How does the UN Security Council Influence Public Opinion?[1]

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Abstract: This paper examines the effect of the UN Security Council on public support for war. We distinguish three reasons why a UNSC resolution that authorizes military action could influence public opinion. Citizens might interpret the resolution as a signal that military force is warranted; as an indication that other countries will share the military burden; or as a public promise that ought to be upheld. We designed an experiment to estimate whether and how UNSC resolutions affect the U.S. public mood for war. We found that U.S. citizens were substantially more willing to support war when the UNSC had authorized a mission than when it had not. Surprisingly, though, the UNSC did not generate this effect by changing people's beliefs about the merits of war, or by suggesting that the U.S. would pay less as a result of burden sharing by other UN members. Instead, our evidence was most consistent with the hypothesis that UNSC resolutions are public commitments, which citizens feel obligated to fulfill as long as other countries do the same. These findings have significant implications for research about public support for war, and about the effect of international bodies on domestic politics.

1. Introduction

International organizations play a fundamental role in world affairs. It is now generally accepted that international organizations contribute to cooperation by reducing transaction costs among countries (Keohane 1984; Abbott and Snidal 1998). IOs usefully monitor the behavior of countries, collect and disseminate scientific data, adjudicate international disputes, and provide forums for negotiation. In the absence of international organizations, cooperation would be more costly and less common.

More recently, researchers have studied a second, indirect channel through which international organizations affect world politics. Perhaps IOs are consequential not only because they reduce interstate transaction costs, but also because they influence domestic politics. For example, Beth Simmons (2009) shows that international human rights treaties mobilize citizens to demand better treatment from their own governments; Mansfield and Milner (2012) argue that trade organizations reassure voters that their leaders are not pursuing excessively protectionist policies; and Chapman (2011) and Grieco et al. (2011) contend that UN Security Council resolutions affect mass public support for war.

We contribute to this theme by studying the mechanisms through which UN Security Council resolutions affect public attitudes toward war. We distinguish three reasons why a UNSC resolution that authorizes military action could influence public opinion. Citizens might view the resolution as a signal that military force is warranted; as an indication that other nations will foot part of the military bill; or as a public promise that they feel an obligation to uphold.

We conducted a unique experiment to disentangle these mechanisms and infer not only whether but also how UNSC resolutions shape domestic politics. Our experiments, embedded in

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public opinion surveys, showed that U.S. citizens were substantially more willing to support war when the UNSC had authorized the mission than when it has not. Surprisingly, though, the UNSC did not move public opinion by altering beliefs about the merits of war, or by convincing Americans that the burden-sharking would make the war less costly to the United States. Instead, our evidence is most consistent with the hypothesis that UNSC resolutions are public commitments, which citizens feel obligated to fulfill as long as other countries do the same. These findings have significant implications for research about public support for war, and about the effect of international bodies on domestic politics.

In the remainder of this paper, we develop three theories about how the UNSC could affect public sentiment, and we derive the testable implications of each theory. We then introduce our experiment, estimate the overall effect of UNSC resolutions on public attitudes toward war, and test each of the causal mechanisms. We conclude by discussing the significance of these findings and suggesting avenues for future research.

2. Why Would the UNSC Influence Public Opinion?

There are at least three reasons why a UNSC resolution in favor of military force could influence U.S. public opinion. First, citizens might view the resolution as a persuasive signal that military force is warranted. Second, citizens could interpret the resolution as a signal that U.S. expenses will be lower because other countries will share the burden. Third, citizens might interpret the resolution as a collective commitment to get involved, and conclude that it would be wrong to renege on the collective commitment. For shorthand, we refer to these three reasons as

the *merit mechanism*, the *burden-sharing mechanism*, and the *public commitment mechanism*. In this section, we elaborate on all three mechanisms and derive the testable implications of each.

UNSC Resolutions as Signals about Merits

Publics do not have complete information about foreign crises, and therefore rely on domestic and international actors for cues about the appropriate course of action. The UNSC could play an important role in this process. By authorizing the use of force, the UNSC could convince domestic audiences that there must be a good case for military action.

A UNSC resolution could change peoples' estimates about the material costs and benefits of using force. An affirmative UNSC vote could help convince domestic audiences that the foreign crisis is genuine and severe, such that failure to take military action could threaten the material interests of the United States and/or other countries. An affirmative vote could also suggest that the human and financial costs of military action would be low, either in absolute terms or relative to the anticipated benefits. Finally, an affirmative vote could signal to domestic audiences that the probability of military success would be high, or at least sufficiently likely to warrant a positive recommendation. In all these ways, a UNSC resolution could alter the public's calculations about whether the benefits of war would outweigh the costs.

A UNSC resolution could also signal that military action would be morally appropriate, independent of the material costs and benefits. A positive vote in the Security Council could be seen as confirmation that some country has committed a moral wrong, such as an act of aggression against its own citizens or a foreign target, and that the international community has a duty to respond. The vote might also suggest that war would be "fair" – an action to which nearly all countries could consent, rather than a war that would serve the parochial interests of

particular countries. Finally, a war undertaken with the blessing of the UNSC would be legal, whereas war without UNSC approval might be seen as a (potentially immoral) violation of international law. Thus, UNSC resolutions could prove influential not only by conveying information about material costs and benefits, but also by signaling whether military action would be morally justified.

