

Advocacy and Change in International Organizations:

Communication, Protection, and Reconstruction in UN

Peacekeeping. By Kseniya Oksamytna. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. 288p. \$110.00 cloth.

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There is a vast scholarly literature on the evolution of international organizations (IOs) and on how IOs adapt in the face of new threats, challenges, and opportunities. The focus of this book is a related but different issue: it is concerned with how international organizations innovate or, as the author puts it, “How, when, and why do IOs expand into new areas and institutionalize innovative practices?” (p. 194). An important yet overlooked source of innovation in IOs, Oksamytna argues, is advocacy. “Change requires committed and capable advocates who are able to overcome resistance,” she maintains (p. 1). *Advocacy and Change in International Organizations* offers an explanatory framework that provides valuable insights into the conditions under which advocacy succeeds, when it does, in effecting change, and the processes that lead to the institutionalization of new norms and policies. Oksamytna illustrates her analysis with meticulous investigations into the processes that led to the institutionalization over time of three important innovations in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping: strategic communications, the protection of civilians, and quick impact projects.

Oksamytna’s explanatory framework is complex. Advocates – a term which encompasses a broad range of actors – effect change, she argues,

through one of three strategies: social pressure, persuasion, or “authority talk” (discourse that emanates from an agent of influence or expertise). The conditions under which a given strategy succeeds (or not) are specific to each strategy across four categories: the characteristics of the advocates, the targets of advocacy, the issues advocates are seeking to promote, and the context in which advocacy is pursued. For instance, social pressure (e.g., shaming) requires a public forum to be effective whereas persuasion works best behind closed doors. Oksamytna identifies three pathways to IO innovation: top-down (e.g., member state-led), bottom-up (e.g., field-led), and outside-in (e.g., external expert-led). Ultimate success requires institutionalization, which may be gradual and can be slowed or even reversed by contestation.

Presented, as it is, in an initial stand-alone chapter, one wonders if the theory could not perhaps be more parsimonious. However, when viewed in the context of the three cases of UN peacekeeping innovation which Oksamytna employs to demonstrate the workings of her model, the value of the complexity – or, rather, the salience of each element of the framework – becomes evident. Oksamytna selects her cases from UN peacekeeping because in her view the institution is broadly representative of IO change: it is subject to contradictory status quo and reformist pressures; its governance arrangements are similar to those of other international institutions in important respects; and there is considerable scholarly debate as to the sources and dynamics of innovation.

The execution of the three case studies is masterful and I expect that scholars of UN peacekeeping will find them valuable in their own right. Oksamytna possesses an impressive command of the detail relevant to the emergence and, ultimately, the adoption of these three now well-established features of UN peacekeeping operations. The command of detail is achieved through interviews she conducted with UN officials, diplomats, and other individuals knowledgeable about the advocacy episodes, as well as examination of a very extensive array of UN documents, public and private archives, and memoirs of former UN officials – all of this alongside a comprehensive and wide-ranging body of scholarly literature. While one might have expected inclusion of a case study of unsuccessful advocacy for the sake of comparison, the three cases exhibit considerable variation within and among themselves with regard to theoretically-relevant aspects of the experiences. Additionally, Oksamytna entertains alternative approaches and explanations, which, notwithstanding their many valid and valuable insights, are all found to be wanting in one respect or another.

An explanatory framework with so many moving parts as this one naturally raises a number of questions. To begin with, are the three strategies mutually exclusive or do they/can they sometimes exist in combinatorial, mutually-reinforcing ways? With regard to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), for instance (not one of the cases examined in this study), we know that “authority talk” (the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty [ICISS]) was critical to acceptance of the norm but so were social pressure and persuasion (see Alex J. Bellamy,

Responsibility to Protect, 2008). It is difficult to say that any one strategy was primary.

It is also important to appreciate the importance of contingency which can be critical to the success of advocacy. Adoption of the Protection of Civilians (PoC) norm owes a lot to Canadian government advocacy following the 1994 Rwandan genocide. However, had Canada not been elected to the UN Security Council subsequently (and, owing to the UN's Rules of Procedure, had it not served twice as its president in that time), and if "human security" had not been one of the innovative priority concerns of that particular Canadian government (see "Human Security: Safety for People in a Changing World," Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, April 1999), it is easy to imagine that the PoC norm might not have had the benefit of such an energetic champion. Indeed, as we learn from Oksamytna's account, an earlier attempt to enshrine PoC in UN peacekeeping practice led by UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in the context of the UN Operation in the Congo (UNOC, 1960-64) failed precisely because many of the conditions favourable for persuasion which Oksamytna specifies had not been met.

Finally, it would have been interesting to see how well the explanatory framework actually travels, beyond Oksamytna intimations of its broader applicability, to other international organizations whose differing designs, rules, and procedures may or not present challenges to replication. Do we observe the same patterns in organizations where voting power is concentrated, as with the World Bank and the IMF? In

organizations that operate on a consensus basis, such as NATO and the OSCE, are the same dynamics at work? These observations merely suggest that there is scope for further fruitful research on the basis of this study.

Overall, *Advocacy and Change in International Organizations* makes a highly significant contribution to the literature on the working of IOs, and UN peacekeeping in particular. It provides a theoretically-informed and empirically-grounded explanatory framework that is cogent and insightful. Its rigorous analysis and compelling arguments ensure that it will be a valuable resource for scholars and a pivotal reference in the field for years to come.