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How and Why Can Digital Diplomacy Undermine United Nations' Performance in the Context of Global Governance?

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Introduction

In an era of constant evolution, characterized by unprecedented technological innovation and a fast-paced global landscape, the long-standing practice of diplomacy has undergone substantial changes. Traditional diplomacy, formerly intended synonymously with secret negotiations, closed-door meetings, and formal state-to-state exchanges, has experienced a profound shift, fostered to a large extent by the development of new digital technologies and the internet's pervasiveness.
The introduction of digital tools, including the commonly used social media, has given a twist to the already innovative public diplomacy, born in the 20th century to publicly engage with foreign audiences and convey a positive image of a country, leading to the emergence of what is now largely know as digital diplomacy. The latter complemented public diplomacy's use of various forms of media, cultural exchanges, educational programs, and other public events, with online communications, information, and a digitalization of interactions.

To understand the origins of diplomacy and contemporary international practices, I devolve the first chapter of my thesis to a careful and detailed report on historical background, complemented by a review of existing literature, ranging from scholarly papers of historical analysis to reports regarding the mechanisms behind contemporary international relations.
I shall start from the Greek etymology of the word diplomacy, providing examples of proto diplomatic exchanges, later going through Roman instances of rudimentary ambassadors and consuls. Afterwards, I will delve into a review of medieval and Renaissance diplomacy, later introducing the concept of multilateralism and conference diplomacy, emerging through the Concert of Europe and developing into the League of Nations, finally flourishing with the multilateral diplomatic practices fostered by the United Nations.

Subsequently, I shall introduce the concept of public diplomacy and its digital transformation, investigating the ways in which digital interactions can either benefit or undermine United Nations action in terms of global governance, and presenting my research question: "how and why can digital diplomacy undermine United Nations' performance in the context of global governance?"

In the second chapter, I will thoroughly examine the impact of digital diplomacy on the United Nations, investigating the role of social legitimacy. To do that, I shall first define the concept of global governance and ascertain that the United Nations fit into its parameters, as identified by Finkelstein (1995). I shall later introduce social legitimacy into the equation, using it as an explaining variable, to tie digital diplomatic practices to a decline in United Nations' performance. Eventually, I must investigate the mechanisms in which legitimacy can be undermined in a digital world, namely the phenomenon of delegitimation, finally questioning a possible correlation between popular and elite beliefs and UN legitimacy.

The following chapter will further serve to solidify my thesis and will hinge around a case study: the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Throughout the chapter, I shall first give an overview of the events that led to the breakout of the war, from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the Crimean crisis of 2014 and Western institutions attempted and successful enlargements, drawing from International Relations scholars' perspective on the matter. Next, I will provide sources retrieved from social media, Twitter in particular, to show how digital disinformation, propaganda and delegitimation take place on the Internet and how they can hinder United Nations' legitimacy, ultimately resulting in a decline in its performance in global governance.

Chapter 1

Historical Background and Literature Review

The role played by the United Nations in the international arena is a theme that has been extensively discussed through the last eighty years, highlighting the benefits and risks of such a broad and encompassing international organization. Understanding the way in which the United Nations work and how their role has evolved is fundamental in order to understand the implications that digital diplomacy has for global governance. Before engaging with existing literature regarding digital diplomacy, it is of the utmost importance to define diplomacy and comprehend how it has evolved through time.

Although multiple scholars identify the Renaissance as the period in which modern diplomatic practices finds their roots, the etymology of the word "diplomacy" would point in a different direction, i.e. Ancient Greece. The term, in fact, is derived from the ancient Greek verb "diploun", finding its correspondent in the noun "diploma" (δίπλωμα), associated with an "official document written on double leaves (*diploo*), joined together and folded (diplono)" (Constantinou, 1996, p. 77).

In addition to this, contributions to diplomacy in ancient Greece are evident on several occasions, most notably during the Peloponnesian War in 425 and 421 BC, in settlements where hints at conference diplomacy can be found.[1]

Ancient Greek diplomacy was an intricate web of relationships and negotiations between city-states that exerted a consequential role in shaping the political and cultural landscape of antiquity.

[1] See (Numelin, 1950, p. 299; Mosley, 1971b). For historical references, see (Thucydides, n.d., 4. 15-22; Thucydides, n.d., 5. 22).

Diplomatic efforts were often critical to maintain peace and resolve conflicts between different Greek communities. Among different examples, we can find the Olympic Truce from the 8th century BC, the Peace of Nicias of 421 BC, and the Aetolian League formed in the 4th century BC among different Greek city-states to ensure mutual defense and cooperation.[2]

Different figures within this context presented features resembling more recent diplomatic dynamics; nonetheless, they lacked duties, rights, and the professional and inter-state character that denotes the work of modern diplomats. More specifically, although only relying on rules dictated by religion or customs of hospitality, four figures are noteworthy: the "angelos", that was a messenger; the "presbys" or "presbeis", used to describe an envoy or an elder; the "keryx", a person designated as a herald, being entitled to a right of personal safety; and the "proxenos", who can be considered as an archaic and embryonic version of consul. To get perspective, even prestigious envoys as Aristides and Demosthenes would not even be considered diplomats following the standards of our times (Mammadova, 2016; Mosley, 1971a, p. 321).

As Professor Raymond Cohen holds, "the practice of Greek diplomacy was quite rudimentary" (Mammadova, 2016) and, while some factors might point to the assumption that Greece might be the birthplace of diplomacy, intended in modern terms, the elements shown above seem to debunk this hypothesis. Considering these factors, contrarily to what Mammadova claims in her paper, Ancient Greece gave diplomacy its name and an initial basis of inter-state practices, but it is necessary to look elsewhere to have a more well-rounded picture about the origins of modern diplomacy.

[2] Historical references of these events can be found in Thucydides' "History of the Peloponnesian War", Polybius' "Histories", and Pausanias' "Description of Greece".

Greek practices, according to Mammadova (2016) significantly influenced Roman diplomacy, as the Romans heavily borrowed from the diplomatic practices of their Greek predecessors. There are several key areas in which the two diplomatic systems are correlated.

While in Ancient Greece envoys were trained in the art of persuasion and negotiation to deal with different city-states, the Romans developed a more elaborate and systematic approach to manage a larger empire, in which envoys were ranked on the basis of their mission and destination. Nevertheless, the concept of envoys as representatives of a state was a practice that was inherited from the Greeks, which can find a contemporary correspondence in the use of ambassadors and consuls, *inter alia.* Another correlation between Ancient Greek and Roman diplomacy is the use of alliances and treaties to secure strategic interests and achieve specific goals; for the first among poleis to strengthen their position, for the second with other tribes and states to expand their territory and secure their borders. Moreover, the concept of a balance of power elaborated by the Greeks was adopted by the Romans, who developed it further, using diplomacy to manipulate alliances and treaties to maintain equilibrium in their empire (Austin, 2006; Erskine, 2009; Keay and Terrenato, 2001; Rich and Shipley, 1995; Walbank, 1957).

For what concerns Roman diplomats, their attitude during negotiations was often described as arrogant and tactless, almost undiplomatic. Specific diplomatic practices varied throughout the various phases of the Roman polity but, to some extent, it can be said that mediation in Ancient Rome resembled overall the contemporary practices of "good offices" and "conciliation" (Ager, 2009; Gruen, 2006).[3]

Different levels of diplomatic representation emerged and consolidated through time, including the "legatio" and "commercium". The first was considered the highest diplomatic office,

[3] As referenced in (Burton, 2018)

consisting in brief missions in which the “legati”, appointed by the Senate, negotiated with foreign powers with regards to alliances, treaties, and the settlement of disputes; the second, on the other hand, had a more economy-oriented approach, as it took care of economic affairs and business agreements (Richardson, 1976).

Although ancient civilizations, such as Romans and Greeks, were known for their extensive trade networks that required diplomatic relations with other civilizations, and some of their practices still hold relevance in the modern world, ancient diplomacy by itself is not enough to understand current diplomatic mechanisms. In fact, the diplomatic mechanisms of the Middle Ages and following historical eras were vastly different from those of the ancient civilizations, for which reason it becomes of the utmost importance to investigate further into more recent periods of time.

An additional reason why ancient diplomacy is not enough to understand current diplomatic mechanisms is the impact of technology. The technological advancements of the past few centuries have deeply transformed diplomacy. Communication technology, such as telegraphs, telephones, and the internet, has made it possible for diplomats to communicate with each other in real-time regardless of their physical location. Furthermore, the use of social media platforms by diplomats, international organizations, and other international actors has become increasingly popular in recent years (Jönsson and Hall, 2002).

Hence, analyzing only ancient practices is not enough to fully grasp the current functioning of diplomacy and its mechanisms.

Taking a step forward on the timeline, diplomacy in the Middle Ages was substantially different from that of the ancient world as the political and social landscape of Europe underwent considerable changes, most importantly the emergence of feudalism as a political system, much more decentralized than the one of the Roman Empire (Teschke, 1998).

Contrarily to the custom of publicly appointed officials, diplomatic practices hinged around feudal relationships and religious affiliations, and were based on principles of chivalry, such as loyalty and respect (Kaeuper, 1999).

One of the most important diplomatic tools of the Middle Ages was the marriage alliance. For this reason, arranged marriages of royalty and nobility were commonly celebrated to create political alliances between kingdoms. For instance, the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine to King Henry II of England acted as a tool to cement the alliance between England and Aquitaine. Another important diplomatic practice of the Middle Ages was the use of emissaries, who were sent to other kingdoms to negotiate treaties and alliances. These emissaries, whose role can roughly recall that of modern ambassadors, were often members of the clergy, as the church played a fundamental role in political decisions and diplomacy during this time period, also because of its extensive networks, as shown by the presence of monks and priests as emissaries. (Sharp, 2017; Teschke, 1998; Urban, 2010).

In light of its distance from current traditions and *modi operandi*, except for the presence of agents such as emissaries, medieval diplomacy might seem irrelevant in the search for the origins of modern diplomacy; nonetheless, it constituted an important step towards the latter, as it paved the way for a new defining era for the history of diplomacy: the Renaissance, which can be considered as a turning point between two different kinds of organization of the international system.

One of the key reasons why diplomacy changed so much between the ancient civilizations, as well as the Middle Ages, and more recent times was the emergence of the nation-state, and the concurrent birth of a political system that sees the nation-state as the primary unit of political organization. Although it spread across Europe and the world over several centuries, this system started to emerge during the Renaissance period, and it fundamentally changed the way diplomacy was conducted, as it started to involve the interaction between sovereign states rather than feudal lords or city-states (Kissinger, 1994).

