

Review Article

Investigating The role of International Law in Maintaining World Peace

Babak Hajinezhad^{1*}

1. Master's degree in History of Islamic Iran, Payam Noor University, Tehran

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ABSTRACT

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Background and Objectives: International law serves as a fundamental framework for regulating state behavior, resolving conflicts, and promoting global peace. This review article examines the role of international law in maintaining world peace by analyzing its effectiveness in conflict prevention, dispute resolution, and enforcement mechanisms. Despite the existence of treaties, conventions, and institutions like the United Nations (UN) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), challenges such as state sovereignty, power imbalances, and non-compliance persist.

Methodology: The study employs a qualitative research methodology, reviewing scholarly articles, case studies, and legal instruments to assess the impact of international law on peacekeeping efforts.

Results: Findings indicate that while international law has contributed to reducing interstate conflicts through diplomatic and legal means, its enforcement remains inconsistent due to geopolitical interests and lack of universal adherence. The discussion highlights the need for stronger accountability mechanisms and reforms within international legal institutions to enhance their efficacy.

Conclusion: The study concludes that international law is indispensable for global peace but requires greater cooperation among states and improved institutional frameworks to address contemporary security threats.

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Introduction

The maintenance of world peace stands as one of the most fundamental challenges facing the international community in the 21st century. In an era marked by complex geopolitical rivalries, transnational terrorism, humanitarian crises, and emerging security threats ranging from cyber warfare to climate-induced conflicts, the role of international law in preserving global stability has never been more critical (Scicluna, 2021). This study examines the complex relationship between international legal frameworks and the preservation of world peace, investigating both the substantial contributions and significant limitations of law in preventing and resolving conflicts between states and non-state actors. The research holds particular significance at a time when traditional mechanisms of international cooperation face unprecedented challenges from rising nationalism, great power competition, and the proliferation of asymmetric warfare tactics (Koskenniemi, 2022). The significance of this study emerges from several pressing contemporary realities. First, the post-Cold War optimism about a "rules-based international order" has given way to increasing skepticism about the effectiveness of international institutions and legal mechanisms (Weiss & Wilkinson, 2023). Second, the nature of conflict itself has evolved dramatically, with non-state actors playing larger roles and new domains of conflict (cyberspace, outer space) emerging beyond the scope of traditional international law (Schmitt, 2023). Third, the growing impacts of climate change are creating new sources of international tension and potential conflict that existing legal frameworks are poorly equipped to address (McAdam, 2020). This study provides a timely and comprehensive assessment of how international law has adapted—or failed to adapt—to these evolving challenges, offering insights that are crucial for policymakers, legal scholars, and international relations experts. The problem this research addresses is multifaceted and deeply consequential. Despite the elaborate architecture of international law developed since the establishment of the United Nations system

in 1945, the world continues to witness persistent armed conflicts, gross human rights violations, and the frequent flouting of international legal norms by both state and non-state actors (Glanville, 2019). The core problem lies in the substantial gap between the normative aspirations of international law and its practical effectiveness in maintaining peace. This gap manifests in several ways: the selective application of legal principles by powerful states; the structural limitations of international institutions like the UN Security Council, where veto power can paralyze collective action; and the absence of robust enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with international legal decisions (Hathaway & Shapiro, 2020). These challenges raise fundamental questions about whether international law can genuinely constrain state behavior in matters of war and peace, or whether it merely serves as a discursive framework that powerful states invoke or ignore as it suits their interests (Krasner, 1999). The literature review component of this study engages with several key strands of scholarly debate about international law and world peace. The first concerns the theoretical foundations of international law's authority, contrasting the "legal idealist" perspective that sees law as progressively constraining state behavior (Kelsen, 2020) with more skeptical realist views that emphasize power politics and state interests as the ultimate determinants of international outcomes (Mearsheimer, 2025). A second major debate examines the effectiveness of specific legal mechanisms for maintaining peace, including the prohibition on the use of force under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter (United Nations, 1945), the role of international courts and tribunals (Alter, 2014), and the evolving doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (Glanville, 2019). A third significant area of scholarship explores the challenges posed by new types of conflict and actors, including how international law applies (or fails to apply) to cyber warfare (Schmitt, 2023), terrorism (Kaldor, 2018), and private military companies (Percy, 2020). The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to systematically assess the empirical record of international law's successes and failures in preventing conflicts and maintaining peace; second, to analyze the structural and political factors that enhance or undermine the effectiveness of legal

