Caught in the Crossfire
United Nations Security and Policy Perspectives on the Refugee Crisis

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Foreword

There can be no doubt that the refugee crisis possesses a security dimension. Armed conflicts with scant prospect of speedy resolution are driving people to seek refuge abroad. Their growing numbers represent an enormous challenge for a string of states – from the immediate neighbourhood with its gigantic refugee camps through the transit countries to the Member States of the European Union. What does this mean for the European security order and its central actors, first and foremost the United Nations (UN), the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (CSDP) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)? How does the crisis affect the German armed forces, facing increasing demands at home on top of growing obligations abroad? How does the refugee crisis alter the role and self-perception of the security institutions, and what influence does it exert on ongoing strategy processes?

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has asked renowned experts to analyse the impact of the refugee crisis on the UN, the CSDP, the OSCE, and the German armed forces. The resulting papers will be published within the next months, starting with this analysis on the impact of the refugee crisis on the UN.

In their analysis, Claire Hajaj and Tuesday Reitano examine the current turmoil in the relationship between the EU and the UN. The self-perception of the EU as a liberal and inclusive Union of states is now deeply challenged by massive immigration and growing blimpish nationalism, while, at the same time, the UN unapologetically points at the obligations resulting from international law. The West, according to the UN, has not done enough to fight the root causes of the refugee crisis and has left transit countries alone for too long.

This conflict between normative principles on the one hand and a pragmatist approach on the other partly results from the identity crisis the UN is currently facing: Can the UN be the guardian of the international order and at the same time serve as vehicle for the West´s international security policy? Is the influence of the UN today limited to poorer countries or does it (still) have the necessary authority to broker solutions at a global level?

Claire Hajaj and Tuesday Reitano, in analysing the UN approach to the refugee crisis, reveal the structural and identity-related challenges the UN face while describing positive developments and possible solutions to the UN´s impasse.

Anna Maria Kellner
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Introduction

Europe and the United Nations are natural partners. The United Nation's first historical field of operation was Europe. European ideals are reflected in core United Nations principles. In other arenas they cooperate on a platform of shared values.

Yet as the refugee crisis has escalated, the United Nations has become increasingly out of step with aspects of Europe's policy response.

Today, the EU's central self-projection of liberalism and inclusiveness is under siege from a muscular display of militant border control and reactionary nationalism. The arrival of more than a million, mostly Muslim, asylum seekers in 2015 has resurrected one of central Europe's oldest bogeymen: Unconstrained migration from fragile states threatening to destabilise its demography, alter its political balance and strain its social welfare systems.

And as Europe falters, the UN's stance has become ever more uncompromising. Waving the flag of international obligations, the UN has linked the migration influx with conflict zones – first and foremost Syria – where both international protection systems and great power diplomacy have failed civilians at their most vulnerable. As a consequence, the UN has maintained a hard line on Europe's obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and international human rights law. After decades of pressuring poorer states to cope with far greater refugee influxes, the multi-laterals are showing little sympathy for wealthy nations now balking at burden-sharing.

As a result, the refugee crisis has been unfolding in a vacuum of international consensus. Bad timing has made a difficult problem worse: weak economies, European integration already challenged by the Greek fiscal crisis, a five-year stalemate around Syria and the 2014 rise of Islamic State.

Solutions have been complicated by lack of coherence both between the UN and the EU, and within the UN system itself. This massive and often self-contradictory international institution is still struggling to connect a clear migration and refugee policy with responses across its three key agendas of security, humanitarian action and development support.

These challenges are playing into a growing crisis of self-definition for the UN. Can it be both a guardian of international order and a vehicle for Western security management? Is UN influence limited to poor nations, or can it broker with authority on global problems? And can its risk-averse reform processes be galvanised for a 2030 future in which different aspects of security – human, national and collective – are likely to be dominant and tightly intertwined concerns?

1. A Tale of Two Cities

What we now call the »refugee crisis« began as a tale of two cities: Damascus and Brussels. Syria has tested the effectiveness of the UN's peace and security system more than any other crisis of this generation, and catalysed the greatest refugee outflows since World War II. These same refugees are now testing the EU's commitment to international standards around solidarity and collective security, enshrined by conventions to which UN is principal guardian.

