



Power in Practice

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Published in:
European Journal of International Relations

DOI:
[10.1177/1354066113512702](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066113512702)

Publication date:
2014

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (APA):
Adler-Nissen, R., & Pouliot, V. (2014). Power in Practice: Negotiating the International Intervention in Libya. European Journal of International Relations, 20(4), 889-911. [2]. DOI: 10.1177/1354066113512702

Power in practice: Negotiating the international intervention in Libya

European Journal of
International Relations
2014, Vol. 20(4) 889–911
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1354066113512702
ejt.sagepub.com


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Abstract

How does power work in practice? Much of the ‘stuff’ that state agents and other international actors do, on an everyday basis, remains impenetrable to existing International Relations theory. This is unfortunate, as the everyday performance of international practices actually helps shape world policy outcomes. In this article, we develop a framework to grasp the concrete workings of power in international politics. The notion of ‘emergent power’ bridges two different understandings of power: as capability or relation. Emergent power refers to the generation and deployment of endogenous resources — social skills and competences — generated in particular practices. The framework is illustrated with an in-depth analysis of the multilateral diplomatic process that led to the 2011 international intervention in Libya. Through a detailed account of the negotiations at the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Union, the article demonstrates how, in practice, state representatives translate their skills into actual influence and generate a power politics that eschews structural analysis. We argue that seemingly trivial struggles over diplomatic competence within these three multilateral organizations played a crucial role in the intervention in Libya. A focus on practice resituates existing approaches to power and influence in International Relations, demonstrating that, in practice, power also emerges locally from social contexts.

Keywords

Competence, diplomacy, emergence, Libya, power, practice theory

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Introduction

In 2011, an international military operation helped remove the Gaddafi regime in Libya. To some, in particular liberal internationalists, the intervention reflected the power of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine since the end of the Cold War (Bellamy and Williams, 2011). Critical theorists (Bush et al., 2011) dismissed the operation as a badly construed cover for Western interests in the region, while realists concluded that a 'neat realist narrative,' with its focus on military capabilities and balance of power, could not account for the Libya intervention (Krasner, 2013: 339). Regardless of how we approach the intervention, there remain many unanswered questions when it comes to the multilateral diplomatic process behind it. For instance, how did France and the United Kingdom (UK) manage to overcome American reluctance to intervene? Why did deeply skeptical North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, including Germany and Turkey, eventually support the military operation? How were BRICS¹ countries, despite two potential vetoes and a relatively strong coincidence of interest at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), ultimately kept at bay? Finally, what pushed European Union (EU) member states to prepare a humanitarian mission that everybody knew would never be carried out?

At the theoretical level, these questions raise a larger issue in the study of world politics: how does power work in practice? More specifically, what makes one country more influential than another in multilateral negotiations? Why do certain states appear surprisingly powerless on the world stage, while others punch above their weight? Existing International Relations (IR) theories provide structural answers to these questions, but we still lack a clear understanding of the concrete workings of power in international politics. Take a classic example, neorealism: as effective as the distribution of material capabilities may be in shaping outcomes, the theory remains indeterminate unless we can explain how positional forces actually translate into power dynamics around the multilateral negotiating table. While IR theories may help identify *who* pulls the strings of multilateral diplomacy, they are less useful to understand *how* strings actually get pulled.

This article fills a gap in IR studies by theorizing power in practice. The practice perspective explores world politics, including organizations, communities, professions, policy making, and state interaction, from the perspective of everyday performances that embody shared knowledge (Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Neumann, 2002). One of the most common criticisms of IR's recent turn to practice is that it tends to overlook power. Specifically, some find the approach too agency-oriented (Hopf, 2010: 345). We agree that a practice approach should not 'obscur[e] the broader context in which practices occur' (Duvall and Chowdhury, 2011: 348). Yet we also observe that structural perspectives in IR problematically fail to explain three relevant facets of power dynamics:

- (1) how structural resources translate into actual influence;
- (2) how endogenous resources may also be locally generated (or undermined) within the social process itself; and
- (3) why many political outcomes significantly differ from strictly distributional determinations.

Taking international practices seriously, we argue, helps address these shortcomings. The everyday performance of international politics is not a mere epiphenomenon of deeper structural forces; it is also a generative force in and of itself. Central to our framework is the notion of ‘emergent power,’ which refers to the endogenous resources — social skills or competences — generated within practices. Through a detailed account of the multilateral negotiations on Libya at the UNSC, NATO, and EU, we demonstrate how state representatives use various tactics to wield influence by establishing themselves as skillful diplomats, while undermining similar claims by their opponents.

Importantly, we do not claim to account *for* the Libyan war, in the sense of identifying all its multifaceted causes. Instead, our more limited purpose is to provide an account *of* the intervention, centered on multilateral diplomacy. In IR, most theories tend to explain military interventions by inferring the belligerents’ interests, derived from the international structure (e.g. balancing), domestic politics (e.g. diversion), or norms (e.g. humanitarianism). There is no doubt that interests, norms, and structural forces played a role in the Libya case, but our argument operates on a different analytical plane. In tune with practice theory, we refrain from using motives, which are often empirically intractable, as explanatory variables. Instead, we zoom in on the actual moves performed by national diplomats at the UNSC, NATO, and EU in order to reconstruct the dynamics of influence that gave the intervention its peculiar shape and pace. In so doing, we shed light on power in practice — a critical dimension of world politics that both interest- and norm-based accounts tend to overlook.

Power in IR theory and in practice

As useful as existing IR theories may be to illuminate structural facets of power, practice theory is unique in capturing the *emergent* quality of power dynamics in international politics. This section begins by distinguishing between two broad ontologies of power in IR theory: capabilities and relations. It then shows how a practice approach effectively spans the two notions: power in practice emerges out of micro-struggles over specific resources that are in part endogenous. These resources take the form of socially recognized competence, which is locally generated, contested, and played out, to eventually affect world policy.

Capabilities versus relations

The most basic distinction in existing conceptions of power concerns whether power is a capability — something that one *owns* — or a relation — a social dynamic (Baldwin, 2013). The best-known proponents of the former approach are realists, who argue that the international power structure essentially amounts to the distribution of material capabilities, that is, the balance of power argument (Waltz, 1979). Thus, the power of a state can be measured in terms of its military hardware and other material resources. The probability of conflict and cooperation depends on the distribution of these capabilities. The capability approach to power does have a relational element in that it focuses on the relative distribution of resources. However, realists assume that the relation between two parties is determined by capabilities, that is, capabilities become a proxy for power.

Many liberal institutionalists also think of power in terms of capabilities, stressing the importance of asymmetrical economic relations to benefit from interdependencies (Keohane and Nye, 1977). In addition to economic resources, liberals such as Nye include non-material capabilities, such as culture and ideology (Nye, 1990). Although he later revisited his position, defending a more relational view, Nye originally defined soft power in terms of objective resources, based on the relative number of US movies, patents, high-level universities, and so on (Nye, 1990: 26; see also Nye, 2004).

