NIU Journal of Humanities Copyright©2025
Nexus International University ISSN: *3007-1704;* 10(1): 273-287

Jurisprudential Appraisal of the Interplay between International Law and Politics in Israel-Gaza Conflict

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Abstract. The Israel-Gaza conflict is one of the longest and most intractable in modern international relations, characterized by recurring bloodshed, competing claims to territory, and deeply entrenched political tensions. This research examines the conflict's tension between international law and international politics, observing that principles of law take a secondary position to geopolitical interest. This research brings to the limelight such issues as humanitarian law's selective application, Palestine's status in law, self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, and limits of institutions such as International Criminal Court and United Nations. This research attempts to critically assess the jurisprudential foundation of international law applied in the conflict, judging to what extent political motives inform decisions in law. Using a doctrinal approach to research, this work is founded on primary sources such as treaties, UN resolutions, and judicatures, in addition to secondary sources such as scholarly articles and expert reports. The work observes that international frameworks of law are applied inconsistently owing to interference of powerful states, rendering mechanisms of ending conflict ineffective. The work also demands reforms in United Nations Security Council institutions, more accountability in terms of violations of humanitarian law, and more efforts towards support of a Palestinian state in foreign policy. The work posits that in order to have a credible umpire of international law, principles of law should be applied without political interference impartially.

1. Introduction

The Israel-Gaza conflict is one of the longest geopolitical crises, punctuated by sporadic bouts of violence, clashes on their respective peripheries, and humanitarian crises which is underpinned by deep grievances in each of their respective narratives and competing nationalisms, it has become a multidimensional struggle over national sovereignty, self-determination, international law, and human rights (Ware, 2024). The circumstances over time have been of concern to the rest of the world, to a point of eliciting a response from international institutions, states, and non-state actors, each of whom has brought their respective political and legal interpretations to it (Antai, 2024). The underlying conflict is that between Palestine and Israel over territory, i.e., over the Gaza Strip, a highly concentrated strip of land in control of the Palestinian armed group Hamas (Antai, 2024, p. 88). Where Israel invokes a right of self-defence in reaction to perceived terror attacks, Palestinians and their allies argue that Israeli action is occupation, apartheid, and systemic human rights violations (Edet et al., 2022, para 39). The disequilibrium of power between the two actors has also been a challenge to attempts towards a negotiated resolution, in that Israel has more powerful military and economic capabilities over Gaza, largely cut-off and economically weakened owing to lengthy closures and blockades (Antai et al., 2024, para 66).

The conflict in Israel-Gaza is fraught with serious questions of international law, theory of just war, humanitarian intervention, and liability of a state (Kisubi et al, 2024., para 206). The applicable bodies of armed conflict law, i.e., Geneva Conventions, United Nations Charter, and customary international law, become relevant in determining the legality of action of the two actors. The International institutions of International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of Justice (ICJ), and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have also been active in investigating claims of violations of international law, though to varying extents of efficacy and application (Aidonjie et al, 2024, para 201). The political nature of conflict also makes it difficult to be resolved in that actors in Middle East and across the world such as United States, European Union, Iran, and Arab actors apply their

influence in terms of strategic interest (Antai, 2024, p. 40). The excessive politicization of political ideologies, security matters, and religious narratives has created a recurring process in that efforts in diplomacy fail to yield a permanent peace. The involvement of actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah, in addition to international human rights groups, has also created a new level of complication in deliberations (Anifowose et al, 2024, para 41). This research pursues a jurisprudential approach to analyze the international politics in the conflict in Israel-Gaza to unravel underlying theory of law, principles, and political forces that have influenced the conflict over time (Ekpenisi et al, 2024, para 9). The work attempts to determine to what extent international norms of law apply, bend, or violate in pursuing political and military strategies. This research also examines the response of international institutions and primary actors of a state to determine efficacy of global governance in containing the conflict. This is also going to explore fundamental questions of jurisprudence such as constructivism, realism, and critical studies of law in their contexts in the international political context of the conflict between Israel-Gaza (Akpanke et al, 2022, para 7). The analysis of such concepts in their different contexts is meant to illuminate their connotations in terms of perpetuating or ending the crisis, in accordance with international political alignments, precedents in law, and diplomacy (Aidonojie et al, 2024, para 293). The work is aimed at providing a sophisticated appreciation of political and legal crossroads that mark one of humanity's longest and most volatile conflicts, indicating potential ways to a just and permanent ending of it (Antai, 2024, p 5).

1.1 Methodology

The method used in this work is a doctrinal and analytical method of inquiry to explore questions of jurisprudence of international politics in the conflict between Israel and Gaza. The work is based on qualitative evidence, using largely legal doctrines, international treaties, scholarly critiques, to provide a fair review of the intersection of international law with political forces in the conflict. Secondary sources such as books, journal articles, reports of international institutions such as United Nations, official government reports, and diplomatic releases would be extensively searched to ascertain political and legal frameworks that inform the conflict.

2. Literature Review

The Israel-Gaza conflict has been debated extensively in a mixture of political and legal analysis, different scholars offering different interpretations of extent to which political forces and international law control course of conflict. Scholars such as Cassese (2005) believe that the conflict is a classic *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* problem, raising questions of extent to which military action of Israel and Palestinian resistance is compliant with requirements of international law (p. 19). He further believes that in spite of reliance of Israel on Article 51 of United Nations Charter to grant a right of self-defence, excessive use of force and civilian casualties in Gaza raise fundamental questions of law in accordance with Geneva Conventions and customary international law. Similarly, Gray (2018) analyses permissibility of military interventions in advancing that principles of proportionality and distinction in such instances of war of asymmetry do not apply in instances of conflict in which non-state actors such as Hamas move between civilian groups (p. 233).

