



No More Wars: Interview with Michael von der Schulenberg

IADL Review: Thank you for accepting this interview by Mail and for answering the following questions from the IADL Review “International Review of Contemporary Law”.

Your CV is impressive: starting with your childhood and adolescence in the GDR. Could you tell us and younger generations more about your family members in the resistance against the Nazi Regime and about the Stauffenberg group? And who was Fritz Werner von der Schulenburg and in which circumstances was he executed at Plötzensee on 20 August 1944?

Two members of my Schulenburg family, Fritz-Dietlof and Friedrich-Werner, took part in the failed Stauffenberg coup against the Nazi regime and were brutally executed by hanging on piano wire at Plötzensee in 1944. I descend from the Russian branch of the Schulenburg family: my father was born in St. Petersburg, my mother in Riga during the Russian Empire. At the age of just fourteen, my father was imprisoned in a Bolshevik labor camp and lost much of his family during the revolution. It was Friedrich-Werner—who personally knew Stalin and who was later executed—who helped him escape from the Soviet Union in 1925.

During the Nazi era, both my parents were classified as “non-Aryans.” This may also explain why they chose to move to the GDR in 1953, I was still born in Munich. Our family endured many of the profound upheavals and tragedies that marked the first half of the 20th century. I believe such experiences and traumas are carried forward into subsequent generations, and much of what I do in life seems subconsciously shaped by this legacy. Although these matters were never openly discussed, the family was firmly anti-Nazi, yet never anti-Russian.

What led to your decision to leave the GDR?

My twin brother and I were never members of the GDR youth movement, the FDJ. When I was conscripted into the GDR army during the military crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968, a new “socialist” constitution was put to a referendum. As the only soldier in our regiment I dared to vote against it. With this any chance to ever study was blocked. So we both decided to leave and escaped over the Baltic Sea hiding in an East German cargo ship that

carried military equipment for Vietnam – it was the height of the Vietnam war – and we jumped ship. Do not ask me how. We were just extremely lucky.

You worked as a diplomat for the UN and, for a short time, the OSCE, and for eight years, you served as UN Assistant Secretary General negotiating in conflicts and wars like in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Haiti and many other places that were inflicted by wars or violent conflicts.

I do not like to be called a diplomat. I was a United Nations official, and much of my work was shaped by decisions of the Security Council. My assignments were often far more demanding—and certainly more adventurous—than those of “regular” diplomats. They included, for example, a three-month journey on horseback through Afghanistan to persuade mujahideen leaders to respect the Geneva peace accord; traveling on the back of a pickup truck into the marshlands of Iraq to investigate the fate of Shia refugees; coordinating with Peshmerga leaders in the Kandil mountains to secure the return of Kurdish refugees; negotiating in Kandahar with the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, for the release of forty Iranian hostages or facing a hostile crowd of 3,000, maybe 5000, highly excited protestors to save 24 young members of the opposition party in Freetown from the risk of being lynched.

One would call some of your activities not “peace keeping” or “peace making” but ceasefire negotiations. However, some were not lasting ones if you look at some situations you dealt with where various Non- State Actors seem to govern in some countries.

Be cautious in the use of peace terminology; in practice, such distinctions are rarely clear. Since the end of the Second World War, genuine peace agreements have been exceptional. Most conflicts conclude with ceasefire arrangements that contain only fragments—often fewer rather than more—of a comprehensive peace settlement. Likewise, there have been very few “traditional” interstate wars in which the regular armed forces of one country fought directly against those of another.

The role of non-state actors must also be understood in the context of specific conflicts. Today, the majority of armed struggles are intrastate, with governments confronting one or several armed non-state groups. In some



cases—such as the war in Ukraine—elements of interstate and intrastate conflict overlap, making peace processes highly diverse and complex.

This complexity poses a major challenge: intrastate armed conflicts are not regulated by the UN Charter. Nonstate actors lack legal identity under international law, and Charter principles such as sovereignty, noninterference in internal affairs, and self-determination remain undefined in this regard. Drafted in the aftermath of two world wars, the Charter was designed to prevent wars among states; internal conflicts were explicitly excluded from its scope.

Could you tell us in general the deep causes behind the difficulties, failures and realizations in your career as a diplomat or any other UN diplomat, seeking peace according to international law based on the UN Charter?

You are far too negative. In my junior years, I was directly involved in the ceasefire that ended eight years of the Iran–Iraq war in 1988—a war that claimed around one million lives on both sides. Remarkably, the very first meeting to work out the modalities of that ceasefire took place in my house in Tehran. It was a personal achievement of then Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. The ceasefire was far from perfect, but it has held to this day.