In both arenas, the UN is in caught in the crossfire. It has the unenviable job of being standard-bearer for international law and human rights in the face of a relentless assault from national self-interest.

Until 2015, the UN and the Brussels were partners in refugee advocacy. Their perspectives synchronised on how non-European nations should cope with refugee inflows – in particular in managing the regional overspill from Syria's bitter war. Speaking together to Syria's increasingly concerned neighbours – Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and a bit more far away Egypt – the EU and UN urged solidarity, and respect for 1951. They encouraged viewing refugees as a resource, with long-term socio-economic advantages to be accrued through smart integration policies. They pledged support to help countries maintain and extend a welcome to refugees, culminating in the German-sponsored Berlin Conference of October 2014.

Since 2015, however, Europe has confronted these very same frustrations and dilemmas, sparked by Syria but not confined to it. The masses gathering at Europe's border are not just Syrians fleeing a high-profile war, but many different nationalities whose impetus may or may not be similar.

This fact has hampered a common EU-UN position – as instability in Syria (and arguably Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya too) amplifies migration patterns in other parts of the world. One country's mass movement has created pull-factors beyond the norm for migrants from the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and Central Asia – a mass migration crisis whose catchment area spans four continents with the smuggling industry serving as a vector. UNHCR believes that up to 90 percent of arrivals would fit the classic 1951 refugee definition; from a window in Brussels, the perspective is not so clear.

The sheer volume of asylum-seekers has also upset traditional relationships and security dynamics. In a strange twist of fate, the EU – a leading donor to the UN's humanitarian response for the Middle Eastern refugee crisis – has become a beneficiary of humanitarian aid.

For the first time since the Maastricht Treaty, the UN is running humanitarian operations inside a EU member state. UNHCR's entry into the Greek arena was delayed until 2015, when Europe's inability to step up and self-manage had been comprehensively placed beyond doubt.

The $550 million Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan coordinated by UNHCR for 2016 covers four candidate nations for EU enlargement and one EU member state, in addition to Turkey. These operations will continue to a large extent, despite the March 2016 »withdrawal« of UNHCR operations from the Greek island camps in protest at the EU's €6 billion deal to deport irregular arrivals to Turkey. In condemning the deal, UNHCR has accused Europe of entering into a Faustian pact: of buying human rights immunity with aid and political concessions, violating international law and the EU's core value of solidarity. This public rejection represents an unprecedented schism between the UN and the EU, and underlines the philosophical gulf between the two institutions.

2. A Refugee »El Niño« Effect

With so much at stake, it seems extraordinary that Europe's 2015 refugee surge was not predicted. Complacency and distraction are both to blame. Migration patterns to Europe from Africa and Western Asia have always ebbed and flowed. Both land and sea routes across the Sahara, the Mediterranean, and the Balkans have been well-travelled for millennia.

Brussels somehow managed to cling to some degree of complacency even as the crisis escalated. As early as 2014, Italy was making increasingly urgent calls to share responsibilities. And yet, Western Europe inexplicably missed the possibility that these refugee arrivals could mutate into a critical challenge to internal borders.

But specific warning signals across the Middle East and North Africa were clear. Refugee outflows from conflicts in Syria and Iraq, thus far regionally-contained, had reached the point of overspill. Syria's southern neighbours had finally tightened their border controls, forcing refugees to look north. Beleaguered families had come to the end of their coping mechanisms, with war still raging back home and a cocktail of poverty and hopelessness causing misery in refugee settings.

UNHCR and its sister agencies, as well as regional governments, had long been urging the West to increase levels of humanitarian assistance and to provide resettlement options for Syrian refugees. They warned that a *status quo* in which relief programmes for the Syria crisis were less than half-funded could not remain stable for long.

For once, the Cassandras were right. The Middle East was, in fact, brewing an »El Niño effect« in the hitherto well-understood world of global migration. Conflict and fragility dynamics from the Middle East to Western Asia coalesced around Syrian refugees to form a global force catalysing mass movements of different nationalities and shifting migration patterns worldwide. Some of those shifts may be permanent, tapping into mobility trends and aspirational migration patterns across the southern hemisphere.

