

**CONFERENCE CONCEPT NOTE: THE FUTURE OF THE UN
IN INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY**



Theme 1 – The UN’s position in the new world order

The present international climate has been called a new world order, likened to conditions during the Cold War, and been seen as a breakdown of universal norms. That the liberal order is under pressure is a commonly held view among academics and analysts from all over the world, exemplified by a special issue in *International Affairs* from January 2018. In recent years we have seen American scepticism towards multilateralism, which at the UN has had such consequences as budget cuts and non-participation in the Global Compact on Migration. Simultaneously, the international community has failed to find a solution to the conflict in Syria, the UK has decided on Brexit, and Russia has annexed Crimea. All these examples point to a renewed reliance on unilateralism in how the great powers handle international relations. Yet, it is still unclear what the setbacks in terms of support for multilateralism means for the UN’s ability to make a difference in the peace and security realm. Besides, a countermovement has developed, where civil society groups and a number of states have renewed their support of existing global institutions. The question is therefore if the UN can play a constructive role in global security governance when the world order is changing, and if so, then how?

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL
SCIENCE

ØSTER FARIMAGSGADE 5
1353 KØBENHAVN K
ROOM 8.1.03

MOB +45 30746401

tge@ifs.ku.dk
cms.polsci.ku.dk

The speakers will touch upon the following subjects:

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- Can the multilateral system survive in the face of the challenges to it, or is it becoming irrelevant? What is the alternative?
- Are the post-WWII institutions suited to face the challenges that the world will experience in the coming years?
- What new dynamics can we expect in the UN Security Council as a result of changes in the balance of power?
- What challenges and opportunities are there for small states, including Denmark?

Theme 2 – The UN’s conflict management: Peacekeeping, prevention, human rights, and development

The UN was established in 1945 as a central element of a new multilateral order with the main purpose of preventing war. Inspired by the two World Wars, The UN’s founders thought mostly in terms of inter-state wars. This type of war has been rare since the fall of the Berlin Wall, but is making a return, although covertly in the form of hybrid wars. The inter-state diplomacy at the UN, and the first generation of peacekeepers, proved to be effective means to lower the propensity of such large-scale armed conflicts. It has, however, been less successful in solving crises, where the great powers have been involved. Since then, civil wars, where rebels and governments fight each other, have become more frequent, and the UN has since the late 1990s responded by mandating large, multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations. In the meantime, a range of both old and new conflicts have flared up, in which civilians fight civilians or where other non-state actors are pitted against each other. These conflicts are difficult to handle in the UN’s state-centric system of negotiators and peace operations. At the same time, there is an increased attention to how non-traditional security threats impact the risk of new conflicts. Examples include climate change, epidemics, lack of water, hunger, and marginalization. In this

present situation, the UN's goal has been formulated as being to improve its preventive efforts, not least because this is estimated to be cheaper than managing conflicts once they break out. The Secretary-General has – among other things – established a High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, which is meant to strengthen the UN's ability to make earlier, more political interventions in (potential) conflicts in order to avoid escalation. This type of initiatives has been tried several times in the history of the UN, but the new element is to connect conflict prevention more closely with the two other pillars of the UN's work: human rights and development. The question is whether the three pillars can work together conceptually, institutionally, and financially.

The speakers will touch upon the following subjects:

- What role(s) can the UN assume in the face of new types of threats?
- Can peacekeeping operations achieve their objectives, seen in the light of new types of conflicts and threats?
- How do the UN's work on peace and security interact with the human rights pillar and the development pillar, and is there a potential to use this strategically?
- Can small states, including Denmark, contribute to improving the UN's conflict prevention efforts?

Theme 3 – The UN's reforms: Progress or standstill?

The UN has been reforming itself since its establishment. Right now, because of the changing world order, there is increased attention to making the Organization fit for purpose. The burning platform that is presented by new types of threats and the criticism of multilateralism, has created room for a new optimism about the prospect for historically large reforms. This is mostly the case with regards to the international bureaucracy, where there are signs of progress in reforms of the Secretariat, not least in the form of a

restructuring of the Departments of Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Operations. Reform of the Security Council has also moved up on the agenda in New York, although prospects are more long-term in that regard. Disagreements on Security Council reform cut across at least two dimensions: the first is the balance between an increase in the Council's legitimacy by enlarging its membership on the one hand, and the Council's decision-making power that would decrease on the other hand. The other dimension is the question of how an increase in representativeness would be distributed among the UN's member states, which pits the new and coming great powers in Germany, Japan, Brazil, and India, against their regional rivals. The former seek permanent seats in the Council, whereas the latter find that this would disadvantage them as well as contribute to the Council's dead-lock on difficult issues. The question is therefore if there is progress or standstill in the reform efforts, and what that would mean for the UN's role in global security governance.

The speakers will touch upon the following subjects:

- What reforms are on-going at the different levels of the UN Organization?
- What reform initiatives have a chance of being implemented, and what would the results be?
- How can small states, including Denmark, contribute to reform efforts becoming realistic and having the desired effects?