In contrast, the relational perspective approaches power as vested not in capabilities, but in social relations. Criticizing capability-based approaches to power, Baldwin (1989: 27) famously claimed that ‘the difficulty of measuring political power is due to the absence of something that fulfills the measure-of-value function of money.’ In economics, money is the fundamental resource because it serves as a generalized medium of exchange. However, no such thing exists in politics, argues Baldwin, where the value of specific resources is bounded by particular contexts. For us, the key issue is not so much the ‘fungibility’ of resources (Keohane and Nye, 1977), but rather their indeterminacy or contingency. It is only in a particular social context that resources truly become a means to an end and may deliver effects. Baldwin (1989: 138) argues that any capability can be a source of power granted the proper conditions: resources are ‘situationally specific’ (see also Guzzini, 1993). Consequently, the ‘only way to determine whether something is a power resource or not is to place it in the context of a real or hypothetical policy-contingency framework’ (Baldwin, 1989: 134). Power dynamics are contingent on the specific relationships in which they are taking place.

In its rationalist version, the relational perspective on power often takes the form of bargaining or game-theoretical approaches. Schelling (1980 [1960]), perhaps most famously, sought to identify the logic of tactics of influence — unilateral promises, reciprocal promises, threats, commitments, the elimination of options, hostages, contracts, appeals to higher authority. Others have refined this framework over recent decades, with reference to audience costs, preferences, incomplete information, and so on, to demonstrate that even materially weaker players may come out as the winner due to the bargaining process and communication between parties (Fearon, 1998). In the case of international interventions, these scholars explain preferences for Security Council authorization of intervention as a search for ‘burden sharing’ and ‘legitimacy for domestic and international purposes’ (Voeten, 2001: 856). Yet, if what is exchanged in a bargaining situation is communication, then we need to take human interaction as a symbol-exchanging process seriously. This has been particularly important for constructivists, who have focused on meaning as crucial for power outcomes. Reus-Smit (2004) argues that to understand power correctly, it needs to be conceived as: relational, not possessive; primarily ideational, not material; and intersubjective and social, not subjective and non-social.

Building on these insights, Barnett and Duvall (2005: 42) propose a broader conceptualization: ‘power is the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate.’ The authors typologize four forms of power (compulsory, institutional, structural, and productive) depending on ‘the kinds of social relations through which power works’ and ‘the specificity of social relations through which effects on actors’ capacities are produced’

(Barnett and Duvall, 2005: 42). This typology subsumes Dahl's original conceptualization ('A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do') as well as key amendments about agenda-setting and ideology and discourse. From a structural or productive perspective, international interventions can be seen as the result of ideological dominance or the discursive negotiation of different understandings of sovereignty.

Although the different relational approaches do much to problematize the dominant ontology of power-as-capabilities, they risk throwing out the baby with the bathwater by not paying sufficient attention to resources. Baldwin, for instance, never spells out where 'situationally specific' resources come from. For their part, Barnett and Duvall have little empirical guidance to offer on the nature and expression of power resources. In fact, for relational scholars, it would seem that capabilities pre-exist power relations as exogenous, latent resources: they are already there, so to speak, waiting to be activated in a particular context. This is obviously the case in many circumstances: a trade diplomat enters an international negotiation armed with his or her country's economic assets. Moreover, institutional rules — for instance, the veto at the Security Council — contribute to biasing the landscape prior to our observation of power in practice.

However, in this article, we argue that this power baseline of pre-existing assets does not exhaust the variety of resources that structure power relations. In many cases, including the multilateral negotiations on Libya, power also emerges from the interaction *per se*. In other words, some power resources are produced locally, in and through a particular practice. This omission is a common flaw of both power-as-relationships and power-as-capabilities approaches, which we hope to redress. How are power resources generated and played out in social relations?

Emergent power: The struggle for competence

The notion of emergence originates in physics and philosophy but is now also a key concept in social theory (Archer, 1995; for an overview, see Sawyer, 2001). Today, it refers to the complex patterns evolving from multiple interactions among units, rendering the system more than the sum of its parts. Canonical examples of emergence include traffic jams, ant colonies, and bird flocks. However, the types of emergence that are observed in human social interaction result from the unique fact that the participating entities are symbol-generating and interpreting agents (Sawyer, 2001: 561). Crucially, emergent properties are not individual attributes. As Lewis (2010: 210) writes: 'Emergent properties are structural or *relational* in the sense that their existence depends [on] parts being organized or arranged into a particular structure that involves them standing in specific relations to one another.' Emergent power resources, then, originate from, and belong to, specific interaction settings. Consequently, an emergent effect is not additive or predictable from our knowledge of its components.

In tune with recent advances in IR practice theory, we emphasize the negotiation of *competence* as the fundamental social process of power emergence (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 6–7; Adler-Nissen 2013; see also Eagleton-Pierce, 2013). Most performances of a practice contain an implicit claim of authority — that 'this is how things are done.' Power plays out in the clash of practices and their authority claims. Put differently, at the

level of practice, power involves a socially recognized competence or mastery in practicing X. Any social context produces a notion of what it means to be an able player at the game. Being so recognized typically allows one to wield a form of endogenously generated power often called *influence*, that is, power without apparent coercion. The exercise of power in practice, thus, rests on a never-ending struggle for recognition as competent in a given practice. Once practices are recognized as competent, they ‘produc[e], in and through social relations, effects that shape the capacities of other players in the game to determine their circumstances and fate’ (Barnett and Duvall, 2005: 42). A spontaneous order emerges. Competence may then be accumulated in the form of reputation or organizational bias, for instance.

As we have already noted, emergent power always works in tandem with exogenous assets, that is, with resources that originate from outside the specific practices under study (the market size of a World Trade Organization member, for instance). The two forms of resources — endogenous (i.e. locally produced) and exogenous (originating from outside the specific social site) — complement each other in explaining world politics. For instance, a country equipped with such exogenous resources as large public finances and top-quality education will often (though not necessarily) generate bureaucratic assets that facilitate the production of local diplomatic resources. The size of permanent missions, the availability of in-house legal expertise, the capacity to draft policy documents, and information and communications technologies do play a large role in the practical unfolding of multilateral diplomacy by opening up space for competence claims and the wielding of influence. To be sure, these bureaucratic resources are structurally derived and pre-exist specific interactions. However, they play out, that is, they are turned into influence, only in and through practice, for example, by volunteering as the penholder on the drafting of a given resolution. It requires constant work to turn structural assets into power in practice. Over time, endogenous resources may build up in the form of reputation, for example, thereby blurring the distinction between structural and emergent power. But even so, like any pre-existing asset, reputation will fall short of influence unless it is mobilized in and through practice.

Practice theory, thus, primarily focuses on the *enactment* of power. We acknowledge the importance of an unequal playing field, institutional biases, and discursive dominance, but we also ask how, exactly, these forces play out in practice. The way in which the game is played, not just its rules or the distribution of tokens among players, is crucial for explaining its outcome. In addition, our perspective enlarges the ontology of power resources by emphasizing locally generated resources in the form of competence. The challenge then becomes to operationalize power in practice, that is, to provide observable markers of the struggle for competence as the backbone of influence. Table 1 depicts three main processes in emergent power dynamics, which overlap in practice but should be kept analytically distinct for heuristic purposes. We conceive of these processes as cyclic and mutually reinforcing: wielding influence at time t helps claim competence at $t+1$, for example.

