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The UN Security Council: Legitimacy and Organized Hypocrisy

The authority of the UN Security Council (UNSC), perhaps also its legitimacy, may have been brought into question by recent events. The war in Ukraine and the inferno in the Middle East challenges its role as preserver of international peace and security, and poor or highly selective responses to mass atrocities challenges its capacity to provide protection to populations when states fail. This article focuses on organized hypocrisy as a possible organizational answer to these challenges, drawing on the theoretical framework developed mainly by Nils Brunsson. Organized hypocrisy treats talk, decisions, and actions as independent elements meeting different demands from the environment with different answers. This may help a complex political organization like the UNSC to reduce the pressure from challenges, because it allows for drawing legitimacy from several loose-coupled sources. A particular important such source is the UNSC's role as the only arena of global scope where representatives from the most powerful states regularly meet for discussions and possible decisions.

Key words: UNSC, global security, responsibility, organized hypocrisy, legitimacy

Introduction

The UN Charter authorizes the UNSC on behalf of the world community to preserve international peace and security. However, despite obvious potentials for escalation, the inability to deal with the war in Ukraine and the recent inferno in the Middle East is striking. The R2P-principle established expectations that the UNSC should protect populations from mass atrocities when national authorities fail. But too often this has not happened. Reflections upon how this influences the legitimacy of the UNSC is therefore relevant. But a possible moderating response to the challenges exists. It is called organized hypocrisy. Based on theoretical insights from the Swedish scholar of organizational theory Nils Brunsson, while mindful of the contributions of others, the question discussed in this article is: To what extent do recent international events challenge the legitimacy of the UNSC, and how can organized hypocrisy reduce this possible threat?

The UN is very much more than the UNSC, but this article focuses on the legitimacy of this separate body, not on the legitimacy of the whole organization. Before the discussion, it is neces-

sary with some words about the two concepts ‘organized hypocrisy’ and ‘legitimacy’, and some general considerations about the most urgent challenges.

Organized hypocrisy

‘Organized hypocrisy’, a concept developed within the academic discipline organization theory, describes how organizations may respond to conflicting demands from their external environments reflecting both differing policies and power levels. Brunsson (1989, introduction) defines the concept: “*The organization meets some demands by ways of talk, others by decisions, and yet others by action. In situations of conflict, it becomes difficult to act consistently with what is said and what is decided*”.

The empirical sources referred to in this article are academic literature (books and scholarly journals) supplied with different United Nations documents. Analytically the discussion draws on the theoretical framework developed by Brunsson. All references to him applies to his book from 1989 entitled: *The organization of Hypocrisy – Talk, decisions, and actions in organizations*. Brunsson bases some of his arguments on other scholars such as James March and Johan P. Olsen but is himself probably the most cited scholar connected to the concept or phenomenon. He studied organizations mainly within domestic contexts, but organized hypocrisy also characterizes international affairs. According to Stephen Krasner who has made substantial studies from an international relations (IR) perspective, organized hypocrisy is perhaps even more present there because socialization is less complete and authority structures to resolve conflicts between competing norms and rules are poorly developed. For Krasner, the presence of longstanding norms that are frequently violated is a manifestation of organized hypocrisy. He considered the basic international institution of state sovereignty to be utopian because a full realization cannot take place in the real world (Krasner 1999 and 2009). Numerous breaches of the principle that states should refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of other states, represented, as he interpreted it, an example of organized hypocrisy related to the model of sovereignty often called Westphalian (Glanville 2010). In addition to Krasner, Michael Lipson (2007) and Gisela Hirschmann (2012) have used the perspective in analyses of UN peacekeeping missions, and organized hypocrisy in the African Union has been addressed by Natalie Zähringer and Malte Brosig (2020), but in general the IR literature is not rife with work on organized hypocrisy. This article is a contribution to reduce the gap and perhaps an inspiration for others to use the perspective more in international contexts. It is an ambition to demonstrate that organized hypocrisy as an analytical tool can generate insights, in accordance with what Tonny Brems Knudsen and Cornelia Navari (2019) has pointed to, that strict attention should be paid in any research project regarding international organizations to the distance between their ambitions and actual achievements.