Even though some aspects of medieval diplomacy persisted, including the strong reliance on logics of good relationships between rulers and among alliances, and the important role played by loyalty and trust in diplomatic negotiations, the Renaissance marked a significant shift in the way nations conducted foreign affairs. In fact, in the period of time going from the late 14th to the early 17th century, diplomacy started to be intended as a distinct and formalized profession, characterized by a growing emphasis on negotiation, treaties and international law. Additionally, Renaissance diplomacy saw the establishment of permanent embassies, that hosted diplomats in the receiving country for extended periods and gave them the opportunity to entertain closer relations with local rulers, conduct negotiations and take actions on behalf of their home country (Anderson, 1942).

While the importance of permanent embassies is undeniably one of the main factors that led scholars identify in the Renaissance a turning point in the history of diplomacy, Riccardo Fubini elaborates a different perspective on the matter in his works, portraying the shift from ancient to modern diplomacy as a long run process rather than a sudden change. Furthermore, he underlines how the need for internal and external legitimation by governments of that time contributed to an evolution and transformation in the functions performed by diplomats, who were given more

autonomy with regards to both prolonged and temporary assignments to mediate conflicts, achieve peace, gather information, and strengthen the institutional role of their government (Fubini, 2000).[4] Another noteworthy aspect of Renaissance diplomacy can be found in the different tools used for communication, which started to be often carried out via formal written correspondence that followed strict protocols and procedures, in contraposition to the personal meetings and oral messages used in the Middle Ages (Murray, 2012).

At the beginning of the 18th century, ambassadors were considered the preponderant representatives of their governments and played a crucial role in conducting diplomacy, being in charge of their countries' external relations, the negotiation of treaties, and disputes resolution. Ambassadors were also expected to provide intelligence to their governments and act as cultural intermediaries between their countries and the host nation. Moving towards the mid 18th-century, however, their degree of importance diminished, as they became less relevant in negotiations and were increasingly used for ceremonial purposes. On the other hand, ministers and envoys started to take over specific diplomatic tasks, such as negotiating treaties and resolving disputes (Black, 2016).

New ways of conducting diplomacy also emerged in the centuries following the Renaissance, including congresses and conferences, which brought together representatives from different countries to discuss and negotiate issues of mutual concern and still constitute a fundamental element in contemporary international relations (Kissinger, 1994).[5]

[4] As reported, among other works by Riccardo Fubini, in (Lazzarini, 2012, pp. 425-26).

[5] Among the most consequential ones we find the Congress of Utrecht (1713), the Congress of Vienna (1815), and the Berlin Conferences (1884-5), which respectively put an end to the War of Spanish Succession, reshaped the political geography of Europe after the Napoleonic Wars, and partitioned Africa among European powers.

Diplomatic communication also underwent significant changes during this period, due to the advances in transportation and communication technology, such as the telegraph, that allowed diplomats to communicate more quickly and effectively, enabling governments to coordinate their actions more closely and respond more rapidly to changing circumstances. Another important development in diplomatic communication was the use of coded messages, used to conceal the contents of their communications from interceptions (Kahn, 1996; Satow, 1979).

All these developments reflected the growing complexity of international relations and the need for more specialized and effective forms of diplomacy, bringing it closer to current intergovernmental practices.

The birth of conference diplomacy must be seen as a turning point, as most of diplomatic practices nowadays tend to be an evolution of that historical event. In fact, starting from the 18th century, congresses started to be preferred to bilateral relations between states by government officials to ensure the achievement of common goals through multilateral international agreements (Nicolson, 1939). This is made evident by the preponderance of conferences, international fora, and bodies that embraced a similar principle in the last three centuries, starting from the Concert of Europe (1815-1914), passing through the League of Nations (1920-1946), and arriving to the still existent United Nations (1945).

The Concert of Europe, established in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, can be considered as a first experiment of regularly held conferences to discuss issues of common interest among European great powers, based on the principles of balance of power and non-intervention. Although initially able to fulfill the goal of preventing war in Europe, the Concert ultimately

collapsed due to its undemocratic and conservative character, which could not prevent the outbreak of World War 1 (Elrod, 1976).

While ideological differences were present among the Great Powers involved in the conference, they "still agreed upon the necessity of peace among themselves and accepted concert diplomacy as the means to manage crises that might jeopardize peace" (Elrod, 1976, pp. 171-172).[6]

What seems to account for the decline of the Vienna system is the occurrence of two mid-19th century events: the spread, in 1848, of liberal revolutions all over Europe, and the Crimean War, fought between 1853 and 1856 (Lascurettes, 2017, p.15).

Trying to learn from this experience, statesmen tried to arrange a new international body that could be more inclusive and democratic and, following Wilson's "14 points", the League of Nations was formed in the aftermath of World War 1 (Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, 2019). Based on principles of self-determination, disarmament and peaceful settlement of international disputes, the League aimed at providing collective security, peace, and fostering economic growth; nonetheless, the presence of authoritarian and totalitarian countries, together with intrinsic defects of the organization, led to its ineffectiveness and to a new war in 1939 (United Nations Office at Geneva, 2023).

Following the end of the Second World War, the world was left in a completely different state than before and, to face the changing nature of international relations and the challenges of that time, a new international organization was born from the ashes of the previous ones: the United Nations. As stated in the UN Charter, the purposes of the organization include international peace and security, the development of "friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle

[6] As quoted in (Lascurettes, 2017, p. 15)

of equal rights and self-determination of peoples", and international cooperation (United Nations, 1945).[7]

However, while the UN Charter gives an overview of the scope of United Nations' objectives, the means to reach these aims and the attitude towards them has conspicuously varied through time. Conference diplomacy, also referred to as multilateral diplomacy, diplomacy by groups, or parliamentary diplomacy, has undoubtedly reached its peak with the United Nations, which have alternated public diplomacy to quiet diplomacy, and evolved over the past decades to fit the needs of the international community (Hovet, 1963, pp. 29-30).

Among the various tools used by the United Nations for global governance, an important role is played by the above-mentioned public diplomacy, a relatively new form of diplomacy that emerged in the early 20th century and involves using various forms of media, cultural exchanges, educational programs, and other public events to engage with foreign audiences and convey a positive image of a country. Public diplomacy is seen as an important tool for building relationships with foreign publics, and it is used to promote a country's political, economic, and cultural interests. While many scholars have engaged with public diplomacy in their academic papers, there are still disagreements on the exact definition of this concept.[8] For this reason, I shall provide a definition of public diplomacy, to which the reader must refer in this work.

[7] For more details, refer to Article 1 of: United Nations. (1945). *United Nations Charter*. United Nations. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.

[8] For additional definitions of the concept of public diplomacy, see (Frederick, 1993, p. 229; Gilboa 1998, 2001, 2002; Rawnsley, 1995; Tuch, 1990)

Signitzer and Coombs (1992), intend public diplomacy as "the way in which both governments and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions" (p. 138).[9]

While this definition is my starting point, some elements must be added or modified in order for it to suit the current international scenario. Firstly, it must be specified that alongside governments, private individuals, and groups, also other non-state actors engage in public diplomacy: international organizations. Secondly, Signitzer and Coombs' definition is undoubtedly general and, to get to the point of this paper, a step forward must be taken.[10]

While Hovet (1963) provides a very accurate reading of two different approaches to diplomacy within the United Nations framework that can still find general application today, and Signitzer and Coombs (1992) give a fairly encompassing definition of public diplomacy, both works clearly miss, due to the timing of their publication, a substantial part of what constitutes current diplomatic practices: digital interactions.

In fact, the increasing use of social media, as well as digital tools and platforms, has led several experts to find a new subcategory of public diplomacy, i.e. digital diplomacy, that accounts for the developments of the last decades in the informatic field. As the ultimate goal of public diplomacy is to enhance an international actor's image and reputation, strengthen its diplomatic relations, and advance its political, economic, and strategic interests (Melissen, 2005); the same applies, by extension, to digital diplomacy.

[9] As quoted in (Gilboa, 2008)

[10] The works of Potter (2002-2003), Melissen (2005), and Gilboa (2006) can be helpful in doing that, as they focus on the effects of more recent changes in international relations and modes of communications.

The United Nations, throughout the last 80 years have made use of public diplomacy to share initiatives, raise awareness on global issues and, in general, to develop social legitimacy, i.e. the "acceptance of an international organization's supranational role and values by states and society" (Summa, 2020).

The role played by social legitimacy, is such that the latter "must be constantly gained and strengthened", as it amounts to "a process based on constant communications streams, ideas that are shared and the perception that different actors can project a common vision of the future. For any international organization, reputation is the cornerstone of its social legitimacy." Within this logic, any damage or lack of social legitimacy can negatively affect its "overall viability and effectiveness." (ibid.)

If on the one hand the social legitimacy of international organizations, including the United Nations, has been the object of several academic papers in the last century, and digital diplomacy is receiving slightly more attention in recent years; on the other hand, the debate surrounding the possible links and paths between the two concepts is still scarce.[11]

Among the actions undertaken by the United Nations to gradually embrace digital diplomacy, we find the creation of UN websites and the building of a social media presence over the course of the last 20 years, to get into closer contact with individuals from all over the world, spread messages and raise awareness on several of the issues tackled by the organization. Multiple profiles for the United Nations, the UN Secretary General, and various agencies have been created and are

[11] With regards to noteworthy recent works analyzing social legitimacy in the context of international relations and international organizations, see (Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2014, 2020; Frost, 2013; Tallberg and Zürn, 2019). For more on legitimacy deficits, see (Stephen, 2018). Among the major papers focusing on digital diplomacy, see (Bjola, 2016; Rashica, 2018).

frequently updated to provide the users of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other platforms with direct information on pressing issues.[12]

Looking, for instance, at the Twitter account of the United Nations, it becomes evident how digital diplomacy can support the UN in coming into contact with people, helping the organization to portray an idea of transparency by providing greater access to information about its activities and operations. UN social media accounts, followed by millions of people,[13] can be used to share information about UN initiatives and to provide regular updates on the organization's work (Verrekia, 2016, p. 20).

This can help to build trust and credibility among stakeholders, and to promote greater accountability in the conduct of UN affairs, in addition to promoting public engagement, as it provides opportunities for citizens and other stakeholders to participate in UN initiatives and to provide feedback on its work.