As it was, the EU was left in strategic disarray. Greek and Italian municipalities initially bore the brunt of what should have been a concerted EU response – reduced to begging for help from national capitals.

The surge into Europe came at an exceptionally bad time for the UN. As the four-year anniversary of the Syria quagmire passed, Libya was mired in chaos, terrorism was rising and spreading across the AfPak region, the Sahel, North and West Africa. A new war had been sparked in Iraq. The proper place to resolve these dilemmas – the UN Security Council – was gridlocked in a manner not seen since the Cold War.

Europe itself was also at the peak of isolationist sentiment. Freshly emerged from the Greek bailout drama, Europe's populace was anxious after years of weak economic growth. The rise of foreign fighters was aggravating fear of domestic terror. New leaders Junker and Tusk – both strong integrationists – arrived as the European project was under unprecedented financial and conceptual assault. They countered by selling a vision of Europe as a safe, supportive space for its members, where greater integration would produce greater benefits.

This marketing strategy withered, as one million non-European asylum seekers headed straight for the Schengen Area and the Dublin Regulation collapsed. The EU and the UN were suddenly in uncharted waters. A gulf had emerged between theory and practice: legal frameworks available to guide a joint response – from process-heavy Dublin up to the 1951 Refugee Convention – were being questioned. To weigh each case on its 1951-defined merits seemed impossible; nor was Europe ready to accept the vast majority of applicants as *prima facie* refugees. The Dublin Regulation was negotiated on the assumption that »real« refugees in Europe would always be a manageable minority.

3. Human Security versus National Security

2015's dramatic challenge to this assumption produced a battle between two security concepts: human versus national. The UN defines human security as: protecting individual freedoms and individuals themselves from critical and pervasive threats – and creating systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity. Human security is a cornerstone UN value, and has been central to its advocacy throughout the refugee crisis.

For many Europeans, the sudden recasting of a longstanding migration debate into an unprecedented refugee crisis with close links to Syria and an ongoing conflict coloured by extremism, gave *national security* concerns greater weight.

Syrians and their specific plight dominated media and advocacy space as the crisis grew – despite representing just a quarter of Europe's million asylum applicants registered in 2015 (the rest were divided mostly between Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kosovo, Albania, Eritrea and a host of sub-Saharan states).[1] The UN and other Syria advocacy groups took every opportunity to underline the connection between Europe's refugee crisis and Syria's unresolved conflict. It was potentially a smart tactic to draw more aid to underfunded Syria relief programmes, and put pressure on the languishing peace process.

But the link between Syria and the refugee crisis has created a double dilemma for Europe: making it harder for Western European states to turn refugees away and, paradoxically, also harder to let them in.

Natural sympathy for Syrian refugees is pitched against public fear of Islamic extremism, as well as popular and electoral concerns over demographic changes and precedent-setting. The flow of foreign fighters between Europe and active conflict zones remains a primary EU preoccupation. At Europe's eastern borders, home to its most fiercely ethnocentric populations, fear has entirely swallowed sympathy in the face of a million Muslims from those very same conflict zones seeking transit through or sanctuary in their neighbourhoods.

Late in the day, the EU turned to the UN seeking a way out of an impossible dilemma. Desperation had trumped political embarrassment; Europe needed to avoid a public relations disaster conjuring ghosts of World War II and find ways to deter refugees from coming. The UN was asked to assist in management of border reception, and to cooperate with »soft« firewall programmes in transit countries such as Turkey beyond the EU neighbourhood.

To the UN, and UNHCR in particular, human security concerns were much more pressing. From a window in Geneva, the West shares the blame for the hosts camping on its borders – for foreign policy and international protection failures in Syria at the top of the list, and Iraq and Afghanistan a close second. The 1951 Refugee Convention gives Europe no legal excuse to shut its door on refugees from conflict zones – and, by extension, on its international humanitarian and human rights obligations.

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1. Cumulative totals for asylum applications are much higher than this. Since 2011, Europe has received almost 900,000 asylum applications from Syrian nationals.

