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For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorksj.ac.uk

The UK's Special Responsibilities at the United Nations:

Diplomatic Practice in Normative Context[1]

Jason Ralph, Jess Gifkins and Samuel Jarvis[2]

Abstract

In a 2017 speech to the United Nation, Theresa May referred to the UK's 'special responsibilities'. This article examines how the UK can properly discharge those responsibilities at the UN in ways that defend its claim to be a permanent member. We offer an innovative analytical framework that merges English School theory of international society with diplomatic practice theory, and find that there are limits to the claim that the UK compensates for its relative material decline through diplomatic activism. We identify the special responsibility of the permanent member in terms of a capacity to reconcile the 'concert' and 'governance' functions of the Council, *and* to contribute materially to the achievement of governance objectives in areas where consensus is possible. Drawing on extensive interview data, and illustrating with reference to current debates on peacekeeping, we find that the an ongoing UK capacity to 'punch above its weight' diplomatically is dependent on an increased material commitments and to a more inclusive approach in the Council.

Introduction

In her September 2017 United Nations speech, Prime Minister Theresa May (2017) acknowledged the UK's 'special responsibilities' as a permanent member of the Security Council without elaborating on how they would be met as the UK adapted to being outside the European Union (EU). This article sets out what those responsibilities are and examines how the UK can properly discharge them in contemporary international society. To do this, we draw on 'English School' International Relations (IR) theory of great power responsibility (Bull 1977), demonstrating how it informs the role of the permanent member, and illustrating its insight with reference to current debates about the Security Council veto and material contributions to UN peace operations. As one of five permanent members, these responsibilities are not exclusive to the UK, but relative to the others, the UK is in a unique position. The literature on Council reform identifies the UK and France as states whose great power status, and therefore their permanent seats, are most in question (Mahbubani 2016). Their 'activism' in the Council, seen in the relative high number of resolutions they draft, is 'aimed at justifying their seat in the select club' (Tardy and Zaum 2016, 121). With additional uncertainty surrounding the UK's international standing after the 2016

[2] University of Leeds, University of Manchester and York St. John University respectively.

referendum (Lang 2016; Adler-Nissen, Galpin and Rosamond 2017, Dee and Smith 2017; Gifkins, Jarvis and Ralph 2019), the question thus arises as to what kind of activism supports its claim to be a responsible permanent member.

The idea that permanent members have 'special' rather than 'general' responsibilities in international society follows from the argument that those with greater capabilities are better able to meet the cost of providing public goods (Bukovansky et. al 2012; Clark and Reus-Smit 2013; Ralph and Souter 2015). Underpinning the Council's membership is the idea that great powers should be given permanent status to bind them to an institution that promotes the common good. Clearly, the definition of the common good and, therefore the special responsibility of the permanent member, has evolved since the UN's founding. These states are still expected to manage and use power in ways that serve the public interest but they now have a special responsibility to reconcile what sometimes are the competing demands of the Council's "concert" function, which is to maintain internal harmony among the great powers, and its "governance" function, referring to the collective provision of public goods, such as human protection (Bosco 2014). Because it acts as a procedural check on the Council, the permanent member's veto is a crucial reminder of the need to balance these two aims, which may require pragmatic compromise on governance objectives for the sake of internal harmony among the great powers.

The importance of this kind of prudence is well understood, but we expand on a less well cited implication. A state's permanent membership and its veto may be justified by the need to avoid great power conflict, but once that point is acknowledged it simultaneously triggers the 'special responsibility' of the great power to make a relatively greater contribution to the pursuit of governance objectives (e.g. human protection through peacekeeping) in situations when it is safe to do so. For the UK, permanent membership of the Council has always sat uncomfortably alongside its relative decline in material power (Mahbubani; 2016, 167-8), which leads naturally to questions about its great power identity (Morris 2011), and its capacity to discharge the special responsibilities associated with permanent membership. Indeed, if the material contribution to peacekeeping is the measure, the UK (and most permanent members) fail to meet normative expectations. As noted, however, the UK compensates for this material deficit through diplomatic activism at the UN, and drawing on the methodologies of diplomatic practice theory (Sending, Pouliot and Neumann 2015; Pouliot and Cornut 2015), we illustrate how the UK wields its 'diplomatic capital' as a permanent member of the Council.

For this project, we interviewed 29 diplomats with experience working in or around the Security Council from 13 different states. Interpreting this data, we found that there are limits to using

diplomatic activism as a 'compensatory strategy' (Adler-Nissen 2008) for material decline. The diplomatic capital that enables activism at the Council, and cultivates the reputation for great power responsibility, is not directly linked to material power, but our data indicates that it is easier to convince other states to contribute resources to peace operations if the state drafting the mandate in New York is perceived to be shouldering a fair share of the material burden. Conversely, if the great power is not contributing material resources, content only to do the diplomatic 'heavy lifting', troop contributing countries are likely to resent what they see as an unreasonable distribution of responsibility and are less likely to follow. Indeed, we illustrate this point with reference to current criticism of Security Council mandates and the manner in which their complexity has evolved beyond capabilities.

