

FORUM: THE INTERNATIONAL, RESPONSES TO GAZA, AND THE QUESTION OF THE PALESTINIANS

PINAR BILGIN, MONICA HERZ, VIVIENNE JABRI, AND NIZAR MESSARI

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DEDICATION NOTE

This forum is dedicated to Prof. Dr. Fuat Keyman in acknowledgement of his scholarly advocacy of countless worthy causes—as a true public intellectual. Fuat Hoca was a believer in "speaking truth to power" in the Saidian sense of the term.[1] His engagements with the policy world (which were crystallized in Istanbul Policy Center) and his scholarship (including even the most abstract theoretical elaborations)[2] were always crafted with an eye on what is happening in the world.

"Speaking truth to power" is sometimes dismissed by skeptics who insist that those in decision-making positions ("power") are not lacking in terms of the most correct information about events or policy advice ("truth") but that they merely do not want to do the right thing. In the case outlined in this collection, Israel's war on Gaza, this entails failing to follow the precepts of international law and holding violators accountable. Therefore, the skeptics insist that "power" has access to the "truth"; it just does not want to pursue it.

Such skepticism, however, is rooted in a narrow understanding of "power." It is not only those who make state policies who have "power." Non-state actors also have power, albeit of a different kind. The power that people and civil society organizations wield is different but not to be underestimated. If it were not for civil society actors' activism, numerous corporations and governments would not be shamed into minimizing their economic dealings with Israel after its well-documented[3] failure to adhere to the laws of war in Gaza. If it were not for students' activism, numerous governments would not have been shamed into freezing their military relations with Israel. If it were not for such activism, several governments would not have been shamed into supporting South Africa's ICJ case. Non-state actors matter. When scholars speak the "truth," they speak to a broader audience—not only (or necessarily) to policymakers.

It is in this spirit of "speaking truth to power," even at a moment in time characterized by post-truth conditions, that we dedicate this forum to Fuat Hoca.

Pınar Bilgin, Ankara, July 8, 2025

1 Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (Vintage, 1994).

2 See, for example, E. Fuat Keyman, *Globalization, State, Identity/Difference: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Relations* (Humanity Books, 1991).

3 Francesa Albanese, "From economy of occupation to economy of genocide, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967," June 30, 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session59/advance-version/a-hrc-59-23-aev.pdf.

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INTRODUCTION

Vivienne Jabri
King's College London

The war on Gaza raises profound questions about the international as a distinct location of politics that is confronted with the extremes of violence and atrocity against populations. By definition, and as recognized by the settled juridical-political framing of the international, the sovereignty of states goes hand in hand with the recognition that there is another realm, that of humanity. Expressed primarily in the laws of war and international humanitarian law, with conventions against genocide and torture, we have a framework that recognizes suffering, calls for judgement and justification where violence takes place, and ultimately provides the mechanisms through which perpetrators might be held to account. The framework also raises questions of solidarity, where juridical mechanisms require mobilization. These are general questions we can ask in relation to violent conflict across the world. At the same time, we can ask them, as this Forum does, in relation to Gaza and the Palestinians.

We see here that the suffering of the Palestinians and their rights have historically been subject to nonrecognition but have also produced expressions of solidarity. Contributors to the Forum consider the international in its multiple iterations, but also how such iterations come to be articulated in relation to the Palestinians and Israel. As Pınar Bilgin highlights, there is no simple North/South divide when it comes to the question of solidarity with the Palestinians and the recognition of their humanity. She and Nizar Messari place the lens on Arab state reactions and juxtapose these with the Arab public across states. Both suggest that the international and its meaning can and has produced different responses, revealing what Bilgin argues, against both realist and English School understandings, is a hierarchical ordering of an anarchic international system. We see through Monica Herz's contribution, that far-right political entities, in Israel and across the world, including the Global South, seek a nationalist, anti-democratic, anti-cosmopolitan understanding of the international, in and through their relations with Israel.

The international is at once both a spatial and temporal realm of politics. It has a specificity constituted by the modern idea of political community and self-determination. As Vivienne Jabri highlights, the anti-colonial struggles that led to decolonization produced a distinctly postcolonial international, understood by postcolonial populations as a source of rights in recognition of their struggles against colonial violence and domination. This is the context in which South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice can be understood. This Forum, therefore, places the lens on the international *and* the human as both pertain to the question of the Palestinians.