Moreover, online platforms and other digital tools can be used to facilitate communication and cooperation among UN agencies, member states, civil society organizations, and other international actors. Additionally, it can strengthen United Nations' social legitimacy by demonstrating its ability to work collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders.

However, the spread of digital diplomacy and the reliance of international organizations, governments, NGOs, and other international actors on it, does not come without its risks. As the internet gives space to everyone's opinion and position, it is extremely important to verify the

[12] The social media account and online platforms of the United Nations and its agencies are easily findable on their websites, at the following link: https://www.un.org/en/get-involved/social-media .

[13] United Nations' accounts, their respective followers, the initiatives proposed or shared on them, and their engagement can be visible by consulting the profiles listed in the link included in the previous note.

sources from which information is collected. Fake, or unverified, information is much easier to be shared on online platforms and it might foster the spread of extremisms, terrorism, and ideologies of any kind (Rashica, 2018, p. 82).

Furthermore, problems related to anonymity, lack of control, and informatic attacks to institutional pages must be added to the challenges posed by digital diplomacy to international organizations. (ibid., pp. 83-84).

In conclusion, while existing literature has been extensively devoted to the history of diplomacy from ancient to current times, going from antiquity, through Greek and Roman practices, to the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and up to current diplomatic mechanisms, it is puzzling to acknowledge that very few works have explored the theme of digital diplomacy, even less when understood as a possible negative factor influencing United Nations' social legitimacy and performance in the field of global governance. For this reason, I shall devote the next chapter of this paper to searching for an answer to the challenging question: "How and why can digital diplomacy undermine United Nations' social legitimacy in global governance?".

Chapter 2

The Impact of Digital Diplomacy on United Nations' Performance in Global Governance: The Role of Social Legitimacy

As highlighted in the previous chapter, public diplomacy is largely considered a key element in the work carried out by the United Nations, as it entails the possibility for an international organization to connect not only with different countries' governments, but also with individual citizens or groups, by promoting educational programs, public events, and cultural exchanges. While this concept had traditionally been exclusively associated with nation-states, in their efforts to pursue their national interests in the political, economic, and cultural fields, as the only noteworthy actors in the international system; it gradually started to be used also in relation to other actors, including even groups and private individuals, in an attempt to influence foreign governments' decisions or stances, by playing on public attitudes (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992, p. 138).

However, two points must be stressed to make this definition of public diplomacy complete: first, other international non-state actors must be included in its formulation, namely international organizations and NGOs; secondly, technological developments that have occurred in the last years have shaped the way that public diplomacy functions to a point that ignoring them would give a less accurate picture of current diplomatic dynamics. (Gilboa, 2006; Melissen, 2005; Potter, 2002- 2003)

Digital diplomacy has rapidly emerged as a key tool in international relations, providing many benefits such as increased transparency, efficiency, and public engagement. However, the spread

of digital diplomacy also poses significant risks and challenges that can undermine the United Nations' performance in global governance.[14]

This paper shall be devoted to the examination of how and why problems arising from the spread of digital diplomacy can undermine UN performance in global governance, using social legitimacy as a variable.

Section 2.1 - The United Nations as an Actor in Global Governance

To fully grasp the core reasoning of the argument at the basis of this paper, it is of utmost importance to define what global governance is, and whether the United Nations can be considered an actor within the context of global governance.

Analyzing the literature regarding global governance, a plethora of definitions regarding this concept emerge. In the words of Finkelstein, who delineates global governance as a concept consisting of "governing, without sovereign authority, relationships that transcend national frontiers", characterized by "purposive acts", as opposed to "tacit arrangements". Hence, being a global governor, means exercising some of those prerogatives reserved to governments in their state, but on the international stage (Finkelstein, 1995, p. 369).

On the other hand, other scholars tend to present a different approach to global governance, which focuses more on the means used to achieve it rather than the phenomenon in its entirety. In this light, global governance would be intended as "the sum of organizations, policy instruments, financing mechanisms, rules, procedures and norms" (Najam et al., 2006).

[14] For an overview of both risks and benefits, see: Rashica, V. (2018). The Benefits and Risks of Digital Diplomacy. *SEEU Review*, *13*(1), 75–89. https://doi.org/10.2478/seeur-2018-0008

A third perspective, is that presented by Avant, Finnemore and Sell, who put the accent on the actors of global governance, i.e. global governors, those "authorities who exercise power across border for purpose of affecting policy" (Avant et al., 2010, p. 2).[15]

Having examined some the various definitions provided by International Relations scholars on global governance and its actors, it is possible to recognize some common elements to this concept. Although Finkelstein's definition might seem the largest in scope among those provided above, it is also the most flexible one, hence the one that can better encompass the several actors that can possibly take part in global governance, ranging from well-established international organizations such as the United Nations to NGOs and other non-state actors. Far from disregarding any of the definitions given, global governance will be intended, for the sake of clarity, as the necessary sum of three elements: the absence of sovereign power in the hands of a global governor, the governing authority exerted by the latter, and the fact that such actor influences relations that "transcend national frontiers", i.e. international relations.

As the role played by the United Nations in the context of global governance is at the basis of my fundamental claim in this paper, i.e. that digital diplomacy has an undermining effect on United Nations' global governance, we must preliminarily establish whether the United Nations conforms to the elements listed above.

[15] As also reported in: Berliner, D., & Prakash, A. (2012). From Norms to Programs: The United Nations Global Compact and Global Governance. *Regulation & Governance*, *6*(2), 149–166. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-5991.2012.01130.x

The first component that must be demonstrated is the non-sovereign character of the United Nations. To do this, I will avail myself of a three-step explanation: the definition of sovereignty, the composition and organization of the United Nations, and the *superiorem non recognoscens* principle.

Drawing from the definition provided in Jackson (2007), sovereignty is a concept founded on three essential characteristics: a delineated and demarcated territory, a people, and an independent political authority; in addition to the monopoly of force within those borders and over said people (p. 18).

By just looking at these widely recognized requirements and comparing them to the characteristics of the United Nations, it is already evident how the international organization does not fit almost any of them.

For what concerns the presence of a delineated territory, while the United Nations can exercise their "control and authority" over its headquarters in line with Article 3 Section 7 (a) of the 1947 Headquarters Agreement,[16] the international organization's control over such territory is very restricted and is limited to a formal authority which, in practice, does not confer any degree of sovereignty to the United Nations (United Nations and United States of America, 1947, p. 18; Kelsen, 2000, p. 353).

Furthermore, although non-self-governing, trust and directly administered territories exist, none of these forms of temporary administration is comparable to United Nations' sovereignty over

[16] Formally called the "Agreement regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations", this document is a treaty between the United Nations and the United States signed in 1947 at Lake Success to discipline the juridical status of the UN seat geographically located in New York City.

those territories. In all cases, the administrative, governmental and policing functions are meant to be yielded temporarily to either a UN Member State and/or the United Nations, in order for that specific territory to develop self-government in its path towards independence in the context of self-determination (De Wet, 2004, pp. 292-306; Halderman, 1964; United Nations, 1945, Articles 73-76).[17]

Several times, throughout the United Nations Charter, it is made reference to "people" or "peoples", which might lead to think that the organization has some sort of authority over them. However, if on the one hand peoples are often cited within the document, the United Nations uses this term to recognize the citizens of its Member States and other entities, implicitly acknowledging the impossibility to exert any kind of sovereign power on those peoples, except via the consent given by their state or documents to which a majority of Member States have expressed their favorable opinion, especially in light of the principle of sovereign equality among states enshrined in Article 2(1) of the Charter (United Nations, 1945).[18]

Another puzzling question is that surrounding the monopoly of legitimate violence, as different interpretations are given to the use of force that can be authorized by the United Nations Security Council, as per the guidelines indicated in Chapter VII of the 1945 Charter.

While it is true that the United Nations hold the power the authorize the use of force in case all peaceful solutions to an act of aggression have been exhausted, it shall be born in mind that the

[17] For more information regarding the specifics of Non-Self-Governing Territories and Trust Territories, refer to Articles 73-76 of the United Nations Charter, available at: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text

[18] For an in-depth analysis of the principle of sovereign equality as a fundamental factor for an international organization, see: (Kelsen, 1944)

Security Council, the organ entitled to make recommendations regarding security matters, is composed of Member States. Hence, there is no way in which the United Nations *per se,* could authorize the use of force by itself.[19]

Additionally, the authorization or legitimation of violence granted by the UN Security Council, does not amount to a monopoly of violence, as no United Nations' army or military force exists to execute the recommendation authorizing the use of force, together with the absence of a territory with demarcated borders within which the UN can actually exercise this monopoly.[20]

Even considering Blue Helmets, they are on first instance serving their own country and, only in the second instance, working under United Nations' command (United Nations, 2018).

Having examined each of the constitutive elements of sovereignty, the United Nations does not seem to comply with any of them, providing a first demonstration of a lack of sovereignty on the part of the international organization. However, further analysis is needed to either confirm or debunk this claim.

Looking further into the organizational and decision-making framework of the United Nations, other considerations might serve to consolidate the assumption that would see the above-mentioned organization as a non-sovereign entity.

[19] For what concerns the composition of the United Nations Security Council, see: (United Nations, 1945, Article 23). With regards to the authorization of the use of force, refer to: (United Nations, 1945, Chapter VII), (Kelsen, 2000, pp. 119-121).

[20] While the United Nations formally has its "military personnel", the latter is composed by members of Member States' militaries.

Taking into account the structure of the General Assembly, the 1945 Charter recognizes as paramount the principle of sovereign equality (United Nations, 1945, Article 2(1)), recognizing the supreme authority of each state within its borders and the equality among states in the international arena, signifying national autonomy in external affairs and "independence from unwanted intervention", be that from a Church, an Empire, another state, or international organizations such as the United Nations (Philippot, 1995, p. 357).[21]

Recognizing the supreme authority of Member States through the principle of sovereign equality, the United Nations acknowledges the importance and unavoidability of consensus by sovereign states in order to reach resolutions and recommendations, enshrined in Article 18 of the 1945 Charter, where each state is also granted one vote.[22] No possibility of maneuver, on the other hand, is left to the United Nations *per se*, which would further reinforce the non-sovereign character of the United Nations as an entity. In light of this, despite the neoliberal character of the United Nations, it is impossible to ignore Mearsheimer's realist perspective, according to which states and their desire to assert their supremacy are the main driving force behind international relations, notwithstanding the existence of international organizations (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 10).

