

Den 1. februar 2019

The role of the UN in international peace and security

This is a quick follow-up from the conference on 17 January 2019. The discussions were too rich to sum up comprehensively, but please find a couple of takeaways and observations below. Moreover, we have created a website with additional information, which may serve as an aide-mémoire. Here you will find one-minute video clips with some of the speakers, photographs, links to the streaming videos, and links to media coverage from the conference: <https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/nyheder/konference-the-future-of-the-un-in-international-peace-and-security/> (English version also available). If you would like to stay updated on relevant events in the future, please also see Danish UN Association's calendar for more information: <http://www.fnforbundet.dk/aktuelt/det-sker-i-fn-forbundet>.

Background for discussing the role of the UN in peace and security

Shifts in global conflict patterns have increasingly led to discussions about whether a new world order is in the making. One question that follows is the effectiveness of the UN's ability to maintain international peace and security. In this context, the conference was conceived in order to make a thorough analysis of what role the UN can and should play in international peace and security in the future. More specifically, the issue was broken down into four themes, each of which were covered by a panel of the most relevant experts and stakeholders:

1. The UN's position in the new global order
2. The UN's conflict management: Between peacekeeping, prevention, human rights and development
3. The UN's reforms: Progress or deadlock?
4. Political debate on the UN's place in Danish foreign policy

Main takeaways

- ❖ Weakened support for multilateralism but increased need. There are no more super powers to police the liberal world order and sustain the rules-based system of multilateralism built up since the establishment of the UN. This is a systemic feature of world politics today, and Trump's foreign policy, Brexit, the annexation of Crimea, are symptoms rather than causes of this new situation. This does not mean that the UN is obsolete. On the contrary, the necessity of a meeting place to discuss what the new world order should look like, is as relevant as ever – even if the Security Council is likely to remain gridlocked, and the new great power dynamics have to be taken into account.
- ❖ Sustained, robust peacekeeping. Since 2015 the concept of sustaining peace has become central to the UN. This new understanding in the UN is that peacebuilding is relevant throughout the conflict cycle. This has led to an ambition of breaking down the silos between the large peacekeeping operations with their military components on the one side, and the political missions on the other. At the same time, peace operations have moved towards a more assertive view of impartiality, which i.e. means that uniformed peacekeepers use more robust force to defend their mandates. This is not least the case when peace operations have to balance between protecting civilians and their human rights on the one side, and dealing with host governments as the perpetrators.

- ❖ The on-going reform agenda at the UN is a step in the right direction for making the UN fit for purpose, but constant pressure is needed for the reforms to be successfully implemented. This is particularly important because there is no constitutional moment, where a complete re-thinking of the UN could take place, and so the way forward is to incrementally improve on the existing structures. On the Security Council, this means improving the working methods, and on the UN Secretariat it means support for on-going reforms and for the Action for Peacekeeping initiative.

Observations and recommendations

- ❖ Two main positions emerged among the politicians: the first being that the UN plays the role in Danish foreign policy that it deserves, meaning that in light of the UN's challenges, it would not give Denmark sufficient return on investment to increase engagement with the UN. The second position was that the UN can be a cost-effective and normatively preferable way of handling peace and security concerns, and that Denmark should therefore consider shifting more resources to the UN, e.g. by increasing funding or the deployment of personnel and equipment.
- ❖ Denmark could benefit from winning its candidacy for Security Council membership. To be elected, however, Denmark has to contribute enough to peace and security to be seen as relevant by the UN General Assembly. It was also highlighted that the campaign needs to start now, and that a good tactic could include funding strategic parts of the UN Secretariat as well as multilateral think tanks. Then, when on the Council, Denmark should not fall into the trap of many elected members, which often leave the initiative to the permanent members. Instead, bold initiatives based on Danish values and a sincere effort on subsidiary bodies would be the way to make a difference. To navigate in the Council, it was seen as necessary to prepare by gaining expertise in the conflicts on the agenda as well as the Council's rules of procedure.

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Latest article: "Conflict prevention as pragmatic response to a twofold crisis: liberal interventionism and Burundi", in *International Affairs* (2018): <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/94/2/363/4872625>