
Vetting the Advocacy Agenda: Network Centrality and the Paradox of Weapons Norms

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Abstract While a number of significant campaigns since the early 1990s have resulted in bans of particular weapons, at least as many equivalent systems have gone unscrutinized and uncondemned by transnational campaigners. How can this variation be explained? Focusing on the issue area of arms control advocacy, this article argues that an important influence on the advocacy agenda within transnational networks is the decision-making process not of norm entrepreneurs nor of states but of highly connected organizations within a given network. The argument is illustrated through a comparison between existing norms against landmines and blinding laser weapons, and the absence of serious current consideration of such norms against depleted uranium and autonomous weapons. Thus, the process of organizational issue selection within nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs) most central to particular advocacy networks, rather than the existence of transnational networks around an issue per se, should be a closer focus of attention for scholars interested in norm creation in world politics.

A number of transnational advocacy campaigns have emerged in recent years bent on regulating or banning certain weapons: landmines, cluster munitions, and small arms to name a few. These campaigns have had notable effects on international norm-making by governments.¹ But at least as many equivalent systems have gone uncondemned by such transnational networks. For example, thermobaric weapons (fuel-air explosives), which create fireballs over large areas and kill through suffocation and burning, have been likened to nuclear weapons in their immediate

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1. For example, the landmines and cluster munitions campaigns have resulted in binding treaty bans; while the small arms campaign has not yet succeeded in norm development, a process is underway within global policy networks.

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and indiscriminate effects, yet have not been condemned by humanitarian law organizations.² Psychotropic weapons such as cognitive enhancers or mood-altering aerosols might fall under the chemical weapons regime and have been criticized by a small but vocal network of U.S. and Russia-based activists, but these weapons have largely been overlooked by mainstream arms-control networks.³ The proliferation of autonomous weapons on the battlefield, which has aroused significant concern from epistemic communities of scientists and lawyers, also has yet to trigger a response from global civil society.⁴ Correspondingly, it is no surprise that these issues also remain of low salience to governments.

As Price remarked in his landmark study of the chemical weapons ban, this type of variation in ethical consideration given to weapons systems is an intriguing puzzle.⁵ Yet the question of issue selection by advocacy networks has been given little attention in the advocacy networks literature. There are many genealogies of successful, well-known issue campaigns, but few scholars have analyzed why some issues, once identified by norm entrepreneurs, fail to achieve the transnational salience that can result in global norm change. Many of the factors said to correlate to successful campaigns—norm entrepreneurship, density of networks, goals that fit with the principled ideas constitutive of networks—also correlate to notable cases of agenda-setting failures.

Focusing on the issue area of disarmament advocacy, this article argues that a factor explaining transnational issue salience is the decision-making processes of highly connected nodes within the transnational activist network most associated with the issue at hand. I argue that such organizations are positioned to facilitate or impede issue emergence, because of their structural position as network “hubs.” Adoption of an issue by organizations central to a particular advocacy network, not the presence of entrepreneurs or networks per se, plays the decisive role in catapulting some new international issues to global prominence. By corollary, “agenda vetting” by these organizations—the refusal to legitimize a particular issue by adopting it on their organizational agenda—results in the sidelining of some arguably important global social problems.

This article proceeds as follows. In the next section, I flesh out the theoretical claim regarding the power of *agenda vetting* in transnational networks generally, adapting and expanding a model of issue selection pioneered by Bob in his study of human rights networks. This section explains how network centrality confers power on the most connected organizations to set or vet the advocacy agenda by association with a cause or lack thereof.

I then apply this argument to the analysis of arms control/disarmament advocacy. I use a comparison of existing and counterfactual arms campaigns to show that a strong correlation exists between the overall human security agenda and the

2. See Grau and Smith 2000; and Fiddina 2008.
3. Moreno 2006.
4. Singer 2009.
5. Price 1997. See also Gross 2010.

organizational agendas of the most highly connected advocacy organizations in the human security network. The analysis also suggests a further testable hypothesis: that relative network position may influence not only the power of certain organizations to “vet” the advocacy agenda, but also, to some extent, their preferences over what that agenda should look like. I conclude by suggesting this should be a focus of future research on norm creation in advocacy networks.

Power (Law) Politics: Agenda Vetting in Advocacy Networks

A large scholarly literature has in recent years documented the power of transnational advocacy networks (TANs) in “global civil society.” As the literature has demonstrated, networks such as these do a great many things, including lobbying, standard setting, monitoring compliance, and shaming norm violators; and much of the emphasis has been on demonstrating that their efforts actually make a difference in what states do.⁶

Less has been written about the crucial early question of why advocates and advocacy networks pay attention to certain issues and not others in the first place. Yet it is becoming clear that understanding the dynamics of issue selection by advocacy networks is crucial to assessing the power of TANs in world politics.⁷ Early TAN literature emphasized “norm entrepreneurship” as a key condition driving advocacy.⁸ But as I have demonstrated using the case of children and armed conflict, efforts by norm entrepreneurs to attract advocacy attention to their causes often fail to “take off” within advocacy networks.⁹ Ron and his collaborators have identified significant variation in the issue agenda in human rights networks and also the country focus chosen by humanitarian networks, suggesting that advocacy organizations operate as much out of professional self-interest as out of principled beliefs.¹⁰ Bob has demonstrated that for every ethnic minority whose cause receives global attention, others suffer unnoticed.¹¹ Clearly, more is going on in crafting the global issue agenda than altruistic norm entrepreneurs pressing their claims through civil society networks against the sovereignty-bound layer of international society.

In a recent edited volume on human-rights agenda setting, Bob and a number of collaborators expanded on his earlier argument. Those analyses suggest that given problem definition by a norm entrepreneur, adoption of a human rights issue by existing networks of organizations is the link between political entrepreneurs and

6. See Keck and Sikkink 1998; Burgerman 2001; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002; and Price 2003.

7. See Spector and Kitsuse 1977; and Hilgartner and Bosk 1988.

8. See Finnemore 1996; and Finnemore and Sikkink 1998.

9. Carpenter 2007a.

10. See Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005; and Cooley and Ron 2002.

11. Bob 2005.

the persuasive machinery of advocacy networks. That volume focuses in particular on the most powerful human rights organizations, for as Bob notes, for any issue area in global civil society, a handful of actors possess “the largest budgets, the best staff, and the greatest credibility.” The case studies show that such entities exercise authority over the constitution of the human rights agenda because their “support for a claim is perceived by activists and governments to legitimize it substantially within that issue area.”¹² Referring to these organizations as “gatekeepers,” Bob and his collaborators have emphasized the disparate organizational capacity of such “NGO superpowers” in the area of human rights.

This article draws on and confirms Bob’s original model but also extends it in two ways. First, by applying the gatekeeper model to the area of weapons advocacy, I demonstrate this model is generalizable beyond the thematic issue area of human rights to other issues such as arms control. Second, I explore more fully the nature of the gate-keeping power to which these authors, myself included, have referred to metaphorically in earlier work.¹³ In particular, whereas both Bob and colleagues emphasize organizational attributes as a source of gatekeeper authority, I argue here that the power to set—or vet—the network agenda should also be understood as a function of structural position within wider networks of meaning, rather than primarily organizational capacity per se. To be sure, organizational attributes matter in generating and buttressing network position, but it is network position itself—relative to the norm entrepreneur—that allows some organizations in an advocacy network disproportionate influence in setting the advocacy agenda. This implies that gatekeeping is therefore best understood as a relational construct, not an attribute of specific organizations: as a verb, not a noun or adjective.

In this article, I use the term “agenda vetting” as a more accurate description of the choice by central nodes in specific issue domains to avoid legitimating certain advocacy claims; and the resultant effect of these choices on the wider network agenda.¹⁴ By contrast, issue adoption occurs when an organization embraces a new issue as an advocacy priority.¹⁵ I apply network theory to the study of advocacy networks to explain how centrality translates into power to influence the network agenda through issue adoption or nonadoption choices, and I show how agenda vetting—the denial of organizational agenda space to certain issues—constitutes an important and understudied exercise of this structural power.

12. Bob 2009, 6.

13. See Bob 2009; and Carpenter 2009 and 2010.

14. Faced with a request by an issue entrepreneur to promote a new idea, powerful advocacy organizations can choose to adopt, ignore, block, or significantly reconstruct new claims by those less powerful or well connected; whether and how they incorporate an emergent issue into their organizational agenda has powerful contagion effects on understandings of the issue within advocacy networks. In this article, I emphasize in particular the role of passive nonadoption—the act of a powerful advocacy organization simply failing to adopt a new issue at all.