Of course, the UNSC is not the only voice on matters of war and peace; other domestic and international actors opine about the merits of military action. In the United States, for example, the president plays an important role in making the public case for war. Building on a long tradition of theoretical and empirical research, Chapman and Reiter (2004) posit that the mass public is fairly war-averse, "whereas the president may have a more expansive sense of the use of force" (p. 887). Thus, the president may propose war even in situations when the public— if properly informed—would conclude that war lacked merit.

Chapman and Reiter (2004) hypothesize that the Security Council can exert special influence in these kinds of situations, by either supporting or rejecting the president's recommendation. They assume that the UNSC and the American public are less hawkish than the U.S. president. Under these assumptions, citizens will interpret a pro-war resolution by the Security Council as "a strong signal of the appropriateness of military action" (Chapman 2011, 8). Their argument belongs to a more general class of theories, in which advice is most persuasive when it comes from an unlikely source. In this particular setting, a pro-war resolution by the Security Council is especially telling, because citizens view the Security Council as dovish and unlikely to recommend wars that lack merit.

Greico et al. (2011) develop a similar argument, in which the UNSC offers the public a "second opinion" about the merits of intervention. In their theory, members of the public are not

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fully informed about whether an external event warrants intervention, and therefore rely on cues from experts such as the President, the Congress, and the UNSC. They hypothesize that a UNSC signal will be most influential when individuals lack "confidence" in the President (and hence distrust what the President says); and when they "value" the international organization (in the sense of regarding it as a "trusted outsider"). They maintain that individuals will value an organization if they think their interests are aligned with the institution's interests on issues of military force (p. 566).[2]

This discussion sets up a number of testable implications. First, a UNSC resolution should affect public perceptions about the merit of military action. Other factors equal, citizens should be more likely to think that the benefits of war outweigh the costs, and/or conclude that war is morally justified, when the UNSC authorizes force than when it does not.

Second, individuals should perceive the UNSC as dovish in general. As Chapman (2012, 149) emphasizes, citizens need not "literally calculate the biases of individual Security Council members," but they do need to "view … the Security Council as generally reluctant to authorize force." If citizens have no clear idea where the Security Council stands, or if they regard the Council as hawkish rather than dovish, UNSC authorizations may not be persuasive.

Third, the effect of UNSC resolutions should vary with prior beliefs about the dovishness of the UNSC. According to Chapman (2011, 55), "public support for foreign policies is likely to increase with multilateral support … as the multilateral institution is perceived as more conservative," where "conservative" in this context means that the institution prefers the status

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[2] Thompson (2006) develops a similar argument that focuses on foreign audiences. He argues that countries work through the UNSC to send a signal to voters and policymakers in foreign countries.

quo to the alternative of using military force. If the public thinks the Security Council is biased in favor of the status quo, they are "more likely to take support as indicative that the policy … will not be overly costly or aggressive and should be supported."

Finally, the impact of UNSC authorization should depend on perceptions of the President's hawkishness. Both Chapman (2011) and Grieco et al. (2011) argue that citizens turn to the Security Council because they fear that the president might be leading the country into a meritless war. Thus, the effect of UNSC resolutions should be stronger for people who think the president is hawkish, since those are the people who would place the highest value on getting "independent verification of the president's statements."

UNSC Resolutions as Signals about Burden Sharing

UNSC resolutions could affect public opinion not only by signaling that military action is warranted, but also by implying that other countries will share the burden. Citizens may think the likelihood of success is higher if countries fight collectively than if their own country acts alone. Moreover, citizens may expect to pay less if coalition partners share the human and financial costs of defeating an adversary. For these reasons, the public should be more enthusiastic when they believe that other countries will help. By raising expectations about multilateral action, UNSC resolutions could, therefore, increase public support for war.

If UNSC resolutions sway public opinion by signaling that other countries will contribute, several patterns should appear in the data. First, the belief that other countries will contribute should be higher when the UNSC has voted for war than when it has not. Second, public expectations about the human and financial costs of war should be lower, and public

expectations about the probability of success should be higher, when the UNSC has voted for war than when it has not.

Third, one could assess the importance of the burden-sharing mechanism by comparing scenarios in which multilateral participation is possible to otherwise identical situations in which multilateral participation is impossible. To the extent that the burden-sharing mechanism is operative, UNSC resolutions should have a bigger effect when other countries could feasibly contribute to the operation, than when they physically could not contribute to the operation.

Finally, one could compare situations in which the public must make their own assumptions about the cost of the military action and the likelihood of success, versus otherwise identical situations in which the costs to the U.S. and the likelihood of success are independent of any Security Council resolution. If the burden sharing mechanism has explanatory power, the effect of a UNSC resolution should be larger when citizens can interpret Security Council resolutions as cues about costs and success, than when citizens do not need the UN to supply cues about the costs of war and the likelihood of success.

UNSC Resolutions as Conditional Public Commitments

Finally, UNSC resolutions could sway public opinion by implying that governments have collectively committed to war. We hypothesize that, when members of the Security Council resolve to use force, their citizens will interpret the resolution as a pledge to take military action. Public support for war should, therefore, rise among people who value fidelity to international commitments.

