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The United States' Active Compliance and Trump's Peace Plan: The Retreat of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in the Gaza Genocide

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This paper analyses the issues of the applicability of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm in the light of the present-day Gaza genocide. It highlights the United States' active complicity in the preservation of Israel's conduct and its contradictory peace plan for a ceasefire in Gaza. It contends that Washington's diplomatic, military, and political aid to Israel has exposed the discriminatory usage of humanitarian principles, undermining U.S. legitimacy as a protector of worldwide human rights. By juxtaposing the academic concept of R2P with its active failure in Gaza, the research highlights the United Nations' passivity, the resolve of great-power vetoes, and the preponderance of realpolitik over humanitarian principles. Employing constructivist and realist theories, it exemplifies how double standards by the United States, through its intervention in Libya and criticising Russia's actions in Ukraine while covering for Israel, corrode its normative leadership in the global order. Finally, the paper contends that the decline of R2P, combined with American complicity in Gaza, foreshadows a wider legitimacy crisis that can accelerate the geopolitical realignment towards a multipolar world order.

Keywords: Gaza genocide, Responsibility to Protect, US legitimacy, Constructivism, Realpolitik

Introduction

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterrus, in the high-level conference on Israel-Palestine war, stated that the humanitarian issue will soon be a point of no return unless necessary actions are taken to prevent the occupation and creation of a one-state solution, later eradicating the Gaza civilians in sum. Therefore, he demands a two-state solution for the crisis to bring justice for Palestinians (Mishra, 2025). The United States have been a constant supporter of Israel and has constantly provided aid and military assistance. Hamas's October 7, 2023, attacks have escalated into a genocide by Israel, with nearly 1.9 million people displaced from the Gaza Strip (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 2025). Deliberate acts of destruction of Gaza with mass killings have been concluded as 'crimes against humanity of extermination', and labelled as acts of genocide under the 1948 convention on genocide, as per the Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Several United Nations agencies and human rights organisations condemned Israeli aggression in Gaza. The US President, Donald Trump, even proposed an administrative takeover of the Gaza Strip in February 2025, a controversial plan to solve the Israel-Palestine crisis (Harvey, 2025). Oxfam stated the death rate of the people in Gaza per day to be more than all other recent conflicts, be it in Syria or Ukraine. The current death toll has reached over 60,000 since October 2023, as per the latest updates (Moench, 2025). Even though the predictions of a famine in Gaza were made since November 2023, the international community failed to halt the genocide. It continued to bomb and destroy infrastructure, spreading diseases and inducing starvation and scholars, including Raz Segal, call Gaza the textbook example of genocide (Verdeja, 2025). Disagreements regarding who is the legitimate victim, while assessing the Israel-Palestine War, are plentiful in the current academic sphere.

The purpose of the article is to examine the relevance and applicability of the Responsibility to Protect norm in Palestine, and how the United States' soft power gets eroded with its support for Israel by neglecting the Gaza genocide as a previous intervenor of R2P in Libya. The question arises whether the U.S.'s active compli-

ance in Gaza will create legitimacy issues for it, potentially eroding public support for the United States and, in turn, affecting the United States' international legitimacy in the future, amid the novel geopolitical shift brewing alongside the 2025 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit.

Research Methodology

The study uses a qualitative analysis, utilising relevant document interpretation and a critical discourse analysis. With Rahmani's concept of 'active complicity' (Rahmani, 2024) of the great powers in enabling genocides and potentially violating global norms, a critical study with a constructivist theoretical framework and realism is done to comprehend the United States' peace plan in Gaza after two years of supporting the conflict. For the document analysis, relevant data from sources including the Human Rights Watch, the United Nations, and the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty have been collected and analysed.

