

Enforcement Challenges of the United Nations Resolutions in the Israel–Palestine Conflict

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Abstract

The Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the longest-running and most complicated issues in modern international relations. It continues to get a lot of attention from the international community, especially the United Nations (UN). Over the years, the UN has passed many resolutions through its main bodies, particularly the Security Council and the General Assembly. These resolutions aim to promote peace, uphold international law, and help find a fair solution for both sides. However, enforcing these resolutions has proven to be a major challenge. This brings up important questions about how effective and powerful the UN really is in solving conflicts. This study looks into the difficulties of enforcing UN resolutions in the Israel-Palestine conflict. It uses a qualitative research approach based on document analysis of key UN resolutions and secondary sources like academic articles and policy reports. The study examines the political, structural, and institutional factors that have limited the implementation of UN decisions. These factors include the use of veto power by permanent members of the Security Council, the geopolitical interests of major countries, the lack of strong enforcement mechanisms, and the complicated nature of the conflict itself.

Keywords: United Nations, Resolution, Security Council, Veto power, Peacekeeping.

1. Introduction

The dispute between Israel and Palestine is considered as one of the longest-standing conflicts in history of mankind. Both nations assert their claims over the same land, which has perpetuated the struggle for many years (Tanwar & Poply, 2023; Gelvin, 2014). Additionally, the Israelis strongly believe that this territory is the land promised to them by God. Muslims in Palestine also hold this land in high religious regard, and the persistent conflict reinforces their beliefs along with various political and colonial influences (Danfulani, Leawat & Dinshak, 2021). Consequently, the United Nations has directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian

conflicts (Mock, Obeidi & Zeleznikow, 2014). This resulted to the establishment of a Jewish state called Israel on Palestinian land under the 1948 UN resolution (United Nations, 1947).

Furthermore, it has been seven decades since the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) made the decision to establish two sovereign states within the region of Mandatory Palestine, one designated for the Jewish population and the other for the Arab population. Since that time, numerous new nations have emerged on the global stage. However, the Palestinian people have yet to realize their rightful aspiration for an independent state

due to a myriad of complex factors and circumstances. For over thirty years, spanning from the First Arab-Israeli War to the ongoing, the United Nations (UN) assumed responsibility for addressing the conflict (Krylov, 2022; Okeke, Obianyo, & Ater, 2024; Dayal, 2024; Henderson, 2013; Voeten, 2005).

The UN has been actively engaged in the Israel-Palestine conflict. A complex and sensitive matter that has significantly influenced international relations in the Middle East and beyond. Since the mid-20th century, the UN has adopted numerous resolutions that address critical elements of the conflict, such as territorial demarcations, the rights of refugees, the protection of human rights, and the promotion of peace negotiations (Nwefuru, 2017). Notable resolutions, including Resolution 181 (1947), which advocated for the partition of Palestine, and Resolution 242 (1967), which urged the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied areas. It illustrates the UN's ongoing efforts to mediate and resolve this enduring conflict. Nevertheless, despite this comprehensive legislative and diplomatic framework, the UN has struggled to implement its resolutions effectively, resulting in many initiatives remaining unfulfilled and, in certain instances, fostering a perception of bias or ineffectiveness (Bashir, 2024; Bashir and Gümüş 2023).

This study contends that the inherent structural constraints of the United Nations, along with the dominance of influential member states and the intricate geopolitical environment, have considerably weakened its ability to implement its resolutions regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. Through an analysis of pivotal resolutions, the political interactions within the Security Council, and case studies of unmet mandates, this study aims to investigate the factors contributing to the UN's challenges and

suggest possible reforms to strengthen its position as a credible and efficient mediator in this enduring conflict.

2. Literature Review

The concepts of United Nations resolutions and enforcement in international law are central to understanding the role of international institutions in maintaining global peace and security. Scholars in international law and international relations have extensively examined how resolutions adopted by the United Nations serve as important instruments for addressing international conflicts, promoting compliance with international norms, and guiding the conduct of states. Resolutions adopted by organs such as the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly often provide legal, political, and diplomatic frameworks for resolving disputes and maintaining international peace. However, the effectiveness of these resolutions largely depends on the extent to which they are implemented and enforced by member states.

