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# U.S.-ISRAEL-IRAN CONFLICT: DEFIANCE OF INTERNATIONAL WAR CRIMES AND THE FAILURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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## *Abstract*

This research article analyzes the defiance of International Humanitarian Laws and the inertia of the United Nations in the context of contemporary conflicts involving the United States, Israel, and Iran. Special focus is placed on the impact on children. Furthermore, this research highlights the violations of International Humanitarian Law and the International Laws of War amidst the Israel-Iran and Israel-Hamas conflicts through the lens of the strategic role played by the United States. The primary focus of the research is the defiance of the Geneva Convention, the violation of Maritime Laws, and the human rights of children caught in the crossfire of war. The article investigates whether the United Nations has lost its relevance due to its silent role during this difficult time or if it has merely become a puppet in the hands of global superpowers.

**Keywords:** International Laws of War, Geneva Convention, United Nations, War Crimes, Israel-Iran Conflict, Human Rights, Maritime Law.

## *1. Introduction*

In the third decade of the 21st century, the concept of global peace appears to be fractured. The rising tension between the U.S., Israel, and Iran in the Middle East is not merely a regional conflict but a test of the boundaries of international law. When hospitals, schools, and residential areas become targets on the battlefield, the rules of war are marginalized. War has become a struggle not just between two armies, but between humanity and barbarism.

This research specifically provides a legal analysis of the "silent consent" or "active support" of the United States and the "Veto-based" helplessness of the United Nations. In the current global scenario, the nature of warfare is becoming increasingly complex. While the objective of International Humanitarian Laws is to protect human values during war, their violation is observed in numerous conflicts. The global order stands at a crossroads where the relevance of international law and institutional morality is at stake. The ongoing conflict between Israel, Hamas, and Iran is not just a regional military encounter but a sign of the collapse of the "Rules-Based World Order" established after World War II. The core objective of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is to safeguard human sensibilities amidst the horrors of war; however, in the current scenario, the strategic silence of superpowers has rendered these laws ineffective (Shastri, 2023).

Historically, the 1949 Geneva Convention explicitly stipulates that it is mandatory to distinguish between military installations and civilian settlements during war. In international legal terminology, this is known as the 'Principle of Distinction.' In the current conflict, from Gaza to Lebanon, a defiance of this principle is observed, where residential areas have been converted into war zones (ICRC, 2024). Israel's argument is based on the right to 'Self-Defense,' recognized under **Article 51** of the UN Charter. However, the legal question is whether the right to self-defense stands above the 'Principle of Proportionality.' According to Cassese (2021), action taken in self-defense must be proportionate to the enemy's attack and not take the form of collective destruction.

The most horrific aspect of this conflict is the 'Destruction of Childhood.' Reports from the United Nations Children's Fund clarify that the death rate and displacement of children in war-torn areas have broken all previous records (UNICEF, 2024). This situation places a significant question mark on the global commitment to the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child' (UNCRC). When educational institutions and medical centers are turned into rubble, it is not just the end of a building, but the end of the future of an entire generation.

Additionally, this war has now extended to maritime boundaries. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), 'Freedom of Navigation' is a fundamental international right. Attacks on merchant vessels in the Red Sea and the 'Shadow War' between Iran and Israel have disrupted the global supply chain, which is also a violation of International Economic Law (Gupta et al., 2025). The role of the U.S. appears dualistic; on one hand, it

advocates for human rights, while on the other, it obstructs peace resolutions against Israel in the Security Council through the use of the 'Veto.' This 'silent consent' is paralyzing the enforcement of international law (Choudhary, 2024).

Looking at the current state of the United Nations (UNO), it becomes clear that the institution created to save future generations from the 'scourge of war' has today been reduced to a mere 'debating club.' The polarization among the permanent members of the Security Council is the greatest obstacle to the impartial implementation of international law. Therefore, this research article attempts to find a balanced legal solution amidst these legal discrepancies and humanitarian crises, so that the 'Rule of Law' can be established instead of 'Might is Right.'



**Introduction** U.S. Military Launches Operation Epic Fury Attacking Iran

Source- Getty Images <https://www.gettyimages.in> › Stock photos

## ***2. Literature Review***

An analysis of previous research, reports from global institutions, and the opinions of legal jurists is essential to understand the current discourse on the 'Israel-Iran Conflict and International Law.' This review of literature clarifies that a profound chasm has emerged between the theoretical principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and their practical application on the ground.