Falk (2014) presents a critical analysis, positing that the conflict is representative of a failure of international law to limit political dominance, as great powers apply selected legal principles to support strategic objectives. Falk argues that politicization of the United Nations and international institutions of law has created a double standard in responding to human rights abuses, such that condemnation of human rights abuses is often met with diplomatic opposition, in particular from the United States (paras 66-69). This is in line with that of Chomsky (2016), in that he perceives a geopolitical alignments role in perpetuating the conflict, in referencing mechanisms in which great power blocs use narratives of law to legitimize or delegitimize actors in line with geopolitical interest over adherence to strict principles of international law. The Westphalian conception of state sovereignty is also challenged in that it is used inconsistently in a manner in which Palestinian claims of self-determination receive piecemeal legal recognition for geopolitical purposes (p. 221).

On the contrary, Dershowitz (2003) presents a realistic view, contending that legal reasoning around the conflict is secondary to security issues and national interest. Dershowitz claims that Israel's legal standing is made more complex by a skewed accountability system, such that democratic states face higher standards of accountability compared to non-state actors or groups that are designated as terror groups (Aidonojie, 2023; Aidonojie et al., 2022). Dershowitz argues that such doctrines of law such as the pre-emptive self-defence doctrine need to be reappraised in view of new patterns of war, in particular in countering terror (p. 79). His arguments differ with those of Koskenniemi (2011), who is a critic of instrumentalism of international law on the part of powerful states, contending that interpretations of law often take their coloration from political and ideological inclinations of dominant actors in the system of globalization (p.

59).

Crawford (2012) examines Palestine's status as a state critically in respect of its legal basis in claims to sovereign status in international law. He argues that recognition of Palestine's status as a state is more widely accepted in international diplomacy, yet there is a challenge to it in a legal realm in respect of divided government of Palestine and weak control over geography. This is compounded by Schabas (2016), in his explanation of application of international criminal law in conflict between Israel and Gaza, in respect of war crime charges and charges of crime against humanity. Schabas argues that though systems of international law such as that of the International Criminal Court (ICC) provide a system of accountability, political constraints in application have hindered practical application, casting doubts on impartiality and universality of international justice.

Shaw (2021) gives a contemporary account of political and legal dynamics of conflict, with a view to looking at players in the region, such as Iran, Egypt, and Turkey, in framing military intervention and legal reasoning. Shaw argues that even though there is a normative order imposed by international law, in reality, power politics trump legalism, in that diplomacy is more a function of strategic bargaining rather than rules of law (Aidonojie et al., 2021; Aidonojie & Victoria, 2022). The same is also in Orford (2015), in that she also critiques liberal order in law, arguing that in application to conflict, it is exceedingly discriminatory, reinforcing existing hierarchies of power more than actual dispensation of justice. The literature on conflict in Israel-Gaza is accordingly diverse in standpoints between legal positivism, natural law, critical studies of law, and realism, chronicling complex interaction between political interest and international law in the world. Some argue that there is a gap in enforcement in international law, yet others point to strategic use of legal norms for political ends (Aidonojie et al., 2020; Aidonojie & Francis, 2022). The jurisprudential analysis of such a conflict is accordingly tasked to walk a tightrope between political reality and legal doctrine, bearing in mind that international law plays out not in a vacuum but in a highly competitive geopolitical order.

3. International Law and Politics? A Jurisprudential Insight

In principle, international law is guided by the principles of equality and neutrality, whereby all countries, whether big or small, powerful or weak, are taken through the same legal standards (Aidonojie et al, 2024, p. 341). Bodies such as the ICJ, the ICC, and other UN organs have the roles of dealing with breaches of international law, conflict resolution, and punishing the perpetrators. However, operational realities often highlight weakness and biases of such a mechanism, making such purported neutrality quite questionable (Aidonojie et al, 2024, p. 89). The principal judicial organ of the United Nations, the ICJ is expected to settle, through the means of binding decisions and also advisory opinions, the legal disputes that states may bring to it. For many years, it has played a great role in shaping international law, though the most ardent criticisms regarding its objectivity have arisen on numerous occasions (Majekodunmi et al, 2024, p. 46).

The basic issue pertains to the limited jurisdictional purview of the ICJ since it can only adjudicate upon disputes with prior states' consent, but that would be a consent-based model that lets mighty states pull out, hence not be held accountable. Consider the United States, for example, which in the 1980s pulled out of the compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ immediately after it had ruled against the United States in the Nicaragua v. United States case; the incident vividly illustrates just how vulnerable the authority of the ICJ is to the political will of the powerful. This selective intervention undermines the principle of equal application of the law and raises concerns about the court's ability to act as a fair arbiter (Izevbuwa et al, 2024, p. 35).

Similarly, the ICC, created to prosecute perpetrators of heinous crimes like genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, also has to deal with concerns regarding its objectivity. Although its mandate is what should finally be expected in terms of efforts toward impunity, its actions are nevertheless critiqued by many observers for one-sidedness in their focus, particularly with respect to Africa (Antai et al, 2024, p. 130). Those critics commonly consider the ICC case selection as hostile to the weak states and lenient toward the powerful countries or their patrons (Antai et al, 2024, p. 50). For instance, the ICC has hardly investigated those cases arising from possible war crimes and crimes against humanity under the conflicts involving powerful states, despite evidence to the contrary of various actors. This one-sidedness has generated claims that the ICC yields to political influence in the decisions that it makes on the investigation of situations and, subsequently, detracts its purported neutrality and ability to apply international law even-handedly (Kisubi et al, 2024, p. 185).