The effect could arise for either instrumental or non-instrumental reasons. Instrumentally, citizens understand that reneging on international commitments could involve reputational costs

(Tomz 2007, 2009). A country that refuses to contribute after having voted for the war will be branded as dishonest in the eyes of international observers. As doubts about the country's sincerity grow, the country will find it more difficult to communicate its intentions and achieve its foreign policy goals in the future (Sartori 2002, 2005). Citizens might also want to keep the commitment for non-instrumental reasons. Many people think that, as a matter of principle, one should honor commitments even when it might be possible to renege at relatively low cost. Thus, other factors equal, citizens should exhibit higher support for war if their government participated in a UNSC resolution than if they did not.

We expect, however, that most people will view Security Council resolutions as conditional commitments, rather than unconditional ones. They regard UNSC resolutions as promises to engage in *collective* action. These promises bind so long as other countries contribute to the collective enterprise. If many countries that supported the resolution ultimately fail to contribute, the remaining parties will be absolved of their obligation to participate. (We find it less plausible that citizens will view Security Council resolutions as unconditional commitments, which bind their own government to take action even if other countries fail to keep their part of the bargain.)

If UNSC resolutions affect public opinion by giving rise to conditional commitments, several patterns should appear in the data. First, the belief that other countries will contribute should be higher when the UNSC has voted for war than when it has not. Second, if citizens regard UNSC resolutions as conditional commitments, support for war should wane if citizens learn that other countries will not uphold their end of the bargain. Of course, the burden sharing theory makes these same two predictions. Thus, based on these predictions alone, one could not distinguish the burden-sharing theory from the conditional commitment theory.

For critical insight, we identify patterns that would hold under one theory but not the other. In particular, if UNSC resolutions work mainly by establishing public commitments (rather than by raising expectations of burden-sharing), then UNSC resolutions should move public opinion, even if they have no effect on perceptions about the cost of military action or the likelihood of success. Moreover, UNSC resolutions should prove consequential, even in specific scenarios for which multilateral participation would not affect either the cost of the operation or the likelihood of success.

3. Do UNSC Resolutions Affect Public Opinion?

A small but growing body of research contends that UNSC resolutions affect public opinion. Chapman and Reiter (2004) analyzed how American citizens responded to U.S. involvement in military disputes between 1945 and 2001. They found that Americans rallied more strongly behind the president when the UNSC had authorized U.S. military action than when it had not. On average, presidential approval was 9 percentage points higher in missions that attracted UNSC support. This finding, though suggestive, is not definitive; the correlation between UNSC resolutions and the rally effect could, unfortunately, be spurious. If, historically,

the UNSC approved of military action when the case was abundantly clear to everyone, including the mass public, we would expect a strong correlation between UNSC approval and public approval, even if the UNSC resolution had no independent causal effect.

Recognizing the limits of what we can infer from historical evidence, researchers more recently have turned to survey experiments. Chapman (2011, 121-26), for example, presented students at the University of Texas with five hypothetical military situations. For each situation, he told half the sample that the UNSC had voted to allow the US government to use military force, and told the other half that the UNSC had voted against letting the US take the proposed military measures. For example, the first scenario said "The United Nations Security Council has voted (for/against) a resolution to authorize the United States to take preemptive military actions to bomb suspected nuclear weapons development sites inside of Iran. Would you support the U.S. taking this action or not?" In this scenario and others, support for military action was higher when the UNSC had voted for war than when it had voted against war.

A second experiment, by Grieco et al. (2011), was administered by telephone to a random sample of U.S. adults. Participants were asked whether they would approve of the US "taking military action to defend the democratic government of East Timor against an insurrection." All respondents were told that the US president favored the operation. Half the sample heard that "the UN Security Council and our NATO allies" favored the operation, while the remainder heard that the UNSC and NATO opposed the operation. Support for intervention was

substantially higher when the UNSC and our NATO allies sided with the president, then when they did not.[3]

These experiments confirm that UNSC resolutions can move public opinion. However, each experiment has certain limitations. The experiment by Chapman (2011) was administered to a small sample of college students, and may not be generalizable to a more diverse population. The experiment by Grieco et al. (2011) was fielded to a more representative sample, but in all experimental conditions the UNSC and NATO allies concurred: both supported the operation, or both opposed the operation. Consequently, we do not know whether public support was higher because citizens were swayed by the UNSC, by NATO allies, or both.

Moreover, neither experiment was optimized test the variety of mechanisms by which the UNSC could affect public opinion. Grieco et al. (2011), for example, interpret their finding as evidence that international organizations sway the mass public by offering "second opinion" about the merits of military action. They acknowledge other possibilities, including the hypothesis that international organizations shape public opinion by sending signals about the likelihood of burden-sharing and effectiveness. They conclude that future researchers should "investigate and compare" the variety of reasons why international organizations could influence public attitudes toward the use of force.

To shed new light on whether and how the UNSC shapes public opinion, we designed a new experiment and embedded it in a public opinion survey. The survey started by presenting some basic facts about the history, membership, and voting rules of the UNSC. Respondents read

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[3] In addition, half the sample heard that "Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress" favored the operation, while the remainder heard that Congressional leaders opposed the operation. The UN/NATO treatment swayed public opinion, not only when Congress approved the operation, but also when Congress did not.

that the U.N. Security Council was created in 1946 to deal with international peace and security.