The Responsibility to Protect Norm and its operational limits in Gaza

Along with Kosovo in 1999, the global indecision in cases of gross human rights violations committed in Somalia, Srebrenica and Rwanda ultimately gave rise to the development of the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm as a substitute to 'humanitarian intervention', developed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), inspired by Francis Deng's and Roberta Cohen's notion of 'sovereignty as responsibility' in the year 2001 (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2010). The 2005 World Summit document defines 'Responsibility to Protect' as the state's obligation to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes, the international community's obligation to support the states in doing so and assist them through all possible means if they fail to do so, set out in articles 138 to 140, and it is to be executed in cases where states fail to protect their citizens from four specific instances: war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide by using chapters VI and VII of the UN charter (2005 World Summit Outcome (A/RES/60/1), 2005). It consists of three core elements: 'Responsibility to Prevent, Responsibility to React, and Responsibility

to Rebuild’ (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2010). When the internationally recognised ‘Responsibility to Protect’ norm was adopted by the United Nations in 2005, through the UN World Summit document, as a substitute for humanitarian interventions, deliberations arose over the legitimacy of international interventions, predominantly spearheaded by the Global South. Particularly because several interventions occurred, most of them during the Cold War era, under the guise of humanitarianism, and historically, global South nations were victims of the West’s mission to be their saviours. The persistent efforts by United Nations Secretaries-General, especially Ban Ki-moon, have led to the reformulation of the three pillars of R2P.

In the United Nations report of the year 2009, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, “reframed R2P’s three pillars as:

- a) The responsibility of each sovereign state itself to protect its own populations from the atrocity crimes in question;
- b) the responsibility of other states to assist it to do so;
- c) the responsibility of the wider international community to respond promptly and by all appropriate means” (Implementing the Responsibility to Protect, 2009, 2009).

This means that, unlike humanitarian interventions with military takeover, responsibility to prevent acknowledges the states’ capacity building and prevention tools that are ready to prevent an atrocity crime. Often, it fails to occur due to the state’s fragile economic, political, and social system. Responsibility to React does not initially call for military intervention but resorts to mediation, conciliation, arbitration, sanctions, and condemnations. This is indeed a way for governments to be forced to adhere to global human rights norms and standards. Military intervention is the last resort after all peaceful means fail and is preferred only on a case-by-case basis. The failure to incorporate the criteria for military intervention, a massive flaw of the norm, which are stated in the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), is as follows:

- a) Just cause; b) Right authority; c) Right intention; d) Proportional means; e) Last resort; f) Reasonable prospects (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2010).

Responsibility to Rebuild enables the states to return to routine administration and governance with the intervener's support. However, there are limitations to it. There is no objection to redefining sovereignty as responsibility, but transferring authority to the global community when a state fails to protect its own citizens violates the traditional concept of state sovereignty. Critics like Noam Chomsky have argued that the United States and its allies represent the international community (Chomsky, 2025). The norm was labelled universal, yet only a few interventions happened through R2P. The inaction in the Syrian civil war, with the fear of Russia vetoing in the UNSC, added fuel to the fire.

Postcolonial scholars rejected the R2P norm as a neo-colonial tool, alongside several global South states that have explicitly expressed their apprehensions about it. The Libyan crisis in 2011 created a huge ruckus with the regime change and the inability to peacefully reinstate peace in the state by the United States through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The Libyan incident highlighted issues with the norm, while Gareth Evans, a proponent of R2P, viewed it as a textbook example of R2P. The norm has been labelled dormant after its application in Libya. Still, it has been widely discussed and proposed in several cases, none of which have materialised due to the fear of a veto deadlock from Russia and China. Roland Paris argues that the norm has several structural issues, making it challenging to be universally applicable, reasonable, and consistent. Issues like mixed motives, counterfactuals, conspicuous harm, Inconsistency, and End-state (Paris, 2014) reveal the inherent problems with a military intervention, even when initiated under R2P with the United Nations Security Council resolution or a United Nations General Assembly authorisation in the event of a veto deadlock. At the same time, supporters of R2P, like Ramesh Thakur, argue that these issues can be addressed through organisational reform, norm adjustments, and improved legitimacy.