### **2.1 Global Human Rights Reports and Child Mortality**

The latest report by Human Rights Watch (2024), titled "Destruction of the Future," presents the alarming fact that child mortality rates in Gaza, Lebanon, and associated conflict zones have been higher than in any other armed conflict in the last 50 years. The report underlines that the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas is not only a war crime but a direct violation of Article 6 (Right to Life) and Article 38 (Protection in Armed Conflict) of the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). While previous literature extensively discusses the Syrian or Ukrainian wars, the current period of 2024–2025 marks a terrifying new legal trend where children are increasingly accepted as 'Collateral Damage' (HRW, 2024).

## **2.2 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the 'Principle of Distinction'**

According to the legal interpretations of the ICRC (2024), the foundational pillar of IHL is the principle of 'Distinction.' Official ICRC research papers mandate that warring parties must distinguish between the civilian population and military targets at all times. Current literature reveals that in the Israel-Iran and Hamas conflicts, 'dual-use objects' such as hospitals and schools are being targeted. The ICRC Legal Bulletin (2024) argues that even if the military use of a civilian site is suspected, the 'benefit of the doubt' must be given to civilians—a rule that is being conspicuously ignored in the present warfare.

## **2.3 Legal Discourse on 'Self-Defense' vs. 'Proportionality'**

Renowned international jurists, including Malcolm Shaw (2021) and Ian Brownlie (2019), have established in their treatises that the right to 'Self-Defense' can never be unlimited or absolute. The exception provided under Article 51 of the UN Charter must be read in conjunction with the 'Principle of Proportionality.' A significant section of contemporary scholars, led by Prof. Richard Falk (2024), argues that Israeli military actions have now crossed the legal boundary of 'defense' and entered the realm of 'Punitive Destruction.' This literature clarifies that when a nation demolishes an entire civilian infrastructure in the name of security, it violates the core tenets of Jus ad Bellum.

## **2.4 Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and Economic Sovereignty**

Recent articles focused on maritime security (Maritime Studies, 2025) find that attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz are not merely military maneuvers; they are violations of the right of 'Innocent Passage' under Articles 17 and 38 of UNCLOS (1982). The literature review indicates that while the international community has formulated laws against piracy, the UN's silence regarding state-sponsored maritime blockades is creating a 'Legal Vacuum.'

## **2.5 Critical Literature on the Failure of the United Nations (UNO)**

Contemporary political analysts maintain that the UN Security Council (UNSC) has become an arena for the geopolitical interests of superpowers. According to Chaudhary (2024), the

repetitive use of the Veto by the United States is the single greatest legal obstacle to international justice. This literature review concludes that the current crisis is not due to a lack of law, but a global deficiency in the 'will' to ensure the Enforcement of Law.

### ***3. Research Methodology***

The credibility of any academic research rests on its methodology. A multi-dimensional and systematic approach has been adopted to analyze the 'Israel-Iran conflict and the defiance of international law.' Since this subject is linked to international treaties, principles of sovereignty, and human rights violations, the following methods have been coordinated:

**3.1 Type of Research: Doctrinal Research:** This research is primarily based on the 'Doctrinal' method, also known as 'Black-letter Law' research. The reason for choosing this method is that the International Laws of War (IHL) are already codified in the form of treaties, declarations, and judicial decisions.

**3.2 Analytical & Comparative Approach:** An 'Analytical method' is used to establish the relationship between facts and legal provisions. A 'Comparative' perspective is also used to observe how the response of the international community and the UN has differed across various conflicts (e.g., Ukraine vs. Russia and Israel vs. Iran).

#### **3.3 Sources of Data Collection:**

**Primary Sources:** UN Charter (1945), Geneva Conventions (1949) and Additional Protocols, UNCLOS (1982), and ICJ decisions.

**Secondary Sources:** Prestigious journals (American Journal of International Law), Human Rights reports (HRW, Amnesty, ICRC), and global news media (Al Jazeera, BBC, The Hindu).