They were told:

> The U.N. Security Council has five permanent members, who have been on the Council since 1946. The five permanent members are the United States, Britain, France, China, and Russia. The Council also has ten temporary members, who are elected every two years by the U.N. General Assembly. This year, the temporary members are Azerbaijan, Colombia, Germany, Guatemala, India, Morocco, Pakistan, Portugal, South Africa, and Togo. Thus, the Security Council has fifteen members in total.
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> The Council sometimes passes resolutions about the use of military force. When deciding whether to pass a resolution, each of the fifteen members gets one vote. A resolution passes if at least nine members vote YES. However, if any permanent member votes NO, the resolution fails. Thus, each of the five permanent members has the power to block or "veto" a resolution.

To make sure everyone understood this information, we gave subjects a quiz, affirmed when they got the answers right, and corrected mistakes when they got the answers wrong.[4] Our respondents gave correct responses more than 90% of the time, indicating that they were paying attention to our survey.

Next we presented a hypothetical scenario. In our control condition subjects read the following information.

> We are going to describe a situation the United States could face in the future. For scientific validity the situation is general, and is not about a specific country in the news today. Some parts of the description may strike you as important; other parts may seem unimportant. Please read the details very carefully. After describing the situation, we will ask a few questions.

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[4] The quiz asked: (1) In any given year, how many countries are members of the U.N. Security Council? (2) How many countries are permanent members of the U.N. Security Council? (3) Which of the following countries are permanent members of the U.N. Security Council? The list included Brazil, Britain, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, India, Russia, and the United States. (4) What happens if one of the five permanent members votes NO on a resolution? The choices were "the resolution fails" or "the resolution passes if enough other countries vote YES."

A country in Africa recently sent its military to take over a neighboring country. The attacking country is led by a dictator, who invaded to get more power and resources. The attacking country has a powerful military, and the neighbor is too weak to defend itself. The U.S. president says the invasion is immoral and will hurt U.S. interests. He wants the U.S. military to push out the invaders.

In the treatment condition, we presented the same scenario, but inserted the following sentences immediately after saying that the neighbor was too weak to defend itself.

The U.N. Security Council passed a resolution calling for immediate military action to push out the invaders. All 5 permanent members of the Security Council (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States), and all 10 temporary members of the Security Council, voted for the resolution. By passing this resolution, the Security Council authorized a military mission to push out the invaders.

The scenario was loosely based on previous UNSC resolutions involving the use of force, such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. After reading information about the scenario we asked a number of follow up questions including whether the respondent favored, opposed, or neither favor or opposed sending the US military to push out the invaders.

We fielded this experiment in May 2012 to a diverse sample of 550 U.S. adults, whom we recruited via an online service called Amazon Mechanical Turk. MTurk subscribers are younger, more likely to be female, and more liberal than the national population. Nevertheless, Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz (2012) show that experiments on MTurk produce roughly the same treatment effects as experiments on nationally representative samples.

In the control condition 35% of the sample supported sending U.S. troops to push out the invaders. In contrast, 53% of individuals in the treatment condition supported sending the U.S. military. Thus, in this experiment, the UNSC resolution led to an 18 percentage point increase in public support for the use of force. The 95% confidence interval around this estimate ran from 10% to 26%. Thus, the effect was not only substantively large but also statistically significant. In

the sections that follow, we examine this treatment effect in greater detail, to shed light on *why* the UNSC moved public opinion so substantially.

4. Testing the Signal-of-Merit Mechanism

In this section we test the theory that UNSC resolutions affect public opinion by convincing citizens about the merits of military action. First, we test whether the UNSC changes perceptions of merit, either by altering perceptions about material costs and benefits or by changing perceptions of morality. Second, we test the key assumption that citizens know the overall tendencies of the UNSC and regard the council as dovish on matters of military force. Third, we test whether the effects of UNSC authorization are moderated by prior perceptions about whether the council is hawkish or dovish. Finally, we test whether UNSC resolutions exert more effect on citizens who think the president is hawkish, than on citizens who think the president is dovish. These four sets of tests match the observable implications we derived in section 2.

Test 1: The Effect of the UNSC on Perceptions of Merit

Does the UNSC affect public beliefs about whether military action would be warranted? To find out, we asked participants a series of questions about the material costs and benefits of sending military forces, and about the morality of taking that decision. First, we elicited expectations about what would happen if the U.S. did not send military forces. We asked whether, in the absence of U.S. action, the invading country would take over its neighbor; the invasion would lead to many civilian deaths; the attacker would invade other countries in the future; the U.S. economy would suffer; and/or the U.S. security would suffer. Second, we measured expectations about what would happen if the U.S. did take military action. How many

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American soldiers would die, how much money would the war cost the U.S. government, and what is the probability that the mission would succeed? Finally, we asked whether respondents thought the U.S. had a moral obligation to send troops to expel the invaders.

