

Complementing or Undermining Peace: Impact of U.S. Actions on U.N. Conflict Resolution in Israel-Palestine

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent to which United States actions have undermined or complemented United Nations efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. Drawing on liberal institutionalism and a qualitative design combining in-depth interviews with systematic documentary analysis, the article identifies four structural mechanisms through which American engagement shapes the institutional landscape of conflict resolution: systematic veto deployment across successive administrations; financial leverage over UN humanitarian agencies, most critically UNRWA; bilateral diplomatic dominance that has persistently displaced multilateral frameworks; and episodic moments of constructive alignment that, while genuine, have proven structurally fragile.

The empirical foundation integrates interview data from United Nations staff, Palestinian diplomatic officials, conflict resolution scholars, and policy analysts with a documentary corpus covering Security Council veto records, US funding patterns, bilateral military assistance to Israel, and official statements from UN Secretaries-General and international judicial bodies. This study also integrates relevant quotes from key Israeli officials, Palestinian officials, and UN Secretaries-Generals.

The central argument is that the paradox of American engagement is not episodic but a durable feature of its foreign policy architecture that reproduces itself regardless of which administration holds office in Washington, recent trends in the conflict is however putting the trajectory of this durable foreign policy into more scrutiny. The United States has, through these mechanisms, simultaneously acted as the conflict's most indispensable external actor and its most consequential institutional constraint. Concrete implications for UN institutional reform, including veto restraint, genuine multilateralisation of mediation, and the protection of humanitarian operations from political conditionality.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution; Israel-Palestine Conflict; United Nations; Security Council Veto; Multilateralism

INTRODUCTION

More than seven decades after the United Nations first engaged formally with the question of Palestine through General Assembly Resolution 181 in 1947, the Israel-Palestine conflict remains without resolution. In those decades, the organisation produced hundreds of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, sustained the world's longest-running refugee relief operation through UNRWA, established multiple mediation frameworks, secured two ICJ advisory opinions, and witnessed the International Criminal Court issue arrest warrants against serving heads of government. The scale of institutional engagement is extraordinary. The transformative impact is not.

The standard explanation points to the conflict's intrinsic complexity: competing nationalist claims over the territory, religious symbolism, decades of occupation, unresolved humanitarian and refugee crisis, and entrenched cycles of violence. Those factors are real and analytically significant. But they are insufficient as a complete explanation. They leave unaddressed the degree to which the conflict's persistence is actively reproduced by the dynamics of the international system and specifically by the actions of the United States within the very institutional framework ostensibly designed to achieve resolution.

The United States is not a neutral observer. It is a permanent Security Council member with a well-documented strategic alliance with Israel, the world's largest bilateral military assistance provider to one of the conflict's principal parties, the self-designated primary mediator of a peace process it has monopolised for decades, and the largest financial contributor to the UN agencies most directly engaged with Palestinian welfare. That combination of roles is, on any serious analytical reckoning, irreconcilable with the impartiality that effective multilateral conflict resolution demands. Yet it has persisted across nine presidential administrations.

This study examines that problem directly. It asks: to what extent have the actions of the United States undermined or complemented United Nations efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict? The answer, developed through qualitative analysis and documentary review, is that the United States has done both but in a deeply asymmetrical way, through mechanisms that are structural and durable rather than incidental and correctable by individual diplomatic gestures.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the United Nations' sustained and multidimensional engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict over more than seven decades, the conflict remains unresolved. Cycles of violence recur with regularity, the humanitarian situation deteriorates, the two-state framework is progressively eroded by facts on the ground, and the prospect of a negotiated settlement appears more distant today than a generation ago. This contradiction high institutional visibility combined with limited transformative impact demands analytical explanation.