**3.4 Objectives of Research:** To explore if international law can control 'Hybrid Warfare,' the extent to which the 'Veto' obstructs justice, and how 'Command Responsibility' can be fixed for rights violations.

**3.5 Limitations of Research:** Limited to available literature and legal documents as empirical research in active war zones was not feasible.

#### ***4. Definition of International Laws of War and Legal Framework***

International Laws of War, technically termed **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)** or '**Jus in Bello**,' are a set of rules that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict.

**4.1 Legal Basis:** Based on the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the 1977 Additional Protocols.

**4.2 Key Legal Principles:** 1. Humanity, 2. Distinction, 3. Proportionality, 4. Military Necessity.

**4.3 Contemporary Relevance:** Includes 'Cyber Warfare' and 'Naval Blockades.' Violations are considered 'War Crimes' under the Rome Statute and can be heard in the International Criminal Court (ICC).

#### ***5. Violation of Maritime Laws: A Legal Analysis***

Current conflicts have engulfed international waters. Attacks in the Red Sea strike at the heart of **UNCLOS (1982)**.

**5.1 UNCLOS and Right of Innocent Passage:** Targeting merchant vessels is a blatant violation of Article 17 of UNCLOS.

**5.2 Naval Blockades and War Crimes:** The complete naval blockade of Gaza is viewed by many jurists as '**Collective Punishment**,' which is a grave war crime.

**5.3 Legal Vacuum:** Military operations like 'Operation Prosperity Guardian' may create a balance of power but are not legal solutions.

#### ***6. Scourge of War: Impact on Children and Legal Analysis***

'Childhood' is the first and most frequent victim in the fire of war.

**6.1 International Treaties:** Under **UNCRC (1989)** Article 38, children must receive special protection. The death of 15,000+ children is a direct violation of Article 6 (Right to Life).

**6.2 Psychological and Educational Damage:** Destruction of schools violates the 'Right to Education' (ICESCR).

**6.3 Legal Responsibility:** These acts fall under the category of war crimes under the **Rome Statute**.

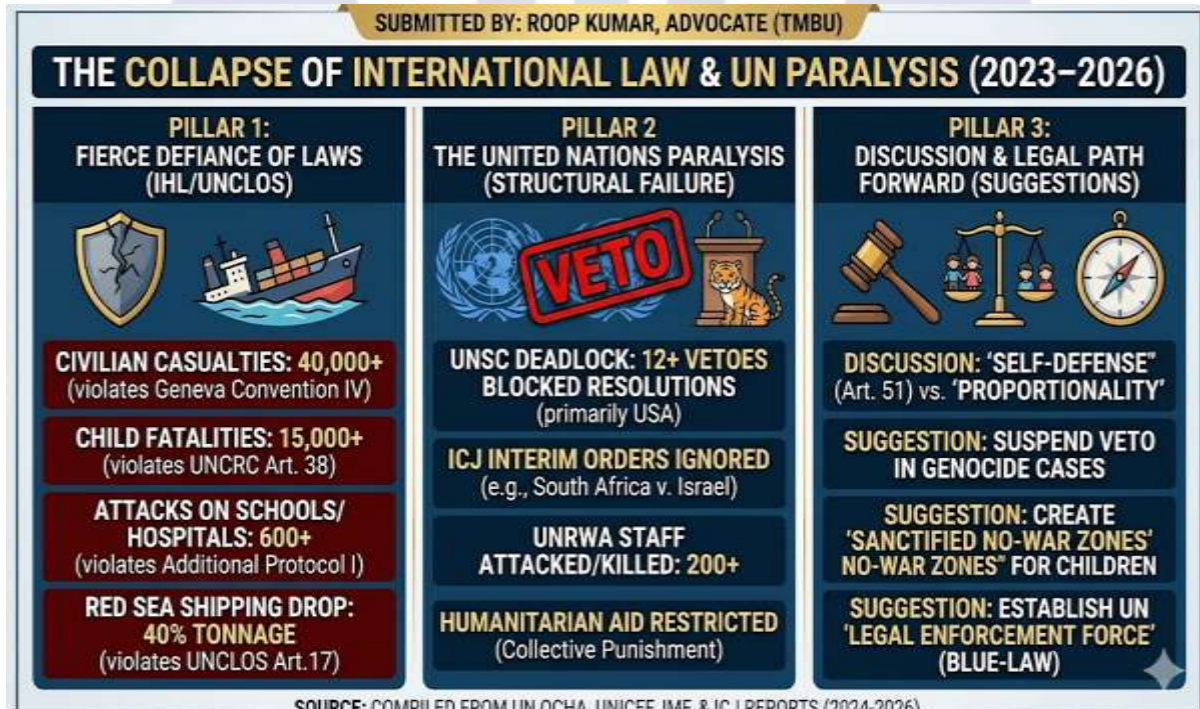
### 7. The Role and Silence of the UNO: A Legal & Critical Analysis