The United Nations Security Council's role for the maintenance of international law provides examples of how hard it is to achieve impartiality (Aidonojie et al, 2024, p. 139). As it is the primary body responsible for maintaining peace and security around the world, it has the power to enact sanctions, authorize military action, and refer situations for the attention of the ICC. Nevertheless, the decision-

making process of this organ depends a great deal on the geopolitical pre-sets by five permanent members -the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China- possessing the right of veto (Aidonojie et al., 2023; Aidonojie et al., 2024). Within the framework of such structure, these countries have a right to block resolutions which are against their or their allies' interests even when the latter commit evident violations of international law. Instead, it deploys the veto disproportionately to shield its allies or to advance strategic interests at the expense of legitimacy for the UNSC, further cementing perceptions of partiality and selectivity in the application of international law (Antai et al, 2024, p. 5). For instance, the US has consistently used its power of veto in UNSC resolutions censuring Israel's actions over the Israeli-Palestinian question, even when the latter are almost unanimously judged illegal by the international community. This is a pattern of veto usage that underlines how the interests of powerful states can overpower the enforcement of international legal norms, making the UNSC an incoherent and politically motivated instrument of law (Anani et al., 2023; Zaman et al., 2024). Similarly, Russia and China have used their veto powers to protect the Syrian government against resolutions which would have invariably moved toward its responsibility for committing war crimes in the Syrian Civil War. These actions reveal the extent to which political factors can compromise the neutrality of mechanisms for the enforcement of international law.

Aside from the institutional dimension, neutrality in international legal frameworks follows deep from broader politico-economic inequalities among nations. This fact -the domination of powerful states in both the drafting and enforcement of international law- has bred accusations of double standards whereby weaker states are more often the ones that will fall under scrutiny and enforcement measures. This fact is also reflected in the issue of economic sanctions, as discussed below, which tends at times to be an enforcement tool used by predominant states or alliances. While sanctions may be employed to enforce adherence to international standards, they have more often been utilized selectively and tend to have excessive effects upon the civilian populations of targeted states, raising ethical and legal objections (Jufri et al., 2024; Haruna et al., 2024). For example, the results of the sanctions imposed against Iraq in the 1990s - detrimental and indiscriminate humanitarian harm - were widely criticized as a political interest taken at the expense of that country's citizens. These examples show better accountability and uniformity that are needed as far as using the instrument of international law enforcement sanctions is concerned. The other critical challenge to the neutrality of international law is the participation of non-state actors, be they in the form of multinational companies, activism groups, or mere citizens (Okpong & Antai, 2024, p. 15).

These actors frequently assume a significant position in the formulation of international legal standards and the strategies employed for their enforcement; however, their participation can also give rise to biases and conflicts of interest. For example, the advocacy activities of influential corporations or interest groups may influence international legal proceedings in manners that support particular agendas, thereby compromising the objectivity of the decision-making process (Aidonojie et al., 2025). Therefore, reliance on budgetary inputs, either from governments or the private sector, has the potential to tempt international institutions to make orientations in their functions according to the interest of the benefactors, hence more and more non-neutrality. Despite this, an attempt has been made to make the international rule of law less biased. The establishment of independent investigative bodies, elaboration of clear and transparent criteria with regard to case selection, supporting the principle of universal jurisdiction for certain types of crimes- each of these reflects a move in the right direction toward a more objective and even application of international law (Antai et al, 2024, p. 39). Nevertheless, such efforts need to be supplemented with a greater commitment from countries and international organizations for the principles of justice, equity, and neutrality in the application of legal principles.

While the structures of international law are pegged upon principles of objectivity and neutrality, in real practice, they are always susceptible to political, economic, and strategic pressures (Wakili et al, 2025, p. 185). The fact that the inequity of application of the law, the pre-eminence of key states' positions in policy making, and the role of non-state actors all reinforce the large-scale sense of partiality and anomaly. It calls for the will of the parties beyond the institutional changes to be committed to the rule of law. Without such an act of transformation, the impartiality of international legal regimes is to remain a discussable and elusive concept. A jurisprudential analysis of the interaction of law, politics, and international law from the Realist perspective shows a many-layered and often contradictory relationship. Realism is one of the most outstanding theoretical schools in the study of international relations; it regards international law as not being a set of neutral rules but as a tool used by states in furthering their national interests and power objectives. This analysis pits the idealism of liberalism-which looks upon international law as an autonomous adjudicator of justice-against the

understanding that its origin, interpretation, and implementation are invariably linked to a relationship of states about the distribution of power as well as the pursuit of political gain.

4. Jurisprudential Foundations of International Law

The various jurisprudential bases in international law stand on the various theoretical, principled, and practical elements that seek to govern the behaviour of the state and international actor in an increasingly interdependent global system. International law, in itself, basically consists of rules created and declared by customary practice and treaty, and other generally recognized sources, as legally binding by the international community. It is distinct from the law in force nationally in that it operates within a regime sans a centralized sovereign authority, yet it requires the consensus of states and the popular will of the international community in its formulation, interpretation, and application (Antai et al, 2024, p. 31). This structure of consent has influenced the theoretical underpinning of international law, which can be understood through several key jurisprudential traditions and schools of thought. Legal positivism is one of the most dominant frameworks in international law. Based on the works of such scholars as John Austin and later refined by Hans Kelsen, legal positivism regards international law as a set of norms created by states through explicit agreements and consistent practice. From this perspective, international legal rules are valid not because of their moral or ethical content but as a consequence of their formal acceptance by sovereign states. Positivism, in particular, emphasizes treaties, customary practices, and general principles recognized by states as the foundational sources of international law, as codified in Article 38(1) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice. This school of thought emphasizes the principle of sovereignty, where international law shall be primarily used to regulate relations between states without eroding their autonomy. Legal positivism, however, according to critics, all too often neglects the normative and ethical dimensions of law, especially in the context of coerced consent or asymmetrical power relations which may influence state consent.