Much of the existing literature examines the conflict through single-variable analytical lenses: historical dispossession (Khalidi, 2020), identity-based perceptions and competing nationalisms (Tessler and Nachtwey, 1998), or territorial and geopolitical dynamics (Hart and Eyina, 2022). These studies illuminate important dimensions but do not adequately capture the multi-layered interaction of variables that together sustain the conflict and prevent resolution. The role of the United States introduces the most analytically significant and underexplored dimension. Scholars broadly acknowledge American influence, but there has been limited rigorous engagement with the specific mechanisms by which US actions within and outside the UN framework interact to shape the institutional dynamics through which resolution must be achieved.

The problem, stated directly, is this: the United States simultaneously enables and constrains United Nations conflict resolution efforts on Israel-Palestine, doing so through durable structural mechanisms that transcend individual administrations and whose aggregate effect has been to prevent the multilateral framework from functioning as designed. Understanding those mechanisms, their character, their consistency, and their consequences is the essential first step toward any serious reform of the international approach to this conflict.

Research Questions

This study is guided by one central question: To what extent have the actions of the United States undermined or complemented United Nations efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict? The specific sub-questions are:

- (i) What are the specific mechanisms through which United States actions have constrained the United Nations' efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict?
- (ii) Under what conditions has United States engagement complemented United Nations efforts to resolve the conflict?

Objectives of the Study

The study pursues two interrelated objectives aligned to the central research question:

- (i) To examine the specific mechanisms through which United States actions have constrained the United Nations' efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict; and
- (ii) To identify the conditions under which United States engagement has complemented United Nations efforts toward peaceful resolution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution, as a field of theory and practice, refers to the range of methods and processes by which parties to a conflict work toward or are assisted in reaching a durable cessation of hostilities and, ideally, a transformation of the underlying conditions that generated the conflict. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2016) draw a foundational distinction between conflict settlement, which addresses the manifest incompatibilities between parties, and conflict transformation, which seeks to alter the deeper social, political, and structural roots of violence. This distinction is analytically critical for the Israel-Palestine case: decades of international engagement have produced occasional settlements of immediate hostilities without approaching the structural transformation that durable peace would require.

Burton's (1990) human needs theory argues that protracted conflicts persist when fundamental human needs identity, security, recognition, and participation remain systematically unmet by existing political arrangements. His framework shifts analytical focus away from purely interest-based bargaining and toward the deep-seated relational and identity dimensions that make some conflicts resistant to conventional diplomatic solutions. Azar's (1990) protracted social conflict model extends this insight, arguing that sustained conflicts are typically rooted in communal identity grievances and structural inequalities that are reproduced over generations. Both frameworks illuminate why the Israel-Palestine conflict has proven so resistant to negotiated settlement: the material and security interests at stake are entangled with questions of recognition, legitimacy, and historical justice that interest-based bargaining cannot resolve on its own.

Wallensteen (2002) introduces the concept of quality peace, which requires not merely the absence of violence but the establishment of conditions legitimate political institutions, security guarantees, and economic viability under which former adversaries can coexist without structural incentives for renewed conflict. Ross (1993) highlights the role of cultural interpretation in sustaining conflict, showing how shared symbolic narratives shape parties' perceptions of threat and opportunity in ways that make purely instrumental compromise insufficient. Together, these theoretical frameworks converge on the conclusion that sustainable conflict resolution in cases like Israel-Palestine demands attention to structural, cultural, and institutional dimensions simultaneously a demand that the international community's predominantly procedural approach has consistently fallen short of meeting.

Conflict Resolution and the Role of External Actors

The conflict resolution literature accords external actors a complex and sometimes contradictory role. On one hand, third-party facilitation mediation, arbitration, peacekeeping, and economic incentives can create conditions under which parties otherwise locked in mutual intransigence find pathways toward agreement. Doyle (1986) and Moravcsik (1997) argue that liberal states and international institutions are uniquely positioned to provide such facilitation because of their credibility, normative commitments, and capacity to offer credible guarantees. On the other hand, Quandt (2005) and Kurtzer and Lasensky (2008) document how external actors whose interests are structurally aligned with one party systematically compromise the impartiality on which effective third-party facilitation depends. When the mediating state is simultaneously the patron of one party as the United States is with Israel the mediator role and the ally role generate irreconcilable structural tensions.

