This project investigates a previously unexamined source of international law on armed conflict: resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. Since the end of the Cold War, the Security Council has taken action on virtually every new armed conflict NIAC and on many that began prior to 1990. These actions are wide ranging. Each act is embodied in a resolution, which frequently imposes binding legal obligations on parties to the conflicts.

The project asks two questions about this now substantial body of Security Council practice. The first is whether the Council has consistently imposed the same obligations over time. In order to answer this question we have created a new dataset that codes all Council resolutions on a list of conflicts ongoing from 1990 to 2013. The resolutions are coded for their imposition of binding obligations on a range of legal issues, from human rights to the law of armed conflict to the permissibility of using force. The data reveals that the Council in fact consistently requires the same acts. More importantly, many of these Council-imposed obligations differ in significant respects from what international law would otherwise require.

Second, the project asks whether these patterns of obligations can contribute to or indeed change existing international law. We ask whether they can be assimilated into several categories of traditional legal sources or whether they should properly be viewed as ancillary to the law-making process but nonetheless relevant.