In this respect, the natural law brings in a jurisprudence basis emanating from the general moral order independent of the will of the individual state. In so doing, the inspiration is largely by Hugo Grotius and Francisco de Vitoria, thinking of international law as a sort of derivation from intrinsic human values, laws of nature binding upon states whether or not the latter are based on their consent. It also forms an ethical basis upon which many of the essential principles of international law function, such as the prohibition against genocide, protection of human rights, and common heritage of mankind. This played a vital role in developing the trends of international law in the sphere of human rights and humanitarian law when moral imperatives happen to override the strict legal formalism. Universality, in this regard, invariably faces confrontation by cultural relativists and state-centric models on grounds that the application of universally perceived norms often encroaches upon the realms of local custom, sovereignty, and self-determination. While realism first and foremost is a theory of international relations, it has provided an important critique of some of the jurisprudential limits of international law. Realist scholars look intrinsically at how international law is shaped by the redistributive properties of the international system in which states emerge as preeminent pursuers of self-interest. This line of thinking frequently sees legal norms and international institutions as nothing but an instrument at the hands of powerful states to perpetuate and legitimize their domination over the weaker ones. Realism so challenges the idealist's picture of an international legal system working neutrally and impersonally; for realists, the creation, interpretation, and application of international law can always be reduced to hidden politico-strategic motivations. This view is further illustrated by current practices within the United Nations Security Council where it often appears that vetoes by the permanent members are motivated more out of geopolitical self-interest rather than out of concern for the legal merits. The critical legal studies, and further, some postmodernist approaches seriously question the neutrality and objectivity of international law. According to them, it is the product of historical, social, and political environments that propagate existing power relations. Among many other authors, Martti Koskenniemi and David Kennedy have reproached international law as a tool of hegemony, underlining its contribution to the legitimation of colonialism, economic exploitation, and undemocratic world government. These positions certainly question the basic assumption of the intrinsic justness or equitability of international law and argue for the inculcation of an inclusive, reflective jurisprudence representative of the voice of the marginalized and varied perspectives (Aidonojie et al, 2024, p. 197).

And yet, despite these various divergences in their theoretical underpinning, the various jurisprudential foundations comprising the theoretical underpinning of international law are ultimately all coalesced in their common purpose-to foster order, justice, and co-operation in the international community. This itself is encapsulated in normative statements such as principles like *pacta sunt servanda*, the prohibition of the use of force except in self-defence or with Security Council authorization, and

protection of human dignity via international human rights instruments. These include institutional frameworks of the International Court of Justice, International Criminal Court, and various treaty-monitoring bodies that, in sum, purport to provide means for the peaceful handling of disputes and holding international actors accountable. In contrast, the jurisprudential basis of international law is contradictory because its functions have dual purposes: one, serving as a normative framework, and two, serving as a political tool. Universal in their aspiration, neutral as such, they nonetheless suffer from their selective application and disparate effectiveness due to state consent and the lack of a central enforcement authority. Further complications due to the dual nature are that international law is at continuous evolution, be it to respond to new challenges brought about by globalization, rapid technological innovation, environmental degradation, and transnational conflicts. International law is jurisprudentially interwoven into a multi-coloured tapestry of several theoretical standpoints and pragmatic challenges-from the formalism of legal positivism through the ethical imperatives of natural law, from realist critique through the power political to the transformationalist ambitions of critical legal studies. These represent the different standpoints from which a view of what the role and limits of international law today could conceivably be is possible. It is clear that, for as long as international law pursues an inchoate development, its jurisprudential bases will remain one dynamic and disputed field between legal norms and political realities shaped by the collective aspiration of the global community (Umo et al, 2024, p. 262).

4.1 Realist Perspective

The central tenet of realism, at least in its most influential variants, is that the sphere of international relations is anarchic, with sovereign states as the principal actors, each impelled by the survival-safety-domination imperative in a fiercely competitive environment, and it is radically incompatible with the finding of genuinely impartial and strictly universal standards of international law (Aidonojie et al, 2025, p. 14). From a Realist viewpoint, international law stems from the balance of powers in the system. It is the manifestation of what the most powerful states feel and desire and not an independent set of laws applicable across the board. Therefore, for the Realists, equality in the eyes of international law is little more than a sound, considering that power discrepancies among states will always shape how statutes are drafted, implemented, and enforced. The Realist critique harbours an underlying supposition that international law often provides a process through which hegemony for powerful states can be legitimized and consolidated. Indeed, this process has been visible in the historical development of key international legal regimes, such as the United Nations Charter and the Bretton Woods institutions, each of which was largely the product of the vagaries of the Second World War victors. It is best described by the makeup of the United Nations Security Council, having five permanent members holding the rights of veto. The UNSC is more a child of the geopolitical times in which it was born than representative of democratic principles of equity and fairness, lending too much power to a select few powerful countries. They have continued to exploit these favourable statuses in advancing their strategic interests, while purportedly advancing international peace and security, and in most cases at the expense of weaker states.

