The OPCW in Syria: Reactions to the Renewed Use of Chemical Weapons

Student Name: Ryan Perry
Student Number: s2105667
Program and Specialization: Political Science: International Organisation
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Supervisor: Niels van Willigen
Second Reader: Frits Meijerink

Abstract

In this paper, I examine reactions to the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria. Specifically I focus on the reactions of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to the use of chemical weapons after the clearance of chemical weapons from Syria that was completed on 4 January 2016, in line with the requirements of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). I test Brandstrom and Kuipers' theory on framing and blame-shifting used in their work on the reactions of the Swedish Government and the Dutch Government in the face of policy failure. In this article I conduct a discourse analysis on 50 speeches and 12 statements/press releases from the OPCW, delivered by Director-General Ahmet Uzumcu, and supplement them with interviews from a Syrian National and the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. These interviews, press releases, speeches and statements span a period of two years, from 4 January 2016 until 4 January 2018. I test the constructivist premise that success and failure are subjective and that the outcomes of one policy will be viewed differently by each actor involved. I also test the typology on framing and blame-shifting used in the article by Brandstrom and Kuipers. I find that the outcomes of a policy are indeed viewed differently by actors, in line with constructivist theory on policy failures. However, I also find that the reaction of the OPCW to the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria cannot fully be understood using this theory on policy failure.

Introduction

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was the subsequent organization coming from the inception of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 1997,

put in action to prevent countries from developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, retaining, transferring or using chemical weapons (OPCW, 2018). The OPCW has seen many successes throughout its brief history, with only four states not currently party to the convention, and the non-use of chemical weapons now becoming almost entirely accepted as the norm (OPCW, 2018). The case of Syria however poses a problem for the OPCW. On January 4th, 2016 the OPCW declared that the last of Syria's chemical weapons had been destroyed, essentially completing its obligations under the CWC in regards to the development, production, stockpiling, and retention, therefore also the inability to transfer, chemical weapons (Arms Control Association, 2012). There were reports of chemical weapons attacks, however, after this point in time, beginning in August 2016 that were said to be committed by the Assad regime (the state) (Arms Control Association, 2012). In late 2017, the OPCW found the Syrian government guilty of coordinating a sarin-gas attack that took place in April of 2017, the first verified attack carried out by the Assad regime since the 2016 completed disarmament (Arms Control Association, 2012). According to the policy failure literature, [the use of chemical weapons in Syria] is classifiably a failure, as the OPCW then did not fulfill its original goal. (Bovens and 't Hart, 2016; McConnell, 2015).

However, policy failure is a social construct (Bovens and 't Hart, 2016; Howlett, 2012; McConnell, 2015; Oppermann & Spencer, 2016). Failure is a concept framed differently by stakeholders of a policy and the failure can come from many different aspects of a policy (the process, program and/or the politics around it) (Howlett, 2012; McConnell, 2015). The framing is done, many times, in reaction to an event, or policy failure. The goal of this research is to judge whether or not international organizations, and the OPCW in particular, react to policy

failure the same way in which states react to policy failure. As international organization proliferation has occurred rapidly over the past 50 years, it is interesting to test whether international organizations act as states do. This brings me to my research question:

Can we understand the OPCW reaction to the use of chemical weapons in Syria since January 4th, 2016 by applying theories of policy failure on framing and blame-shifting?

In the coming pages I will give an overview of the current state of the literature on policy failures: the different ways in which failure is presented in the literature and how the authors define these concepts; and also how stakeholders of the policies studied react to failures. Secondly, I will outline the theoretical framework and methodology which I use for this study. I will defend why I chose the methodology I have, how it will help me answer the research question and outline the significance this study holds for the policy failure literature. Thirdly, I will state my hypothesis and analyze the reactions of the OPCW, as well as the Syrian Government. Lastly, I will report on whether or not my hypothesis was proven or not. Then, I will finish with some concluding remarks and give some direction on where future research can expand on the work I have done.

Literature Review

I. Explaining the different usage and definitions of 'failure'

Policy failures have been marred over by academics and researchers alike (Bovens & ‘t Hart, 2016; Brändström and Kuipers, 2003; Howlett, 2012; and Howlett et al., 2015; McConnell, 2015; Oppermann & Spencer, 2016). In general, works on policy failure can be divided into two camps, the positivists and post-positivists (“‘objectivist’ and ‘interpretivist’”) (McConnell, 2015, 223; Oppermann & Spencer, 2016, 649).

Oppermann and Spencer discuss the work of the positivists such as Klaus Brummer, Christoph Meyer, Andreas Kruck and Ryan Beasley (2016, 647-48). As they describe, Brummer looks at the personal attributes of leaders within an institution as the possible causes for failure while Beasley, though still discussing decision-making, focuses on the complexity that globalization has placed on policy-making as a cause for failure (Oppermann & Spencer, 2016, 647-48). Meyer and Kruck discuss how past failures cause recurring failures, with Meyer analyzing how the over- or under-reaction of policy failures lead to further failures, and Kruck using historical institutionalism delves into how failures make successes harder to achieve (Oppermann & Spencer, 2016, 647-48).

Director-General (DG) Uzumcu recognizes the truth in Beasley's argument, when he states that "In our increasingly complex, globalized world, it is vital that policy-makers understand the technical dimensions of issues affecting human security" (Uzumcu, 8 September 2016a). This does not however address the reaction of the OPCW to the failure and the significance that it holds for the future. Meyer and Kruck recognize the importance of the reactions to policy failure, but do not attempt to understand the reasons for a certain reaction in itself, only how the reactions may or may not affect the future of the organization. It is not possible to address the latter without the former.