If citizens treat UN resolutions as signals of merit, perceptions should vary, depending on whether the UN authorized force or not. As Figure 1 shows, though, we found no statistical or substantive contrast between the treatment condition (T), in which the UNSC authorized force, and the control condition (C), in which the UNSC did not. The only exception was the morality: the percentage of respondents who felt the U.S. had a moral responsibility to intervene was around 12 percentage points higher in the treatment condition than in the control condition. This fact is noteworthy, but it is also consistent with the collective commitment theory. Overall, though, we find surprisingly little evidence that citizens interpret UNSC resolutions as cues about the merits of taking military action.
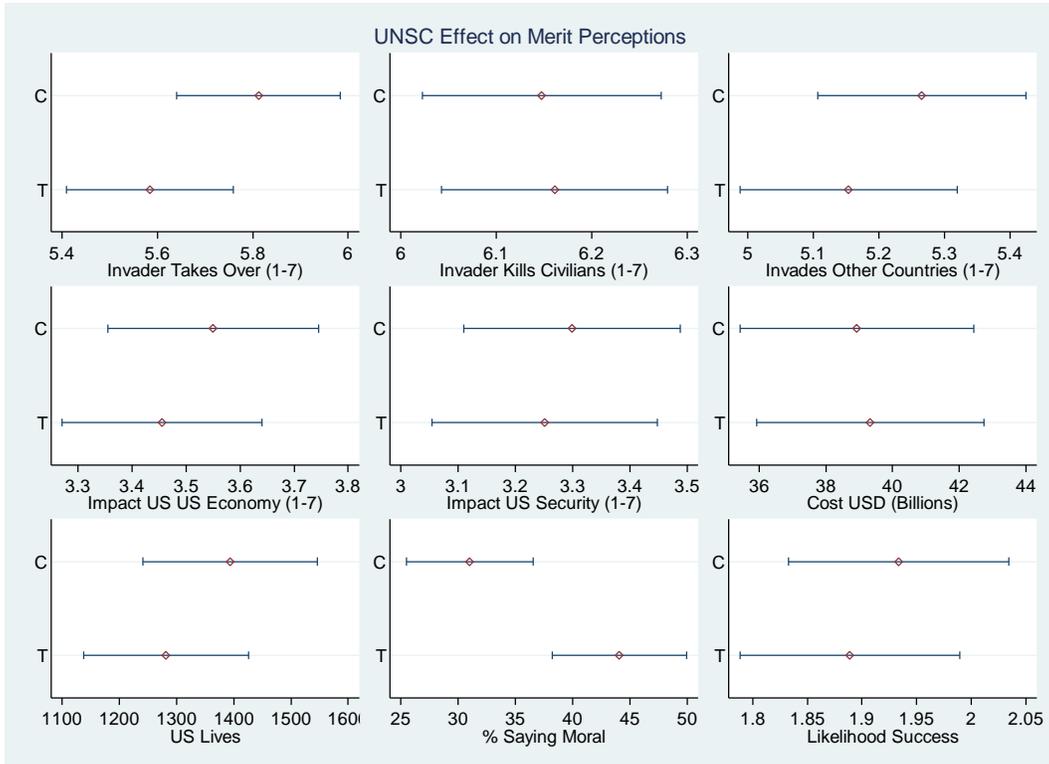
Figure 1: Impact of the treatment condition (T) versus control condition (C) on perceptions of the merits of the mission. Average levels and 95% confidence intervals displayed for each experimental condition.

Test 2: Prior perceptions of UNSC hawkishness

Prior to presenting the scenario about the invading country, we asked people to place the UNSC on a seven-point scale, ranging from extremely dovish (thinks that military force should never be used under any circumstances) to extremely hawkish (thinks there are many situations in which military force should be used to deal with problems).[5] In addition, we asked how confident people felt about where they had located the UNSC on the scale.

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[5] Some people think that military force should never be used under any circumstances. They are at "1" on the scale below. Other people think there are many situations in which military force should be used to deal with problems. They are at "7" on the scale below. And, of course, other people have opinions in between. Where do you think the U.N. Security Council, as a group, usually stands on this same scale?

Figure 2 shows that perceptions of UNSC hawkishness varied considerably. Moreover, almost no one thought the UNSC was extremely dovish or extremely hawkish. Instead, nearly 75% of respondents placed the UNSC at a 3, 4, or 5, the three central values on our seven point scale. Overall, participants in our study did not perceive the UNSC as highly dovish about the use of force.

Moreover, the vast majority of individuals had little idea about where to place the UNSC on the hawk-dove scale. 25% "were not sure at all," and more than half were only "somewhat sure" about the overall military proclivities of the council. If most citizens cannot place the council, and if, when urged to guess, citizens generally do place the UNSC at the dovish end of the spectrum, it seems unlikely that UNSC authorizations exert influence via the mechanisms hypothesized by Chapman (2011) and others.
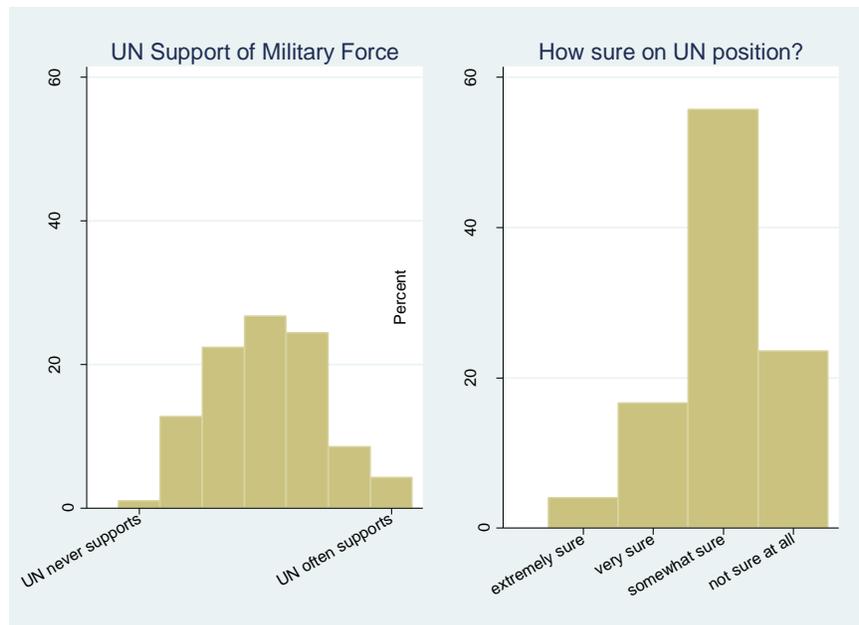

Figure 2. Pre-treatment opinions of UNSC hawkishness and opinion confidence.