The article's contribution then is twofold: firstly, by setting out what the special responsibilities of the permenant members are and how they discharge them, the article offers a novel analytical framework that merges the normative approach inspired by English School theory of international society with diplomatic practice theory. It therefore adds to an emerging body of 'pragmatic' practice theory (Bueger and Gadinger 2015; Bode 2018; Brown 2012; Frost and Lechner 2016; Ralph and Gifkins 2017), which emphasises the contingency of practice and the reflexivity of practitioners, and assesses both in wider normative contexts. Secondly, because this approach bridges the gap between normative and practice theory, the article offers an analytical framework that can guide the ongoing process of identity construction and policy realignment, which is particularly relevant to post-Brexit Britain.

The article is structured by four sections: the first applies the English School understanding of great power responsibility to develop the argument that Security Council permanent members should be judged by their attempt to reconcile their 'concert' and 'governance' roles. The second illustrates this argument with reference to the current debates about veto restraint and the protection of civilian mandates in peacekeeping operations. The third elaborates on practice theory's concept of 'diplomatic capital' to examine how diplomats discharge the UK's special responsibilities, and the fourth demonstrates the limits of this strategy with reference to the current criticism of peacekeeping mandates and their distance from peacekeeper capabilities.

Great Power Responsibility and UN permanent membership.

At the core of the English School approach to IR is the idea that international society exists when 'a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in

the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in their working of common institutions' (Bull 1977, 13). Implicit in this definition is the 'voluntary compliance … that actors give when they believe a rule, decision, or command is rightful, even if it contradicts their narrow self-interests' (Reus-Smit 2007, 163). Not all states may conceive themselves as equally bound by common rules. States vary in their perception of a rule's legitimacy. While some may be content to comply with a rule, others may be compelled to contest its value because they hold a different view of the common interest. Power can influence this judgment. A state in the 'front rank' (Bull 1977, 195) of political power may be more inclined to challenge a common set of rules knowing that it has a relatively greater chance of success and that it can absorb the costs of failure. Preponderant powers are, as the classical international lawyer Emer de Vattel observed, 'in a position to lay down the law to others' (Bull 1977, 104). Their responsibility to avoid doing anything that upsets international order is thus 'special' because it requires them to exercise relatively more restraint than the non-great powers (Claude 1971, 71-3, 154; Claude 1986, 726; Jackson 2000, 139; Morris 2013, 515-6).

By virtue of their status, great powers have opportunities to assert their national interest and contribute to the common good, which as E.H. Carr (2001, 71) reminds us, is often presented as the same thing. Exposing those moments when great power interest and the common good are in tension is part of the English School's normative contribution. When great powers have shown insufficient restraint or threaten international society through a 'relentless' (Linklater 1992, 28) pursuit of their selfish national or ideological interests, English School theorists have labelled them the 'great irresponsibles' (Bull, 1980). There are limits to this criticism. To ignore a great power's interests when constructing international order can be self-defeating, as for instance when the waning powers tried to construct a post-World War I order based on laws and norms that were detached from the realities of power (Kennan 1950). There may well be, in this sense, a common interest in tolerating a great power's narrow definition of its interests, even while hoping for a more generous and publicly-minded approach (Carr 2001, 71); and this we contend is significant when considering the UN Charter's pragmatic acknowledgment of the great power's special rights (especially its veto right). It plays an important role in binding national power to international institutions, and this is a significant check on the centrifugal forces in contemporary international society.

To the extent the victors of the second World War were seen as the post-war powerbrokers, there was clear recognition of the relationship between capability and responsibility within the UN Charter (Bukovansky et al 2012, 31; Morris 2015, 410); and significantly, the correlative right to veto was an acknowledgment that the organisation would likely fail to preserve international peace

and security if it did not ensure great power participation (Bosco 2009, 36; Mahbubani 2016,158-9; Morris and Wheeler 2016, 228).[i] As Inis Claude (1971 , 73-4) explained in the seminal work *Swords into Plowshares*, the special privileges of permanent membership and the veto was an attempt to solve 'the dilemma of arranging great power leadership while erecting safeguards against unprincipled dictatorship of the great powers'. Being a minority on the Council meant the great powers could not dictate, but having permanent status and the veto meant they would commit to the UN in ways previous great powers had not committed to the League. In this vein, there are those who argue that the current problem with the Council is not the privilege of permanent membership and the right to veto, but which states have those privileges and rights (Mahbubani 2016, 159).

Aside from setting out in Article 24 the Council's responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security there is little guidance within the UN Charter on how permanent members should act. As such, the role of the permanent member has evolved as circumstances have changed, and commentators describe this in dualistic terms (Bosco 2014, 545-61; Morris 2015, 398-421; Jones 2015, 793-813; Morris and Wheeler 2016, 227-241). Mervyn Frost (2009, 98), for instance, argues UN diplomats must 'pay attention to the possible tensions and conflicts' between two global practices, which he calls 'the society of sovereign states' and 'global civil society'. Likewise, David Bosco (2014) sees the Council as fulfilling a 'concert' and a 'governance' role. The priority of the former is 'internal harmony' between the great powers, which maps on to Bull's (1977) insistence that the great powers have a special responsibility to manage their own relations in the interests of international order. The latter refers to the collective provision of public goods beyond great power peace.