The concept of spoiler management, developed by Stedman (1997) and applied to peace processes by Greenhill and Major (2006/07), identifies the risks posed by powerful state actors and non-state actors whose interests are served by continued conflict rather than resolution. The spoiler concept has most commonly been applied to non-state armed groups, but its underlying logic applies equally to great powers whose strategic interests, domestic political incentives, or alliance commitments lead them to block or undermine institutional peace efforts. This article argues that the United States has, through the structural mechanisms identified below, functioned in practice as a systemic spoiler of multilateral conflict resolution efforts not through malice or deliberate obstruction, but through the structural consequences of its institutional position and strategic interests.

Multilateralism

Multilateralism refers to the cooperation among three or more states with the aim of addressing common issues through the umbrella of international institutions be it financial, political, strategic or otherwise. The make-up of the United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly is primarily an institutional expression of this framework, where member states are expected to work in a cooperative manner to promote world peace and address conflict around the globe. The United States (and of course other members of the Security Council) has however repeatedly tested this model. It is now a tool to block council consensus despite overwhelming support. Veto was designed to enable multilateralism by keeping the P5 engaged in arriving at a consensus through negotiations; however, the veto has become the greatest obstacle to multilateralism in the United Nations creating perception of bias, undermining the UN's legitimacy and pushing issues outside the UN framework.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The United Nations in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Scholarship on the UN's engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict converges on two consistent conclusions: the organisation has been irreplaceable as a normative and humanitarian actor, and persistently constrained as a political resolver. Roberts (1996) and Neack (2007) identify the structural tensions embedded in the UN Charter's peace architecture particularly the veto mechanism as the primary source of those constraints. Quigley (2005) provides detailed legal analysis showing how the deliberate ambiguity of Resolution 242 (1967) created interpretive space that persistent violators exploited without triggering enforcement responses.

More recent scholarship has sharpened these critiques in light of post-October 2023 developments. Chesterman (2024) documents the acceleration of Security Council paralysis during this period, concluding that the gap between the Council's normative commitments and its operational incapacity has reached historically unprecedented proportions. Mahlangu (2025) situates this within a broader argument about structural constraints on the UN as a conflict resolution institution, warning that the organisation's credibility damage during this period may produce lasting consequences for its effectiveness in other theatres. Gordon and Pardo (2015) offer a more measured assessment, noting that the UN's contributions sustaining international attention, establishing legal frameworks, providing humanitarian relief carry real value even when they fall short of political resolution.

United States Policy between Alliance and Mediation

Kurtzer and Lasensky (2008) provide the foundational analysis of the tension at the heart of American policy: strategic alliance with Israel and credible mediator status are, under most conditions, structurally incompatible. The more comprehensively Washington commits to the former, the less credible it becomes as the latter. Khalidi (2020) situates this within a longer historical argument about external power complicity in Palestinian dispossession, while Qonita, Warasti, and Sholeh (2022) offer a systematic review concluding that American engagement has consistently prioritised Israeli interests over Palestinian rights and multilateral legitimacy. The domestic political determinants of this consistency receive sustained analytical attention from Khan (2015), who examines the structural influence of pro-Israel lobby organisations in producing the bipartisan uniformity of American positions across governments with otherwise widely different foreign policy orientations.

The Veto and Its Systemic Consequences

Bosco (2009) established the historical case that the Security Council veto has functioned less as its designers intended a safeguard against great-power conflict and more as a mechanism for protecting P5 strategic interests and those of their client states. Zunes (2004) applies this argument specifically to American veto deployment on Israel-Palestine, documenting the pattern across multiple administrations and identifying it as a structural feature of US policy rather than a series of contingent decisions. Bellamy and Williams (2015) connect this to what they identify as a structural double standard: actions for which other states attract binding Council resolutions are systematically shielded from accountability when undertaken by states with P5 patronage. Hasan (2024) extends this analysis into the contemporary period, concluding that power disparities entrenched within the Council's architecture make lasting settlement practically unachievable without institutional reform.

