-term.¹⁷ One expert expressed concern that the increased polarisation could impede the council's efforts on conflictive issues, such as climate security, and thus hinder an effective response to current conflicts characterised by interdependent, cross-border security threats.¹⁸

Beyond the UNSC level, the Ukraine war put a spotlight on structural inequalities of the multilateral system and deepened rifts between MS from the Global South and the West. The council's blockade reinvigorated the UNGA, which passed the long-standing initiative to promote more transparency and accountability on the veto use in 2022, and six resolutions on Ukraine to date.¹⁹ Over time, however, experts noted a Ukraine fatigue, with many MS from the Global South calling for a focus on issues of greater concern to them – i.e. the climate crisis, financial system reform, or implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals – and not losing sight of conflict and violence in other parts of the world.²⁰ Several countries of the Global South abstained from voting in UNGA resolutions condemning Russia and only a few of them imposed punitive measures – due to several reasons. Further, global differences in perceptions of the war became evident as Russia continued to score many votes to sit on the UN Economic and

10 Cf. interviews with INT-02, journalist, 16.08.2023; INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024; Gowan, Richard (2023): How the World Lost Faith in the UN. *Foreign Affairs*, 09.11.2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/how-world-lost-faith-united-nations-gaza> (accessed 27.12.2023).

11 Gowan, Richard (2023): Defending International Security Cooperation in an Era of Deglobalisation. *BKHS Magazine* 3, pp. 60–62.

12 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-02, journalist, 16.08.2023; INT-09, director of a think tank, 04.09.2023; INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023; INT-11, former employee of an international organisation, 06.12.2023; INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023; INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

13 Cf. interviews with INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.10.2024; Saad, Rodrigo (2023): The United Nations in Hindsight: The Security Council, One Year After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine. *Just Security*, 31.01.2023,

<https://www.justsecurity.org/84952/the-united-nations-in-hindsight-the-security-council-one-year-after-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/> (accessed 27.12.2023)

14 Cf. interview with INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; Benkler, Monika; von Gienanth, Tobias; Golewski, Sina; Hansen, Annika S.; Matschie, Christoph; Pietz, Tobias; Schoppa, Maximilian & Wittkowsky, Andreas (2023): White Dove Down? Peace Operations and the Zeitenwende. Center for International Peace Operations, April 2023, https://www.zif-berlin.org/sites/zif-berlin.org/files/2023-05/2023_ZIF_Study_WhiteDoveDown_ENG_Web.pdf (accessed 04.04.2024), p. 30.

15 Interview with INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023.

16 Cf. interviews with INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023; INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

17 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-08, journalist, 01.09.2023; INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023; Clancy, Dawn (2023): Russia's Violations of Global Aviation Rules Could Leave the UN With Tough, Costly Choices. *PassBlue*, 16.08.2023,

<https://www.passblue.com/2022/08/16/russias-violations-of-global-aviation-rules-could-leave-the-un-with-tough-costly-choices/> (accessed 27.12.2023).

18 Cf. interview with INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024.

19 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-02, journalist, 16.08.2023; INT-08, journalist, 01.09.2023; INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023.

20 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-02, journalist, 16.08.2023; INT-06, employee of an international organisation, 29.08.2023; INT-08, journalist, 01.09.2023; INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024.

Social Council or re-join the HRC from which it was suspended in 2022.²¹

The effects of the Ukraine war also strained UN organisations' activities on the ground across the world. With rising wheat and energy prices following the war, some UN organisations struggled to continue providing same levels of assistance to people in need. In addition, a heavy focus on the war in Ukraine made advocacy and resource allocation harder for other contexts, for example in Latin America, and was even leading to resource competition within the UN system.²² Globally, the war's effects exacerbated crises and increased needs – asymmetrically to available resources. The international economic fallout of the war came on top of previous donor fatigue and an increasing fiscal austerity by many states in the post-Covid-19 recovery that increased the financial pressure of a range of UN activities.²³ Due to funding cuts, the World Food Programme had to reduce its assistance in several countries.²⁴

THE UN'S COMPLEMENTARY ROLE IN FUTURE PEACE AND SECURITY CRISES

The Ukraine war unfolded before the background of a shrinking legitimacy of the UN and its contested role in peace and security crises worldwide. Alongside adapting its own peace operations, the UN should enhance its support to regional initiatives. Further, it must strengthen its peacebuilding tools, and leverage its inclusive platform to address cross-border threats.