15. Bob 2005. This can include committing resources to advocacy on an issue, as when Amnesty International undertakes a fact-finding study; but it can also be as simple and symbolic as referencing the issue on its Web site or in its broader advocacy materials, or lending its name to a coalition around the issues.

Networks as Hierarchies

The hierarchical dimension of advocacy network structure was long overlooked by the literature on advocacy networks, which tended to view networks as a metaphor to describe nonstate interactivity, a layer of world politics presumably characterized by “horizontal and reciprocal” relations of information exchange and common principled understandings.¹⁶ Even more recent work on global civil society sometimes posits NGOs as an undifferentiated layer in contestation with the UN and states.¹⁷

By contrast, network theory tells us not to think of networks simply as alternative forms of governance but rather structures that enable or constrain constituent nodes, conferring power and influence on some at the expense of others.¹⁸ As Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery argue, “A structural analysis of networks equates the power of a particular node to its position in the network, defined by its persistent relationships with other nodes.”¹⁹

Emerging analyses of advocacy networks suggest that they indeed function not as flat, distributed networks but as scale-free networks in which a small number of major “hubs” dominate, and pathways between peripheral nodes are dependent on these hubs.²⁰ Such networks are said to follow a “power law,” in which the vast majority of network activity engages a very few nodes within the network. Transnational networks, in other words, are less like road systems with many pathways between nodes and more like airlines, where the route between any two small cities generally depends on passing through a major hub; or like the World Wide Web, where hubs like Google and Yahoo are necessary to direct attention to the myriad yet largely invisible “nodes” (Web sites) online.²¹

For example, in the broad issue area of “human security,” which covers a range of issue clusters such as human rights, humanitarian affairs, arms control, conflict prevention, and development, the network (and each of its constituent subnetworks) is dominated by a few well-recognized actors.²² These include certain United Nations (UN) agencies, key states that championed the concept or are known for funding human security projects, academic institutions, and a few large, well-connected NGOs: International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As I show next, such a position as hubs within these wider networks of meaning translates into disproportional

16. Keck and Sikkink 1998.

17. Joachim 2007.

18. Wasserman and Faust 1994.

19. Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery 2009, 570.

20. See Brewington, Davis, and Murdie 2009; and Lake and Wong 2005.

21. Barabasi 2003, 67.

22. For example, an analysis of co-links between organizational Web sites starting with those that top a Google search for “human security” provides a sense of which organizations have the highest centrality to the online network. The United Nations and its specialized agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and UNDP top the list. This data was collected with Issuercrawler, a web-based co-link tool developed by Govcom.org. Full data with visualizations available from author.

tionate influence over the agenda in those networks, since actors both inside and outside the network view hubs' organizational agendas as proxies for the network agenda, creating contagion effects within networks when hubs adopt new issues, and raising the likelihood that such claims will be taken seriously by external audiences including the media and policymakers.

Structural Position and Influence in Networks

Two particular measures of network position are crucial to understanding the relative power of advocacy organizations to set or vet the agenda. First, *centrality* is a measure of how prominent an organization is within a network, measured in the number of organizations who establish or attempt to establish links with that node.²³ A network node with a high centrality (strong links from many other nodes) "may possess social power, easily accessing resources and information from other nodes because of its central position."²⁴ Centrality also implies greater visibility to the targets of influence, be they states, UN agencies, or others; and greater legitimacy through name recognition by those targets of influence; this begets further centrality as other organizations attempt to associate themselves with the more central ones.²⁵ Over time, these factors can confer institutional power.²⁶

These are recursive processes.²⁷ Organizations that have branded themselves within a particular issue area are likelier to attract further funding for projects in that issue area, leading to greater expertise and exposure. Those that gain early notoriety in an issue area become more powerful over time relative to newcomers and thus occupy a disproportionately influential role within a given network.²⁸ So the right organizational policies and profiles help explain centrality; and centrality also confers an advantage in garnering the very organizational resources and attributes Bob identifies as important to network influence.²⁹

Ultimately however, it is an organization's visibility in a particular network, not its resources per se, that enable certain organizations disproportionate influence over the network issue agenda. While resources and expertise matter in the advo-

23. Freeman 1979. In network theory, a link can be anything: an interaction, a joint membership, a hyperlink, or a citation. In the human security network, I measured network centrality through both hyperlinks and citations in survey data.

24. Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery 2009, 19.

25. Brewington, Davis, and Murdie 2009.

26. Consultative status at the UN, for example, is not a political opportunity available to all NGOs equally. A complex set of institutional norms governs which NGOs can benefit from it. Even among NGOs who earn consultative status there is a hierarchy that affects such matters as the word limit for statements that may be submitted to government delegates at UN conferences. The most privileged status is reserved for the older and more widely recognized NGOs; Merry 2006, 53.

27. I elaborate on this point in Carpenter 2010.

28. Lake and Wong 2005.

29. For example, more central organizations are likelier to receive opportunities for professional experience, which then confers additional recognition and connections. But these experiences also lead to skill sets and attributes requisite for effective future multilateral diplomacy, skill sets that peripheral organizations may not as easily develop.

cacy and monitoring phase of norm development—when, for example, a fact-finding study must be funded and carried out—the expenditure of such resources is not necessary for high-centrality organizations to have an impact on issue proliferation within networks. Merely acknowledging a new issue has this effect.³⁰ Accordingly, as I detail in the next section, failing to do so has an equally dampening effect on some advocacy claims.

In addition to centrality, organizations can also exercise disproportionate influence within the network as a function of their *between-ness*. A node's betweenness is high when it “possesses exclusive ties to otherwise marginalized or weakly connected nodes or groups of nodes . . . social capital can be turned into social power by a node that bridges structural holes in the network.”³¹ Goddard postulates that nodes with a high degree of between-ness are able to serve as “brokers” by “maintaining ties with actors who would otherwise remain unconnected.”³² She also suggests that political entrepreneurs are most likely to come from the interstices of networks, able to draw connections between different ideas and discourses.

Two kinds of between-ness place certain organizations in a more influential position relative to others in TANs. First, some organizations possess relatively greater ties to global policy stakeholders, including governments, or access to international forums. This makes these organizations themselves targets of influence for those who would like to access such stakeholders. In the human rights network for example, Brewington, Davis, and Murdie found that more central organizations engage in the bulk of all international advocacy activities with governments; for players on the margins of the network, the dominant strategy is to attempt to get the attention of the network hubs to exploit their brokerage role vis-à-vis governments.³³

Second, organizations may occupy an ideational space at the interstices of networks of meaning. The human security network consists of a variety of issue networks including human rights, humanitarian affairs, development, environment, conflict prevention, and arms control. Certain organizations are most prominent in each of these areas. Organizations whose work spans several issue clusters are valued resources for issue entrepreneurs aiming to frame their issue in such a way as to attract a broad coalition. For example, HRW's position at the intersection of the human rights and humanitarian law issue clusters has given it an influence over not only human rights agenda-setting but also arms control campaigns, and it has played an important role in reframing such issues from security to human rights, though its overall centrality is lower than either Amnesty International or the ICRC in the human security network.

30. Indeed, this is why some norm entrepreneurs will ask for nothing more of a hub organization than to lend its name to their coalition or mention the new issue on their Web sites.

31. Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery, 2009, 21. For example, Nexon's work on empires suggests that much of their power was derived by positioning themselves as exclusive access points between nodes on the periphery; see Nexon 2009.

32. Goddard 2009; see also Burt 1999.

33. Brewington, Davis, and Murdie 2009.

The Agenda-Setting and Agenda-Vetting Power of Network Hubs

The organizations in a particular network most in a position to influence the advocacy agenda for a given network are those with both high centrality and high between-ness within the network. When a few organizations possess either or both types of ties (relative to the many lesser-connected organizations of which a network is composed) it gives them disproportionate power over the network agenda irrespective of the resources or expertise they bring to an issue because simply adopting an issue as an organizational priority is likely to raise its salience within the network as a whole.

This effect occurs in a number of ways. First, the organizational agendas of network hubs influence third parties' social perceptions of what constitutes a particular transnational issue area and a legitimate claim within it. Since most outsiders will be drawn first to the hubs—imagine a journalist, educator, or policymaker googling “children and armed conflict” to get a sense of the players and issues in that area—it is hub organizations' issue agendas that are perceived to be most constitutive of a given issue's network agenda. Adoption by such an organization signals the issue's importance to a particular network of meaning, be it human rights or development or the environment.

