

# International Laws and the Common: A Study Case of the UN Roles in the Middle East Conflicts

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## Abstract:

The paper in hands attempts to explore the effectiveness of International Laws and policies as well as the roles of the United Nations in regulating the conflicts in the Middle East and their benefits for the people. The question the paper attempts to answer is whether such rules, resolutions, and policies are as objective as they are assumed to be. It does so by reviewing the interventions of the world superpowers on the one hand, and the UN on the other, in the conflicts prevailing in the Middle East. Such interventions, the paper postulates, were not as effective and objective as supposed to be. Instead, they were part of the problems and fueled the chaos in the Middle East. The resolutions made for the sake of peace, the attitudes towards the conflicts, the support lent to particular sides, the labels attributed to the events and groups and the efforts made to control the crises are motivated and politically, regionally and economically interested. Examples are taken from the Western attitudes towards the conflicting parties in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, The Gulf, Palestine, and Iraq. The Yemeni crisis is essential in this argument as it includes a broader circle of conflicting interests. The intervention of two of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, from one side and Iran and Qatar from the other, has laid bare the real United Nations' loyalties. In between, the common peoples' hopes and aspirations of a good and peaceful life are crushed. The paper concludes that the laws and policies that are assumed to be meant for the welfare of the people regardless of their region, race or any other affiliations other than being humans, are compromised on several grounds. They, the examples have revealed, are rather tailored to serve some nations and political leaders than to maintain the well-being and dignity of the masses.

## Keywords

## I. Introduction

Different countries around the world have their own cultures, identities, codes of conduct and laws. These vary from a nation to another, and they decide the independence and sovereignty of a nation. There is, also, a set of inter-national laws and regulations by which all countries - regardless of race, religion or geography - have to abide. Such policies and protocols regulate the relations between countries on the highest levels of decision-making and are assumed to be set for the welfare of the people around the globe and to maintain humans' dignity and peaceful life. In the present scenario, however, they proved useless for the common people for whose welfare such policies are supposed to be designed.

In the present paper, pieces of evidence have been gathered through observation of different incidents and events that happened in the Middle East, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also, to support the paper's argument, the researcher analyses some of the United Nations' reports as well as important reports in some newspapers. In this sense, the paper is both empirical and theoretical in nature.

## II. United Nations, Super Powers and the New World Order: The Case of the Middle East Conflict

The internal politics of a country highly determine its international relations. The extent to which a nation complies with the international codes and regulations depends upon its interests and benefits. It is not a secret to anyone that the national policies of the superpowers in the twentieth century sparked the two great wars because of their political and economic interests and their aspirations for unlimited national wealth. Such conflicting interests resulted in crushing the less militarily and scientifically advanced nations under what is now acknowledged as colonization.

In this context, the national policies of the present century seem to be a continuation of that of the previous century. The century started with the American war against Iraq in 2003 under the pretext that Saddam, the late Iraqi president, was a threat to the region as well as to the world. Saddam was then accused of possessing nuclear weapons that would threaten the world security. The American decision, which was claimed to be an implementation of the international laws whose burden the U.S has borne on behalf of the world, had disastrous consequences not only on the Iraqi people and the Middle East region but on the whole world. For example, ISIS emerged and flourished in Iraq after the American-British invasion and became a *real* threat to the world (Reminding us of the emergence of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan which the U.S founded on *goodwill* to drive the Russians out of Afghanistan).

Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, in debating the rule of the United Nations with his counterpart, Richard Holbrooke, argues

*It is important to understand that countries serving on the Security Council, and especially the five permanent members, follow their own national interest, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. The inability of the Security Council to reach agreement does not represent the failure of a global test of legitimacy; it reflects the political reality in the world as a whole. (Bolton and Holbrooke)*

It is strange that an Ambassador to the United Nations justifies the manipulation of the rules and regulations and the exploitation of other nations by the five permanent members of the UN. Nevertheless, he is quite right in that such manipulation and exploitation 'reflect the political reality in the world as a whole.'