Rather than proposing an R2P, it is failing to offer protection to the people in Gaza, limited by the United Nations Security Council vetoes. To put it simply, the UN remains paralysed. A recent comprehensive study with qualitative interviews from forty R2P experts, from

Western as well as the BRICS, suggested that even though a majority did not propose a military appeal to the situation, putting international pressure on Israel received considerably high consensus rates, and the authors conclude that internal pressure from people in the West could result in shifting the mainstream attitude towards Israel and potentially change Government opinion, particularly the United States and possibly halt the ongoing genocide (Crowley-Vigneau et al., 2025). Illingworth argues for the incorporation of a negative duty, more specifically, a duty to prevent harm and inflict harm upon states after identifying the current hypocrisy of Western states and their assistance to the abusive regimes, like that of Israel in the Gaza genocide (Illingworth, 2025). Notably, the United Nations is losing its credibility as the world is witnessing severe famine, with over 50,000 people in Gaza at risk currently (United Nations, 2025).

The United States' Active Complicity and Legitimacy Crisis in Gaza

Rahmani describes 'active complicity' as the Global North driving specific humanitarian interventions by showing active involvement in civil wars occurring, by modifying their foreign policy, and does not simply choose inaction during a crisis, as represented by 'bystander complicity' (Rahmani, 2024). As the international community of intervenors is predominantly led by the United States and its partners, the West categorises Russia and China as obstructers of a possible international humanitarian intervention, even with United Nations approval. Samuel Grass examines how US foreign policy is constructed through continually created norms and narratives, highlighting its power and ascendancy. Gavan Duffy and Brian Frederking have demonstrated how US public speeches and anti-China narratives influence foreign policy choices and hypothesise potential opponents (Lim, 2021).

Neo-liberal scholarship portrayed the United States as the custodian of humanitarianism. However, the inability to initiate an R2P intervention, as the world watches the genocide and the induced famine in Gaza, is due to the United States' hesitancy to initiate an R2P and potentially apply veto power in the UNSC. The United States, being the leading protector of Israel in the Gaza genocide, has revealed the dominance of geopolitics and counter-terrorism propaganda

over humanitarianism in the global system. This affects the legality of the worldwide community, the UN, and the global norms on humanitarianism. The United States has labelled Israel's act as self-defence and against terrorism, rejecting the claims of genocide in Gaza. The United States' stance on Gaza exposes the mixed motives issue inherent in the norm, with the U.S.'s lack of national interests in the scenario, revealing the double standards of the U.S in upholding global norms on humanitarianism. The international community serves as a global governance mechanism that lacks the means to implement. The United States is likely transforming its identity from being the defender of human rights and democracy to focusing on overt realpolitik, and constructivist scholars define this as an instance of 'identity crisis.' While the United States condemned Russia's aggression in the Ukraine war, it has taken a contradictory stance in Gaza. Scholars view this act as a retreat from global norms on humanitarianism and as a shift in agency from the United States, as the norm interpreter and intervener, redefining the legitimacy of the global order. There were no proposals to impose a no-fly zone or sanctions to protect Palestinians, in sharp contrast with the actions taken during the 2011 crisis in Libya and calls for responsibility to protect globally. The United States' support for Israel is indeed a challenge to the liberal democratic values they uphold, as Moses revealed, contradicting the notion that atrocity crimes and liberal democracy have a considerable gap, and R2P always had a political rather than a moral base that argues for a shift in universalisation of warfare to an advanced humanitarianism (Moses, 2024). Apart from the choosiness problem with humanitarian interventions and the bystander complicity, by not responding to a grave humanitarian crisis, as it does not align with their national interests, 'active complicity' is illustrated here, with the United States contributing to the humanitarian situation in Gaza by being the key enabler of the crisis (Rahmani, 2024). To illustrate, the NATO-led intervention in Libya should be cross-checked. Was it purely driven by humanitarian motives or had underlying strategic interests? Did the intervention resolve the crisis, or has it led to an ongoing crisis in Libya? These 'typical intervening actors' (Rahmani, 2024), including the United States, as Rahmani states, are themselves enabling humanitarian crises. From

the U.S. way of ‘Scramble for Africa,’ by randomly dividing Africa and making borders within provinces without acknowledging the regional diversity, to the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Latin American wars during the Cold War epoch, are enough examples of the U.S. being the key enablers of humanitarian crisis and not just being mere bystanders to the crisis. The U.S.’s urge to become a saviour, with the intention of ending the authoritarian arbitrariness in the so-called underdeveloped states where humanitarian crises frequently occur, occurred only when its strategic interests aligned. This has been ongoing since the end of the two devastating World Wars and throughout the Cold War era. However, with the dominance of other states, the US became invested in framing global narratives in its favour, focusing on anti-terrorism after 9/11 in 2001 to fight in Afghanistan, then as the proponent of democracy and as the guardian of human rights to compete against the security threats from China and the emerging powers, who could probably create a multipolar world order against their will.