2.1 United Nations Resolutions

Since the emergence of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the United Nations has played a pivotal role in promoting peace negotiations and addressing humanitarian issues through a series of resolutions. These resolutions articulate the UN's stance on territorial disputes, the rights of displaced individuals, and the necessity for peace and security in the region. However, despite the explicit nature of these resolutions, achieving compliance has consistently been a challenge, often influenced by geopolitical interests, the exercise of veto power by prominent member states, and the inherent limitations of the United Nations system. This section provides an overview of the significant UN resolutions related to the Israel-Palestine conflict and explores the reasons behind

the lack of success in realizing their intended objectives.

As tensions heightened between Jewish and Arab communities in British-administered Palestine, the United Nations introduced Resolution 181. This resolution aimed to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, while designating Jerusalem for international oversight (Beinin & Hajjar, 2014; Shemer-Kunz, 2023). The proposal outlined the creation of independent Jewish and Arab states, each with clearly delineated borders, and suggested the establishment of an economic union between them. To mitigate potential conflicts over religious sites, it was recommended that Jerusalem be governed internationally (Al-Abid, 2022; Gofman, 2020). While the plan received approval from Jewish leaders, it was met with opposition from Arab nations and Palestinian authorities, ultimately leading to the onset of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The failure of the resolution to foster enduring peace marked the beginning of the UN's challenges in effectively mediating the ongoing conflict (Franco, 2024).

UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) appeals for withdrawal of Israel from occupied areas. In the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967, during which Israel acquired control over the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights, the United Nations sought to establish a framework aimed at ceasing hostilities and fostering peace (Lynk & Akram, 2013). This resolution called for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict” and affirmed the right of all states to exist “in peace within secure and recognized boundaries (Steinitz, et al., 2005; Rosenne, 1978). It served as a foundation for future peace negotiations; however, it remained unenforced, as it did not explicitly mandate Israel's withdrawal from the occupied

areas. The varying interpretations of the resolution's terminology, particularly the distinction between “territories” and “the territories,” resulted in diplomatic disputes that hindered its effectiveness (Karayanni, 2024; Quigley, 1990).

Furthermore, UN Security Council Resolution 338 (1973) adopts in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. It aims to cease hostilities between Israel and the surrounding Arab nations. It advocates for a return to negotiations grounded in Resolution 242. The resolution mandated an immediate ceasefire to conclude the Yom Kippur War and reaffirmed the tenets of Resolution 242, emphasizing the necessity for peace talks to foster enduring security and stability (Buchanan, 1998; Baruch, 2018). While it succeeded in establishing a temporary ceasefire, the resolution did not facilitate lasting peace in the region. Similarly, UN Security Council Resolution 425 (1978) adopts in response to Israel's incursion into southern Lebanon. It urges the Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon. Consequently, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was created to oversee the withdrawal and restore peace and security in the region (Nan, 2024; Morphet, 1990). However, the protracted nature of Israel's withdrawal, which was not finalized until 2000. This underscored the UN's challenges in enforcing compliance, revealing the limited effectiveness of this resolution and the ongoing difficulties faced by the UN in maintaining order in the area (Öberg, 2005).

Another UN Security Council Resolution 1322 was established in 2000. This resolution was implemented in reaction to the beginning of the Second Intifada. A period marked by increased tensions and hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians. The resolution condemns the excessive use of force against Palestinians and calls upon all parties involved to seek a negotiated resolution. Additionally, it

called for the implementation of measures to safeguard Palestinian civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law (Arsenault & Musu, 2021). Nonetheless, lack of specific enforcement mechanisms in the resolution undermined its effectiveness, allowing violence to continue in the region (Cortright, Lopez & Gerber, 2002). Additionally, UN Security Council Resolution 2334 was adopted in 2016. The resolution condemns Israel's settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. UN reaffirms that such settlements contravene international law. Despite its significant declaration, Resolution lacked enforcement mechanisms, which allowed Israel to persist in its settlement expansion in the face of international disapproval. Furthermore, the resolution highlighted the UN's reliance on consensus within the Security Council, as it was adopted only because the United States chose to abstain rather than veto the measure (Sayegh, 2023).

2.2 Enforcement in International Law

The idea of enforcement in international law has been discussed for a long time by experts in international law and relations. Unlike domestic legal systems, international law functions in a decentralized setting. There is no central authority that has a monopoly on the use of force. Therefore, enforcing international legal rules relies heavily on cooperation among countries, institutional mechanisms, and political processes. Scholars typically define enforcement as the way legal rules are applied and ensuring that legal obligations are met. Joshua Kleinfeld explains that enforcement means using legally established power to make legal norms effective in practice. This means enforcement is closely tied to how effective and credible laws are since it makes sure that legal obligations are not just symbolic but can actually influence behavior (Kleinfeld, 2011).