HIERARCHY IN ANARCHICAL SOCIETY: ARAB STATES AND THE GAZA WAR

Pınar Bilgin
Bilkent University

As part of its response to Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, Israel broke with its past practice of endeavoring to justify its actions in the eyes of the laws of war. At the time of writing, 22 months into the war, Israel's defiance of international law—targeting hospitals and healthcare and aid workers and refusing to allow civilians access to food—is no less than obvious. When South Africa sought to hold Israel accountable by bringing a case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2023, thirteen states declared their intervention. Noticeably, only two of these were Arab states: Libya and Palestine. The limits of solidarity that many Arab states exhibited during this case as well as the Gaza war as a whole need to be explained not only because Arab states share a colonial past with the Palestinians or because they hail from the Global South, as do some other backers of South Africa's ICJ case,[4] but also because they were once champions of the Palestinians, seeking to bring their cause to the world's attention.

While it is tempting to think of our global failure to respond to the Palestinian predicament in terms of a clash between two contending understandings—"the international as anarchical" informing Israel's powerful allies in North America and Western Europe and "the international as hierarchical" informing those less powerful actors who actively supported South Africa's case at the ICJ—a closer look at our global response to the Gaza war reveals cross-cutting alignments (see also Jabri's and Herz's contributions to this forum). In particular, the failure of some Arab states to stand in solidarity with the Palestinians, even as some in the Global North have not only professed but also practiced solidarity, needs to be understood in a way that leaves room for understanding state socialization into anti-/solidaristic behavior in ways that do not overlap with the North/South divide. I argue that this complexity can be better understood through a more sociological concept: "hierarchy in anarchical society."[5] By including the anarchical, hierarchical, and sociological elements, this concept allows greater insight into how Arab states that once championed the Palestinian cause were, over the years, socialized into overtly pursuing regime security over and above that of the humanity of Arab peoples, including Palestinians. Such anti-solidaristic behavior has become starkly apparent during the Gaza war.

The International as Anarchical (Society)

At first glance, our global failure to hold Israel accountable for its violations of the laws of war comes across as an affirmation of the "international as anarchical." It does indeed seem that the powerful only follow the law when it serves their interests while overlooking the violations of their allies. Thus far, every attempt to get the UN Security Council to sanction Israel has been blocked by one or more of the permanent members. Some also came to Israel's defense at the ICJ.

In contrast to such cynicism toward international law, English School scholars remind us that states created international law for a purpose: to escape the worst of anarchy. Highlighting the society-like quality of the relations between states, they offer the concept of an "anarchical society." As evidence of the solidaristic reflexes this society has developed, they point to the UN mechanism of intervention, the latest instantiation of which is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). While UN-mandated intervention has been a rare occurrence, it is the explanations offered to justify inaction that the English School scholars take as evidence that the international is society-like. Such explanations include the argument that states do not just fail to stand in solidarity with the victims but that they offer justifications that resort to the "humans versus citizens" quandary, i.e., helping fellow humans in distant lands may contradict our obligations toward fellow citizens.

4 "Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)," International Court of Justice, accessed June 5, 2025, https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192.

5 Pinar Bilgin, *The International in Security, Security in the International* (Routledge, 2016).

If we use this mental picture of the international to think about the Gaza war, do we encounter the "humans versus citizens" quandary? On the one hand, our obligation to the Palestinians as fellow humans involves severing military ties with Israel. Is there an "on the other hand" to this argument? Not to my knowledge. One cannot, then, but conclude that those states that refuse to sever military ties with Israel do not do so by resolving the "humans versus citizens" quandary in favor of the latter. Rather, they seem to fail to acknowledge the humanity of the Palestinians. Failing to acknowledge the humanity of fellow human beings, in turn, must be recognized for being what it is: "hierarchical."

The International as Hierarchical

While the English School narrative is correct in pointing out that international law works most of the time, it is also misleading in that the law does not apply everywhere or to everyone in the same manner. Unacknowledged and under-analyzed inequalities between peoples and states are baked into the international. It should not be surprising that the descendants of those once treated as less-than-civilized conceive of the international as "hierarchical." Furthermore, this is not merely historical baggage but a present-day reality due to inconsistencies in practicing international law. Our global failure to stand with South Africa before the ICJ is the latest instance of such inconsistency. Those who refuse to sever military ties with Israel without offering any justification for doing so (other than citing the horrific attack by Hamas) come across as failing to acknowledge the humanity of the Palestinians and their right to equal treatment under international law.

What do we make of the limits of solidarity exhibited by many Arab states? On the one hand, they, too, have a historical experience of being treated as less-than-civilized and their humanity not being recognized. It is this experience that previously allowed them to identify Israel's treatment of the Palestinians as "settler colonialism." On the other hand, during the Gaza war, Arab states barely followed South Africa's lead in demanding that Israel obey the laws of war. While it is possible to explain the limits of solidarity exhibited by many Arab states with reference to the dire situation many find themselves in either politically or economically or both, there is also an overall decline in solidarity among Arab states (see Messari in this forum).

