

Legitimacy, Power, and the Symbolic Life of the UN Security Council



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The Charter of the United Nations gives the Security Council enormous formal powers, but it does not give it direct control of the tools with which to enact those powers. As many have noted, much of the power of the Council is contingent on the voluntary cooperation of states, measured in variables such as the contribution to peacekeeping missions and the national enforcement of sanctions regimes.¹ It is often also noted that this voluntary compliance depends also on states' perceptions of the legitimacy of the Council and its actions.² However, the central role that legitimacy plays in supporting the power of the Council is rarely investigated. After Inis Claude's statement of the matter in 1966, the issue has not been revisited.³

The contingent nature of Council authority means its effect in the international system is both broader and narrower than the formal powers of the UN Charter—narrower because the Cold War stunted the development of the four-policemen idea, but broader because the high social status of the Council signals a deep pool of “social capital” that it can draw on to induce compliance by states. This article expands the traditional emphasis of international organization (IO) studies from the black letter of treaties and charters to a perspective that takes into account actual practices and the power of symbols around the Security Council. Taking seriously the symbolic power of the Council helps us to see the reasons behind certain otherwise inexplicable phenomena in international relations (IR) and allows us to ask questions regarding the legitimacy of the Council that were previously hidden from view. Most political conflicts have symbolic payoffs at their root, which a concern only with studying material gains will inevitably misunderstand. This is an important problem with respect to the Security Council because so much of what makes the Council a significant actor in international politics is a result of the informal development of its role in international society. This is both a cause and a consequence of the distribution of material rewards and costs. We miss much that is interesting in social

and political affairs if we stick to what Kertzer calls “the naïve notion that politics is simply the outcome of different interest groups competing for material resources.”⁴

The exercise of power through symbols involves “complicating” the relations of coercion and dominance that would otherwise prevail. The strong must delegate some symbol-making power to others, they must back up the symbols with promises to behave a certain way, and they must trust in the symbols to achieve what force might otherwise have done. This creates an opening for the weaker agents to appropriate, manipulate, and perhaps subvert the meaning of the symbols and alter the path of the society.⁵ That legitimacy is the source of the Council’s authority may therefore sometimes be a source of power to the rest of the UN membership.

I begin this article with a theory of legitimacy and symbolic power for international organizations and then consider three kinds of state behavior with respect to the Security Council that illustrate this power in practice. These three are the impulse to keep one’s issues on the Security Council agenda, the desire to be a nonpermanent member of the Council, and the need to legitimize state military operations with the label “UN peacekeeping.” In conclusion, I point to some lessons for the practice of international politics that arise from recognizing the importance of symbolic politics for international organizations. Of particular significance is the realization that efforts to legitimize an institution naturally generate efforts by others to *de*-legitimize. The interplay of these two processes is deserving of further research.

Legitimacy and Symbols

The power of social institutions in a society is largely a function of the legitimacy of those institutions. An institution that is perceived as legitimate by an individual is treated with more respect, is endowed with a corporate existence beyond the units that make it up, and finds compliance with its rules more easily secured than in the absence of legitimacy.⁶ International organizations seek legitimacy because they have problems in each of these areas.

An institution that is perceived as legitimate gives rise to symbols that possess a mobilizing power because of their association with the institution. Objects (such as a flag, a uniform, a scepter), phrases (the judge saying “I sentence you to . . .”), procedures (the General Assembly making a decision by majority vote), or manners of speaking (the “proper-English” speaker visiting the colonies) become imbued with power because they are associated in the minds of an audience with the

authority they perceive in an institution. Symbols, as Wolin says, “serve to evoke the presence of authority despite the physical reality being far removed.”⁷ There is no inherent quality of the object that produces the effect of the symbol. We see symbolism in an object only because of the intersubjective social agreement that the object represents something conceptual. In this way, symbols are collective goods, part of the intersubjective baggage of actors situated in a community.⁸ Symbols are a currency of power because enough individuals believe that others believe in them. Once an object becomes a symbol and is invested with this power-by-association, it becomes a power in itself and the object of contestation in search of that power.