This dual role was rarely made explicit when the Charter was being drafted. Instead, Bosco explains, the assumption was that 'comity between the permanent members would be a prerequisite to – rather than a product of – the Council's operations' (Bosco 2014, 549). Yet by facilitating a denser network of diplomatic relations and acting as 'a vehicle for "constructive ambiguity" ', the Council has helped the great powers to better manage their relations in ways associated with a concert (Bosco 2014, 553; also Gowan, 2018a; Morris and Wheeler 2016; Luck 2015). The UK's former Ambassador to the UN, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, reinforces this argument. The fact that representation is permanent leads the ambassadors of these states 'to place a higher value on a collective solution, even if their national instructions imply a lower one', and to use their 'personal relationships and creativeness to shape one' (Greenstock 2015, 820). As there is a common interest in preventing great power disharmony, and because the Council assists in that,

the implication is that permanent members have a special responsibility to work through the Council and respect those institutions, like the veto, that bind the great powers to the UN.

The priority of the Council's 'governance' function is the collective provision of international peace and security, yet the content of this goal 'has varied considerably over time'. While the meaning at the UN's founding centred on the threat of interstate aggression, it has changed, especially after the Cold War. The Council now addresses an array of security challenges, including intrastate conflict, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the protection of populations from atrocities, democratization, health and environmental issues (Bosco 2014, 546-7; also Clark and Reus-Smit, 2013). This raises important questions about both great power status and the permanent member's responsibilities. As a great power concert, permanent membership is ideally determined by the *destructive* (e.g. nuclear) capacity of the great power and the public interest in containing that. The more destruction the great power can cause the more important it is to include it in institutions like the Council that facilitates the peaceful resolution of its conflict.

From a governance perspective, however, permanent membership is ideally determined by the *constructive* capacity to contribute solutions to the global challenges. Nuclear weapons may be a symbol of great power status, but they are useless in addressing governance problems in the humanitarian and development fields. This means the capacities that constitute great power status change, and the UN now has an interest in binding to the Council those states with, for instance, large peacekeeping and development aid capabilities. Indeed, questions have been asked about the current membership on the basis of these ideals (Jones 2016, 805) and it is a useful exercise to think how, taken separately, the concert and governance functions change the Council's composition. Yet from an English School perspective that sees 'order' and 'justice' as inextricably linked (Bull 1977), we should not separate the concert from the governance function. The avoidance of great power conflict is still as important as finding solutions to other global challenges. The task of the Council, and the special responsibility of the permanent member, is to transcend what Morris (2015) calls the 'conundrum' of finding solutions to global problems without provoking great power tensions.

Squaring circles. Veto reform and peacekeeping.

One issue that illustrates the special responsibility of the permanent members to square the Council's concert and governance functions, and the difficulty of doing that, especially in the current era of political fragmentation (Greenstock 2016, 817-9; Von Einsiedel, Malone and Ugarte

2016, 829), is the question of the permanent member's right to veto resolutions that address situations involving atrocities. Various initiatives have called on states to adopt voluntarily codes of conduct when confronted by such situations (Vilmer 2018). The initiative from the Small Five Group (S-5) proposed that the negative vote of a permanent member be counted in the same way as that of an elected member rather than a veto. The Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency Group (ACT) of 20 states advocated the P5 voluntarily suspend the use of their veto when faced with a 'credible' draft resolution to end atrocity. France and Mexico proposed adding a procedural trigger to this whereby veto restraint would only apply when at least 50 member states request the Secretary-General to confirm that the situation necessitates veto restraint. The P5 would not be expected to forego the veto in situations that involved the 'national interest' (Morris 2015; Morris and Wheeler 2016; Adediran 2018; Luck 2019).

Much has been written on the limitations of these proposals. These accounts focus mainly on the difficulty of defining a 'credible' resolution. As this is often disputed, it becomes impossible to know when the veto should be withheld or ignored. The malleability of the 'national interest' concept is also problematic. It means a P5 member can easily make a case for using its veto in almost any situation (Morris and Wheeler 2016; Adediran 2018). Understanding the role the veto plays in constituting the 'concert' function of the Council highlights additional problems with these proposals. The risk – especially in the S5 proposal - is that a permanent member would not be able to signal its opposition to action set by the majority of the Council and this could lead to great power disengagement, or worse, great power conflict. Inis Claude (1971, 156) famously compared the veto to a fuse 'designed to break the flow of electricity whenever circumstances are such that continued operation of the circuit would be dangerous'. By removing the veto, the Council no longer acts as that fuse and international society risks being overwhelmed by a surge of great power conflict.

Underpinning the veto then is what English School theory refers to as a 'pluralist' bias for international order (Wheeler 1992). Because international society is politically fragmented and international order unstable, it is better to compromise on governance objectives (such as peacekeeping) if they risk great power conflict. The normative assumption behind the veto is that it is better to have the Security Council deadlocked than to have a majority take action against a great power. 'A stalemate is an inconvenience', Claude (1971, 157) wrote, 'a showdown would be a disaster. These political realities cannot be fixed by legal processes or procedural amendments to the veto because as Claude (1971, 72) also writes, the UN Charter 'registered power; it did not confer it'. The veto, as the realist Hans Morgenthau (1954, 19) put it, is 'a mere manifestation in institutional terms of the structure of the society of sovereign nations'.[ii] To recognise the legal

validity of a resolution by ignoring the veto of the great powers may simply mean that the resolution ends up being ignored by states who are compelled by prudential ethics to respect power balances. That would make the Council irrelevant if not dangerous.

