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Stormy Times on the East River

Why Germany must increase its engagement in the UN: using the Blue Helmets and refugees as examples

The post-1945 world order is under threat. **The established system of international law, the United Nations, human rights and free trade and unrestricted shipping is under pressure from outside and from within. This liberal international system, which favors globalization, enables prosperity and has carried the values and principles of Western enlightenment around the world, is now under threat.**

Authoritarian governments such as Russia, China and Iran, as well as terror organizations like the so-called Islamic State are pushing from the outside into openings arising from the power-political withdrawal of the USA and other liberal countries. At the same time, there have been rumblings relating to the financial, economic, debt, migration and culture crises in Western states; populists on the left and the right are organizing nationalistic majorities against the "globalist" alliance of the scientific, political, media and economic elite. The result is that Western dominance is dwindling. Emerging powers such as China and Russia often do not share the Western perspective on fundamental international norms, or at least they do not anymore. **In this context, the UN plays a predominant role. This is because it is not only the protector of the liberal principles of international order; it is also the only forum in which (almost) all countries take part in shaping this order. This refers not only to the crucial policy area of security, but also various other areas ranging from economic development to migration and climate change. This text takes the example of the future of Blue Helmets missions as well as the UN's migration and refugee policies, and makes recommendations for action for German foreign policy.**

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The United Nations on New York's East River.

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1. Trends in the peacebuilding and peacekeeping Blue Helmets missions

The general development of the world's security situation did not leave the UN Blue Helmet soldiers unscathed: The mandates that the Security Council assigns to the Blue Helmets are becoming more and more **comprehensive**, and the operational contexts are becoming more and more **complex**. Several simultaneous developments are responsible for this. On the one hand, the United Nations is showing more and more willingness to deploy missions even when the governments of the affected nations are completely opposed to such a mission or support it very reluctantly. This lacking "host nation support" has forced the United Nations to act more robustly. At the same time, it has made it more difficult for the United Nations to cooperate with those governments whose control over the country it wants to strengthen.

While the Blue Helmet missions are becoming more challenging, Western states are again preparing for their own stronger participation in United Nations peacebuilding and peacekeeping missions. This implies a slight shift in the distribution of tasks. In the past years, when Western states primarily financially contributed to the Blue Helmets missions, the actual military burden was often carried by emerging economies. There is not one NATO state among the ten largest suppliers of troops. Inspired by the greater readiness of Canada and the Netherlands to send troops on Blue Helmets missions, other Western states are following suit. The **German Government** will again show greater commitment to the missions. However, the qualitative change in the peacebuilding and peacekeeping missions fosters a number of new challenges:

The expansion of the mandates of the Blue Helmet missions by the Security Council includes in many cases the remit to protect civilians from imminent danger. Though the remit is understandable and sensible in principle – the Blue Helmets should not become spectators to serious human rights violations like in Rwanda and Bosnia – up to now, however, no mission has been equipped with the **resources** that would make it possible for it to actually protect civilians. This was made clear in particular in the case of South Sudan, where Blue Helmets did not prevent a coordinated attack on reconstruction workers and non-governmental organizations in the capital Juba. The Kenyan commander of the mission was dismissed in the wake of this incident. The question remains as to whether the mission is successful in actually protecting the population, given that the staff of Western non-governmental and aid organizations in the capital is already not protected.

The protection of civilians has particularly clearly illustrated a widespread problem in United Nations peace operations: The mandates for the Blue Helmet missions are more and more frequently becoming what are known as **"Christmas tree mandates"**. In UN staff and expert jargon, this term refers to resolutions or documents that deal with too many topics and are too ambitious overall. For example, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has a total of eight tasks that are divided into numerous individual tasks. These range from the protection of cultural and historical properties in cooperation with UNESCO to stabilization work through the implementation of "quick-impact" measures. Even if all of these tasks are justified, this also shows that the United Nations did not pay enough attention to setting clear priorities, and that the missions were overloaded by a multitude of tasks. In the worst cases, the commander on the ground must choose which part of the mandate s/he will actually implement.