Along with positivist approaches, there are also post-positivist approaches to policy failures. These authors would side more with the assertion that 'failure' is a constructed concept and the extent to which a policy is a 'success' or 'failure' can and will be differentiated by stakeholders (Bovens and 't Hart, 2016; McConnell, 2015; Oppermann & Spencer, 2016). As will be explained below, the perspectives of stakeholders on policy outcomes can vary greatly. Since failure is socially constructed, there is also different interpretations of what defines a policy as a failure or success. Failure itself has been labeled under many definitions in the literature, such as 'fiascos', 'disasters', 'crises', 'mistakes', and 'blunders' (Oppermann and Spencer, 2016, 644). As Oppermann and Spencer discuss, some authors use these terms as synonyms, while "others, in contrast, differentiate these concepts – for example, by pointing to differences in the role of agency or in the levels of severity and politicization" (2016, 644). Oppermann & Spencer point out the differences in definition used by Bovens and t' Hart in their work, *Understanding Policy Fiascoes* (2016, 645-46). Although Bovens and 't Hart do recognize the more 'objectivist' side of failure (programmatic), they focus mainly on the 'interpretivist' side (political) (Bovens and 't Hart, 2016). The authors use 'tragedy', 'farce' and 'fiasco' all to describe policy failures depending upon which level a policy fails, with "Policies which are evaluated positively on the programmatic dimension may still damage the reputation of political actors ('tragedy'), just as policies which fail to deliver beneficial outcomes can bring dividends on the political dimension ('farce'). Policy 'fiascos', in turn, are policies which are judged to have failed in terms of both the political and the programmatic logic" (Oppermann and Spencer, 2016, 646). McConnell, in his work delving into what defines a policy failure, also points to the separation, made by Bovens and 't Hart, of political failure and programmatic failure (Bovens

and ‘t Hart, 2016; McConnell, 2015). Unlike Bovens and ‘t Hart however, McConnell does not point so much to the reputation of political actors due to a policy, but to the levels of opposition and/or support against or for the given policy (Bovens and ‘t Hart, 2016; McConnell, 2015). Also like Bovens and ‘t Hart, McConnell points to other labels relating to failure, although not his own, ‘disaster’ and ‘blunder’ (McConnell, 2015, 225). Disaster is defined as “‘. . . policies which have failed against nearly every possible criteria of evaluation, caused considerable disruption which was foreseeable and/or avoidable, and triggered complex trails of unintended consequences”, while blunder is defined as ". . . an episode in which a government adopts a specific course of action in order to achieve one or more objectives and, as result largely or wholly of its own mistakes either fails completely to achieve these objectives, it does achieve some or all of them but at a totally disproportionate cost, or else does achieve some or all of them but contrives at the same time to cause a significant amount of “collateral damage” in the form of unintended and undesired consequences” (McConnell, 2015, 225). These definitions are very much in the ‘objectivist’ light, and McConnell does not use them to define his ‘failures’, he instead refers “to the realpolitik of failure… that failure is bound up with issues of politics and power, including contested views about its existence and the power to produce an authoritative and accepted failure narrative” (McConnell, 2015, 222). Like Bovens and ‘t Hart, McConnell stresses the addition of a political interpretivist aspect to policy failures.

Howlett builds on existing literature by looking at the sources of policy failure mentioned in McConnell’s work (political, process and programmatic), but adds an important caveat, avoidability (Howlett, 2012). He addresses the ability to avoid blame [of a policy stakeholder] as one of the criterion for dividing the definition of failure into four parts (anomalies, mistakes,

accidents and fiascos). (Howlett, 2012, 551) He uses the effectiveness of execution of a policy and the acceptance of a policy's program as the variables of avoidability. (Howlett, 2012, 551) Avoidability is key to the policy failure literature because it is essential to understanding how, as Howlett correctly mentions, "decision-makers… claim credit for policy successes, then, at least, avoid blame for their failure" (Howlett, 2012, 541). This is key to understanding the next focus in the literature for which I will underline.

II. How actors react to failures

Bovens and 't Hart point out that the declaration and cause of policy failures are not usually agreed upon, nor is the cause of any deviation from success (Bovens and 't Hart, 2016). McConnell adds the point that the causes are usually laid out in a battle of actors to blame one another, or certain other factors, when a failure has been declared (McConnell, 2015, 222). The reactions of these actors are part of the blame-game and blame-avoidance discussed by not only McConnell, but also extensively by Michael Howlett in his 2015 piece mentioned above (Howlett, 2012; McConnell, 2015). Brandstrom and Kuipers examine reactions to failure in the cases of the Swedish submarine [fiasco] and the failure of the Dutch military in the UN mission to Srebrenica (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). They discuss the selective politicization of certain policies depending on actors' abilities to frame the events that have occurred (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). Actors can frame and shift blame for policy failures because of the fact that failure *is* a socially constructed concept. Perceptions are an essential part of social constructs, how actors perceive an event or a policy overall. Take for example the current case of Donald

Trump and his claim that numerous things said about him or his policies (for which he does not like or not agree) are 'fake news'. Mr. Trump is able avoid blame from some of his supporters due to his perception and his ability to drive others' perceptions by framing or shifting blame. Brandstrom and Kuipers claim that if actors are able to downplay events then the framing process ends there (2003). However, if they are not able to downplay the events, each actor will try to position themselves in positive relation to the events causing a blame-game to take place (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). The way in which actors place themselves in relation to policies can have a great effect on how they either learn or do not learn from policy failures, thus the future of an actors' policies greatly depends on how they react to failure. This makes this article, studying the reaction of the OPCW to the use of chemical weapons use in Syria, post-claim of success, an important and significant contribution to the policy failure literature and policy literature more broadly.