Symbols, therefore, are power. Because a change in the symbolic field can change the material environment participants face, there is power in being seen as the legitimate author of such changes. For example, the practice of declaring a new entity a “state” (via the symbolic rituals of UN General Assembly statements, exchange of diplomats, and recognition by existing states) calls upon the established legitimacy of the institution of sovereignty and associates the new entity with the existing pattern of authority. Afterwards, the entity is treated differently than before; it is held to different standards and is expected to act differently.⁹ The agent that is recognized in the community as authorized to make such dispensations of symbols is in a position of power relative to the rest. It has “discursive power,” that is, the ability to “promote and impose concepts as the basis of preferred policies.”¹⁰ The importance of this power is easy to see. Consider the influence held by the actor who gets to decide what the criteria for statehood will be.¹¹

Politics at all levels is in part about the struggle over symbols and over the right to use them. These fights go beyond the issues that affect an individual directly—even people without children hold strong opinions about prayer in school; people in Connecticut care whether people in Nevada have access to abortions. The symbolic struggles at the heart of politics exist also in the international community, perhaps even more so than in domestic politics. For instance, the status of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) delegation to the UN, the presence of Blue Helmet troops in a war zone, and the outcome of an International Court of Justice (ICJ) hearing are the kinds of issues, primarily symbolic, that animate foreign offices and constitute the stuff of international relations, even for states not directly involved in the dispute. To say that a matter is of symbolic importance is not to contrast it to matters of “real” importance. In politics, as in language, it is the symbols of an issue that constitute its substance. Symbolic stakes, inasmuch as institutions and relations of authority are socially constructed, are real.

Perceptions of the legitimacy of an institution are subjective feelings on the part of actors that lead them to behave differently than they otherwise would because they believe the institution requires them to. This might take the form of respect for a particular rule, or for an organization as a collective rule maker. At the macrolevel, legitimacy can cause an actor to believe that a given institution is the right one to be making authoritative declarations. This is what perpetuates the authority of the American state over its citizens and is the essence of “citizen-building” by state authorities everywhere.¹² Perceptions of legitimacy *create* the authoritative institutions of society and thus their symbols.

Both forms of legitimacy are at work in international relations, although they are not often studied directly.¹³ For individual rules, a good case can be made that the norm of sovereignty is obeyed by states mostly because they feel they ought to, and not because they fear punishment for violation—although exceptions exist.¹⁴ The issue of authoritative institutions, the second manifestation of legitimacy, is the concern of this article, and it is here that we can begin to see the basis of the practical power of the Security Council. Many scholars and commentators have noted that the UN Security Council is in danger of losing its legitimacy if it continues on a given course of (illegitimate) action,¹⁵ but very few explain how or why it matters that the Council build or preserve its legitimacy. The usefulness of legitimacy is taken for granted but not explained. In what follows, I suggest that the authority of the Council is fought over by states who believe in its symbols and seek to increase their power by being associated with them.

The Security Council

Like all political systems, the United Nations runs on symbols. Symbols are used, *inter alia*, to legitimate the institution, to define subgroups among members, to communicate and to act, to delegate power, and to establish authority roles. Practitioners and states behave as if they clearly understand the importance of the power of symbols in international relations. Their behavior is what gives symbols their worth. In the moral economy of international relations, demand by states for certain kinds of symbolic assets (such as space on the agenda of the Security Council) exceeds supply, such that the asset appreciates considerably and enormous energy is spent in competition over it. The legitimacy of the Security Council makes its scarce symbolic resources worth fighting over by giving them perceived value. Further, legitimacy is fungible and transferable. It can be exported by association from the holder to other

actors. The symbolic power of the Security Council leads to struggles to appropriate those symbols to various causes. In this section, I explore three areas in which states compete for symbolic rewards in and around the Security Council; first with respect to the agenda, second with respect to membership, and third with respect to the label “peacekeeping.”

The Agenda

The symbolic power of the Security Council is evident in the energy states expend on having the Council pay attention to issues of concern to them. The bringing of issues to the Council carries enormous symbolic weight, and so perhaps nothing illustrates better the struggles over the symbolic power of the Security Council than keeping the Council’s agenda.