There has also been a **change in the composition of the deployed troops** in the peace missions. While past Blue Helmet missions were primarily deployed to ensure adherence

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with adopted peace agreements and thus involved a fairly simple mix of competencies, in recent years missions have demanded more and more complex compositions of troops. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations not only have drones for reconnaissance, but also heavy attack helicopters to deter militia. This change is in principle the right answer to the increasingly difficult challenges facing countries of operation. However, the traditional suppliers of troops can hardly make these skills available by themselves. Therefore the greater readiness of Western states to take part in United Nations missions is coming in the nick of time.

2. Migration and refugee policy in the United Nations

Now more than ever, migrants and refugees are posing a **global challenge** that demands a joint response from the international community. According to UN data, there are currently 244 million international migrants around the world and their number is growing faster than the world population. Approx. 21 million of these are international refugees. In response to this record high, the United Nations organized a UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants for the first time in New York on September 19, 2016. The main objectives were to achieve an increasing international sharing of responsibilities and improve coordination within the international community.

This summit made this a topic of concern again at the highest level of the United Nations. Refugee and migrant movements were recognized in New York as a global challenge that demands **better concrete solutions**. Migration issues are to appear on the UN agenda regularly in future. The intergovernmental International Organization for Migration (IOM) became a "related organization of the UN" at the summit, which is to strengthen the cooperation between both institutions as well as the voice of the IOM in various UN entities. In their New York Declaration, Member States also agreed to start a two-year process that is expected to lead to the adoption of a Global Compact on Refugees and a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018.

The first compact aims to develop a 'Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework' under the leadership of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The second compact is to build on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that entered into force on 1 January 2016. The agenda aims to, among other things, facilitate an "orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies".

Following several intergovernmental and regional conferences in 2016 (such as in London, Geneva, Istanbul and Dhaka) and the UN Summit in September 2016, the year 2017 should become an **implementation year for the United Nations** with regard to migration issues. **Two new faces** will play an important role in this:

The former Prime Minister of Portugal and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from 2005 to 2015, **António Guterres** succeeded South Korean Ban Ki-Moon as Secretary-General of the United Nations on 1 January 2017. Many UN experts hope that Guterres will show strong leadership in his new position and that the UN Secretariat will again play a leading role in the organization under his leadership. Expectations are high - not least in the area of refugees and migrants, where Guterres has the most expertise and practical experience.

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Donald Trump, who was sworn in on 20 January 2017 as the 45th President of the United States, will also exert influence over UN migration policy, if not the organization as a whole. However, based on statements that Trump made about the United Nations since his inauguration as well as before, there is reason to fear that this will be of little constructive value. As the largest contributor to the United Nations (22 per cent of the UN budget), the US is the most influential member of the organization. Due to lack of interest and readiness to provide resources, the new US Government could cause sluggishness in UN migration policy, and maybe in the UN in general. The new US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, former Republican Governor of South Carolina, also called the high US contributions to the UN into question and wants to increase the voice of US interests in the UN. Haley is an American of Indian descent who publicly spoke out against his migration policy even before Trump's election. However, she has little foreign policy experience, which brings considerable concern regarding her effectiveness in the United Nations.

3. Recommendations for German foreign policy action

The United Nations is traditionally considered highly significant in Germany. Especially against the backdrop of an impending collapse of international order, the UN is, from the German perspective, **more important than ever**. At the same time, outside the country, **expectations are high for Germany** to become substantially more involved in the United Nations and show leadership. Germany has recognized this and is ready to take on more responsibility, including in the UN. The current application to once again have a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for the year 2019–2020 demonstrates this; it is an expression of German willingness to shape progress and, at the same time, a call to Germany to formulate creative and pragmatic political ideas.