Theoretical Framework

The use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, especially the usage of chemical weapons post-accession to the CWC, can be interpreted as a policy failure of the OPCW to ensure that the provisions of the CWC are followed. In the past years, there have also been reported chemical weapons attacks by non-state actors. These however cannot be perceived in the same light as the Syrian government's usage (although still a disappointing truth) due simply to the fact that the OPCW is set with the task of ensuring parameters of the CWC are carried out by the *states* party to the Convention. There is a responsibility placed on state actors in the

international system, and especially to those states who have agreed to set standards of behavior, for what occurs within their borders, as they are the recognized authorities within international organizations, in this case the OPCW.

Going from this I will test the applicability of the policy failure theories on framing and blame-avoidance on the case of the OPCW in Syria. Theories on policy failures are useful in analyzing my case for many reasons. For one, policy failure theory gives way to the premise that ideas, such as failure and success, are subjective and constructed by actors. From the start of the Syrian conflict, actors went to the media proclaiming it was one party's fault or the other's, and attempting to place themselves in a positive light in comparison to the others. This construction is done by framing and blaming in response to events.

In Brandstrom and Kuipers' work, they create a typology of responses to events that could be perceived as policy failures (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). The authors state that when a policy failure occurs, actors will first react in one of two ways, downplay the events or begin "framing events as crises – as opposed to mere 'incidents' or 'disturbances' – which is the sine qua non for any politics of blaming to develop" (Branstrom and Kuipers, 2003). This is The Severity Dimension (Branstrom and Kuipers, 2003). Different interpretations of non-routine occurrences will struggle for domination" (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003, 290). As 'tragedy' and synonyms for non-blame applying occurrences no longer suffice in today's world, we want to know "why it happened and who is responsible" (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003, 292). That is why actors take part in the frame and blame battle.

Once the event is framed as a crisis or 'failure' of some sort, the framing process will then address the question of whether this is a one-off event, or a recurrent trend (Brandstrom and

Kuipers, 2003). Is the event symptomatic of a larger issue within the political system/policy, or of failing policy-makers (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003)? Or is the event an incident caused by specific actors at one point in time (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003)? These are The Agency and Responsibility Dimensions (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). The different ways in which the events are framed and who receives blame are divided into four categories: scapegoating - blaming one actor for his/her failures in an isolated time frame; organizational mishap - an isolated incident coming from a network failure; failing policy-makers - blaming actors for endemic problems; and policy/system failure - the policy itself or an entire system is failing and has been for some time (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). Where stakeholders place blame and how they frame events greatly impacts how they will move forward in improving, continuing, or discontinuing a policy, thus holding great significance.

I will conduct a discourse analysis and I will look for the four different framing methods of which I have just outlined from Brandstrom and Kuipers. It is likely that actors may even, at times, use a combination of more than one framing method in order to place themselves in a good position in relation to other stakeholders of the policy (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). As the theory on framing and blame-shifting used by Brandstrom and Kuipers is constructivist in nature, it claims that actors' views on a policy's outcomes are subjective. Actors react to the result of a policy in a way that they believe places themselves in a positive light. They will do this when events have grabbed enough public attention to be debated in the public discourse. The OPCW will react the same way to the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria. As the use of chemical weapons grabbed major public attention, they will use one of the four framing methods (or more) - scapegoating, organizational mishap, failing policy-makers, or failing policy/system

failure - to place themselves in a positive light, by way of their reactions to the events. Due to the high salience of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the OPCW will, as said by Brandstrom and Kuipers to at times occur, use a combination of framing methods to place themselves in a positive light in relation to the events in Syria. This leads me to my hypothesis:

The OPCW will use a combination of the four framing methods mentioned by Brandstrom and Kuipers in order to avoid and/or shift blame for chemical weapons usage in Syria by the regime since January 4th, 2016.

It should be noted however, that although I will analyze the events that have taken place to determine whether it is a policy failure of the OPCW, I do not claim that the use of chemical weapons in Syria are the *fault* of the OPCW. I will delve into the way in which actors in this case react and fight for good position in relation to the use of chemical weapons. I aim to see the ways in which the organization positions themselves as keys to how they may go forward. Policy should look to be improved upon to not only fix problems that occurred as a fault of the actor themselves, but also due to the fault of other actors or negative externalities. The reaction to failure is the first step in improving on what went wrong. To fix a problem you must first recognize there is one. In this vein, understanding the reaction of the OPCW to chemical weapons use in Syria is critical to understanding how the organization may or may not improve as it moves forward, to ultimately achieve the goals set in the CWC.