The agenda of the Council consists of two parts. First, there is the provisional agenda for each Council meeting, which is prepared by the secretary-general and contains the current issues that may be topics at the meeting. The second part consists of all the topics that were once on the official agenda of an individual meeting but that were not finally disposed of by the Council. This list is the *Summary Statement*¹⁶ (also called the Agenda) of the Security Council and is effectively a running tab of open issues that the Security Council once discussed and may return to, or may just postpone but does not want to formally close. The *Summary Statement* is a good location to observe the symbolic politics of the Council. States often work hard to keep a favored issue on the Agenda, but there is little material payoff for it being there. The payoff comes in the currencies of symbolism and recognition.

In the debates over the shape of the UN at San Francisco in 1944, the medium and small states recognized that the right to bring matters to the Security Council might be a valuable tool and should not be exclusively reserved for Security Council members or, worse, for permanent members only.¹⁷ The right of non-Council actors to bring issues to the Council was enshrined in the UN Charter at several points: in Article 35(1) for UN members without a Council seat; in Article 35(2) for nonmembers of the UN; and in Article 99 for the secretary-general. Since they cannot force the Council to act on an agenda item, the small and medium states effectively fought for the right only to bring issues to the Council.

No provision was made at San Francisco for how items were to be removed from the *Summary Statement*, and items are removed much less readily than they are added. In practice, disposing of an item from the Agenda is treated as a prerogative of the Council collectively (and

not of the state that originally raised the matter).¹⁸ This requires an active decision on the part of the Council, but there are often reasons why the Council is not willing to act; and so matters have by default passed from the agenda of an individual meeting to the *Summary Statement*, where they accumulate. Once a question is on the *Summary Statement*, there is often little reason to return to it, absent some exogenous change in circumstances, but attempts to remove it generally provoke a strong reaction. There is usually at least one state that feels a need to keep an issue alive, even if “alive” means practically moribund on the *Summary Statement*. With the right to place issues before the Council distributed among all UN members and no easy mechanism for the Council to remove them, the *Summary Statement* has become a catalogue of simmering arguments, increasingly separate from the real work of the body.

The rank-and-file membership of the UN has historically resisted efforts to rationalize this system, recognizing in its peculiarities one channel by which non-Council members can associate themselves and their problems with the authority of the Council. In a revolutionary move, after some ad hoc pruning of the list in the early 1990s, the Security Council took unilateral action in 1996 and passed a new procedural rule that said that “matters that had not been considered by the Council in the preceding five years would be deleted from the list of matters of which the Council was seized.”¹⁹ This would have removed forty-two of the then 139 items on the *Summary Statement*. However, even before this rule could take effect, the protests from the nonmembers of the Council were such that the Council (after a change in its presidency) amended the new rule so that any member of the United Nations could keep an item on the *Summary Statement* by annually notifying the secretary-general that “it wished an item to remain on the list.”²⁰ Of the forty-two items bound for deletion in early 1997, twenty-nine were kept on at the request of member states. In October 1997, five more items were dropped and one was retained by request, leaving a *Summary Statement* (including new items) of 128 items.²¹

It is interesting to note, in digression, that this power to request that an item remain on the Agenda is the right of any member of the United Nations. Thus, the peculiar organizational situation has been created in which nonmembers of an organization have a say in the organization’s agenda. This extends the unusual arrangement agreed to at San Francisco whereby non-Council members can introduce items to the Council agenda and the Council itself cannot veto their introduction. Now, technically, the Council cannot even remove those items once they are introduced except by a substantive resolution or decision that resolves the matter. This is one way in which the distinction between

member and nonmember of the Council is becoming increasingly blurry.

One leader in the agenda game has been Pakistan. The *Summary Statement* contains several ancient items relating to the India-Pakistan dispute in its various manifestations, and the government of Pakistan makes frequent reference to this fact in its international statements. In October 1998, a spokesperson tried to use the continuance of the dispute on the Council Agenda to leverage greater attention to the issue at the UN. Calling the India-Pakistan question “the oldest issue on the UN agenda,”²² the deputy permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN said the matter “deserved a more detailed reference in the UN Secretary General’s annual report.”²³ Not surprisingly, Pakistan has been very quick under the new procedures to protect its agenda items from falling off the statement after five years of inactivity.

