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The Impact of US - Israel vs. Iran and Israel vs. Gaza War on Multilateralism and the UN

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Introduction

The formation of United Nations (UN) can be traced back to the post-World War II era where the nations collapsed, and populations distraught were looking towards a long-term commitment to peace. With a heavy death toll and the subsequent failure of the treaty of Versailles, it was apparent that there was a dire need for a better, functional, and sovereign authority to perpetuate stability throughout the regions. Through the formation of UN, there has been a rise in globalization as well as multilateralism. Multilateralism is a diplomatic approach where three or more countries coordinate their national policies and collaborate to solve global problems. It provides a framework for nations to agree on shared rules, promote global stability, and address borderless challenges like climate change and economic development through international institutions. The UN assists and keeps a check on the countries collaborating together. Recently, due to the war between US. Israel- Iran and Israel- Gaza, the mass scale economic and cultural exchange once seen has plundered into distrust and a scenario best described by policy analysts as World War III.

The conflict between Iran and US. Israel highlights the irrelevance of international organizations in resolving global conflicts. It indicates the corrosion of the systems over time that were built to survive and makes the fragility of nations in a rule-based international order despite its anarchic tendencies painfully evident. It also highlights the lineage of neoliberal globalization that the states carry, which is the weight of the multilateral organizations such as World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) that place debts onto the economies of the third world countries

in the name of economic liberation. Although these wars threaten the world order, but was it ever worth saving to begin with? With the global south and north being established soon after the formation of these organizations and trampling other states with debt despite the exploitation of those regions, it raises questions on the idea of political pluralism being advocated by the aggressors themselves.

Problem Statement

The rising conflicts have not only weakened the trust in international organizations but has made the humanitarian crisis impossible to handle with great power rivalries limiting collective decision making. Do the hostile foreign policies of Iran towards US and Israel strengthen self-sustaining tendencies fostering stable and long-term growth or will the emerging new world order trample the US opposing bloc. This policy brief examines the repercussions of opposition and whether it is possible to let go of the petrodollar economy to revitalize local currencies and the impact it creates on multilateralism and the crippled institutions of the UN.

US, Israel and Iran

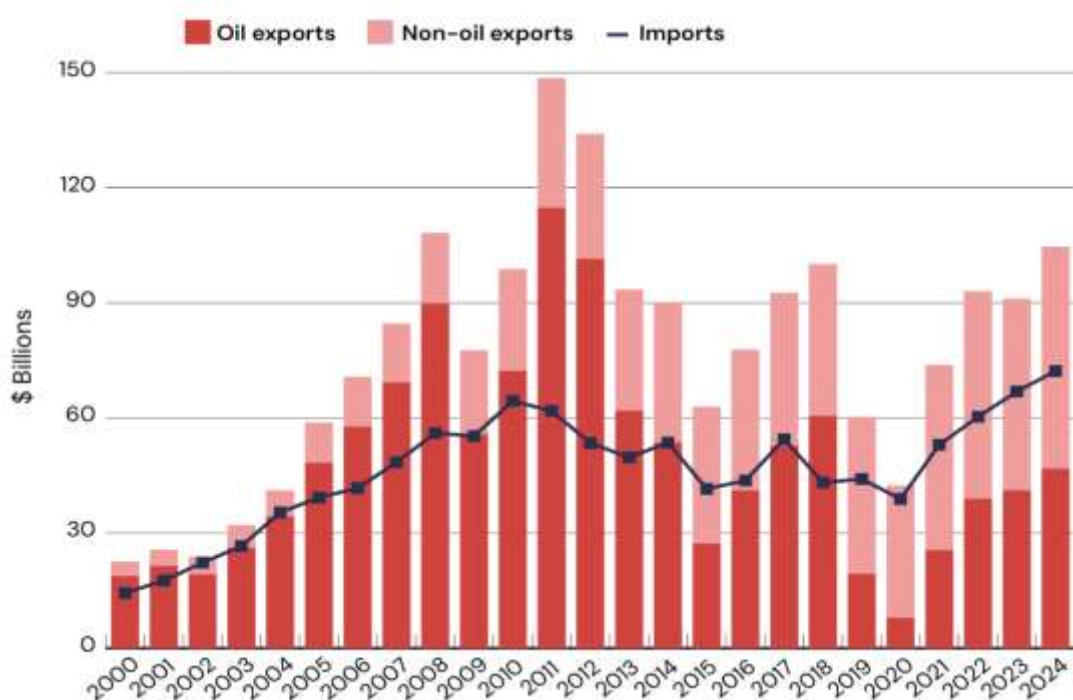
The joint airstrikes took place on February 28 targeting Iran's leadership, military installations preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and degrading proxy networks all leading to the systemic degradation of the Iranian government.