Brunsson’s framework differs from analyzes of organizations exclusively as units where collective coordinated actions steers production of goods or services. Lack of coordination is particularly visible in so-called political organizations which are multi-ideological in the sense of reflecting a variety of ideas and ideologies about the nature of the organization and what it should

do, often missing an obvious way to act. All organizations need a certain degree of legitimacy in the eyes of their environments. High dependence on organized action may therefore generate serious trouble. But political organizations tend to produce little action if they produce that at all. They focus on problems, not solutions. Problems are their strength, even those who seem to be insoluble. To win legitimacy and support from environments dominated by inconsistent demands, political organizations use talk and decisions or solely talk. Talk may satisfy one demand, decisions another, but actions do not necessarily follow.

It is possible to design an organization based on the expectation that organized hypocrisy will come to characterize its behavior. However, to calculate with organized hypocrisy as an element of a conscious strategy is probably quite unusual, because the word ‘hypocrisy’ is negatively loaded. Seen isolated, it represents something false, about pretending, covering, or decorating the truth. Using the term ‘organized’ leads our reflections to something designed. It is about collective action problems, but in this context, it should rather be considered consequently, a result of organized activity, but not primarily based on original intentions.

Legitimacy

David Beetham (2011, p. 1414) explains legitimacy: *“The legitimacy of any system of power, including that of its individual power holder, lies in the degree to which it is acknowledged as rightful, both by those involved with and subject to it, and by third parties whose support and recognition it may depend on”*.

To be considered ‘legitimate’ requires matching established rules, principles, or standards. ‘Legitimacy’ is the quality of being legitimate. But legitimacy has not been a popular concept among political scientists, tricky both to measure and to apply, with much confusion about how it creates and maintains. The concept is often treated as a dichotomous variable in everyday use, fully present or fully absent. Yet, there are reasons for allowing degrees. The term ‘illegitimacy’ refers to manifest breach of the conditions connected to legitimacy (Gilley 2009; Beetham 2011).

In international relations close connection exists between legitimacy and recognition (Evans – Newnham 1998). In a classic 1990 study Thomas Franck concluded that states obey rules at least in part because they perceive them and their international penumbras to have a high degree of legitimacy. He understood legitimacy as the capacity of a rule to pull those to whom it is addressed toward consensual compliance. Later he focused more on perceptions and commonly shared beliefs where commitments states have accepted will constrain their conduct, either by specific consent or by virtue of their membership in a rule regime such as the UN (Franck 1990 and 2006). Ian Hurd has pointed to legitimacy as under-communicated in international relations studies, and when attended to, scholars often fail to spell out how it operates. He saw the power of social institutions largely as a function of their legitimacy. An institution perceived as legitimate mobilizes power, and he discussed how the UNSC does this through symbols (Hurd 1999 and 2002).

The UNSC: recent challenges

The UNSC is not a world government, but anyhow the closest we come to one in the international sphere. It acts on behalf of all UN member states, and in the broad sense its environment is the whole world community. The main task is nothing less than to maintain international peace and security, as stated in Article 24-1 of the UN Charter.

The relationship between the UNSC and international law is somewhat complex. As a formal organization, the UNSC is derivative of international law. It exists by virtue of the UN Charter which brought it into existence and defines its authority. As a multilateral treaty the Charter is binding on the states that sign it (Hurd 2014). But some UNSC resolutions are of a recommendatory nature. Those who have international law implications are resolutions related to UN peacekeeping missions, ad hoc tribunals, and sanctions (UN International Law Documentation). Resolutions adopted under the UN Charter Chapter VII about action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression, can be either non-binding recommendations or law-binding decisions. As such the term ‘resolution’ includes both recommendations and decisions, both with a rather vague and variable meaning in the UN Charter (Öberg 2005). Presidential statements made by the current UNSC president on behalf of its members have a lower status compared to resolutions and are not law-binding.