From this perspective, the narrative of Europe's refugee response is one where national security obsessions have caused a panoply of devastating human security consequences: squalid camps proliferating within Europe, horrific and preventable deaths in the desert and at sea, predatory trafficking groups picking off the most vulnerable for exploitation and a rise in trans-national crime.

UNHCR in particular felt it risked complicity through cooperation. When Europe finally made its refugee deportation agenda explicit through the EU-Turkey deal, it was a bridge too far. UNHCR's operational withdrawal from Europe's detention and expulsion process widened the gulf between the EU's political needs and the UN's principled objections.

4. UN Coherence: A War Within

But UNHCR's approach to Europe is not the only UN voice – because on this issue the UN has also struggled to define a common posture.

While the UN talks a great deal about coherence, it is uniquely poorly designed for it. Every new office, agency and programme added to the UN's roster since the 1950s has had to graft itself onto a fundamentally split personality: the UN as voice of international consensus speaking on behalf of global decision-makers (the Security Council and the General Assembly) and the UN as voice of universal norms and values on behalf of the most vulnerable (agencies, funds and programmes, human rights arms).

Despite fervent efforts and endless reform debates, the UN still struggles to draw a straight line between system-wide policy and organised implementation across its myriad arms. Its approach to complex global issues, from conflict prevention to climate change, is complicated by convoluted and often competing systems for raising and apportioning funds, assigning mandates and cooperating with partners.

Where the UN does attempt collective thinking, the result can be so nebulous as to have no operational impact whatsoever. The UN's Global Migration Group, established since 2006, is one prime example – entirely absent from the policy arena during a major moment for this issue.

In confronting this particular crisis, the UN's security and rule of law bodies – notably the Security Council and its political missions – have shown far greater consensus around security implications than human rights dimensions. Security Council Resolutions and Presidential Statements have tended to focus on destabilisation, crime and the rise of radical extremism, which offer a universal »bad guy«: *inter alia* SCR 2240 (2015) on people smuggling in Libya, SCR 2253 (2015) adding the Islamic State to its sanctions list and Presidential Statement S/PRST/2015/10 on regional stability threats from Syria's refugee crisis.

Strangely, however, these resolutions largely failed to translate into enhanced security cooperation between the UN and its European partners.

Joint initiatives between relevant UN bodies, the EU, NATO and the OSCE were not significantly or coherently stepped up. Instead, various instruments were deployed in an *ad hoc* manner, often as a response to flares of social media outrage. Warships in the Mediterranean and the Aegean became the *de facto* symbol of the EU taking action, but with little apparent capacity to enhance security, as attacks in Cologne, Paris and Brussels have demonstrated. And as the crisis continued to unfold, neither the UN's security and rule of law systems, nor their European counterparts look remotely well placed to facilitate a practical upsurge in security responses.

There are two reasons for this: first, uncertainty around what to ask of the UN in this arena, and secondly the UN's relatively weak capacity as an operational security partner, in Europe and beyond.

In Europe, the EU's own Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) does not align with the UN Transnational Organised Crime Convention (UNTOC), despite the latter's Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants and its almost universal ratification status. Border control here is an area where international intervention is rarely appreciated, unless to reinforce security capacity through state institutions. Inside Europe, border management is an OSCE province – and OSCE's involvement in the crisis to date has been negligible. In addition, the civil-military coordination mechanism between UNOCHA and NATO – designed to provide operational support during crises elsewhere – has been largely dormant on NATO's home turf.

Beyond EU borders, the institutional mandate for responses to migrant smuggling falls under the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). But the Vienna-based organisation is primarily normative rather than an operational – with small budgets and smaller programmes. Migrant smuggling has long been a relatively low priority for UNODC – seen as a collateral issue to the more compelling issue of human trafficking. Until recently, it had just one focal point working on this issue part-time.

The lack of comprehensive engagement by those charged with a security and rule of law response has had an unfortunate side effect: the criminalisation and penalisation of human movement itself. Boats continue to sink, smugglers continue to distort local economies and exploit their clients, and migrants not lucky enough to come from a highly publicised warzone who survive the dangerous journey to Europe all too often find themselves treated in a manner indistinguishable from the smugglers who brought them there.