The Realist school further highlights the partial application of international law as a reflection of its political nature. While legal standards for condemning aggression, war crimes, and crimes against humanity may be universal in theory, in practice their application is often at the mercy of political agendas. Rarely are dominant powers or their allies held accountable for violations, while smaller states or adversaries may be far more vulnerable to investigation and censure.

For instance, the US has invariably used its powers to get out of liability for a number of controversial military operations, such as in Iraq or Afghanistan, deemed to run in contravention of international legal principles. In the same way, the actions taken by Russia in Ukraine, most especially over Crimea, have seen stringent condemnation and legal challenges. Yet, the lack of any robust enforcement apparatus acts to remind one of the inabilities of international law to restrain the powerful. The International Criminal Court was formed to prosecute individuals accused of heinous acts under international law, although many have characterized it as a political tool. Those critics-mostly from Africa -have been vociferous that the ICC has been used as an instrument against the leaders of less influential nations while closing its eyes on atrocities committed by the most influential states or their allies. The fact that the ICC is unable or unwilling to investigate or prosecute war crimes from powerful actors, for instance, those conducted by the United States in Afghanistan-again strengthens the perception that the court works within the boundaries of global power. In this instance, a realist would identify that his contention is asserted: international legal institutions are neither independent nor neutral but highly embedded in the broad structure of international politics. Another aspect of the Realist critique concerns the practice of international law as a form of soft power exercise; states whose political clout in the formulation of legal norms is significant often manage to stamp the

legal regime with their values and strategic interests, whereby the latter condition the global legal system in their favour. This fact has been clearly dramatized in trade agreements, intellectual property regulations, and environmental protocols, where dominant states have succeeded in setting standards that perpetuate their economic and technological lead. For realists, such behaviour logically points to the proposition that international law functions as a method of consolidating state power, not as a means of seriously embracing the ideal of good governance. The Israel-Palestine conflict provides a poignant case study for examining the Realist critique of international law. The fact that the international legal framework has consistently failed to bring about a successful resolution to this intractable conflict only underlines the extent to which legal precepts remain subordinated to political ones (Ogu et al, 2024, p. 331).

United Nations resolutions, including Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, do provide a basis for a legal settlement to this conflict-in particular, such resolutions impose upon Israel an obligation to withdraw from occupied territories while recognizing all regional states within secure boundaries. These have remained mere rhetoric, however, in view of the political support Israel enjoys from powerful patrons, above all the United States. As reflected by the latter's habitual use of its UNSC veto power in order to protect Israel against censure, international law is manipulated in a way that serves strategic alliances, not impartial justice. Apart from that, the legality of the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian land, being prohibited under international legal frameworks by the ICJ, the UN, among others, shows the ineffectiveness of international law in containing the activities of strong actors. While the legal prohibition against the expansion of such settlements is clear, political dimensions have so far been introduced to ensure that no effective enforcement mechanism is in place, demonstrating an inability for international law to operate in a vacuum devoid of those power relations which Realism seeks to underscore. Realists, for their part, stress the utilitarian function of international law in cloaking military interventions and other strong-arm actions in a veneer of legitimacy. The so-called R2P doctrine stands as a vivid example, invoked to legitimize interventions allegedly intended to prevent mass atrocities, but criticized for serving as a license for dominant states to pursue regime changes or strategic interests under the cloak of humanitarianism. Meanwhile, the selective application of R2P in Libya, not replicated in Syria, underlines inconsistency as the hallmark of international law's application and reinforces the Realist claim that law is subservient to politics.

The realist critique of international law as an instrument of power politics is unflinching in its look at what it sees as its limitations and inherent biases. It is against this view that Realism despises the notion of international law as a neutral middleman of international order, through the elaboration on how those norms are constructed, implemented, and enforced according to the interests of hegemonic states. It does not belittle the relevance or utility of international law but rather presses for an understanding in its proper place within the greater structure of power relations. The point for Realists is that, structurally linked to the strategic interests of states-particularly the most preeminent in the international system-international law could never be effective or fair because it would always be undermined. This is a critique that is quite fair and invites an insight into how the dynamics of justice and equality work in congruence with the dynamics of power, a point at the very heart of the ongoing development and application of international law.

4.2 Constructivism View

The theory of Constructivism, through a jurisprudential approach to the interaction among law, politics, and international law, would give the analyst a rather different perspective, putting into importance the role of norms, identities, and intersubjective understandings in shaping the structure of international law. While constructivism is opposed to the Realist vision, which views international law either as a handmaiden of power politics or a set of inflexible rules, the former looks upon international law as a structure of variable shape moulded by social interaction, culture, and the identity of states and other diverse international actors. From this perspective, international law is by no means a passive product of power relations but a carrier of values, beliefs, and understandings shared in the world community. The roots of constructivism begin with one assertion: the international system is socially constructed. Brunnee & Toope (2012) believe that while Realists perceive international relations as being essentially anarchic and driven by material power considerations, Constructivists suggest that state behaviours are shaped, indeed, by ideational factors, such as norms, values, and identities. Herein, international law would serve both as a repository and as a carrier of such norms, crystallizing collective beliefs and guiding the behaviours of states (p. 32).

From a Constructivist perspective, international law is organic and thus not static. It is constantly evolving over time according to global norms and the shifting identities of its actors. For instance, the phenomenon of human rights law was one of a shift in priorities that took the international community

from a state-centric view to one focused more on human dignity and simple justice. The Constructivist critique explains how international law and international politics interact. While political factors determine the genesis and application of legal norms, international law in turn affects political behaviour by stabilizing or questioning the existing norms and identities. Legal norms are not simply tools to be used for the pursuit of material interests but possess in themselves constitutive power: they define the roles and responsibilities of states and other actors in the international system (Hughes & Shereshevsky, 2023). The ban on genocide, for instance, in international law is not simply a legal prohibition but a normative standard guiding how states think about themselves and others. It is possible that a state accused of genocide would suffer reputational harm beyond mere material sanctions, illustrating the normative weight of legal principles.

