PUSHING THE AGENDA - ADVOCATING FOR A

Global Resilience Council
for the people and the planet

A mixture of idealism and realism, post-World War II multilateral institutions and notably the UN system have generally served the world well, providing a solid basis for international cooperation and global governance over the past 75 years. Nevertheless, as the UN turns 75 and in the wake of the huge disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, it is timely to reflect on new approaches that address 21ˢᵗ century needs, filling gaps and deploying tools unimagined in 1945 or in the years after.

Need for a Global Resilience Council
The UN system lacks an operational body that can effectively deliberate and act on non-military global threats. Whether it is responding to a pandemic, climate change or food insecurity, there is no equivalent body to the UN Security Council with the authority to dictate a large-scale collective response to not-military crises. Creating a Global Resilience Council is a global governance necessity; it is long overdue.

In the absence of such a body, the UN Security Council is occasionally requested to respond to a broad range of threats. Its remit, though, is limited to the actual or likely armed conflicts that might evolve from a "soft security" threat; the Security Council does not have the authority – nor the expertise – to address the underlying causes of non-military crises. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the Security Council is often questioned because of its two-tier composition and limited representativity of the current UN membership, while the Council is also increasingly paralyzed due to competing geo-political interests of its five, veto-yielding permanent members (P5).

 In the 1945 UN Charter, the body assigned to deal with non-military global challenges, namely the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is given limited powers of persuasion. It "may make or initiate studies and reports" (Art. 62.1) and "may make recommendations" to the General Assembly on international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters, as well as on human rights and fundamental freedoms (Art. 62.1, 62.2), "may prepare draft conventions for submission to the General Assembly" (Art. 62.3), and finally "may call… international conferences" (Art. 62.4). Unfortunately, ECOSOC does not have the equivalent obligatory authority of the Security Council.

Other bodies like the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF), the Human Rights Council (HRC), along with most other intergovernmental and expert bodies within the UN provide platforms for diplomatic exchanges and declaratory outcomes but they too have very limited operational authority.[1] For example the HLPF may only issue "a ministerial declaration" when it meets under the authority of the ECOSOC and "a concise negotiated political declaration" when it meets under the authority of the General Assembly.[2]

 Appeals from these and similar bodies for voluntary contributions by state and non-state actors work only so well. Whether it is Governments reaching out to each other and to non-state actors to implement

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[1] While the High-level Political Forum and the Peacebuilding Commission are currently undergoing internal reviews, neither of these reviews anticipate a significant expansion of their terms of reference nor the addition of obligatory authority.

[2] Format and operational aspects of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, General Assembly resolution 67/290 of 9 July 2013.

greenhouse gas emission reductions, the General Assembly's call for a new social contract via the 2030 Agenda, or the Financing for Development Conference call for significant new private sector funds to fight entrenched poverty, voluntarism fails when used to meaningfully address systemic global risks. There will always be a significant number of global actors, states but also multinational corporations, who act contrary to a voluntary call and face no legal, financial, or other consequences for their on-going, narrowly self-interested actions. In short, voluntarism cannot solve complex contemporary crises. Some level of explicit international obligations pronounced by a body with the recognized authority to do so are necessary to avoid a deteriorating crisis.

In the 1945 design of the intergovernmental system, each global issue area was assigned to a specialized organization – for example food to the FAO, education to UNESCO, development to the World Bank and later also UNDP, and health to the WHO. Increasingly, though, the world is now facing crises that transcend the legal, operational and even conceptual capacities of these separate organizations. Too many contemporary crises fall into an institutional and leadership vacuum, or overwhelm the organizations assigned the primary responsibility to deal with them. Yes, these organizations may issue warnings, authorize appeals to Governments and non-state actors, and adopt resolutions, but their actions are not able to change the trajectory of contemporary multi-dimensional crises. A resolution from one multilateral body doesn't even obligate other parts of the UN system to discuss the matter, let alone to act.

To correct the 1945 fragmented approach to global governance, some intergovernmental body is needed at the level of Heads of State or Government to meaningfully create a whole-of-government approach. This is the only level where action can be taken across all sectors to confront today's interconnected global risks by engaging all the relevant UN system agencies, the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs), the Basel-based institutions, and similar intergovernmental organizations.

> **The pandemic is not just a health threat**
> As it is now clear, a health crisis is not just a problem that can be solved by the WHO and nurses, doctors, medical schools, health supply companies and ministries of health. It is a problem that is intimately connected with almost every other aspect of governing – from domestic environmental rule-making to controlling global drivers of climate change, from labour safety regulations for health providers to regulations governing domestic impacts of the transnational pharmaceutical industry and from non-tariff trade policies to allocation of finances to health ministries. Every systemic global crisis has this same cross-ministry and cross-disciplinary character.