In 1998, the Taliban in Afghanistan took forty Iranians hostage, and Iran threatened to invade with an army of 120,000. Such an escalation would have inevitably drawn in Pakistan and possibly Saudi Arabia. I accompanied a UN mission to the Taliban headquarters in Kandahar, and together we secured the release of all hostages to Iran—helping to prevent a regional war.

In Sierra Leone, it was the UN-mediated Lomé Peace Agreement that brought an end to one of the most brutal intrastate conflicts. When I became the UN Executive Representative of the Secretary-General in Sierra Leone, the war had only recently ended, and my task was to organize the peaceful transition to full sovereignty. During my four years there, we recorded only a single murder—in a country where previously hundreds were daily killed, maimed, or women mass raped. That was a success, even if newspapers such as *Der Standard* or the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* chose to ignore it. And let us not forget: in Sierra Leone, 289 UN peacekeepers lost their lives.

Who speaks of them? In Western media, their sacrifice is of little interest—perhaps because those who lost their lives were not Europeans and had darker skin. Yet the same media never hesitate to speak ill of the UN.

There are indeed many cases where a ceasefire merely freezes a conflict. But if a comprehensive peace agreement cannot be reached, what is the alternative? To let the war decide, with all the victims that this would entail? And what guarantee is there that war would ever bring a better solution?

In the realm of war and peace, there are never just or perfect solutions—and the UN itself is not perfect. But again, what would be the alternative?

Since 2024 you are an independent member of the Parliament of the European Union on the list of Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht- für Vernunft und Gerechtigkeit. Was your sincere quest of peace behind your election?

Sahra Wagenknecht once called me to ask whether I could strengthen the future BSW team in the European Parliament—and my wife simply said yes. As straightforward as that. Sahra's request was surely motivated by the shadow the Ukraine war casts over the Parliament. For the past year, I have tried to contribute to changing its stance: away from military posturing and an endless stream of sanctions, and toward genuine engagement with Russia through negotiations. In this effort, however, I have been painfully unsuccessful.

Why did you publish your book on 24 October 2025? What is your purpose? and what are your next steps on the difficult road to world peace according to the UN Charter?

We live in a world where the application of international law has all but collapsed. In Western Europe, few people know much about the UN Charter, and many dismiss the United Nations as utterly ineffective—whatever they imagine the UN to be. Yet the Charter has been the foundation of the international order since the end of the Second World War. In my view, it is even more vital today than in 1945: in an age of ever more destructive weapons and ever faster delivery systems, the Charter remains essential to humanity's survival.

The perception that the UN Charter—and by extension the UN itself—is useless prevails largely only in Western



NATO countries. In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the picture is very different: there is strong and continuing support for the Charter. This matters, as these regions represent more than 85 percent of the world's population. The negative image in the West stems from the conviction that we live in a unipolar world dominated by "us," hence the rhetoric of a so-called "rules-based international order." But whose rules are these? Ours? Such assumptions are no longer tenable. We no longer live in a unipolar world—you need only look at the recent U.S. National Security Strategy published by the Trump administration to see the shift.

And do not forget: the UN Charter is owned by all countries – all 193 states have ratified the Charter making the Charter de-facto law in all countries. In contrast, the so-called "rules-based international order" has never been ratified by any state; it does not even exist as a treaty/document. It is purely Western hegemonic ideological phantasy.

And there is one more important aspect: The UN Charter begins with the simple words "We the people ..." and hence the Charter concerns to all of us. So, we all are responsible that our governments observe the principles of the UN Charter in pursuit of peace. This peace must belong to all of us, as any modern war will also affect – and possibly kill – all of us!

The European Union turning from a peace project into a war project: What are the perspectives of the European Union? With the militarization of the budget? What could be or should be the role of a neutral state like Austria?

I see the future of the European Union as bleak—not because I am a sceptic of European integration, but because the EU pursues an irrational policy drowned in war hysteria. The threat does not come from foreign forces; rather from its ideologically motivated policies and its refusal to recognize realities. With these the EU is in the process of committing political and economic suicide. I do not expect the Union, in its present form, to survive. We must rethink how we want to live together in Europe: how we secure a sustainable economy, how we protect our social achievements and social justice, and how we want to live with Russia and China – and indeed with BRICS. We must strive restoring peace by developing a new security framework based on mutual understanding

and respect, instead of chasing security through an arms race we cannot afford. The 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe may offer a better path than the endless war rhetoric dominating today's EU.