On the other side of the UN spectrum, the organisation's humanitarian and operational bodies strongly object to attempts to securitise the refugee crisis.

UNHCR, UNICEF and the UN's other agencies, funds and programmes view the current crisis as emblematic of a global culture of economic inequities and compromised human rights, many of them the result of national security priorities. Their advocacy language rejects security terminology that implies refugee movements are burdens or destabilising; accusing nations of dehumanising the most vulnerable families and opening a dangerous door to legitimising even extreme security responses.

They also object to treating Europe as a »special case« where security concerns are somehow more legitimate and humanitarian obligations less binding. Europe's refugee crisis only began in late 2014. But for UNHCR, OCHA, OHCHR, UNRWA and the rest of the UN's humanitarian bodies, it is simply one more event in decades of refugee and displacement crises – some temporary (Kosovo), and some permanent: Palestine, Afghanistan, DR Congo, Somalia, Iraq.

5. Security Now or Stability Later?

The UN's humanitarian and operational resistance to »securitising« the Europe refugee response is a product of experience, particularly around the Syria crisis.

There, Syria's refugee-hosting neighbours used security to justify limits on refugee freedoms and protections considered fundamental by the UN. And Western donor governments, unable to achieve results through the UN's peace and security mechanisms, also used the soft power of humanitarian assistance and development as a proxy tool to stabilise and monitor volatility, fragility and threat.

At the Middle Eastern end of the refugee crisis, the UN's operational agencies were funded to deliver protection-related aid, build »cross-line« aid relationships, negotiate truces and broker refugee integration policies. In this way, the EU and other Western donors hoped to limit »seepage« of insecurity across the Mediterranean in the form of disaffected asylum-seekers. In 2015 the UN also expanded its refugee response remit to include EU-backed stabilisation programmes – encompassing education, employment, youth and community development projects. The first €3 billion Turkey/EU deal fell under this *quid pro quo* transit nation incentive package, as did the €1.8 billion EU Valletta emergency trust fund.

But these responses – while valuable in themselves – beg an important, unanswered question: can and should the UN's operational agencies fill the vacuum left by an absent international security system?

The trade-off between security and stability is similar to that between emergency and development responses. One is short-term and constraining, the other requires much deeper thought and longer horizons.

But UN is not well designed for long-term thinking during crises. Stuck in its traditional humanitarian response formula, the operational UN system was late to define critical stabilisation dilemmas presented by mass movement of people on this scale.

Even now, many regional experts argue that the necessary »Marshall Plan« approach remains painfully absent. Were Syria's war to end, halting the flood of refugees, stability and state-building will still require generational commitments: reform of social protection

and labour markets; integration programmes for troubled communities; education and opportunity for an ever-growing youth cohort. But these issues are still on the backburner – displaced by the vain hope that the crisis would be self-limiting, and unhelpful attempts to separate its humanitarian, security and development aspects in a kind of ideological centrifuge.

6. Drawing Lessons for Europe

There are clear parallels between the refugee response in the Middle East and the current dilemmas in Europe. But with EU policies currently limited to refugee-swapping, quick-fix quotas and limited humanitarian support, there is little evidence that lessons are being translated.

Instead of taking a long-term view, the European Commission and the EU's national leaders have largely sought instruments for migrant *control* rather than measures for migrant *integration*, to protect Schengen and calm populist security fears. This may well backfire from a national security perspective. Ironically, the EU and UN have often warned other refugee-hosting nations that insufficient, begrudging and self-interested deployment of resources could catalyse chronic integration issues with migrant and refugee populations already resident in their cities.

In fact, the UN has little incentive or capacity to support European migration control efforts. Without an existing footprint in European countries and with very relevant concerns about diverting resources from poor contexts, UN agencies were reluctant to set up operations inside EU member states. And the EU has been equally reluctant to encourage the UN's involvement. It has its own mechanisms for dealing with crises inside its borders – the European Commission´s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO), Frontex, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, NATO civilian protection, the OSCE.