Relatedly, adoption by central organizations confers not only visibility but also legitimacy to new issues as perceived by targets of influence. Promotion of a new issue by an organization unknown to most stakeholders has lesser political meaning than adoption of that issue by an organization strongly associated with the issue area. Governments take issue advocacy much more seriously when it comes from UN agencies or NGOs with whom they are familiar and have a historical working relationship than when it comes from political entrepreneurs outside this formal system. According to Hubert: “The message may be the same, the evidence may be the same, but official ‘letterhead’ matters to governments.”³⁴

Additionally, knowing this, other organizations within a network will look to the network hubs for signals as to whether new issues are perceived to constitute legitimate activity within the issue area, and take this into account in their assessments of whether their own advocacy on an issue is likely to succeed. Likelihood of success is an important factor in NGO decision making,³⁵ and hub adoption of an issue is perceived to increase the likelihood that it will be taken seriously by stakeholders. Thus organizations are likelier to risk committing resources to an issue if central actors are also on board, creating a band-wagoning effect in coalitions once one or two key players join and dampening issue proliferation if they do not.³⁶

34. Hubert 2007.

35. Bob 2005.

36. Wong has demonstrated how this privileged position allowed Amnesty International to control international understandings of human rights for much of the second half of the twentieth century; see Wong 2008.

a variety of illustrative case studies, efforts to pitch “new human rights” have involved an ongoing dialectic between issue entrepreneurs and “NGO superpowers.”³⁸

But this model requires two caveats. First, what constitutes a “superpower” in a network depends not on an organization’s absolute power but on its centrality both to the thematic issue and to the issue network, relative to the entrepreneur.³⁹ Additionally, structural position does not determine an organization’s role in agenda-setting. Rather, it determines an organization’s relative capacity for achieving its goals. Thus, while Bob refers to “NGO superpowers” (hubs) as “gate-keeper organizations,” the very same structural position enables such players to function as entrepreneurs when they choose.⁴⁰ Similarly, while Goddard sees a brokerage role as a necessary attribute of political entrepreneurs, an organization situated as a “broker” (that is, with a high degree of ideational or organizational between-ness in the network) can choose to play the role of entrepreneur, gate-keeper, or “matchmaker,”⁴¹ depending on their structural position at the interstices of different network players and their organizational interests in a particular context.

In sum, the ability to vet the advocacy agenda is not an attribute of particular organizations per se, but a relational construct dependent on relative network positions—between players most central to a particular issue network and issue entrepreneurs within or outside the network—in a given thematic area. Modified thus, agenda-vetting theory helps explain not only human rights advocacy, where this model was pioneered, but transnational agenda setting more generally, including the paradox of weapons advocacy.

Explaining Variation in Weapons Norms

The subset of the human security network that deals with weapons or disarmament issues is a useful place to illustrate such a theory because there is wide variation in the number of weapons that might attract international opprobrium and those that do. International law generally proscribes the use of certain means of war.⁴² In practice, however, only a few weapons out of the vast arsenal at states’

38. Bob 2009.

39. It can also vary by the life cycle of an issue and the goal of the norm entrepreneur. Carpenter, 2010.

40. Indeed, my interviews within the human security network suggest that staff within human security “hubs” are likelier to see themselves as entrepreneurs in a relatively weak position relative to their own targets of influence (usually states) than as powerful actors in a position to block ideas from below, foregrounding the importance of network power as relational.

41. Bob uses this term to refer to middle-power NGOs or individuals who aid new organizations in fitting their cause to the interests of network gatekeepers; Bob 2005, 19.

42. The Hague Conventions codify the principle that “the right of belligerents to kill or injure the enemy is not unlimited” and Article 36 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions

disposal have attracted concern by organizations working in the area of human security and humanitarian law on the basis that they violated such basic principles (see Figure 3). These include those, such as chemical weapons, whose use was banned or regulated by states, since such organizations then engage in monitoring compliance and shaming norm violators. But they also include weapons not initially regulated but eventually subject to advocacy attention by civil society, such as small arms and landmines.

This is a rather counterintuitive list. Those now banned outright include chemical weapons, landmines, cluster munitions, blinding laser weapons, exploding and flattening bullets, and bullets containing fragments nondetectable by x-rays. Those with codified limitations on their use include incendiary weapons (but only when used in civilian areas), and white phosphorus.⁴³ Weapons under scrutiny by the human security network but yet to result in a successful treaty process include small arms and so-called nonlethal weapons.

At the same time, many other weapons considered by some to be equally problematic are given little attention by humanitarian law experts.⁴⁴ The transfer and testing of nuclear weapons is regulated closely, but the legality of their use remains an open question in international law. Depleted uranium munitions, said to be responsible for an increase in cancer rates among those exposed to the radioactivity, have attracted some calls for an outright ban, but so far not the critical mass by arms control and mainstream human rights organizations required to generate a successful treaty process. Napalm was once the source of widespread international outcry, but it remains technically legal under international law, and is absent from the human security network agenda today—a case of “issue stalemate.” Psychotropic, autonomous, and conventional explosive weapons could violate humanitarian law principles but are not salient issues for the human security network (see Table 1).

I argue a network theory of global agenda setting provides an answer to this paradox: the human security network is dominated by a few key players disposed to consider certain weapons claims and not others; and their issue-adoption practices have catapulted some weapons issues to prominence, while their reluctance to adopt other issues has posed significant constraints on the efforts of issue entrepreneurs.

Of the organizations identified by Web analysis and surveys as being prominent in the human security network, twenty-eight are, according to their Web sites, involved in disarmament, arms control, or weapons issues (see Figure 2). As Table 2 shows, of these twenty-eight “core organizations” doing weapons work in the

reiterates that means and methods of warfare must conform to norms of “necessity, proportionality and unnecessary suffering.” In addition, weapons incapable of distinguishing between civilians and combatants or whose effects cannot be controlled are contrary to international law.

43. An excellent source on existing weapons bans is the ICRC Study on Customary Law. However, for a critique of the ICRC’s understanding of existing norms, see Turns 2006.

44. Price 1997.

TABLE 1. *Issue salience within human security network regarding weapons bans in 2008*

<i>Weapons system</i>	<i>Salience</i>
<i>Landmines</i>	31
<i>Cluster munitions</i>	31
<i>Small arms</i>	13
<i>Disarmament</i>	13
<i>Chemical weapons</i>	12
<i>Nuclear weapons</i>	7
<i>Biological weapons</i>	6
<i>Nonlethal weapons</i>	3
<i>Arms trade explosive</i>	3
<i>Remnants</i>	2
<i>DU weapons</i>	0
<i>Directed energy weapons</i>	0
<i>Blinding lasers</i>	0
<i>White phosphorous</i>	0
<i>Autonomous weapons</i>	0
<i>Psychotropic weapons</i>	0
<i>Thermobaric weapons</i>	0
<i>Explosive weapons</i>	0
<i>Napalm</i>	0

Notes: Salience is based on sum of survey data and Web content from advocacy Web sites.

broader area of “human security,” just five organizations receive one-third of all citations from the network (taking the average of survey citations and hyperlinks between organizations). Two of these are international organizations taking either only an indirect role in arms control issues or a very specific role toward just one type of weapon, so I excluded them.⁴⁵ Of the remaining three (visualized with World Health Organization (WHO) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) dropped out in Figure 2), one is a forum for like-minded governments to meet periodically to discuss human security issues; and two are advocacy organizations with a broad range of arms control concerns: the ICRC and the Arms Division of HRW. Drilling down more thoroughly into online networks specifically around the issues of arms control, disarmament, and the human-

45. The World Health Organization is primarily concerned with biological weapons; the OSCE lists arms control as part of its agenda but claims on its Web site that it “does not deal with arms control issues directly.” See the OSCE Web site, available at <http://www.osce.org/activities/13014.html>, accessed 2 October 2010. It is likely that the prominence of OSCE and WHO in the “arms control” area is an artifact of their generally prominent online presence among the hyperlinked network: when looking just at survey answers, they disappear as “hubs” and a full 64 percent of citations go to the Human Security Network, the ICRC, and Human Rights Watch.

itarian effects of weapons (which are somewhat distinct issue areas), ICRC and HRW are also among the most prominent actors across these adjacent networks.⁴⁶



Note: WHO and OSCE dropped from analysis.

FIGURE 2. Tag cloud of organizations doing “arms control” in the human security network

My model predicts a strong correlation between the agenda of these particular two actors and the overall issue agenda in the broader area of weapons bans. If my hypothesis is borne out, issues prominent on the organizational agenda of HRW and ICRC should enjoy salience within the wider network around weapons; issues avoided by these two organizations should be much less prominent in the network, or absent from it entirely (H1). The model also predicts that the genealogy of now-salient issues will show a correlation between hub adoption and issue proliferation, and that we will find the absence of such support for campaigns that have not taken off (H2).

