

THE FRAMING OF THE ROHINGYA CRISIS: UNITED NATIONS' SECURITY COUNCIL (UNSC) AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (R2P)

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Abstract

In this paper, we will argue that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is framing a narrative that enables them to sanction the Government of Myanmar and urge them to stop the atrocities, but at the same time does not obligate the UNSC to take any meaningful steps to help the people facing human rights violations. This paper looks into the situation in Rakhine State and show that: First, the criteria of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) paradigm and therefore the criteria that justify UNSC military intervention apply; Secondly, the narrative the United Nation (UN) has used is not congruent to what we see happening in Myanmar according to the UNSC statements. This paper asserts that a new narrative must be framed that accurately labels the atrocities in Myanmar. By doing so, we hope this will put intervention back on the agenda for the UNSC to further discuss the case, primarily concerning the severe implications of UN in-action, as proved in case of the Rwandan genocide.

INTRODUCTION

The long-simmering conflict between the Government of Myanmar and the Rohingya intensified on 25 August 2017 when the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked around 30 police stations and a military camp in northern Rakhine State. This attack was followed by organized killings, rape, looting, and razing villages from the Myanmar Military. The brutal retaliation forced over 600,000 people, the majority being Rohingya Muslims, to seek refuge in neighboring countries, most extensively in Bangladesh.¹

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¹ Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, "Darker and more dangerous: Higher Commissioner updates the Human Rights Council on human rights issues in 40 countries. United Nations Human Rights Office of

In September 2017, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to impose targeted sanctions and an arms embargo on Myanmar. However, the gravity of the crisis and continuation of human rights violations against the Rohingya people calls for UN military intervention, through the setting up of a UN peacekeeping mission in Myanmar, to end the persistent attacks on the Rohingya.

From the perspective of the theories of causal stories and framing narratives, we want to show that there are sufficient empirical facts to justify UN military intervention in Myanmar based on the prevailing rationale of the UN's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) paradigm. The question is, has the UNSC framed the situation in a way that prevents them from intervening even though requirements for intervention under the principles of responsibility to protect have been met?

In this paper, we will argue that the UNSC is framing a narrative that enables them to sanction the Government of Myanmar and urge them to stop the atrocities, but at the same time does not obligate the UNSC to take any meaningful steps to help the people facing human rights violations. To make our case we will first consider the concept of causal stories and framing narratives as introduced by Deborah Stone.² Furthermore, we will see how other authors have developed the concept and investigate Carrie Booth Walling's application in analyzing decision-making in the UNSC.³

From this theoretical base, we will then look at the situation in Rakhine State and show that: First, the criteria of the R2P paradigm and therefore the criteria that justify UNSC military intervention apply; Secondly, the narrative the UN has used is not congruent to what we see happening in Myanmar according to the UNSC statements.

From this, the paper asserts that a new narrative must be framed that accurately labels the atrocities in Myanmar. By doing so, we hope this will put intervention back on the agenda for the UNSC to further discuss the case, primarily with regard to the severe implications of UN in-action, as proved in case of the Rwandan genocide.

the High Commissioner", available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/News_Events/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22041&LangID=>(accessed on: 05 March 2019).

² Deborah A Stone, "Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas" *Political Science Quarterly*, USA, Vol. 104, no. 2, 1989, pp. 281-300.

³ Carrie Booth Walling, "Human Rights Norms, State Sovereignty, and Humanitarian Intervention", *Human Rights Quarterly*, John Hopkins University Press (USA), Vol. (37)2, 2015, pp.383-413.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter of the paper, we will first discuss the theory of framing narratives and how it was used in the UNSC context before. Subsequently, we discuss the basics of the R2P framework to show when military intervention according to the UN's guidelines is justified and necessary.

2.1. Causal Stories and Framing Narratives

In accordance with Deborah Stone, this paper takes a constructivist point of view. We live in a 'social world' and how we see a particular situation or conflict is shaped by ideas. Political actors, in turn, can create stories to portray issues as it suits their agenda which helps them gain support for their policy goals. An important aspect of this argument is that policymakers are framing issues deliberately to control situations. Causal stories are not only important for agenda-setting but also for the consecutive choice between policy alternatives. Further, Stone states that fights over causal stories “[...] are fights about the possibility of control and the assignment of responsibility”.⁴

In the context of the argument related to inaction, we want to stress that, this view is also applicable if we want to detect a causal story or narrative as a hindrance of action. As pointed out by Knill and Tosun, relevant policy decisions are not only comprised of what legislatures do but also by what they do not do.⁵ Likewise, Entman posits that most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omissions of potential problem definitions, evaluations, and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding the audience (for instance omitting a genocide perpetrated by a government, as in our case study).⁶

In contrast to Stone's concept that mainly focuses on cause and effect, Carrie B. Walling's application of framing narratives helps us understand processes inside the UNSC. In her 2015 article, she examines how the framing of conflicts and the definitions of norms have determined UNSC action or inaction. By examining the members' statements, she shows that how they frame the conflicts on the agenda is directly related to the policy outcome.⁷

According to Walling, the powerful narratives or stories that the members of the UNSC create during formal meetings are highly significant and are based on the legal frameworks of the UN Charter or internationally shared moral

⁴ Supra note 2, p. 283.

⁵ Christoph Knill, Jale Tosun, *Public Policy: A New Introduction*, Basingstoke:Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, P.114

⁶ Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm”, *Journal of Communication*, Cambridge University Press USA, Vol. 43(4), 1993, pp. 51-58.

⁷ Supra note 3, pp. 383-413.