It is relevant to ask to what extent the legitimacy of the UNSC is challenged because there exists an apparent mismatch between what it is formally expected to deliver and what it de facto delivers. The war in Ukraine, and more recently the war between Israel and Hamas, are not the only ongoing wars as of fall 2023, but probably the ones with the greatest potential to escalate to a threat against international peace and security. Ideally, one should therefore expect these wars to occupy most of the UNSC’s time and attention, taking concrete steps to end them. The measures are available, laid down specifically in Chapter VII, but also in the chapters VI, VIII and XI of the UN Charter. Peaceful measures are described in Article 41, measures which include the use of military force in Article 42. But the current paralytic situation is easy to understand. In the Ukraine war, the aggressor who has violated the Charter is Russia, and since Russia is a permanent member holding a veto, the UNSC is pushed towards deadlock, the words used by the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenski, in his UNSC speech on September 20th, 2023. The UNSC has debated the war, and many of its members have condemned the aggression, but this is not reflected in any resolution. The UNSC as a collective does not stand behind these condemnations. The UNSC has also debated the war in the Middle East, but the strong support for Israel from particularly the United States makes it rather unlikely that Council members will find common ground.

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted, during the high-level week in September 2005 named the New York World Summit, the principle ‘Responsibility to Protect’, or R2P, the commonly used acronym, about protection for all populations from mass atrocities, specified as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. The responsibilities are described in §§ 138-139 of the World Summit Outcome Document (UNGA Resolution 60/1, September 16, 2005). The UNSC expressed support for R2P in 2006 (UNSC Resolution 1674, June 28, 2006), and the UNGA reaffirmed its support in 2009 (UNGA Resolution 63/308, September 15, 2009).

R2P is primarily a national responsibility. UN member states also obliged themselves to assist each other in their efforts to fulfill the protection expected from them. Yet even though the mechanisms for doing this has been greatly expanded and improved since the adoption of the principle, national authorities may still fail to provide protection. That is when the responsibility to protect transfers to the international community. The toolbox contains a variety of peaceful means, but not only. The use of military force is meant to be the last resort, when other means have been tried without success, or when a conflict has escalated to a level where nothing else is relevant. In accordance with international law this sharp end of R2P is fully anchored within the UNSC.

This article's focus concerning R2P is on the role of the UNSC. But R2P is very much more which may involve the UN directly or indirectly, without necessarily involving the UNSC. Prevention is often communicated as the most important aspect of R2P. To prevent a conflict from developing into a manmade catastrophe is always the least costly and the least controversial alternative. Different UN agencies and arrangements cooperate closely with many sorts of actors, governmental bodies, public organizations as well as private and voluntary ones, in addition to individuals, to identify risk factors and to respond early when the scope for dialogue may still be present. A substantial network for the sharing of knowledge has been established. The UN Secretary-General delivers yearly reports on R2P to the UNGA, and several successes are mentioned in these reports. But events that was prevented are usually less visible compared to those where prevention failed. That is why inaction from the UNSC may become a threat to its legitimacy, because this body must deal with the most difficult cases, and because it is expected to manage this task.

Discussion¹

The discussion has three parts, one where the UNSC produces talk, decisions, and action; one about talks and decisions, but poor or no action; and one about just talk.