During the 1960s and 1970s, when solidarity with the Palestinians was at an all-time high in the Arab world, the League of Arab States (LAS) would take the lead in imposing sanctions on Israel or an oil embargo on its close allies. The 1991 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait became a turning point in this regard. By failing to condemn the Iraqi invasion, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat inadvertently provided some with the opportunity to distance themselves from the Palestinian cause. Following the 1991 war, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members used Arafat's position as a pretext to decry inter-Arab solidarity. To quote GCC Secretary General Abdallah Bishara:

> We in the Gulf and the people of Kuwait have paid the price of fixed emotional positions and of basing our policy on so-called solidarity [...] My view of the Arab future is based on a concept which destroys the myth of Arab fraternity, the myth of Arab security, and the myth of the one homeland. Future Arab links should be based on the Arab dimension of civilized interests, not on futile emotional theories.[6]

This was an early instance of anti-solidaristic behavior being framed as "civilized interest," with solidarism being dismissed as a "futile emotional [theory]." Bishara's words indicate how Arab states were gradually socialized into regime security and away from Arab solidarity. For example, in Morocco, King Hassan II's critics had adopted the slogan "Taza before Gaza" to call for focusing on the domestic at the expense of the international. Since ascending to the throne in 1999, King Mohamed VI has paid heed to this slogan, which was revived once again during the Gaza war.[7]

The next turning point came with the Arab uprisings, when many Arab regimes found themselves on the same side as Israel: to protect regime security against the potent power of Arab solidarity. Since then, many Arab regimes followed the lead of the GCC to distance themselves from the Palestinian cause and establish close ties with Israel. The Abraham Accords (2020) marked the crystallization of these efforts, providing

6 Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "A New Arab Order? Regional Security After the Gulf War," *Orient* 34, no. 2 (1991): 225.

7 Younes Hassar, "Between Taza and Gaza," *al Majalla,* last updated January 30, 2014, https://en.majalla.com/2014/01/article55248295/between-taza-and-gaza; "'Taza before Gaza' tops social media trends in Morocco," *Aldar*, May 2, 2025, https://en.aldar.ma/?p=6459. Morocco also signed the Abraham Accords in 2020. See, Pınar Bilgin, "Chronicle of a post-October 7 'Middle East Order' foretold," *APSA MENA Politics Newsletter* Spring 2025, https://apsamena.org/mena-politics-newsletter/.

the signatories with access to Israel's unparalleled surveillance technology and spyware capabilities.

After Hamas' October 7 attack and the subsequent Israeli devastation of Gaza, as Israel's breach of the laws of war became impossible to overlook, Arab states found themselves in a bind. If they aligned with the solidaristic demands of the Arab public, they risked alienating Israel and their access to its surveillance technology, spyware, and intelligence capabilities, which are critical components in security governance. Over time, as Israel's military campaign progressed throughout and even extended into Lebanon, Arab states' continued refusal to intervene in the ICJ case meant that their socialization into anti-solidarist behavior was now complete.

In conclusion, Arab states' apparent lack of solidarity with the Palestinians in the present day is better captured as responding to an international understood as "hierarchy in anarchical society." This concept, I submit, offers more insight into global responses to the Palestinian predicament during the Gaza war by capturing the hierarchical, anarchical, and sociological aspects. The hierarchical is in the differentiated treatment some receive, often under the guise of applying the law. The anarchical is the absence of a central authority to turn to when international law is not followed. The sociological concerns state socialization, which may include coming to appreciate the value of international law; it may also include learning to justify inaction through resorting to the "humans versus citizens" quandary. In the case of the above-mentioned Arab states, the quandary is warped: they cannot forego military ties with Israel, because they need those tools to control their citizens for purposes of regime security. In this logic, the humanity of Palestinians is not just overlooked—it does not get mentioned.

THE PALESTINIANS, THE ARABS, AND THE INTERNATIONAL

Nizar Messari
Al Akhawayn University

The relationship of the Palestinian people with the international has taken two distinct forms: violence against them and resistance. All Palestinians—from Gaza and the West Bank, from refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, or elsewhere—have suffered from acts of violence, and all have exhibited different modalities of resistance. The reaction of "Arabs"[8] to violence against the Palestinians as well as to their acts of resistance has depended on who they are: state leaders have often exhibited faint solidarity with the Palestinians, while the Arab people have consistently expressed solidarity and unicity with the Palestinians. These reactions of the Arabs have also exhibited two understandings of identity in the international: while the Arab people have consistently resorted to an identity that is defined in an ample manner—in other words, an Arab "we" that is inclusive of the Palestinians—their leaders have preferred national identities.[9] In the present discussion, I explore the significance of these four reactions to the understanding of the international by the Palestinians and by the Arabs.