Test 3: UNSC persuasiveness by prior perceptions of UNSC

An additional implication of the signaling merit explanation is that perceptions about the

hawkishness or dovishness of the UNSC should moderate the effect of the UNSC support for the

use of force. Is there any evidence that supports this view? In his book *Securing Approval*,

Chapman (2011) reports an experiment in which he manipulated prior information about the bias

of the UNSC. Half the college students who participated in this experiment were told:

> The Security Council has a solid record of supporting U.S. initiatives in all areas of the
> globe and experts expect the council to develop a resolution heavily influenced by U.S.
> goals. Since its inception in 1945, the Security Council has only failed to adopt
> resolutions put forth by the United States twice, while passing over 400 U.S. initiatives.
> Despite several high-profile debates in the council, it has historically been regarded as an
> advocate of U.S. policy and, since the United States holds an important position on the
> council, its policy has traditionally been dictated by U.S. interests.

The other half were told:

> The Security Council has historically played an important role as a counter to U.S.
> dominance in most areas of the globe. Since its inception in 1945, the Security Council
> has only passed resolutions put forth by the United States twice, while voting down over
> 400 U.S. initiatives. The council also has historically been extremely conservative in
> granting authorization for various military actions. The United States, in particular, has
> had difficulty garnering Council support because many of its members often oppose U.S.
> policy and unipolarity.

Chapman then presented a series of hypothetical military situations, randomized whether

the UNSC supported or opposed the use of force, and asked participants for their opinion about

whether the U.S. should take military action. According to the UN-as-signal-of-merit theory, the

effect of UN authorization should have been stronger among people who read that the UNSC

generally opposes the U.S., than among people who read that the UNSC generally supports the

U.S. The data did not match this expectation, however. On the contrary, Chapman found that UN resolutions had a slightly bigger effect on recipients who were told that the UNSC was biased in favor of the U.S.

We used our experiment to conduct a follow-up test. Instead of manipulating the perceived hawkishness or dovishness of the UNSC, we asked respondents (before treatment) to place the UNSC on a hawk-dove scale. We then tested whether these pre-treatment attitudes moderated the effect of the UNSC. Specifically, we estimated a probit regression model in which the binary dependent variable was 1 if the respondent wanted to send military forces, and 0 otherwise. The key independent variables were the treatment (dummy variable that took a value of 1 if the UNSC authorized the use of force, and 0 otherwise); the respondent's perception about the location of the UNSC on the seven-point hawkishness scale; and the interaction of these two variables. Signal-of-merit theory predicts that the coefficient on the interaction term will be negative and substantively significant. Put differently, the effect of the treatment should be smaller among citizens who think the UNSC is hawkish. We found a negative interaction term, but it was statistically insignificant (β=-.06, t=-.78).

To assess the robustness of these findings, we included additional control variables, including the respondent's own level of hawkishness, or their hawkishness relative to the UNSC. We also estimated a linear linear regression in which the dependent variable was the respondent's level of support for sending U.S. troops, measured on a seven-point scale instead of as a binary variable. None of these analyses uncovered an interaction term that was statistically or substantively significant. Overall, then, we found no evidence that the effect of UNSC approval depended on a respondent's own perception about the dovishness of the Council.

Test 4: UNSC persuasiveness by prior perceptions of the president

The influence of the UNSC treatment might also depend on the perceived hawkishness of the President, whether an individual thought the President was less hawkish than themselves, or if they thought the UNSC was less hawkish than the President. To explore these possibilities we also measured, prior to the treatment, where respondents placed themselves on the dove-hawk scale, and where they placed Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush. Next, we created interactions between the treatment variable and these measures or measures derived from them (e.g., whether an individual was more hawkish than a President). In supplementary materials we report these statistical models, which again cast doubt on the view that perceptions of hawkishness by an actor supporting the use of force will decrease the persuasiveness of their message to use force. Apparently, the influence of UNSC authorizations was not moderated by the perceived hawkishness of the two most recent US Presidents.

5. Testing the Burden Sharing and Public Commitment Mechanisms

If the UNSC does not change expectations about the merits of the mission, does it suggest that other countries will share the military burden, and/or that governments have publicly pledged to join a collective mission? In this section we test the empirical predictions of the burden sharing and public commitment theories.

Both theories predict that a UNSC resolution will cause citizens to think that other countries will contribute to mission. To test this prediction, we described the scenario (with or without the news that the UNSC had authorized the mission) and then asked, "If the U.S. sent its military, how likely is it that other countries would help the U.S. carry out the operation?" Subjects chose one of five options: no chance, 25% chance, 50% chance, 75% chance, or 100%

likely. We mapped these answers onto a natural scale from 0 to 100%. On average, people who received the treatment, which involved a UNSC resolution, thought there was a 70% chance others would participate. Those who received the control condition, without a UNSC resolution, thought the probability was only 50%, a contrast that was highly significant both substantively and statistically (p<.01).