Effect on Multilateralism and the UN

During the preliminary stages of the attack, the Security Council failed to conjure up any meaningful response. It did not authorize any measures to mitigate the effects of the current crisis neither did it stop the conflict from escalating. Although lacking in its efforts, it did not fail to establish its double standards to the world. The resolution passed by the UN later on exhibited residual willingness at best. It mentions none of the initial US-Israeli strikes on Iran, which were the cause of the conflict, and nor does it address the legality of the strikes especially the death of Ayatollah Khamenei. Under the UN Security Council's supervision, unilateral military actions which were once an exception and worthy of strict retaliatory actions have now become the norm for the western states. It raises a question that does geographical placement, or better, the affiliations with the western states earn a privilege to do as they please or does the UN's unbiased structure to protect the fundamental norms still exist?

This practice has been followed since many years and has further undermined the credibility of UN and its institutions, but another player of multilateralism also exists. Formed not long after the UN is the European Union which was built to fund peace on the basis multilateral cooperation and the non-violent resolution of disputes. The EU acts as a normative power resolving conflicts through soft power but the guise of duality only lasts so long in the face of violence that threatens human rights. In this dog-eat-dog world, Europe seems helpless. France, Denmark, Greece, Latvia and the UK all express a deep concern about civilian casualties, with France, Germany and the UK. issuing a joint statement condemning Iran for retaliatory attacks against neighbours in the Gulf. Side-lining the fact that the UK was not informed about the initial attacks, yet in its recent statements it shows reluctance to break with Washington completely. In the face of the Iran war, it keeps on sabotaging itself in internal quarrels demonstrating a disappointing end to the legacy once seen by European leadership that brokered the Iran nuclear deal.

The third point of our discussion is multilateralism. Iran's strategy of evasion by keeping trade, finance and oil exports moving have been taking place with likeminded nations with a hostile foreign policy towards US. It has not isolated itself but connected deeply in its region. Tehran has thus far developed shadow banking channels, reflagged vessels, informal payment systems, diversion from the dollar and exchange houses etc. to keep Iran afloat.



Evasion technique to bypass restrictions by the US had been its strength although it seems to be transforming into its weakness now that the war has forced countries to choose affiliations. Its trade partners, which numbered 157 in 2010, declined to 142 in 2023. China replaced the EU as the main trading partner and became the largest buyer of Iranian oil, importing 80 – 90% of Iran's crude oil. The survival of Iran benefits China's interests in context to division of the US for which Beijing has invested thousands in.

- The United Arab Emirates remained a crucial commercial, logistical, and financial gateway but the situation might differ now after the recent attacks.
- Bahrain described missile strikes on civilian infrastructure and residential areas as "a grave threat to international and regional peace and security."
- The representative of the League of Arab states, Ambassador Abdul-Aziz Al-Shamsi linked the crisis to the broader Israeli Palestinian conflict, warning that the "Arab Israeli conflict has expanded into a full- scale regional war."
- Afraid of escalation and subsequent humanitarian consequences for civilians, Somalian representatives stated on behalf of other African members "Sustainable peace can only be achieved through diplomacy, not through force,"
- In contrast, China and Russia sharply condemned the strikes. China describes the operation as "brazen," emphasizing that Iran's sovereignty "must be respected" and urging an immediate cessation of military action.