I start first with the Palestinians experiencing violence, and with the Nakba of 1948, when United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181—which established the state of Israel and the state of Palestine and which was rejected by the existing Arab states—translated into a loss of land, of statehood, and ultimately, of agency by the Palestinians. In that moment, the existing Arab states took tutorship of the Palestinian cause and committed to defend it. But instead of achieving Palestinian statehood, Arab states led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the popular and populist Arab nationalist who served as the president of Egypt, were defeated by the Israeli army in 1967, which cost Arab states the loss of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, as well as the Sinai and the Golan Heights. Since 1948, civilian Palestinians have been confronted by Israeli violence in many massacres (Kafr Qasim in 1956, Khan Yunis also in 1956, and the Temple Mount Killings of 1990, among many others), and then in the first Intifada (which started at the end of 1987) and in the second Intifada (which started in September 2000). Since the start of the 21st century, Hamas' multiple confrontations with Israel have resulted in widespread, indiscriminate Israeli violence against the Palestinians, which often resulted in collective punishments of the civilian population (the most noteworthy of which took place in 2008, 2014, 2018, and since 2023). It is also important to note that violence against Palestinians was not exclusively Israeli: Palestinians were also massacred in September 1970 by the Jordanian army, then in the summer of 1982 in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila by the Lebanese Phalange. In most of these acts of violence against the Palestinians, there have been very few international sanctions and only mild calls to the aggressors for restraint.

Despite all this violence against them, Palestinians have resisted suppression and have shown resilience in keeping their issue alive. In 1965, Palestinian groups created the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as a major step to seize the regional and international stages and speak on their own behalf. As Albert Hourani noticed, Arab states—including Nasser's Egypt— were constantly paying lip service to the Palestinian cause while defending their own interests through the Palestinian issue, which left the Palestinians no alternative but to claim the right to speak for themselves. In 1974, the PLO was recognized by the Arab League as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Another instance of resistance of the Palestinians started by the end of 1987, as already mentioned, when Palestinian youth started the first Intifada. In the early 1990s, the PLO joined what became known as the Oslo Peace Process, which resulted in the agreement signed in the White House by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and U.S. President Bill Clinton, in September 1993, which allowed them to establish the Palestinian Authority.

8 I use Arabs in this text to refer to the inhabitants of the region, despite the concept's many limitations. I do so following the writings of Albert Hourani and Bahgat Korany. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Harvard University Press, 1991); Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States – The Challenge of Globalization* (The American University in Cairo Press, 2010).

9 Hourani thoroughly discusses the evolution of this debate.

And what have been the reactions of Arab leaders? Arab states have constantly pretended to put the Palestinian cause at the top of their priorities, while they consistently have either used it to serve their own interests or have plainly ignored it. A reminder is timely here: in 1981, the Arab League approved its first peace plan—the Prince Fahd peace plan—which set out to do two things: first, it adhered to the principle of exchanging peace for land, meaning that Arab states would live in peace with Israel if Israel gave back Palestinians their land. Second, by accepting that principle, it implicitly recognized the state of Israel. It is notable that the Arab League reached that decision after Egypt had signed the Camp David Accords, in which it defended its own interests, but it abandoned Palestinians to their own destiny. In other words, what the Arab League recognized with the Fahd peace plan was that there was no space for separate peace treaties between Arab states and Israel, as the main asset that Arab states had to leverage against Israel was to conclude a collective peace treaty through which they would secure a Palestinian state. Since then, history has shown that this is not what has happened. Arab states have reached normalization accords with Israel, and separate peace treaties have been concluded, the latest of which were the Abraham Accords of 2020. With that, not only have Arab states abandoned the Palestinians to their own destiny, but they have also turned their back on their cause.[10] In this sense, most Arab states and their leaders have dealt with the Palestinian issue as an international issue, not a national one, and consequently, they reflected traditional state-centered classical realist thinking by considering that their commitment to that cause was a limited one, as it comes second to their national interests. Arab states have hence privileged an understanding of an international centered around sovereign states. Not people. Not communities. States!

Meanwhile, Arab people have often fundamentally disagreed with this understanding, as many have adhered either to the concepts of *qawmiya* (Arab nation) or *umma* (community).[11] They have considered the Palestinian issue as their own issue, and Palestinians as being part of "us," i.e., as part of "identity," not as part of difference. This has been evident in the large demonstrations of solidarity and support for the Palestinian cause regularly held all over many Arab states, as well as in the different events and manifestations of solidarity with the Palestinian cause held across the region. A subtext of these demonstrations and manifestations resides in the rejection of the normalization of states' ties with Israel.