A brief examination of the Security Council's response to the Syrian conflict illustrates this tension. From a 'governance' perspective, the situation triggered international society's responsibility to formulate, through the Security Council, a timely and decisive response that protected Syria's populations. When Russia and China vetoed the France, UK, and US led resolutions between 2012-4 they were accused of failing in their responsibilities as permanent members, and this 'reenergized' interest in veto restraint (Luck 2019). Indeed, the argument that the Russian and Chinese vetoes were unreasonable because they advanced narrow national interests at the expense of a credible proposal to protect vulnerable populations is a powerful one. From the 'concert' perspective, however, the Russian veto had to be respected, even if it was unreasonably motivated by the national interest, because the cost of pursuing a course of action without its support, especially if that was military intervention after 2015 when Russia itself had intervened, risked the internal harmony of the Council and even conflict among its members (Borger, 2018a). Arguments for collective action that by-pass the Council and take authority from a so-called 'coalition of the willing' risk enabling direct conflict between the great powers, as well as undermining the more diffuse benefits produced by the Council as a great power concert.

The best that can be said for the various veto reform proposals is that they do remind Council members of their responsibility to protect vulnerable populations from atrocity crimes. Former Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General, Ed Luck, makes this point in his defence of the various codes of conduct. For him, they 'represent a significant step forward in the ongoing struggle to raise the visibility and political salience of efforts to curb atrocity crimes' (Luck 2019, 81). But he accepts that these proposals do not offer 'short cuts or magic answers' to the Council's dilemmas (Luck 2019, 85). In fact, he argues that these proposals in some way miss the point because resolutions are not the primary means of protecting vulnerable populations and it may be irresponsible for the Council to pass resolutions knowing that the political situation make it practically impossible to implement. 'The authority and credibility of the Council are not necessarily enhanced by the quantity of its decisions in a particular matter' (Luck 2019, 84). More important is what happens materially on the ground, as opposed to textually in New York. It is right then that the UK has indicated support for the French proposal on the veto (Foreign Affairs Committee 2018b), as it signals the importance of finding a collective and decisive ways of protecting vulnerable populations from atrocities. But it does not follow from that it is always responsible for Council members to ignore the veto of a great power, especially if the political

consequence of that is increased great power enmity and disengagement from the Council.[iii] The problem of how to respond to a veto 'calls for pragmatic judgment, not dogmatic adherence to a set formula' (Claude 1971, 159).

While it is important to recognise the pluralist concern about political fragmentation among the great powers, and to accept that the Council's concert function can ameliorate these risks, it is also important to not exaggerate the extent of the challenge, nor compromise too easily on governance objectives. Within the limits set by great power politics, diplomats at the UN should seek to build consensus on governance issues,[iv] and where consensus on how to respond exists, the special responsibility principle means great powers should shoulder a major share of international society's burden. This is significant in contemporary international society. Despite Greenstock's recognition of fragmentation and political pluralism, for example, he reminds us that there are still areas where Security Council business 'proceeds with reasonable efficiency' (Greenstock 2016, 819-20); and Von Einsiedel, Malone and Ugarte (2016 843) note how permanent members on the Council are able to 'compartmentalize their differences'.

Jones (2016 801) likewise argues that we should not exaggerate the pull of the great power concert and the extent to which it demands the compromise of governance objectives. In fact, the inclusion of protection of civilian (POC) mandates in UN peacekeeping missions is an example of how the forceful pursuit of humanitarian governance objectives need not necessarily lead to great power disagreement and tension. Where previous mandates had insisted on strict neutrality and limited the use of force to self-defence, these mandates enable peacekeeping forces to in effect take sides and use force to protect vulnerable populations (Guehenno 2016, 373-92). On the political level, the Security Council has demonstrated the continued practice of writing POC into the mandates of peacekeeping operations, including in the DRC (MONUSCO), CAR (MINUSCA), Mali (MINUSMA), Darfur (UNAMID), South Sudan (UNMISS), Abyei (UNISFA),
Lebanon (UNIFIL), Liberia (UNMIL), and Haiti (MINUJUSTH) (de Razza 2017; Guehenno 2016, 376). Crucial to the consensus developed among Council members is the distinction, articulated in the 2008 Capstone Doctrine, between the tactical and strategic use of force. The former is more acceptable because, with the consent of the 'main parties' it targets only the 'spoilers' of a peace process or those that threaten the civilian population. This does not address the question of what to do when the main parties are accused by the permanent powers of threatening the civilian population, as in the Syrian case. Framed in this way, however, the Council has authorized civilian protection missions despite increasing political fragmentation.