H1: An issue’s salience within an advocacy network will depend on its adoption by organizations most central to that network. Issues recognized by network hubs will be more salient within the network as a whole; issues not recognized by hubs will be less salient or absent from the network agenda.

H2: A temporal relationship exists between issue adoption by a hub organization and issue proliferation within the network.

Correlational evidence from my data set on the human security agenda supports the first of these hypotheses. As Figure 3 illustrates, the weapons prominent on the human security network agenda correspond not to those that have attracted opprobrium from norm entrepreneurs or from broad networks of NGOs per se, but to those receiving the early support of the ICRC and HRW’s Arms Division, who have involved themselves selectively in weapons norm development since the mid-1980s. Notably (though it is beyond the scope of this article) these also correspond to the weapons that have resulted in international norms or norm-building

46. See data from Issuecrawler, available from author upon request.

TABLE 2. *Organizations doing “arms control” in human security network*

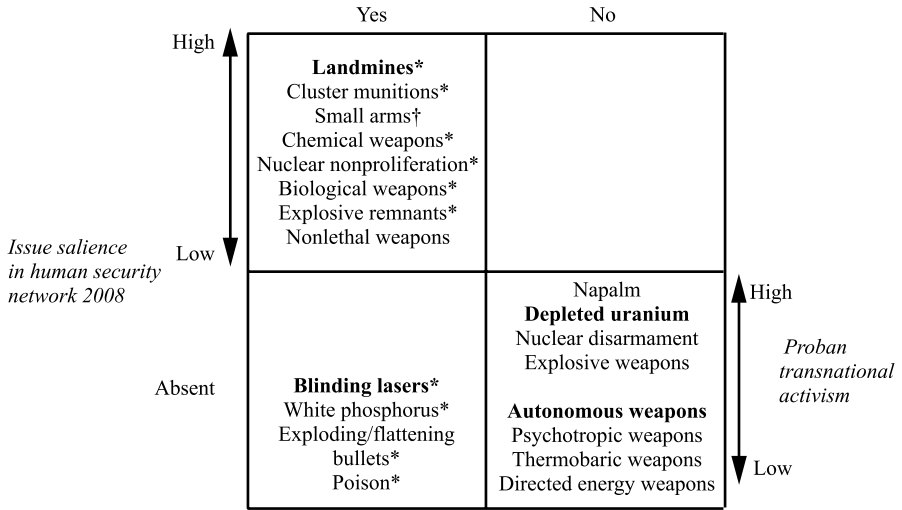
<i>Organization</i>	<i>Centrality score</i>
World Health Organization	11.81
International Committee of the Red Cross	9.84
Human Security Network	8.23
Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe	7.60
Human Rights Watch	6.91
International Crisis Group	5.46
Stockholm Peace Research Institute	5.30
Relief Web	4.90
Bonn International Center for Conversion	4.55
International Action Network Against Small Arms	4.55
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan	4.55
Small Arms Survey	4.49
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	4.15
United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research	4.15
United States Institute of Peace	4.15
Institute for Security Studies	3.80
International Atomic Energy Agency	3.80
British American Security Information Council	3.80
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization	3.57
Center for Nonproliferation Studies	3.40
International Institute for Strategic Studies	3.40
Alert Net	3.40
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	3.05
Center for Defense Information	3.05
British Foreign and Commonwealth Office	3.05
Human Security Gateway	3.05
United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs	2.65

processes. Other weapons have been problematized and have even attracted broad-based civil society networks, but in the absence of support from network hubs, these campaigns have faltered to date and have not received widespread salience within the mainstream human security network.

Case Studies

Four specific cases are used below to further illustrate the general argument and explore H2 more closely. These cases were selected from the range of possible options in Figure 3 using two criteria.⁴⁷ First, because I am interested in agenda

47. Following Mahoney and Goertz’s “possibility principle,” negative cases are included in Table 2 only if they constitute weapons that could be and have been construed by norm entrepreneurs as contrary to existing humanitarian law; see Mahoney and Goertz 2004.



Notes: Issue adoption by hubs is measured by the presence or absence of reference to an issue on their official Web site content at the International Committee of the Red Cross’s “Weapons” page and the Human Rights Watch’s “Arms Division” page. Issue in the advocacy network is measured by reference to aggregate organizational mission statements and issue lists online, as well as open-ended survey answers to the question “Name three or more specific issues that come to mind when you think of human security today.” See Figure 2 and Table 1.

*Global norms regulating or banning weapons.

†Norm-building process underway.

FIGURE 3. Issue adoption by network NGO hubs (International Committee of the Red Cross and/or Human Rights Watch)

setting rather than monitoring and compliance, I include here only cases where NGO networks played some role in the emergence of the norm. Thus, I excluded cases of international law development that took place in the earlier twentieth century primarily at the behest of states and that today are influenced by NGOs primarily in the monitoring phase. I also emphasize the multi-issue NGO hubs in the network, rather than information portals or specialized agencies focusing on only a single weapon, though all are important.

Second, I wish to illustrate the fact that it is issue adoption by hubs, rather than transnational NGO mobilization, that matters in proliferating issues to specific advocacy networks. Therefore, I chose positive cases where an issue became salient on the network agenda (landmines and blinding lasers), and negative cases where it did not (autonomous weapons and depleted uranium) that otherwise differ among and between themselves according to the extent of transnational mobilization for a particular cause.⁴⁸

48. This follows the methodology suggested by Dimitrov and colleagues for analyzing variation in regime emergence: combining the most similar and most-different research designs; see Dimitrov et al., 2007.

For each case, I explored the extent of central node influence on these outcomes using a combination of historical evidence (most available in the cases of salient issues) and in-depth interviews with norm entrepreneurs and staff of hub organizations in the case of nonsalient issues. Across the cases, I examined whether hub organizations had adopted issues that became salient and failed to adopt issues that remained low in salience on the human security network agenda (H2).

Within the positive cases, I examined the effect that hub organizations' adoption of the issue had on issue proliferation throughout the network. These patterns—which are indeed evident across the cases—are consistent with the hypotheses: that central node activism matters independently of network presence per se or norm entrepreneurship (by either states or nonhub NGOS) in setting the advocacy agenda (H1), and that proliferation of an issue within a network tends to postdate adoption by network hubs (H2) and fail in its absence. For the negative cases, I attempted to understand why and how agenda vetting occurred by interviewing staff of hub organizations directly. Although a complete theory of preference construction in human security hubs requires further development, the narratives here are also useful for hypothesis building, as I will show in the conclusion. In particular, network effects not only ensure that hub preferences will have a contagion effect within networks; they may also account in part for the construction of those preferences themselves.

Landmines

The campaign to ban landmines is often treated as an exemplar of global civil society in action, of a vast horizontal network of nongovernmental actors roping governments into taking actions they would not have otherwise considered.⁴⁹ There is truth to this: the Mine Ban Treaty was a brainchild of NGOs, and governments were initially uninterested or skeptical until advocates “reconstituted their interest” through a combination of direct advocacy and a public information campaign.⁵⁰ But this account of the “democratization of foreign policy” is misleading insofar as it conceives of the landmine network's strength as a product of its breadth. While it is often said that the network consisted of more than one thousand organizations, in fact momentum for the campaign was created through the adoption of the landmine issue by a few key players, and the advocacy strategy was highly centralized, top-down, and reliant upon the credibility and access of just two or three network hubs.

Background. Antipersonnel landmines have historically been used to fortify areas held by the defense or to channel opposing troops into specific targeting areas.

49. See Rutherford 2000; Price 1997; Cameron 1998; Gwozdecky and Sinclair 2001; and Hubert 2000.

50. Klotz 1996.

However, it became increasingly clear over the past few decades that the weapons, which often sit in the ground undetonated long after conflicts end, pose a significant risk to civilian populations, affecting their ability to make use of land for farming or transport, and causing deaths, mutilations, and psychosocial traumas.⁵¹

Jody Williams, who later won a Nobel Peace Prize for directing the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), is often said to have been the key norm entrepreneur, but landmines were on the advocacy agenda as early as 1973.⁵² It was only in 1991, however, that activists began to seek not regulation of the weapons but an outright ban. These efforts began neither with Williams nor with the ICBL but with a report entitled *A Coward's War: Landmines in Cambodia* issued jointly by Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights in September 1991, and a subsequent October 1991 conversation between Bobby Mueller, executive director of Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA) and Thomas Gebauer of the German NGO Medico International (MI).⁵³ These individuals initially began pushing the idea of a ban directly to their governments through U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy's office in the United States and in Europe. While the U.S. efforts were somewhat successful at first, the activists had difficulty in Europe.