What is significant in the politics of the Agenda is the strength of the attachment of UN members to their piece of official Council attention. What is at stake here is more than the second-face, agenda-setting power noted by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz.²⁴ The second face of power is important because manipulating the agenda can have a substantive effect on the decisions that are taken or not taken in an organization. How this plays out depends on the decision-rule of the body. Interest in the Agenda of the Security Council is different because actors have enough experience to know that there is very little chance that an item that remains on the *Summary Statement* will ever be raised again, let alone that any decision might be taken on it. Instead, states appear to value, *in itself*, having an item on the agenda of the Council, independent of action being taken on it. It provides some institutional acknowledgment that their problems are recognized by the international community, and such recognition is symbolically powerful.

Membership

Recognizing the symbolic power of the Security Council also helps us understand another strange phenomenon surrounding the body: the continued strength of the desire to become a Council nonpermanent member. At one level, this phenomenon is not so strange, since it appears clear that Council membership, even in the form of a two-year nonpermanent seat, is a valuable good for a state: the Council is an enormously influential body, and the number of seats is very limited relative to the number of eligible states. However, we must ask how real is the influence of a nonpermanent member? The effective decisionmaking power in the Council is monopolized by the Permanent Five. We cannot

look for the value of a nonpermanent seat in terms of the ability of a state to make or break Council decisions in accord with the state's interests.²⁵ Rather, it comes in the ability to raise points of interest in discussions; to learn about the views of others and about the leanings of the Council on given issues; and to appear to be at the center of important things. The Canadian foreign minister recently said of the nonpermanent member positions, "Clearly the permanent five have a privileged position but it doesn't stop the other non-permanent members from saying what they want to say, being in the Security Council when the issues are discussed, and using that as a forum to reach out."²⁶ These are important opportunities for states, which provide the motivation for seeking a nonpermanent seat. However, to assess the value of a seat, we need to compare the access available to the nonpermanent member with that of a nonmember of the Council. The distinction between these two groups has diminished significantly in recent years.

The decline in the difference of decisionmaking power between states with nonpermanent seats on the Council and nonmembers has come about through several means. As noted, power over the Agenda has been somewhat diffused to all members, but more important is the increase in consultation between the permanent members and states not formally involved with the Council.²⁷ The form of consultation that has been most institutionalized has involved the states that have contributed matériel to peacekeeping missions. Extensive rules are now in place to regularize contact between the troop-contributing countries and the Council.²⁸ Other states that contribute exceptional resources to the UN, notably through the budget (such as Germany and Japan) have also developed something like "quasi-membership" on the Council by virtue of their frequent and substantial participation in Council consultations, whether they are in a nonpermanent seat or not. In addition, certain groups of states, such as the Nonaligned Movement, have extensive consultations between their members that have a Council seat and the rest in the General Assembly. Still others participate less often, but perhaps more visibly, in the shape of being invited to Council debates without a vote when their interests are at stake. Such invitations have become routine. Approximately one third of all official Council meetings now involve the formal participation of non-Council members. The increase in participation by nonmembers has increased greatly since the early history of the United Nations, devaluing the special privileges of membership.²⁹

In addition to the growing consultation between nonmembers and the Council, a second movement has increased the gap between the Permanent Five and the nonpermanent members. Increasingly, the real

work of the Council takes place among the Permanent Five in “informal sessions” (which, because they are not official Council meetings, do not need to be open to the nonpermanent members or to the public). Almost every formal Council meeting now is a pro forma affair, scripted in these advance informal consultations. The president of the Council almost invariably notes in opening an official meeting that “the Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.”³⁰ As the distance between the Permanent Five and the nonpermanent members has grown, and that between the nonmembers and the nonpermanent members has diminished, the difference between nonmembers and nonpermanent members has doubly declined. This should reduce the value of a nonpermanent seat to aspiring states.