A key constructivist insight is that international law derives much of its strength from the fact that it forms one important site where identities are constituted and shared understandings of proper behaviour are developed. To a considerable extent, actors will comply with international legal rules not just out of fear of material reprisals, but also because those legal norms reflect and project how they understand themselves, and wish to be seen by others (Akram et al, 2010, p. 6). This dynamic is perhaps most apparent in the role of customary international law, which springs from the converging practices of states with the belief in the legal necessity to act one way or another-a process known as *opinio juris*. For the constructivist theorist, these sorts of practices reveal the operation of collective norms and social identity in the making of rules. This is more the case with those areas in which the structure of international law has been readjusting in line with shifting global concerns. In the case of environmental law, for example, its development has reflected a strengthening sense of agreement among nations over the need to address climate change and preserve natural resources for future generations. The shift in normative priorities has heralded the creation of legal frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, which, even if not legally binding in the strictest possible sense, still exerts powerful normative influence on countries to align their policies with international goals related to the environment. As far as constructivist scholars are concerned, what gives such agreements their effectiveness is not the legal detail but their potential to alter state identities and the moral and political obligation that comes with it. On the other hand, however, the Constructivist critique points to the limits and possibilities existing within international law. Inasmuch as norms and identity are decisive elements in marking legal arrangements, they do not stem from one single international community. The cultural, political, and historical differences of various countries provide different perceptions of legal norms and, hence, resistances to their adoption. For example, debates about the universal applicability of human rights standards versus cultural relativism are indicative of the conflicts occurring when international legal principles meet regional identities and beliefs. As constructivists will argue, such a conflict is more than a mere technical or legal disagreement but, instead, one about which norms and values should be hegemonic within the global legal system. It is the extraordinary example from the Constructivist approach to international law, whereby the whole Israeli-Palestinian conflict has obtained deep roots in conflicting identities and historical accounts shaping the legal and political attitudes of both parties. For example, the claim of statehood on the part of the Palestinians is framed in a narrative of self-determination and historical righteousness, while that of the Israelis appeals to the necessity of security, ancient links to the land, and a homeland for the Jews. The meaning and practice of international legal norms related to self-determination, occupation, and the protection of human rights have been shaped by the double sets of conflicting identities.

But relevant United Nations resolutions in relation to the Israeli-Palestine conflict, such as General Assembly Resolution 181 and Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, are manifestations of normative changes and multi-layered interplay of identities. But whereas there has been a legal foundation for resolution through those resolutions, implementation has remained premised on the diverging identities and interests of the parties. Constructivists would go further and argue that such legal structures' success would depend not only on their legal validity but also on the degree to which these could be inculcated into the identity and normative commitments of participating actors. The same constructivist critique would apply to the enforcement of international law. Whereas Realists stress the material power present in enforcement mechanisms, Constructivists stress normative pressure and legality that are embedded in norms and central in compliance. Indeed, the ICC relies essentially on the normative authority of its mandate to assume responsibility through crimes such as crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide. Obviously, the ICC does not have striking powers of enforcement; rather, it lies in discrediting a certain behaviour and engraining international norms of accountability and justice. In the case of Israel and Palestine, ICC, through investigations into war crimes, has raised questions over accountability and its normative impact, and the role legal institutions can play in conflict resolution. Constructivists

further contest the proliferation of international legal regimes that reflect the embedded norms and identities of powerful states or coalitions. While the reach of international law may be universal, its development and practice tend to be exclusionary, often marginalizing other ways of narrating the self and other. A case in point is how the modern structures of international law are rooted in the West, raising suspicions of bias and misrepresentation, especially from states in the Global South. Constructivists argue that these biases can only be addressed by a more pluralistic and inclusive methodology in international law, one that recognizes and incorporates diverse identities and normative structures. In other words, the Constructivist critique of international law is a sophisticated approach in which it is viewed as a social creation born out of norms, identities, and shared knowledge. By contrast, this perspective argues that international law is neither objective nor neutral but essentially murky and contested. Insofar as international law might have the potential to reshape state practice and foster international cooperation, international law itself depends on whether or not it resonates with the identity and the normative commitments of the community of states. The Constructivist approach underlines the need not to overlook either the normative or the identity-related facets of international law, especially in complex, entrenched conflicts such as that between Israelis and Palestinians, whose contested narratives and identities keep shaping legal and political outcomes. (Akram et al, 2010, p. 35)

5. Theoretical Implications for International Law's Legitimacy

From calling into question the validity of international law itself, to foundational principles, via societal perceptions, to the empirical consequences that mould its recognition, effectiveness, and authoritative status internationally. International law may be understood as a set of norms advising states and other subjects of international law on what their actions should be. Existing at the juncture of sovereignty, the precepts of power, and normative principles, its validity is drawn not solely from its so-called establishment or codification but heavily from commanding respect, compliance, and recognition by the international community (Finkelstein, 2018, p. 218). The theoretical debates on such validity often dwell on questions of consent, universality, enforcement, and the normative basis of law in an anarchical international structure. State consent remains a very promising theoretical consequence in terms of its validity of international law. In a positivist scheme, international law is considered legitimate because it represents the free will of independent states in upholding the code of conduct that it prescribes. Treaties are the building blocks of international law, having acquired their validity from the express consent of states reflected in their processes for negotiation, ratification, and execution. On its part, customary international law is seen to come into being when states follow constant and general practices combined with a belief of legal obligation, that is *opinio juris*. However, this salience of consent generates a paradox: while it consolidates state sovereignty, it also allows mighty states to be selective in their choice of compliance with or retreat from legal commitments, which undermines the universality and impartiality inherent in international law. This selective compliance calls into question the status of international law as a binding framework, at least insofar as it is heavily reliant upon the voluntarist consent of its subjects.