Yuki Yoshida stated that no change has occurred after R2P’s evolution, as qualitatively compared to NATO’s interventions, both of which were unilateral: in Kosovo in 1999 and through R2P resolution 1973 in Libya in 2011 (Yoshida, 2013). Strategic interests were at stake in both cases, and the U.S. seized the opportunity to assert its dominance and present itself as the liberator, protecting the victims. The world has seen the U.S. voice for human rights, democracy and liberalism while doing covert interventions, often using humanitarianism as a camouflage. However, in Gaza, we see the U.S. offering overt support for its strategic partner and prioritising its strategic interests over human rights protection. The United States and its allies call Israel’s action self-defence and display a prejudiced political stand, as the population in Gaza suffers indiscriminately, and the United Nations’ credibility is getting tarnished through the United States’ actions (Hemchi, 2024). The U.S. faces global criticism for its support for Israel, particularly after the Pentagon’s clarification regarding weapon supply for the genocide and the constant diplomatic backing for Israel in global platforms (Teitt, 2025). Russia’s war with Ukraine was met with stringent measures, condemnation for war crimes, rapid deploy-

ment of sanctions and calls for R2P. Similar measures were also followed in Syria. What is illustrated here is the U.S.'s explicit double standards. The state has failed to utilise the Leahy law or to enact the Congressionally mandated law, which could prevent aid to states that conceivably commit human rights abuses, and any meaningful investigation is being dismissed repeatedly (Yager, 2024). With the United States' actions in Gaza, future human rights endeavours of the U.S. will not carry legitimacy and will be seen as political over humanitarian.

Constructivism, Realpolitik, and the United States' Peace Plan

Constructivism explains that ideas, norms, and values shape how states behave in the international arena, in contrast to traditional theories of international relations. As these norms and values vary across social contexts, states leverage opportunities to shape public opinion in their favour. The perception of the U.S. is shifting globally with its involvement in the Gaza genocide, particularly with the pro-Palestine media narratives. It is far more likely that the U.S. would stop defending Israel. Still, the younger generation in the state has stood for the Palestinian cause, officially delegitimising the state's actions in the global sphere. The pro-Palestinian protests within the state have the potential to gradually influence the government. To give an idea, the ending of the U.S. war with Iraq was influenced by public opinion and constant heavy political pressure.

It is unlikely that the existing world order, dominated by the U.S., would undergo drastic change. The hegemonic status of the U.S. depends on the confluence of military spending, economic dominance, and political influence. Their military spending is the highest, and financial experts recognise the global dominance of the US dollar, which possesses an 'exorbitant privilege' (Yared, 2024). However, because they break the international norms and rules they have shaped, they face a legitimacy crisis. The potential rise of other states, such as China, Russia, and India, challenges U.S. hegemony, eroding global trust and confidence. Shifting their image from being the protector of democracy and human rights to being explicit accomplices of genocide in the social media age would have its repercussions. Selective morality, one for the U.S. and its allies and others, has its limits. Even

though several implicit controversial interventions happened and the U.S. got away with it several times through their blatant justifications of human rights norms that they created through institutions that they have a superior say in, the Gaza genocide infuriates the public to an extent they have never seen before. Putting a ‘Democracy vs Autocracy’ label would not help them escape taking accountability for the Gaza genocide. To put it another way, the U.S.’s international identity is being rebuilt every day. This could potentially increase the likelihood of a geopolitical shift, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in 2025 has drawn attention, with several scholars viewing it as a significant development against the United States. The United States claims that India’s imports of Russian oil, which contributed to the war in Ukraine, and the increased tariffs imposed as a result, turned things around when the SCO meeting concluded with Russian Gas deals with India. While it was the U.S.’s way to coerce India to cut off economic ties with Russia, to condemn the Ukraine war, while being complicit in the genocide happening in Gaza, thus disclosing the Western double standards.