Gaps this Study Addresses

Specific gaps in the existing literature motivate and shape this article: First, the insufficient focus on how external actors interact with, complement, and possibly undermine UN conflict resolution efforts requires scrutiny, the extent to which their perceived or actual biases affect the legitimacy and efficacy of the United Nations' efforts is underexplored. Most studies treat US engagement either as a bilateral phenomenon or as a constraint on UN action without systematically analysing how these two dimensions interact to produce the structural paradox at the centre of this study. Most literature often assumes a neutral mediating role for the United Nations without critically examining the undermining impact of competing third-party interests. Although several studies acknowledge the influence of the U.S. veto power and bilateral mediation efforts, most treat this factor descriptively rather than analytically. This study seeks to analyse the tension between multilateral institutionalism and power based bilateralism, and also how unilateral diplomacy/mediation, funding decisions and geopolitical alignment shape the operational space of the United Nations in its conflict resolution efforts

Theoretical Framework

Liberal Institutionalism

Liberal Institutionalism provides the study's primary analytical scaffolding. Drawing on Keohane (1984), Nye (1988), and Claude (1968), it holds that international institutions can help states overcome the collective action problems generated by anarchic conditions reducing uncertainty, establishing norms, and creating compliance mechanisms. Institutions, on this account, are not merely reflections of existing power distributions; they exercise independent effects on how states behave and can constrain even powerful actors through the normative and reputational costs of violation.

The theory's acknowledged limitations are equally important here. Keohane recognised that institutions reflect the power distributions of the states that construct them. When power is concentrated and one state's strategic interests are durably aligned with one party to a conflict, institutional mechanisms become vulnerable to capture used as sources of legitimacy while their collective mandate goes unfulfilled. Liberal Institutionalism is therefore applied on two levels in this article: as a normative benchmark for evaluating what UN mechanisms were designed to achieve, and as a framework for understanding why they fall short when the most powerful member state's interests diverge from the collective institutional goal.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design combining primary data collection through in-depth interviews with secondary documentary analysis. Three complementary designs are integrated: a descriptive design for systematic documentation of UN resolutions and institutional decisions; a historical design for situating the UN's role within its political context; and a case study design treating the Israel-Palestine conflict as a theoretically purposive case through which broader propositions about multilateral conflict resolution and hegemonic power are examined (Yin, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Twenty (20) in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected respondents across four stakeholder categories: United Nations staff in Abuja; officials of the Embassy of the State of Palestine in Nigeria; researchers and analysts at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja; and political science academics at Bingham University. Purposive sampling secured informational depth participants were selected for direct institutional experience with, or scholarly expertise in, the subject rather than for statistical representativeness (Bryman, 2016; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This number is adequate as it falls within the range recommended for qualitative research depending on the nature of the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mason 2010). The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, where interviews continued until no substantial new information emerged from the data. (Guest et al, 2006; Mason 2010). Added to the in-depth interviews, this study integrates relevant quotes from key Israeli officials, Palestinian officials, and UN Secretaries-General. Official statements were treated with the same directness as interview data and presented.

The documentary body includes Security Council veto records, UN General Assembly resolution records, UNRWA annual reports, White House policy documents, and official statements from UN Secretaries-General. Sources were accessed through the UN Documentation Centre, the UN Audio-Visual Library, official government portals, and academic databases. Documentary data were analysed through qualitative content analysis structured around thematic categories aligned to the research objectives. Triangulation across primary and secondary sources was applied throughout.

Analysis and Discussion

The Veto as Structural Constraint

From 1972 to the present (June 2025), Washington has vetoed at least forty-nine Security Council draft resolutions relating to Israel-Palestine more than any of the other P5 members on one conflict in UN history (UN Security Council Veto List, 2025; Jewish Virtual Library, 2025). A wide range of issues from demands for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories to condemnation language on settlement construction, calls for a ceasefire during military operations, accountability measures against violations of international humanitarian law, and Palestinian applications for full UN membership all amount to a permanent attempt at undermining the institutional capacity of one of the world's most high-profile cases before the Security Council.