Outside the UN system, the main operational multilateral body that addresses non-hard-security threats is the G20. While this body played a significant role in tackling the global financial crises of 1998 and 2008, the increasing expectations and hopes placed on it have not materialized, as it has tended to become another declaratory body. By design it has no standing support arrangements, relying on the country of its annually rotating presidency to provide them. It is, though, a "minilateral" body of choice for several of its members and beyond. It creates expectations, is the recipient of demands for action and occasionally delivers results of broader import, even if its legitimacy can be challenged from a multilateral perspective.

Related efforts and considerations

There have been discussions in the past about the need for a body that would deal with "soft" or "human" security threats. Such threats are becoming ever more prominent in our globalized world and jeopardize the well-being of individuals and communities around the globe. The term "human security" is an accepted part of the UN vocabulary[3] and is used to describe those threats that do not fit into the traditional peace and

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[3] See https://www.un.org/humansecurity/reports-resolutions/

security definitions. In search of a body that would cover a wide range of the interconnected challenges of today, thus dealing with economic security as well as health security, food security, livelihood security, climate and environmental security, there have been calls for the establishment of an Economic Security Council[4] or a Sustainable Development Council[5] . The word "Council" is used to indicate the operational character of the body and the capacity to make decisions and react with speed and concrete measures to challenges as they arise.

One significant challenge in developing an institutional arrangement to deal with violent, non-armed security issues is the proposed use of the nomenclature of "security" to cover issues that normally fall under (sustainable) development or human rights. In an effort to avoid entanglement with long-lasting debates, and to stress the need for all of the respective communities of practitioners and experts to come together, the provisional title for the proposed new body includes the term "resilience", which can be seen as helping the world move to a more sustainable and safe place in every respect.

The proposed Council could be a body central to the entire UN system, scaling up the issues in importance and in terms of their interconnections from the level of individual specialized bodies to the global community at large, while decisively promoting concerted action cutting across sectoral agendas. The establishment of such a body responsible for ensuring the resilience of individuals and communities would help Introduce a new generation of multilateral institutional arrangements fit for the 21st century and for the UN75+25 period.

Moving forward

This proposal to create a new body to lead the world in dealing with violent non-armed crises in the 21st century is not advanced lightly. It took decades from the initial proposal to create the International Criminal Court, UN Women or the Peacebulding Commission till these bodies were actually created.

The purpose of this policy paper is to start a conversation about the nature of the institutional gaps in contemporary global governance and the urgency to move from the broadly acknowledged frustration with the current system to the recognition that there are ways to adjust the 1945 system to address systemic non-military crises. The second part of this paper puts on the table the contours of a possible Global Resilience Council only to demonstrate that there are ways to have a global body with the capacity to require action by its members and other actors. Several additional research and policy papers will be needed, along with many conversations with key governments and other actors till this proposal gets ready for implementation.

Opportunity to innovate and try out new arrangements
The proposed Global Resilience Council could be characterized by innovative elements in all its aspects, namely in:
  a. *Its creation*
     It could be simultaneously a "subsidiary body" under the auspices of the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC, but also of the assemblies of UN system entities and other intergovernmental bodies (i.e. Conferences of Parties and regional intergovernmental bodies), as they gradually adhere to the founding document of the new Council.

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4 See, for example, https://euobserver.com/economic/27373
5 See, for example, recommendation 52 in https://en.unesco.org/system/files/GSP_Report_web_final.pdf

b. **Its membership**
1. Along the precedent of the UN's Peacebuilding Commission it could meet in different configurations depending on the global issue in question each time, as well as occasionally in a core, cross-issue composition.
2. In its issue-specific composition, called a Ministerial Working Group, the Council should certainly involve the countries chairing the intergovernmental bodies of the UN system entities most relevant to the issue in question, along with leaders of regional integration bodies with competence in the issue area (e.g. EU, AU, ASEAN, CARICOM).
3. The leadership of secretariats of relevant multilateral organizations would participate as in-house issue experts, while non-state actors could be brought in as external experts according to their respective expertise and capacity to follow-up on any decisions.