The preponderance of great powers' interests in international politics becomes even more evident when looking at the UN Security Council composition and decision-making peculiarities.

Considering the composition of the Security Council, the lack of sovereignty on the part of the United Nations is visible in the presence of only 15 members, 5 of which are permanent and retain

[21] Independence from the United Nations or any other international organization must be intended as limited by the legal boundaries and obligations that a state, in its own right, has decided to consent to through the ratification of an international treaty or other binding instruments.

[22] For more detailed information regarding the United Nations General Assembly, its voting procedures and questions concerning majority within the Assembly, see: (United Nations, 1945, Article 18)

a veto power in the voting procedures of the abovementioned organ. (United Nations, 1945, Article 23). The stress is, again, put on state sovereignty and state consent, without which it would be impossible for the United Nations to autonomously enforce any measure.

In the end, having scrutinized the organizational and decision-making framework of the United Nations, either from a neorealist or neoliberal perspective, it is indisputable that the international organization does not hold any sovereign power, neither on sovereign states nor on people.

In line with the *superiorem non recognoscens* principle, there is no superior power to that of sovereign states in the international arena: not even the United Nations can impose any measure on states, unless they consent to it, as international organizations derive their authority from state consent, further underlining the centrality of state sovereignty within the UN's operational framework.

This leads us onto the following part of the definition of global governance, that includes a government-like power of the United Nations which can influence relations that "transcend national frontiers".[23]

But, considering the non-sovereign character of the United Nations demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, how can such international organization manage to still exert a power comparable to that of a government in shaping international relations? The answer shall be found in the power that ideas have in influencing the behavior of states in such relations.

[23] For reference, see the definition of global governance drawn from (Finkelstein, 1995, p. 369) provided at the beginning of this section.

From this perspective, the United Nations have a paramount in role in "providing a forum for debate; generating ideas; giving ideas international legitimacy; promoting the adoption of such ideas in policy-making; implementing or testing ideas and policies at the country level; generating resources to pursue new policies; monitoring progress" (Dutt, 2012, p. 188); and burying those that might result "inconvenient or excessively controversial" (Jolly et al., 2009, p. 35).[24]

In this light, the United Nations, despite not being a sovereign entity, manage to influence the ideas and polices of international actors, and provide a platform where states can coordinate their actions (Keohane and Nye, 1998, p. 91).

The extent to which the United Nations play a role in influencing sovereign states' behavior is conspicuously seen in several fields, where the international organization's efforts have been focused: human rights, gender and women's rights, development, and environmental sustainability (Dutt, 2012, pp. 189-191).

The ideas elaborated in the context of cooperation fostered by the United Nations end up having the effect of influencing, if not shaping, the way in which elites, states and even individuals perceive a specific matter. Expert networks, for instance, affect international political debate by interacting with policymakers and being in charge of providing a scientific frame on specific issues; as visible, for example, through the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Weiss, 2010, p. 7).

[24] As reported in: (Dutt, 2012, p. 188)

In conclusion, while the United Nations do not retain any sovereign power, it is apparent how over the course of the last 60 years they have attained a government-like authority, by being in charge of the agenda in international fora, spreading ideas and influencing sovereign states' policymaking. For these reasons, the abovementioned organization is able to govern international relations notwithstanding the absence of a military body that can enforce norms, treaties, resolutions, or recommendations. Having understood this complex process, in which the United Nations play a crucial role, the standing of the organization as a fundamental global governor has been ascertained and goes beyond its non-sovereign character.

Section 2.2 - Social Legitimacy as an Explaining Variable: The Power of Ideas

While the first section of this chapter has been devoted to establishing United Nations' lack of sovereignty and fundamental presence in global governance, in which explanation the driving force exercised by ideas on international relations has been acknowledged; this second section shall explore how social legitimacy can be the missing piece in the puzzle of digital diplomacy and the effects it has in undermining United Nations' role in global governance.

1- How does social legitimacy affect global governance of the United Nations?
2- Having established the way in which this happens, how is social legitimacy shaped today? In most cases, tools of digital diplomacy can backfire, as social media and digital tools can be used to the detriment of the United Nations to reduce its legitimacy and, as a consequence, its effectiveness in global governance.

Before examining whether United Nations' social legitimacy has an effect on its global governance, a differentiation between the two similar, yet distinct, concepts of legitimacy and legitimation must be made.

In the words of Tallberg and Zürn (2019), legitimacy can be generally intended "determined by the beliefs and perceptions of audiences about the exercise of authority" (p. 586). In the case of international organizations, such audience can be distinguished between constituencies and observers, which can be referring either to state governments or citizens. What brings together the two different audiences is the way in which they can perceive an organization: legitimacy from such actors, both for states and individuals, does not consist in an objective judgement on the normative goodness of the institution but rather a positive perception that lies in the eyes of the actor. Overall, legitimacy equates to the simple belief that an organization acts in an appropriate way (Tallberg and Zürn, 2019, pp. 585-87).[25]

Legitimation, on the other hand, consists in the purposive act by an actor to influence, in a positive manner, the beliefs of another regarding the legitimacy of an organization. Conversely, the act of negatively shaping one's perception, is known as delegitimation and is generally a practice put in place by the opponents of an international organization or an action of the latter (Tallberg and Zürn, 2019, p. 588).

If, on the one hand, social legitimacy tends to be much more analyzed in existing literature, both legitimacy and legitimation might have profound implications on the United Nations effectiveness as a global governor. In fact, not only does performance influence legitimacy, as claimed by Tallberg and Zürn: legitimacy and legitimation affect performance as well.

[25] For further details on legitimacy, see also: (Hurd, 2007, p. 7; Reus-Smit, 2007, p. 44)

Following the two scholars' argument, "legitimation and delegitimation aim at shaping people's beliefs about an IO's legitimacy through discursive and behavioral practices that invoke these standards." (Tallberg and Zürn, 2019, p. 592)

The role that ideas and beliefs play proves fundamental in understanding the ways in which international political influence works, not only in a legitimacy-oriented discourse, but also in the analysis of international organizations' performance.

As claimed by Jolly, Emmerij and Weiss (2009), since policymaking is among the main focuses of international organizations, the latter "live or die by the quality and relevance of the policy ideas that they put forward and support" (p. 1).[26]

This, however, can only work in a framework where such ideas are legitimated by the support of national elites and civil society, which are described by most literature as interdependent, in addition to nation-states themselves that, up to an extent, all share some degree of accountability towards their citizens.[27]

Hence, while citizens, being individuals, are directly influenced by the ideas that are accessible and spread through social media and digital platforms, their states' stances are indirectly influenced by those inputs as well. Additionally, while all abovementioned actors can be influenced by ideas spread internationally through media, they contribute as well to the shaping of those ideas surrounding legitimacy.

[26] Quote retrieved from: (Dutt, 2012, p. 188)

[27] While not all kind of regimes, except democracies, include accountability among their foundational principles, it can be said that even autocracies present a degree of accountability, even if understood or applied in terms which differ from the liberal Western tradition. For more on accountability, see: (Schmitter, 2007)

Section 2.3 - Undermining Legitimacy in a Digital World

Having understood that beliefs about legitimacy of an international organization such as the United Nations can be affected through practices of legitimation and delegitmation, it is undeniable that social media and means of digital diplomacy are crucial in shaping opinions about the international organization's legitimacy. While mechanisms pertaining to the field of digital diplomacy which are used to legitimize or delegitimize actions from actors within the international system usually see states as their targets, they can act as a blueprint that can be repurposed and directed to international organizations as well. Among the various techniques that can be employed to undermine the legitimacy of an international actor which, in the specific case of this paper, is the United Nations, three are noteworthy: disinformation and propaganda, cyber-attacks and hacking, and a malicious use of personal data.

While the use of "bad information" has traditionally been conceived as a powerful weapon to counter opponents' legitimacy (Fukuyama, 2017), questions regarding digital disinformation have emerged in recent decades. Should false information spread through digital means be treated as traditional propaganda or does it amount to a completely new kind of weapon? (Nye, 2016). Scholars from different IR theories have tried to shed light on this question; however, as it is made evident by La Cour (2020), none of them manages to grasp the wholeness of a phenomenon like digital disinformation.

Nonetheless, the works of Edward H. Carr, the neoliberal thinker Joseph S. Nye, and the realist John J. Mearsheimer, are useful to comprehend the reasons behind disinformation (La Cour, 2020). While Carr and Nye believe that spreading disinformation might hurt the credibility and soft power of the actor sharing the false information, such perspective might not find application in today's

digital and interconnected reality, as truthful information is harder to be ascertained. On the other hand, Mearsheimer explains the motives that push leaders to lie in the context of security, disregarding the reasons that might lead states to lie or why false information spreads (Ibid.).

While reasons behind propaganda may vary and are specific to the situation in which false information is spread, La Cour (2020) identifies three prototypes of digital disinformation: a disinformation story, i.e. a single fake news; a disinformation campaign, consisting in various false stories spread internationally in relation to an event and aimed at creating confusion; and a disinformation operation, which amounts to a systematic spread of false information in the long run (La Cour, 2020, pp. 6-7). While disinformation and propaganda have been often used by state actors to exert an outside influence on another state's internal decision-making and foreign policies in the three prototypical shapes just described, as seen in multiple works of IR theorists, in reality there is a plethora of actors that can be behind this form of propaganda or that can be targeted by it, especially due to the easy accessibility of social media: civil society organizations, state actors, private companies, government elites, terrorist groups, international organizations, and even private individuals. (La Cour, p. 6)

As Paul and Matthews (2016) observe by taking Russian propaganda as their object of study, the great volume of malign information and the spread of the latter through multiple channels, can make the audience receiving it believe in the truthfulness of such information, especially when it is directed to people inclined to identify in the message they read. Furthermore, using rapid, continuous, and repetitive propaganda, further enhances the credibility of the information being delivered. Hence, although consistency or attachment to reality might lack, the large volume of disinformation, together with the rapidity and continuity with which it is delivered, make audiences

more prone to accept it as factual, in light of the familiarity they have with the sources and the communicative patterns they use (Paul and Matthews, 2016).

In the end, the effect of such propaganda and disinformation is that of affecting, either positively or negatively, the legitimacy of another actor, ultimately enhancing or undermining the performance of the latter.

As the literature suggests, often disinformation operations can combine the dissemination of inauthentic content on social media with cyberattacks and personal data leaks, two other common mechanisms in the context of malign use of digital tools in diplomacy.