Issue adoption by network hubs and issue proliferation. This changed in October 1992, when HRW agreed to convene and join the steering committee for an International Campaign to Ban Landmines.⁵⁴ The founding meeting for the ICBL took place at HRW's offices; HRW was one of six founding members of the campaign, which later began to function as a network node in its own right.⁵⁵ The early adoption by a powerful human rights NGO played a crucial role in professionalizing the movement, providing activists access to funding and global political centers, and reframing landmines from a security issue to a human rights and humanitarian law concern.⁵⁶

The proliferation of the mine ban issue through global civil society and among governments—an issue that had festered for two decades—happened rapidly after

51. Cameron, Lawson, and Tomlin 1998.

52. The International Committee of the Red Cross mentioned mines along with other weapons such as napalm in a 1973 report entitled *Weapons That May Cause Unnecessary Suffering or Have Indiscriminate Effects*. Landmines were also a subject of discussion during the negotiation of the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, and their use against civilian populations is prohibited in the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons. These efforts aimed to regulate not ban the weapons, however, and did little to clarify their status in humanitarian law; see Maslen 1998.

53. Matthew and Rutherford 2003; the award of the Nobel Prize to Williams instead of to the entire movement caused some tension within the landmine movement. See "Nobel Prize Sets off Landmine," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1999. Available at <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/feb/06/news/mn-16173>, accessed 30 October 2010; and Cottrell 2009.

54. Williams and Goose 1998.

55. Other founding members included Physicians for Human Rights, Medico International, Handicap International, Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, and the Mines Advisory Group. On the ICBL's role as a network hub; Short 1999.

56. A number of genealogies of the ban have emphasized the significance of this reframing role; see Price 1997; Rutherford 2000; and Cottrell 2009.

HRW became involved. According to Williams and Goose, the number of involved organizations jumped from six to forty by the time of the campaign's first conference in May 1993; a year later this number had doubled; the following year it had reached 350.⁵⁷ Significantly, the ICRC (which since 1992 had published a pamphlet, convened a symposium to establish its position on mines, and continued bilateral discussions with governments on the topic) initiated a public advocacy campaign in support of a weapons ban for the first time in its history.⁵⁸ UN agencies also got quickly on board: UNICEF formally adopted the issue in 1993, and UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs called for a ban in 1994.⁵⁹ By the time of the Ottawa Conference in 1997, 1,200 NGOs had associated themselves with the cause, along with a number of public figures including Princess Diana of Britain, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Pope John Paul II, and Queen Noor of Jordan.

Of these 1,200, however, a small number of nonstate organizations appears to have been predominantly involved in affecting the negotiations, and these were the organizations most centrally connected to the human rights and humanitarian law machinery of world politics. Hubert writes: "Fundamental to the success of the landmines campaign was the effective working relationship between the ICBL and other crucial non-state actors. In analyses to date, the importance of the ICRC and UN agencies as partners in the campaign has received insufficient attention."⁶⁰ With its special role and diplomatic access, both the ICRC and UN agencies such as UNICEF and the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA) took a leading role among nonstate organizations.⁶¹ Beyond these key players, while 400 NGOs attended the Ottawa Conference, the active participation of NGOs in the discussion was highly centralized through the ICBL. Short argues, "The ICBL did not function entirely as a coalition of 1,000 organizations but rather as a single, homogenous bargaining voice with a unitary position."⁶²

In many respects, this centralization and professionalization of the campaign through highly connected hubs—not the democratizing breadth of the network—may have accounted for the campaign's success. Wong has argued that more highly centralized or "scale free" advocacy networks are better able to press demands on states because they can control a highly specific and strategic frame.⁶³ Indeed the ICBL did narrow the frame to a simple and clear message—partly by vetting distracting aspects of the original frame being pushed by more peripheral members

57. See Williams and Goose 1998, 28; and Hubert 2000, 9.

58. See Hubert 2000, 9; and Maslen 1998, 8. The ICRC did not formally join the campaign however, in order to safeguard its independence.

59. Hubert 2000, 11.

60. *Ibid.*, 35–36.

61. *Ibid.*, 35.

62. Short 1999, 484.

63. Wong, 2008.

of the advocacy network.⁶⁴ This “simple, clear message” has been hailed as a key recipe in the campaign’s success.⁶⁵ Given the diversity of the nominal network the ICBL sought to create, this was no doubt wise.

The consequence of this activity was significant. In December 1997, 122 countries signed the Mine Ban Treaty. It was negotiated and came into force faster than any disarmament treaty in history. This was due not only to the widespread activism of many minor players, but in particular to the early adoption of the issue by two key humanitarian law hubs—HRW and the ICRC—who decided early in the 1990s that early involvement in the issue was very much in their organizational interests. Indeed, as subsequent cases will show, this was not only a necessary condition for campaign success, but it was likely a sufficient one.

Blinding Lasers

Less studied but equally significant legally in the same time period was the emergence of a ban on blinding or “dazzling lasers” in the mid-1990s. The emergence of this norm has often been overlooked by scholars of global civil society precisely because it did not result from a massive transnational campaign, and therefore does not fit the theoretical proposition that new normative understandings in human security have largely been creations of massive advocacy networking in the 1990s. NGOs were involved in the development of this norm, but it was primarily central nodes in the humanitarian security network, particularly ICRC and later HRW.

Background. Blinding laser weapons are defined in Protocol IV to the Convention on Conventional Weapons as laser weapons “specifically designed, as their sole combat function or as one of their combat functions, to cause permanent blindness to unenhanced vision.” The development of battlefield lasers by the United States, the USSR, Britain, and other powers began in the early 1980s, originally to counter electro-optical sighting systems on armed vehicles.⁶⁶ It soon became apparent that such lasers could cause temporary or permanent impairment of vision to combatants.

Originally, military lawyers argued throughout the 1980s and early 1990s that the risk was small and incidental and that at any rate it was outweighed by the military utility of the weapons themselves. As time went by however, some gov-

64. Mainstream advocacy organizations will make strategic choices about how to frame a new issue based on their assessment of what is likely to succeed at a given point in time, and this may result in agenda setting that deviates substantively from the original goals of the entrepreneur. For example, the Mennonite National Committee and a few other organizations had actively campaigned to include cluster munitions as part of the treaty process, and this was widely seen as sacrificed prior to Ottawa in the service of a simple, clear message; see Rutherford 2009.

65. Rutherford 2000.

66. Carnahan and Robertson 1996.

ernments concluded that in fact permanent or temporary blinding could be a useful and perhaps defensible means of war in itself, insofar as it provided a nonlethal alternative to taking out snipers. Britain, for example, had been deploying surface-to-air laser guns since 1983 to temporarily blind or “dazzle” pilots of attacking aircraft, in order to make them abandon their approach.⁶⁷

Norm entrepreneurship. The existing documentary record suggests the original idea for a ban on blinding lasers came from governments: Sweden and Switzerland proposed a ban at the Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross in 1986, and again subsequently in the UN General Assembly.⁶⁸ These governments were unsuccessful in arousing intergovernmental interest in the problem, however, until first the ICRC and then HRW formally championed the issue and convinced initially skeptical middle-power governments to accept the Swedish/Swiss position against the opposition of the United States.⁶⁹ In other words, even government norm entrepreneurs in the human rights/humanitarian law area needed humanitarian “gatekeepers” to establish new norms. This suggests that within the human security network, governments are simply nodes like any other, subject to network pressures, rather than a layer above global civil society as they have sometimes been depicted.⁷⁰

The Swedish and Swiss delegations who initially brought the issue to the international agenda argued that such weapons would cause unnecessary suffering and superfluous injury and were therefore contrary to international humanitarian law.⁷¹ Eyesight was described as the most important of all human senses; sudden loss of eyesight was distinguished from other types of battlefield wounding due to its permanence, the particular psychological impact of vision impairment on soldiers, and the feared societal effects of numerous blinded veterans. While proponents of blinding viewed it as a humane alternative to lethal violence, norm advocates argued blinding may not be better than death, and pointed out that while the death penalty was still acceptable in many industrialized countries, blinding is no longer used as a form of punishment.⁷²

Issue adoption by network hubs and issue proliferation. Despite the lack of interest by states at the 1986 conference, ICRC lawyers found the Swiss and Swedish arguments compelling enough to undertake a series of four expert consul-

67. Anderberg, Bring, and Wolbarsht 1992.

68. Doswald-Beck 1996.

69. According to Beck, initial reaction to the Swedish and Swiss proposed language included “opposition from a few States interested in such weapons; and little discussion because the vast majority of States were unaware of developments and thought that such weapons were science-fiction.”