Methodology

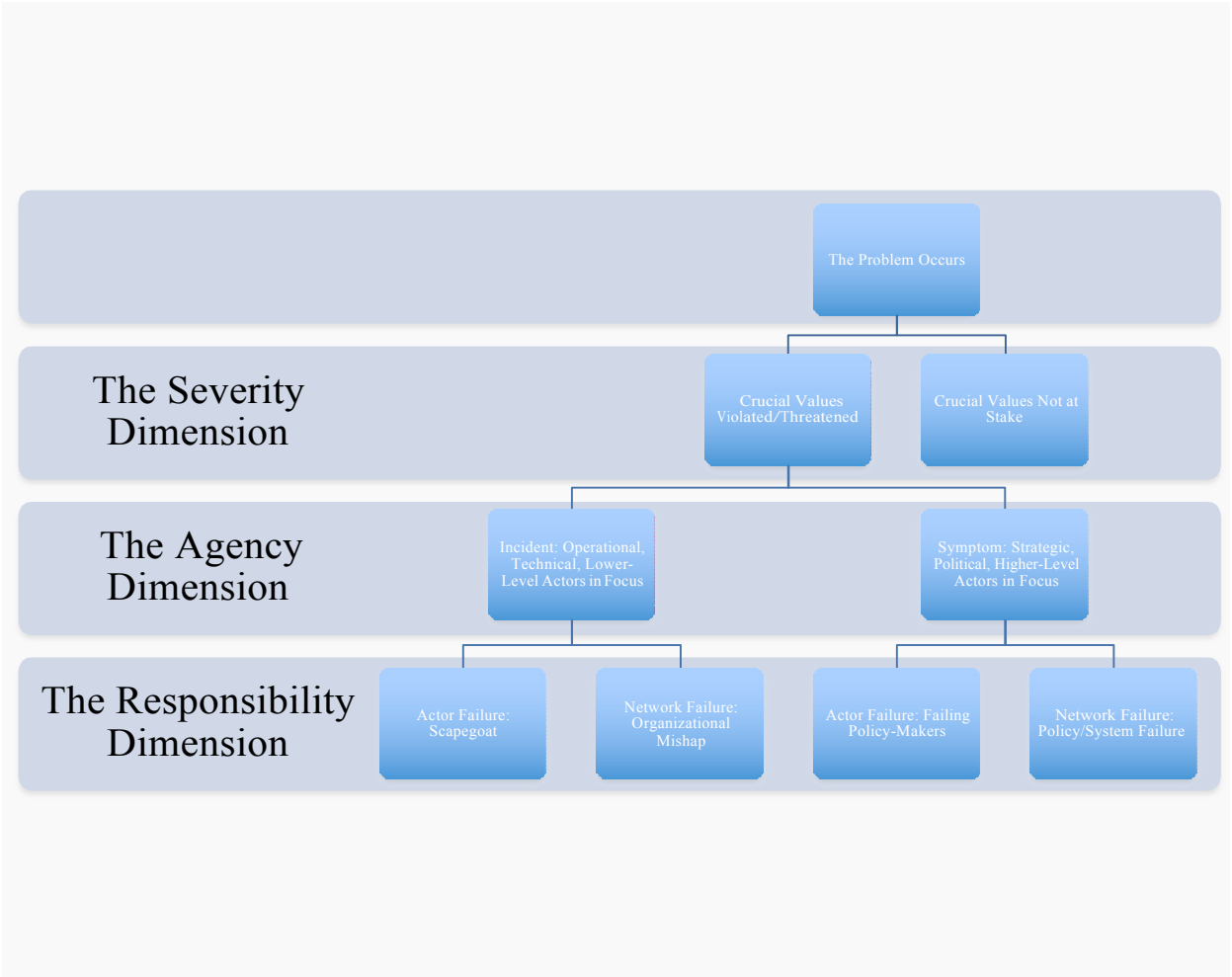
In an attempt to understand the reaction of the OPCW in light of policy failure in Syria, it is likely that the answer lies within the policy failure literature. This means that policy stakeholders are likely to frame failures not as such, and/or position themselves not as the culpable party for why a policy has failed. The OPCW is likely to position itself in positive relation to the usage of chemical weapons in Syria, post CWC secession, and shift blame to other actors and/or other causes.

I divide the following chapter into six sections, representing six instances in which there have been reports or confirmations of chemical weapons use in Syria post 4 January, 2016. The instances will then be analyzed within each of the three dimensions outlined by Brandstrom and Kuipers in the chart below: The Severity Dimension; The Agency Dimension; and The Responsibility Dimension.

The actors' responses will be classified as either claiming that OPCW implementation of the CWC has been a success, a failure, or a combination of success and failure. Then, the responses will be subdivided by whether they claim that norms/values have been violated with the re-emergence of chemical weapons in Syria. This is to analyze whether the reactions coincide with a certain reaction outlined in The Severity Dimension. Next, the responses will be subdivided again into the Agency and Responsibility Dimensions used by Brandstrom and Kuipers, when discussing blame-shifting. The language used in the responses is seen as either claiming that there was an incidental failure - an operational or technical failure made in the lower level division of political actors, or being a symptomatic failure with strategic political, higher level actors in focus (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). The incidental failure and

symptomatic failure are then divided in the responsibility dimension (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). Incidental failures are either blamed on a single actor (scapegoating) or a network failure (organizational mishap) (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). The symptomatic failures are divided as either being the fault of an actor failure (failing policy-makers) or a network failure (failing policy/system failure) (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). These are the four categories of who receives blame and the ways in which the events are framed. The process of assigning blame used to analyze the responses of the OPCW, Syrian Government and Syrian national, used by Brandstrom and Kuipers, is shown below.