The (re)production of endogenous power resources begins with the positioning of a given individual or group as a competent player. This requires what Bourdieu called ‘*ars inveniendi*’ — ‘the creativity that comes with the feel for the game’ (Mérand, 2010: 352). In this socially thick understanding, the strategies and tactics used are not necessarily

Table 1. Constitutive processes in emergent power dynamics.

Claiming competence	Players seek to establish their mastery of the game by framing particular issues and positioning themselves as leaders
Social negotiation	Other players acknowledge or challenge the skillfulness of a player's moves as part of an ongoing struggle
Wielding influence	Players cash out their socially recognized mastery in the form of non-coercive influence

conscious. Most of the time, they belong to the 'practical sense,' the tacit know-how of competent players (Pouliot, 2008: 269–277). This basic dynamic consists of playing the local order to one's advantage. Competence is akin to what Fligstein (2001: 105–106) calls *social skill*, that is, 'the ability to engage others in collective action.' As he explains: 'Skilled actors understand the ambiguities and certainties of the field and work off them. They have a sense of what is possible and impossible' (Fligstein, 2001: 114). By framing issues in certain ways or through initiative taking, players strive to establish their ways of doing things as competent practice.

The second process, once a competence claim has been made, is the social negotiation of skillfulness. In practice, competence is never recognized for good but is the object of endless contestation (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 7). The struggle over competence rests on a combination of competing moral and technical claims, on the one hand, and social maneuvering, on the other. As Barnes (2001: 27) puts it: 'practices are socially recognized forms of activity, done on the basis of what members learn from others and capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly.' Whether a practice is performed well, badly, correctly, or incorrectly depends on social negotiation. In contrast to the possession of capabilities, competence is irreducible to an individual attribute: it emerges out of a never-ending struggle for authority. By implication, there are no grounds from which to evaluate competence in an objective fashion. It would be wrong, then, to claim that such and such actors are 'really' competent, while others are not. For example, in the international intervention in Libya, we do not claim that the British and the French were 'really' more competent than their counterparts. Our point is rather that their overwhelming influence over the diplomatic process stems, in part, from the success they obtained in getting their competence claims recognized by counterparts.

Processes of competence contestation are at the root of social change (Duvall and Chowdhury, 2011). We distinguish between two kinds of contestation. A first, thinner form of contestation may affect the relative positions of agents within a configuration by shuffling the distribution of endogenously generated resources. This is when the players accept the criteria of competence, but contest the way in which they or others are categorized in order to climb positions in a particular setting. Then there is a second, thicker form of contestation, which not only regards the competence of another member, but also involves questioning the definition of competence altogether. Such contestation, when successful, changes not only the relative position between the agents in a particular practice, but the very game itself. As our case study below makes clear, however, in the rather conservative world of multilateral diplomacy, we observe a lot of thin contestation but rarely any of the thicker kind.

The third process of emergent power dynamics is the production of power effects in the form of non-coercive influence over outcomes. In order to produce such effects, socially recognized competence must be actively deployed as a power resource. To achieve this, practitioners must turn what passes for mastery into a non-coercive form of influence. The archetype, here, is the master–apprentice relationship (Pouliot, 2010: 47, 140–147). Masters wield power over apprentices because their practices are endowed with self-evident competence. Of course, as we have just argued, in actual practice, the reputation for competence is usually fought over, making the translation of endogenous resources into power more complicated than our operationalization suggests. Power in practice is never passive; it requires the active deployment of competence. As Fligstein (2001: 115) writes: ‘Skilled social actors tailor their actions depending on the current organization of the field, their place in that field, and the current moves by skilled actors in other groups in the field.’ By implication, analysts should trace how competent players need to be actively engaged and constantly on their marks and aware of shifting positions. They should also identify how their moves deliver effects on outcomes. That said, our goal is not to create a tight temporal sequence, in which one obtains recognition at time t , and then wields influence at time $t+1$. The two processes are not independent, as in a Humean causal relationship, but constitutive of one another. Competence (as a socially recognized attribute) does not exist prior to influence (as an effect over outcome). For example, a master is not, first, competent, and only then, second, influent. The two come together, and this interplay is part and parcel of the story we tell about the Libyan intervention.

In the case study below, we show that each diplomatic setting generates its own unarticulated common sense about what it takes to be a skillful negotiator. We isolate a number of features in the international intervention in Libya that flow from the active search, negotiation, and deployment of diplomatic competence. For instance, we demonstrate how superior legal knowledge was translated into influence in the UNSC, how an ambassador’s ability to maintain a flexible position on a controversial issue improved his country’s status, how some NATO ambassadors mastered the production of ‘agreed language’ (which considerably limited the subsequent room for maneuver for other allies), and how the label of ‘diplomatically incompetent’ paralyzed certain players. Of course, the intervention was a highly political issue, and we do not take sides on the opportunity. In the end, our analytical objective is to study power in practice.

Methods and data

A few words about case selection, data, and interpretation of sources are in order. The aim of this study is theory development and we stop short of drawing generalizations about international interventions or the probability of war. Instead, we see Libya as a challenging case for a practice perspective as it ventures into a territory — military intervention — that is traditionally dominated by structuralist explanations. Indeed, if we find that the Libya intervention was significantly shaped by diplomatic struggles for competence — rather than just exogenous factors such as geostrategic interests, military capabilities, or norms — we have strong support for the proposition that practice matters in international power politics. Admittedly, we cannot generalize the specific dynamics of the Libyan case to others, but that is mainly due to the ‘situationally specific’ workings of power in practice, to borrow Baldwin’s words.

We selected officials from various levels and functions — permanent representatives (ambassadors), political experts, and international civil servants — based on their central position in the multilateral negotiations over Libya. Our questionnaire focused on the turning points in the negotiations and the various tactics and moves that diplomats used to influence the process. To increase reliability, we returned to several of the representatives to discuss whether we had understood them correctly and we also used internal notes from several foreign services to double-check dates and events. Fully aware that interviewees may seek to portray their contributions in favorable ways, or rationalize their involvement in the process, we triangulated accounts and probed secondary sources of evidence. These interview artifacts, in fact, are but another piece of evidence of the struggle for competence in multilateral diplomacy.

The analysis builds on a total of 50 in-depth interviews. In New York City, we held a total of 36 interviews, covering 25 UN member states including 13 sitting at the Council in 2011. In Brussels, we interviewed representatives from nine different NATO member states as well as two senior officials from NATO's international staff. Moreover, to cover the process in the EU, we interviewed two national diplomats and one senior EU official. We supplemented our interview data with field notes that we collected during a one-year ethnographical stint at the Foreign Ministry of one EU and NATO member state. Given the highly sensitive nature of our subject matter, all of our sources except one requested that our conversations remain strictly confidential. As a result, the article refrains from referring to individual names and specific titles, and we also erased certain countries' names. When it comes to validity, we double-checked the accounts that we report, either with insiders or through a survey of world media reports.