It is also significant that those powers cast as obstructionists in the area of humanitarian protection have acquiesced in this development. Most notable in this respect is China, not simply because it has consented to the development of the new doctrine, but because it has materially supported the peace operations mandated by the Council. As Zhu Wenqi and Leng Xinyu (2016 92) note, China's 'discomfort' with robust peacekeeping, has given way to a more "flexible attitude", and in late 2014 China deployed an infantry battalion to South Sudan to serve in a peacekeeping mission that contained enforcement elements under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. More generally, China is playing a greater role in peacekeeping operations. It has significantly increased its financial and personnel contributions, now funding 10.25 percent of the UN's $6.7 billion peacekeeping budget (second only to the US's 28.47%) as well as having more peacekeeping troops than all other P5 states combined (Pauley 2018). As of February 2019, China had 2512 personnel serving, making it the 10th largest contributor.

When observed through the lens of financial contributions the UK is well ranked. It makes the sixth largest contribution (5.77%), behind Japan (9.68%), Germany (6.39%) and France (6.28%) but ahead of Russia (3.99%). It has also maintained an important role in training for peacekeeping (Curran and Williams 2016, 647; UK Government 2019). Yet all these contributions should be set in the broader context of what the UN needs, as well as the US intention to decrease if financial contribution from the current 28.47%. The UN Secretary General Ant6nio Guterres, for instance, has called for a 'quantum leap in collective action' on peace operations (Sherman 2018). Furthermore, the UK's position in the rankings of states contributing personnel to UN peace operations drops, as does the position of all permanent members. As of February 2019 Ethiopia (7554), Bangladesh (6550), Rwanda (6541), India (6453) and Nepal (5757) were the top five contributors of troops and police personnel. On this ranking, the permanent five Security Council members were 10th (China 2512 personnel), 31st (France 739), 36th (UK 603), 69th (Russia 81), and 79th (United States 40). While 286 of the UK's personnel are currently committed to the difficult mission in South Sudan (most of the others are stationed in Cyprus), the UK's 2016 decision to withdraw its police officers from that mission during an upsurge in violence led to criticism that even questioned the UK's status as a permanent member of the Council (Nichols 2016, cited in Curran and Williams 2016, 643).

This imbalance, between the P5's willingness to pay for the missions that are staffed by personnel for other countries may be appropriate. The Indian armed forces, for instance, are roughly 10 times that of the UK's, so there is an argument that the contribution to peacekeeping operations should indeed be 10 times larger. Moreover, the deployment of forces from the global North often battles against accusations of neo-colonialism. In this vein, the African Union contributions

to the UN approved mission in Somalia (AMISOM) builds on the idea that regional responses to regional problems have greater legitimacy. The impression, however, that the global South is doing the 'heavy lifting' in the field of peacekeeping has a different normative consequence, especially when it is combined with a critique of the way the P5 write the mandates these personnel have to implement. It is to that aspect of the permanent member's special responsibility that we now turn.

"Punching above its weight". Discharging special responsibilities with diplomatic capital.

The argument to this point is that as a great power and permanent member of the Security Council, the UK has a special responsibility to reconcile the concert and governance functions of the Council, and to materially support those developments that achieve great power consensus, such as the protection of civilians through peacekeeping operations. The UK has a mixed record here. It contributes a reasonable share of the UN's peacekeeping budget, although that budget needs to grow, but its status as a great power suggests it could contribute more personnel (United Nations 2015, para. 199). Indeed, there is a view in Westminster that UN peacekeeping is 'an attractive means to bolster its international image and defence relationships as it leaves the European Union' (Reeve 2018). There are reasons, however, for doubting the UK's capacity to deliver on that. Calls for increased defence spending post-Brexit, for instance, are motivated to maintain influence in NATO and 'to deter and challenge peer adversaries' rather than make a larger contribution to UN peace operations (Defence Committee 2018). Moreover, the extent to which peacekeeping is 'in the bloodstream of the British Army' has been questioned by experts who call for peacekeeping to be better incorporated into the military career structure (Curran, Holmes and Cunliffe 2018; also Curran and Williams 2016).

Building on Justin Morris's (2011) English School inspired discussion of great power status, it is possible to argue that even if the UK's material contributions fall short of expectations, it still meets its special responsibility simply by drafting resolutions that respond to human protection concerns. For Morris, great power status in the context of international society implies qualities that go beyond material capacity. There is an 'ideational dimension' (Morris 2001, 326), which is exercised through political and diplomatic leadership. In this sense, and returning to the peacekeeping example, other states may contribute the troops, but it is sufficient for the UK to lead the doctrinal shift in peacekeeping toward civilian protection, especially when other permanent members on the Council have merely acquiesced in the process. The implication here is that the UK is a responsible great power because it has the diplomatic capital in the Council to facilitate such shifts. Through UK diplomatic leadership, the Security Council is better able to

agree on resolutions that discharge both its 'concert' and 'governance' responsibilities. While the UK's financial and military capital may fall short of what is required, it compensates for this with its reserves of diplomatic capital.