Figure 1
Constructing Blame by Framing Political Crises



When looking at policy failure, most studies have been done with a focus on states, rather than international organizations, with a few exceptions (e.g. the work by Brandstrom and Kuipers mentioned above). I chose to use this single case study on Syria in particular because it is the only country to have signed on to the CWC, completed its requirements, and then experienced a re-emergence of chemical weapons inside the country. Only four states are non-members to the CWC. However, Syria is considered to be a deviant case within the convention. The OPCW is an important institution in the non-proliferation of chemical weapons. It is at the core of the international movement against chemical weapons. It is also considered important in

regard to their usage in Syria in determining cases of extreme violations of human rights and international law, which have caused immense devastation and suffering. The importance of understanding how the OPCW reacted, as an international organization, to a policy failure will shed light on the future of the organization, as well as others, in the struggle against WMD proliferation.

When looking at the reaction of the OPCW, I analyzed twelve press releases and 50 speeches given by the Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Uzumcu. In looking at how Syrians reacted to chemical weapons use, I have looked at governmental and non-governmental actors' reactions. I analyzed three interviews with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and conducted one interview with Mr. Abu Moutasem, head of the Syrian Emergency Task Force based in Washington, DC. The Task Force advocates for peace in Syria via a new government. Mr. Moutasem is a Syrian-American who was born and raised in Syria, but escaped as a young adult and has worked for peace in Syria ever since, gaining knowledge and an insight through experience, personally and professionally, to give him expert authority. Lastly, due to the mandate of the Joint-Investigative Mechanism ending in November 2017 when the Russian Federation vetoed the extension of the JIM's mandate, I was only able to conduct a full and balanced analysis of the three actors analyzed from Jan 4th, 2016 until Jan 4th, 2018. However, I will make some brief remarks in regards to the OPCW reactions to chemical weapons use in Syria post January 4th, 2016.

This will be an expansion of tools used by Brandstrom and Kuipers as I am testing if their theory is applicable in this case, in addition to the policy failure literature, as well as the literature on international organizations more broadly as this case deals with the international

organization at the heart of the chemical weapons non-proliferation movement. As an organization that has greatly impacted the international system in terms of states' actions, their international commitments and weapons non-proliferation, this study holds a great significance in the policy realm of political science.

Findings

I have analyzed the reactions of the OPCW through the speeches of the Director-General/Ambassador Ahmet Uzumcu, the reactions of the Syrian government through interviews with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the reactions of a Syrian national through an interview with Mr. Abu Moutasem.

The reactions of the OPCW listed here have been within the period from 4 January 2016, the date in which Syria was claimed to be cleared of the declared chemical weapons, and until 4 January 2018. The responses given fall in line with the constructivist premise that failure is a construction, i.e. different actors will perceive the outcomes of one policy differently. The OPCW perceives the Chemical Weapons Convention and its implementation by the Organisation to be “successful”, but failing on certain aspects such as the addition of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) to the CWC and still needing to work on other aspects including the renewed use of chemical weapons not only in Syria, but Iraq as well. Bashar al-Assad denies all reports of chemical weapons use in Syria and re-frames questions regarding the OPCWs implementation of the CWC (Al-Assad, 2017). Mr. Abu Moutasem, however, views the OPCW

implementation of the CWC as a complete failure due to its inability to prevent the use of chemical weapons (Moutasem, 2018).

I will discuss these perspectives further as well as the analysis I have completed of each actor in more detail below, and finally analyze the validity of my hypothesis.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' Reactions

I. 10 August and 7 Septemeber 2016: The first reported renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria

On 10 August 2016, the first claims of the renewed use of chemical weapons use were reported by hospital officials in Aleppo (Arms Control Association, 2012). The first statement or speech made by the OPCW and/or the Director-General were not made until 7 September. In the *Statement from the OPCW Director-General on Recent Allegations of Toxic Chemical Use in Aleppo*, Üzümcü stated that the OPCW was "disturbed" by the allegations and that any use of chemical weapons is "unacceptable" (OPCW, 7 September 2016). He did not label the event as a failure on the record of the OPCW, claim that any norms had been violated, or assign blame to any actor.

However, in a speech that he gave the following day at Hankuk University in Seoul, DG Üzümcü discussed the success of the OPCW in the context of approaching the complete destruction of chemical weapons (Üzümcü, 8 September 2016a). In this discussion Üzümcü states, "Underlying this success more recently has been the unprecedented international mission

led by the OPCW to move and destroy Syria's chemical weapons" (Üzümcü, 8 September 2016a). This is in complete contrast to the reaction given by Mr. Moutasem. When asked if he believed the work of the OPCW should be considered a success for its work in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention, Mr. Moutasem clearly stated that he believed it is a failure (Moutasem, 2018). He is not alone, many have claimed that the international community has not fulfilled its duties. Later in his speech, the Director-General does go on to explain, "The mission to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons - for all its successes - was not the end of these activities (Üzümcü, 8 September 2016a). "There have been persistent reports of chemical weapons use over the course of this mission and since it was completed" (Üzümcü, 8 September 2016a). When asked by NBC Nightly News about the allegations that he has used chemical weapons, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad states frankly, "We didn't" (Al-Assad, 2016). He then goes on to say that it has been three years and yet there has been no proof of a chemical weapons attack carried out by his forces, "only allegations" (Al-Assad, 2016). This directly goes against the reports of the OPCW from 2013 (Arms Control Association, 2012). President Bashar al-Assad even recognizes the work of the OPCW as he states that the Organisation entered Syria and collected samples for testing but came back with no evidence against them, which is false (Al-Assad, 2016). Then he redirects the question by stating that it would not be logical for the regime to use the weapons (Al-Assad, 2016). This is an attempt to place them in a position of a rational and reasonable actor, a more positive position.