Instead, in a positive development, the role the UN would traditionally have played has been taken up by civil society and *ad hoc* volunteerism. The UN-coordinated refugee response plan now funds many of these civil society organisations, raising the question of how they can be coordinated effectively, and sustained without creating aid dependency.

Without its usual operational weight, the UN has been trapped in a strangely remote relationship to Europe's policy efforts.

UNHCR's relentless insistence that this mass movement is a *prima facie* refugee flow, while unimpeachably moral, has arguably isolated it from credible dialogue.

UNHCR was consulted on the development of key EU policy documents around the crisis, but has had only a minor voice in their implementation. The European Agenda for Migration, the 17-Point Action Plan on the Balkan Migration Route, and the EU-Turkey Action Plan ask for the help of the UN (notably UNHCR) on operations rather than policy.

UNHCR's fierce defence of 1951 was predictable and perhaps also circumstantially necessary. The UN's humanitarian effort had just spent half a decade hectoring, persuading and funding Middle Eastern governments on the other side of the Mediterranean to support their own significant refugee burden at volumes four times Europe's numbers within a much smaller population pool. From a credibility perspective, and to protect their relationship with these governments, UNHCR and its sister agencies had no choice but to base their EU advocacy on the same principles: solidarity, the 1951 Refugee Convention and respect for human rights. On philosophical grounds, too, the UN's refugee agency rejected a response that categorised arrivals from fragile and warring states as economic migrants and aimed primarily to keep them out rather than facilitating their orderly entry.

But by connecting the current refugee crisis so closely to Syria rather than confronting it as a paradigm shift in the root concept of migration, the UN has played into the bitter refugee/migrant debate splitting Europe.

Europe's people simply do not believe that all asylum seekers at their borders have come in genuine fear of their lives. Whether from Syria or not, they believe (rightly) that many are driven by economic and social incentives. The UN's reluctance to come to grips with the grey zone between refugee and economic migrant is inadvertently supporting a perception of migrants as an inferior class of being, as well as the false notion that distinctions can be easily made between the two categories.

This rigidity has made the ground-level relationship between the EU and the UN more combative than cooperative at a critical moment. And therefore, questions of significance to both institutions remain largely unanswered: is this a permanent shift in patterns of migration, demanding a rethink of international norms and conventions, or the short-term results of one country's collapse? Is it possible to defuse the transnational smuggling networks activated to bring people to Europe, or is this now a permanent feature of Europe's security landscape? How should Europe cooperate with refugee or migrant-producing nations to reduce pull factors? And how should global cooperation be stepped up to protect families along the route?

7. Signs of Life Amid Schisms

There are several positive signs of life emerging around the UN's operational presence in Europe and its policy processes in New York.

The half-a-billion-dollar humanitarian and protection operation coordinated via UNHCR in 2016 has convened more than sixty other organisations region-wide. Some are traditional UN and NGO humanitarian partners. But a significant proportion is local civil society organisations – which in turn benefit from the energy of home-grown volunteers. The UN would do well to build the capacities of these home-grown initiatives, to ensure they long outlast UN operations, particularly if further principled stands are to be required in future.

UN operations outside the Middle East are scaling up: UNHCR has created new senior-level posts in Greece, Italy and along Europe's eastern and southern borders to support reception, registration and capacity building. Other UN agencies have followed suit to offer humanitarian and capacity support to border nations, strengthening their local footprint for at least a two-year horizon – although there is no appetite for permanence on either side. The effect of the EU-Turkey deal on this nascent cooperation remains to be seen.

The UN and EU are also partnering through UNODC on a multi-year initiative to combat trafficking across the Sahel, in parallel to the post-Valetta €1.8 billion initiative to help the EU recatalyse the Khartoum and Rabat processes and get a better understanding of migration's root causes in Africa.

Pledges made at the London conference on Syria have been welcomed by UN agencies. If delivered, this $10 billion would plug significant gaps in the UN response at point of origin for most of Europe's asylum-seekers. But acceptance is gradually dawning that money may do little to stem refugee flows without a systemic change in regional integration policies. Syrian refugees who currently cannot work, who struggle to get their children into school and live with increasingly uncertain legal status will keep looking across the Mediterranean in hope of finding longer-term security there.