At more recent time, the politics of the superpowers have not much changed. Economic and political interests determine their decisions and support. One prominent example of such policy is the *unconditional veto* power which is exclusively given to the five permanent members

in the United Nations Security Council (Russia, China, France, The United States, and The United Kingdom).

This power does not only put the fate of the whole world in the hands of five nations but also contributes to fueling, extending and expanding the conflicts in different parts of the world. Russia, for example, vetoed a resolution that merely calls for *investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria* in April 2018. “Today’s meeting marked the twelfth time Russia has used its veto to block Council action on Syria” (UN News). The United States fought this veto back as the previous resolution was out by the US. “Similarly, a *competing draft* – penned by Russia – which would have established the mechanism for one year as well but would have given the Security Council the responsibility to assign accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, was also not adopted.” (UN News)

Similarly, China and Russia used *veto* power also against *the imposition of sanctions on the Syrian regime over alleged use of chemical weapons* in February 2017. (The Guardian) “The international inquiry found Syrian government forces were responsible for three chlorine gas attacks and that Islamic State militants had used mustard gas.” (The Guardian) The two countries have interchangeably used their *veto* to prevent many resolutions that might have ended the conflicts in countries in Syria, Yemen and Libya or at least pointed out those involved in fueling the conflicts.

The history of Russia and China’s use of the *veto* power, however, explains their position in supporting their allies. Bolton comments “Looking at a current threat in the proliferation area, Iran, we have seen Russia and China persistently covering for Iran in the Security Council.” Russia and China, therefore, will keep using their veto against any resolution that might condemn the *Asad* government, who is a loyal friend of Iran. The fact, then, is that mutual interests are the primary criterion for any resolutions on, or solution of, any conflict in the Middle East. Bolton goes on

*There may well be a third Security Council resolution sanctioning Iran in the coming weeks, but it will be almost as toothless as the first two resolutions. That is not surprising because it is not just Russia and China that are the problem—it is also our friends in the European Union, whose interests are represented by their two permanent members, Britain and France, and by their nonpermanent members, which this year happens to include Italy, one of whose energy firms just signed a hundred million dollar plus deal for the exploration of oil and natural gas with the Iranians in the Persian Gulf. (Bolton and Holbrooke)*

Bolton’s comment hints to another critique of the *veto* system in the United Nations. It gives the five permanent members of the UN Security Council the ability to call off any resolution that would condemn them or any of their allies. In 1989, for instance, it was enough for the United States to use the *veto* power as a permanent member to stop a resolution draft that condemned its invasion of Panama (Nguyen). Recently in Dec 2017, the U.S used the *veto* power to prevent a resolution that condemned Trump’s decision to declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and called it ‘void and null’ (Sanchez). Hence, it should not surprise us to find Russia and the United States go unpunished in their interventions in and invasions of other countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

More recently, on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018, The United States vetoed a draft resolution that was supposed to *condemn the use of force* by Israel in the Gaza border protests. “Over the years, the United States has vetoed several Security Council resolutions critical of Israel.” (Reuters ) The same report quotes U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley “It is now completely clear that the UN is hopelessly biased against Israel,” The protests were encountered by the Israeli ‘excessive’ use of force. According to Aljazeera “... Israeli forces have killed at least 214

Palestinians and wounded more than 18,000.” (Aljazeera) The report mentions that the Palestinians were “Demanding their right to return to the homes and lands their families were expelled from 70 years ago” (Aljazeera)

Such opposition to end the use of force against peaceful protests confirms the view that international laws are accepted or rejected based on the close relationships and political and religious interests. Using the *veto* power here seems even unjustifiable and contradicts the essence of the United Nations assumed policies.