This needs to be embedded in structural changes. The UN must acknowledge its challenged legitimacy and provide MS of the Global South with more influence.

Adapting to a New Era of Peace Operations

In the context of a shifting global order and a changing nature of conflict, the UN is side-lined in many processes and its traditional peace and security instruments, particularly peacekeeping operations (PKOs), are under pressure. While several aspects contribute to this, overall, the crisis of the current peacekeeping model is a symptom of an increasing contestation of the liberal peacebuilding approach and its manifestations. Host state and host society support is waning. Additionally, with sustainable peace far away in several mission contexts, many MS question the enormous personnel and financial costs of huge multidimensional PKOs overburdened with “Christmas tree mandates”²⁵, and council divisions affect the missions' mandates and their work on the ground.²⁶ While shrinking “top-down” and “bottom-up”²⁷ support and “the wrangling over the values and goals of peace operations”²⁸ is nothing new, the intensified geopolitical tensions after the Ukraine war render mandate renewals even more difficult and the agreement on a new large mission unlikely.²⁹

Against this background, experts stressed the need for critical internal reflections and agreed on the limited, ambiguous future of such missions.³⁰ But instead of ringing “the death knell”³¹, they highlighted peace operations' adaptability and resilience: not the

21 Interview with INT-09, director of a think tank, 04.09.2023; see also INT-08, journalist, 01.09.2023; Méheut, Constant (2023): Russia Is Denied a Seat on the U.N. Human Rights Council. *New York Times*, 10.10.2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/10/world/europe/russia-un-human-rights-council.html> (accessed 27.12.2023).

22 Cf. interviews with INT-06, employee of an international organisation, 29.08.2023; INT-11, former employee of an international organisation, 06.12.2023.

23 Cf. interview with INT-06, employee of an international organisation, 29.08.2023; Hunt, Charles T. (2023): *International policing and/as the future of UN peace operations*. Gilder, Alexander; Curran, David; Holmes, Georgia & Edu-Afful, Fiifi (Eds.): *Multidisciplinary futures of UN peace operations*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, p. 45.

24 World Food Programme (2023): *WFP at a Glance*. 23.10.2023, <https://www.wfp.org/stories/wfp-glance> (accessed 27.12.2023).

25 United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, A/70/95-S/2015/446, 17.06.2015.

26 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-05, researcher at a think tank, 24.08.2023; INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

27 Hunt, Charles T. (2023): *International policing and/as the future of UN peace operations*. Gilder, Alexander; Curran, David; Holmes, Georgia & Edu-Afful, Fiifi (Eds.): *Multidisciplinary futures of UN peace operations*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, p. 46.

28 Benkler, Monika; von Gienanth, Tobias; Gologowski, Sina; Hansen, Annika S.; Matschie, Christoph; Pietz, Tobias; Schoppa, Maximilian & Wittkowsky, Andreas (2023): *White Dove Down? Peace Operations and the Zeitenwende*. Center for International Peace Operations, April 2023, https://www.zif-berlin.org/sites/zif-berlin.org/files/2023-05/2023_ZIF_Study_WhiteDoveDown_ENG_Web.pdf (accessed 04.04.2024), p. 8.

29 Cf. interview with INT-05, researcher at a think tank, 24.08.2023; see also INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024.

30 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-05, researcher at a think tank, 24.08.2023; INT-07, then-researcher at a think tank, 30.08.2023; INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023; INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

31 Hunt, Charles T. (2023): *International policing and/as the future of UN peace operations*. Gilder, Alexander; Curran, David; Holmes, Georgia & Edu-Afful, Fiifi (Eds.): *Multidisciplinary futures of UN peace operations*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, p. 46.

what, but the *how* of UN engagement is contested and needs to change.³² The future seems to be a more “stripped back”³³ UN with smaller, specialised, technically focussed and less intrusive missions, such as observer-type missions, and overall more Special Political Missions.³⁴ But rather than “fall[ing] into the trap”³⁵ of just applying a broader spectrum of preconceived mission models across settings, there is need to rebuild trust, particularly among host populations, and create missions that really suit the context and that address a variety of human security threats and root causes of conflicts.³⁶ It remains open how the competing global ideologies will manifest in future mandates also regarding already conflictive issues such as climate security or human rights.