But what is diplomatic capital? Recent work importing the 'practice theory' of Pierre Bourdieu into the study of diplomacy helps us answer this question (Sending, Pouliot and Neumann 2015; Pouliot and Cornut 2015). It conceptualises 'capital' as 'the resource that agents [diplomats] can draw upon to act in any given field [diplomacy]', where field is understood as 'a social space [the Security Council and its surroundings] that situates its agents' (Kuus 2015, 371). Applying this more precisely to the field of diplomacy, Rebecca Adler-Nissen writes that 'there is a particular form of social capital, which Bourdieu calls political capital. It is the political power enjoyed by politicians and leaders [including diplomats], a power that is derived from the trust expressed in a form of credit that a group of followers places in them.' These resources can be formal and accrued, for instance, as part of an institutionalised role, or informal and obtained though 'social competences, reputation and personal authority'. While political capital 'is more disguised … and less convertible than economic capital' it enables diplomats to achieve their objectives and fulfil their responsibilities (Adler-Nissen, 2008, 670).

In her article with Vincent Pouliot on diplomatic practice at the UN Security Council, Adler-Nissen applied this concept to analyze P5 diplomacy. They found that the UK delegation in New York is 'widely recognized in New York for its superior skills in many legal technicalities that often bog down the Council' (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014, 898). Our own interviews confirm this. UK diplomats are described by their peers as "top of the league" (Author interview #23, #24). Of course, the capital the UK accrues stems in part from its permanent status on the Council and the institutional knowledge and resources attached to that. The UK delegation is one of the largest at the UN and it is relatively successful in placing nationals in key positions in the Secretariat, which brings with it access and influence (Author interview #21, #26). 'At a technical level', Richard Gowan (2018b 15) notes, the UK's knowledge of the practical workings of issues such as peacekeeping and mediation, as well as sanctions' is appreciated. The fact also that discussions outside the Council chamber are normally conducted in English gives UK diplomats advantages over diplomats from non-English speaking countries, especially representatives of elected members, who may only be working on the Council for two years (Author interview #12).[v] UK diplomats have also cultivated a reputation for being the most consultative member among the P5 (Author interview #16).

This capital enables the UK to act as penholder in the Council. Penholding is an informal process whereby a state takes a leadership role in the Council on a particular situation or issue area, which usually means drafting resolutions. Of the 39 situations and issue areas on the Council's agenda in 2019, the UK held 12 pens (Security Council Report 2019). These included high-profile conflicts such as Yemen and Myanmar, as well as significant thematic areas such as peacekeeping, protection of civilians in armed conflict, and Women, Peace and Security (Gifkins, Jarvis and Ralph 2019, 5). The UK can draw on this level of diplomatic activism when claiming to be a responsible great power that properly discharges the special responsibilities of a permanent member. It is no coincidence too that France is also active as a penholder, and is in some ways in competition with the UK. As Thierry Tardy and Dominik Zaum (2016, 121-4) write:

> This activism has to a certain extent been aimed at justifying their seat in the select club, to demonstrate that because of their contribution they deserve the privilege to be a permanent part of the world's most important mechanism of global security governance. … No other foreign policy instrument provides France or the UK a similar position on the world scene.

Also, like France, the UK has been reluctant to cast its veto knowing that this could throw an unwelcome spotlight on the legitimacy of their permanent seat (Mahbubani 2016, 167-8; Tardy and Zaum 2016, 130). The UK and France have not cast a veto since 23 December 1989 when they prevented condemnation of the US invasion of Panama. Where the influence of other permanent members stems in part from the so-called 'informal veto' (i.e. the threat of vetoing a proposed resolution, which need not be stated explicitly), therefore, UK diplomats work hard to accrue diplomatic capital through more consultative methods.

Diplomacy thus helps the UK discharge its special responsibility by leading on the formulation of collective responses. It has also been able to indirectly deliver the material resources that support the missions the Council authorizes. In addition to its own financial contribution to the peacekeeping budget, the UK has been able to use its membership of the European Union to secure resources for UN mandated missions like the African Union mission in Somalia or AMISOM. Since 2007, the EU has contributed 1.5 billion euros to AMISOM,[vi] and this has been interpreted as a success for UK diplomacy. As one interviewee put it, 'the UK had an agenda of promoting support to Somalia and they promoted that in the UN and they made the EU pay for it" (Author interview #9). EU support for AMISOM was in fact capped in January 2016 leading to questions about future EU priorities, especially after the UK decision to leave the EU later that year. Omar S Mahmood and Christian Ani (2017, 7-8) write for instance that 'France has led the charge to shift funding away from AMISOM in favour of the G5 Sahel mission'. The UK

responded to these concerns when, on the occasion of the Prime Minister's visit to sub-Saharan Africa in August 2018, an extra £7million of new UK funding for AMISOM was announced (May 2018), although that was not sufficient to address longer term concerns about the future of the mission and the date of the handover of security responsibilities to Somali forces (Gifkins, Jarvis, Ralph 2019, 11).

UK diplomacy is therefore important to the UK's claim to be a responsible great power. It has sufficient capital to sustain the penholding role and to use that to reconcile the concert and governance functions of the Council. While this kind of soft power does balance against concerns of declining hard power, however, there are limitations to that; and, as the following section illustrates, questions are currently being asked of the relationship between those states exercising diplomatic leadership at the UN and those contributing peacekeeping personnel. Such questions threaten to undermine the progress made in peacekeeping as an institution that addresses both the governance and concert functions of the Council. Before moving on, however, it is worth illustrating the relationship between diplomatic capital and material contributions with reference to an area where the UK has an undisputed reputation for leadership: international development aid. UK diplomats have much capital in this area because the UK government is seen to be leading in material contributions by committing 0.7% of gross national income in development aid (Author interview #2 #5 #22). As one interviewee told us:

> you can look at individual countries … who have very high development spending and are held in high regard as a result and it's easier also for those countries to advocate for certain human rights policies in developing countries if they're backing it up with financial development support. If you don't do that and you're still trying to lecture you get less of a hearing (Author interview #11).