This war not only affects multilateralism directly related to the war but in other aspects as well.

- The prolonged war has allowed Russia to reinforce its air operations as the missile interceptors provided by the US fall short for the Kyiv, as US is currently depleting its resources in its own war, Russia is most likely to win the Russia-Ukraine war. Similarly, the US sanctions on Moscow have been reduced as well to lower energy prices which seems to have boosted Russia's economy.
- Furthermore, the ships used for deterrence in the western pacific has raised concerns for the security of Taiwan. To strengthen operations around the Strait

of Hormuz, Taiwan is left vulnerable. If the conflict is stretched further, it is impossible for the US to resist the depletion of its capabilities and opposing China from gaining control of Taiwan.

Israel - Gaza War

On October 7, 2023, militant members of Hamas attacked military bases and towns in Southern Israel from Gaza, where 1200 were killed and over 5000 injured. The group also took 240 Israelis hostage. In retaliation, Israel immediately launched a massive attack on Gaza, home to 2.3 million people mainly who were the refugees following the 1948 conflict.

Israel's campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing has already been in action for more than a year. The live streamed bombings, unethical chemical warfare and on ground invasions have resulted in 41,000 deaths, 96,000 injured, an estimated 10,000 missing and more than 2 million people forcibly displaced. The famine caused is due to constant blockade of aid coming internationally. 70% of all infrastructure has been totally destroyed. Even basic International Humanitarian Laws have been violated with no mercy shown to even medical aid or media personnel.

Regional and Global Implications

The UN is currently in deadlock due to the power imbalance in the governing UN bodies. All member states of the UN have an equal vote in the General Assembly. On the other hand, Security Council's five permanent members have veto powers while the remaining can only vote. Due to this, a single member of the UN can overpower the will of the majority of the states.

The votes for a ceasefire in Gaza have been countless. The US has used its veto against the vote of 12 states on October 18, against 120 states on October 27 and on December 12. This has now been done over 30 times as of now. Efforts to secure a ceasefire despite many previous violations continue. Due to this, the UN is undermined in having an effective role multilateral conflict resolution. These half-hearted reforms have left the accountability of the gravest international crimes in the hands of the proprietor. Although this must not be allowed to continue yet the global multilateral system has not responded the call that needs much to be answered. This shows a radically flawed post WWII multilateralism. The genocide in Palestine is evidence that

a new architecture of multilateralism, which currently serves neoliberal globalization, must be built with reformed and independent institutions as the foundation.

Several structural realists believe that bipolarity is much stable than multi-polarity with 2 actors matching each other's powers and minimising the likelihood of war. Yet we see multi-polarity today instead of multilateralism. The situation is as follows

- South Africa has submitted an application against Israel requesting provisional measures, addressing Israel to not engage in genocide. The 84-page application exhaustively covers the evidence of genocidal acts of Israel on Gaza.
- The Abraham accord and the Balfour declaration which had opened defence and security opportunities has been hindered.
- Bahrain has cut economic ties with Israel and recalled its ambassadors, so has Jordan
- Jordan has vocally protested Israel's actions and Egypt's support for Palestine has been consistent.
- Turkey normalized relations with Israel in 2022 but after openly criticising western supporters of Israel and supporting Hamas, calling it a liberation group rather than a terrorist group. Despite this stance, turkey indicates neutrality by halting negotiations with Hamas.
- The US and Israel had already been deeply intertwined, with 250 US legislatures going to Israel to pledge allegiance, while other countries sought out their benefits.
- The UK pledged diplomatic, intelligence, and security support to Israel when needed.
- Russia and China's vested interests in the region and globally have a massive role in prolonging the conflict. Additionally, Russia has seen the Israel-Hamas war in its favour as it has distracted the US much like the US- Iran war.