The argument of legal positivists like John Austin is the source of one of the traditional discussions on enforcement in international law. Austin maintained that a sovereign authority's sanctions must support a law. He questioned whether international law could actually be regarded as "law" in the strict sense because it lacks a centralized sovereign with coercive power. Scholars of international law have long debated the nature and enforceability of international legal norms as a result of this criticism (Austin, 1832; Shaw, 2017). Despite these objections, a number of contemporary academics contend that international law does have enforcement mechanisms, albeit they are very different from those in domestic legal systems. Nicole Scicluna asserts that states are the main actors in a system of international anarchy where international law enforcement takes place. When legal obligations are broken, compliance in such a system frequently depends on state approval, diplomatic pressure, and the threat of countermeasures from other states (Scicluna, 2015).

The study also emphasizes the decentralized character of international law enforcement mechanisms. Due to the lack of a global government, scholars observe that enforcement takes place through a range of formal and informal mechanisms. International courts, arbitration panels, diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and collective security measures organized by international organizations are a few of these. International law depends on cooperation between states and institutions to guarantee compliance because there is no single enforcement body (Dixon, 2013; Shaw, 2017). Additionally, formal and informal enforcement mechanisms are distinguished in the literature. Formal enforcement typically entails institutional or judicial procedures, such as international courts or tribunals, which have the power to decide cases and impose

penalties. Conversely, informal enforcement takes place through diplomatic and political means like reciprocal actions by states, reputational costs, and sanctions. According to Scott and Stephan (2006), compliance frequently depends on political cooperation and shared interests among states when formal enforcement institutions are weak.

Enforcing international law also heavily relies on the idea of state responsibility. When a state transgresses an international obligation, it may be held accountable internationally and forced to stop the wrongdoing and make amends. To promote adherence to international legal standards, other states may occasionally take countermeasures, such as suspending treaty obligations or enforcing economic restrictions (Crawford, 2013). All things considered, the literature demonstrates that domestic legal systems and international law enforcement are very different. International law functions through decentralized mechanisms that integrate legal, political, and diplomatic processes instead of depending on centralized coercive authority. Although these mechanisms have the power to affect state behavior, their efficacy frequently hinges on states' and international organizations' cooperation and adherence to international legal standards (Brownlie, 2008; Shaw, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for analyzing the UN shortcomings in implementing resolutions regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict is based on multiple theoretical perspectives within international relations, notably realism.

Realism posits that states function within an anarchic global system where power, security, and national interests serve as the primary motivators for their actions (Freyberg-Inan, Harrison & James, 2009). This perspective suggests that the United

Nations' failure to effectively enforce resolutions regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict is largely a result of the power dynamics at play among its member states (Berdal, 2003).

Israel, as a significant ally of influential nations, particularly the United States, benefits from substantial military and political backing. The United States has often exercised its veto power in the UN Security Council to prevent the passage of resolutions it deems detrimental to Israel (Reich & Powers, 2012). According to realist theory, the decisions made by the UN are frequently swayed by the influence of major powers, especially the P5 (the permanent members of the Security Council), whose national interests can eclipse collective efforts aimed at achieving peace (Korab-Karpowicz, 2010).

The inability to enforce UN resolutions can also be interpreted through the concept of balance of power, where Israel's military superiority and the political backing from global powers such as the United States create a scenario in which the UN struggles to take decisive action (Voeten, 2005). Additionally, the absence of a unified stance within the international community, coupled with internal divisions within the UN, further obstructs the implementation of resolutions that might confront Israel's actions (Sela, 2012).

The composition of the Security Council, characterized by its permanent members possessing veto authority, significantly constrains the United Nations' capacity to implement decisive measures. The United States has often exercised its veto power against resolutions that are critical of Israel, thereby hindering the UN's ability to operate impartially or to enforce resolutions pertaining to the Israel-Palestine conflict (Al Shraideh, 2017).

3. Methodology

This research seeks to examine the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the United Nations (UN) in implementing resolutions related to the Israel-Palestine conflict. A qualitative methodology is employed, primarily drawing on secondary data sources, including official UN documents, resolutions, historical records, academic literature, and expert analyses, to evaluate the actions and inactions of the UN in this particular context. This section delineates the materials and methods utilized in the research.