Another theoretical implication concerns the universality of international law. A basic principle of international law is that it applies to all states and peoples; it is an intrinsic part of its claim to validity. Normative approaches to international law, but in particular those based on the natural law perspective, would contest that their validity is derived from correspondence with universal moral values, such as justice, human dignity, and equality. This latter principle of universality finds codification in foundational legal documents like the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Universality in international law, critics hold, is, for the most part, an aspiration rather than a fact, in so far as in formulation and implementation, it is often expressive of hegemonistic values and priorities. Its contemporary underpinning rests on the back of European colonial efforts, which have indeed made allegations of partiality and marginalization possible. Many Global South countries view international law as a tool for maintaining inequality and exploitation, instead of a framework which truly advocates for universality. The legitimacy of international law is questioned through this critique, pointing out how it may bolster current global power inequities rather than challenge them. Another important aspect related to the question of the validity of international law is how it is put into practice. While national laws function within well-detailed structures and are subject to one central force or method of enforcement, international law operates within an anarchic system with decentralized enforcement, often dependent on the goodwill of states to take action. All this takes away the legitimacy from the international law- flagrant breach going unpunished or application of the law seemingly unfair and politically engineered (Sabel, 2022, p. 65). According to the realists, it is inherent in international law that legitimacy is curtailed because it depends on state power and particularly the great powers that exercise disproportionate influence in

international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council.

The wielding of veto powers by permanent members of the Security Council to block resolutions, even when clear violations of international law are at issue, is perhaps the clearest example of how enforcement often yields to political interests. This inconsistency relinquishes any notion of international law being an impartial and effectively applied norm, hence opening questions on its ability to truly claim legitimacy without reliable means of enforcement. The legitimacy of international law is also heavily intertwined with its normative grounding. Constructivist approaches have pointed out that the legitimacy of international law is inextricably intertwined with its ability to reflect and foster shared norms and values of the international community. Legal rules which correspond to widely shared principles-for instance, prohibition of genocide or the protection of human rights-are more likely to be regarded as legitimate and thus complied with. On the other hand, international law has equally been denounced as illegitimate, if interpreted as running against the grain of the dominant normative positions, or as a means of imposing foreign values in disregard for cultural diversity. The debate on universal standards of human rights versus cultural relativism probably is the most characteristic example, evidencing the tension between the objective of proclaiming a universally applicable legal regime and the fact of cultural, political, and historical diversity. Therefore, the validity of international law relies not solely on its formal validity but also, and essentially, on whether it substantively reflects the values and priorities shared in the global community. The validity of international law also draws a lot from the procedural dimensions. In this vein, its making and application processes come with publicity, inclusiveness, and accountability, which, under democratic perspectives of international law, make it more legitimate. This approach, therefore, underlines participatory processes in the negotiation of treaties, representative diversity in the composition of international organizations, and the accountability of states and international organizations for their activities and performance. The issues of process legitimacy assume particular importance in challenging the assumption that international law is the monopolistic domain of a few powerful states or actors. The reformist tendencies of the United Nations Security Council to make it representative of the existing world order show the realization of the fact that substantive justice together with procedural justice is essential to attain legitimacy. Without these attributes, international law runs the risk of being perceived as a tool of hegemony and not representative and objective (Nijhoff, 2023, pp. 47, 91).

Discussions regarding multiple theories on the legitimacy of international law do often go hand in hand with questions regarding its effectiveness or inefficiency in achieving stated objectives. Effectiveness itself is often an important determinant of legitimacy: laws that prove ineffective in their outcomes, or in terms of addressing pressing international concerns, undermine their legitimacy and moral authority. It is seen as moderate because the very limited success of international law regarding dispute settlement, climate change policies, or accountability for serious human rights abuses can only establish the claim of legitimacy. According to critics, it seems very unlikely that international law will bridge the gap between normative aspiration and the real world on more occasions than not, having stronger mechanisms ensuring compliance and effectiveness. Still, adherents believe that the efficiency of international law cannot be estimated based solely on its short-term output; it is about whether, in the longer term, it serves as an agent for norms, interactivity, and a common basis for peaceful cooperation. Ultimately, the credibility of international law is deeply connected with its capability to adapt to new situations and challenges in the world. The international system is in a state of flux, marked by shifts in relative power, addition of new players, and establishment of norms at an international level. To this extent, international law needs to retain its element of flexibility and responsiveness. To fail to do so-to remain impervious to current reality, be it the increased relevance of non-state actors, the attacks in cyberspace, or the urgent appeals for climate control-threatens it with irrelevance and redundancy. This flexibility needs, however, to be balanced by stability and predictability, for eternal change would also destroy confidence in the legal regime. The theoretical debate on legitimacy therefore needs, in discussing the manner in which international law can be subject to change without losing its underlying bases and legitimacy, to take into account the dialectic between continuity and renovation (Agboti et al, 2024). The legitimacy of international law is, in the final analysis, multidimensional and highly contested, informed by theoretical debates about consent, universality, enforcement, norms, procedural fairness, effectiveness, and flexibility. The claim of its legitimacy stands or falls with whether it can balance the various dimensions: it actually serves the needs of a great variety of stakeholders while retaining its relevance and authority in a complex and fast-changing world. There are, indeed, important ways in which international law is on much shakier grounds from a validity perspective: issues relating to bias, selective application, and narrow scope. It could prove a basic instrument for equity, cooperation, and peace in the

world. The theoretical reflections of its legitimacy underpin that it is only through continuous critical engagement of its principles, processes, and practices that it can be considered valid and representative in the way it deals with concerns common to human beings (Chinweze et al 2024).