mechanisms; and third, to propose potential reforms that could strengthen the capacity of international law to address contemporary security challenges. The research employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative analysis of legal texts and case studies with quantitative data on conflict patterns and legal compliance, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation that bridges the normative and empirical dimensions of international law's peacekeeping function. By examining both the theoretical underpinnings and practical operations of international law in conflict situations, this study makes several important contributions to existing scholarship. It provides an up-to-date assessment of international law's role in an era of shifting power dynamics and new security threats, moving beyond the traditional state-centric focus of much legal scholarship to consider the complex interplay between states, international organizations, and non-state actors in contemporary conflict scenarios. The research also develops a nuanced framework for understanding why certain international legal mechanisms succeed in some contexts while failing in others, offering insights that can inform both academic debates and policy discussions about the future of global governance. The study's findings have significant implications for multiple stakeholders. For scholars of international relations and law, the research provides empirical evidence to inform ongoing theoretical debates about the role of norms versus power in international affairs. For policymakers and diplomats, the analysis offers practical insights into the strengths and limitations of legal tools for conflict prevention and resolution. For civil society organizations and advocates of global governance reform, the study identifies concrete areas where institutional improvements could enhance the effectiveness of international law in maintaining peace. Ultimately, this investigation seeks to advance our understanding of whether and how legal frameworks can contribute to a more peaceful world order at a time when such questions have taken on renewed urgency.

Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative research design to systematically examine the relationship between international law and global peace. As Scicluna (2021) emphasizes, qualitative approaches are particularly suited for analyzing complex legal frameworks and their real-world applications. The methodology incorporates three principal components: documentary analysis of legal instruments, case study examination, and thematic review of scholarly literature. The documentary analysis focuses on primary sources including foundational treaties like the UN Charter (United Nations, 1945) and the Geneva Conventions (ICRC, 1949 cited in Paraschivu 2024), which establish the legal parameters for international conflict resolution. As Kelsen (2020) notes, these documents form the bedrock of contemporary international legal order. The study also examines key UN Security Council resolutions, particularly those related to peacekeeping operations under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (United Nations, 1945). Judicial decisions from the International Court of Justice, such as the landmark *Nicaragua v. United States* case (ICJ, 1986), are analyzed to assess enforcement patterns. For case study analysis, the research adopts Yin's (2018) case study methodology to examine three representative conflicts: the Ukraine crisis (2014-present), the South China Sea dispute, and the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA). These cases were selected based on their geopolitical significance and their demonstration of both the strengths and limitations of international law, as highlighted by Koskenniemi (2022). The Ukraine conflict particularly illustrates challenges to the prohibition on use of force (Article 2(4) of UN Charter), while the South China Sea arbitration (Ward, 2015) demonstrates enforcement difficulties against powerful states. The thematic analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to identify recurring patterns in scholarly literature. Key themes emerging from this analysis include: the sovereignty vs. collective security dilemma (Glanville, 2019), effectiveness of sanctions (Hathaway & Shapiro, 2020), and the growing role of non-state actors (Kaldor, 2018). This tripartite methodology allows for comprehensive assessment

while acknowledging certain limitations, particularly regarding case selection bias and reliance on publicly available documents (Tisdell et al., 2025).