From October 2023 onwards, that rate accelerated rapidly. Six vetoes within less than two years against resolutions calling for ceasefires during a military campaign that UN officials characterised in terms of unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe brought the structural dangers of this pattern into especially stark relief. In an interview conducted on 8 March 2025, a senior UN staff member summed up the core contradiction:

"Several U.S. Administrations have given so much economically and humanitarily over time but their leverage in the UN as a veto-holding member of the Security Council actually contributed to the stalling and watering down of UNSC Resolutions regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict."

This pattern is analytically decisive not simply based on its scale but more specifically because of the consistency with which it has persisted. Across nine presidential administrations Democratic and Republican, interventionist and restrained, multilateral and sceptical the fundamental posture has not changed: America unconditionally provides diplomatic protection for Israel from Security Council censure. That consistency can only point to structural sources rather than idiosyncratic ones. This structural dimension was captured by a Professor of International Relations during an interview on 10 March 2025:

"The U.S. has been a staunch ally of Israel for decades and this has created an imbalance in power. Over time the support from the U.S. played into making sure that any efforts by the international community to push Security Council Resolutions addressing the conflicts would not only be ignored but also actively sabotaged."

Similarly, Ambassador Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian Permanent Observer, offered a diplomatically coded but analytically precise summary of the institutional consequence in a 2019 Security Council media stakeout:

"The Security Council does not have the political will to act to implement its resolutions for the obvious reasons that we all know." (Mansour, UN Audio-Visual Library, 2019)

What this pattern illustrates, from a Liberal Institutionalist perspective, is institutional capture: consensus no longer serves as an instrument for collective governance but has become a procedural tool allowing specific interests to assert themselves with all the formality of institutionalised incapacity. The result, as Bellamy and Williams (2015) document, is the gradual erosion of the principle that international law applies universally, an erosion whose consequences extend far beyond the specific conflict.

The Entrenchment of Structural Asymmetry & Financial Leverage

While the veto is arguably the most recognisable tool of American influence, it operates alongside another structural leverage that has not been scrutinised as such: its role as a leading contributor to UN spending. Washington pays approximately 22 per cent of the UN regular budget, and 25 per cent for peacekeeping, while

providing significant voluntary funding across agencies (Wall Street Journal, 2025). This is not just a wellspring of altruism, but also a mechanism of control in setting budget priorities and resolution language; at critical moments it may even mean ensuring that programming upon which millions depend for their basic welfare continues.

The 2018 Trump administration cut all US funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) some USD 360 million per year, approximately a third of the agency's annual budget. The decision was directly connected to a larger political plan aimed at delegitimising the mandate of UNRWA and removing Palestinian refugees from the negotiating table in any future peace process (Brynen, 2019). Funding restored by the Biden administration in 2021 provided some corrective, but simultaneously laid bare the structural vulnerability it was meant to remedy: an entire refugee population's essential humanitarian services were shown to hinge on a single country's domestic political cycle.

This precariousness was further evidenced in 2024 when several Western governments, including the US, terminated UNRWA funding citing allegations from Israel that a handful of agency staff had participated in the October 2023 attack allegations subsequently largely disproven by independent inquiry. In an interview conducted on 3 June 2025, a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution highlighted that structural consequence:

"Nations must continue to address the plight of millions of Palestinian refugees left without a just or durable solution under international law. Withholding funds to agencies who meet the needs of these refugees greatly increases the anguish of an already traumatized people."

This statement speaks to the adverse consequences using aid funding as a tool for diplomacy there by creating a tension between the multilateral objectives of the U.N. UNRWA and unilateral actions of the U.S. who is a major financier of UN's budget. This financial dominance provides Washington with both formal and informal influence over agenda-setting, institutional priorities, and decision-making processes. In practice, this leverage has often translated into the ability to shape, dilute, or block resolutions perceived as unfavourable to Israel, particularly within the Security Council where financial influence intersects with veto power.