Despite a decline in the operational distinction between nonmembers of the Council and nonpermanent members of the Council, the energy and resources spent by states trying to get themselves elected to a nonpermanent seat is considerable and is apparently increasing. In the election in 1998 within the Western European and Others Group, self-styled candidate states Canada, Greece, and the Netherlands engaged in strenuous lobbying and gift giving. The Netherlands invited voting delegates to performances of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam and took them on cruises of the East River; Canada ran a four-year campaign, costing an estimated \$1.9 million, that included sending retired diplomats and academics to lobby governments in nearly 100 countries and ended with free tickets to a performance of the Cirque du Soleil in New York; and Greece hosted a weeklong cruise in the Aegean for 120 UN delegates and their families.³¹ Earlier campaigns in this and other groups have also been extravagant, including “brown envelopes left in hotel rooms during junkets,” with new levels being reached in 1998.³²

What is the payoff to such efforts, particularly on the part of states that are already in a position to consult closely with the Council because of their roles in peacekeeping operations or elsewhere? The answer is that Council membership confers status and recognition on a state and allows the state to appropriate some of the authority derived from the legitimacy of the Council. The status and prestige of the state’s diplomats increases, in New York and around the world; the state is in a position of prominence, even if not of actual power, should a world crisis arise; and the state knows that it is in a position that other states envy. A Security Council nonpermanent seat is to established states what a General Assembly seat is to new states: a source of authority-by-association. This status can also be useful to governments in domestic political contests if a high international profile is valued by voters or by

other powerful interests.³³ Even if the real increase in decision or access influence due to winning a nonpermanent seat is minimal, the jump in status is huge. With the growing clubbiness of the Permanent Five, the value of a nonpermanent seat can perhaps be measured in terms of a single, symbolic payoff for the state: international recognition. The desire to be a nonpermanent member is not for the power it brings, but rather for the apparent proximity it brings to those with *real* power, the Permanent Five.

“Peacekeeping” as a Label

The third form of symbolic recognition sought by states from the Council has arisen increasingly since 1992 as so-called regional peacekeeping forces have become more common. Since the retreat from “conventional” UN peacekeeping after the U.S. reaction to the Somalia mission, it has become more common for a regional power to intervene in local conflicts under the rubric of “peacekeeping.” However, because these missions often resemble the kind of overt regional imperialism that has lost much of its credibility in the international community, they leave participants vulnerable to criticism as “neoimperialists.” Russia, in particular, has suffered criticism from many quarters that its regional “peacekeeping” in Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan, and elsewhere in its “near-abroad”³⁴ is a “figleaf”³⁵ that merely covers up “the Kremlin’s imperialistic recidivism”³⁶ and that signals its desire to return to the Russian continental empire.³⁷ Similar doubts about the intentions of peacekeeping by former colonial powers have been raised with respect to most of the large states, even when involved in operations that originate at the UN, including France in Lebanon,³⁸ and the United States in Africa, Haiti, and elsewhere.³⁹ While the following examples are drawn from Russian cases, other military adventures (such as in West Africa and Central America) could usefully be explored.

The general response to these criticisms has been to invoke the legitimizing symbols of the United Nations. Thus, the Russian army painted its helmets blue early in its unilateral involvement in Moldova in the summer of 1992, as a way of winning local and international support for the idea that the mission was one of “peacekeeping.”⁴⁰ They did the same sort of thing in painting their vehicles white during the conflict in Tajikistan. A colonel-spokesman for the Russian army in Tajikistan said, “We need to do this to show that we are proper peacekeepers.”⁴¹ More seriously, Russia has campaigned at the UN and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) to have these bodies recognize its operations as “official” multilateral peacekeeping missions.⁴²

These campaigns have downplayed the Russian dominance of the operations and emphasized their multilateralism (despite available objective evidence to the contrary) and their similarity to the UN model and standards of peacekeeping. The Russians also accepted a number of limits on their behavior in exchange for Security Council recognition, including a requirement for reporting back to the Council and the presence of UN “monitors” in the field.⁴³ The government in Moscow also dropped its opposition to a U.S. military plan to enforce sanctions against Haiti.⁴⁴

The Russian efforts to earn the approval of the Council for their operations make sense only if we appreciate the importance of symbols in international politics and the power of the Council to transfer its legitimacy to the acts of others. The label “peacekeeping” is treated similarly to a commercial trademark: its owners (the Security Council) guard it jealously, and consumers (the international community in general) view its presence in an operation as a signal indicating the operation’s contents or quality. The benefit to the Russians for their effort is that states not involved in either the Council decision or the conflict on the ground end up responding differently toward the conflict if the Council passes positive judgment on it. Compare the effects of attaching a “peacekeeping” label to attaching an “imperialism” label. The difference comes from the associative effects of the Council’s legitimacy.