Beyond adapting its own instruments, a potentially more limited UN during an increasing demand for crisis management means it will have to attach greater importance to its relationship with other, particularly (sub-)regional, actors. Experts noted the UN’s role in supporting regional initiatives diplomatically, financially, or through support missions.³⁷ The December 2023 UNSC resolution on financing African-Union-led peace support operations is a crucial step after long-standing debates – how several obstacles will be managed in its translation into practice remains to be seen. Overall, this development mirrors both a general shift towards peace enforcement, which PKOs were not originally designed for, as well as a regionalisation of peace enforcement, evident also in the UNSG’s New Agenda for Peace published in 2023.³⁸ In that regard, regional

initiatives should emphasise holistic approaches to conflict management, including closer alignment to civilian- and locally-led efforts, embedded in a political strategy.³⁹ While not without challenges, the UN needs to adapt to the increasing demand for more regional ownership in conflict management and enhance its support to (sub-)regional actors to this end.

Bolstering UN Peacebuilding Tools

In times of a return to militaristic conflict solutions, reflecting on the UN’s future role requires to reinforce its peacebuilding architecture. Similar to the UNSG’s New Agenda for Peace, experts interviewed for this policy brief emphasised the need for the UN to strengthen national prevention and peacebuilding capacities as well as efforts in order to better address the root causes of conflicts around the globe and support countries’ sustainable development. Many underlined in this regard the importance of a context-specific, inclusive and participatory assistance based on local and national ownership.⁴⁰

To this end, MS should reinforce UN peacebuilding institutions, such as the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), and Peace and Development Advisor positions.⁴¹ MS’ commitment at the Summit of the Future to upgrade, among others, the PBC’s mandate and its relationship with other UN bodies and International Financial Institutions would be crucial and would provide important guidance for the peacebuilding architecture review

32 Cf. interview with INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023; similar responses also INT-07, then-researcher at a think tank, 30.08.2023; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

33 Interview with INT-05, researcher at a think tank, 24.08.2023.

34 Cf. interviews with INT-05, researcher at a think tank, 24.08.2023; INT-07, then-researcher at a think tank, 30.08.2023; INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

35 Interview with INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

36 Cf. interviews with INT-05, researcher at a think tank, 24.08.2023; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024; Benkler, Monika; von Gienanth, Tobias; Golgowski, Sina; Hansen, Annika S.; Matschie, Christoph; Pietz, Tobias; Schoppa, Maximilian & Wittkowsky, Andreas (2023): White Dove Down? Peace Operations and the Zeitenwende. Center for International Peace Operations, April 2023, https://www.zif-berlin.org/sites/zif-berlin.org/files/2023-05/2023_ZIF_Study_WhiteDoveDown_ENG_Web.pdf (accessed 04.04.2024), p. 35.

37 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023; INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024; De Coning, Cedric (2023): The New Agenda for Peace and UN support for African peace operations. ACCORD, 31.08.2023, <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-new-agenda-for-peace-and-un-support-for-african-peace-operations/> (accessed 27.12.2023).

38 Street, Jordan (2023): Counterterrorism in Disguise? Does A Shift Toward ‘Peace Enforcement’ Spell a Death Knell for UN Peacekeeping? Just Security, 15.12.2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/90688/counterterrorism-in-disguise-does-a-shift-towards-peace-enforcement-spell-a-death-knell-for-un-peacekeeping/> (accessed 08.04.2024); United Nations (2023): A New Agenda for Peace. July 2023, <https://dppa.un.org/en/a-new-agenda-for-peace> (accessed 27.12.2023).

39 Allen, Nate D. F. (2023): African-Led Peace Operations: A Crucial Tool for Peace and Security. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 09.08.2023, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-led-peace-operations-a-crucial-tool-for-peace-and-security/> (accessed 05.04.2024).

40 Cf. interviews with INT-03 and INT-04, employees of an international organisation, 23.08.2023; INT-11, former employee of an international organisation, 06.12.2023; INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023; INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; United Nations (2023): A New Agenda for Peace. July 2023, <https://dppa.un.org/en/a-new-agenda-for-peace> (accessed 27.12.2023).