The study incorporates both primary and secondary data. The primary data comprises resolutions from the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the General Assembly (UNGA) that pertain to the Israel-Palestine conflict. These documents, accessible via the UN's official website and archives, offer insights into the stances taken by member states, the language employed in the resolutions, and any proposed or rejected enforcement mechanisms. In contrast, the secondary data encompasses a thorough review of academic articles and books addressing the Israel-Palestine conflict and the UN's role in international diplomacy, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping. Additionally, publications from governmental bodies (such as the U.S. State Department and the European Union) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Crisis Group, which frequently assess the UN's involvement and its resolutions concerning the conflict, will be included. Furthermore, articles, interviews, and analyses from reputable news organizations (including The New York Times, BBC, Al Jazeera, and Haaretz) will provide timely reporting and commentary on the effectiveness of UN actions in the region.

4. Results and Discussion

The UN is essentially saddled with the promotion of global peace, security, and human rights. Nevertheless, its attempts to implement resolutions regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict have consistently been inadequate, primarily due to intrinsic structural challenges. These challenges are rooted in the UN's institutional framework, its decision-making procedures, and its reliance on the political will of its member states. This section explores the key structural obstacles within the UN that hinder its ability to enforce resolutions related to Israel-Palestine, with particular emphasis on the role of the Security Council, the veto authority of its permanent members, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, and the UN's dependence on compliance from states.

4.1 Veto Power Dynamics

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) serves as the principal entity tasked with the preservation of international peace and security. Its resolutions are obligatory, rendering it an essential platform for the resolution of conflicts (Gifkins, 2021). The Council consists of 15 members, which include five permanent members (P5) endowed with veto authority: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China (De Wet, 2004). A major obstacle to the effectiveness of the UN is the veto power exercised by its five permanent members, especially the United States. The U.S. has frequently employed its veto to obstruct resolutions deemed detrimental to Israel. A prominent example of this occurred when the U.S. vetoed a resolution that criticized Israeli settlements in occupied territories (Matthews, 2011). This recurring behavior has contributed to a perception of partiality within the UN and has weakened its standing as an unbiased mediator.

4.2 Limitations within the UN Charter

The UN Charter designates the organization primarily as a facilitator of international collaboration rather than as an entity endowed with sovereign power over nations. Article 2 of the Charter underscores the sovereignty of its member states, thereby restricting the UN's capacity to undertake actions that may violate national interests or autonomy (Scott & Andrade, 2019). The Charter empowers the Security Council to impose sanctions or authorize peacekeeping operations. However, it does not establish automatic enforcement mechanisms. The UN is reliant on the willingness of member states to adhere to resolutions or provide necessary resources. In the context of the Israel-Palestine situation, this reliance on voluntary compliance has resulted in a lack

of significant progress, as the involved parties or their allies may opt to disregard UN directives (Louwerse, 2022). The vague wording of Resolution 242 (1967), which calls for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territories, illustrates the Charter's focus on negotiation rather than unilateral enforcement. In the absence of a binding enforcement clause, Israel has been able to interpret the resolution in a manner that suits its interests, facing minimal consequences (Kiswanson & Power, 2023). Below is the structured table summarizing key failed UN enforcement attempts on the Israel-Palestine conflict, including voting records, timelines, and outcomes:

Table 1: UN Resolutions on Israel-Palestine Conflict – Failed Enforcement Attempts

Resolution	Year	Vote (For- Against- Abstain)	Key Demand	Enforcement Failure	Reason for Failure	Source
<i>UNSC Resolutions</i>						
Resolution 242	1967	15-0-0	Withdrawal from occupied territories	Israel retained control	No enforcement mechanism	(UNSC, 1967)
Resolution 338	1973	14-0-1 (China abstained)	Ceasefire & negotiations	No lasting peace	Non-compliance	(UNSC, 1973)
Resolution 446	1979	12-0-3 (US, UK, Norway abstained)	Halt settlements	Settlements tripled	US blocked sanctions	(UNSC, 1979)
Resolution 2334	2016	14-0-1 (US abstained)	End settlements	Settlement expansion accelerated	Non-compliance	(UNSC, 2016)
<i>US Vetoed Resolutions</i>						
S/2011/24	2011	14-1 (US veto)	Palestinian statehood	Statehood denied	US veto	(UNSC, 2011)
S/2014/916	2014	8-2-4 (US, Australia opposed)	Gaza ceasefire	War continued	US veto	(UNSC, 2014)
S/2023/970	2023	12-1-2 (US veto)	Humanitarian truce	Escalation in Gaza	US veto	(UNSC, 2023)