The financial leverage dimension also extends to the bilateral strategic relationship itself. Under a 2016 Memorandum of Understanding, USD 38 billion in military assistance for Israel over ten years the largest such bilateral package ever covers advanced weapon systems, missile defence programmes, and privileged access to technology-related equipment alongside intelligence cooperation between the US and Israeli militaries.

Bypassing Multilateralism: Diplomatic Dominance of the U.S.

The third dimension of American structural power is a pattern whereby the United States has consistently presented itself as the primary external mediator of the conflict while working parallel to, or often outside, any multilateral framework offered by institutions such as the United Nations. The milestones of this displacement from the Camp David Accords (1978), to Oslo I and II (1993-95), to the Camp David Summit (2000), to the Annapolis Process, to the Abraham Accords (2020) have in common American ownership of the mediation, forcing the United Nations to a peripheral or spectator role, and an inability to deliver durable settlement.

The Middle East Quartet represents the most serious attempt to create an architecture of genuinely multilateral mediation, dating from 2002. Elgindy's (2012) post-mortem concluded that it achieved essentially nothing in its decade of official existence. The diagnosis is insightful: the United States pressed for an informal framework to escape the binding obligations of international law, creating a structure that offers multilateral legitimacy without multilateral accountability. The Quartet lacked a true decision-making body, enforcement tools, or monitoring ability. Tocci (2013) draws a similar conclusion: the Quartet failed precisely because it was informal and lacked accountability mechanisms.

The Abraham Accords of 2020 provide a more recent and illustrative example. The agreements between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco were engineered to reconfigure how the Arab world engaged with Israeli policies without requiring progress on Palestinian statehood. While the Accords generated regional benefits, they also systematically deflected focus from resolving the underlying conflict, making such resolution

appear less pressing while contrasting with the UN-anchored understanding that normalisation was contingent upon progress toward Palestinian statehood.

Moments of Constructive Complementarity

An analytically honest examination requires genuine confrontation with evidence that US-UN interactions around Israel-Palestine are not simply obstructionist. The most obvious instance is UNSCR 2334, adopted by the Security Council in December 2016 after the Obama administration decided to abstain rather than use its veto. The resolution stated that Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory constituted a grave breach under international law and called for their immediate cessation. It passed fifteen to zero. This illustrates an undeniable analytical proposition: when Washington decides not to obstruct the Council, the Council can speak decisively. The constraint has never been about institutional design; it has always been about political will.

More importantly, most US vetoes in favour of Israel are predicated on US national interest and the extent to which any given administration is prepared to support Israel unconditionally. Trump's first and second administrations marked periods of strong US support for Israel; however, the recent turn of events in the US-Israel relationship with Trump seeking to secure a deal on the Iran conflict while Israeli government's actions appear to be complicating that objective reflects a developing tension between both leaders. Additionally, the declining level of public support for Israel among Americans as a result of Israel's response to the October attack has begun to place a considerable strain in US foreign policy towards Israel. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan identified the structural requirement for American engagement alongside its limits:

"The United States has a potentially absolutely vital role to play in this conflict. It is the only country that has both leverage and relationships to bring both sides together. America cannot do it alone but must act in concert with the wider international community" (Annan, 2012).

Annan's position clearly advocates for a more coordinated alignment between U.S. diplomacy and UN multilateral processes. Annan also acknowledged the importance of having America as a progressive partner in the peace process. The path forward therefor is not one without the U.S. in the peace process but one that aligns objectives and build consensus across board amongst major stakeholders just as it is with the original multilateral framework on which the United Nations was formed. Another angle to this is not whether these episodes of complementarity are real, they clearly are but whether they can be sustained is another focus. Resolution 2334 was the outcome of a political calculation in the final weeks of a departing administration and was substantially undone within weeks of the succeeding administration. The more genuine American engagement can lead to real pathways; the problem is that holding such engagement hostage to electoral cycles and domestic political calculations renders its constructiveness an unstable pillar of conflict resolution architecture.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are organised around the two research objectives, and together they support a single overarching conclusion: the paradoxical character of United States engagement in the Israel-Palestine conflict is a structural feature of American foreign policy architecture not an accident of any particular administration's preferences.