This is an interesting illustration of the way material contributions can multiply diplomatic capital because they convey the impression that the state is leading by example. The state making the material contribution is not asking followers to do something it is not prepared to do; nor is it asking a state to do something without support. As the next section illustrates, the converse holds true. When a state asks another to do something it is not prepared to do, its diplomatic capital is devalued. In this case, the UK's ability to lead at the Council is threatened by a frustration among troop contribution countries, who experience a sense of exclusion from Council deliberations while also being asked to do something (i.e. risk soldier's lives) the P5, including the UK, is unwilling to do.[vii] The apparent hypocrisy threatens the development of peacekeeping and that should lead the responsible great power to reflect on how to respond.

The !imits of dip!omatic activism

The Indian government's commitment to the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC, known by its French acronym, MONUC illustrates the current frustrations among troop contribution countries. The mission, which included 22,000 uniformed personnel by 2007, was heavily criticised for its inability to carry out the civilian protection mandate, as well as allegations of misbehaviour including sexual abuse and smuggling. Indian officials in particular thought their forces were being unfairly criticised, arguing that the 'the mission's complex mandate of protecting civilians … hindered its ability to fulfil its obligation' (Mampilly 2018, 184). Despite threats to withdraw its contingent, however, the mission was successfully reformed at the local level in ways that meant 'peacekeepers in eastern DRC [we]re indisputably saving lives' (Boutellis and Lacaille 2011, 4). Yet according to Zachariah Mampilly (2018), this progress was subsumed by the politics of the Security Council, which India had been elected to in 2010.

The following year saw a split between the UK, the US and France (Permanent3 or P3) on the one hand, and the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) states on the other, all of whom were on the Council. At issue was the manner in which the NATO-led operation interpreted its responsibility to protect Libyan populations under Security Council Resolution 1973. For the P3, Resolution 1973 authorized the overthrow the Gaddafi regime, but for the BRICS that conclusion had been formed without proper consultation (Ralph and Gallagher 2015). In this context, Mampilly argues, Indian officials looked afresh at the protection of civilians agenda. 'Blindly supporting R2P through its contributions to peacekeeping missions while allowing the P-3 [UK, US and France] to retain control over defining peacekeeping mandates produced a deep sense of unease' (Mampilly 2018, 188).

To make a point about what it saw as the P3 selectivity and hypocrisy, the Indian government withdrew 8 Mi-25/35 attack helicopters and 9 Mi-17 transport helicopters from the DRC mission, which by then had been renamed MONUSCO. This limited the force's capability to undertake medical and reconnaissance missions. What followed was the advance by the so-called "March 23" (M23) group, which led to war crimes and a massive humanitarian crisis (Mampilly 2018, 181- 91). It may not be the case that these events were linked, but for Mampilly (2018, 191), India's 'decision to pull its helicopters and equally importantly, to cancel the reforms that improved relations between the mission and civilians' likely hindered MONUSCO's ability to protect civilians against M23.

The lesson for the permanent members of the Council, especially those like the UK who rely more on the power of persuasion to discharge their special responsibility, is that the emerging powers

will support robust human protection but not if they are taken-for-granted (Von Einsiedel, Malone and Ugarte, 2016 849; Sirohi 2019). As Mampilly (2018, 193) concludes,

> the division between TCC's [troop contributing countries] and those that pay for the missions in which the former cede any influence over the design of peacekeeping mandates is no longer stable. Increasingly, India and other rising powers not only demand a say in devising the mandates of peacekeeping operations, but also have the leverage to affect the performance of missions, for better or worse.

Conscious of this instability in the Council's approach to peacekeeping, the Secretary General has called on member states, as part of his Action for Peacekeeping A4P agenda, to stop writing mandates that have an unrealistically high number of tasks. 'Paring back mandates' in this way, can address 'a bugbear of some major, troop, police, and financial contributors who blame the permanent members of the Security Council for handing down "impossible mandates" (Bellamy and Hunt 2019; see also Day 2017). It might be concluded in this sense that the UK, as a major penholder, should use its diplomatic capital to rein in this aspect of the Council's governance objectives. Rather than authorize POC mandates as a matter of course, the Council should assess what is practically possible on a case-by-case basis. Bellamy and Hunt (2019), however, express a note of caution about reversing the progress in this area. Writing mandates on a case-by-case basis could threaten great power consensus by opening the door to states that have acquiesced in the protection of civilians agenda but have also pushed back against the human rights by lobbying to cut funding for posts dedicated to their promotion (Borger 2018b).

