

Of Foxes and Chickens

Oligarchy and Global Power in the UN Security Council

Discussion with Hans-Christof von Sponeck, former UN Assistant Secretary-General and James A. Paul, long-time Director of the Global Policy Forum



Whether it be the war in Iraq, the NATO wars against Yugoslavia and Libya, the war in Syria or the current conflict in Venezuela - the inability of the UN Security Council to prevent wars and resolve conflicts peacefully leaves many in doubt about the organisation.

When after the Second World War the United Nations was founded by the victorious Allies to secure peace, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin placed a Security Council at the top – a body dominated by five permanent members, a “trusteeship of the strong”.

These powerful nations had to shoulder the burden of peacekeeping and to ensure that wars of aggression would never happen again. The UN Charter declared the prohibition of the use of military force and of the interference in the affairs of other states the central principles.

The reality is different. Even though the UN Security Council has achieved undeniable successes, it is shaped, often paralyzed and not infrequently abused by the classic interest politics of the great powers. It is dominated by the USA, most of the time supported by the two Western European permanent members, France and Great Britain. Since the end of the Cold War, the UN Security Council has drastically increased its activity and supremacy.

But whether it be armament, nuclear weapons, unilateral economic blockades or military inter-

ventions - often veto powers themselves are involved, where United Nations initiatives are urgently needed to overcome dangerous crises.

On the other hand, from a historical perspective, the UN and especially the Security Council seem to be an impressive progress, measured against the conditions before 1945 and the work of the League of Nations. But are they really “the best we can get”, as it is often said, in view of the power relations?

Hans v. Sponeck will begin his talk speaking about his experiences with the Security Council and outlining some initial ideas for urgently needed reforms.

James Paul will then discuss in more detail the working methods of the Security Council and the steep hierarchy that prevails in the Council. On the basis of his reform efforts to date, he will discuss the directions in which the Council could develop in the future and the opportunities for democratic change that would be needed to enable the UN to really work for peace.



James A. Paul was co-founder and long-term director of the „Global Policy Forum“ an NGO that critically observes the work of the UN, and until 2012 he led the „NGO Working Group to the Security Council“, an association of 35 international human rights, aid and peace organisations. In 2017 his latest book, „Of Foxes and Chickens“ – an analysis of the UN Security Council, was published.



Hans-Christof von Sponeck worked for the United Nations at various locations from 1968, including as head of the UN offices in Pakistan and India. In 1998, as UN Coordinator and Assistant Secretary-General, he took responsibility for the humanitarian programme “Oil for Food” in Iraq. He resigned in February 2000 in protest against the UN Security Council’s sanctions policy.

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