Finding 1: U.S. Actions Have Constrained UN Conflict Resolution through Four Durable Structural Mechanisms

The evidence across all analytical dimensions converges on a clear answer to the first research objective. The United States has constrained United Nations conflict resolution efforts through four identifiable and interlocking structural mechanisms.

First, systematic veto deployment has transformed the Security Council's enforcement function in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict from a collective governance instrument into a tool of selective non-enforcement. Forty-nine vetoes across five decades, covering a comprehensive range of issues from settlement construction to

ceasefires to Palestinian statehood, have insulated Israel from the binding accountability that the UN Charter's enforcement architecture was designed to impose. The consistency of this pattern across administrations with widely different foreign policy orientations confirms its structural character.

Second, financial leverage over UN humanitarian agencies particularly the United States' demonstrated willingness to withhold UNRWA funding as a diplomatic instrument has subjected the welfare of millions of Palestinian refugees to the contingencies of American domestic politics. The 2018 funding cut and the 2024 suspension demonstrate that this leverage is not merely theoretical; it has been deployed, with direct humanitarian consequences.

Third, bilateral diplomatic dominance has consistently displaced the multilateral framework. By positioning itself as the indispensable mediator while maintaining a well-documented strategic alliance with one party, the United States has reproduced across successive peace processes a structural compromise of the impartiality on which effective facilitation depends. The failure of every American-owned peace process to produce durable settlement reflects the impossibility of reconciling the mediator and patron roles.

Fourth, selective engagement with international legal mechanisms most sharply illustrated by the contrast between endorsing the ICC warrant against Vladimir Putin while condemning equivalent warrants against Israeli leaders has produced a pattern of double standards whose cumulative effect is to erode the universal application of international law. The Trump administration's sanctions on ICC personnel involved in the Israel investigation represent the most aggressive expression of this pattern.

Finding 2: U.S. Complementarity Has Been Genuine but Operationally Fragile and Episodically Contingent

The evidence equally supports a clear answer to the second research objective. The United States has, under specific and identifiable conditions, complemented United Nations conflict resolution efforts and those contributions have been real, not merely symbolic. Resolution 2334 demonstrated that the Security Council is capable of decisive legal action on settlement policy when the United States chooses not to block it. Oslo demonstrated that American diplomatic engagement can create negotiating openings that purely multilateral processes could not generate independently. UNRWA funding restoration under the Biden administration provided essential relief to millions of Palestinian refugees whose welfare had been disrupted by political decisions.

The conditions that produced these moments of complementarity have all proven contingent on electoral cycles, departing administration dynamics, or specific domestic political calculations that could not be sustained. Resolution 2334 was reversed in substance within weeks. Oslo collapsed without an enforcement infrastructure capable of compelling compliance when political conditions changed. UNRWA funding was suspended again in 2024. The pattern is not one of progressive deepening of constructive engagement but of genuine openings that are closed by the structural forces that produced the obstructive pattern in the first place.

This finding has significant implications for reform strategy. It suggests that the problem is not one of American capacity; the United States clearly has the resources and relationships to play a constructive role. Reforms that address only the willingness of individual administrations without altering the structural conditions that generate the obstructive pattern are unlikely to produce durable change.

Finding 3: The UN's Effectiveness Is Conditional and Structurally Constrained

A third finding, emerging from the intersection of the two research objectives, concerns the character of UN effectiveness in this conflict. UN mechanisms have proven effective in limited but important domains monitoring, humanitarian service delivery, norm diffusion, and the generation of a legal framework that maintains international consensus on the terms of a just resolution. These contributions carry real value and represent the institutional accumulation of decades of sustained engagement.