6. Findings and Conclusion

The research indicates that the conflict between Israel and Gaza is not only a geopolitical conflict but also a matter of law in that political interest is in conflict with international law. The evidence indicates that despite there being mechanisms of regulation of armed conflict in international law, including Geneva Conventions, customary international law, and the Charter of the United Nations, political interest dictates their application to a great extent over strict adherence to the rule of law. The use of self-defence provision in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations is used to justify military action by Israel, yet it is controversial in the face of conflict asymmetry and heavy civilian loss of lives. The Palestinian groups, including Hamas, accused of attacking civilian populations in contravention of international humanitarian law have a spotty system of accountability due to their status as a non-state actor and political interest of global superpowers.

The selective application of international law is a challenge that undermines its universality and impartiality, reinforcing the argument that principles of law take a secondary position to political and strategic requirements. The study also indicates the legal challenges of Palestine's struggle to be a state. The recognition of Palestine as a state is increasingly gaining popularity in international diplomacy, yet there are still challenges in sight of a deficiency of unambiguous sovereignty, governance, and control of a specific territory that would enable application of Palestinian rights in international law.

Further analysis shows that doctrines of military necessity, distinction, and proportionality are used by each of these actors to justify their actions that, in most instances, violate basic principles of international humanitarian law. The results also indicate that institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) provide a system of accountability in law, yet political realities intervene heavily in their attempts to do their work. The action taken against actors in Palestine or Israel is often slowed up in diplomatic manoeuvrings in which actors in the global and regional contexts use argumentation in terms of law as tools of advancing their geopolitical ends rather than in a genuine pursuit of justice. The study also indicates that theory of state sovereignty, one of the cornerstones of international law, is enforced in a disordered manner in the conflict. The sovereignty of Israel is staunchly upheld by its patrons, yet demands of Palestine to self-determination get a political and legal reaction that indicates contradictions in system of law in the world. In short, Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a classic example of contradictions between international politics and international law. There are mechanisms of law to control and intervene in the conflict, yet their use is in many cases more in control of strategic interest of great powers than neutral reasoning of law. Non-interference of international law in a conflict undermines efficacy of international institutions of law to manage entrenched geopolitical rivalries. The analysis indicates that without a trend towards more neutral application of international law, in which rules of law prevail over political loyalties, the conflict would continue to be a battlefield of armed clashes as also of political and legal battles.

The need for a more even-handed and more just approach of law, backed up by diplomatic action that gives precedence to human rights and conflict resolution over political compulsions, is of decisive importance in addressing age-old issues of a conflict between Israel and Gaza.

7. Recommendations

The research recommends that international law be applied without political bias to all participants in the conflict in Israel-Gaza, such that principles of proportionality, distinction, and necessity be applied without political favouritism. The United Nations Security Council must be reformed to restrict the monopoly of veto powers that generally obstruct adoption of resolutions that pursue prosecution of war crimes and human rights abuse. This would uphold credibility of processes of law at the international sphere and deter great powers to use their power to protect their friends in order to exempt them from accountability in courts of law. There must be increased resort to diplomatic and legal methods of resolution of conflict, in place of use of military campaigns that exacerbate humanitarian crises. The international community must support institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) in pursuing their mandate and ensuring that proceedings in respect of suspected war crimes and crimes against humanity are not obstructed by political interference.

The report also recommends that efforts towards a Palestinian state be strengthened in respect of processes of law and diplomacy, ensuring that Palestine’s rights in international law be not subordinated to geopolitical objectives. International recognition of Palestine as a sovereign entity with unambiguous boundary limits would be a vehicle of law for disputants to negotiate their

divergences and would be a beginning towards a long-term peace. Humanitarian law must be enforced more strictly, independent monitor bodies ensuring that it is respected by both Israel and groups in Palestine. International institutions such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) must be endowed with more powers to undertake impartial investigations and propose sanctions or action in respect of violations of international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, regional actors, such as Arab neighbouring countries and international institutions, must become more active in efforts towards peacebuilding, applying diplomatic pressures in support of ceasefires and arrangements in the long term in accordance with international law. Economic reconstruction and relief must be redirected to rebuilding Gaza in a way that avoids humanitarian relief to fuel political dimensions of conflict. Scholars of public international law and practitioners must undertake more serious studies and advocacy to challenge ambiguities in law that allow for selective application of rules of law in conflict. The provision of more explicit rules in responding to conflict involving actors other than states would be a more formal approach to addressing issues around groups such as Hamas.

The work signals a need for more accountability in applying international law, insisting on mechanisms that hold everyone, regardless of political affiliations, to the same expectations of law. This would require working in cooperation with international courts, human rights groups, and scholars of law in unmasking contradictions in law and in advocating reforms that depoliticize legal adjudication in international conflict. In proceeding forward, it is crucial that international law is not perceived to be a mere instrument of reinforcing hierarchies of power but a genuine instrument of ensuring justice, accountability, and protection of human rights in the conflict in Israel-Gaza and beyond.

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