The key limitation of our account is that, due to space constraints, we cannot spend much time mapping the multilateral playing field or the domestic politics of the intervening powers prior to the eruption of the crisis in February 2011. We readily acknowledge that institutional rules at the Security Council (primarily, the veto for the Permanent Five (P5)), NATO (in particular, consensus decision-making), and the EU structured the negotiations on Libya. At the corporate level, countries that possessed larger and deployable military assets, for instance, may also use the 'outside option' (Voeten, 2001) as a key source of leverage in multilateral negotiations (although that was not the case in the Libya intervention). In addition, as we mentioned above, over the years, countries such as France or the UK have accumulated significant bureaucratic resources and reputational capital in a multilateral site such as the UN. For these (and other) reasons, even in the early days of the negotiations, the multilateral battleground upon which negotiations took place was far from equal. Indeed, had the Gaddafi regime not been universally despised, it is unlikely that there would have been the same room for emergent power and British–French leadership in the multilateral negotiations. This relatively unusual structural condition, in a sense, makes it easier for us to demonstrate how power in practice actually works.

Negotiating the Libyan war: Diplomatic struggles for competence and influence

Libya's violent protests and uprisings began in mid-February 2011, paralleling similar political unrest in Tunisia and Egypt, among other Arab countries. Within a little more than a week, insurgents seized control of several areas in the eastern part of the country,

around Benghazi, as well as in the western side including the city of Misrata. Gaddafi's regime swiftly moved to militarily quash the rebellion, warning of the possibility of civil war. On the international stage, the reaction was just as fast, as a number of multilateral organizations convened meetings to discuss the Libyan situation, including the Arab League and the UN SC, on 22 February, the EU on 24 February, as well as NATO, on 25 February.

The adoption of Resolution 1970

Building on their organizational assets, leadership at the UN SC was rapidly captured by the French and British delegations through the deployment of particular diplomatic skills. After a presidential statement condemning the violence and calling for an immediate end to the hostilities was unanimously passed, on 22 February, British and French diplomats started to push hard for a resolution with teeth. However, 'at that time it was impossible to get Russia and China on board,' said one delegate. In order to win over reluctant Council members, British and French diplomats actively strove to establish themselves as the competent hands on Libya.

The UK quickly imposed itself as the 'penholder' or 'lead country' on Libya — that is, the Council member who takes it upon itself to draft resolutions and suggest a course of action. The UK delegation, with its many seasoned diplomats and numerous 'experienced lawyers,' is widely recognized in New York for its superior skills in the many legal technicalities that often bog down the Council. One delegate observed that many provisions on sanctions, for instance, are 'cut and paste' from previous, British-drafted resolutions. Without a doubt, the 'tremendous institutional memory' that P5 missions have is a huge source of influence at the Council — perhaps the greatest difference, in the struggle for diplomatic competence, between them and E10 delegations, according to one insider. But these assets do not automatically lead to influence; the British and French also have to display 'ars inveniendi.' From the outset, the British 'decided we'd throw everything in 1970. And that decision was taken really, really between us and London.' In close consultation with the French, they drafted a text, okayed it with London and Paris, and circulated it to the Americans and European non-permanent members of the Council (Germany and Portugal). After the US approved the draft, it was shared with other P5 members (China and Russia) and, later, with the rest of the Council members. Being penholder allowed the British to introduce a clause authorizing 'all necessary measures for humanitarian access,' which was later withdrawn as a bargaining chip with the Russians. In the end, according to an African diplomat, all that the other Council members did was 'fine-tune' the British draft.

Once British leadership was recognized by others, this reputation for competence was easily cashed out in concrete influence: with the situation on the ground rapidly degenerating, British and French negotiators basically took control of the pace of the diplomatic process, moving 'extremely quickly.' Such a furious pace compelled less experienced members to make moves they might otherwise not have done: 'I was very surprised at how fast things moved. ... That was one of the main reasons why, for example, the Indians, who had important reservations toward the referral to the ICC [International Criminal Court], at the end of the day, decided to go for the consensus' on

Resolution 1970. The British and the French were also very active in harnessing the framing power of the media to construct the intervention as a ‘responsibility to protect civilians’ — a kind of ‘mélange of concepts: protection of civilians and the responsibility to protect,’ said one diplomat. Aided by Gaddafi’s inflammatory rhetoric, the P3 — as France, the UK, and the US are often designated in New York — imposed its own evidence and frames even in the face of contrary reports from other members’ embassies in Tripoli, according to one E10 delegate.

As part of their struggle for competence, the British and French representatives also managed to twist UN procedures to their advantage. The most striking example, which diplomats said ‘contributed to the ability to pass Resolutions 1970 and 1973,’ is the defection of Libyan Deputy Permanent Representative Ibrahim Dabbashi on 21 February. Obtained through ‘lobbying,’ this event allowed the P3 ‘to say: “Clearly the Libyan people want this [intervention].”’ The British and French delegations asked Dabbashi to write a letter to the Council presidency, held by Brazil, calling for an immediate Security Council meeting. This move led to the very first reunion on Libya, even though some members questioned Dabbashi’s diplomatic credentials. Through ‘informal handling,’ Dabbashi was allowed to speak in the name of the Libyan people. To translate competence into influence, P3 diplomats made the most of an unfolding and fast-moving situation: ‘you play these things as they come.... Later on, Gaddafi kept trying to send a replacement but you know there were hold-ups with the visas, blah blah blah. You know we played it for as long as we could. So we threw everything into that.’ Recognized mastery of procedures turned into critical influence.

P3 diplomats also took advantage of Lebanon’s cooperation to harness an Arab voice in favor of the intervention. After the Arab League suspended Libya’s membership, on 21 February, the Lebanese mission contributed to the UK–French effort ‘by tabling resolutions, lobbying and rallying support on certain initiatives.’ Providing an ‘inter-linkage’ between the League and the Council, Lebanese diplomats became ‘a very unique regional pulling factor,’ said one Western delegate: ‘Lebanon took basically the job of interpreting what the Arab League said and did, and not only bringing it to the attention of the Council but basically following up in the Council.’ Despite being a very small state, Lebanon was able to wield disproportionate influence through its partnership with P3 diplomats: ‘if you really want to get good results, you need people who are (a) influential and well-connected in their systems ... and (b) who are trusted enough to be able to go beyond their instructions, push things here, even though it might not necessarily fit with their instructions, and sell that back to their capitals. Those are the people that are really effective here. And that Lebanese guy was, in that, really effective.’ The skillful handling of this diplomatic opening paved the way to exerting power in practice.

Indeed, the amount of influence deployed by French and British diplomats is particularly clear when it comes to a provision about the ICC calling for an international inquiry into alleged massacres performed by Gaddafi and his clique. Faced with American reluctance, French and British experts ‘made many calls to Washington DC and NGOs [non-governmental organizations] to say: “The US does not have anything to fear.” So before you have the resolution distributed to even the Permanent Five, you have civil society involved.’ When it came to Portugal, also hesitant at first, the French and British missions obtained an intervention by an ICC head, which put the Portuguese delegate ‘in an

embarrassing position.’ As for China and Russia, the most skeptical Council members, French and British diplomats asked — again — the defecting Libyan ambassador Dabbashi to write to the Presidency to request an ICC referral as part of Resolution 1970. With ‘an African country asking for an ICC referral,’ recounted one P3 diplomat, ‘the case was over because China and Russia were using the argument to wait for regional organizations first. But once the Libyan representative sent the request, South Africa gave up.... So did Russia. The Chinese asked for some time to make a decision and then ended up supporting it.’ Before influence can be wielded over diplomatic partners, the French and the British had to struggle for authority.