Part 1: talk, decisions, and action

The UNSC is politicized not only in the sense that the debates which take place there are concerned with urgent political matters, but also because the participants are heavily influenced by the political ideas they adhere to. The UNSC is authorized to act on behalf of the world community, but the members also frequently use this arena to forward the national interests of their own states. This often demonstrates when one or more of the permanent members use their prerogative to veto suggested resolutions, but national interests also motivate non-permanent members, influencing how their representatives argue and how they vote. Organized hypocrisy

¹ Theoretical insights from Brunsson drawn on in the discussion are from the following pages in his 1989 book *The Organization of Hypocrisy – Talk, Decisions and Action in Organizations*: 4-7, 19, 22-24, 31, 95-101, 124, 146-150, 172, 177-180, 183, 189, 192, 195, 203, 218, 225 and 233-234.

characterizes the behavior of many organizations with similar features, but the UNSC is not one organization among many. It is unique due to its composition, the seriousness of the problems it addresses, and the tasks it is expected to perform, as well as the measures it can use which are different, more intrusive, and more far-reaching than anything connected to other organizations. The primary task, to maintain international peace and security, is not a task it can choose to ignore. It is a duty. The articles 24.1-2 in the UN Charter Chapter V describing the functions and the power of the UNSC both uses the word duties. Therefore, one should expect its performance as a collective to be evaluated according to how talk leads to decisions followed by adequate action. Three examples illustrate this point.

On November 29, 1990, the UNSC adopted Resolution 678 which gave Iraq a time limit until January the following year to withdraw its troops from Kuwait or being forced out. Kuwait, a sovereign UN member state, had been occupied the foregoing summer. Iraq ignored the resolution, which was implemented militarily by a coalition of 35 states lead by the United States.

Convinced that the North Korean program for development of nuclear weapons represents a serious threat to international peace and security, the UNSC has imposed several economic sanctions on the regime. Sanctions are methods of enforcing laws by imposing penalties on perpetrators. The UNSC repertoire encompasses diplomatic, social, and economic sanctions against a state that has violated international law (McLean 1996; Bealey 1999). The first sanctions on North Korea were adopted on October 14, 2006 (UNSC Resolution 1718) after the first nuclear test, with trade bans on weapons-related materials and goods. Later resolutions, of which there are many up to 2023, has expanded the sanctions by broadening the arms embargo, targeting luxury goods for the elites, financial assets, banking transactions, and exports of many North Korean products. In 2006 the UNSC established a Sanctions Committee to gather and analyze information. The sanctions have not prevented North Korea from achieving and testing nuclear weapons but is supposed to have made the production more troublesome.

After having tried peaceful means without sufficient success, the UNSC on March 17, 2011, adopted Resolution 1973 allowing for using all necessary means except occupation to protect civilians in Libya. This was the first time ever the UNSC authorized the use of military force against a functioning government for the primary purpose of protecting a civilian population (Williams – Bellamy 2012). Although R2P is not directly mentioned in the mandate text, the debate before the adoption was heavily influenced by the principle. Relevant regional organizations were called to implement the resolution, which NATO did.

The three examples have one striking common feature. The UNSC is dependent on other actors to implement its decisions. The UN Charter gives the UNSC enormous formal powers, but it falls on member states and regional organizations to mobilize political will and resources, in the examples a coalition of states, member states willingness not to undermine sanctions, and NATO. This is important from the perspective of operational control because decision making becomes a limited instrument when the tools with which to enact the powers are moved to the hands of other actors (Hurd 2002; Dunne 2015). As demonstrated by Jeffery Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky in their classical study of implementation from the 1970s, and confirmed by several later studies, to let others implement one's decisions is a highly risky sport (Pressman – Wil-

davsky 1973). Some actors may be eager to participate because they have an additional agenda on their own, representing a danger that implementation will be drawn in directions deviating from the decision maker's intentions. But one of Brunsson's arguments is that decisions in themselves generate responsibility. Outsiders tend to regard decision-makers as responsible for following actions, even for events beyond their control. They may therefore both have to defend the decision and cope with criticism from the environment connected to action. This represents a challenge from the perspective of legitimacy. Responsibility is easy to require, but it is substantially more difficult to gain influence.