Results:

The findings reveal significant disparities between the theoretical potential and practical effectiveness of international law in maintaining peace. Treaty-based mechanisms have demonstrated notable successes, particularly the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA), which temporarily constrained Iran's nuclear program through verifiable measures (Khan, 2024). However, as Weiss & Wilkinson (2023) documents, the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 exposed the fragility of such arrangements when major powers disregard their commitments. Judicial mechanisms show mixed results. While the ICJ's Nicaragua ruling (1986) established important precedents regarding unlawful intervention, subsequent cases reveal enforcement challenges. The ongoing Ukraine conflict demonstrates how Russia, as a permanent Security Council member, can obstruct collective responses to aggression (Viveros, 2023). Similarly, China's rejection of the South China Sea arbitration award (Ward, 2015) exemplifies what Koskeniemi (2022) terms "great power exceptionalism" in international law. The research identifies three critical gaps in the current legal framework. First, non-state actors like ISIS operate in legal gray zones, exploiting the lack of binding regulations on transnational armed groups (Kaldor, 2018). Second, corporate accountability remains weak, with multinational companies often evading responsibility for human rights violations in conflict zones (Ruggie, 2013). Third, emerging threats like cyber warfare lack comprehensive legal frameworks, despite the Tallinn Manual's (Schmitt, 2023) attempts to establish guidelines. Statistical analysis of UN peacekeeping operations reveals another dimension. While missions authorized under Chapter VII show a 60% success rate in preventing conflict recurrence (Walter et al., 2021), their effectiveness diminishes when major powers are involved. The Syrian conflict, where Security Council vetoes blocked decisive action (Weiss & Wilkinson, 2023), exemplifies this limitation. These findings

collectively demonstrate that while international law provides essential conflict management tools, its effectiveness is often constrained by structural factors and power asymmetries.

Discussion and Conclusion:

The results necessitate critical examination of international law's structural limitations. As Krasner (1999) theorizes, the Westphalian system's emphasis on sovereignty creates inherent tensions with collective security mechanisms. This is evident in cases like the U.S. invasion of Iraq (2003), which bypassed Security Council authorization, and Russia's annexation of Crimea (2014), which violated multiple international norms (Glanville, 2019). Such actions reinforce the realist critique that powerful states will disregard legal constraints when vital interests are at stake (Mearsheimer, 2025). The Security Council's veto power emerges as a particularly problematic feature. As Weiss & Wilkinson (2023) documents, the five permanent members (P5) have cast 295 vetoes since 1946, frequently blocking action on major conflicts. This structural flaw supports proposals for Security Council reform, including expansion of permanent membership to include states like India and Brazil (Luck, 2021). However, as Hurd (2024) cautions, institutional reforms alone cannot resolve deeper geopolitical rivalries that undermine collective security. The ICC's challenges further illustrate enforcement dilemmas. While the court has secured some convictions (e.g., Lubanga case, ICC, 2012), its cases against powerful states often stall due to non-cooperation. The U.S. revocation of ICC officials' visas in 2019 (Schabas, 2020) demonstrates active resistance to international judicial oversight. These examples support Alter's (2014) contention that international courts depend fundamentally on state consent for effectiveness. Emerging areas like cyber conflict present new challenges. The absence of binding cyber warfare treaties creates legal vacuums that malicious actors exploit (Schmitt, 2023). Similarly, climate change-induced conflicts highlight the urgent need for legal frameworks addressing "climate refugees," who

currently lack protected status under international law (McAdam, 2020). These gaps suggest that international law must evolve rapidly to address 21st century security threats.

This study confirms international law's indispensable yet imperfect role in maintaining global peace. While legal frameworks provide essential norms and mechanisms for conflict prevention, their effectiveness is frequently undermined by power politics and structural limitations. The research supports three key conclusions:

First, institutional reforms are urgently needed to enhance the UN system's legitimacy and effectiveness. This includes Security Council restructuring to reduce veto abuse (Luck, 2021) and strengthening the ICC's enforcement capabilities (Alter, 2014). Second, new legal frameworks must address emerging threats, particularly in cyberspace (Schmitt, 2023) and climate-related conflicts (McAdam, 2020). Third, the study affirms the importance of normative power in international law - even without perfect enforcement, legal standards shape state behavior through legitimacy concerns (Hathaway & Shapiro, 2020).

Future research should explore regional legal systems (e.g., African Union mechanisms) and non-Western perspectives on international law (Anghie, 2005). Additionally, quantitative studies could further assess the correlation between legal compliance and conflict reduction. Ultimately, while international law cannot eliminate conflict entirely, it remains our best hope for a rules-based global order. As this study demonstrates, its continued relevance depends on both institutional adaptation and renewed commitment from states to prioritize collective security over narrow self-interest.

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