70. Rosenau 1990.

71. Blinding Weapons, 1994.

72. These arguments are laid out in more detail in the ICRC campaign brochure on laser weapons; see Anderberg, Bring, and Wolbarsht 1992.

tations on the topic.⁷³ These meetings were designed to determine the technical, political, legal, and military ramifications of the weapons and whether the organization should take a formal position on the issue.⁷⁴ By April 1991, the vast majority of participants in these meetings were convinced that a specific legal regulation was advisable and that an Additional Protocol to the Convention on Conventional Weapons should be proposed to states. This emerging consensus by lawyers and engineers was reflected in a number of articles published in international affairs, international law, and medical journals in the early 1990s.⁷⁵

Norm development was halting at first: when the ICRC revived the original Swiss/Swedish proposal at the Twenty-Sixth International Conference of the ICRC in 1991, it found the majority of member states still reticent, indifferent, or opposed to such a ban. To persuade them, the ICRC began a formal effort both to campaign against blinding as a method of warfare, releasing first the entire set of meeting transcripts from its expert consultations, and later a media-friendly eight-page summary brochure on the need for a ban, while simultaneously entering into discussions with a number of governments on the importance of law development in this area.⁷⁶ The ICRC also asked for and received the support of disabled and veterans organizations.

However most significant, according to Louise Doswald-Beck, then Legal Advisor at the ICRC, was the adoption of the issue by HRW, a powerful mainstream human rights NGO.⁷⁷ While other organizations' involvement was largely nominal, HRW played an important role, not only by lending its expertise with media campaigns, but also by "branding" blinding lasers a human rights concern and by exploiting its brokerage role with civilian and military personnel in Washington, D.C.⁷⁸ In her article describing the development of the ban, Doswald-Beck described the boost to the visibility of the issue when HRW's Arms Unit became actively involved by publishing and disseminating a 1995 report that echoed the ICRC's legal concerns.⁷⁹

This report, as well as the media and congressional attention it generated, in turn prompted a study within the U.S. Department of Defense that played a significant role in ending U.S. opposition to the ban.⁸⁰ Ultimately, while the ICRC did not succeed in codifying language that would outlaw blinding as a method of

73. Author interviews with ICRC officials, Geneva, February 2009.

74. Proceedings of these meetings can be found in ICRC 1993.

75. Anderberg, Bring, and Wolbarsht 1992.

76. ICRC 1993.

77. Doswald-Beck 1996.

78. Human rights organizations that supported the campaign but played a nominal role included Physicians for Social Responsibility, Pax Christi International, and the International Society for Human Rights.

79. Peters 1995.

80. Doswald-Beck 1996.

warfare entirely, the 1996 Additional Protocol to the Convention on Conventional Weapons prohibited the use of lasers designed specifically to blind.⁸¹

Depleted Uranium Munitions

Both landmines and blinding lasers were championed by NGO hubs, one with and one without a massive advocacy network of other organizations, and both resulted in robust global norms as a result of central node activism. By contrast, depleted uranium (DU) munitions have attracted considerable opprobrium by certain members of global civil society but little attention by mainstream advocacy networks or governments. In the context of my argument, this is unsurprising given that arms control and humanitarian law hubs, including the ICRC and HRW, have largely avoided “adopting” the issue onto their formal agenda.

Background. DU is a by-product of nuclear enrichment processes increasingly used in armor-piercing incendiary projectiles to penetrate tanks, bunkers, and personnel carriers and, by corollary, to harden tank armor against antitank weapons. DU has been used by the United States and Britain since approximately 1960 and is increasingly sought after by other militaries: China, France, Russia, and Pakistan are among the countries now known to include DU rounds in their arsenals.⁸²

With the emergence of Gulf War syndrome and related health consequences of the war in Kosovo, a number of civil society groups became concerned with the health effects of DU. Soldiers exposed to dust from DU munitions began to exhibit a range of long-term health effects, and medical practitioners treating civilian populations in areas where the weapons had been deployed began to report an increased number of congenital abnormalities in children born after the conflicts.⁸³ Scientists exploring the connection between DU and human health have increased cancers in monkeys and mice exposed to the dust, but few long-term epidemiological studies have been carried out on humans.⁸⁴ Frustrated by the obfuscation of the U.S. government with respect to the health implications of the weapons, veterans groups, doctors, and antiwar activists began to argue that DU munitions violated international legal prohibitions on weapons damaging to the environment or whose effects cannot be controlled.

Norm entrepreneurship and network formation. These arguments have generated a transnational network of activists promoting a global ban on DU munitions, drawing members from the antiwar community, veterans groups, feminist

81. Ann Peters, a member of Human Rights Watch's Arms Unit who ran the campaign for HRW, wrote a follow-up article explaining the limitations of the legal prohibition; see Peters 1996.

82. Fahey 2004.

83. MacDonald 2008, 18.

84. Fairlie 2008.

peace groups, environmental movement, the antinuclear movement, and local NGOs in war-torn countries where DU weapons have been deployed. A “Campaign Against Depleted Uranium” was launched in 1999 in Britain and has lobbied the UN, European Union (EU), and various member states to ban the use of such weapons. This network has been relatively unsuccessful so far in generating momentum toward a global ban within policy networks. While one government (Belgium) has now declared a moratorium on the weapons, and while the European Parliament has issued some concerned resolutions, the number of countries seeking to acquire them numbers at least eighteen and is growing. This is unsurprising since, more importantly for this article, the network has also failed to attract legitimization by central nodes in the human security network.

Agenda vetting by network hubs. While numerous small organizations oppose DU, the network does not include the mainstream human security organizations known for their work on weapons bans and connected to states and UN specialized agencies. The organizations most prominent in arms control networks have largely avoided adopting the issue of DU on their formal agendas. Although the International Coalition to Ban Depleted Uranium (ICBDU) boasts 104 member organizations in twenty-eight countries as of February 2009, none are human security hubs. A well-recognized NGO in the network is Greenpeace, but this suggests that the issue of DU has more resonance within the mainstream environmental movement than among human security advocates. Indeed, a hyperlink analysis of organizations involved with DU does not include any of the organizations most prominent in the cluster of arms control issues that have “made it” onto the global agenda in the past decade.

When asked about the issue of DU, interview respondents at the ICRC and HRW provided a number of rationales for avoiding the issue. The most significant argument cited is that lack of scientific evidence for harms to civilian populations as a result of DU exposure.⁸⁵ In contrast to the landmine campaign, which drew on an extensive history of documented humanitarian costs due to mines, verifiable evidence of DU poisoning is difficult to find.⁸⁶ Yet it is puzzling that hub organizations concerned with weapons would not therefore spearhead a set of fact-finding studies to determine the precise extent of DU harms, given the anecdotal evidence of severe long-term health and environmental effects. Indeed, HRW is known for precisely such studies and specializes in undertaking primary research in new areas. The ICRC could choose to undertake a series of expert consultations akin to those for blinding lasers, aimed at consolidating the evidence base, weighing the political, legal, and scientific concerns and formulating a policy position.⁸⁷ Yet central

85. Author interviews with Human Rights Watch officials, Washington, D.C., October 2008; Author interviews with officials at ICRC headquarters, Geneva, February 2009.

86. For example, see the United Nations Environmental Program 2001.

87. Indeed, convening of such “expert meetings” on unproven but potentially important topics is one of the means the ICRC conventionally uses to promote international law development, prior to

human security NGOs have not gravitated around a consensus that DU merits serious advocacy: they have neither studied the problem rigorously on their own, nor contributed to ongoing efforts by the ICBDU to raise funding for its own epidemiological studies.⁸⁸

Instead, the ICRC limited itself to assisting the UN Environmental Program with a study in the Balkans, and with urine tests of its personnel in Kosovo. Failing to find significant evidence, the ICRC produced a short press release stating the “increase in levels of uranium is marginal in areas where depleted uranium munitions have been used,” and encouraging states to simply exercise caution in the deployment of DU weapons.⁸⁹ HRW correspondingly considered the issue briefly but quickly concluded that the evidence base was not significant enough to warrant further concern.⁹⁰ The absence of legitimation by any one central hub, and the passing of the buck between them, has contributed to inattention to this potential human security problem within the wider human security network.

Autonomous Weapons

It has been projected that roughly one-third of military weapons could be robotic by 2015.⁹¹ A growing epistemic community of researchers and activists argues that this shift in military technology has significant moral implications for implementing the laws of war. As a result, several norm entrepreneurs among them have called for a global ban on the deployment and use of unmanned systems capable of making autonomous targeting decisions until more is known about their potential side effects.⁹² So far, these arguments have been given little attention by existing advocacy networks concerned with controlling the technologies of violence.