The U.S. acts as a security protector by providing military assistance to Ukraine and Israel, thereby representing their right to self-defence, contesting for their territory, and asserting their sovereign authority (Raine, 2024). The rupture in the U.S. legitimacy with its active compliance in the Gaza genocide challenges its unipolar dominance in the international sphere. As the U.S. tries to uphold the Israeli identity, it is reconstructing identities that may potentially sustain the conflict situation in Gaza, further questioning its own legitimacy in both the domestic and international arenas. In stark contrast to other states facing sanctions, the blocking of economic aid, isolation, public condemnations, and exclusion or suspension from international organisations, the U.S. would not have to fear these consequences. As far as the U.S. is concerned, its public image, shaped by Western narratives, discourse, and media, is vital to its international trust. Even though Donald Trump initiated a peace plan in Gaza on October 10th 2025, it is being scrutinised for his ulterior intentions to twist public opinion after years of backing up Israel, as it is viewed as just a formality to initiate Israel’s policy to maintain full rights to conduct at-

tacks until further notice, just like it did in Lebanon (Rusho, 2025).

Being on top of the pedestal, they have the power to influence global norms, and by supporting a genocide, it has ruined the state's reputation. What triumphs here is the predominance of realism over liberalism in US foreign policy, which can potentially overshadow humanitarianism, human rights, democratic peace theory, and even geopolitical advantage. The US policy in Gaza demonstrates the dominance of realism, a world where national interests are supreme. Sarah Yager, the Human Rights Watch director in Washington, opines that the US forces should be held accountable for aiding and assisting war crimes against Gaza (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Samuel P. Huntington stated that the erosion of internal legitimacy would weaken global authority, focusing on the importance of moral authority alongside power in the international system and as per his premonition, the US, trying to impose its model internationally, particularly in Israel and Palestine, would make it lose credibility in a multipolar world order (Huntington, 2005).

Conclusion

The Gaza genocide is a turning point in the lifespan of the Responsibility to Protect. What was once hailed as an ethical development in international relations has been brought low by great-power politics, veto-holdup, and selective application. The United States' active complicity in making it conceivable for Israeli atrocities to happen is the embodiment of normative discrepancy that reduces R2P as a political tool, as opposed to a universal principle. This complicity not only corrodes the United States' humanitarian credibility but also accelerates its failure to maintain legitimacy as the self-appointed protector of democracy and human rights. The abandonment of R2P in Gaza carries worrying implications. To begin with, it marks the failure of the international system to protect vulnerable groups when geopolitics becomes complex.

Second, it validates how the U.S. is moving from an enabler of humanitarian norms to an apparent perpetrator, aligning itself with strategic associates even when there is atrocity crimes involved.

Third, it highlights the cumulative disappointment of the Global South with Western-led global governance and, for the first time, delivers an opportunity to discover alternative power structures, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, that challenge U.S. domination.

Finally, the Gaza case exemplifies that the success of R2P is not reliant solely on institutional reform but also on greater credibility through justifiable application. Unless the U.S. and its allies resolve their own double standards, the international community is at risk of standardising genocide as a geopolitical chip. The loss of U.S. legitimacy could, in turn, accelerate the shift towards a more multipolar, fragmented world order in which humanitarian protection is eclipsed by strategic calculation. The two-state solution is being sidelined, the triumph of realism is exemplified, and the peace plan is intended mainly to shift the U.S. public opinion, as the pro-Palestinian supporters have arisen worldwide. This necessarily explains how the U.S. cares to build the global narrative to retain the state's legitimacy in the world order.

Limitations

The study faces restrictions, as the Israel-Palestine crisis is a rapidly developing scenario since military and diplomatic developments change considerably over time. The paper aims to give a theoretical analysis of the relationship between the United States' foreign policy and the 'Responsibility to Protect' norm's further failure in Gaza, resulting in the loss of U.S. legitimacy under the Donald Trump administration. The Trump Peace Plan during a particular period of time have been examined, and further reinterpretations of the same study would need a reassessment of the issue with new evidence and developments in the area.

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