In addition to operational responses, the UN has also gained some momentum on the agenda-setting front.

Responding to a proposal from the Secretary-General, the General Assembly will host a high-level summit on 19 September 2016 entitled »Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants«. To help member states prepare, the Secretary-General has established a special advisor, former UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Abu Zayd. Her three-person office is currently engaging in a broad range of consultations with the EU, other governments and civil society – with a view to producing an initial proposal for the summit's framework in May 2016. UN headquarters hopes that the summit will transcend reactions to this immediate crisis. It is intended to shift thinking forward, to how migration and refugee issues should be tackled within the 2030 Agenda – demanding a sea-change in the way global mobility is viewed.

8. New Era, New Ideas?

The UN's current predictions align with Europe's worst fears: that while this current crisis may subside with time, crises of similar magnitude can be expected in the future. Europe's crowded borders are an acute symptom of profound changes in the landscape of human movement. As the UN squares up to mobilising states for the 2030 Agenda, it will need new ideas on how such crises, and migration as a whole, can be managed.

Perhaps the key question is: can the UN still lead change? The EU may not want policy advice from the UN, particularly if packaged as a lecture on 1951. But it needs

it nonetheless. The call for help to UNHCR, late though it was in coming, acknowledges a deepening connection between developed and fragile states, and the hopes and fears of those who live there.

Crises like this are what the UN was created for; the UN cannot be the UN just for poor countries. The EU's »finger in the dam« response to migration, shored up by tactical humanitarian support and bribery for gateway nations, cannot break a permanent and dynamic connection between Europe and fragile countries just a deceptively short boat-ride away.

The UN faces a different kind of challenge: finding the right balance between principle and pragmatism during moments when the former cannot be served without some consideration of the latter. The moral high ground can be costly – not merely for the institution itself, but for the people it serves and the wider values it cherishes.

Across the globe, mobility and displacement are increasingly becoming long-term phenomena. The average refugee spends two decades out of his or her home country. Climate change, insecurity and economic inequality will continue to drive mass movements of people. This human El Niño effect will not dissipate along with one country's problems.

If 2015 is not to mark the beginning of irrelevance on these issues, the UN's three sacred cows – Security Council, humanitarian system and development system – need urgent reform. This crisis has shown each to be more or less unfit for purpose; clinging to them in their current form will only consign them to irrelevance.

From Damascus to Brussels, the UN's peace and security bodies failed to provide peace and security. Its humanitarian system saved lives, but perpetuated inappropriate and energy-sapping cycles of short-term thinking. And its scattered development planners are yet to arrive at the same table. Much-heralded UN doctrines such as R2P became impotent in the face of member state gridlock, leaving the UN helpless to prevent a humanitarian crisis spreading across continents.

Not all UN failings can be blamed on member states. In many ways, UN leaders are their own worst enemies. By defaulting to set pieces when times call for dynamic leadership, by clinging so stubbornly to norms and

systems created in a different age, they too quickly get left behind.

As one example, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 10 on inequality calls for nations to facilitate »orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.« But at this key moment of mass movement, the UN refused to brook any discussion around international norms. This intransigence appeared disingenuous to Europe's public. More critically, it has made the UN miss a key opportunity. Conflict and persecution are not the only compelling drivers of human movement in today's world. To date, the international system lacks appropriate purpose-made tools.

The Syrian-European refugee crisis has provided fodder for the UN's existing reform processes; but whether it galvanises them remains to be seen. The UN University's Centre for Policy Research and other internal UN review bodies have tabled several ideas for a re-wired UN system – connecting its vertical policy and operational systems, and as well as its horizontal security, humanitarian and development mandates. These ideas will feed into the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit, the Peacebuilding Commission's review process and UNDS reform discussions for the 2030 Agenda.

To communities now confronting frightening social change, and to governments trapped between international obligations and the concerns of their electorate, the UN can seem a weak and idealistic body. But all people connected to this crisis – whether refugees, migrants or European citizens – need both national *and* human security to thrive. The UN is uniquely placed to bridge the gap between the two. But first it must heal the divisions within itself.

About the authors

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