To what extent did this change in beliefs lead to greater enthusiasm for the military mission? To answer this question we conducted a mediation analysis (Imai, Keele, Tingley and Yamamoto 2011), which involved two stages. First, we used OLS regression to estimate the effect of the UNSC resolution on the belief that others would help. Second, we used probit regression to estimate how the belief that others would help increased support for sending U.S. troops, *controlling* for the UNSC resolution. Using the *mediate* package (Hicks and Tingley 2011), we found that the probability of support for sending troops changed by 8 percentage points [95% CI: 5%, 12%] because of UNSC-induced change in in the perception that others would help. This effect accounted for 45% of the total effect of the treatment.[6]

For additional evidence that these perceptions were driving public support for war, we designed a follow-up experiment in which we randomized not only the presence or absence of a UN resolution, but also the likelihood that other countries would help. Our experiment involved a new treatment condition, in which we randomly told some respondents: "If the U.S. gets involved, it will have to act alone. Other countries can't help, either because they do not have the

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[6] In this design we did not randomly assign whether other countries would participate. The mediation analysis relies on the assumption that there is no unmeasured confounder influencing both sending troops and the intermediate variable. Sensitivity analysis suggests that this result is extremely robust.

military capability, or because they are experiencing economic crises at home." We carefully chose this language to avoid suggesting that other countries refused to help because they disagreed with the merit of the mission. We call this the *No Help* condition. If providing this information substantially decreases the effect of the UNSC approval, we can be more confident UN resolutions work by signaling information about the behavior of other countries.

When we told subjects that the UNSC had passed a resolution but the U.S. would have to act alone, 41% wanted to send U.S. troops. In contrast, recall that 53% supported sending U.S. troops when the UN passed a resolution but we did not say the U.S. would have to act alone. Thus, the news that other countries would not help caused the effect of the UNSC resolution to decline by $53 - 41 = 12$ percentage points, leaving a residual treatment effect of only $41 - 35 = 6$ percentage points. Put another way, the *No Help* condition reduced the treatment to only one-third of its original value, bringing it to a level that was statistically indistinguishable from zero.

In summary, both our mediation analysis and the *No Help* experiment reveal that UNSC resolutions affect public opinion mainly by heightening expectations that other countries will participate in the operation. This finding is consistent with both the burden sharing and collective commitment theories. We now describe a series of additional tests, which allow us to discriminate between the burden sharing and collective commitment mechanisms.

Burden sharing theory predicts UNSC resolutions will encourage citizens to anticipate multilateral action, which in turn will lead them to revise their estimates about how much of the human and financial costs would fall directly on the United States. Similarly, citizens might expect that the chances of success are higher with multilateral action than with unilateral action. Consequently, if the burden sharing theory is correct, public expectations about the human and

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financial costs of war should be lower, and public expectations about the probability of success should be higher, when the UNSC has voted for war than when it has not.

Our data do not support this prediction. As shown in Figure 1, the passage of a UNSC resolution did not affect estimates of how much the mission would cost the US in dollars and lives, or about the likelihood that the mission would succeed in expelling the invaders. Thus, the patterns in Figure 1 contradict not only the signal-of-merit theory, but also the burden sharing theory.

To double-check this finding, we administered an additional experimental condition, in which we explicitly fixed the cost of the mission and the likelihood of success. Some respondents, selected at random, were told: "There is no doubt that the U.S. military could push out the invaders. However, the operation would cost the U.S. government $20 billion, and 1000 American soldiers would die." We call this the *Fixed costs/success* condition. If UNSC resolutions change public opinion by altering beliefs about cost and success, then when we fix those parameters, the influence of the resolution should diminish.

