

The UN Charter must remain the heart and soul of any new peace architecture

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Michael von der Schulenburg.
(Photo ma)

This article is a contribution to the German peace movement's pamphlet on the occasion of this year's "Anti-War Day on September 1". On this day, 84 years ago, the German Reich marched into Poland and ignited the Second World War, bringing indescribable destruction, misery and suffering to Europe and the world.

The *UN Charter* was the attempt to counter the two most terrible, destructive, and murderous wars in human history since the epoch of the Enlightenment with a peace concept based on humanity.

While the First and Second World Wars required trillions of dollars in today's currency to produce and deploy ever more terrible weapon systems with which to kill millions of people, the *UN Charter* consisted of just twenty pages of paper. The power of a few words of peace stands against an enormous arsenal of weapons of war – two very unequal opponents! And yet, the principles of the *UN Charter* and not any wars or military victories, are the real historic achievements for humankind.

For when 26 representatives of the victorious Allied nations met in San Francisco in June 1945, they did something incredibly revolutionary. The new world order that was to emerge after the Second World War was no longer to be determined by a peace treaty dictated by the war's victors, as had been the case after the First World War. From now on, a collective security

system based on common principles was to preserve world peace.

All nations, regardless of their size or their political and economic systems, would participate in it. The unifying aim was: Never again war! Thus, the *UN Charter* was not about revenge and retaliation and there was no longer a distinction made between just and unjust wars or between victors and vanquished. Conflicts between states were to be resolved only through negotiations and no longer through military force. The *UN Charter* hence made both sides of a conflict equally responsible for finding a peaceful solution.

In this spirit, *UN Charter* member states committed themselves to equal rights of all nations, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, compliance with international agreements, and to international cooperation and mutual tolerance. Conventional considerations of preventing wars through military balances was no longer an issue. On the contrary, the *UN Charter* now emphasizes respect for fundamental human rights, the inviolable dignity of every human being, regardless of origin, gender, or religion and equal rights between men and women, as well as the right of all people to social and economic progress.

And yet the *UN Charter* was almost immediately challenged. Only 20 days after the signing of the *UN Charter* on 26 June 1945, and a few hundred kilometers from the meeting place in San Francisco, the first atomic bomb exploded in the New Mexico desert. And even before the *UN Charter* came into force on 24 October 1945, two atomic bombs were dropped on Japanese cities

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that may have killed a quarter million people, almost all of them civilians.

The millennia-old conviction that only military superiority could guarantee security had thus reemerged with unprecedented destructive force. If the previous wars had already caused world fires, there was now the possibility of wiping out the entire human race, virtually within minutes. It was then that during the Cold War, nuclear weapons rather than the UN Charter determined international relations among nations. The hope for a peace that was built on the cooperation among nations was replaced by the Cold War threat of 'mutually assured destruction'.

The great tragedy of our time is that even the end of the Cold War did not bring peace. Yet the conditions for it had been extremely promising. With the dissolution of the *Warsaw Pact* and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there were no more enemies. The path to global peace envisaged in the UN Charter was now clear. At first it seemed that way when the *Charter of Paris* for a New Peaceful Europe, based on the UN Charter, was solemnly adopted in 1990.

But the strategists of the USA saw it quite differently. With Russia sinking into chaos and China not yet playing a geopolitical role, the USA had risen to become the sole global superpower.

In 1992, only one year after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the *Wolfowitz Doctrine* envisioned a very different world. According to this doctrine, not a collective security system like that of the UN Charter, but the USA alone, based on its military, economic and technological superiority, should determine and enforce international rules. The idea of a so-called 'rules-based international order' was born.

It was to be a new 'American century', whereby the European states would be incorporated in this new American century through NATO membership. Thus, in the post-Cold War area NATO grew quickly from 16 to today 32 member states; even though the USA and its allies faced no military threats at that time.

The purpose was now to uphold US' global dominance: "Our first objective (for the USA) is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere ..." (Wolfowitz Doctrine).

With this, NATO was no longer a defense alliance, but had evolved into an instrument of power for 'white northern' states led by the USA.

Although they represent today only a minority of just 11% of the world's population (that is declining), NATO assumed the right to militarily dominate the world with its global web of 700–800 US military bases and with controlling 60% of the world's military spending – compared to China's 13%, Russia's 4% and India's 3.6%.

As a defense alliance NATO was compliant with the UN Charter, but as a military alliance to assert global supremacy it no longer is. What makes NATO a threat to other countries is the fact that it is today the only existing military alliance in the world with a global agenda. It should therefore come as no surprise that resistance to NATO is building up among non-NATO states.

The Ukraine war that is fought over a further expansion of NATO into Ukraine and Georgia, is an expression of this resistance. This primarily concerns Russia, but also explains why there is no support in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America for the Western Ukraine policy of NATO expansion, despite Russia's illegal military intervention.

The political-military tensions between the USA and NATO on the one side and Russia and China on the other seem to be worse today than at any time during the Cold War. We are engaged in an accelerating spiral of new sanctions that hurt the global economy. Worse, global military spending has reached unprecedented levels – and continues to rise. Nuclear weapons are being "modernized" to become "smarter" and new hypersonic missile systems and stealth fighter jets are designed to deliver them "safely" to their targets. Autonomous weapon systems operate increasingly without the need for direct human actions and are being equipped with stealth technologies and artificial intelligence. Preparations are made for future cyber and space wars. We might be close to a situation in which humans may no longer fully control military decisions.

Yet the world's pressing problems are quite different: life on this planet is threatened by the warming of the earth's atmosphere, rising sea levels, the desertification of vast regions, the lack of water, and the still rampant poverty and widespread malnutrition. There are swelling refugee and migrant flows, spreading slums, deadly epidemics, limited raw materials, a rise in in-country conflicts and violence and failing states. We will not be able to solve any of these problems with tanks, rocket launchers or even weapons of mass destruction.

The destructive forces of modern weapons systems have now become far too great for our ever smaller and more densely populated world. We no longer have the option to rationally choose between security through arms or peace through cooperation. Perhaps the senseless killing and destruction in the Ukraine war could be the trigger for us all to realize that we need a peace order that is not based on military superiority and powerful military alliances but on international understanding and cooperation. This can only be a peace order based on the principles of the UN Charter.

The UN Charter is and remains an expression of humanity's hope for peace. It is now embedded in multiple UN international conventions and agreements that provide framework solutions for almost all aspects of our human coexistence, from human rights to climate protection and to fairer humanitarian, social and economic conditions in the world. They have in common that they are built on non-violence among states, sovereign equality of all member states and equal rights and self-determination of all peoples.

The problem is therefore not the UN Charter, but the fact that four of the five veto powers in the UN Security Council, and thus the actual

guarantors of the UN Charter, the USA, Great Britain, France and now also Russia, have repeatedly violated it and waged illegal wars. These four veto powers are all states of the 'white north', three of them are even leading members of NATO. For the sake of global peace, this must change and countries of the 'Global South' be given much greater decision-making rights in the UN Security Council.

In the wake of the Ukraine war the position of the 'Global South' has already strengthened while the quest of the West for global supremacy are likely to weaken. As an unintended positive outcome of this senseless war, we may see, a world that will move towards a more equal, fairer, and multi-polar global order, a global order for which the UN-Charter had once been designed.

Today, the world will need more than ever the UN Charter to "save future generations from the scourge of war" and to build a more peaceful and fairer world for the soon to be 10 billion inhabitants on our planet, 9 billion of whom will be from the 'Global South'. The UN Charter must therefore be at the center of every peace movement.

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