Portfolio plan Global Development and International Relations

CONTENTS

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Security and governance

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Following a period of steadily increasing cooperation and relative stability, most indicators now point towards a more turbulent and unpredictable world. Several regions of the world are characterised by instability, violence and ongoing conflicts, most recently in Europe with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Confidence in research, media, institutions and leaders has been weakened due to conspiracy theories and fake news. The international security situation is affected by the development of new technologies, including military technologies and in the space and cyber domains. Tendencies towards de-globalisation and fragmentation and various interdependencies mean that questions about trade, technologies and finance are strongly linked to security competition and risk management. The EU is facing several external and internal challenges, including Brexit, the geopolitical strains on the union's relations with Russia, China and the USA, and challenges to freedom of the media and the rule of law in some member states.

Rule-based order

The international order is changing. Growing inequality puts new pressure on the multilateral system. There is more competition between great powers and generally heightened levels of tension and conflict. Norway has a major stake in a rules-based and stable world order with open and free markets. A functioning multilateral system is also of crucial importance if the SDGs are to achieved. Hence, research is needed on the conditions under which multilateral cooperation and the institutions can be strengthened, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of key organisations, such as the UN.

New knowledge is required to understand how heightened competition between the great powers is further challenging the established world order and its institutions, and how this development creates a new, more challenging, and less predictable context for international cooperation on matters related to security, climate change, trade, commerce, and the world economy, as well as health and development issues. In this heightened competition, it is also imperative to understand and develop new knowledge of the changing legal framework surrounding international conflict. This new and challenging context affects all regions, states and communities.

An increasing number of regional institutions have been established. It is important to carry out research on the intentions behind and impacts of these new institutions. Do they help to fill a vacuum and offer public goods that are not otherwise available, or do they compete with existing institutions and regimes? And how can we understand the role of the great powers in regional institutions?

Foreign and security policy

Foreign and security policy concerns the behaviour of individual countries and is of course affected by systemic impulses that impinge upon individual countries, e.g. the number of and relations between the great powers, and by alliance obligations. But foreign and security policy behaviour is also a product of domestic factors: the mindset and ambitions of key decision-makers, domestic political constellations, including the character of the bureaucracy, and economic and military capabilities. Security policy is about the survival of the nation state and the safety of its citizens.

Transnational crime, international terrorism and cyber threats are putting societies, including Norway, under pressure. The hacking of critical infrastructure, fake news, disinformation campaigns and other external meddling are all part of a complicated new threatening situation, thus adding further complexity to the challenges posed by the traditional threats to the nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

Obviously, some countries, regions and institutions stand out as particularly significant and deserving of attention from a Norwegian point of view. These countries may be important to Norway's foreign and security policy relations or may be global drivers because of their economic and military strength and/or their technological impact. At the same time, however, it is essential to carry out research on themes, countries and areas other than those that appear to be most immediately important, both because this helps us to understand new developments and changes to the international system, and because it gives us access to knowledge that may be useful in contingency situations. Of particular importance from a Norwegian foreign and security policy standpoint are Russia and the former Soviet states, the High North and the Arctic, the USA, Europe and the

European Union, as well as the leading Asian countries.

Governance and human rights

Democracy as a system of government expanded geographically from the mid-20th century. This trend is now moving in reverse, however. Authoritarian-style government is on the rise in many parts of the world. People are losing faith in democratic governments for multiple reasons: inequality, a decline in relative or absolute living standards, and inequities as a result of globalisation. One commonality is widespread anger at existing political elites that is further agitated by forceful populist politics. Many of today's anti-democratic movements also challenge ideas of gender equality and minority rights. The core enlightenment values of democratic principles, freedom of speech and individual human rights are under attack.