However, UN mechanisms have proven organisationally constrained with respect to decisive political outcomes ceasefires, accountability for violations, enforcement of withdrawal obligations, or the compulsion of good-faith

engagement with a two-state framework. The constraint is not institutional design; the Charter provides adequate tools. The constraint is political: specifically, the operation of the veto mechanism in the presence of a P5 member whose strategic interests are durably aligned with one party. In line with liberal institutionalism, UN mechanisms work where member consent and consensus exist, and stall where power politics and vetoes prevail. The UN's effectiveness is conditional and partial, with identifiable bottlenecks in veto dynamics that no amount of institutional energy can overcome in the absence of political will from the relevant great power.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this research suggest four interconnected recommendations for reforming the international approach to Israel-Palestine. In combination, they form neither a utopian reimagining of the international system nor an idealised new world order, but rather concrete adjustments to existing institutional architecture that would significantly alter many of the fundamental structural realities driving intractability.

Reforming the Veto Mechanism

The most basic structural reform relates to the use of veto powers in situations involving ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and mass atrocity crimes. The ACT Group's Code of Conduct has been signed by 122 states urging P5 members voluntarily not to use their veto in mass atrocity situations the United States has not yet subscribed. A workable model is the already-negotiated French-Mexican proposal for a voluntary restraint code, which does not require amendment of the Charter. If the Council is blocked, the existing formal mechanism contained in Resolution 377-V of the General Assembly the Uniting for Peace procedure exists and its more systematic application to such crises lies within current institutional architecture (Chesterman, 2024; Hasan, 2024).

Genuine Multilateralising of the Peace Process

The single non-neutral mediator must be supplanted with a truly multilateral framework. Such a credible coalition would include the European Union, Arab League, African Union, Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt all displaying diplomatic capacity and holding at least partial interests in sustainable settlement. Reconstituting the Middle East Quartet framework requires providing it with the legally binding decision-making capacity, compliance mechanisms, and enforcement options whose absence Elgindy (2012) identifies as responsible for previous Quartet failures. This recommendation builds directly from Finding 1's conclusion that bilateral diplomatic dominance has constituted a major channel of constraint.

Shielding Humanitarian Operations from Political Conditionality

UNRWA must be shielded from domestic political conditionalities in the United States by establishing a more diversified funding model drawing on assessed contributions from an expanded pool of member states, ideally including financially and politically well-positioned Gulf States with vested interests in Palestinian welfare. The basic principle that humanitarian programming must be protected from political conditionality needs to find expression through institutional architecture that guarantees no single donor state can suspend critical life-saving services for millions as a diplomatic instrument. This recommendation finds its empirical and analytical basis in Bocco (2010) and Brynen (2019).

CONCLUSION

The paradox that gave rise to this article that the United States is at once the most indispensable and most obstructionist external actor in UN conflict resolution efforts on Israel-Palestine has been revealed by our analysis less as a paradox than as a structure. It is a stable, durable, self-reproducing structure of strategic interests and institutional arrangements whose enduring character across five decades and nine presidential administrations is implausible as the result of discrete policy decisions.

Through systematic use of forty-nine vetoes, operational leverage over UN humanitarian agencies through financing, bilateral diplomatic dominance that has routinely elided multilateral arrangements, and selective

engagement with international legal obligations, the United States has shaped an institutional environment for conflict resolution along lines consonant with its interests. The moments of actual complementarity Resolution 2334, the Oslo framework, the restoration of UNRWA funding are analytically significant but operationally fragile.

The road to productive multilateral cooperation runs through structural reform: restraint on vetoes; genuine multilateralisation of mediation efforts; safeguarded humanitarian access; and accountability for violations of international law. None of these is straightforward, and some involve alterations in the US domestic political architecture that cannot be obtained from outside. However, identifying the real structural barriers as this study has attempted to do is the essential starting point for any serious reform agenda. Resolving the conflict will require American engagement, but not through the dominant US leadership that has characterised the past half-century of international engagement with this crisis. An alternative configuration must be identified, and the international community must work collectively to elaborate the institutional conditions that make it possible.

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