Despite the admittance of continual use of chemical weapons however, the Director-General states that the mission to rid Syria of its chemical weapons was a success in another speech he gave that day at the Fifth Seoul Defense Dialogue (Üzümcü, 8 September, 2016b).

Üzümcü does state his belief that the [Chemical Weapons] "Convention is more than a legal norm" and discusses the strength of that norm and its power in allowing the OPCW to clear the declared chemical weapons in Syria within such a short period of time (Üzümcü, 8 September 2016a). He does not claim that these norms have been violated. Although Mr. Moutasem did not directly state that the use of chemical weapons violated an accepted norm within the international community, he expressed his feeling that if we allow one entity to use chemical weapons, what is to stop the future use of chemical weapons against another group of citizens in another country (Moutasem, 2018). This is the act of reversing the practical norm claimed to have been built through, first, the legal norm begun through the CWC and OPCW. Serious action needs to be taken, he declares (Moutasem, 2018).

DG Üzümcü also holds off from naming the Syrian State as the culpable actor for the attack, although they had just been named in the Third Joint-Investigative Mechanism Report as responsible for chemical weapons attacks in April 2014 and March 2015, which was after their accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention (Arms Control Association, 2012). However, these were before the completed clearance of their declared chemical weapons. In the same report, the Islamic State is named as the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in August 2015. It is interesting to note that the DG names the Islamic State and not the Syrian regime although both have been confirmed to have used chemical weapons. In his speech at the Defense Dialogue, DG Üzümcü speaks of the importance of preventing non-state actors from acquiring chemical weapons and claims that the "gaps in capturing activities by terrorists does not reflect gaps in the Convention, but rather in its implementation at the national level" (Üzümcü, 8 September 2016b). This reflects the responsibility placed on national actors, for activities in

within its territory, by the international community, as mentioned previously. With this statement, he removed the responsibility from the CWC and OPCW and places it on state parties to the Convention, but does not directly assign blame. Using the system described by Brandstrom and Kuipers, the DG would not go further than *the Severity Dimensio*n as he did not claim that crucial values were violated or threatened, but does put states (*higher-level actors*) into the focus (*the Responsibility Dimension*) (Brandstrom and Kuipers, 2003). This suggests that the OPCWs reaction is different than the process outlined by Brandstrom and Kuipers.

II. 13 December 2016: Further allegations of chemical weapons usage

In a speech just two days after further allegations of chemical weapons attacks in Syria on 13 December 2016, at the *Meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the Implementation of Resolution 1540 (2004)*, the DG of the OPCW underlined the progress made by the OPCW in Syria (Üzümcü, 15 December 2016). As in almost every one of his speeches, the Ambassador discussed the percentage of declared chemical weapons cleared worldwide (at this point in time, 94%) and how close that brings us to a world free of "an entire class of weapons of mass destruction" (Üzümcü, 15 December 2016). This characterization of progress suggests that the Ambassador views the OPCWs implementation of the CWC as a success, although he often points out that the work is incomplete. He sees chemical weapons use in Syria as a Convention not quite finished in its implementation, rather than a failure, as his reactions will continue to show in the pages that follow.

The OPCW also put out a *Statement from the OPCW Director-General on Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Uqayribat, Hama Governate, Syria* in which, "States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention deem the use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances as reprehensible and wholly contrary to the legal norms established by the international community" (OPCW, 13 December 2016). The Director General, once again, refrained from naming the Syrian state in his speech on 15 December 2016, but called out the Islamic State, this time as "DAESH", although both actors had been named in the Joint-Investigative Mechanism Reports (Üzümcü, 15 December 2016). He also doubled down on his stance that states need to do more at the national level to ensure the Convention is successful and for "global norms" to be reinforced (Üzümcü, 15 December 2016). Using the system described by Brandstrom and Kuipers, the Director-General brought the process of framing and blame-shifting, as described by Brandstrom and Kuiper, to *the Agency Dimension* by placing states (*higher-level actors*) into the focus, but does not go all the way and into *the Responsibility Dimension*. This suggests that the OPCWs reaction is different than the process outlined by Brandstrom and Kuipers.

III. Chemical weapons attack believed to be committed by the Syrian government

On 4 April 2017 there was another chemical attack "believed to have been perpetrated by the Syrian government, due to the type of aircraft in the area at the time." (Arms Control Association, 2012). In an *OPCW Press Release on Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Southern Idlib, Syria* the Director-General simply stated that the Organisation was "concerned"

and “condemned” the attacks (OPCW, 4 April 2017). In both, the Press Release on 4 April and in a speech two days later at the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism, Üzümcü did not declare that norms had been violated or name the Syrian Government as a culprit. He repeated the fact that DAESH used chemical weapons in Syria recently (OPCW, 6 April 2017).