The ICC example helps understand the struggle for competence at the Security Council. In a display of diplomatic skill, the French and British were able to undermine the claims of other members despite their resonance with local practice. India, for instance, abandoned its opposition in the face of mounting pressure at the Council and in the media, although its objection was based on the need to avoid radicalization of the regime. Brazil, concerned with the many exemptions for non-signatory countries of the Rome Statute, suffered a similar fate: ‘When you have 14 countries in favor it is difficult even to abstain.’ In the face of P3 framing, expressing dissent became impossible: ‘Sometimes we have positions that are not the mainstream, not the likely majority, and we express that, but it doesn’t mean that you are going to reach the point of voting against the resolution,’ confessed one E10 delegate. This reference to tacit knowledge about what it takes to be competent shows that certain power dynamics, with significant effects on world politics, inhere to the Security Council itself.

On 26 February, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1970 (UN Doc. S/RES/1970), which invokes the R2P, demands an immediate end to hostilities under the authority of Chapter VII of the Charter, refers the situation to the ICC, establishes regimes of arms embargo, travel ban, and asset freeze, and finally expresses the Council’s readiness to consider additional measures. Given the far-reaching scope of the text, one of the most intriguing aspects of the passing of Resolution 1970 is that it was not really carried through. As one P3 diplomat put it: ‘Resolution 1970 was passed on a Saturday. But on Sunday it had already been put in the dustbin.’ Instead, British and French diplomats used 1970 to build ‘momentum’; with 1970, ‘the bar was raised so high,’ said one diplomat, that ‘you are limiting the future options, really, because every time, you need to up the ante.’ In the face of a fast-evolving situation on the ground, competent diplomacy consists of building a multilateral momentum that takes on a life of its own.

The adoption of Resolution 1973

One of the key turning points in the negotiations that led to the intervention came on 13 March 2011, when the Arab League called for a no-fly zone over the country. This ‘unprecedented request,’ conveyed by Lebanon, provided the opportunity for the British mission to once again take the lead with drafting a new resolution. Quickly, however, it became clear that the US mission was not comfortable with a no-fly zone mandate only. Early into the negotiations, there were doubts that the American position may be a bluff, ‘push[ing] it that far in order to have it vetoed so that they wouldn’t have to get involved.’

When it became clear that the White House had agreed to this course, late on 15 March, the British sought a compromise formula that would meet American objectives without offending the Arab League, which refused to have Western boots on the Libyan ground. The Lebanese suggested the innovative language of ‘no foreign occupation,’ which made its way into the resolution. As one Western diplomat put it: ‘It’s not very usual language. It’s a very political wording.’ However, this crafty compromise was key in overcoming Russia’s opposition to the resolution: the successful struggle for competence led to actual influence.

American diplomats skillfully made use of the presence of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Council to cast Libya in terms of the Balkans precedent: ‘The Americans came out to say in the Council: “Do you want another Srebrenica?” ... The Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina was at the Security Council meeting with me and he said to the Council: “I know what the airstrikes can do, I was there, but eventually it did bring peace.” Everyone was silent after this statement. This was a turning point at the Council.’ P3 diplomats took control of information flows at the Council. In the words of one E10 diplomat: ‘The information flowing in, and the discussions among diplomats outside the Council, often took the following form: “Do you want to wake up tomorrow and there is no Benghazi?”’ The way in which the information was presented was such that [we] ended up supporting Resolution 1973.’ Again, the skillful framing of the crisis played a role in determining voting patterns.

In the struggle to look competent, other Council members could not counter P3 moves and resources. As one diplomat said, countries such as Russia were ‘skeptical at first, but they also didn’t have sufficient information to say that [the P3 narrative] was a lie.’ In deploying its tactics, French, British, and American delegates harnessed the local voices of the Libyan team of defected ambassadors as well as Lebanese delegates: ‘Lebanon was very, very active on this and they were really corralling the Arab League to make demands and at the same time sitting on the Council and saying: “we are sitting there in the region, this is our patch, and we are telling you that you should do X, Y and Z.”’ In addition, presentations by UN officials, such as the High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, were also instrumental in giving moral high grounds to those in favor of intervention. ‘Even for public opinion,’ said one delegate from a large non-permanent member, ‘the UK and France were very active in showing that they had the moral high ground and [they were] the good guys supporting the Libyan people.’

Once circulated to all members, the UK draft served to narrow the options on the Council table. When it comes to Operative Paragraph (OP) 4 (which contains the ‘all necessary measures’ provision), opined one delegate, ‘the position statement of countries, especially Brazil, made it clear that they were critical of the clause. But there were no other options offered.’ Here, the French made creative use of UN procedures by tabling the British-drafted resolution early: ‘We put our resolution in blue first, so we work on our draft first. It was the first time this happened, so the Russians didn’t know what to do.’² By speeding up the whole negotiation process, P3 diplomats also hindered the formation of counter-blocks at the Council. As one large E10 diplomat put it: ‘These negotiations took place in a very short order.... There was no time here. There weren’t any side meetings, or very few.’

Time pressure also helped undermine the more gradual approaches defended by several other countries. One E10 diplomat, whose country wanted more time for negotiation, said: '[We] wanted to explore all avenues, but there was a sense of urgency that pressured them into action.' With the crisis aggravating on the ground, the P3 resorted to 'demarching,' announcing to the Council that 'we have a resolution and we go to the capitals to ask for support for it.' In a very short time span, the negotiations became 'a multilevel thing,' with 'contacts at a higher level in the capitals.' Two sources, for instance, mentioned strong pressure by France over Gabon, at the time, an elected Council member. This illustrates nicely how external dynamics (here, in the form of bilateral pressure) and endogenous resources combine to produce power effects.

In order to wield influence over larger E10 countries, the P3 sought to establish their moral authority through what one diplomat described as 'press harassment': 'They put the ambassador or the PR, for example of France, to give an interview to a major conservative newspaper in [country X] saying: "Well, [country X] is not acting for the people of Libya, whatever and so on."' In this specific country's case, this kind of pressuring had the effect of making its gradualist approach to intervention appear insufficient and, in the end, impracticable (even though several other members shared it):

the issue of the moral high ground and the narrative was very important at that moment. Of course you had the media, mostly from the P3 countries, and now Qatar, which was allied with the P3. So I think that the cost of having vetoed, for example for Russia and China, would have been so high, it would have been very difficult to sustain. And to tell you frankly, this use of the media is incredible. They are professional... This power of determining the agenda, saying: 'the moral situation is that and the transgressor is this' — is huge. So it's difficult to fight against this.

One delegate from another large, non-permanent member put forward the very same story: 'They [the P3 diplomats] pressure you through media leakages: they pressure you in the corner and then you see on TV: "one country is standing in the way, against this issue." You don't want to be seen standing alone.' Being so isolated would deal a serious blow to one's competence in the eyes of partners and undermine influence.