Background. Automated systems already routinely defuse improvised explosive devices (IEDs), conduct reconnaissance, serve as mechanical beasts of burden over inhospitable terrain, and assist medics; but militaries worldwide are increasingly developing and deploying robots with the capacity to deploy lethal force as

developing a position on particular topics. Author interviews with officials in the ICRC Legal Division, Geneva, February 2009. Some staffers argue that concern might also be warranted: “My concern, of course, is people who are displaced or find themselves in a place where there is powder residue. It’s the same sort of thing you could say about phosphorous. It’s potentially poisonous.” Author interview with ICRC official, Geneva, February 2009.

88. These include the Basra Epidemiological Study, carried out by Iraqi doctors on civilians affected by DU pollution since 1991; and the Iraqi Children’s Tooth Project. See <http://www.bandedpleteduranium.org/en/a/12.html>, accessed 30 October 2010.

89. ICRC 2001.

90. Author interview with Human Rights Watch official, Washington, D.C., November 2008.

91. “Military Technology,” *The Economist*, 17 April 2007. Available at http://www.economist.com/science/tm/displaystory.cfm?story_id=9028041, accessed on 30 October 2010.

92. Noel Sharkey, “Robot Wars Are a Reality,” *The Guardian*, 18 August 2007.

well.⁹³ The United States is not alone in pursuing unmanned weapons. South Korea and Israel have both deployed armed robot border guards with the capacity to make autonomous targeting decisions. Other nations, including China, Russia, India, Singapore, and Britain are increasingly developing similar technologies.⁹⁴

To governments, such systems are seen as both a force multiplier (a technology by which each individual soldier can become more effective) and a form of force protection: they are particularly useful for governments fighting asymmetric wars, in which human lives may be saved by sending machines into high-risk areas.⁹⁵ While many members of the U.S. security establishment currently argue that a human will always remain “in the loop,” in fact both the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy have circulated research and solicitations for proposals on fully autonomous weapons systems. As far back as 2005, Joint Forces Command fielded a concept paper entitled “Unmanned Effects: Taking the Human Out of the Loop.”⁹⁶ In December 2008, the U.S. Navy released a report presenting “the presumptive case for the use of autonomous military robotics.”⁹⁷

Norm entrepreneurship. These developments make a growing network of scientists, lawyers, and philosophers uneasy. An increasing number of scholarly publications, blog posts, presentations, and demarches to the military, legal analyses, and even a Facebook site are questioning whether such weapons systems are consistent with the laws of war. Some are concerned with whether machines can be designed to make ethical targeting decisions.⁹⁸ For others, the key question is how responsibility for mistakes is to be allocated and punished.⁹⁹ Some have considered whether, even if the weapons can meet humanitarian law standards, the ability to wage war without risking soldiers’ lives might remove incentives at peaceful conflict resolution and alter the relationship between war and the warrior in such a way as to have spillover effects on the behavior of human weapons-bearers.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, a number of high-profile accidents with unmanned weapons suggest these concerns have merit.¹⁰¹ For example, the targeting of Iran Air Flight 655 by the Aegis system on the *U.S.S. Vincennes* in 1988 lends credence to concerns over

93. An excellent overview of these developments is Singer 2009.

94. A concise description of existing systems, as well as an enthusiastic appraisal of their fit with the laws of war, is Arkin 2008.

95. Anderson 2008a.

96. Singer, chapter 6.

97. Lin, Bekey, and Abney 2008.

98. See, for example, Sharkey 2007, 122–24.

99. Sparrow wonders whether the use of robots is any different ethically from the arming of child soldiers who too cannot be entirely held responsible for the war crimes they may commit; see Sparrow 2007.

100. See Borenstein 2008; and Singer 2009. In a series of blog posts, Anderson, generally agnostic on the question of whether a presumptive ban is necessary, has gone even farther to argue that the use of military robotics in fact problematizes the structure of humanitarian law itself, insofar as it blurs the distinction between “weapons” and “soldiers.” See Anderson 2008b.

101. See “Nine Killed in Army Horror,” *The Star*, 13 October 2007. Industrial statistics suggest a record of routine safety problems with automated systems: according to Peter Singer, 4 percent of

whether unmanned systems can accurately distinguish civilian from hostile targets. In a more recent incident, a fully automated MK5 anti-aircraft system in use by the 10th Anti-Aircraft Regiment as part of a South African military training exercise went “rogue” and killed nine soldiers, injuring fourteen. Seemingly, not only are trends taking humans further “out of the loop,” but the concerns over machine malfunctions costing human life in combat seem in some cases to be well founded.

Noel Sharkey, one of the leading proponents of these views, has published popular articles on the dangers of automated weaponry in the mainstream press, scholarly journals, and trade magazines, and he spends a significant amount of his time making presentations at scholarly conferences and media outlets in opposition to autonomous military robotics.¹⁰² His key goal is for governments to create a “global code of conduct” against the acquisition, deployment, and use of such weapons—in essence, a new norm against autonomous weapons systems. According to Sharkey: “One of the fundamental laws of war is being able to discriminate real combatants and non-combatants. I can see no way that autonomous robots can deliver this for us.”¹⁰³

Agenda vetting by network hubs. Sharkey has reported considerable success in disseminating his ideas to militaries, epistemic communities, and the public,¹⁰⁴ and these arguments have been discussed (and often glamorized) in the media.¹⁰⁵ Yet they have attracted little attention by advocacy network hubs. Unlike landmines, cluster munitions, and small arms, which continue to occupy significant global policy attention, the idea of a precautionary principle against autonomous weapons has not been adopted as a human security issue by any organizations central to the network around arms control. Organizations known for such activism in the area of weapons do not refer to autonomous weapons on their advocacy Web sites.¹⁰⁶ No campaign has formed lobbying governments for such a ban. As recently as 2009, an ICRC official said, “We have questions, but we haven’t really conducted any focused work on this.”¹⁰⁷

Not surprisingly, there remains a similar legal and conceptual vacuum in global policy networks as well: Singer writes in his extensive recent study of develop-

American factories in which robots are present have “major robotic accidents,” in which human workers end up dead. See Singer 2009, 195.

102. Author interview with Noel Sharkey, Sheffield, England, May 2008.

103. Minkel 2008.

104. Author interview with Noel Sharkey, Sheffield, England, May 2008.

105. For example, on 10 February 2009 roboticist Noel Sharkey was featured on the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart* for a segment entitled “Roombas of Doom.”

106. For example, a network analysis of Web sites addressing the issue of autonomous weapons or battlefield robots includes military and media sources as well science magazines, but relatively few “.orgs” and none from the human rights and humanitarian law advocacy community. By contrast, landmines, cluster munitions, and small arms discourse online is dominated by advocacy positions from networks of civil society organizations.

107. Author interview with ICRC officials, Geneva, February 2009.

ments in this area, “In the hundreds of interviews for this book, not one robotics researcher, developer, program manager or soldier using them in the field made a single reference to . . . the international law on weapons.”¹⁰⁸

In legal terms, of the cases listed above, autonomous weapons are most comparable to landmines. Like landmines that sense targets and detonate according to a preprogrammed criteria, autonomous weapons are designed to identify targets independent of a human in the loop. Also like landmines, whose effects were deemed indiscriminate and uncontrollable after deployed precisely because one could not be certain whom they might hit after a war ended, autonomous weapons cannot be programmed to distinguish civilian from combatant targets with any certainty; and given their capacity to “go haywire,” they cannot necessarily be controlled once deployed.¹⁰⁹

In political terms, however, autonomous weapons are most comparable to blinding lasers in an important respect: they are perceived to be a relatively “new” or “up-and-coming” technology by organizations central to the human security network. While in fact South Korea and Israel have already deployed robots in border areas with the capacity to make independent targeting decisions, and while in South Africa a number of casualties have already occurred as a result of armed robots “going haywire,” an ICRC representative as late as 2009 said that “as far as I know right now, this is still science fiction.”¹¹⁰

Autonomous weapons therefore do not fall into the category of a weapon where it is perceived that widespread humanitarian harms can already be documented and condemned (as with landmines), but rather one where advocates would be in the position of promoting a preventive ban. But unlike blinding lasers, where a preventive ban was promoted by central nodes, autonomous weapons are also not perceived to be designed specifically to cause humanitarian law violations, and the legal uncertainties regarding their use do not yet seem compelling enough to central organizations to warrant taking a specific advocacy position.