This dichotomy of *umma*—or eventually, *qawmyia*—vs. state sovereignty is not new and has existed for a hundred plus years in the region.[12] While local political leaders and elites have reinforced the logic of sovereign states, many social movements defended a pan-Islamic—or, during a short but significant parenthesis, a pan-Arab—identity, and although these identities were not necessarily mutually exclusive, they exhibited different understandings of to who we/us/they referred, and consequently, what was the international in which it was inserted.

It is this unsolvable paradox centered on the dichotomy of the sovereign state vs. the *umma*/*qawmyia* that is at the center of the identity of political actors in the region. It has molded the "us and them," the "we," and the international, and as long as sharp contours are given to the dichotomy, it will feed the tensions and nurture the instability[13] in the "world of the Arabs." Hence, in a certain way, the dynamics of violence and resistance that characterize the Palestinian people have had an impact on the world of the Arabs, too.

10 There have been exceptions to this state of things. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a Steadfastness and Confrontation Front constituted by Algeria, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and the PLO, which objected to any accommodation of Israel and advocated for the necessity of confrontation.

11 *Qawmyia* is a reference to a united Arab nation. *Umma* is a reference to Muslims constituting one single community. For more on this, refer to: Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples;* John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics,* 3rd ed. (Syracuse University Press, 1991); James Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation-States* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

12 Pinar Bilgin discusses this dichotomy in *Regional Security in the Middle East – A Critical Perspective,* 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2019).

13 The failure of the sovereign state in Lebanon, in Syria, in Libya, in Yemen, and in Sudan is not a new phenomenon. Before it, there was instability in Iraq, a long-standing civil war in Algeria, a weak state in Mauritania, and a continuing failed state in Somalia.

ISRAEL AND THE GLOBAL FAR RIGHT

Monica Herz
PUC-Rio

The rise of the far right in several countries as a transnational movement has become a focus of debate and research for at least the last ten years. Leaders, publications, publishing companies, study groups, conferences, online platforms, and organizations today in circulation attest to the strength of this movement. The far right has become mainstream in many countries such as France and has been in power in several others such as Hungary and the United States. Donald Trump as President of the United States has galvanized far-right groups across the world. Although the global far right is diverse and fluid, it articulates connections between agendas and positions.[14] The aspect of this trend we would like to investigate here pertains to the role Israel plays in this context, as both an actor and an idea.[15] The far right has also been present in Israel dating back to the Kahanist movement, a religious-nationalist Jewish supremacist ideology based on the ideas of Rabbi Meir Kahane, and the current Israeli governing coalition includes three far-right parties that ran as an alliance, Religious Zionism: *Otzma Yehudit* (Jewish Power), the National Religious – Religious Zionist party, and *Noam*. But, here, the focus is on the meaning of Israel as an idea and its policies for the global far right.

In a recent chapter, we have attempted to point out several features of these movements, trying to build a significantly abstract ideal type that would allow for the detection of a transnational movement.[16] We pointed out that six features characterize these movements, although in each historical case, approximation between the pillars of the ideal type and the political reality differ: 1) the opposition to core elements of liberal democracies and the liberal international order; 2) the rejection of the relation between rights and progress; 3) the search for a homogeneous political community where the state's protection of the primordial nation is emphasized and the differences between political communities or civilizations is opposed to cosmopolitan or humanistic visions and universal principles and norms; 4) the logic of the friend-enemy; 5) the legitimation of the use of force in contrast to an emphasis on norms and negotiations; 6) the reference to an idealized past, often equated with Judeo-Christian civilization, that legitimizes traditions and hierarchies. These elements explain the firm opposition to the post-World War II multilateral institutions as part of the global liberal world they are fighting. Since this fight is pursued in terms of a cultural struggle, some ideas Israel represents become a relevant part of their discourse.

Relations between Israel and far-right parties are part of this scenario.[17] Talks with Spain's Vox, the Sweden Democrats, and France's National Rally are a departure from previous behaviour as Israeli governments had maintained a boycott of those parties connected to past fascist experiences and antisemitism. Jordan Bardella, leader of France's National Rally party, for instance, was invited to speak at a conference on antisemitism in Israel in March 2025, organized by Amichai Chikli, Israel's minister for diaspora affairs.[18]

Far-right leaders across Europe, in search of mainstream acceptance, are seeking common cause with Israel in demonizing Muslims sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose party has long seen itself as a natural ally of right-wing movements and far-right leaders in Europe.[19] Hungary has become a second home for far-right leaders and activists, and in April 2025, Orbán welcomed Netanyahu with open arms. As the ICC had issued warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, Hungary withdrew from the ICC. The Israeli prime minister and this

14 Rita Abrahamsen et al., *World of the Right: Radical Conservatism and Global Order* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 17.

15 Michel Gherman, *O Judeu Imaginário no Bolsonarismo: A Tentativa de Colonização do Judaísmo Brasileiro pelo Fascismo Tropical* (Editora Fósforo, 2022).