For his part, Bashar al-Assad claimed that the reports and videos that surfaced of the chemical weapons attack on 4 April was a complete “fabrication” (Al-Assad, 2017). He continued to refute the claims of the attack by questioning the validity of the video. “Were the kids really dead” he asked and then continued to claim that it could have been a fake video (Al-Assad, 2017). In the same interview, that took place just over one week after the attack, President al-Assad claimed that the “West fabricated the whole story to justify an attack”, placing blame on them and terrorists for disrupting the security of the Syrian state (Al-Assad, 2017).

In an *UPDATED Media Brief: Reported Use of Chemical Weapons, Southern Idlib, Syria, 4 April 2017* DG Üzümcü responded to the chemical attacks by using a common set of lines on how the OPCW responded to allegations of chemical weapons used with the establishment of the Fact-Finding Missions (FFM) in 2014 and its role in confirming chemical weapons usage (OPCW, 7 April 2017). Mr. Moutasem views this reaction as in-contrary with the purpose of the OPCW. He argues that if the organization was established to solely research chemical weapons use and report its findings, then it has achieved its goal (Moutasem, 2018). However, if the purpose of the OPCW and the CWC were to prevent the use of chemical weapons, then they have not fulfilled their purpose (Moutasem, 2018). “The outcome [of the work against chemical weapons in Syria] is almost nothing.” (Moutasem, 2018). This is in stark contrast to the way in which Üzümcü views the OPCW's work. Throughout the Ambassador’s

speeches and statements, he regularly addresses the achievements made by the OPCW within and outside of Syria. The Director-General views the CWC, with the OPCW as its implementing body, as "arguably the most successful disarmament treaty in history" (Üzümcü, 8 September 2016a). He believes this while also underlining the extreme violation of the legal norms of the international community (Üzümcü, 8 September 2016a). This again suggests that the Director-General views the OPCW's work as unfinished rather than as a failure.

IV. On 20 years of the CWC and OPCW

In a speech at the *Ceremony to Commemorate the Twentieth Anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW*, DG Üzümcü states that the OPCW is a success, but that its "work in Syria is not yet finished" (Üzümcü, 26 April 2017). In this speech, the Ambassador directly states that the use of chemical weapons occurs when "universal norms [have been] callously breached" (Üzümcü, 26 April 2017). He also expresses his feeling on the future of state cooperation with the CWC when he says, "I have no doubt that States Parties will continue their efforts to make the Convention a document of enduring validity that is universally respected" (Üzümcü, 26 April 2017). He directly states that the work in Syria has not yet finished, affirming the suggestion that the DG sees the work of the OPCW not as a failure, but simply unfinished.

V. A FFM confirms chemical weapons use on 4 April 2017

On 30 June 2017, the FFM in Syria confirmed that chemical weapons had been used in Syria on 4 April 2017 (Arms Control Association, 2012). Then, on 2 July, the Director General of the OPCW gave a speech in which he states, "For all the OPCW has accomplished over the last twenty years, it is clear that the threat posed by chemical weapons remains very real" (Üzümcü, 2 July 2017a). He continues on to speak of the CWC and OPCW comparatively to every other disarmament and non-proliferation international agreement in saying that the, "OPCW represents the most effective response to such cruelty" (Üzümcü, 2 July 2017a). Essentially, his stance in saying this is that the OPCW and its implementation of the CWC is not perfect, but it is the best of its kind, while still accepting that "...there are those who continue to defy the norm" (Üzümcü, 2 July 2017b). This reiterated the argument that he views the OPCW as a success with work to be done, rather than as a failure. Lastly, the Director-General once again looks to the future with hope when he states that "with political will and cooperation, the Organisation and the international community are capable of dealing with extraordinary situations" (Üzümcü, 2 July 2017b).

Mr. Moutasem is not as hopeful as the Director-General and expresses his feeling that the real issue is that "there is no political willingness to stop this" (Moutasem, 2018). If there was a willingness to stop this tragedy then it would have been done a long time ago (Moutasem, 2018). "The failure is not on one individual or one entity, it is on the entire world" (Moutasem, 2018). "What we see is lip services… There is no political willingness to stop this" (Moutasem, 2018). This confirms the constructivist position that actors will view the outcomes of policies different from one another.

VI. The Seventh JIM Report confirms that the Syrian Regime was culpable of the attack on 4 April

In looking at the entire 20 year history of the OPCW in his speech at the ICCA Board Meeting in Vienna on 27 October 2017, one day after the seventh JIM report stated that the Assad regime was responsible for the chemical weapons attack on 4 April, Director-General Üzümcü did not address the report directly and therefore did not claim that this constituted a policy failure (Üzümcü, 27 October 2017). On the contrary, a section of the speech that he gave was titled "Achievements of the OPCW" in which he outlined the ability of the OPCW to adapt to increasingly difficult circumstance as they have in Syria, and that "the CWC created one of the most extensive verification systems devised for a disarmament instrument" (Üzümcü, 27 October 2017). This is a common reaction of the OPCW Director-General as we have seen throughout his speeches and the public statements from the OPCW. The Director-General views the OPCW as a success, having achieved much, but still much is to be done within the CWC and specifically Syria.

The Director-General did not discuss the violation of norms as is also common in his speeches. This reaction contained something else quite new for the DG's speeches, which was that he explained that the mandate to identify the perpetrators of the chemical weapons usage (assigning blame) was that of the OPCW-UN Joint-Investigative Mechanism (Üzümcü, 27 October 2017). But yet, Üzümcü still addresses the use of chemical weapons by ISIL even as he does not name the Syrian regime, one single day after it has been stated in the JIM report that they indeed are culpable for some of the attacks (Üzümcü, 27 October 2017). He does not assign

blame for the usage of chemical weapons and instead speaks hopefully about the future of the CWC and the OPCW to achieve great milestones in the disarmament and nonproliferation of chemical weapons.