The implementation of Resolution 1973 is illustrative. The implementing actor was the NATO alliance, in accordance with §139 in the Outcome Document and the mandate text. Russia and China could have vetoed the resolution. They did not. By abstaining from voting, they signaled a degree of sceptics, but also unwillingness to be seen as obstructionists having prevented suitable response to mass atrocities. Many observers in March 2011 saw mass atrocities orchestrated by the Libyan government as a probable scenario unless prevented by the international community through the UNSC. However, the military operations did not end before the Libyan regime collapsed. The decision-makers in March 2011 hardly calculated with this outcome. Critical voices became numerous, with consequences when the civil war broke out in Syria. After 2011 the UNSC has not been able to deal effectively with mass atrocities in numerous conflicts. Regarding the civil war in Syria, Russia, occasionally accompanied by China, has vetoed several suggested resolutions. China's participation in double vetoes, walking behind Russia, may reflect a certain nervousness among Chinese leaders at being perceived as spoilers. But for the UNSC this represents a potential challenge to its legitimacy. Organized hypocrisy may reduce this challenge by redirecting attention.

Careful reading of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document § 139 is relevant here. This paragraph outlines the international component of R2P, the use of peaceful means, commitment to help states building protection capacities, and when states manifestly fail to provide protection, preparedness to take collective action in a timely and decisive manner on a case-by-case basis, through the UNSC, disposing all measures described in the UN Charter.

Having the UNSC as the anchor for all decisions that may involve military force has consequences. Relevant regional organizations are expected to cooperate, but not to act on behalf of their own. Neither is there any independent room for coalitions of willing states or other individual actors. This was perhaps not the optimal option from the perspective of fast response and smooth implementation, reflected with this frustration by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon (2016, p. 3): "*The frequency and scale of atrocity crimes have increased and will likely continue to do so unless the international community takes more determined and consistent action to fulfil its responsibility to protect*".

However, this was the alternative that made consensus possible. A new obligation for the UNSC had not sufficient support. Alex Bellamy (2014, p. 14) catches the point: "Consensus on R2P was possible precisely because it did not change – or even seek to change – the basic rules governing the use of force". §139 says: "...we are prepared to act... To be prepared is not the same as a duty or an obligation. Confronted with a relevant situation, it is in principle up to the UNSC not just to decide what to do, but also to decide if to respond at all. This specification is

important because it differs from the responsibility to maintain international peace and security, clearly formulated as a duty in the UN Charter.

Organized hypocrisy as an analytical approach explains why there often in conflictual environments is a gap between rhetorical commitments and action. Yet, as pointed to by Natalie Zähringer and Malte Brosig (2020), non-application of R2P is itself possible to understand as a case of organized hypocrisy. The UNSC strives to accommodate conflicting demands in the environment. Decoupling the normative framework from operational action may reduce the harm these conflicts can cause upon UNSC legitimacy. But there is a danger that the organization will become dysfunctional if the decoupling of normative promises becomes permanent. UN Secretary-General António Guterres is worried. Each year beginning in 2009, the Secretary-General has delivered a report on R2P to the UN General Assembly. In his 2017 report he reminded members of the UNSC about what he called a basic principle of accountability, that those authorized to undertake actions on behalf of others are accountable to those that authorized them. Both in this report and in the one from 2018 he expressed deep concern for what he saw as a negative trend with a growing gap between words of commitment and the experiences of vulnerable populations. In his 2020 report he reiterated that the time had come to close this gap (Guterres 2017, 2018 and 2020).

Although the term ‘responsibility’ is much used, its precise meaning is often obscure. One use is of being the cause or the originator of an event or a series of events, for which one might be credited or blamed (Bovens 2011). The controversies after the implementation of Resolution 1973 illustrate the difficult balance between talk and decisions on the one hand, and action on the other. Organized hypocrisy is present when these three elements are not consistent. Since someone who is perceived as the cause of an event will normally be regarded as responsible for it, a more diffuse causal connection might be an advantage in making challenges to legitimacy less acute. The UNSC can try to highlight talk and decisions, and at the same time try to downplay their own role connected to implementation, to soften disappointment in the environment. The maintenance of high values often needs an element of organizational hypocrisy to evoke a discrepancy related to action.