And what of Austria's neutrality? Listening to its foreign minister, one fears Austria has already lost its status as a place where feuding governments could meet to discuss peace settlements. Now there is talk of joining NATO. But would this make Austria more secure? Hardly. It would turn Austria into a front-line state. What has happened to Austrian diplomacy? I always regarded Austrian diplomats—especially compared with their German counterparts—as highly professional. Is Austria now joining Germany's quest to become the dominant player in NATO and to build the largest army in Europe? Is Austria joining in trying once again to push Russia out by gaining military control over Ukraine – despite its costly failures do so during WWI and WWII. In Austria's history, siding with Germany on war and peace issues have never ended well.

All the great work of Bruno Kreisky—gone, undone by mediocre politicians. How profoundly sad. We all needed a neutral Austria in Europe to keep the door open to negotiations. Now peace negotiations are in gulf states, in Turkey or possibly even in Hungary.

Resolution 2803 of the Security council: Resolution 2803 focus on the badly needed ceasefire in Gaza to stop a genocide but ignores the badly needed right of the Palestinian people to self-determination in political, economic, and cultural fields, It ignores settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict according to previous Security Council resolutions and ICJ decisions and orders on Palestine.

The UN Security Council has supported the 20-point Trump peace plan for Gaza with near unanimity: thirteen members voted in favor, while only Russia and China abstained. Their abstentions nevertheless suggest a degree of support, as their reservations stemmed primarily from the absence of any explicit reference to a future Palestinian state. Taken together, the Council's position endorsing the plan as a means to end the violence, while leaving open the longterm possibility of Palestinian statehood, appears to me a good development.

We must never forget: there are no just or perfect peace



plans—never. There are only those that have a chance to work, and those that do not. I am cautiously optimistic about this one. First, all Arab states, and even Turkey and Qatar – traditional supporters of Hamas—have endorsed it, and they possess the financial resources needed to rebuild Gaza. Second, Israel has been weakened by its many wars, which have gone terribly wrong; it can no longer hope to achieve its aims militarily. Third, public opinion in the United States has shifted dramatically away from blanket support for whatever Israel does. Just listen to Tucker Carlson or read the new U.S. National Security Strategy.

When Israel invaded Gaza, destroying housing and killing Palestinians forced into the southern corner of the territory, it was driven by the ambition of creating a “Greater Israel.” The Trump peace plan has now halted this trajectory: Gaza will be returned to the Palestinians. Trump has also repeatedly stated that he would not accept annexation of the West Bank. Of course, the plan does not go so far as to establish a Palestinian state—but it keeps that hope alive. And that hope matters.

To those who criticize the plan—and there are indeed many aspects that deserve criticism—I would ask: what is the alternative? There is none. So let us try to make this work.

On Collective Security: How can Articles 43, 45, 46 47 and following of the UN Charter be implemented with regard to the special agreement for a permanent contingent of peacekeepers, under the command of a military, that can serve as an interposition force in armed conflicts around the world?

What appeal do you propose to address to the Security Council for said implementation of Articles 43,45, 47 of the UN Charter?

For me, this is a strange and dangerous question—especially at this time. Articles 43, 45, and 47 all belong to Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression. They deal with the possibility for the Security Council to authorize joint military action against a state that disrupts peace, as happened in response to Iraq’s illegal occupation of Kuwait in February 1991. But this cannot be the core activity of the United Nations. To consider a permanent contingent of UN peacekeepers is, quite frankly, lunacy.

The UN’s greatest strength lies precisely in its weakness.

Yes—weakness. Acting on behalf of the international community, the UN must stand apart from member states—especially Western states—that increasingly view war as a legitimate means of settling conflicts. The UN must not follow the Roman maxim, now so popular in the West: “If you want peace, prepare for war.” The UN Charter says exactly the opposite! All 193 member states that signed the Charter agreed to negotiate their conflicts in order to prevent wars. The UN must remain a reminder that it is a collective security system designed to settle disputes peacefully, not by force.

When the Secretary General—and by extension his senior staff—engages in mediation, he comes without an army. He does not threaten military intervention or sanctions, nor does he have financial resources to promise. He has the right to speak in the Security Council, but no right to vote. All he possesses is the credibility and integrity of his office. And that is exactly as it should be.

A word on peacekeepers: they are not mentioned in the Charter, yet they have become a reality and, in my view, generally do good work. But it is crucial to remember that they are deployed only once a peace agreement has been reached. Their task is to up-hold a mutually agreed peace settlement—not to bring about a peace solution by force. Every peacekeeping operation must be authorized by the Security Council with a tightly formulated mandate. This means peacekeepers can only be deployed when they have all members support—or at least if no major power opposes it in the Council. Their mandates are determined by the Council and not by the Secretary General, and are reviewed at least every six months.

The idea of transforming the UN into a military power would destroy its role as a collective security system. That is why Articles 43, 45, and 47 must never dominate the UN.