In the end, Security Council Resolution 1973 (UN Doc. S/RES/1973) authorizing members to take 'all necessary measures ... to protect civilians' was passed on 17 March 2011 with 10 favorable votes and five abstentions (Brazil, China, Germany, India, and Russia). Resolution 1973 was the result of skillful framing, including 'press harassment,' crafty compromises, demarching coupled with time pressure, and the ability to display the moral high ground. To repeat an earlier point, throughout the negotiations, the British and the French made use of their institutional privileges, bureaucratic expertise, and reputation to establish their competence. But a full account of the negotiations also requires showing how these assets were creatively put to work. As Zartman and Rubin (2002: 10) illustrate: 'The issue with power as a possession is that it fails to take into account the control of resources through will and skill. It takes more than brushes and paint to paint a picture.'

Germany and South Africa in the wake of Resolution 1973

The German abstention on Resolution 1973 created a storm in the world of multilateral diplomacy. In New York, the decision was perceived as 'surprising' and even 'shocking'

by other diplomats, given that it was unprecedented for Berlin to go it alone without its usual partners on the multilateral stage. The abstention seriously undermined Germany's diplomatic standing as a competent player, in the eyes of its partners, and it consequently dented the country's ability to wield influence in and through practice. From our interviews, it appears that the German UN mission did not fully grasp the course of negotiations and, in particular, the American change of mind that occurred late on 15 March. Of course, there was disagreement between the German chancellery and foreign ministry, but our sources suggest that decision-makers and analysts thought that the US would not go for the war and, thus, felt safe in their objection.

Indeed, the first British draft did not contain any provision regarding the use of military force. While the P3 and Lebanon were working on more forceful language in response to the new American leadership, Germany was reportedly pursuing 'a sanctions track' in cooperation with other Council members. When, on 16 March, US Ambassador Susan Rice took the floor to explain what the military intervention would entail, recalled one insider, 'for the Germans this became problematic and they said: "this is not what we understood and what we signed up for."' In this fast-paced evolving context, Berlin ended up sending 'tough instructions' that left its New York diplomats 'pretty annoyed.' One close partner stamped Germany as incompetent, arguing that the abstention 'showed a delay in assuming responsibility for a country that has claimed greater responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security.'

In order to make up for their bad posture, German diplomats took a number of steps in both Brussels and New York. This repair work, in which competence is fought for, can only be understood from the perspective of the diplomatic practice within which it is embedded. Germany had lost face and needed to compensate to regain its status at the UNSC. From then on, Germany consistently sought to be looked at as a 'constructive partner on the Council on all issues,' aligning its subsequent votes with those of France and the UK and even taking it to the barricades for its partners. For example, while the Brazilians put forward the notion of 'responsibility while protecting,' in a thinly disguised attack on the NATO intervention, overzealous German diplomats were 'more vocal in criticism ... than other countries like, for example, the United Kingdom. Because they were in a fragile position, to make up for their abstention.' One close ally concurred that Germany had to 'overcompensate' for its abstention, in an attempt to regain its lost authority and, potentially, its influence.

Meanwhile, in NATO, the abstention greatly damaged the country's capacity to exert power on the ground: 'Germany is no longer a player. Worst of all, you cannot count on Germany in NATO anymore.' The official further commented: 'In Berlin, they now believe that they have less influence [in NATO], and I have to say that they are right.' Struggling to compensate, the German cabinet voted, on 23 March 2011, to increase Germany's role in surveillance flights over Afghanistan in an effort to free up NATO Airborne Warning and Control System planes for ongoing air strikes in North Africa. But such 'back filling' does not always translate into influence, as one delegate mentioned: 'How much credit did they get? Not much. The damage was done.' Once undermined, competence is not easily restored, and without social recognition, a country's diplomats weigh considerably less.

In a somewhat reversed logic, South Africa equally suffered from its support of Resolution 1973. Given the lack of a unified African Union (AU) position at the time, the country found itself in a very uncomfortable position, pushing for more diplomacy while

being pressurized to help stop the killing of civilians. Why did South Africa not join Brazil and India in abstaining? According to one P3 diplomat, 'we didn't know how they [South Africa] would vote until the very last minute.... The vote was delayed while they were getting instructions. They didn't have instructions.' Faced with similar pressure as their German counterparts, though, the South African mission ended up providing the swing vote on 1973, because 'Nigeria had decided they would vote along with South Africa in this case. So if they had not voted in favor in this case, if they had abstained, you would only have eight votes.' This kingmaker position put the country under the spotlight and it was 'strongly criticized' by African countries for colluding with the West. In an Asian delegate's view, the P3 fooled South Africa 'by including this AU thing [i.e. a mention of the AU mediation effort], and once the resolution was adopted ... they threw South Africa like they throw the fly out of the milk.' In the view of many UN countries, for South Africa to align with the P3 was plainly incompetent.

Similar to Germany's 'overcompensation,' South Africa followed its positive vote on Resolution 1973 with a sustained attempt to restore its diplomatic authority by denouncing the military intervention in Libya and the broad interpretation of the mandate provided in the text. In order to regain its leadership on the continent, South Africa strongly pushed for a greater mediating role for the AU, but its efforts were in vain. There was a concerted effort, led by the P3, to delegitimize this initiative as doomed to fail: 'we said, "you know the plan that you came up with isn't realistic."' In New York, efforts were made to sabotage a planned meeting between the AU and the Security Council: 'Sometimes it's the little things that matter, for example the UN Secretariat's power. When the South African Foreign Minister came to visit the UN and wanted to hold an AU-UNSC meeting, there were problems over the room books.... the African Union was only given a side-room to hold the meeting. On top of that, some countries sent lower-level representations to the UNSC-AU meeting. The AU realized the meaning afterwards and was furious. This all sends a diplomatic message.' Diplomatic competence is hard-fought and not all players manage to be recognized as skillful. In the Libyan case, the limiting effects on South African influence were clear.

The role of NATO and the EU

On 19 March, only two days after the adoption of Resolution 1973 and before most states had had time to digest the dramatic negotiations in New York, France staged a crisis meeting in Paris. There, agreement was reached that military action by French, British, and US forces would begin on 19–20 March, with the aim to protect Libyan civilians and degrade the regime's capability to resist the no-fly zone. At that time, the situation in Benghazi was deteriorating, with civilians at risk of massacre by pro-Gaddafi forces. Command and control of operations would initially rest with the US in what became known as 'Operation Odyssey Dawn.'

In the first weeks of March, a majority of NATO allies were reluctant or outright against any kind of NATO military engagement in Libya. Members such as France, Germany, Poland, and Turkey — for very different reasons — made their opposition clear. British diplomats established creative leadership by skillfully devising the criteria that could pave the way for a military engagement by NATO. This became known as the

'Leslie criteria,' named after UK Ambassador Mariot Leslie, who at a North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting on 10 March, set out three conditions for NATO intervention: (1) a demonstrable need for military activity; (2) a clear legal basis; and (3) regional support. This 'agreed language' made some arguments reasonable and others out of line, eventually helping legitimize the war by answering to domestic concerns in most NATO countries. This show of competence by the British mission allowed the country to exert quite a significant influence over the outcome.