The cyberspace and the internet have continuously evolved during the last years, bringing many advantages to the daily lives of individuals, international organizations, and states; however, the dependence on such means of communication can give rise to concerns regarding cyberspace infrastructure, political processes, and sensitive data (Roche, 2019, p. 68; Maulana & Fajar, 2023, p. 174). While the kinds of cyberattacks that can be perpetrated by state and non-state actors are many, the most common one is the Distributed Denial of Service attack (DDoS), "a situation whereby the host computer (or web server), which houses the targeted website, is unable to respond or communicate with legitimate requests from other computers because its resources have been consumed by the barrage of requests from the attackers" (Putra & Punzalan, 2013, p. 270). In other words, a DDoS impedes other "legitimate" users to access the web server by overwhelming it with an excessive number of "illegitimate" requests. In addition to the increasing number of cybercrimes and espionage, also international cyber warfare and cyber terrorism have seen a spike (Maulana & Fajar, 2023, p. 174; Putra & Punzalan, p. 269).

On the political side, parties and political figures can be affected as well as entire nations. If on the one hand cyber warfare is far less costly than its traditional counterpart, one other hand it manages to have effects that reach into civil society, crossing national borders and making national security more vulnerable. A notable example of the political use of cyberattacks is found in the foreign intervention in the 2016 US Elections, that saw the British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica and Facebook involved (Chansoria, 2012, p. 106; Roche, 2019, p. 69; Maulana & Fajar, 2023, p. 174).[28]

In light of the various cyberattacks and data leaks perpetrated in the last decades, during the Paris Peace Forum of 2018, world leaders, heads of international organizations, private sector companies, and civil society members launched the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace. The initiative, aimed at dealing with the challenges brought on by the cyberspace and the insufficient regulation concerning this field, was well received by the public but, still to this day, protection of data and from attacks has not reached an acceptable level (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, 2023; Cyber Risk GmbH, 2023).

Following up on the concerning issue of data leaks, threats to privacy and human rights violations arise from the stealing and the use of such information, perpetrated either by governments, companies and criminal organizations (Maulana & Fajar, 2023, p. 174; Roche, 2019, p. 70). Whether emerging from internal or external threats, intentional or unintentional behavior, the consequences of data breaches can be concerning, especially for the damages to the reputation and legitimacy of the actor whose information is leaked (Cheng et al., 2017, pp. 1-2).

[28] For a more extensive account on the Cambridge Analytica-Facebook scandal, see: Hu, M. (2020). Cambridge Analytica's black box. *Big Data & Society*, *7*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720938091

While digital and, especially, cyber diplomacy might be intended mainly as state-led practices, as pointed out by Attatfa et al (2020, p. 64), their causes and consequence are often intertwined with the work of international organizations, the United Nations among others. If, on the one hand, the extensive literature exploring the intricate fields of digital diplomacy and legitimacy tends to focus on nations-states as the main actors, highly disregarding the effects it can have on the United Nations (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018); on the other hand, I argue that international organizations actively participate in practices of digital diplomacy and are often the target of delegitimation actions by other actors of the international system which, through disinformation campaigns or operations, propaganda and other digital tools, can hinder the performance of such organizations in the context of global governance.

Following the analytical pattern presented in this section and the previous one, as legitimacy can come both from popular support and the support of elites, it can be hypothesized that a correlation exists between the support on social media by individuals towards an action of the United Nations and state support towards the same action. For this reason, in the following section, I shall provide foundations to support this correlation, in addition to a scholarship-based demonstration of my thesis.

Section 2.4 - Does a Correlation between Popular and Elite Beliefs about United Nations' Legitimacy Exist?

Elites influence people, but people through media can influence elites and the legitimacy of an IO, legitimating or delegitimating its action. In this two-sense pathway, beliefs about the legitimacy of UN performance might actually end up influencing the performance of the organization as well.

Analyzing past literature, several scholars tend to emphasize a correlation between elite's and individual's beliefs, generally embracing the consideration that elites exercise a certain degree of influence over popular opinion. These works, however, seem to support a unilateral vision which, I argue, is not able to grasp the great extent to which popular beliefs, in turn, can act as a determinant factor in state policies.[29]

As individuals' opinions about foreign policy have traditionally been thought to be superficial and unstructured (Almond, 1950, p. 232), people tend to rely on the beliefs of "trusted cue-givers", normally embodied in prominent political figures from their preferred political party (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017, p. 544). In light of this ignorance, public opinion on matters of foreign policy would be "driven in a top-down fashion by the balance of elite opinion" (Berinsky, 2007; Berinsky, 2009; Zaller, 1992).[30]

Conversely, contemporary accounts have moved towards an approach that emphasizes a correlation between elite and popular beliefs in a reciprocal sense, rather than in a unilateral top-down one, which assumes a much more realistic meaning in the digital world we live in, also taking into account the impact that social media and digital diplomacy have in this opinion-shaping process. While it is true, on the one hand, that elite communication still has a central role in shaping ideas about the legitimacy of international organizations and their actions, contemporary media

[29] To get a deeper understanding of the impact of public opinion on policy, see: (Burstein, 2003).

[30] Quoted from: (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017, p. 544)

have managed to foster a “socialization of conflict” (Schattschneider, 1975, p. 6) that has led to the mobilization of a greater portion of society (Schmidtke, 2018, p. 634).[31]

Given the fact that, through digital means, a growing amount of people has gained access to information regarding international organizations and is able to produce an opinion and influence others through media, the top-down model seeing the elite as a trend-setter for opinions regarding the international system has clearly been overcome, leaving space to a more balanced correlation between individuals and elites, where they are reciprocally influenced.

As stated in the first chapter, digital diplomacy has quickly evolved as a critical weapon in international relations, giving various benefits to the UN such as enhanced transparency, efficiency, and public participation. However, as explained in this chapter, the expansion of digital diplomacy brings substantial risks and problems that can impair the UN's effectiveness in global governance. The spread of digital diplomacy's problems, such as the spread of disinformation and propaganda, cyber-attacks and hacking, and privacy and data protection concerns, can undermine the UN's social legitimacy by eroding trust in its ability to govern effectively and decreasing public support for its initiatives and programs.Taking into account what has theoretically been delineated in this chapter, to solidify the claimed that has been advanced above, i.e. that digital diplomacy can undermine the performance of the United Nations in the context of global governance, a more practical approach is needed. For this reason, the following chapter will be devoted to the analysis of a case study regarding the impact that the Russian use of digital tools and social media accounts has had on United Nations performance.

[31] For further information on the processes of legitimation and delegitimation of international organizations, refer to: (Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2020).

Chapter 3

Case Study: The Russo-Ukrainian Conflict and its Implications for the United Nations in a Digital World

In view of the risks posed by the spread of digital diplomacy, extensively developed in the past chapter, this portion of the paper will hinge around the analysis of a case study: the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Erupted in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and subsequent military actions in Eastern Ukraine, the war fought between the Russian Federation and Ukraine has cast a long and complex shadow over the global diplomatic landscape. Beyond its geopolitical ramifications, the conflict has served as a crucible for exploring the transformative dynamics of digital diplomacy, disinformation, and propaganda in the realm of international relations.[32]

This chapter shall be devoted to an exploration of the multifaceted implications of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict on the United Nations and its performance in global governance, in addition to a scrutiny of the influence exerted by digital diplomacy tools, including disinformation campaigns and propaganda.

After an historical account on the origins and the evolution of the war between Russia and Ukraine, I shall provide the reader with evidence retrieved from online platforms and social media to support my claim, seeing a correlation between digital diplomacy and United Nations global governance performance. Additionally, statistical data will be used to substantiate the interdependence between UN perceived legitimacy and its performance.

[32] With regards to the start of the Ukrainian crisis and its later developments, see (Shaheen Zafar & Saeed, 2021); for more on the implications of the conflict from a digital perspective, refer to: (Galus & Nesteriak, 2019)

Section 3.1 - History of the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict: Origins and Developments

Following the end of the Cold War, the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought to a renewed equilibrium in the international system, in which Russia faced problems ranging from those of an economic character to domestic political instability and an annihilated capacity to exert international influence (Sauer, 2016, p. 85). The weakness demonstrated by the Russian Federation, newly born from the ashes of the USSR, was perceived from the West as an unmissable opportunity to establish its superiority, remarked through a series of enlargement maneuvers which, as of today, can be identified as the earliest causes of Russia's aggression of Ukraine (Ibid.). From a realist perspective, the intrinsic temporary character of alliances, combined with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, should have led to the downfall of NATO as well (Mearsheimer, 1990). On the contrary, pressures coming from the American allies, made NATO reconsider its aim and scope, and lead to further expansion over the European continent, ultimately working as a basis for later Russian fears and consequent actions and claims (Brown, 1995; McCalla, 1996; Sauer, 2016).

Ignoring Moscow's messages and initial promises from the West not to expand in ex-Soviet countries, NATO ultimately went through a series of enlargements in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, resulting in the accession of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Bulgaria over the course of 15 years.[33]

[33] For a more detailed report on the accession of new countries to the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance, see: NATO. (2020, May 5). *Enlargement and Article 10*. NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49212.htm.
To get a deeper understanding of the promises and statements of NATO and its members regarding eastward expansion, consult: (Sauer, 2016, pp. 85-87)

While the possibility for a reconciliation with the Russians could have been advanced prior to these actions, it became clear that the West had no intention of including Russia into an already established equilibrium of power and, as a consequence of this, Russia changed its expectations from the Westerners. However, as the country was still recovering from the fallout of the Soviet Union, it favored a more cooperative approach rather than overt opposition, notwithstanding the multiple operations conducted by NATO or the United States, without any UN Security Council Resolution authorizing the use of force (Sauer, 2016).[34]

To repair the deteriorating relationship between NATO countries and Russia, the latter was included in the (current) G8 and a NATO-Russia Council was formed in 2002, in addition to the drafting of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 2003 (*Ibid.*).[35]

Notwithstanding that, relations between Western countries, together with NATO and the EU, and Russia kept on deteriorating in the following years, giving rise to higher tensions between the two sides. In particular, the perception that Russia developed and strengthened in relation to Western actions, either enacted as national foreign policy or through international organizations, was characterized by deep distrust, accentuated even more by Russian internal problems, including economic ones, the decrease in popularity of President Vladimir Putin started already in 2008, and

[34] Clearly, NATO military operations don't formally need any UNSC Resolution to be carried out; however, in a post-Cold War era, during which the West formally embraced a more cooperative approach, the use of NATO instead of a common UN body as the Security Council, was perceived by the Russians as a manifest humiliation attempt. Among the operations conducted following this *modus operandi,* we find noteworthy the NATO 1999 bombing of the Serbs and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

[35] For more precise information regarding the NATO-Russia Council, see: NATO. (2022, September 1). *NATO-Russia Council (NRC)*. NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50091.htm.

the following protests that broke out in Moscow with objective of achieving political change (*Ibid*.).