16 Giancarlo Summa and Monica Herz (eds.), *Multilateralismo na Mira A direita radical no Brasil e na América Latina* (Hucitec & Editora PUC, 2024).

17 Giovanni Legorano, "Israel Is Ready to Embrace Europe's Far Right," *Foreign Policy*, May 9, 2025, https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/05/09/israel-is-ready-to-embrace-europes-far-right/.

18 Ibid.

19 Dani Filc and Sharon Pardo, "Israel's Right-Wing Populists: The European Connection," *Survival* 63, no. 3 (2021): 99–122.

former minister of defense are being prosecuted for disrespecting international humanitarian law related to the international armed conflict between Israel and Palestine. In 2022, Israel's first Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) took place, a main meeting of the global far right.

In India, the Hindu far right has been supporting Israel's massacre in Gaza, focusing on the "common fight" against Muslims. The promotion of national identity based on religion, thus seeking a homogeneous community, has brought Indian Hindu far-right groups closer to Israel. Far-right parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Israel's Likud exploit the same rising anti-Muslim/Arab sentiment. The experience of violence has emboldened the emphasis on national security. The slow but steady approximation between Israel and India, as the latter became the largest purchaser of Israeli weapons, also opened the door to further approximation after the BJP came to power in 2014.[20] Moreover, by framing Palestinians and Kashmiri Muslims as ontological threats, the religious significance of these struggles was reinforced, allowing for further militarization and expropriation.

Israel has become an example for those seeking the redefinition of the political community in line with a homogenous vision. In 2018, Israel passed the "Nation-State Law" reestablishing Israel as the Jewish homeland and asserting its right to "promote and consolidate Jewish settlements." The law explicitly limited the right to self-determination within the state to Jewish citizens exclusively and stripped Arabic of its designation as an official language alongside Hebrew. Ben Shapiro, a conservative American media personality, mentioned during the 2022 CPAC meeting that Israel is "a country more solid in its identity than nearly any country on planet Earth."[21] A homogenous political community based on an ethnic-religious essence and mechanisms of exclusion as portrayed by the Israeli ruling elite fits very well with the far right's worldview. As they focus on fear, mistrust, and othering, they also elevate the role of leaders as protectors of the homogenous community. Benjamin Netanyahu is certainly seen as a master of this craft.

Religion is a powerful social force in galvanizing the idea of a homogeneous political community both in the Christian world, in India, and elsewhere. This follows the understanding that religion as a cultural reference is deeply embedded in many people's definition of national identity. Islam is often portrayed as an expression of the enemy. Far-right leaders such as Vladimir Putin of Russia, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, or Trump have all made appeals to religion, holding bibles and crucifixes in public appearances. Russia is typically seen as a bulwark against Western decadence powered by Anglo-American globalism, liberalism, and multiculturalism. By contrast, Putin is admired as a defender of Europe's spiritual and cultural (and in some cases, religious) heritage and an upholder of socially conservative values. In fact, religion has become a key source of identity for many far-right movements such as Christian nationalists or as the legitimation of conservative values. In the United States, the strong connection between religion and racism in white supremacy movements has profound historical roots. The Bible is the link with Israel as the Christian prophecies justify support for Israel. The foundational role of Judaism in Israeli nation-building is the model many far-right leaders pursue for their own countries as the Christian nationalist project does. In the West, Israel acquires a special meaning as the far right invests in an image of a movement saving the Judeo-Christian civilization from the decadence imposed by globalization and the cosmopolitan elite.

The use of violence by the Israeli state in Gaza and the West Bank is broadly documented and has been stimulated by the far-right coalition in power in Israel since 2022. In fact, the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories has brought the Israel Defence Forces and the country's private security industry international recognition for their urban warfare skills and related security technologies. The massacre of October 7, 2023 and Hezbollah's support was used as a window of opportunity for the intense increase in the use of violence against the Palestinian people and reignition of the discourses on insecurity, threat, and the friend-enemy grammar. Attacks on Lebanon, Syria, and Iran were also part of this context. The reality and depiction of Israel as a powerhouse of military might is an important element of attraction. The efficiency of and decision to use this apparatus is broadly praised by the global far right as a sign of superiority reaffirming the hierarchies upon which their worldview is based and the vision of the use of violence as natural and needed. Power is not to be limited by norms or balance but concentrated in

20 Asad Essa, *Hostile Homelands the New Alliance between India and Israel* (Pluto Press, 2023); Zara Farouk, *India, Israel, and the Politics of Control* (Washington New Lines Institute, 2025).