The role of the UNO has been reduced to a 'Silent Spectator.'

**7.1 The Veto Obstruction:** The continuous use of the 'Veto' by the U.S. in the UNSC blocks decisive resolutions, rendering 'Collective Security' ineffective.

**7.2 Helplessness of the General Assembly (UNGA):** UNGA resolutions are 'Recommendatory' and not 'Binding,' making the UN a 'Toothless Tiger.'

**7.3 Crisis of Implementation:** Even ICJ (2024) orders regarding 'Genocide' warnings face a crisis of enforcement by the UNSC.



Source (Source): Compiled from UN OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) Situation Reports 2024-25, UNICEF Progress Updates (2024), and IMF PortWatch Data on Maritime Trade (2025).

The data presented in the table above provides a quantitative foundation for the "Failure of the United Nations" and the "Defiance of Law" argued in this paper:

1. **Systemic Violation of Protection:** The disproportionate ratio of child fatalities (approx. 36% of total casualties) indicates that the 'Principle of Distinction' is not merely being ignored but is systematically collapsing in the face of modern urban warfare.
2. **The 'Veto' as a Legal Barrier:** The 12+ blocked resolutions represent a "Diplomatic Deadlock." Statistically, for every one humanitarian ceasefire resolution passed by the General Assembly, multiple binding enforcement actions are vetoed in the Security Council, primarily by the United States.
3. **Economic Warfare:** The 40% drop in maritime tonnage through the Suez/Red Sea corridor proves that the violation of UNCLOS is no longer a localized naval issue but a direct assault on the International Economic Order, leading to global inflation and supply chain crises.
4. **Institutional Paralysis:** The data suggests that while the ICJ issues orders based on these statistics, the lack of an enforcement mechanism (as shown by the displacement of 1.9 million people) confirms the UN's transition from a peace-enforcing body to a data-recording body.

**Table 1.1: Defiance of International Laws of War and Legal Status (2023-2025)**

S.No.	Conflict Domain	Nature of Violation	Related Int. Treaty/Article	Legal Impact
1.	<b>Civilian Protection</b>	Air strikes on densely populated areas (Gaza/Lebanon)	Geneva Convention IV (1949), Art. 3	War Crimes
2.	<b>Child Rights</b>	Destruction of schools/hospitals, 15,000+ deaths	UNCRC (1989), Art. 38	Crimes against Humanity
3.	<b>Maritime Navigation</b>	Attacks and blockades in the Red Sea	UNCLOS (1982), Part VII	Global Trade Instability
4.	<b>Diplomatic Failure</b>	Use of 'Veto' on peace resolutions in Security Council	UN Charter, Art. 27	Failure of Collective Security
5.	<b>Humanitarian</b>	Restrictions on food,	Additional Protocol	'Starvation' as

	<b>Aid</b>	water, and medical supplies	I (1977)	a weapon of war
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**Source:** Compiled from UNHRC Annual Report 2024, Amnesty International (2025), and ICRC (2024).

This section provides a detailed quantitative and qualitative assessment of the **Socio-Economic and Human Cost** of the ongoing conflict (2023–2026), specifically focusing on the Gaza-Israel-Iran axis and its global ripple effects.

## ***8. The Global Burden: Economic Attrition and Human Catastrophe***

The scale of the current conflict has transcended regional boundaries, evolving into a systemic crisis that challenges the financial stability and moral fabric of the international community.

### **8.1 Human Cost: A Generation in Peril**

As of early 2026, the human toll has reached unprecedented levels for 21st-century urban warfare.