c. **The agenda and working methods of the Council in its core composition**
(a) The primary means to address global challenges would remain with the competent UN system bodies. A crisis-specific Ministerial Working Group (MWG) would be established by the Council following a request from the relevant intergovernmental body(ies) assigned to deal with the core issue, or when the UN General Assembly requested that with a specific majority (to be agreed upon);
(b) It will be possible to hold public hearings and/or to create expert advisory group(s), as necessary to examine the issue in question and devise potential solutions for the Council's consideration.
(c) There can be annual or biannual meetings of the Council in its issue-specific/MWG or core configuration.

d. **The membership of its crisis-specific Ministerial Working Group** [6]
The Council meeting in its core composition could appoint 25-30 state members to each crisis-specific MWG, each member with a vote in any MWG decision. Members of advisory groups could be invited to participate in any and all parts of MWG deliberations, but without the right to vote.

e. **Its funding**
Contributions by all participating intergovernmental bodies.

f. **Its chairing**
A rotating Presidency among its members, as in the case of the UN Security Council.

i. **Enforcement tools**
The Council could have a variety of tools available to address global crises, such as:
i. capacity to advise specific agenda items and proposed actions to any intergovernmental body or combination of bodies;
ii. direct intergovernmental financial, trade, and monetary bodies to consider sanctions or withdrawal of benefits from institutions/countries aggravating a global crisis (analogous to the UN Security Council's freezing of assets);
iii. allowing countries to impose tariff or non-tariff measures to compensate for costs incurred by non-conforming institutions/countries (e.g. carbon taxes);
iv. ability to establish public lists of non-complying institutions/countries or products to influence decisions by investors, consumers, and others;
v. ability to refer cases to the International Criminal Court (ICC), Interpol, other related permanent or ad hoc, global or regional judicial or policing bodies;
vi. ability to establish fact-finding commissions to investigate the truthfulness of allegations before considering enforcement measures;

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[6] Similar to the Peacebuilding Council's XXXXX

vii.   ability to demand the temporary freeze of state or non-state actions expected to have a negative impact on an ongoing crisis or precipitate a crisis, while the Council is considering whether to intervene more decisively.

j. Its transparency
The Council to have its deliberations and decision-making sessions broadcast and provide easy and free access to all its working documents in the appropriate languages.

k. Its substantive and logistical support
The entire UN system under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General, through the mechanism of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), involving non-CEB organizations of the broader UN system and beyond as necessary.

l. Its seat and meeting venues
Mix of physical, hybrid and virtual meetings out of established UN system headquarters, as appropriate.

This brief organizational presentation of the Global Resilience Council is an initial effort to lay out the range of elements needed for such a body to be established and operationalized. FOGGS thus hopes to provoke discussion in the international community, including within and between foreign ministries, at university research centres, civil society and in the governing bodies of the UN system. The efforts and inputs of many activists, experts and officials will be needed to bring the Council into existence, but hopefully there will soon be a broad coalition established to that end.

A hypothetical case study: **Global Food Crisis**

The governing bodies of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) recognize that, because of COVID-related health and economic crises, the world will experience a sharp increase in global hunger. However, organizing an effective response is well beyond the institutional authority and capacities of these three UN system bodies. Therefore, they decide to take the issue to the Global Resilience Council.

The aforementioned three Rome-based institutions know that an effective global response requires significant exemptions from the rules of the global economic and trade regime, the engagement of national ministries well outside the agriculture departments, and strong action to dissuade agribusiness firms from profiteering on – or magnifying the consequences of – the instability of the food system. But their specialized mandates will not allow them to address these issues. In this situation their governing bodies take the initiative to refer the COVID-related multi-dimensional food crisis to the Global Resilience Council.

The Council under the rotating chair of its core configuration convenes public hearings to gain a full understanding of all causes and inter-related impacts of the new food crisis and to gauge the global public's sentiment about possible courses of action to avert a major hunger crisis. On the basis of these assessments, the Council decides on the exact composition of its special configuration (Ministerial Working Group – MWG) for the said crisis.

The Council convenes in its crisis-specific MWG configuration and considers a number of interrelated actions. These actions could include requiring key agricultural export, marketing and processing countries to share publicly their best understanding of the crisis and their recommendations for joint public action to contain the crisis; advise key governments to remove the right to trade in commodity futures from firms undermining the global food system; grant other governments the legal right to temporarily withdraw from international trade commitments to protect their domestic populations; and recommend other countries to open criminal investigations into trading practices that are magnifying the instabilities in the global food market. They could also direct that all the relevant intergovernmental bodies report back by a specific date on how their respective organization will address the specific causes and effects of the crisis.

As all key sessions of the Council and its MWG(s) will be public, the media will be able to focus attention on the causes of the crisis and on those held responsible for aggravating the crisis.

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