Resolution	Year	Vote (For-Against-Abstain)	Key Demand	Enforcement Failure	Reason for Failure	Source
UNGA Resolutions						
Resolution 181	1947	33-13-10	Partition Plan	1948 War	Arab rejection	(UNGA, 1947)
Resolution 67/19	2012	138-9-41	Palestine as observer state	No sovereignty change	Israel withheld taxes	(UNGA, 2012)
ICJ Rulings						
Advisory Opinion (Wall)	2004	14-1 (US opposed)	Dismantle West Bank barrier	Wall expanded (700 km)	Israel ignored ruling	(ICJ, 2004)

4.3 Fragmented International Consensus

The divided international agreement regarding the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is based on historical accords and persistent disagreements. The foundation of this proposal can be traced back to UN Resolution 181, which was introduced in 1947 and suggested the division of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states (Beinin & Stein, 2006). However, the global community exhibits a lack of consensus regarding the methodologies to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although a considerable number of nations advocate for the implementation of a two-state resolution, others hold divergent perspectives shaped by geopolitical considerations or affiliations with either Israel or Palestine. This fragmentation serves to hinder endeavors aimed at

establishing a cohesive stance within the United Nations and diminishes the efficacy of any resolutions that may be enacted (Barnett et al., 2023).

4.4 Lack of Independent Enforcement Mechanisms

The UN does not have the ability to enforce laws through military or police forces. Instead, peacekeeping forces are formed on an *ad hoc* basis, depending on the contributions of member states, which can be delayed, inadequate, or influenced by political negotiations (Duursma et al., 2023). While the UN has the authority to propose sanctions, their implementation frequently necessitates consensus among influential nations and the collaboration of international entities, including banks and trade organizations. In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, achieving agreement on sanctions has proven difficult due to existing political alliances and economic considerations. Efforts

aimed at curbing Israeli settlement expansion or addressing human rights abuses have not been accompanied by enforceable penalties, resulting in resolutions that lack significant consequences when ignored (Aguirre & Bustelo, 2024).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The UN has repeatedly encountered criticism for its failure to effectively implement its resolutions concerning the Israel-Palestine conflict. In spite of various resolutions and diplomatic initiatives aimed at addressing the situation, the UN has struggled to persuade Israel to adhere to its directives or to establish a sustainable peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The organization's limited enforcement authority, coupled with geopolitical rifts within the Security Council and the intricate dynamics of the conflict, has significantly impeded its ability to drive substantial progress. Conversely, the UN has played a crucial role in bringing attention to the humanitarian crisis and advocating for the protection of Palestinian rights. However, its resolutions frequently lack tangible effects and remain largely symbolic. The impasse within the Security Council, exacerbated by the veto power of permanent members such as the United States—historically supportive of Israel—further diminishes the UN's effectiveness in this conflict. Consequently, while the UN may issue a multitude of resolutions, their implementation is often constrained, and prevailing geopolitical dynamics overshadow its initiatives. In this scenario, the UN's inability to enforce its resolutions has contributed to the ongoing nature of the conflict and the distress experienced by both Israelis and Palestinians. The international community, including the UN, continues to face challenges in addressing the fundamental political, territorial, and human rights issues that sustain the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Base on the above findings, the study recommends a reform of the Security Council that will eliminate the veto power concerning specific matters of peace and security as well as empowering the UN to undertake more decisive actions in conflict resolution. It equally recommends that the UN should prioritize investment in impartial third-party mediation initiatives. It should recruitment experienced diplomats who maintain neutrality and are not affiliated with any of the principal powers engaged in the conflict. A more robust and targeted diplomatic approach is crucial to encourage both parties to return to the negotiating table. Additionally, the UN must investigate alternative enforcement strategies that do not solely depend on Security Council mandates. This may involve closer cooperation with regional organizations such as the Arab League or the European Union to exert diplomatic and economic pressure on both Israel and Palestine to comply with UN resolutions. Furthermore, it is imperative for the UN to ensure that its resolutions emphasize tangible human rights outcomes rather than merely focusing on political negotiations. A human rights-oriented strategy could incorporate more effective monitoring systems, targeted sanctions, and mechanisms for international accountability regarding breaches of international law. Finally, the UN should persist in advocating for a two-state solution as the foundational framework for resolving the conflict. It must enhance its efforts to tackle the fundamental issues of borders, refugees, settlements, and security, thereby providing a viable pathway for peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine.

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