There are good reasons for defining military means as the last choice. According to Sebastian von Einsiedel and Louise Bosetti (2016) consensus about using tough measures against hard cases has always been frail. Humanitarian-based interventions were controversial long before R2P entered the international sphere, and they still are controversial. Operations are risky for participating soldiers and officers, seldom popular at home in contributing countries, and always with uncertain outcomes. They may very well produce other results than intended and expected, perhaps something worse than the situation meant to be healed. Vaguely formulated decisions may open for a range of subsequent actions. Resolution-texts are often diffuse about implementation. Perhaps they were written under time pressure in a fast-evolving situation, or perhaps they simply reflect what it was possible to agree about without much delay across ideological differences. Probably it is easier to mobilize resources from UN member states when there is some room for individual adjustment connected to implementation. But the passenger will often be a hidden source for later conflicts.

Part 2: Talk and decisions

When intentions and actions risk not to support each other well, it can be a good idea to abandon action and concentrate on talk and decisions. Although decision-makers normally look for the best among many alternatives, they often lack sufficient relevant information about options and possible consequences. In relation to R2P, aware of the difficulty to obtain consensus around concrete action, the UNSC can choose to specialize in producing talk and decisions and communicate this as the main outcome. They can try to visualize for the audience that a distance exists between UNSC as decision-makers and other actors as implementers of the decisions, for instance by blaming NATO for having stretched the mandate on Libya too far, hoping that the decision makers who adopted the mandate will not be blamed to the same extent. Similarly, when sanctions against North Korea are undermined, which seems to be the case quite frequently, those to blame are UN member states violating international law, but not the sanctions regime itself and those responsible for its establishment. A successful strategy containing these elements will probably reduce a possible challenge to the legitimacy of the UNSC, because it downplays the importance of action as source of legitimacy.

Some UNSC decisions are not expected to be followed by specific actions orchestrated by the Council. Even after 2011, several resolutions on different conflicts remind state leaders of their responsibilities to protect their populations from mass atrocities, in accordance with the national dimension of R2P. It is of course expected that the states addressed take these reminders serious and behave in accordance with them, but from the perspective of the UNSC such decisions are also symbolically important because they demonstrate concern for the situation in question. For the legitimacy of the UNSC this is positive, despite the absence of resolute Council-lead action. However, there are different levels of intervention. To remind state leaders of their national responsibilities can hardly be called very intrusive. But it can be accompanied by statements communicating worry and surveillance. Still, this will be a quite soft response unless supplied with threats to use harder measures.

An alternative when a resolution is beyond reach is a presidential statement. Presidential statements do not generate obligations for UN member states but are adopted at formal meetings and issued as official UNSC documents. An example is the presidential statement on the Myanmar Rohingya case (S/PRST/2017/22) dated November 6, 2017. The UN Human Rights Council, an intergovernmental body within the UN system responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights globally, documented deliberate targets of civilians carried out by Myanmar security forces against the Rohingya minority, with evidence of ethnic cleansing in the Rakhine province. More than 750 000 Rohingyas, a Muslim minority in Myanmar, escaped in 2017 and 2018 to neighboring Bangladesh (Kirby 2018). China refused to negotiate on a draft resolution obliging the Myanmar government to work closer with the UN. Yet, the statement China accepted does more than just reminding about responsibilities. It also expresses concern over human rights violations committed by Myanmar security forces (Yhome 2019).