41 Cf. interviews with INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023; INT-11, former employee of an international organisation, 06.12.2023; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024; Day, Adam & Buddenborn, Sophie (2024): Elevating the UN Peacebuilding Commission: Proposals for the Summit of the Future. United Nations University – Centre for Policy Research, January 2024, <https://unu.edu/publication/elevating-un-peacebuilding-commission-proposals-summit-future> (accessed 26.02.2024).

in 2025. Strengthening conflict prevention and peacebuilding within the UN system must also be reflected in increased regular-budget contributions for Peacebuilding Support Office staffing.⁴² The UN's effective contribution to prevent and respond to conflicts and address their roots requires more political but overall more – predictable and sustainable – financial support.⁴³ Last year's UNGA decision to provide annual assessed contributions to the PBF starting in 2025 was critical, but in addition, UN peacebuilding efforts require a significant increase of MS' voluntary financial contributions.

Reinforcing Bridge-Building for Addressing Cross-Border Threats

Despite their differences, states are aware of today's transnational crises and show interest in finding solutions through the UN. After Russia's full-scale invasion, for instance, MS turned to the UN to address the resulting food crisis. The UN should leverage its comparative advantages over other, more exclusive and informal, forums to facilitate inclusive exchange and trust-building and establish normative frameworks on cross-border threats, such as climate change and new technology-related challenges. Through its presence across national, regional and global levels, the UN can bridge discussions and link the implementation of complementary solutions. For instance, regarding climate change adaptation and mitigation, different actions are needed in the short-, medium- and long-term and at the national, regional up to the global level.⁴⁴

A more effective and inclusive multilateral system is crucial, including to prevent outsourcing discussions on addressing global challenges to more exclusive forums than the UN – rendering the Summit of the Future a vital opportunity at a critical juncture. It offers

the chance to change the course of the status quo and restore the trust of MS, particularly of the Global South, in multilateralism. States need to ensure that the summit's outcome document, the Pact for the Future, goes beyond re-commitments and underline operational proposals to address cross-border threats with new, including financial, commitments and concrete reform ideas based on a future-oriented vision. The planned follow-up of the pact's implementation is positive. MS across the West and the Global South should build broad alliances based on a shared interest in an impactful summit and promote promising proposals towards a more capable and effective UN rather than focusing on formulations. The adoption of the pact by consensus involves various challenges. Nonetheless, at the summit, MS should set the stage for initiating dialogue and processes on global issues such as new technologies and, additionally, could push bold side initiatives (not signed by all MS) on conflictive issues, such as Germany on climate security. Overall, MS should make (more) use of civil society's expertise in the complex negotiations – whose support the UN and MS will need anyway to increase public awareness of the summit and implement its outcomes.⁴⁵

Changing Mindsets and Behaviour

Deep institutional changes are inevitable for the UN to adapt to a shifting environment. The discussions on the voting patterns of MS from the Global South on UNGA resolutions on the Ukraine war exposed paternalistic Western attitudes.⁴⁶ Previous questioning of the rules-based international order and claims of Western double standards were reinforced. The deteriorating perception of the UN among the public and MS after the Ukraine war adds to prior frustrations and further undermines its ability to act.⁴⁷ To rebuild

42 Street, Jordan (2022): UN Budget vs. Rhetoric: Touting "Agenda for Peace" But Investing in Counterterrorism Instead? Just Security, 01.12.2022, <https://www.justsecurity.org/84334/un-budget-vs-rhetoric-touting-agenda-for-peace-but-investing-in-counterterrorism-instead/> (accessed 27.12.2023).

43 Cf. interview with INT-11, former employee of an international organisation, 06.12.2023; see also INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024.

44 Cf. interviews with INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024; Gowan, Richard (2023): Defending International Security Cooperation in an Era of Deglobalisation, pp. 60–62.

45 Beisheim, Marianne (2024): Auf dem Weg zum Zukunftspakt der Vereinten Nationen. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2024, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/aktuell/2024A20_vereinte_nationen_zukunftspakt.pdf (accessed 05.04.2024); Gowan, Richard (2024): The UN Summit of the Future: A Fight at the End of the Tunnel. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, January 2024, <https://ny.fes.de/article/the-un-summit-of-the-future-a-fight-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel> (accessed 05.04.2024); United Nations (n.d.): Summit of the Future. <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future> (accessed 09.04.2024); cf. interview with INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024. The editorial deadline for this publication was before the revised draft (Rev.1) of the Pact for the Future was circulated.