While the Leslie criteria clarified the conditions for intervention, they did not settle the role of the Alliance. After leading the first few days of operation, the US insisted that the NAC should be the only and supreme political decision-making body during the operation. France opposed on the grounds that NATO was 'a purely military organization.' Turkey favored transforming the operation into a humanitarian mission. Germany quickly announced that it would not participate, but not obstruct either. This disagreement on the role of NATO led the UK and France, in a show of diplomatic creativity, to set up a 'Libya Contact Group' in late March, comprising NATO countries as well as the UN Secretary-General and delegates from the Arab League. French diplomats argued that the Contact Group appeared more legitimate than the NAC in view of the regional support criterion. However, several sources explain that the 'real' problem was that in NATO, 'France has to accept US leadership.'

To prevent the Alliance from taking over full control of the operation, French diplomats also pushed for a parallel diplomatic process in the EU. A French 'dream scenario' — openly voiced by French diplomats in Brussels — was a coalition of countries led by France and the UK with strong EU involvement. However, from the very beginning, this was seen as an 'absurd idea' by other EU and NATO diplomats. Not only did EU member states not agree on Libya, but also, '[e]verybody knew that it would never work. None of the other member states wanted a strong EU involvement because the EU clearly lacked the command structure and capacities.' Nonetheless, France managed to make the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) 'meet regularly and listen to Libya briefings whose content was essentially identical to those provided in the NAC.' In the struggle for diplomatic competence, the EU and its officials were judged harshly by many diplomats. For example, letters were circulated between foreign ministers criticizing Catherine Ashton and the European External Action Service (EEAS), while reports from PSC meetings denounced the EEAS's 'poor preparations of foreign affairs minister's meetings,' 'lack of in-depth knowledge,' and the need for more 'strategy and leadership.' Failure to establish the EU's competence significantly constrained its influence over the multilateral process.

Yet French diplomats pressured the EEAS to draft proposals for a humanitarian EU mission in Libya to avoid NATO from taking over the leadership. On 12 March, EU foreign ministers were presented with a 61-page document on the concept of operations, prepared by the EEAS, including various scenarios for the mission, such as securing port areas, aid delivery corridors, loading and unloading ships, and providing naval assistance. The EEAS was then tasked to compose a draft mandate for an EU mission in Libya — a process in which 'French diplomats were ghost writers.' On 1 April, the Council formally adopted the legal framework for Operation EUFOR Libya, with a budget of EUR 7.9 million for an initial period of four months (Council Decision

2011/210/CFSP). Around 100 staff were stationed at the operational headquarters in Rome to plan the operation. At the end of the day, though, they were all sent home after just three months.

France's allies were becoming anxious. On 22 March, Italy demanded that NATO take over the operations, threatening to no longer authorize the use of its air bases. The Netherlands also required that the command be under NATO control. However, with the final operation plan on the table, the French mission continued to oppose NAC leadership. Discussions among the 28 allies were intense. At the last weekend meeting, French ambassador Errera and his officials left the negotiations in anger. According to one senior diplomat, 'if the debate had gone wrong, it could have been the end of the alliance' because the issue was so central to what NATO is. A diplomatic solution was found in a brief document drafted by the US and French NATO delegations on 25 March. The document stated that the NAC was 'politically responsible' for the operations (a US and Turkish *sine qua non* requirement), while France received guarantees that the Libya Contact Group would be responsible for political strategies during and after the war. France thereby ensured that it could continue to claim diplomatic leadership and competence despite NATO involvement.

With the French on board and the Germans back in the fold, only the Turks continued to obstruct a NATO take over of the military intervention, concerned not only about its commercial interests and the thousands of Turkish citizens residing in Libya, but also about 'Turkey's role as regional leader and a Moslem country.' On 22 March, Turkey vetoed NATO taking over the no-fly-zone operation. Exploiting this leverage, Turkish diplomats were seen as competently 'selling themselves as expensively as possible.' According to one diplomat, the Turkish delegation assumed a position that 'they are well-known for in both the EU and NATO: the tough negotiator.' Referring to their 'inexcusable exclusion' from the Paris meeting, they played 'carpet sellers,' to use a delegate's image. On 24 March, Ankara finally acceded to US pressure to support the no-fly zone. Two weeks after the adoption of Resolution 1973, NATO aircraft took off from bases in the Southern Mediterranean and began striking military forces in Libya that were thought to be attacking civilians.

When asked to describe the decisive moments during the NATO negotiations, one diplomat from a smaller Western ally put it thus: 'At some point you just know where the wind blows.' The wind metaphor is striking because it points to a force which does not stem from an individual actor yet is locally generated and experienced. In other words, in the struggle for competence, the diplomatic process gradually gains a life of its own. For medium-sized and smaller allies, this pressure to participate was almost intuitively sensed. Italy's change of position provides a good example. At the outbreak of the crisis, Italy was deeply skeptical toward any kind of intervention, apprehending that its commercial and strategic interests could be severely challenged by a policy of confrontation with the Gadhafi regime. In addition, the US's ambiguous position in the run-up to the NATO-led intervention made it difficult for Italian diplomats to maneuver, given their traditional transatlantic stance. Fully aware of this difficult position, the newly appointed Italian NATO ambassador carefully avoided making any categorical statements during the negotiations. As one of his counterparts explains: 'He sensed where the wind blew.' One senior NATO official involved in the planning of the operation explained: 'I would

have wanted Italy to do it before, but once it joined [the consensus], it really did join.' In the end, Italy performed as a good ally because its diplomats were able to change position quickly, making Italian air bases available for the operations and even participating actively in the war, despite its initial reluctance to do so.

What did medium-sized or smaller NATO allies get out of following leading members on Libya? One of the gains from being seen as an active and competent ally, reportedly, is to obtain institutional recognition, which can be turned into influence, for instance by being awarded high-level positions in NATO. Thus, Danish diplomats are convinced that previous Danish activism has resulted in their former Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen becoming NATO Secretary-General. 'You would never give the SG [Secretary-General] position to a country that is free-rider. When you contribute military, it affects your position inside NATO. This is not something you can quantify. It is something you feel; you feel it.' In other words, for some allies, the decision to support a NATO operation in Libya reflects more their concerns to remain a respected NATO ally than their specific national interests in Libya. The hope, in turn, is that recognized competence will later be turned into influence.

The fallout at the UNSC

To conclude our case study, let us go back to New York to analyze how the struggle for competence may prevent diplomats from wielding influence. Following the passing of Resolution 1973, the five BRICS countries, which happened to be all sitting on the UNSC in 2011, took action. A number of diplomats were of the view that 'the BRICS made a real change in how policies were made in the Security Council. Sometimes, the P3 had real difficulties to convince the BRICS, which gave the P3 a change.' One key reason is that IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) countries altered the balance of power at the Council: 'Normally if Russia opposed they would be supported by China. But in this case, you had more countries that would support Russia and China's position, making them look less isolated.' One insider confirmed, on that note, that 'we had separate meetings with them [the other BRICS] to coordinate our opinions, and it worked well and it helped cover common ground.' If such is the case, however, how can we explain that when the BRICS went to the barricades against the NATO intervention, their actual influence over events was so limited? Why, for instance, did the Russian push for 'an immediate cessation of hostilities' fail to 'receive enough support' at the Council despite the BRICS alignment of interest?