Decisions include elements of talk but are more than just talk. They formalize in documents for later study and interpretation. Since the Russian veto most probably will continue to stop any

suggested resolution about the war in Ukraine, the UNSC must find other ways to demonstrate that it still focuses on peace and security issues, even in times of deadlock related to some conflicts. The clue is to adopt resolutions addressing either specific other conflicts where agreement might be possible, or conflicts more generally. Resolution 2686, adopted June 14, 2023, is a good example. The text is rife with concerns and encouragements, but it does not contain a single word about the war in Ukraine. Neither are other wars named directly. Concrete conflicts are relegated to the sphere of talk. Politicians and civilians in Ukraine will hardly be impressed, but even a text which primarily mirrors what UNSC member states could agree about, is not without a potential to generate legitimacy from parts of the environment. But it surely is a limit to how much legitimacy can be drawn from general concerns, if one accepts the premise that the war in Ukraine has a large potential to challenge international peace and security. However, this example shows how organized hypocrisy operates behind the scenery, where some, but not all, environmental demands are satisfied through talk and decisions. Some of the legitimacy possibly lost by inability to deliver action may be regained by drawing on other sources. Both talk and decisions are themselves important tools for the creation of legitimacy through influence on how people think about different situations. Talk takes place both before and after an eventual decision is made, an argument for publicizing decision processes that often involve complicated struggles difficult to understand for outsiders.

Part 3: Just talk

The UN is the world's most important meeting-arena for state leaders and diplomats. This pertains both to the UNGA and the UNSC and is possible to communicate as an independent value producing legitimacy, even when discussions do not lead to decisions. For the UNSC one may even argue that talk alone is sufficient as a source to uphold legitimacy, since this is where the most powerful states are always represented. In addition to the formal meetings comes the value of the many bilateral talks. This legitimating potential is easy to underestimate when focusing primarily on inability to deal effectively with current crisis.

The paralysis to act in accordance with formal obligations and expectations is perhaps more normal than what we like to think. Similar frustrations were expressed during the Cold War. For instance, the UNSC could do very little about the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. A grace period followed from the early 1990s where Russia and China deferred from using the veto on many occasions, allowing for proliferations of several UN peacekeeping operations. More recently, the UN Secretary-General has several times urged the veto-powers to restrict their use of veto in situations where mass atrocities take place or are imminent. In his 2016 report on R2P to the UNGA, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon expressed his frustration by demanding from those who ignore this request to publicly explain why and what alternative they would suggest (Ban 2016). Today, with the return to a sort of normality, the UNSC must again draw more on alternative legitimating sources. Just talk is an obvious candidate.

A substantial majority of UN member states have condemned Russia's war on Ukraine, with speeches and votes in the UNGA where no vetoes exist. UNGA resolutions signalizes the dominant view of the world community but is without binding obligations. The UNSC can theoretic-

cally order action to stop the war, or at least produce a condemning resolution. But this has not happened due to reasons discussed above. There are important similarities between this and the Iraq-Kuwait example from 1990. Both scenarios include a UN member state attacking another one, incorporating the territory of the victim, or some of it, into its own. But Iraq had no supportive friend among the veto powers. By condemning the Russian aggression UNSC member states have used the opportunity to expose their own responsibility through talk. However, it is not obvious that external actors will blame Russia alone for the inability of the UNSC to decide and act. The strong focus on duties in the UN Charter speaks against it. Yet, although degrees of legitimacy are at best possible to sense and interpret, not to measure, the UNSC would probably have been in a worse position had it behaved as if this war did not exist. Neither has the UNSC ignored the war in the Middle East. But if just talk related to this conflict shall produce any surplus of legitimacy for the UNSC, it will probably have to be among peripheral environmental actors. Just talk is hardly what the civilian victims in the region need most.

Some demands are easiest to meet by talk only. The UNSC reflects environments filled with inconsistent ideologies, but as demonstrated in debates about Russia, Ukraine, and the Middle East, the Council also embraces this variety itself. Politicians who have required much practice in analyzing and discussing different problems are often good to produce talk. When different ideologies are represented both within and outside, the best way to act is often obscured. A solution from the perspective of organized hypocrisy is to deliver double standards of talk to please different demanders. If decisions and actions are beyond reach, talk as source of legitimacy may work, primarily to establish a symbolical accord with the environment.