46 Shiferaw, Lidet Tadesse & Paviotti, Irene (2022): The EU-Africa peace and security partnership: Political and financial stumbling blocks and a few ways forward. European Think Tanks Group, November 2022, <https://ettg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-EU-Africa-peace-and-security-partnership.pdf> (accessed 18.10.2023).

47 Cf. interview with INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024.

trust and credibility particularly among MS of the Global South, a shift in mindset and behaviour within the UN is needed. Despite existing policies like the Young Professionals Programme for nationals from un(der-)represented MS, UN secretariat staff should reflect a greater geographic diversity and various (decolonial) perspectives at all levels, also with regard to responsive and performant policy-making.⁴⁸ The recognition that its legitimacy is being challenged is crucial for the UN system. In response, the organisation should pursue a way of working that centres national and local ownership and closer host state involvement and that inclusively and holistically addresses various human security threats.⁴⁹ Peacebuilding instruments such as the PBF and the PBC are positive examples. Western MS need to critically reflect their own foreign policy role and take seriously claims of double standards and broken promises, as well as the interests and agency of MS of the Global South.⁵⁰ At the summit, Western MS should walk the talk and push new (financial) commitments to address concerns of many Global South MS, such as the climate crisis, sustainable development and reforms of the financial system.

The Ukraine war has demonstrated how structural flaws damage the UN's legitimacy and constrain its capacity to act, with practical consequences for people in need. The UN needs to convince the public "why it's still relevant"⁵¹ and should use the Summit of the Future to this end. The latter should also be used to materialise the renewed momentum on institutional reforms, including the UNSC. The council's structure and way of working is the "biggest internal threat for the system and [its] irrelevance".⁵² Further ignoring the majority of the world's population from decision-making will result in ever more countries turning to other forums. Only if they have a say and issues of their concern are being addressed, will states work to preserve and strengthen the collective security system that all MS alike have an interest in.⁵³ While a radical

UNSC reform remains utopian, the modernisation and better use of the council's working methods could be a more realistic approach for the near future. In this regard, experts highlighted developments such as co-penholding.⁵⁴ Further, other UN parts could be strengthened, including the UNGA, the network of UN-related institutions, and its mediation and peacebuilding work.⁵⁵ Overall, a realistic expectation management is crucial: the UN's efficiency depends on MS' political and most importantly their adequate, predictable and sustained financial support to the UN. Germany's punctual and complete transfer of its contributions in recent years presents a good role model. It should commit to and advocate for increased assessed contributions.⁵⁶

48 Badache, Fanny (2022): Unpacking the Bureaucratic Representation–Legitimacy Relationship in International Organizations: The Role of Elite Beliefs and Self-Legitimation Practices. *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2(4), 1–12; cf. interview with INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023.

49 Cf. interviews with INT-05, researcher at a think tank, 24.08.2023; INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023.

50 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-10, diplomat, 25.10.2023; INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023.

51 Interview with INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

52 Interview with INT-12, researcher, 08.12.2023.

53 Plagemann, Johannes & Maihack, Henrik (2023): *Wir sind nicht alle: Der Globale Süden und die Ignoranz des Westens*. München: C.H. Beck, pp. 204–206.

54 Cf. interviews with INT-01, employee of an association, 16.08.2023; INT-09, director of a think tank, 04.09.2023; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; INT-15, researcher at a think tank, 12.01.2024.

55 Cf. interviews with INT-13, researcher, 04.01.2024; INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024.

56 Cf. interview with INT-14, senior researcher, 10.01.2024; BICC Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies; PRIF Leibniz-Institut für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung; IFSH Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg & INEF Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (2023): *Friedensgutachten 2023: Noch lange kein Frieden*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, p. 28.

Imprint

Published by

Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung
Hamburg Office
Kattrepel 10
20095 Hamburg
+49 40/ 18 23 12 18
info@helmut-schmidt.de
www.helmut-schmidt.de

ISSN 2749-7216

Published: June 2024

With support by

Simon Eckert, Student Assistant,
Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung

Final editing

Uta Schlott,
Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung

Copyediting

Paul André Arend

Design

Sandra Sodemann

The respective author is responsible for the content of the article.*



Kirsten Hartmann, M.A.

Research Assistant European
and International Politics,
Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung

* The contributions do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung.



The Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung commemorates one of the most important 20th-century German statesmen. As a future-oriented think tank, it addresses issues that also animated Schmidt, the pioneering thinker.