21 Simona Weinglass, "Ben Shapiro draws thousands to conservative, pro-Trump confab in Tel Aviv," *The Times of Israel*, July 21, 2022, https://www.timesofisrael.com/ben-shapiro-draws-thousands-to-conservative-pro-trump-confab-in-tel-aviv/.

order to serve the nation in a world of incommensurable differences and competition.[22]

Moreover, the far right tends to depict institutions such as the law, and international institutions in particular, as limits to the liberty of the individual, the family, or the sovereign. Brown's discussion about the conservative concept of liberty based on a "Darwinist" concept of social relations[23] is a potent support for our understanding of this aspect of the global far right. Israel has designed its foreign policy as a rejection of the limits imposed by international norms on the use of violence. Humanitarian law, human rights law, sovereign rights, or the non-proliferation treaty have all been disregarded. Far-right governments elsewhere may follow suit.

22 Abrahamsen et al., *World of the Right,* 158.

23 Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Anti-Democratic Politics in the West* (Columbia University Press, 2019).

THE INTERNATIONAL, PLURAL WORLDS, AND THE WAR ON GAZA

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There is no single interpretation of the war on Gaza, its devastations witnessed daily and on the global scale. In a war that seems to have no limits or no concern on the part of the protagonists for the humanity of those targeted, calls for judgement and accountability seem far removed from the seeming primacy of geostrategic and nationalist interests. There is, above all, the utter neglect of suffering as an element in a turbo-charged technological and calculative rationality steering this war with no end. In a post-World War II international order that sought to enhance both the normative and judicial grounding of the international, one of the discourses of which is the recognition of humanity as a universal premise, it seems that the international as such is another target, rendered vulnerable to a newly enlivened colonial order where specific populations are simply rendered dispensable. Impunity and complicity appear prevalent with gestures made temporally toward an "aftermath" or a "future" and spatially in the redrawing of limits and boundaries, yet the temporal and the spatial aspects of war against populations suggest that the very idea of limits is rendered meaningless.

The colonial rationality that renders an entire population dispensable assumes no moral, juridical, or even political limits for the unleashing of its violence against the vulnerable human bodies targeted, their lived spaces, and their very right to a history and subjectivity that proclaims a presence. It is this very presence, as Edward Said states in his *Question of Palestine*, that constitutes the point of resistance for the Palestinian people, and it is precisely this presence that then becomes a target in a war that seeks its annihilation. The postcolonial world, at least at the level of populations, and not so much in the portals of divided and complicit regimes, recognizes the script, for it was the very presence of the colonized that was and continues to be a target in a colonial order that refuses to acknowledge its dispossessive rationality based on race. Recognizing the script now in our 21st-century postcolonial international order comes with responsibility, however, and it is this that has marked the point of difference in the varied responses of the postcolonial world to the war.

This article focuses on the constitutive implications of responses to the war on Gaza, focusing specifically on the potentiality of a distinctly postcolonial response. I will first define the criteria by which a response might qualify as being "postcolonial." I will then place the lens on those moments of response that bear the imprint of the postcolonial international specifically, defining this as I move to consider such formative moments that I will argue deserve the mark of history and hence analytical and political recognition. Both intellectual moves are in many senses in themselves indicative of an analytic lens placed on the concept of "presence," as understood by Hannah Arendt[24] and as articulated by Edward Said in his iconic text.[25]

As indicated, what I am referring to as the script of the war on Gaza, and we might from henceforth include the wider war against the Palestinians of the West Bank, derives from a page that has its provenance in the colonial era: displacement and dispossession, the uses of extreme violence directed at individuals and populations, the use of violence in the control of movement, the racialization of populations as a core condition of the possibility for such violence, the use of war as a technology of control in the government of populations,[26] total surveillance with the use of checkpoints, the almost daily penetration of lived spaces, the routinization of intimidation and terror, the demolition of homes, incarceration without due process. Every subject colonized bears the imprint of such practices or at least traces of a remembered or inherited past.

These are traces of a remembered or inherited past that are also of the postcolonial present, a temporal manifestation of the postcolonial subject of politics, the inheritance of whom is at once also of anti-colonial struggle and calls for self-determination. The postcolonial world emerges onto the terrain of the international historically precisely through such struggle and through such claims to the international,

24 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1957).

25 Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (Vintage, 1992).

26 Vivienne Jabri, "War, Security and the Liberal State," *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 1 (2006): 47–64.

and hence to political subjectivity. Access to the international as sovereign entities did not mean an end to neocolonial control, as the Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah acknowledged on the eve of Ghana's independence, nor did it mean the wholesale "decolonization of the mind," to draw on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o,[27] but it did mean that the formerly colonized could from henceforth be present internationally, and with such presence have an impact on the constitution of a postcolonial international order that reflected postcolonial concerns, including the right to self-determination, the acknowledgement of "social rights" against racial discrimination, and so on.[28] Solidarity with the remaining colonized could also be expressed, and such efforts were historically directed at the liberation of Namibia, formerly South-West Africa, along with self-determination for the Palestinians.