To be sure, the P3 could withstand a prolonged, hostile charge by BRICS and their followers because the military operation was already under way in Libya. It remains striking, however, how NATO members of the Council skillfully dispelled the legal and political charge mounted by the BRICS. For months, the latter claimed that Alliance bombings and military activities had far exceeded the mandate of civilian protection provided by the Security Council. As one diplomat recalled: 'The Russian ambassador called Resolution 1973 a "rubber resolution" because you could bend it and do whatever your wanted with it.' Another added: 'Some countries felt duped; they didn't understand the way the resolution was interpreted.' Whether these complaints were valid or not is, for the purpose of our demonstration, not the point. What is striking rather is that the

BRICS charge never really hit home, and it did not visibly affect the implementation of the resolution. Despite a fierce struggle to make competent diplomatic arguments, they were never recognized as such, and could not wield power in practice.

For example, the Russians argued that taking sides in an internal conflict went beyond the UN's mandate and duty of neutrality. The Russian reasoning resonated in the UN: 'It is one thing to enforce a no-fly zone so the government can't use aircraft to launch attacks on civilians and it is another thing to take sides in a civil war. We actually reminded the Council members that there were also [operative paragraphs] 1 and 2 [in Resolution 1973], which called for an immediate cessation and dialogue. It never took place, however.' In the end, Russian diplomats were not able to win the argument with the P3 and alter the operation: 'You have to be realistic: three permanent members were taking part in the military operation. Do you think they would allow for a change in the implementation through a Security Council vote? We raised the issue over and over again but the other Council members replied that they tried to protect civilians from a tyrant.' Even a veto-holder had to resign itself as it became clear that it was losing the struggle for diplomatic authority.

Brazil experienced a similar powerlessness with its own argument — that the military intervention was aggravating the loss of human lives. As per one diplomat's account: 'I think it was very difficult to sell the idea, which was our argument, that in order to reduce casualties in general during the conflict, you would have to bring the parties to the table and not fuel the conflict... If the mandate is to protect civilians, how do you attack a city which is not the main city at risk of, for example, war crimes or genocide?' Here, again, the argument, despite its resonance with the R2P doctrine, failed to convince and effect change. One P3 official angrily recalled the events: 'Even though, you know, the Brazilians bang on about human rights and this and that, then they take a completely different position when it comes down to it. It's astonishing really.' In his mind, diplomatic incompetence stemmed from the lack of consistency: 'The Chinese and the Russians, you expect that kind of nonsense. But the South Africans, after what they've been through, and indeed the Brazilians and all their talk, it's quite shocking.' Opposition to the intervention, even for the protection of human lives, was skillfully framed as an unwillingness to defend human lives. As a representative from one of the dissident countries conceded: 'I think they [P3 diplomats] tried to evoke the moral high ground by saving the heroic Libyan people who were fighting for their rights, which is a very compelling argument.' After weeks of diplomatic struggle, many BRICS diplomats resigned themselves to their inability to exert influence, showing how the struggle for diplomatic competence can turn structurally strong countries into powerless actors on the Council.

The struggle for diplomatic competence, including the BRICS's failure to affect outcomes, is obvious in the way that P3 diplomats dismissed the uproar as 'irresponsible.' As one delegate said: 'Some P3 were annoyed by some of the non-permanent members, arguing that they were not being constructive enough and should be more compromising.' Another confessed: 'A French diplomat said to me: "To be a permanent member, you need to be responsible and decisive. But they [IBSA] were not. You need to have strong views, and the means [to achieve them]; they didn't.'" On the Brazilians, one P3 diplomat regretted: 'You basically couldn't work with them. I mean you basically just bounce them and you try and corner them.' His words were no kinder in relation to his

Indian interlocutors: ‘they’ve achieved nothing. It’s not clear what they want or what they would want out of their time on the Council ... I don’t think they are good performers.’ This episode clearly shows how those who establish themselves as masters of the multilateral game can influence outcomes.

All in all, a practice approach implies that there is no such thing as ‘power’ in a universal, transcendental, sense. Power in practice involves a constant negotiation of what counts as competent (e.g. ‘responsible,’ ‘decisive,’ and ‘informed’) and incompetent (‘irresponsible,’ ‘inconsistent,’ and ‘unprepared’) moves. This very negotiation is part of defining what the practice is. In this emergent process, Lebanon could play a central role, Germany had to compensate, the BRICS were sidelined, while France punched above its weight. Power in practice is a performance whose processes often depart from the pre-existing distribution of exogenous resources.

Conclusion

Drawing on the recent surge of practice-oriented scholarship in IR theory, this article develops a theoretical framework addressing how power works through local practices and routines in world politics. We have argued that some power resources emerge out of practical competence, which requires constant work and negotiation. The framework focused on three constitutive processes of power in practice: the claim for competence; the social negotiation of skillfulness; and the deployment of recognized mastery in the form of influence. The result is a broader ontology of power that recognizes the key role of social relations in the generation of resources. Power should be studied not just as the possession of material capabilities or as discursive dominance, but also from the perspective of everyday social relations, including the ways in which various resources are put to task.

The second part of the article applied the framework to the multilateral negotiation of the 2011 international intervention in Libya. Contrary to realists pointing to underlying material interests of the intervening parties or liberals and constructivists arguing that normative changes among Western states explain humanitarian interventions, this article showed that micro-level diplomatic dynamics are crucial to explain the negotiation process. For example, the practice approach solves the puzzling UNSC process by which the P3 was able to disarm its opponents — including China and Russia — by undermining as ‘irresponsible’ those proposals in favor of more diplomacy and sanctions. Our interviews with key diplomats enable us to show that what was at stake in the hectic weeks leading up to the intervention was not just a play of national interests with regards to Libya, but a complex social game in which maneuvering for diplomatic competence became an end in itself.

A focus on emergent power has broader implications for the study of world politics. The social categorization of competence and incompetence contributes to the ranking of groups and individuals within a particular practice and it has power effects. Our case study clearly reveals the inner workings of the utterly dominant position currently enjoyed by a few Western countries in multilateral security dynamics. While we already knew that the P3 call the shots at the Security Council, our understanding of *how* this is done in actual practice has so far remained rudimentary. Our article points to the importance of emergent power dynamics, that is, endogenous power resources

generated, struggled over, and converted into influence within particular settings. It shows how traditional Western powers seem to master and control the diplomatic game in ways that go beyond their formal positions in multilateral organizations. Thus, the challenge that our article raises is also of a theoretical nature: just how is it possible to accumulate competence — a power resource that is so evanescent on the face of it? IR theory needs a deeper understanding of the everyday struggles through which particular skills become recognized as power resources and affect world politics. More generally, emergence as a social phenomenon, characteristic of complex social systems, merits more investigation in IR.

Acknowledgments

For comments on earlier versions of this article, we are grateful to Séverine Autesserre, Barry Buzan, Peter Viggo Jakobsen, Frédéric Mérand, Rens Van Munster, Rasmus Leander Nielsen, the International Relations group at the University of Copenhagen, and several audience members at Columbia University, University of Toronto, and APSA 2013. We also thank Lydia Zemke for her outstanding research assistance, especially with interviews.

Funding

Vincent Pouliot's research was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Note

1. Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa.
2. In Security Council procedure, a resolution is put in blue when negotiations approach their final stage.

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