Russia’s behavior helps illuminate the structure of authority in the international system. The discursive power to apply the peacekeeping label lies not with Russia but with the Security Council. This is not a legal or academic judgment but one evident in the practice of the actors involved. In material terms, Russia or others could simply use the peacekeeping label without any UN input, essentially appropriating to themselves the authority to make such classifications. This would be acceptable linguistically but would not have the same practical effect in the world since it goes against the intersubjective definition of the symbol to which states have been socialized. Anyone can use an object in ways that do not validate its accepted symbolic associations, but one cannot expect it to still be recognized as the symbol. Russia’s activity shows that it, as much as anyone, recognizes the Council as the legitimate authority to decide on the proper use of the term “peacekeeping.”

Contestation and Delegitimization

Having discussed legitimacy here in somewhat monolithic terms, we need to recognize that communities are never unanimous in their assessment of the legitimacy of institutions. Legitimacy and authority are

always contested and prone to unsettling. In international relations this is equally true, and so attention must be paid not only to the use of symbolic capital of the Security Council but also to competing claims of its illegitimacy. If being seen as legitimate is a source of power for the Council, then those against whom that power is used would do well to try to deny that power by convincing the society that the institution has lost its legitimacy or never had it in the first place. For lack of space, this topic cannot be adequately addressed here, but I wish to sketch an illustration based on Libya's response to the economic sanctions imposed against it by the Security Council in 1992 and 1993.⁴⁵ This brief examination begins to open research to the uncertain bases of Council legitimacy and the dangers faced by the Council from its own unlimited power to define threats to "international peace and security."

After the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Libya in 1992 and 1993 for its suspected involvement in the Lockerbie bombing, Libya engaged in an active strategy to delegitimize the sanctions among the key audience of third-party states. Libya recognized the unlikelihood of getting the Council to remove the sanctions, but it also recognized that the Council was relying on the support of third-party states to make the sanctions effective. Exploiting this reliance, Libya tried hard to show that the sanctions were generally seen in the community as illegitimate—as a way of encouraging states to indeed *see* them as illegitimate. For instance, in its many communications with the General Assembly and the Security Council, Libya hammered on the theme that it was being punished *in advance* of any judicial finding of responsibility and that this violated basic Western and international juridical norms.⁴⁶ Similarly, it reported the human cost of the sanctions and argued that this violated the international principle of avoiding harm to innocents.⁴⁷ Repeatedly, in international forums, and in press reports and legal settings, the government tried to associate the Libyan position with an international institution or practice that already enjoyed widespread legitimacy. The sincerity of these claims and statements aside, what matters is that they were so publicly and frequently made and that the act of making them appears to have had at least some effect on the strength of the sanctions regime. This is all the more interesting if the statements are indeed insincere, since then we see the power of "mere rhetoric" to move governments and the strategic use of the "social magic" of symbols to make a difference in international politics.⁴⁸

The strategic manipulation of symbols is, of course, difficult and never perfect. However, the Libyan strategy conforms to what we know from other sources about effective methods of resisting legitimated authority. Sociologists and anthropologists report that resistance works

best when presented in terms borrowed from the language of the authority and where the point is not to challenge the existing authority head-on but to argue that the existing authority is not being true to its own professed values. For instance, James Epstein has shown how the popular radicals in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries relied on the established traditions of English constitutionalism in order to make their case for reform or revolution. The rhetoric of the new and competing idiom of Thomas Paine and the American and French revolutions was present but were used secondarily to “the borrowed language of the past.”⁴⁹ The Libyan strategy could be used as a handbook for the internationalization of this advice—it persistently tried to present the sanctions regime as being at odds with the professed values of the international community (of procedural justice, of respect for international organizations, and of avoiding harm to innocents) and to present themselves as upholding those values. This strategy was extremely useful to them at a time when they had few other instruments of power.