On the one hand, Mearsheimer believes that the Russian annexation of Crimea must be read in a realist key, which would justify the act as a response to NATO enlargement and Western power play in Moscow's sphere of interest (Mearsheimer, 2014); on the other hand, other prominent figures, including the American ex-ambassador in Moscow Michael McFaul, would suggest a different interpretation, judging President Putin's move as an attempt to regain domestic popularity and to reassert Russian regional hegemony (McFaul, 2014, pp. 167-71). While both perspectives might have a factual foundation, they lack the understanding of the other actor's point; as a middle ground, Allison partially accepts McFaul's stance, but underlines how the latter misses a fundamental point: the fact that the West, through its actions, enabled Putin to use them as a pretext to legitimate in the eyes of the Russian people the pursuit of his goals (Allison, 2014; Sauer, 2016).

Regarding the Ukrainian crisis, even the EU Committee of House of Lords pronounced a statement, observing in a fairly objective way the incident, claiming the following:

> 'There has been a strong element of "sleep-walking" into the current crisis, with [EU] Member States being taken by surprise by events in Ukraine. Over the last decade, the EU has been slow to reappraise its policies in response to significant changes in Russia. A loss of collective analytical capacity has weakened Member States' ability to read the political shifts in Russia and to offer an authoritative response. This lack of understanding and capacity was clearly evident during the Ukraine crisis, but even before that the EU had

not taken into account the exceptional nature of Ukraine and its unique position in the shared neighbourhood'.[36]

Following the invasion of Crimea and the referendum held in the peninsula resulting in its annexation to the Russian Federation, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution in which states were urged not recognize changes in the status of Crimea, portraying widespread support to Ukraine, its territorial sovereignty and borders, and denouncing Russian violations of international law (United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2014).

Fast forwarding to recent events, after almost a decade of tensions between the Kremlin and Western organizations and states, including summits of various nature, UN Security Council attempted resolutions and sanctions from the European Union (Sauer, 2016, p. 89); a new significant development is the one registered between the last months of 2021 and early 2022, consisting in a suspect movement of Russian troops towards the Ukrainian border (Centre for Preventive Action, 2023).

On February 24th, 2022, the Russian forces invaded the Eastern part of Ukraine, justifying the act of aggression as a "special military operation" aimed at the "demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine", which was also accused of genocide and bullying towards the Eastern separatists, to which aid Russia had come already from 2014 (Centre for Preventive Action, 2023; Osborn & Nikolskaya, 2022).

[36] House of Lords EU Committee. (2015). The EU and Russia: Before and Beyond the Crisis in Ukraine. 6th Report of Session 2014-2015. In *UK Parliament Publications*. Stationary Office. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldeucom/115/115.pdf

The United Nations Security Council, in an attempt to fulfill its functions and the mandate of the United Nations, met in the wake of the Russian aggression of Ukraine, in order to provide the maintenance of peace and security, cooperate to solve the international problem arisen and guarantee the respect of human rights (United Nations Security Council, 2023; United Nations, 1945). In the meeting held, however, the draft put forward by the United States and Albania, in which the UNSC would have strongly opposed Putin's act of aggression as violating the Charter and urged the immediate cessation of the use of force and withdrawal of troops from Ukrainian territory,[37] met the abstention of China, India and the United Arab Emirates, and was vetoed by the Russian Federation, ultimately leading to the rejection of the draft (United Nations, 2022a).

While assisting both sides and protecting civilians by pledging the allocation of $20 millions from the Central Emergency Response Fund (United Nations | Global Perspective Human Stories, 2022a), the UN General Assembly also passed a resolution demanding the Russian Federation to "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders" United Nations | Global Perspective Human Stories, 2022b).[38]

While Security Council's resolutions are binding, contrarily to those issued by the UN General Assembly, and could impose sanctions to a country which does not comply with the prohibition of the threat or use of force, the favorable vote of the 5 permanent members is needed. In this case, however, being Russia one of them, it would have been impossible to enforce Article 41 of the Charter, which would grant the aforementioned power to adopt measures leading to the cessation

[37] Refer to (United Nations, 1945, Article 2 (4)) for the provision urging states to refrain from the threat or use of force.

[38] The resolution passed with 141 votes in favor, 35 abstentions, and 5 vote against.

of the use of force (United Nations, 1945). For this reason, a form of "informal multilateralism" has developed worldwide, resulting in countries from all over the globe to impose various rounds of economic sanctions and restrictions on the freedom of movement of Russian oligarchs, in addition to private companies' boycott of Russian products and market, and European Union sanctions (Biersteker, 2022).

Additionally, several United Nations bodies and agencies, opened various kinds of proceedings and adopted documents to oppose the continuance of the war in Ukraine. On March 5th, 2022, the UN Human Rights Council formed an "independent international commission of inquiry"; some days later, the International Court of Justice ordered the Russian Federation to "suspend military operations in Ukraine", after the International Criminal Court had opened an investigation on human rights violations on February 28th; in late March 2022 a new resolution was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly was adopted in relation to humanitarian violations and the protection of the civilian population, followed by the appointment of three experts to investigate violations of human rights; and, on April 7th, Russia was suspended from the Human Rights Council through a new UNGA resolution (United Nations, 2022b).

Section 3.2 - Russian Federation and Ukraine's Digital Diplomacy and Its Implications for Social Legitimacy

While military operations continue to occur on a daily basis on Ukrainian territory, another extremely important battlefield is found online, where both the actors involved in the conflict directly and those who indirectly support one of the two parties, find themselves involved in the use of digital tools, either being members of a state's elite or common citizens.

As explained in the previous chapters, digital diplomacy and cyber diplomacy have been fundamental instruments to influence the legitimacy of other actors, be that in a positive or negative way, i.e. to legitimize or delegitimize another's actions credibility.

It is undisputable that most of the literature analyzing digital and cyber diplomacy usually sees digital disinformation, propaganda, and cyber-attacks as state-led practices (Attatfa et al., 2020, p. 64; Bradshaw & Howard, 2018) or more in general sees states as either the recipients or the manipulators of digital campaigns or operations. However, international organizations, primarily the United Nations, are progressively more often entangled in digital diplomacy and delegitimation strategies, frequently orchestrated by states, that result in the indirect hindering of the good performance of such organization in the context of global governance.

To remark the truthfulness of my claim, I shall now present the practical applications and implications of digital disinformation and propaganda on United Nations' performance within the case study of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

Before presenting some factual examples to substantiate my argument, it is of utmost importance to understand the different kinds of actors behind them. Three main actors can be identified: official accounts of embassies, ministries or countries; individuals of various degree of social media popularity; and bots, automated programs able to perform designated tasks (Chu et al., 2012; Geissler et al., 2023).

Among the various existent social media platforms, Twitter is the one to which most individuals refer, as it is considered to be a forum for news to be shared, to get information about current events, and to follow politics, either national or international (Twitter News, 2022).[39]

According to Geissler et al., even by only considering Pro-Russian "tweets" and their "retweets"[40], the number of users reached is estimated to be around 14.4 million (Geissler et al., 2023). If a comparable, if not higher, reach must be computed for tweets in support of Ukraine, the number of accounts reached could be hypothetically of 30 million.

Clearly, given the enormous reach of messages regarding the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, or related to it, I shall present only a limited number of tweets that are concluding for the demonstration of my thesis.

Digital disinformation and propaganda can assume different forms, ranging from direct attacks to new instruments, including memes.

[39] The social media Twitter, having assumed the name "X" since July 2023, is notoriously a platform where confrontation occurs on a daily basis, be that between common users, between an individual and an institution, between two institutional accounts, etc. Throughout this paper, X will be referred to as Twitter, the name of the platform at the time of the writing.

[40] The two Twitter functions are respectively used to post a content on your profile (tweet), and to share someone else's content (retweet).

Figure 1

Figure 2

As portrayed in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*, memes can be used as digital tools for subtly attacking an opponent. A difference between the author is notable: if, on the one hand, we find a common person denouncing India's tendency to abstain in voting resolutions concerning the Russo-Ukrainian conflict; on the other, the political use of a meme is made by the official account of Ukraine that, already in December 2021, was suspicious of the Russian troops' movements towards the Ukrainian Eastern borders. In both cases, the protagonist is the alluding character of memes, for which the tweets of the two figures respectively hint at Indian's political and economic interests and Russian dubious military operations, but without openly stating that.[41]

[41] The tweets pictured in Figure 1 and Figure 2 are available at the following links: https://twitter.com/Pradeep_NF/status/1506866872465395712?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/Ukraine/status/1468206078940823554?s=20 .

However, not all the tweets regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war are memes. On the contrary, many of them consist in overt attempts at undermining the legitimacy of another actor, without the need to conceal it. Among the most prolific institutional accounts, we find the Russian Embassy in the United Kingdom, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Russian Mission to the United Nations, whose most prominent tweets are presented in the figures below.

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

While referring to different circumstantial situations, all three of the tweets in *Figure 3*, *Figure 4*, *Figure 5,* and *Figure 6* share a specific intent: to delegitimize the West, intended as the European Union or the United States, and indirectly doing the same to Western-dominated organizations like the United Nations.[42]

This intent is reached by accusing such countries and, by reflex, Western international organizations, to obtain the compassion and/or the support of Twitter users, spreading disinformation and making propaganda out of a conflict. Notwithstanding the unconditional support towards Ukraine by several countries and international organizations (see European Commission, 2023); the online interactions, including likes and retweets to the tweets in *Figures 3, 4* and *5*, suggest that another fringe of the international society could firmly back Russia.[43]

Many of the tweets presented insofar fall into the category of Russian attempts at the legitimacy of the United Nations, primarily in an indirect way but, as visible in *Figure 6,* also in the form of direct attacks at the actions of the Security Council. Nonetheless, it is fundamental to get an objective perspective on the extent to which both sides could have undermined United Nations' legitimacy and, consequently, its performance in the context of global governance. For this reason, I shall now present additional tweets to show how Ukrainian supporters have contributed to profound criticism and delegitimation towards the United Nations.