This takes us to another example of the hypocrisy exercised on the international level. The United States’ attitude towards Gaza protests is quite different from its attitude towards the Arab Spring in 2011. Hesitant as it was, The United States’ position ended in the revolutionaries’ favor. Even then, the US position was built on its interests in the Middle East. Tariq Ramadan argues that the United States supported the uprisings, though it was in complete favor with the Arab autocratic regimes, to reconfigure its control in the region. “Barack Obama, president of the United States, applauded the “courage and dignity of the Tunisian people” and spoke of preparing the future for democracy calmly and serenely” (Ramadan). (Selim) supports this idea stating that

*In Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, the United States openly supported the Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Saleh regimes before and during the mass protests. However, when it became clear the dictators were collapsing, the United States changed tactics by siding with the revolutionary forces while working, especially in the Egyptian and Yemeni cases, to maintain the main power structures which would serve American interests.*

Similarly, the dominant (Western) countries view of the uprisings split into voices with the people against what they called (Tyrannical) regimes, and others stood with the governments against the people. This split is until our present day an obstacle before the UN Security Council to end the conflicts in countries like Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Iraq.

To state an example, at the beginning of the conflict in Yemen, the UN Security Council put forth the 2216 Resolution which declared many political leaders as responsible of the dispute and imposed strict penalties on them (Resolution 2216). The Resolution included the leader of the Houthi movement, the late president of Yemen and his son, and others. However, no further steps were taken for the implementation of the Resolution. Neither the people included by the Resolution gave heed to it, nor did the UN intervene to implement it. On the other side, the other party of the conflict (the legitimate Yemeni government) took the implementation of the Resolution as the first condition for any political solution.

Consequently, the conflict continues, leaving behind vast numbers of victims and displaced innocent civilians. Hence, one might exclaim, if there were uncompromised and strict codes of conduct and regulations, would not such countries have united their voices and spared the people the consequence of the conflicts!

Yemen crisis goes on to uncover such hypocrisies. Egypt, where the Muslim Brethren party has been reported as a terrorist organization, supports Saudi Arabia’s war against the Houthis in Yemen. The two countries, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, have recently boycotted Qatar under the pretext that Qatar supports terrorism including the Muslim Brethren. Interestingly, in the very same war in Yemen, both Saudi Arabia and Egypt are in full support of the *Islah* party, which is a part of the larger Muslim Brethren Organization.

In the same vein, there is an indirect conflict between Saudi Arabic and Iran, which goes parallel to that between the U.S and Russia. The conflict blasts the myth that the international policies are set away from any religious, geographical or racial interests. The conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, for instance, is explicitly a conflict for power, but it carries religious and sectarian implications.

These conflicts, unstable attitudes and infringements of international policies show the latent intentions behind them and reveal the hegemony of power among the powerful countries to protect their interests in, and assure their control over, the Middle East. The American aggression against Iraq was revealed as propaganda for the ruling party in the U.S then. Similarly, as Donald Trump announced, the American invasion of Iraq should have given the U.S a legitimized access to the Iraqi oil. Such declaration, by implication, was the beginning of Trump's election campaign. In the same manner, the Saudi war against Yemen is for its national security, not as a favor for the Yemeni people as the claim goes in the media.

### **III. Conclusion**

The paper has reviewed and analyzed the role of the United Nations as a body in the Middle East in light of some of the recent events in the region. This role has been weighed up in contrast to individual interventions of some of the new world superpowers such as America and Russia – which are supposed to be part of the UN body and comply with its objectives.

The study has found that, despite all the attempts to cover the politics of the ruling regimes and their exploitation of the ordinary people with the cloak of international laws and policies, their practices revealed their real intentions and interests. Actual situations proved that the international laws were set to support a class of nations over the others and to help some regimes to stay in power or gain it. International policies, therefore, are geographically, politically, economically and religiously interested and loaded. They are used as cloaks to cover the otherwise naked internal political, economic and even religious interests, exploitations and hypocrisies.

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