Conclusion

The power that the Security Council wields is a function of the esteem in which the body is held by the membership of the United Nations in general. Absent its capacity to mobilize states to voluntarily follow its decisions or contribute to its defense, the Council has no practical power. This is not to denigrate the Council (since its capacity to mobilize states by its symbols is great), but we should recognize clearly that the foundation of this power is the legitimacy that actors confer on the organization. This has several implications for the management and future of the organization.

Since legitimacy is subject to loss if mishandled, it needs to be carefully cultivated. The progress of recent discussions on the reform of the Council gives the starkest reminder that different actors hold different criteria for judging the legitimacy of the body; this is reflected in the variety exhibited among the reform proposals.⁵⁰ But it also allows room for revitalization. The change in the composition of the UN membership since the 1940s has shifted the goalposts with respect to legitimization, because the diversity of value systems represented has increased and because the size and composition of the Council is increasingly disproportionate compared to the General Assembly. In addition to representativeness, another threat to the legitimacy of the Council are perceptions of the dominance of the United States (or any other small group). Legitimacy is easily lost

if the audience comes to believe that the institution is in the end only a stand-in for one of its members. The myth of collectivity is essential for the legitimacy of the institution. The reform process and its outcome could either reinforce or undermine these perceptions.

The existence of symbolic politics around the Council is worth recognizing not just because it aids in our understanding of the Council itself, but also because the presence of an international organization that states accept as legitimate means that we should not continue to talk of the international system as anarchy. Legitimate institutions suggest the existence of centers of *authority*, and authority is precisely what IR scholars have held to be the missing ingredient that gives us international anarchy.⁵¹ The Russian pursuit of the label “peacekeeping” through the Security Council is but one example of state practice revealing and reinforcing authority beyond the state. A society in which centers of authority exist, even if not universal or totalitarian, is a society that is *governed* in the traditional sense of that word as we use it to describe domestic politics. Recognizing that institutions such as sovereignty and organizations such as the Security Council are perceived by a broad range of states as legitimate means that the traditional dichotomy between domestic authority and international anarchy is misleading.⁵²

The pursuit of international political goals takes much the same shape as does the pursuit of domestic political goals. In both areas, actors fight over the deployment of symbols to further their interests. This involves attempts to establish the authority of international organizations like the Security Council and also to disestablish that authority by presenting alternate readings of its legitimacy. The future power of the Council depends on how it responds to these contradictory forces and whether it can maintain the “myth of collectivity” in a pluralistic international political system. In the absence of legitimacy, the Council would have to rely on outright coercion as its only instrument of power and would therefore probably cease to exist. ☉

Notes

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1. For instance, Michael Barnett, “Partners in Peace? The United Nations, Regional Organizations, and Peacekeeping,” *Review of International Studies* 21 (1995): 411–433. On sanctions, see Lisa L. Martin, *Coercive Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

2. For instance, Bruce Russett and James S. Sutterlin, "The U.N. in a New World Order." *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 2 (1991): 69–83.
3. Inis L. Claude Jr., "Collective Legitimation as a Political Function of the United Nations," *International Organization* 20 (1966): 367–379.
4. David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 174. See also, Alison Brysk, "'Hearts and Minds': Bringing Symbolic Politics Back In," *Polity* 27, no. 4 (1995): 559–585.
5. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
6. A classic discussion is provided in Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics, Economics, and Welfare* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1992 [1953]).
7. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), cited in Ronald D. Rotunda, ed., *Politics of Language: Liberalism as Word and Symbol* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986), p. 4.
8. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). See also, Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
9. On obligations of states qua states, see Maurizio Ragazzi, *The Concept of International Obligations Erga Omnes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
10. Paul A. Chilton, *Security Metaphors: Cold War Discourse from Containment to Common House* (New York: P. Lang, 1996), p. 6.
11. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973).
12. Charles E. Merriam, *The Making of Citizens* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1931), p. 13.
13. For one example, see Daniel Bodansky, "The Legitimacy of International Governance: A Coming Challenge for International Environmental Law?" *American Journal of International Law* 93, no. 3 (1999): 596–624.
14. See Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics," *International Organization* 53, no. 2 (1999), 379–408.
15. For instance, José E. Alvarez, "The Once and Future Security Council," *Washington Quarterly* 18 (1995): 5–20, David D. Caron, "The Legitimacy of the Collective Action of the Security Council." *American Journal of International Law* 87 (1993): 552–588. See also Thomas M. Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy Among Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
16. Its full title is *Summary Statement by the Secretary General on Matters of Which the Security Council Is Seized and on the Stage Reached in Their Consideration*. It was established under rule 11 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council (<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/scrules.htm>) and is now an annual document.
17. See Ruth B. Russell, *A History of the UN Charter* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1958), pp. 650–654; and Leland M. Goodrich and Edward Hambro, *The Charter of the United Nations: Commentary and Documents* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1946), pp. 147–149.
18. Sydney D. Bailey and Sam Daws, *The Procedure of the UN Security Council*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 79–81.
19. The rule is contained in S/1996/603; quote is from S/1997/40, 2–3.
20. S/1997/40, p. 3.