The last confirmed use of chemical weapons, before the mandate for the OPCW-UN Joint-Investigative Mechanism ran out due to a veto by Russia in the United Nations Security Council, was reported by the FFM on 6 November 2017 (Arms Control Association, 2012). On 11 November, DG Üzümcü gave a speech in Ieper, Belgium on the Occasion of Armistice Day. In these remarks the Ambassador addressed the use of chemical weapons in Syria, admitting "Chemical Weapons are still being used, in the Syria and elsewhere" (Üzümcü, 11 November 2017). At the same time, he addresses how far the OPCW has come in its mission to create a world free of chemical weapons (Üzümcü, 11 November 2017). This reiterates his feeling that the OPCW has been a success but its work in Syria and elsewhere is not finished.

Ambassador Üzümcü does not address that the norms of the international community have been violated but believes that there are norms within the CWC that must be upheld. He does not assign blame and simply looks to the future in stating that the "The OPCW will continue to play its part in these endeavors [to fulfill its mission]" (Üzümcü, 11 November 2017). In going forward, Mr. Moutasem believes that if the OPCW is to play a role in the prevention of chemical weapons use, it will need to be given greater authority to enforce the CWC and an ability to truly punish the perpetrators of a chemical weapons attack (Moutasem, 2018). As he remarks, the organization "needs to have teeth to bite" (Moutasem, 2018).

The reaction of the OPCW to the use of chemical weapons in Syria after 4 January 2016 has only taken the typology of Brandstrom and Kuipers to *the Agency Dimension* and does not

always follow the typology as they had outlined it. This analysis suggests that we cannot fully understand the reaction of the OPCW using theories of framing and blame-shifting as outlined by Branstrom and Kuipers. The table below summarizes the results of the analysis from all six reaction cases.

Table I. Summary of the reactions of the OPCW in relation to Brandstrom and Kuipers' theory on framing and blame shifting

Case	**Dimension reached**	**Does the reaction completely follow the typology by Brandstrom and Kuipers?**
I. 10 August and 7 Septemeber 2016: The first reported renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria	The Severity Dimension	No
II. 13 December 2016: Further allegations of chemical weapons usage	The Agency Dimension	No
III. Chemical weapons attack believed to be committed by the Syrian government	None	No
IV. On 20 years of the CWC	The Severity Dimension	No

and OPCW		
V. A FFM confirms chemical weapons use on 4 April 2017	The Severity Dimension	No
VI. The Seventh JIM Report confirms that the Syrian Regime was culpable of the attack on 4 April	None	No

Conclusion

This paper attempts to understand the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' reaction to the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria by applying theories of policy failure on framing and blame-shifting. There is much scholarly work on policy failures and political actors' framing and blame-shifting in response to these failures. However, the literature largely ignores the reactions of international organizations and specifically the OPCW, which is one of the most involved international organizations in the disarmament and non-proliferation movement of Weapons of Mass Destruction. The study of policy failures, framing and blame-shifting would be incomplete without the inclusion of international organizations and specifically the CWC, implemented by the OPCW. This article suggests that actors will indeed perceive the outcomes of policies differently, with the OPCW, the Syrian Government, and Syrian nationals all viewing the work of the OPCW differently. I have found that the OPCW views itself as a

success for the work it has done in Syria, but also believes that the work is unfinished as it admits to the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria, by both the government and non-state actors as declared by the JIM Reports. The OPCW does declare that any use of chemical weapons violates the norms and values of the international community, bringing the framing and blaming process by the Organisation as far as the *Severity Dimension*, in line with Brandstrom and Kuipers' typology. The reaction of the OPCW does continue within the typology by placing the focus of the events on *Strategic Political/Higher-Level Actors*, which makes Brandstrom and Kuipers' process of framing and blaming hold true to the *Agency Dimension*. The next and final stage of their typology does not hold true in this example of the OPCW, however, as the OPCW does not directly assign blame on *Failing Policy-Makers* and/or the *Policy/System Failure*. This argues with the theory on framing and blame-shifting used by Brandstrom and Kuipers, suggesting that this theory alone cannot allow us to understand the OPCW reaction to chemical weapons use in Syria after January 4, 2016. There must be something else at work.

Different theories on international organizations may be able to help explain better why the OPCW reacted the way it has to the re-emergence of chemical weapons in Syria. Realist theory, for example would claim that the OPCW is an extension of state power, therefore the OPCW's reactions could be explained by the power of the states that make up the organization. In the case of the OPCW in Syria, the Organisation could be reluctant to assign blame to one actor or Syria specifically due to the involvement of other state parties such as Iran and Russia, and what this could mean for the Organisation. Other authors such as Barnett and Finnemore would argue that international organizations are more autonomous than as realists recognize. The international organizations such as the OPCW would "create new norms, interests, actors and

shared social tasks" (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). The reactions of the OPCW would make sense in the context of creating a greater role for itself and empowering the norm it believes it has helped create and strengthen. These are two observations within the current state of the literature on international organizations, but in order to fully understand the OPCW's reactions to the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria, further research is needed, testing these theories and others.

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