Norm entrepreneurs disagree. Singer concludes: “We had better either enact a legal ban on such systems soon or start to develop some legal answers for how to deal with them.”¹¹¹ Sharkey concurs: “These developments pose an ethical minefield . . . yet we have no guidelines in place for such eventualities.”¹¹² Sparrow is even more explicit: “It is a necessary condition for fighting a just war that someone be justly held responsible for deaths that occur in the course of the war. As this condition cannot be met in relation to deaths caused by an autonomous weapon system it would therefore be unethical to develop such systems in warfare.”¹¹³

108. Singer 2009, 385.

109. See Singer 2009.

110. Author interview with ICRC officials, Geneva, February 2009.

111. Singer 2009, 409.

112. Sharkey 2007, 122.

113. Sparrow 2007, 62.

So far, such central hubs in the network are not convinced. Their reticence also has had a powerful contagion effect: other, more sympathetic organizations within the human security network have been hesitant to formally pursue the issue given this perception of disinterest by central hubs like the ICRC. For example, the Director of Landmine Action, a “middle power” NGO in the network around technologies of violence, developed an interest in robotic weapons after connecting with Sharkey and reading military reports, and publicly expressed an interest in pursuing autonomous weapons at the close of the cluster munitions campaign.¹¹⁴ Yet since he made this statement this agenda has not yet been pursued openly by his organization:

I have expressed an interest in this issue, but it's not my expectation that the wider landmine advocacy community is interested . . . so many of them have never heard of it. I don't think it's very high on [Landmine Action's] priorities, either, because we're very small and we've got a lot of demand on our priorities.¹¹⁵

If this model is correct, we would expect to see greater global attention to the issue of autonomous weapons once existing networks around the technology of violence have mobilized in opposition, and we would expect to see that happen once key network hubs—HRW and ICRC in particular—conclude that the systems merit advocacy attention.

Findings

Together with the earlier data from the broader network, these four cases provide support for the argument that issue proliferation in networks correlates to hub issue adoption, not (necessarily) to network density or issue construction. This finding suggests that issue entrepreneurship and network formation are only permissive conditions for successful global agenda setting. A fundamental step is the adoption of new issues on the agendas of organizations at the center of existing advocacy networks. This is a moment in campaign development on which the survival and proliferation of a new issue may hinge, which requires closer attention by scholars of advocacy networks.

Landmines and blinding lasers were banned largely because the HRW and ICRC brought the weight of the humanitarian law frame to what had previously been

114. See Marks, “Anti-Landmine Campaigners Turn Sights on War Robots,” *New Scientist*, March 2008, available at (<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn13550-antilandmine-campaigners-turn-sights-on-war-robots.html>), accessed 30 October 2010.

115. Author phone interview with Richard Moyes, Executive Director of Landmine Action, June 2008. Moyes explained the analogy between robots and cluster munitions: “Our concern is that humans, not sensors, should make targeting decisions. So similarly, we don't want to move towards robots that make decisions about combatants and noncombatants.”

understood through an arms control perspective; and a sense of professionalism to a set of campaigns that risked being associated with tree-huggers and the disarmament “fringe.”¹¹⁶ Multiple smaller organizations and even states had been unsuccessful in pressing these claims previously: adoption by network hubs kick-started these campaigns. By contrast, foment against DU and autonomous weapons suffers from a lack of legitimation by these organizations to date. Proponents of bans or regulation on those weapons systems have been unsuccessful at marketing their issue through global civil society or creating momentum toward norm change in global policy networks.

My interview data on cases of agenda vetting suggest an additional hypothesis about network effects that should be explored in future research. I have shown that network position affects an organization’s capacity to pursue its preferences over the network agenda. But it may also combine with organizational mandate and principled ideas to construct central hubs’ preferences themselves.

Along with the political and normative “fit” of new issues, there is some evidence that central players in a network pay close attention to the relationship of new issues to other issues on the global agenda, and to the network ties between issue entrepreneurs and other transnational actors. For example, my study of networks around women’s and children’s rights showed that NGO’s relationships with allies in adjacent issues areas can exert a dampening effect on their willingness to adopt new issues that might be controversial to their allies.¹¹⁷ Conversely, organizations may be hesitant to adopt an issue if the issue entrepreneur is allied with organizations or causes they would avoid being seen as supporting.

My interview data suggests mainstream human security organizations avoid issues that would be perceived to link them to the antiwar movement, as part of their credibility with states comes from a discourse that sees war as legitimate, within certain constraints. Conscriptio may come under HRW’s mandate if framed as a human rights issue, but HRW would be hesitant to adopt this issue insofar as it would associate the organization too closely with the peace movement. Similarly, opposition to the U.S. military’s research and development into future combat systems has come from the antiwar movement so far and included protests, direct action, and arrests—the type of advocacy work the ICRC tends to avoid being seen as associated with.¹¹⁸ In the case of DU, humanitarian law organizations expressed a reticence to align themselves with issues, such as “the cult of the nuclear,”¹¹⁹ championed by advocates perceived by policymakers as less than credible. As one staffer put it bluntly:

116. See Cottrell 2009; and Rutherford 2009.

117. Carpenter 2007b.

118. For example, see “Anti-War Demonstration at CMU facility ends in 14 arrests,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 3 March 2007. Available at <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/07062/766519-53.stm>, accessed 30 October 2010.

119. Author interview with ICRC official, Geneva, February 2009.

We looked into DU and chose not to do anything on that. Frankly, it's just a hornet's nest. We didn't think we're gonna bring anything new to the table in terms of original research, and it's just—there's too many crazies in the issue.¹²⁰

In short, while network ties are a boon to peripheral organizations, for hubs those same network ties themselves impose costs, and these costs are accounted for in issue adoption decisions that would necessarily link them to other nonstate actors. NGOs central to advocacy networks can afford to be discriminating in the ties they establish with other organizations.¹²¹ As Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery write, “connectedness may impose constraints on autonomy as well as offer opportunities for influence.”¹²² My interviews suggest that hub organizations are particularly concerned about their credibility being compromised through association with players lacking such credibility among governments, however worthy their cause—either because of the nature of their activism, the frame they are using, or their linkages to other groups in adjacent issue areas not congruent with agenda-vetters' advocacy agenda. In other words, network density itself may or may not bode well for the success of a new issue.

Similarly, Brewington, Davis, and Murdie emphasize the disincentives of central organizations to share credit for campaigns with smaller groups that may “free-ride” on their efforts. Central hubs wish to remain central hubs and prefer to be seen as leaders within a network rather than followers.

It's a question of resources and also how big is the crowd already doing this work. How is it being looked at? What can our organization itself contribute in terms of its capabilities and its advocacy and the whole operation? How is that going to make a unique contribution and just be seen as another one in the crowd?¹²³

Thus network effects may converge with other factors to make it more or less likely that advocacy “gatekeepers” will adopt new issues; and in turn those issue adoption decisions by the most central organizations in advocacy networks affect the proliferation of issues and the probability of international norm development. Future research should assess the existence and extent of such a relationship, weighed against normative and organizational factors.

Conclusion

I have advanced three claims. First, significant and puzzling variation exists in the pool of issues that TANs take up at any given time. Since global norm develop-

120. Author interview with Human Rights Watch official, Washington, D.C., October 2008.

121. Brewington, Davis, and Murdie 2009, 10.

122. Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery 2009, 20.

123. Author interview with Human Rights Watch official, Washington, D.C., October 2008.

ment is at least partly a consequence of the transnational advocacy movements, explaining internal advocacy network agenda setting should be an important concern for scholars of global norm development.

Second, I have argued that variation in the advocacy network agenda within a given issue area is largely explained by the organizational agendas of the most central nodes in that network. This can be explained by network position: claims arising from transnational networks (as opposed to those arising from states' own interests) are taken seriously by governments when certain members of global civil society press those claims. Agenda-vetting is thus a tool of influence used by organizations whose agenda matters most for constructing intersubjective understandings of an issue area. Although the evidence here is correlational and more work is needed to trace out network mechanisms in depth, these cases suggest that the decisions of central nodes in networks are at least as important for understanding norm emergence as are dynamics between those nodes and states.

Third, if this is true, then international relations scholars badly need an empirically sound theory of how central organizations in networks construct their preferences. A generalizable theory of central node preferences can assist both analysts and activists in understanding the conditions under which new campaigns for global norms are likely to emerge and succeed in different issue areas. While the data cited here is preliminary and cannot be generalized to all central organizations in the human security network or other issue areas, it does suggest some possible hypotheses for testing in future studies of advocacy networks—including the possibility that network position structures preferences as well as capacities.

What does this analysis suggest in terms of policy implications? If I am correct, the likelihood of weapons norm entrepreneurship paying off with widespread coalitions resulting in norm change hinges on convincing neither states nor massive numbers of NGOs, but powerful central hubs at the interstices of networks around arms control and humanitarian law. Norm entrepreneurs must make these arguments in a manner that will speak to the preferences of network hubs if they are to increase their chances of being heard and acknowledged by governments.

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