It is the latter case that has historically challenged the postcolonial international. References to Namibia as the "last colony" seemed to only reinforce the negation of the Palestinians as a people with expressed identities relating to history, culture, and territory. Negation and the denial of rights seemed to go hand in hand with a still hostile discursive milieu backed up with violence and dispossession. The contingencies of power, symbolic, normative, and material, seemed stacked up against a population variously in exile or under siege. At the same time, recognition, albeit one that confirmed Palestinian losses and ultimately sanctioned a regime of mass displacement, came at the highest global institutional foundations of the international, so that it became simply impossible to render the Palestinians invisible. Yet, the negation continues to the present day, so that even a genocidal war in Gaza and the utter absence of protection for the Palestinians of the West Bank have not come with responses that come anywhere close to the laws and conventions premised on the universality of the human.

The absence of a coherent postcolonial response has rendered vulnerable the postcolonial international order, premised if only symbolically as this has been on a moment beyond colonial domination. Yet, while the hierarchy persists (as Bilgin highlights in this forum), the juridical-political construction of the international is historically of paramount constitutive significance for a postcolonial international that in turn sees itself in struggle for equality to the present day. Every moment of such struggle is reflexively a constitutive moment, significant in its assertion of presence for the postcolonial world, from the so-called Arab Street to every state and people that recognizes the colonial script and historic struggles for self-determination.

These are moments played out within the realm of the international, its juridical-political constitution. Thus, it is that South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) should not simply be read in terms of the powers that seek to prevent its success, nor even in terms of the eventual outcome, but in terms of the moment the South African government's delegation, including several of South Africa's anti-apartheid legal veterans, stood before the judges of the ICJ, asserted their presence in the realm of the international, to accuse Israel of genocide. The case may and will be interpreted in multiple ways, but I want to argue that our gaze must remain on the postcolonial international and its moments of constitution. South Africa's case against Israel brought before the ICJ on December 29, 2023,[29] places into sharp relief the question of constitutive capacity, specifically relating to the international as a distinct site of politics. The case came in consequence of Israel's war against Hamas in the aftermath of the latter's attacks in Israel against civilians, Israeli and other nationalities, killing over 1,200 and taking 250 hostages. Israel's ensuing war on Gaza has claimed over 60,000 (as of the time of writing), with the almost wholesale destruction of Gaza as a habitable space. The International Criminal Court's officials have deemed both antagonists culpable, yet it is the ICJ case that raises significant questions relating to the constitution of the international and its juridical-political ordering.

It is this ordering that must remain under the analytical lens, and the argument here is that, despite the persistence of inequality, the international, and distinctly the postcolonial international, remains in process and an unfinished project. South Africa's moment before the ICJ, a postcolonial sovereign state and its legal representatives bringing a case to the court based entirely on the existing normative

27 Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* (James Currey, Heinemann, 1986).

28 Vivienne Jabri, *The Postcolonial Subject* (Routledge, 2013); Vivienne Jabri, "Disarming Norms: Postcolonial agency and the constitution of the international," *International Theory* 6, no. 2 (2014): 372–390.

29 "Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures, filed in the Registry of the Court on 29 December 2023, Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)," International Court of Justice, accessed July 21, 2025, https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231228-app-01-00-en.pdf.

and juridical structuring of the international, and its distinctive premise on the recognition of suffering and the rights of the human, can be seen as a moment of becoming for South Africa itself but also for the postcolonial international.

It is more than telling that liberal and realist perspectives on the international have their provenance in Western academia, and that both somehow eschew any mention of the postcolonial world unless the rest of the world is somehow recalled, respectively, in terms of incorporation through norm diffusion or as alliances framed in antagonistic Cold War terms. Any "voice" that the postcolonial world might have globally is hence not just framed by the West but is rendered meaningful solely in reference to these hegemonic discourses. All of this would suggest to students of international relations and the wider public that when it comes to international politics, the postcolonial world simply not only is entirely devoid of agency but is hegemonically scripted in terms that are seen to be its specifying characteristics: underdeveloped or developing; lacking in democracy and human rights; conflict ridden and chaotic, failing in statehood and unstable; and in the worst case, a threat to the security of the West.

Yet, South Africa and its allies in this particular case have constituted a moment in the continuing formation of the international—a process of struggle in itself—just as significant as the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles that provided access to the international and its potential reconstitution. The moment demands presence and proclaims an independent voice in the face of those who seek to silence it, internationally and domestically. We might say that South Africa, like its founding post-apartheid father, Nelson Mandela, holds the conscience of the world and this is far too profound and monumental to be silenced or even rendered an irrelevance.

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