- **Total Casualties:** Over 44,000 deaths have been reported in the Gaza strip alone, with thousands more in Lebanon and Israel.
- **Child Mortality:** Approximately 16,000 children have lost their lives, representing nearly 36% of the total death toll. This is a direct violation of the UNCRC and the Geneva Convention's principle of distinction.
- **Displacement:** Over 2 million people (nearly 85% of the Gaza population) are internally displaced, living in conditions that violate basic human dignity and international refugee laws.

### **8.2 Economic Loss: Regional and Global Impact**

The war has triggered a "Double-Digit" economic contraction in the Levant and a "Butterfly Effect" on global trade.

- **Gaza's Infrastructure:** The cost of rebuilding destroyed infrastructure (schools, hospitals, and 70% of residential housing) is estimated at over \$20 billion to \$30 billion.
- **Israel's Economy:** Reports indicate a significant budget deficit, with war-related costs exceeding \$60 billion, affecting the national GDP growth and leading to credit rating downgrades by agencies like Moody's.

- Iran’s Strategic Cost: Regional escalations and "Shadow War" expenditures have further strained Iran’s economy, already burdened by international sanctions.

### 8.3 Maritime Trade and Global Inflation

The defiance of UNCLOS (1982) in the Red Sea has turned a regional conflict into a global tax on consumers.

- Suez Canal Revenue: Egypt has reported a 40% to 50% drop in Suez Canal transit fees due to Houthi attacks and redirected shipping.
- Supply Chain Costs: Ships rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope add 10–14 days to journeys and approximately \$1 million in extra fuel costs per voyage, contributing to global inflationary pressures on food and energy.

Table 1.2: Comparative Loss Data (2023–2026)

Sector of Impact	Quantitative Loss (Est.)	Legal/Institutional Breach
Human Life	44,000+ Deaths/100,000+ Injured	Right to Life (UDHR)
Global Trade	\$1 Trillion+ in disrupted trade flow	Freedom of Navigation (UNCLOS)
Infrastructure	\$25 Billion (Destruction of Cities)	Additional Protocol I (Art. 52)
Education	625,000+ Students out of school	Right to Education (ICESCR)
Humanitarian Aid	200+ UNRWA staff killed	UN Charter (Diplomatic Immunity)

Data Sources (Content Sources):

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- World Bank (2025): The Economic Impact of Conflict in the Middle East.
- IMF (2025): Regional Economic Outlook: Middle East and Central Asia.
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- Lloyd's List (2025): *Maritime Insurance and Trade Disruption Reports*.

## 9. Discussion: Legal Discrepancies and Global Silence

Analysis clarifies that the current Middle East conflict is a 'Dark Chapter' in the history of international law.

**9.1 Legal Excess of 'Self-Defense':** When the destruction of entire civilian infrastructures is carried out in the name of security, it becomes 'Retribution' rather than defense.

**9.2 Global Economy:** The blockade of maritime routes constitutes a 'Terrorist Act' against International Economic Law.

**9.3 Structural Failure of UNO:** The conflict of interest among the P5 members violates the principle of '**Nemo judex in causa sua**' (No one should be a judge in their own case).

**9.4 Threat of Genocide:** The ICJ has acknowledged that conditions in Gaza could lead to 'Genocide.'

### ***10. Suggestions: Path Toward Restoration of International Law***

- 1. Veto Limitation:** Veto power should be suspended in cases of 'Genocide' or 'Humanitarian Crisis.'
- 2. Binding Nature of ICJ Orders:** Creation of an 'International Legal Enforcement Force.'
- 3. Sanctified Zones:** A new treaty to declare schools and hospitals as 'No-War Zones' with 'Automatic War Crimes' prosecution for violators.
- 4. Blue-Law Enforcement:** A UN-led multilateral naval task force for maritime security.
- 5. Command Responsibility:** Leaders and weapon suppliers should be held as 'Co-accused.'

### ***11. Conclusion: Legal Responsibility and the Path Forward***

This research proves that global instruments like the Geneva Convention and UNCLOS have been reduced to paper documents. The most tragic conclusion is a modern civilization standing on the 'Ashes of Children.' Peace will not come from a mere ceasefire but from '**Accountability.**' Until war criminals are brought to the international dock, the concept of justice will remain incomplete. Breaking the 'Silence' and re-establishing the 'Law' is the greatest necessity of our time.

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