

Navigating the fog of war: Transforming the UN Security Council's Veto power in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

In the thick mist of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the term “fog of war” has become a lived reality with tangible and tragic consequences. The concept, which indicates the uncertainty inherent in battle, is clearly visible in the Middle East's complexity and instability (Shapiro, 2004). The ineffectiveness of international observers in such local conflicts, as well as their limited mandate and lack of enforcement power, has contributed to perpetuating this “fog” (Berdal, 2003). Therefore, to remove uncertainties and cultivate long-term peace, key aspects of international governance must be rethought. It is critical to analyze how global entities can go from being passive spectators to proactive agents of change, leading to tangible and meaningful results. This paper will begin by examining the concept of the “fog of war”, after which the focus will be shifted to analyze the role of the United Nations, specifically its lack of enforcement power. The paper will conclude by offering insights and recommendations on how global entities can cut through the “fog”, leading to meaningful results in the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

“Fog of war” is a metaphor for the chaos and uncertainty that characterizes conflicts and seriously hinders clarity of view and effective decision-making (Shapiro, 2004, p. 234). This phenomenon is not only limited to the battlefield but also extends to the geopolitical arena as well. Its impact is particularly visible in long-running hostilities such as the Israeli-Palestinian war, which has often been described as “the most intractable conflict of all time” (Wei & Santos, 2019, p.258). In these scenarios, two major challenges arise: the struggle to obtain clear and unbiased information and the presence of political biases that often distort the understanding of enduring conflicts. Carl von Clausewitz famously stated, “War is the realm of uncertainty; three-quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater and lesser uncertainty” (Russel, 2010).

The United Nations, designed as a guardian of world peace, finds its ability to dissolve this fog restricted by structural limitations within its own system. The Security Council's veto authority, in particular, has often been scrutinized in the past years (Krause and Ronzitti, 2012). In theory, the veto ensures that big nations have a role in global peace efforts. However, it has also frequently resulted in delays, particularly when rapid and decisive action is necessary (Berdal, 2003). Certain members frequently take advantage of the current power

dynamics in the Security Council, and employ their veto against crucial resolutions, which leads to the obstruction of the truth. These actions prevent the implementation of potential majority-supported solutions, thereby creating situations where the true nature of a conflict remains misrepresented (Szewczyk, 2011). For example, in 2023, the United Nations Security Council failed to adopt a resolution on the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The October 18, 2023 resolution calling for "humanitarian pauses" and for Israel to rescind its evacuation order for northern Gaza was blocked (Asrar, 2023). In general, the US has vetoed resolutions on Israel a total of 46 times, which has usually resulted in diplomatic deadlock (Asrar, 2023). The "fog of war" is thus not merely a consequence of the complexity of conflicts themselves but is also a product of structural limitations within the very institution designed to resolve them.

Consequently, reforming the Security Council's veto authority is crucial for the international community to resolve crises effectively (Leigh-Phippard, 1994). Without the veto power, the resolution for a humanitarian pause in Gaza might have passed, mandating a ceasefire that could have allowed the delivery of crucial humanitarian aid earlier. This action would have not only alleviated immediate suffering but also enabled more international observers to enter Gaza and report accurately on the situation (Leigh-Phippard, 1994, p.2). The absence of a veto would potentially encourage more diplomacy and compromise, which in turn could reduce the "fog" by ensuring that the UN acts as an impartial entity dedicated to resolving conflicts based on the principles of justice and international law and not on the agendas of few dominant states (Patrick 2023). It is also crucial to mention that removing the veto would potentially have to be accompanied by the existing majority voting system, ensuring that the collective will of the majority prevails, even if at least one country opposes a resolution. This reform of the United Nations Security Council could be a critical step in unwinding complex conflicts all over the world, while also changing the status quo where confusion, uncertainty and indecisiveness reign.

In conclusion, the "fog of war" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is exacerbated by the United Nations Security Council's veto power, which often prevents timely and equitable resolutions. Reforming this system by eliminating the veto could lead to more decisive and just actions, potentially resolving conflict and promoting a world where peace can be sustained. Such reform could be vital for the UN to act as an impartial force, guiding conflict resolution

through the principles of international law and justice, thereby clearing the uncertainty that obscures the path to lasting peace.

Reference List

- Andresen, S. (2007). The effectiveness of UN environmental institutions. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 7(4), 317–336.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10784-007-9048-0>
- Asrar, S. (2023, October 26). How the US has used its veto power at the UN in support of Israel. Al Jazeera.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/how-the-us-has-used-its-veto-power-at-the-un>
- Berdal, M. (2003). The UN Security Council: Ineffective but indispensable. *Survival*, 45(2), 7–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/003963303123313434761>
- Krause, J., & Ronzitti, N. (2012). *The EU, the UN and collective security: Making Multilateralism Effective*. Routledge.
- Leigh-Phippard, H. (1994). Remaking the Security Council: The Options. *The World Today*, 50(9), 3-6. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40396700>
- Patrick, S. (2023, June 28). UN Security Council Reform: What the world thinks. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
<https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/28/un-security-council->
- Russell, J. (2010). Innovation, transformation, and war: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007. *Stanford Security Studies*.
- Shapiro, M. J. (2005). The Fog of War [Review of *The Fog of War, No Man's Land*, by E. Morris & D. Tanovic]. *Security Dialogue*, 36(2), 233–246.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26298889>
- Szewczyk, B. M. J. (2011, July 13). Variable multipolarity and UN Security Council reform. SSRN. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1883850
- Wei, J., & Santos, E. (2019). Narrative Origin Classification of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Texts. Retrieved from <https://cdn.aaii.org/ocs/18443/18443-79383-1-PB.pdf>