Norm implementation through intrinsic reinforcement

Resolutions 1888 and 1889 deployed this week by the United Nations Security Council are imperative efforts to curb gender-based human rights violations that are too often denounced as empty gestures. The recent resolutions have deliberately outlined the UN’s stance on gender-based violence in armed conflicts[[1]](#footnote-1) and the organization’s intention to reduce accounts of sexual violence in wartime and post-conflict regions. Past resolutions and the monumental proposals outlined in the Geneva Convention and Rome Statutes were echoed throughout 1888 and 1889 as Secretary General Ban Ki-moon attempts to stand on the shoulders of giants in his call for more research on sexual violence in conflict ridden regions.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Prominent scholars in academia, journalists in the media, and actors on the global stage have long discredited attempts by the UN to create lasting peace around the world. The UN is under fire once again for providing empty gestures to protect individuals around the globe from sexual violence, and these claims lay with a degree of truth. The resolutions, at worst, are words on paper that attempt to dictate peace and prosperity to a nasty and brutish world suffering from countless human atrocities. Further, these words merely reflect the “rights identities” or a moral obligation felt by the UN and northern states.[[3]](#footnote-3) Lastly, as these resolutions are translated into headlines for the general news cycle, they face the same criticisms as human rights organizations do when they emphasize “rights talk” as a means to generate attention and funding for a particular issue.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Though such criticisms are accurate and necessary for the development of effective human rights advocacy, these criticisms gloss over the importance of the 1888 and 1889 resolutions and the broader implications for human rights advocacy in armed conflict. These resolutions do a great deal to set the stage for “naming and shaming,” an important tactic in human rights that publicly denounces wrong doings and simultaneously prevents future offenses, treaty writing, and other important legislative efforts.[[5]](#footnote-5) For instance, Resolution 1889 called for collaboration between Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, and requested that organizations, agencies within the UN, and legislators work to include the needs of women in their disarmament, demobilization and integration programs.

These are platforms on which treaties and links between foreign aid and human rights performance can be built. What is more, this type of human rights advocacy provides essential discursive proliferation and norm creation. Critics often accuse discourse and norm creation of having little, if any effect at all, on curbing human rights atrocities. These critiques, however, fail to take into consideration the importance of establishing international norms. Norms act as the pillars on which international law stands in light of the fact that there is no standalone power greater than the state itself.[[6]](#footnote-6) Although norms are not the answer to end human rights abuses, their role in shaping a globe that can reduce gender-based violence should not be undermined. Establishing and then managing norms and discourse is a feat in itself in molding how the world at large sees a human rights issue like sexual violence. Only after institutional, normative, and discursive human rights advocacy flourishes can we look towards practicing norm implementation[[7]](#footnote-7), and now may be that time.

Taking this step will require the continuation of tactics like naming and shaming, responsible rights talk[[8]](#footnote-8), treaty writing, threats of foreign aid based on human rights performance, sanctions, and even prosecutions of war criminals. Both qualitative and quantitative sides of the literature agree that these methods benefit individuals to some degree, but no conclusions can be made until we get “better” data.[[9]](#footnote-9)

We must maintain our institutions and norms that promote human rights while finding ways to implement them. The Rome Statutes, which outlines the laws of war, and introduction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) where international war criminals are tried, were an attempt to bridge this gap between norm creation and implementation. I do not want to diminish the importance or success of these momentous pillars for human rights and the protection of civilians, however, they are rooted in extrinsic reinforcement. The primary avenues through which we advocate on behalf of human rights are rooted in punishment and reward mechanisms. Utilizing fields such as behavioral psychology and education in an interdisciplinary analysis of these tactics would show that intrinsic reinforcement is more productive and effective than extrinsic reinforcement when attainable.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Why then have we approached human rights advocacy in a largely extrinsic motivational manner through rewarding good practices and punishing bad ones? For starters, it is our nature to punish and reward, it comes more naturally, and we tend to think it is rather effective. That said, we are using intrinsic motivators, just not enough. Resolutions 1888 and 1889 and the UN itself stands as an intrinsic reinforcer of peace and human rights because of states’ desirability to be included and the image or creed it echoes around the globe. Therefore, we should begin by increasing the UN’s intrinsic reinforcement capabilities by mitigating the corruption within it.

More importantly, we must call on academics, legislators, and activists to create other means of norm implementation based in intrinsic reinforcement. Hoover-Green, a scholar on armed conflict at Drexel University, has bridged the divide between qualitative and quantitative literature and found an avenue through which we can employ intrinsic reinforcement to curb the amount of civilian violence inflicted by combatants.[[11]](#footnote-11) If we can derive intrinsic reinforcement methods of combatant training from Hoover-Green’s research that can be replicated and distributed within future resolutions, treaties, and human rights organizations, it will be one of many steps towards intrinsic norm implementation.

Word Count: 942

1. Uppsala University, The Uppsala Conflict and Data Program (UCDP), (Uppsala University, accessed March 21, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UN General Assembly, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (last amended 2010)*, (United Nations, UN General Assembly, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Emilie Hafner-Burton and James Ron, *Seeing Double:**Human Rights Impact through Qualitative and*

   *Quantitative Eyes*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dara Kay Cohen and Amelia Hoover-Green, *Dueling incentives: Sexual violence*

   *in Liberia and the politics of human rights advocacy*, (California Berkeley, Sage Publications, 2012); Hafner-Burton and Ron, *Seeing Double*

   *of Westphalia*, 1648

   Hafner-Burton and Ron, *Seeing Double* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hafner-Burton and Ron, *Seeing Double*, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Treaty of Westphalia, *Peace of Westphalia*, 1648 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hafner-Burton and Ron, *Seeing Double* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cohen and Hoover-Green, *Dueling incentives*, (California Berkeley, Sage Publications, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hafner-Burton and Ron, *Seeing Double* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Amelia Hoover-Green, *The commander’s dilemma: Creating and controlling armed group violence*, (California Berkeley, Sage Publications, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hoover-Green, *The commander’s dilemma* (California Berkeley, Sage Publications, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)