In the area of peacekeeping, the German Government is planning a return to the peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions following a reduction in Germany's participation – with the exception of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) located off the coast of Lebanon – to few soldiers in support functions in the headquarters. Germany's participation in the mission in Mali demonstrates that it also wants to do justice to its regulatory responsibilities, including in difficult circumstances. However, it is essential that Germany increases its engagement **beyond its intense involvement** in MINUSMA. This raises the following points:

- Although the German Government regularly deploys soldiers in missions, this is mostly limited to a few officers in the missions' headquarters. The German Government should therefore **provide** the United Nations more frequently with **those capacities** that are always lacking in Blue Helmets missions: from helicopter units to drones.
- The German Government should also initiate a process beyond these special capacities by which the United Nations collects experience from the mission at an institutional level and feeds it into a continuous **development of doctrine**.
- The circumstances into which the United Nations peacebuilding missions in particular are sent did not only require a robust mandate and offensive capabilities. Situational awareness is becoming more and more important in being successful in these missions because transferred troops can only fulfill their mandates if they are

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adequately deployed. For this the Blue Helmets require **intelligence** capacities, which they too often lack. To this end, the German Government should work towards strengthening the corresponding capacities of the United Nations to contribute this itself and also make it available for other Blue Helmet missions outside of Mali.

- In accordance with the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) adopted in 2005 by the General Assembly, a nation must be assessed with regard to its ability and will to protect its own population. If this is not the case, it is the responsibility of the international community to provide assistance. If the government is unwilling to protect the population, the international community is authorized to use military intervention. This exact situation is unequivocally present in Syria. If the Security Council is blocked, the required mandate for this can also come from the General Assembly in Resolution 377A(V) Uniting for Peace. Germany supported the Responsibility to Protect at least in principle and should, primarily in the General Assembly, work towards ensuring that this approach is used again in future crises and conflicts and strengthened substantially. In order to achieve this, Germany should seek out a group of like-minded states in the General Assembly, push for compulsory **criminal proceedings** for the Syrian regime in the International Criminal Court and create a learning initiative to process the failures of the international community in Syria.

In the area of **migration**, Germany can contribute in many respects to develop and implement the newest United Nations initiatives on international refugee and migrant movements. Germany was a driving force in preparing for the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016.

- In the full knowledge that the UN is "a club of Member States" and that nothing in this institution can move forward without them, Berlin could, together with other EU Members, take on a **leading role in the preparation** of both compacts on refugees and migrants. The European Member States are, according to observers in the UN environment, the most influential group in the United Nations and are already an important actor regarding migration issues, which are primarily being dealt with in the UN General Assembly. The international context of the United Nations and the distance from Europe also have the positive effect that the EU Member States can generally agree on common interests more easily in New York than in Brussels in order to defend them to third countries. Primarily with regard to the compact for legal migration – which is an area in which much normative work is still required – it would be of benefit if Germany would push for the more **active participation of Europeans**.
- Parallel to this process surrounding the Global Compact on Migration, which is only progressing slowly, Germany and all European Member States could set a good example and strive for a solution to the refugee crisis in Europe through **increased coordination and sharing of responsibility within the EU**. This stance as well as **increased cooperation with third countries** to combat the causes of migration and refugees (including in the areas of development and climate) would strengthen the credibility and the position of Europeans in the United Nations.
- Ultimately Germany could also work towards ensuring that the two UN pacts on refugees and migration, which are to be prepared over the next two years, do not

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become the above-mentioned "Christmas tree" initiatives. Examples of such thematically overloaded and excessively demanding initiatives are the New York Declaration of September 2016 and the report of the former Secretary-General from May 2016 that called on the Member States to find solutions for at least ten per cent of the global refugee population each year. Beyond general, guiding declarations and conferences – which certainly send a positive signal to the public – the United Nations requires **compacts with more streamlined and effective aims** for refugee and migration issues as well as a **clear setting of priorities** and **binding commitments** for Member States.

Background

From November 28–30, 2016, a delegation of the Working Group of Young Foreign Policy Experts as well as experts from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) were invited to visit to the newly opened KAS Office in New York in order to learn about the current challenges to international order from the perspective of the United Nations. The personal conversations and briefings focused on the future of peacekeeping, migration and refugees as well as on the role of Germany in the United Nations. The delegation had the opportunity to talk with UN staff members, representatives of various UN delegations as well as external professionals, academics and experts from think tanks. **The impression that the liberal international order is now in serious danger was a common thread in all conversations.**

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