The global power shift towards emerging players, like China in particular, with their very different political traditions, is also affecting development towards democracy in new ways. How does the emergence of these new players affect the possibility of supporting human rights and democracy movements when they remain intellectually, culturally and politically powerfully opposed to them? The very notion of a public sphere and civil society is being reframed and undermined by the politics espoused by players like China, Russia, and to some degree, India. Together, these countries account for almost half of the global population and over a quarter of global GDP, figures that are likely to increase in the coming years. Ignoring the challenge these countries pose to the values of the West would be negligent. However, taking a zero-sum approach, whereby they simply figure as problems that will eventually be prevailed against, is naïve and unrealistic. The stability of the world is being fundamentally challenged by strong identity conflicts, ethnic as well as religious, and by a shift from a unipolar to a multipolar, and therefore more diverse but fragmented and potentially unstable, global order. Knowledge of these fundamental geopolitical changes, and tensions of this type, and, not least, how different actors and countries utilise them, is important in order to understand not only local conflicts within and between countries, but also more general challenges to the world order, and the need to create a new, more dynamic structure within which that order is framed and defended.

New and inexpensive digital platforms and social media have enabled the extensive and rapid exchange of information. New digital technology is being used to access information about people's personal lives. This threatens universal rights relating to elections and freedom of expression, as well as minority rights intended to protect against discrimination.

Major incidents that are a serious threat to society, such as natural disasters, conflict, terrorism or pandemics, normally trigger extraordinary measures and regulation by the authorities. There is a need to understand the wider consequences of such measures, such as emergency laws and the imposition of severe restrictions, for human rights. We also need to better understand the impact of urban and domestic violence and broader security threats and tensions. Furthermore, there is a need to understand how changing geopolitical priorities and more intense great power rivalry change the conditions for human rights advocacy.

Population displacement and migration

The number of internally and externally displaced people has doubled in the decade 2011–2021[3] and it is expected to rise further. Individual lives and livelihoods, regional and national stability, and decades of development are at risk. New and ongoing conflicts, the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic continue to increase the need for humanitarian assistance. Children, especially girls, are missing out on education. Women's rights are threatened. Gender-based violence (GBV) is increasing in humanitarian settings, mainly affecting women but also children and men. More research is needed to understand how and what measures need to be implemented to ensure effective prevention of all types of GBV, including through legal tools and mechanisms. The implementation of effective programmes that facilitate the provision of compassionate care, safe spaces, and referral pathways for those who have survived GBV is a priority since they are not available to the majority of people affected by conflict and war.

The humanitarian caseload is a growing concern in relation to development and has a direct impact on the SDGs, as there is a lack of resources and a need for reforms that enable a more adequate response to humanitarian challenges. It is necessary to find appropriate ways of linking humanitarian assistance with long-term development and responding to the root causes of vulnerability. This includes the roles of local, national, and international actors in the humanitarian response and how social and political factors affect the root causes of vulnerability and marginalisation processes, as well as being accountable to affected populations and reaching the most vulnerable. New knowledge is needed about key concerns relating to the delivery of efficient and timely humanitarian aid to 'hard to reach' areas. How can humanitarian principles be upheld in complex conflict settings, where the ruling party sets the conditions for the delivery of humanitarian aid? The presence of peace operations, with their resources and infrastructures, affects and interacts with the social, material and institutional infrastructure of local states. Research is needed to understand the unintended effects of such international presences. The political roles and effects of humanitarian action are important to understand, as is answering the question of whether humanitarian efforts succeed or fail.

Large migration flows have significant and complex impacts on the development of countries of origin, on transit countries, and recipient countries, and not least on the individual migrants. New knowledge is needed about the entire migration chain, from the causes of migration to the effects of migration on countries of origin, transit countries and recipient countries, in order to improve the chances of benefiting from opportunities and meeting the challenges.

Migration also comes in other forms. Regional labour migration is growing despite difficult working conditions and limited access

to welfare benefits. There is large-scale internal migration in countries with rural-rural migration and migration to big cities that leads to major changes in the composition of population, the labour market, the economy and the environment. Going forward, it will be important to monitor how migration in all its forms affects international and regional cooperation, governance policies, economies, social structures and societal values.

[3]UNHCR - Figures at a Glance

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No global messages displayed at time of print.