Figure 3 shows, however, that the effect of the UNSC resolution remained just as large when we fixed the costs and the probability of success, as when we did not. Recall that, when we did not fix the cost and the probability of success, the UNSC resolution increased public support for war by $53 - 35 = 18$ percentage points. When we fixed the financial costs at $20 billion, the human costs at 1,000 American soldiers, and the likelihood of success as nearly certain, the effect was similar. Approximately 42% of respondents favored U.S. military action in the context of a UNSC resolution, whereas only 26% wanted to deploy U.S. troops without a resolution, implying a UNSC effect of $42 - 26 = 16$ percentage points.
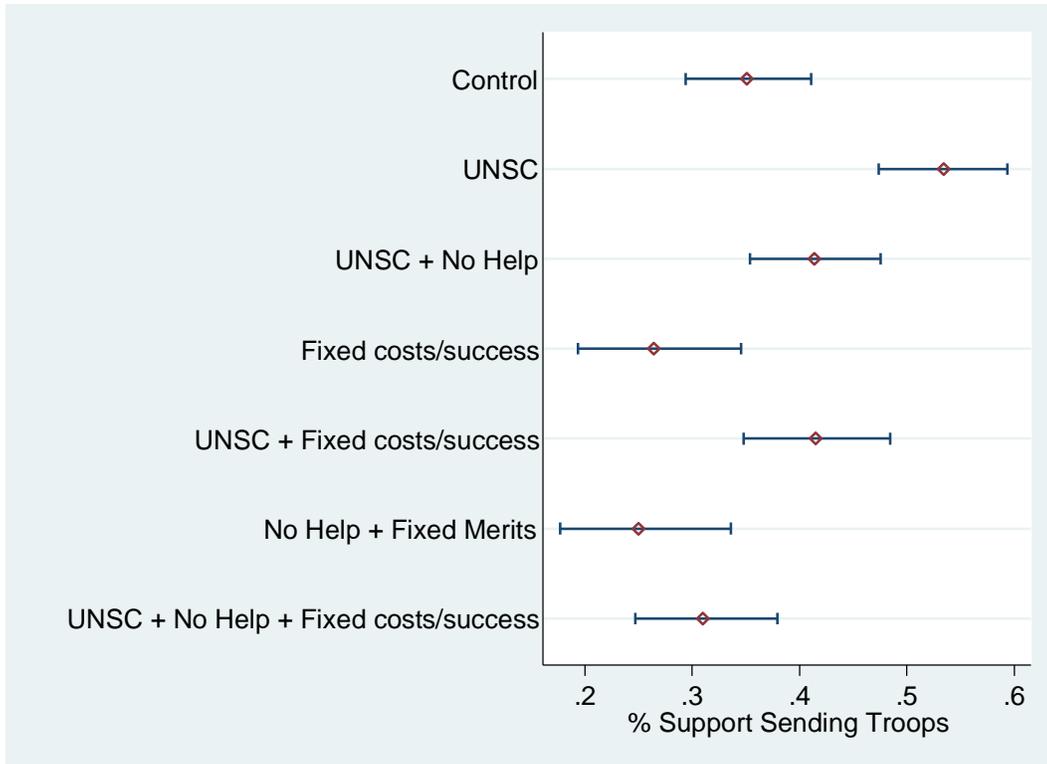
Figure 3: Comparison of treatment effects on support for sending troops. Proportions supporting sending troops with 95% confidence intervals based on the binomial distribution.

In summary, burden sharing theory predicts that UNSC resolutions affect public opinion by changing popular perceptions about the burden the U.S. will bear, and the likelihood that it will succeed. We find no empirical support for these predictions. In our experiment, the UNSC resolution had no effect on perceptions of financial cost, human cost, or the likelihood of victory. Moreover, when we designed an experiment that explicitly suppressed the mechanism at the heart of burden sharing theory, by fixing the costs to the U.S. and the likelihood of success, the effect of the UNSC resolution remained large and robust.

For a final, critical test between the burden sharing and collective commitment theories, we investigate the effect of the *No Help* condition, in scenarios where the UN has passed a resolution and we have fixed the merits. Burden sharing theory implies that the *No Help*

condition will have no effect, *after* fixing the costs of the mission and the likelihood of success. In contrast, conditional commitment theory predicts that the introduction of the *No Help* condition will sap public support for war, even after fixing the merits of the operation. We find the latter pattern. When the UNSC voted for war and we fixed the merits, around 42% of Americans wanted to send U.S. troops. When we also mentioned that the U.S. would need to act alone, support fell to only 31%. This 11-point decline in support is consistent with collective commitment theory, but not with burden sharing theory.

6. Conclusion

Recent work suggests that international institutions can have an indirect effect on foreign policy by influencing public opinion. In this paper we focused on whether and why the UNSC might shape public attitudes toward war. The UNSC is a major institution, which leaders often consult before going to battle. It is important to understand exactly why publics might be swayed by signals from this international organization.

We distinguished three reasons why UNSC authorization might be influential and subjected them to a series of tests. Signal-of-merit theory, perhaps the best developed with respect to the UNSC, received surprisingly little support in our data. Burden sharing theory was consistent with some aspects of the data, but ultimately failed several crucial tests. Public commitment theory accorded most closely with our data. Apparently, UNSC authorizations signal collective commitments, which citizens want to fulfill independent of any beliefs about the cost of the mission and the likelihood of success.

There are ample opportunities for future research. We conducted our experiment on a convenience sample of U.S. adults. Future research could involve more representative samples,

and could study public opinion in other countries. It would be particularly instructive to conduct studies in countries that are not members of the UNSC, since the collective commitment mechanism should not apply to countries that never voted for the resolution. By examining the behavior of the public in other countries, we could also assess whether the UNSC has different effects on the U.S. citizens than on other domestic audiences.

Future research could also include new experiments to illuminate additional causal mechanisms. For example, Voeten (2005) argues that UNSC resolutions are tacit commitments not to obstruct a military mission. Perhaps domestic audiences perceive the resolutions this way: when the Security Council authorizes the use of force, domestic publics conclude that other countries have given the "green light" and will not impede their own government's efforts to carry out the operation. It would also be fascinating to study how the public responds to resolutions that attract widespread support but fail because one or more permanent members casts a veto. Likewise, it would be informative to study resolutions that pass because great powers use carrots and sticks to obtain the desired vote tally.

Finally, the public may apply different criteria when thinking about other types of international organizations. In the case of foreign aid, Milner and Tingley (2012) find that burden sharing looms large in public option about whether to support institutions like the World Bank. Future research could investigate the relative importance of our three mechanisms—signaling merit, signaling burden sharing, and making commitments—in other international spheres.

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