[42] Find the tweets at the following links – Figure 3: https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1672694547170615297 ; Figure 4: https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy/status/1506347652136505348?s=20 ; Figure 5: https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy/status/1504530573527760909?s=20 ; Figure 6: https://twitter.com/RussiaUN/status/1702440754440720395?s=20 .

[43] In particular, the tweet shown in Figure 4, and its original tweet (from the Russian Embassy in France), have each reached around 45k likes and 18k retweets. The tweet in Figure 5 has collected approximately 18k likes and 7k retweets, while the one in Figure 3 has been liked by 20k users circa and retweeted by 6.5 k.

Figure 7

Figure 8

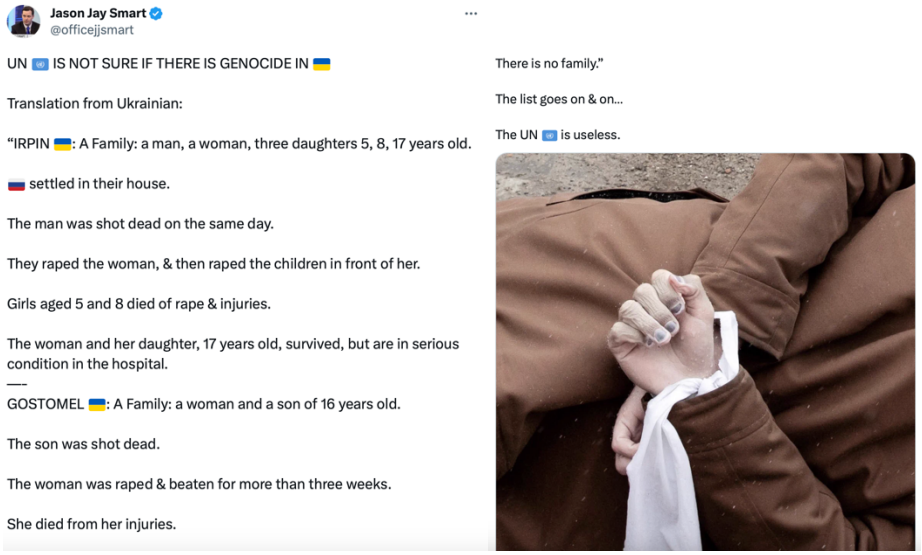


Figure 9.1-9.2

Figure 10

As it is made evident by the tweets in *Figures 7 to 10,* it is not only Russia and its supporters to have critical views of the UN, but also Ukrainian ones, primarily directing their attacks at the United Nations Security Council and its incapacity to successfully perform its functions.[44] What is denounced in the tweet reported above, is an "irrevocably broken" architecture of the body which should provide the maintenance of peace and security (United Nations, 1945), the "uselessness" of the United Nations, and the failure to recognize genocide, which prevention is a core value of the organization, together with the prevention of other "atrocity crimes", including war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.[45]

Without distinction between the two parties to the war, the actor coming out as the most targeted on social media is by far the United Nations, undergoing a two-sided attack: on the one hand by Russia and its supporters, calling for a Western-dominated international organization which only pursues the interests of the West; on the other hand, Ukraine and its advocates, highlighting the operational inefficiency of the United Nations Security Council, a body which structure is outdated and cannot bring to effective measures aimed at providing the maintenance of peace and security and the respect of international law, ultimately leaving space for genocide, war crimes and acts of aggression, in light of the fact that the country perpetrating those actions is a

[44] The tweets presented in the Figures 7, 8, 9, and 10 can be found at the following links – Figure 7: https://twitter.com/HawaiiDelilah/status/1497343461309120512?s=20 ; Figure 8: https://twitter.com/RJ1979_/status/1704138878410432706 ; Figure 9.1 and 9.2: https://twitter.com/officejjsmart/status/1699535384961483153?s=20 ; Figure 10: https://twitter.com/OlenaHalushka/status/1702033312829604305?s=20 .

[45] To learn more about "atrocity crimes", see: (United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, 2023)

permanent member of the Security Council, vetoing any binding resolution considered inconvenient by it.[46]

Having acknowledged this, it is undeniable that, either directly or indirectly, the legitimacy of the United Nations, intended as the "beliefs and perceptions of audiences about the exercise of authority" (Tallberg and Zürn, 2019, p. 586), has been undermined. As claimed by Cottarelli, "potential trade-offs between legitimacy and efficiency exist for any public institution but are arguably more severe for an international one" (2005, p. 1).

Section 3.3 – The effect of Declining Legitimacy on the United Nations Performance

From the pattern presented in the precedent chapter and the practical use of digital means in the context of public diplomacy during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict furnished in the previous section, legitimacy has emerged as declining. In this section, I shall present data to support my reasoning.

As United Nations legitimacy *per se* cannot be measured, I will avail myself of a proxy used in various studies: trust.

Drawing from data collected in the FES Global Census 2022, it appears that among the countries surveyed, when asked the "preferred level of involvement" of their country in the UN, at least

[46] Such ineffectiveness was further denounced by Ukrainian President Zelensky at his address to the Security Council. See: Al Jazeera. (2023, September 20). *Zelenskyy says UN Security Council "ineffective" due to Russian veto*. Www.aljazeera.com. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/20/zelenskyy-says-un-security-council-ineffective-due-to-russian-veto

60% of the surveyed individuals in each of them signaled their will to either maintain or increase involvement (*Figure 11*).[47]

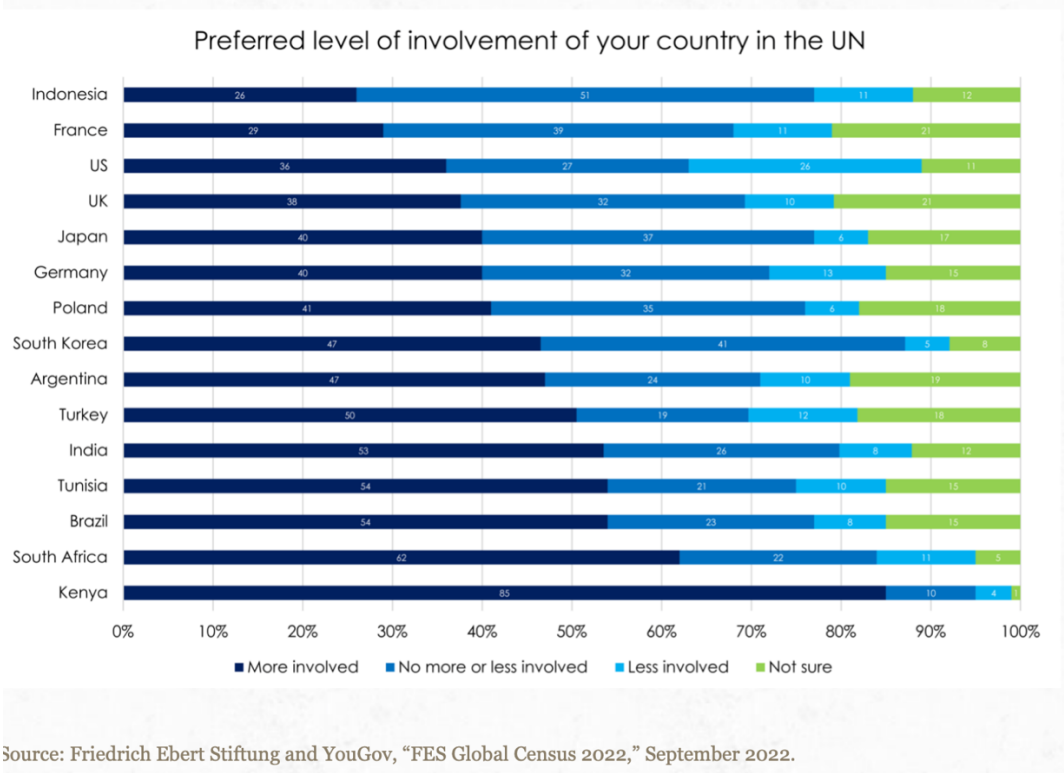
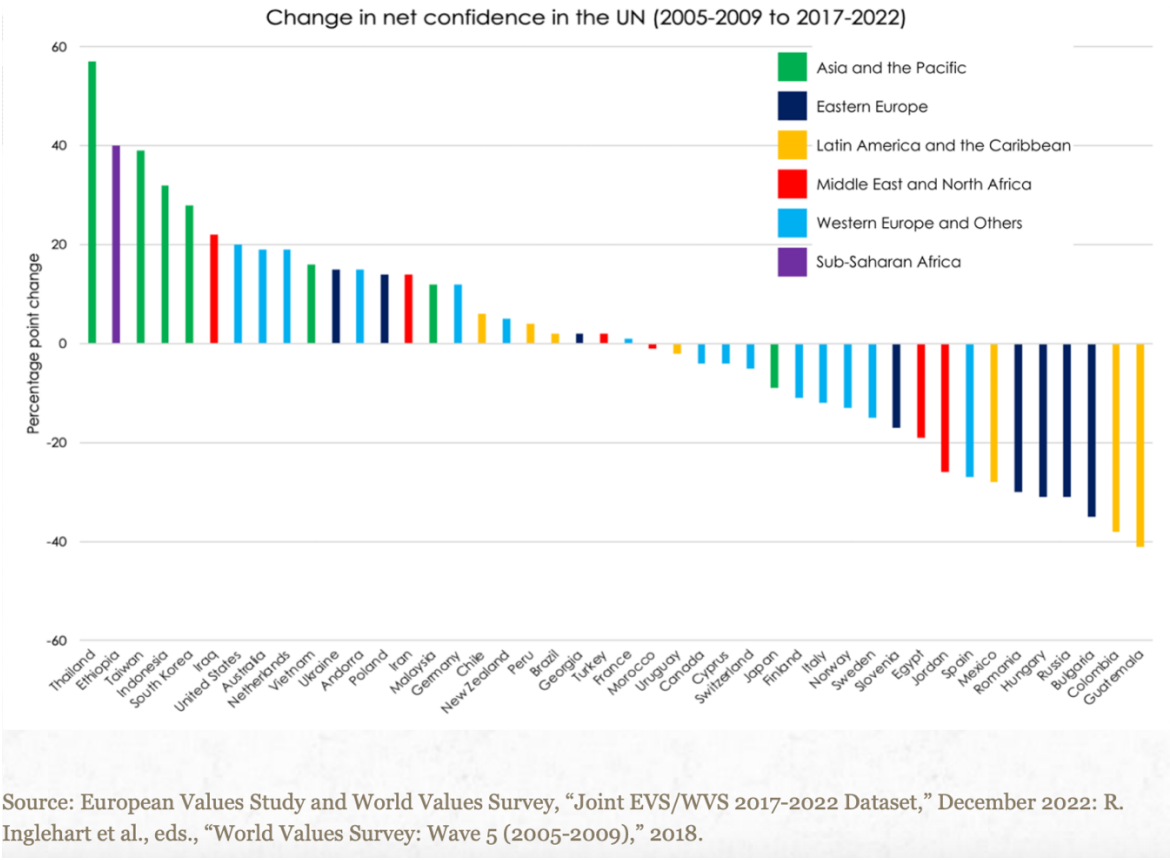