The UK's dilemma as a permanent member is thus reframed. Without indicating a willingness to commit personnel to increasingly demanding mandates, the UK (and other permanent members) risk losing the support of those states (like India) that are willing to commit personnel; and by simplifying missions to keep troop contributing countries engaged with the Council the UK risks not meeting its special responsibility to deliver mandates that protect civilians. Of course, the UK may lead its way out of the dilemma by committing resources to protection of civilian mandates in ways that address appearances of hypocrisy; and a July 2019 decision to contribute a long-range reconnaissance group to MINUSMA was indeed framed in that way. As Secretary of Defense, Penny Mordaunt put it: 'This will signal a significant shift in the UK's approach to peacekeeping as we bridge the gap between those who pay and those who deliver by providing a highly employable, highly capable task force' (Ripley 2019).

Whether the deployment of this 250 strong group does in fact 'bridge that gap' is debatable, but it is an important acknowledgment that there are limits to any claim that the UK can discharge its special responsibility through the use of diplomatic capital alone. However skilled diplomats are,

they accrue more capital if the state they represent is willing to make material commitments (through development aid or peacekeeping personnel for instance), and they lose it if the state is unwilling to make such commitments. It is also clear that diplomatic activism at the Council can be counterproductive if it is not sufficiently inclusive. Indeed, the lesson of the Libyan crisis, as Ralph and Gifkins (2017) note, is that when diplomatic competence is removed from the broader normative context it can lead to ineffective practice. The argument here is that it is unwise to write mandates without including in that process the states who will implement them, for when the Council's ideals (e.g. POC) become separated from material power (of the TCCs in the global South), the permanent member fails to properly discharge its special responsibility.

Leading a more inclusive approach to Council decision-making again resonates with an English School pluralist approach to the challenges of political fragmentation. The problem here may not necessarily be the threat of great power conflict; but to the extent the global South is providing the personnel to implement POC peacekeeping mandates it is about keeping those states engaged in the work of the Council. Moreover, English School pluralism is not too far removed from the idea of 'Global Britain' and existing UK practice at the UN. As noted, UK diplomats are regarded as the most consultative of P5 members; and UK politicians, including Winston Churchill have long realised that 'the world organisation cannot be based on a dictatorship of the Great Powers' (Churchill quoted in Morris 2013, 529). Conscious of the UK's relative material weakness, the Foreign Office realised in 1945 that the UK's 'global standing could only be maintained through an engagement with and coupling to the Dominions' (Morris 2013, 524-6). While this language is outdated, the sentiment is not. The UK's position on the Council is linked to its diplomatic leadership not its material power, and the diplomatic capital that underpins its effectiveness on the Council is cultivated through an inclusive approach to leadership that persuades and does not dictate. This approach is immanent in the current concept of 'Global Britain'.

Conclusion.

The purpose of this article was to define the UK's special responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and to consider how it discharges those responsibilities in the context of relative material decline. To do that it offered a novel analytical framework that merges a normative approach inspired by English School theory of international society with diplomatic practice theory. It therefore adds to an emerging body of 'pragmatic' theory that locates practices in normative contexts that encourage reflection on the purpose of everyday activity (Ralph and Gifkins 2017). In this vein, the article argued that when questions are asked about the UK's

material contribution to international public goods such as peacekeeping, UK diplomatic competence at the Council enables it to at least claim it is properly discharging the special responsibilities of a permanent member, which the article defined as reconciling the sometimes competing goals of the Council's 'concert' and 'governance' functions.

Because this approach bridges the gap between normative and practice theory, the article also offers guidance on the current process of identity construction and policy realignment in post-Brexit Britain. The argument that a permanent member can properly discharge its special responsibilities through diplomatic activism alone only takes the UK so far, and while the UK's standing benefits from its commitment to the UN (including peacekeeping) budget, as well as the commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on development aid, the relatively small commitment of service personnel to peacekeeping missions highlights problems with its approach at the Council, as well as that of its peers among the permanent members. More specifically, the sense that the global South is being asked to implement the increasingly complex and demanding missions that are conceived by the great powers in the North challenges the UK as a permanent member to reflect on its practices in the Council. Locating these practices in a wider normative context suggests diplomatic activism is not the only criteria of a responsible permanent member. The willingness to back that up with material leadership or, failing that, a more inclusionary approach toward those states that are making significant material contributions, is also important.

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[i] Article 27 (3) of the UN Charter states: 'Decisions of the Security Council on all other [non-procedural] matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members'.

[ii] We are grateful to Troels Engell for this reference. See also Brown, 2013; Morris and Wheeler 2016, 241; Morris 2015, 401.

[iii] The UK may have been comfortable making exceptionalist arguments to by-pass the veto when it was aligned to the US in the so-called 'unipolar' moment. It was unlikely that other states then had the power to turn that act into a precedent with negative consequences. Yet as power shifts from the West, or as the US power becomes less aligned to UK priorities, it becomes more difficult to predict those consequences. See Ralph 2018.

[iv] For an example of UK leadership on nuclear issues, including the the 'p5 process' see Dee and Smith 2017, 534-9.

[v] English is just one of six official languages, but informal consultations are normally in English, which gives UK diplomats an advantage. Author Interview #12.

[vi] http://amisom-au.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/10_years_Partnership_EU_Mag_2017.pdf

[vii] Concern about the increase in peacekeeper fatalities exacerbates the problem. The year 2017 saw the largest number of fatalities since 1993 (United Nations 2019).