This is probably best understood by regarding the environment as composed of two dimensions, one technical and one institutional. Most organizations must relate to both. The technical environment is everything external with direct influence on realization of goals, for instance actors who deliver resources. The institutional environment consists of values, norms, and ideologies, cultural conditions that influence perceptions and degrees of acceptance. An organization's ability to adapt shared views of how it should look and behave contributes to avoid questions about its right to exist. Suitable structures and processes that reflect environmental demands do more than coordinating action. Making them explicit is a way to communicate with the environment, serving the purpose to win support. When tasks are problematic, it may help to emphasize good intentions (Hatch – Cunliffe 2006; Jacobsen – Thorsvik 2013).

One reservation seems relevant. As pointed to by Brunsson it is typical for highly politicized organizations to try to exaggerate their own importance in the eyes of the outside world. Demands are always formulated by actors in the environment that are beyond organizational control. Since the degree of acceptance depends on environmental judgements, the UNSC can try to exaggerate its role as a vehicle of multiple interests. To what extent and under which circumstances this may work is a more open question.

The UNSC agenda is also worth to include in a discussion of legitimacy. The agenda is the list of issues the UNSC may debate. All UN member states can suggest issues in accordance with Article 35 of the Charter, but it is the prerogative of UNSC members to decide which problems will be debated and when, during their one-month period of presidency. A place at the table is

therefore attractive also for non-permanent members, an opportunity to be heard and perhaps to convince others through good arguments. Non-permanent members can also gain influence through the role as penholders, which implies to take responsibility for a selected question. For those who understand how to take advantage of it, this is a window of opportunity, although goodwill from the permanent members is needed to move beyond the phase limited to talk (Nordtvedt – Røysamb 2023).

Poor results are often blamed on organizational structures and processes. When confronted with perceived threats to its legitimacy, organizations often try to re-organize. Brunsson points to organizational reforms as common answers to criticism. A widespread criticism against the UNSC is that composition and distribution of privileges reflect the international political arena immediately after WW2 better than the world of today. But the UNSC seems to be extremely difficult to reform. Any reform will need the consent of the current permanent members. They are not known for their willingness to share power. Charlotta Friedner Parrat (2019) argues that the initial arrangement can be seen as a stabilizing attempt by means of strong reproductive formal procedures, but this has developed to a barrier to changes contemporary shifts in the balance of power calls for. To lean on organized hypocrisy is for the UNSC probably a more realistic alternative, today and for the near future, but what may function to preserve a sufficient degree of legitimacy today does not come with any guarantee that this will prevail.

Conclusion and final remarks

The question discussed in this article has been to what extent recent international events challenge the legitimacy of the UNSC, and how organizational hypocrisy can reduce this possible threat. Even though the UNSC's position from a legitimating point of view would have stood on more solid feet if it had handled better the duty to maintain international peace and security and the expectations derived from the international component of the R2P-principle, the discussion has shown that the UNSC can draw on many legitimating sources. A particular important source is the role as the only arena of global scope where politicians and diplomats from the most powerful states regularly meet for discussions and possible decisions. By using the theoretical framework of organized hypocrisy developed by Nils Brunsson, where talk, decisions, and actions are treated separately to satisfy different environmental demands, it becomes quite clear that the very existence of the UNSC is not directly threatened today, even in times where people around the world hardly can count on this UN unit as their protector. The challenges to legitimacy pointed to in the discussion are all real, but they are balanced by certain quite strong moderating forces.

Organizational hypocrisy usually develops without being consciously designed. It is possible to include it in a conscious strategy, or at least to be aware of and to accept that organizational hypocrisy will be a result of planning. But Brunsson gives us a warning. High morality should characterize both intentions, talk, and decisions in organizations. Political organizations are no exceptions. Brunsson does not specify in any detail how he understands the content of the morality concept, but it is rather obvious that planning for hypocrisy falls

outside the acceptable. Complex political organizations may find it almost impossible to avoid organized hypocrisy, but that is not a recommendation to strive for the phenomenon (Brunsson 1989, pp. 233–234).

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