

of sovereign states, international law provides a stable and convenient basis for the myriad of interactions that make routine international interactions trustworthy.

For the agenda of global security and strategic ambition, the design of the UN itself recognized the lack of political will to close the gap between international law and its dependence for implementation on political will and capabilities, epitomized by the right of veto conferred upon the winners of World War II, arguably the most dangerous political actors in the world at the time.

At present, despite the widespread disappointment and tension arising from this gap, there is still the absence of political will among the leading geopolitical actors (the US, Russia, and China) to close the gap. From a legal perspective, this gap is insulated from remedy by each of the P5 possessing an unrestricted right to veto any proposed amendment of the UN Charter. The most that can be realistically envisioned in the near future is more prudent or responsible behavior by these dominant geopolitical actors and by secondary geopolitical actors of limited geographic scope to restrict their lawlessness to the security agendas of regional geopolitical configurations of power, although US imperial geopolitics and Russian and Chinese spheres of influence geopolitics ensures that the harmful gap between what international law requires and what international politics determines will continue to cause immeasurable harm, especially to vulnerable peoples and nations, or states that have resources coveted by geopolitical actors.

Some argue that international law has always been subordinate to politics rather than an independent constraint upon it. From your perspective, is the relationship between politics and international law inherently conflictual, or is there still room for a constructive and mutually reinforcing relationship?

To avoid confusion and repetition, please consider the relevance of my responses to earlier questions. In sum, with respect to all aspects of global security, international law, in practice and design, has long been subordinated to politics, but only for regional and global political actors, and then only since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, when Europe gave birth to a self-serving format for an international normative order that legitimated coercion in the course of colonizing projects in the Global South.

A deficient version of symbolic international law enforcement occurs at the conclusion of major wars ending in victory for one side. As in the aftermath of World War II, the winners prosecuted the war crimes alleged to be committed by surviving German and Japanese individuals at Nuremberg and Tokyo, which critics persuasively derided as justice of the "victors".

As also suggested in previous responses, where reciprocal benefits result from compliance, international law has long provided a reliable framework guiding the behavior of individuals, corporations, and financial institutions, and governments in many international interactions — although even here, there are important subtle encroachments by the rich and powerful on the rights of the poor that escape from the discipline of a legal order administered on the basis of equality of all.



◀ Muhammad and Abdel, Gazan children who lost a limb when the UNRWA school they were sheltering in was hit by an Israeli air strike in Nuseirat in 2024, talk to each other. ▶ UNRWA

Reporters photograph a display for "Midnight Hammer," the name of the American operation to bomb Iran's nuclear sites, during a news conference on June 22, 2025. ▶ ALEX BRANDON/AP



At a time when powerful states increasingly disregard or actively undermine multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, and the global human rights regime, how do you envision the future of multilateralism?

There is little doubt that this is a bad time for internationalism, given global trends toward ultra-nationalism and xenophobia, which tend to devalue cooperative multilateralism. These trends are accentuated by the intense US hostility to internationalism given Trump's diplomacy on behalf of the United States, which continues to be the most influential world state — although in danger of losing this status due to China's continuing rising star. Early in 2026, the US government, by executive order, withdrew and stopped funding for no less than 66 international institutional arrangements, 31 of which were within the UN System.

The global scope of ecological challenges, as well as the complexities of digital age communications, global migration flow, and vulnerabilities to disease epidemics, makes it likely that a new cycle of functional pressures will, in the years ahead, restore and even expand dependence upon multilateralism. This seems probable, although the signature reality of the present global setting is radical uncertainty, or put differently, the unknowability of the future.

Can global civil society, academics, and human rights institutions play a meaningful role in restoring the legitimacy and effectiveness of international law, or are such efforts structurally constrained by the current global power configuration?

In line with the unknowability of the future, an initial response is to underscore unknowability, together with an awareness that there are many historical examples of surprising happenings in international life that were not anticipated by relevant experts or public opinion. Among notable recent examples is the victory of Vietnamese nationalism in opposing the militarily superior US intervention in the Vietnam War. Other important examples are the collapse of the Soviet Union, the peaceful transition of the apartheid regime in South Africa into a multiethnic constitutional democracy, and the Arab Spring attacking dictatorial rule in several Arab majority countries at least briefly.

In light of this defining feature of unknowability, it is appropriate to struggle for a desirable future. This suggests that

◀ Kidnapped Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro (in handcuffs) and his wife, Cilia Flores, arrive at the Wall Street Heliport in Manhattan under heavy escort on January 5, 2026. ▶ AA

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I believe Iran, among contemporary states, has suffered more acutely and over a longer period than any other sovereign state or member of the United Nations from the shortcomings of international law. It has endured diplomatic pushbacks, overt and covert violations of its territorial sovereignty designed to destabilize and replace its structure of governance, double standards with respect to nuclear programs, and recent acts of aggression and repeated threats designed to undermine Iran's security and deny the country and its people their inalienable right of self-determination. These grievances were brilliantly articulated by Iran's current foreign minister at the Al Jazeera Forum held in Doha, Qatar, on February 7–9, 2026.

initiatives and informal pressures by protests and boycotts, mounted to promote national and international sanctions.

In your analysis of the shortcomings of international law, you highlighted its ineffectiveness in restraining major powers and the geopolitical dominance of the P5. Iran, as a country that over the past four decades has consistently faced confrontation with this power structure — from unilateral extraterritorial sanctions to the assassination of its military commanders on the territory of a third country — has experienced blatant violations of fundamental principles of international law. Yet none of these actions have elicited an effective response from international bodies, and at times they have even been accompanied by tacit legitimacy. In light of Iran's lived experience in this regard, do you see Iran as a confirmation of the thesis that "international law functions as an instrument of power," or rather as a sign of the legitimacy crisis in the current order, which could pave the way for a transition toward a more just system? And particularly considering your role as the UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine, what structural similarities or differences do you perceive between the international system's handling of the Palestinian issue and its handling of Iran?

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Iran is above all a victim of Islamophobic geopolitics that intensified after the end of the Cold War and the 2001 terrorist attack attributed to Al Qaeda. US foreign policy toward Iran is also distorted by counter-revolutionary pressures of Iranian exile communities and by Israeli lobbying and donor leverage. It is these largely "invisible" realities that have shaped US policies toward Iran ever since 1979.

In the current dangerous atmosphere, the short-term fate of Iran and the Middle East is also unfortunately subject to the irresponsible and unpredictable impulses of the American president, Donald Trump. This dominant political leader is capable of making dramatic, disruptive moves, often in cooperation with Israel and Saudi Arabia, and occasionally making abrupt changes in policy, sometimes of a stabilizing nature. Above all, Iran is long overdue to be a recipient of international justice, a first step of which is an international show of support for its sovereign rights, which includes the termination of prolonged sanctions that have inflicted hardship on the Iranian population and given rise to the recent internal crisis of manipulated protest.

