UNDERSTANDING ELECTED MEMBER INFLUENCE

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK TO EXPLAIN INFLUENCE
ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

BRIEFING NOTE, DECEMBER 2018

Background

On 14 June 2018, the Security Council Analysis Network (SCAN) participated in a New York roundtable by United Nations University and Security Council Report. At that roundtable, entitled 'Influence in the UN Security Council: What Role for the E-10?', SCAN members presented preliminary research findings from a 5-year project funded by the Australian Research Council. This project critically engages with the conventional wisdom that the centrality of the permanent members of the Security Council (P5) crowds out any space for elected members (E10) to have meaningful influence in Council decision-making. It argues that scholarly analysis of Council decision-making, with its focus on the P5, has overlooked many of the dynamics critical to the Council's outcomes, resulting in shallow understandings of the various ways in which the E10 wield influence. One of the project's objectives is to map the diplomatic practice of the Council with specific reference to the role and influence of the 188 UN member states that do not hold permanent Council membership.

The main purpose of the 14 June roundtable was to initiate a dialogue with UN practitioners and experts on SCAN's preliminary research findings. The roundtable considered questions such as: the issues on which elected members have the most influence; the institutional and procedural conditions that facilitate or hamper elected members' influence; the impact of dynamics outside the Security Council on the influence of elected members on the Council; and the best ways for elected members to maintain influence on Council decision-making beyond their two-year term.

This *Briefing Note* develops the project further by proposing a three-dimensional framework to understand influence on Security Council decision-making. This framework comprises the following three dimensions: the *pathways of influence*, the *purchasing power of influence* and the *practice of influence*.

Pathways of Influence

The research of our project suggests that 'the other 188' enjoy significant opportunities for voice and influence in the Security Council's decision-making process. Drawing on examples that emerged from interviews and workshops with current and former UN diplomats, UN staff, civil society representatives, and academics, we have identified five *pathways of influence*.

1. Agenda shaping: members are able to set, maintain, reform, and block agenda items.

2. Brokering new solutions: members develop and/or advocate an innovative approach.

3. Shaping outcomes: members influence the substance of a Council decision, even if they are not a primary driver for its adoption.

4. Blocking outcomes: members block a Council outcome under Article 27 of the Charter.

5. Incremental reform: members reform procedures embedded in existing Council agendas.

In this context, it is important to note that opportunities for influencing Council decision-making go well beyond stints of elected membership.

The Purchasing Power of Influence

Within those pathways of influence, we offer four key – mutually reinforcing – explanatory factors of E10 influence, which we call the purchasing power of influence.

Diplomatic capacities and competences

Diplomatic practices and the personal qualities of elected member representatives—their *diplomatic competences*—are particularly important in accounting for elected member influence. These include the longevity of association with the UN, expert knowledge and proficiency, and personal charisma. Our interviews with UN practitioners have revealed that many accord substantial explanatory weight to the reputation, tactical skill and tenaciousness of an elected member's Permanent Representative and its other senior diplomats.

Representative legitimacy and voice

Legitimacy dynamics are critical to Council practice. Although the permanent members enjoy an outsized role in Council decision-making, it is not an exclusive role. Permanent members need the elected members, and not only to obtain the nine affirmative votes necessary for a resolution. An institution that is seen *only* as a vessel for manipulation by the most powerful states quickly loses its influence. Without legitimacy, the Council—like any institution—loses authority: states more often ignore its decisions and turn to alternative institutions. That is, for its decisions to have impact in the world, the Council needs to command the respect, consent and compliance of the world's states and, increasingly, its non-state actors. This means that elected members must be effective, or least *seen to be* effective, in representing the views of the broader UN membership.

Formal and informal mechanisms of influence

Our broader observations of Council dynamics highlight specific mechanisms, formal or informal, commonly seen in cases of elected member influence. For instance, elected members have at times used the rotating Presidency astutely to provide a platform to set and advance an agenda. The provisional rules of procedure (ProP) have given non-permanent members the opportunity to participate in Council debates in specific circumstances. Mechanisms like Arria-formula meetings have allowed council members to address an issue in the absence of a consensus to hold a formal meeting. Coalition-building practices have enabled elected members to leverage representative legitimacy as a means of influence. Finally, elected member influence may rely on the input and active cooperation of epistemic communities and outside experts on a particular issue.

Favourable conditions

Exercising influence is not simply a matter of assembling resources and employing a set of tactics. While the agency of an elected member will be crucial in determining influence, the ability to influence Council decision-making is often constrained by factors beyond the control of any one state. Timing, the political context and the specific composition of the Council are particularly important. Furthermore, the longer an issue is considered, the greater the opportunities for influence. Whereas the pace of Council diplomacy often limits the entry points for elected member influence, issues on which the P5 are either stalemated or not seeking a rapid decision allow elected members the time to build a coalition, develop proposals and solutions, and engage Council members through creative diplomacy.

Practical Recommendations for E10 Influence

Based on these explanatory factors, we offer the following tentative practical recommendations for elected (and aspiring) members on how to exercise influence in and around the UN Security Council. These recommendations will be further substantiated and refined in the final phase of our project.

Combine pragmatism and principle: explore and exploit the art of the possible; at the same time consider the primary purpose of the Security Council: to maintain international peace and security.

Responsible diplomacy: cultivate good working relations with permanent members, while making it clear that your diplomatic support cannot be taken for granted.

Networked diplomacy: harness and invest in diplomatic networks and coalitions in and around the Security Council.

Strategic diplomacy: be prepared and strengthen legitimacy by cultivating and representing constituents (national, regional, like-minded).

Smart diplomacy: be creative and innovative in setting precedents through diplomatic practice; keep in mind that the UN Charter is a flexible instrument and that the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council offer a great deal of diplomatic leeway.

Maximize expertise and experience: exploit synergies between capitals, missions, UN Headquarters, NGOs, and the epistemic community.

Institutional memory: build and sustain a repertoire of Security Council working methods and practice.

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