Figure 11

Nonetheless, if we look at the change in net confidence, a more concerning picture appears. Comparing the Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2022 Dataset with the 2005 World Value Survey, we notice a negative trend for approximately half of the countries surveyed, mirroring the declining legitimacy of the United Nations in more recent years (*Figure 12*).[48]

[47] The survey, conducted by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and YouGov, was conducted on 15 countries with different political, social, and economic conditions. Graph retrieved from: Trithart, A., & Case, O. (2023, February 22). *Do People Trust the UN? A Look at the Data*. IPI Global Observatory. https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/02/do-people-trust-the-un-a-look-at-the-data/#:~:text=A%20global%2Dlevel%202020%20survey

[48] Graph retrieved from: (Trithart & Case, 2023)

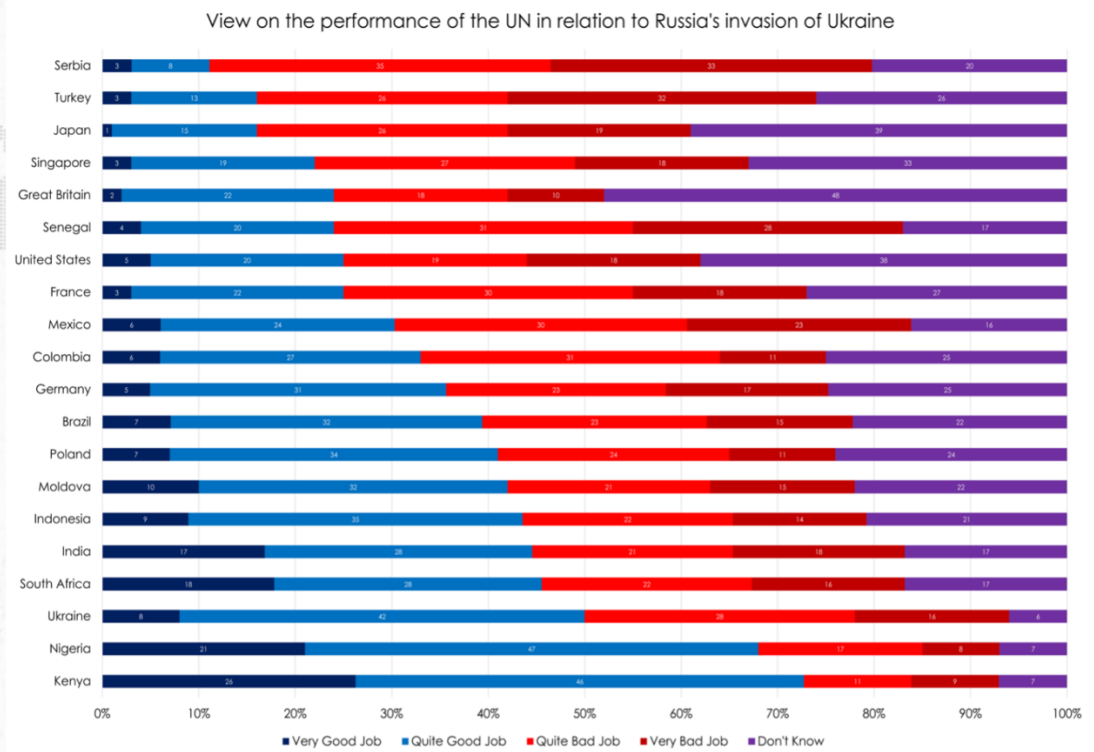


Source: European Values Study and World Values Survey, "Joint EVS/WVS 2017-2022 Dataset," December 2022: R. Inglehart et al., eds., "World Values Survey: Wave 5 (2005-2009)," 2018.

Figure 12

In addition to these studies, which are undoubtfully helpful in understanding the overall perception and legitimacy of the United Nations and its change over time, I shall present a third survey that aims at portraying countries' perception of the United Nations in the wake of the war between Russia and Ukraine, tying it to UN performance (*Figure 13*).[49]

[49] The graph is available in: (Trithart & Case, 2023)



Source: Open Society Foundations, "Fault Lines: Global Perspectives on a World in Crisis," September 2022.

Figure 13

In relation to the performance of the United Nations, combining the options "very good job" and "good job", only 2 countries out of the 22 surveyed surpass the 50% threshold: Nigeria and Kenya. The other 20 countries on which the study has been conducted, present a majority of individuals believing the United Nations has either done a quite or very bad job, or does not know how to judge the way in which the UN dealt with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

If, on the one hand, United Nations operational efficiency in the contingent case study being analyzed has shaped beliefs regarding legitimacy, as made visible in Section 3.2 of this chapter, it must be established whether legitimacy has, in turn, influenced performance as well.

As for the analysis of United Nations legitimacy, I shall avail myself of proxies that, although not being a direct measurement of UN performance in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, can give a broader picture of how the operational efficiency of the organization has been affected by the latter.

To assess the performance, I have picked three indicators tied both to this specific case study and to the United Nations' mandate in general: the maintenance of peace and security, the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the prevention of war crimes and human rights violations.

Considering the maintenance of peace and security, a goal enshrined in the 1945 Charter, the role played by the United Nations must not be underestimated. As previously stated in Section 3.1, from the moment the Russian troops have entered Ukraine, the UN has tirelessly tried to find solutions within its power to reestablish order by putting forward then-vetoed draft resolutions in the Security Council, passing resolutions in the General Assembly, opening commissions of inquiry and investigations by the International Criminal Court (Feltman, 2023; United Nations, 2022b).

Notwithstanding the efforts made by the United Nations in trying to reestablish international peace, problems regarding the effectiveness of institutions have arisen, as General Assembly resolutions are not binding instruments and Security Council resolutions need to be agreed on by all permanent members, leading to a *de facto* uselessness of UN tools and the need for institutional reforms. Even the introduction of "political costs" to the use of veto by permanent members of the Security Council through a UNGA resolution pushed by Liechtenstein, the powers of the permanent members are practically unchanged, ultimately resulting in a lack in efficiency in United Nations performance to govern global affairs (Feltman, 2023).

A second parameter that can be used to assess United Nations performance is the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, another fundamental principle of the international system (United Nations, 1945). As recognized by President of the General Assembly Csaba Kőrösi, the reassertion and restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is the only possible solution to end the ongoing conflict (United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2023). However, notwithstanding the several attempts made by the International Court of Justice and the General Assembly,[50] no result has been achieved yet with regards to this, signaling how this conflict has led to the emergence of existing problems within the UN institutional framework and the extent to which United Nations global governance performance has been hindered.

Finally, with regards to the UN mandate to promote human rights and prevent war crimes, a third problematic point comes up. As denounced by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, "a wide range of violations of international human rights law international humanitarian law in various regions of Ukraine, many of which amount to war crimes" has occurred (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023), including the willful killing of civilians, violations of the right to life, gender-based violence and rape, torture. In light of this, the Commission has recommended the investigation of all these crimes and violations and pushed for guaranteeing victims their right to "truth, reparation and non-repetition" (*Ibid*.). Nonetheless, all of the abovementioned violations are still unpunished, while the United Nations fails to safeguard human rights and prevent war crimes from continuously happening. Again, the organization's performance shows a lack of efficiency.

[50] Refer to Section 3.1

Conclusion

After drawing a historical and scholarly framework within which I carefully scrutinized the ambiguous role played by digital diplomacy, providing an explanation of both the risks and benefits it entails, I provided with several claims to build up the theoretical foundations of my thesis' demonstration.

As a non-sovereign entity with an influencing power over international affairs, the United Nations fully comply with the requirements identified as constitutive of global governance by Finkelstein (1995). However, while this influence has always been consequential in "providing a forum for debate; generating ideas; giving ideas international legitimacy; promoting the adoption of such ideas in policy-making; implementing or testing ideas and policies at the country level; generating resources to pursue new policies; [and] monitoring progress" (Dutt, 2012, p. 188); the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has been fundamental to bring to light the structural limits and institutional problems of the United Nations, as well as practically showing how digital diplomacy can be made into an instrument working to the detriment of UN performance in global governance.

As postulated in the beginning of this paper, digital diplomacy does, in fact, bring with it some downsides: digital disinformation and propaganda, cyber-attacks and hacking, and a malicious use of personal data. These mechanisms, as demonstrated in the second chapter and consolidated in the third, serve the purpose of specific actors, usually states, to undermine the beliefs surrounding the legitimacy of other actors, in this case the United Nations. The delegitimation coming from such practices, in turn, hinders the performance of the abovementioned international organization

and the fulfillment of its international mandate. Using existing studies and surveys, I supported with statistical data the claims put forward, noting a decrease in UN trust, a proxy used to measure legitimacy, especially visible when the current levels are compared to past ones.

However, it would be naïve to think of a malicious use of digital diplomacy as the sole reason behind the decrease in UN legitimacy and poor performance in the maintenance of peace and security, guarantee of human rights, prevention of war crimes, and safeguard of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Other factors, which have not been included in this paper, have certainly contributed to this double-step phenomenon, COVID-19 and the growth of authoritarianism among others, as well as some structural limitations of the United Nations, as the non-binding character of General Assembly Resolutions and the veto power retained by the 5 permanent members of the Security Council.

In light of this, institutional reforms are needed to tackle the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of certain United Nations actions, and to restore its global governance, further solidifying it.

In conclusion, while this paper has provided theoretical and practical elements to support a correlation between digital diplomacy and United Nations performance, ultimately explained by the effect that social legitimacy has on the latter, many possible routes can still be explored to either complement my thesis with additional explanatory variables tying digital diplomacy to UN performance as a global governor or rule out alternatives.

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