21. See A/52/392, where the secretary-general notifies the General Assembly of issues before the Security Council.

22. This is only partly true. The oldest India-Pakistan question on the Summary Statement dates from 6 January 1948, while the Palestinian question, which is also still on, was introduced on 9 December 1947, but was postponed and first discussed on 24 February 1948. See S/7382.

23. Radio Pakistan, 6 October 1998, cited in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 8 October 1998.

24. Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "The Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962): 947–952.

25. Barry O'Neill, "Power and Satisfaction in the Security Council," in Bruce Russett, ed., *The Once and Future Security Council* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

26. *Ottawa Citizen*, 9 October 1998, p. A1.

27. Ian Hurd, "Security Council Reform: Informal Membership and Practice," in Russett, *The Once and Future Security Council*.

28. See S/PRST/1994/22, 3 May 1994; S/PRST/1994/62; A/49/621; A/RES/49/37; S/PRST/1996/13.

29. At least for nonpermanent members—the decision power of a permanent seat remains much greater than the influence of nonpermanent seats or nonmembers.

30. This phrase appears in the opening paragraph of the provisional record of nearly every Council meeting. See, for instance, S/PV.3848, 14 January 1998.

31. *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 October 1998, p. H4; *Financial Times* (London), 9 October 1998, p. 4.

32. *New York Times*, 2 August 1998, p. 4.

33. This domestic effect is potentially extremely significant, although it cannot be done justice in the short space available. Clearly all three candidates in the WEOG election in 1998 believed in a domestic payoff to their efforts. In an opposite way, we can see some of the domestic uses of membership, although not in the Security Council, in the domestic U.S. reactions to losing its seat on the UN Human Rights Commission and the International Narcotics Control Board.

34. This is itself a term that inspires images of empire.

35. *Financial Times* (London), 2 December 1993, p. 2.

36. *Boston Globe*, 6 January 1994.

37. See also the *Independent* (London), 10 February 1994; and *Daily Telegraph*, 30 October 1993. For a defense of Russian policy, see Maxim Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping in the 'Near Abroad,'" *Survival* 36 (1994): 46–69, especially pp. 60–65.

38. Interview with Timur Goksel, May 1998, Yale UN Oral History Project, on deposit with Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, p. 42.

39. Phyllis Bennis, *Calling the Shots: How Washington Dominates Today's UN* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1996).

40. *Independent* (London), 10 February 1994, p. 23.

41. *Financial Times* (London), 2 December 1993, p. 2.

42. It did the same for its force in Georgia. See *New York Times*, 27 May 1994, p. 3.

43. See Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping."

44. *New York Times*, 1 August 1994.

45. For an elaboration, see Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy, Authority, and Power at the UN Security Council" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2000), chap. 5.

46. Among others, see S/26139, S/24428, A/28/PV.20.

47. See, for instance, S/1998/1131, S/1996/717, S/26139.

48. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

49. James A. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 4.

50. Reform proposals are collected at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/reform/index.htm>.

51. See, for instance, Helen Milner, "The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique," *Review of International Studies* 17 (1991): 67–85, and James N. Rosenau, *The United Nations in a Turbulent World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992).

52. The possibility of multiple kinds of international authority is discussed in Ian Hurd, "UNTAC, Authority, and International Relations Theory," paper presented at the meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 2000.