Nevertheless, the active complicity of the Global North in perpetuating this cannot be denied.

Discussion

If we look at precedent cases, the Cuban missile crisis led to the nuclear test ban treaty, the cold war led to the strategic arms limitation talks and this current war may also just lead to a reassessment of the existing frameworks. Although there are multiple sides of the nuclear deterrence theory, but the pessimist's paradox is most applicable on President Trump who uses factitious notions to stop Iran and in turn further integrate the petrodollar economy against BRICs agenda. Furthermore, United States remains one of the largest suppliers of conventional arms, accounting for almost 43% of global arms exports in FY2020- 2024 while ironically positioning itself as the principal critic of nuclear proliferation. It seems that Washington prefers a world in which other possess weapons, but not necessarily the strategic autonomy on their usage.

The rhetoric of multilateralism has done nothing but strengthen the influence of the west who had deep roots after the WW2, giving it a structural advantage. When a state's head, who is accused of human rights violations, speaks about the regime changes due to oppression while simultaneously bombing a school in the other country, it makes it clear that the problem lies within the hands of the self-proclaimed 'reformer'. The idea of political pluralism which discusses the norms, human rights and economic liberation has been subject to selective application ever since it came into being. From ignoring women rights violations in Saudi Arabia, hindering economic autonomy in Guatemala, and funding ICE while calling immigrants 'animals', these US practices have broken the 3 core ideas of political pluralism. Additionally, in the process of legitimization of dehumanization, it is clear that geography can appear to be the determinant of the value of human life. When suffering occurs within the orbit of western alliances, it becomes a crisis demanding attention while if it constitutes of people from third world countries, it is then rendered politically invisible.

These recent events expose the structural and administrative flaws of the UN. It is evident that the UN has lost in the very endeavour it was created for. From blood-stricken streets of Gaza, exploitation of resources in Congo, and the breach of territorial integrity in Iran and Lebanon, the failures of UN are numerous. To ensure stability, the board of peace is created following the same pattern. After actively

cleansing the population of Palestine and cramming them to small spaces, the board of peace has been given its task to rebuild Gaza. Keeping in mind the fact that this organization has no Palestinian representatives. This whole situation seems oddly familiar with the emergence of US as a superpower in the unipolar world. The pattern of these isolated events when brought together stitches the fabric of agenda 2030, a plan supported by both the US and Israel. Reduced international consensus points to the deterioration of existing frameworks. The current situation is not bringing peace and stability; it is rearranging the world as we know it.

Policy Recommendations

To tackle ongoing conflicts and to prevent further ones from escalating, the policy recommendations are as follows

- Preventative diplomacy through UN mediation should be strengthened although it also relies on political willingness.
- A faster response mechanism should be developed by the Security Council during humanitarian conflicts. Strict sanctions, legal accountability and diplomatic isolation should be enforced to set examples stressing over the fact that human rights are not breach able under any circumstances. Similarly, permanent members should not be allowed to veto on any decision involving human rights disruption or ceasefires.
- There should be an increase in cooperation between the UN and the regional organizations.
- An active police force should be provided to the UN to enforce the punishments, and an unbiased committee should be formed to examine, inspect and give verdicts on situations free from pressure and alliances.

Conclusion

The overlapping crisis of the Iran versus US- Israel and Israel- Gaza war has exposed the structural limits of the UN and the fragility of multilateralism. These conflicts exhibit the rivalries of great powers, veto politics and the biased “neutrality” of the UN. The deafening silence of the UN in the face of escalating violence highlights the imbalance between the global north and global south. For policymakers, the lesson is

clear; unless reforms addressing the dominance of hegemonies and lack of accountability are introduced, multilateralism's risks being symbolic more than a reality. The institutions, without such changes, will remain vulnerable to being sidelined in these situations where the thing needed most is collective action.

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