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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**The Failure of The United Nations Organisation to Protect Muslim Countries Against War****Mirza Shouja Baig**

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Abstract

The United Nations (UN), established in 1945, and the primary mandate of the United Nations is “To maintain international peace and security” under Chapter I of its Charter, has continuously failed to provide shield Muslim-majority states from huge-scale armed conflicts. This paper examines the organisation’s systemic shortcomings through a qualitative, multi-case study approach focusing on Palestine, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq and the 2025-2026 Iran crises. Drawing on UN Security Council (UNSC) records, veto data, and scholarly critiques, it argues that structural flaws, particularly, the veto power, combined with geopolitical self-interest have rendered the UN ineffective. While the UN has achieved limited successes elsewhere (e.g., Kuwait 1991), its performance in Muslim-majority contexts reveals a pattern of paralysis, selective enforcement, and eroded legitimacy. The analysis employs realist and liberal institutionalist lenses to explain these failures and proposes targeted reforms.

Introduction

The UN Charter’s Article 1 explicitly commits member states to suppressing acts of aggression and settling disputes peacefully. Yet, since 1945, Muslim-majority countries, many members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), have endured protracted wars with devastating humanitarian tolls. From the partition of Palestine in 1947 to the ongoing crises in Gaza, Syria, Yemen, post-2003 Iraq, and February-April 2026 Iran conflict triggered by US-Israeli strikes, the UN has issued resolutions, deployed observers, and invoked the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), but rarely translated rhetoric into decisive action.

This paper contends that the UN’s failures are not isolated incidents but stem from inherent design defects and power asymmetries. It addresses three research questions:

- (1) What specific mechanisms have paralyzed UN action in Muslim-majority conflicts?
- (2) To what extent do national interests of permanent members override collective security?
- (3) Can institutional reform restore credibility?

The study is timely amid renewed calls for UNSC reform following repeated vetoes on Gaza and Syria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly literature identifies three interlocking critiques of the UN: structural (veto-induced deadlock), political (P5 self-interest), and normative (selective application of R2P). Early post-Cold War optimism faded after failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica, prompting analyses of the UN's "crisis of relevance." In the Muslim world, critics highlight a perceived double standard: robust action against Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait contrasted with inaction on Palestine and Syria and the initial US-Israeli aggression against Iran in 2026.

Realist scholars argue that great-power politics inevitably trumps multilateralism. Liberal institutionalists counter that the UN's architecture—designed for 1945 realities—cannot accommodate multipolarity. Regional studies on the MENA region document repeated UNSC paralysis due to U.S. vetoes on Israel-related resolutions (over 50 since 1972) and Russia-China vetoes on Syria (at least 16 since 2011). The 2026 Iran case further illustrates , swift condemnation of Iranian retaliation via Resolution 2817 but no equivalent action against the initiating US-Israeli strikes. Recent works also note the post-Libya 2011 backlash against R2P, where Western intervention led to state collapse and subsequent Russian-Chinese vetoes on similar cases.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This research adopts a hybrid realist-liberal framework. Realism explains P5 veto behaviour as rational pursuit of national interest; liberalism highlights how institutional rules enable or constrain cooperation. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative case-study analysis of four conflicts selected for variation in UN involvement: Palestine (chronic deadlock), Iraq (mixed record), Syria (veto paralysis), and Yemen (humanitarian catastrophe with limited enforcement). Data sources include UNSC resolutions, Secretary-General Reports, Human Rights Council findings, and secondary scholarly sources. Veto tallies and casualty estimates provide empirical grounding.

Case Studies

(a) Palestine and the Israel-Gaza Conflict

The UN's engagement began with General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947), partitioning Palestine despite Arab rejection. Subsequent decades produced hundreds of GA resolutions affirming Palestinian rights, yet the Security Council constrained by repeated U.S. vetoes, has failed to enforce withdrawal from occupied territories or halt settlement expansion. The 2023–ongoing Gaza war exemplifies this: despite documented war crimes and calls for ceasefire, structural power imbalances have blocked enforcement. Critics describe this as a "legal crisis" where the UN cannot punish genocide or crimes against humanity.

(b). Iraq (1990 Success vs. 2003 Failure)

The 1990 Kuwait invasion prompted swift UNSC action under Chapter VII, authorising a U.S.-led coalition (Resolution 678). This remains a rare success. However, the 2003 U.S.-led invasion bypassed the Council entirely after France, Russia, and China signalled opposition. The UN's post-invasion role was limited to humanitarian coordination and Oil-for-Food oversight, later marred by corruption scandals. The episode underscores how unilateralism flourishes when P5 consensus collapses.

©. Syria (2011–present)

The Syrian civil war has produced over 350,000 deaths. Early GA resolutions condemned violence, but UNSC attempts at arms embargoes, sanctions, or ICC referral were vetoed repeatedly by Russia and China (tandem vetoes in 2011–2014 alone). Russia's strategic alliance with Damascus and China's

sovereignty concerns blocked action, even as chemical weapons and barrel bombs targeted civilians. Humanitarian aid resolutions were watered down or time-limited. The UN's investigative mechanisms produced evidence but no accountability.

(d). Yemen

The Saudi-led intervention (2015–present) created the world's worst humanitarian crisis. UNSC Resolution 2216 (2015) demanded Houthi disarmament but was criticised for implicitly legitimising the bombing campaign. Despite expert reports on war crimes, arms embargoes remained narrowly applied. The UN special envoy's repeated failures to broker peace reflect P5 reluctance to confront Saudi Arabia and its Western backers.

(e). Iran (February–April 2026 US-Israel Strikes and Regional War)

The most recent illustration of UN failure unfolded in early 2026. On 28 February 2026, the United States and Israel launched large-scale airstrikes on Iranian targets, including nuclear facilities, ballistic missile sites, naval assets, and leadership compounds. These strikes killed Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other senior officials, as well as civilians (including reported strikes on schools killing dozens of schoolgirls). Iran responded with retaliatory missile and drone attacks on Israel and several Gulf states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan), some of which hit civilian infrastructure. The conflict rapidly escalated across the region, spreading to nearly a dozen nations and causing significant civilian casualties and infrastructure damage.

The UNSC convened emergency sessions immediately. Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the escalation and called for de-escalation but framed Iranian actions as “retaliation” while urging respect for the Charter. On 11 March 2026, the Council adopted Resolution 2817 (2026) by a vote of 13-0-2 (China and Russia abstaining), condemning Iran's “egregious attacks” on its neighbours in the strongest terms, demanding an immediate halt, and affirming the targeted states' right to self-defence under Article 51. The resolution co-sponsored by 135+ states and authored by Bahrain on behalf of the GCC and Jordan made no reference to the initiating US-Israeli strikes or their legality. A competing Russian draft resolution addressing the full context (including the original aggression) received only four votes and failed. UN human rights experts separately denounced the US-Israeli attacks as “unprovoked” violations of Article 2 of the Charter and acts of aggression, yet no binding Council action followed against the aggressors.

By early April 2026, a fragile two-week US-Iran ceasefire was announced amid ongoing talks (which later faltered), but the UN's response remained one-sided: swift condemnation of Iranian retaliation while the P5 (particularly the US, UK, and France) shielded the initial strikes from equivalent scrutiny. This episode exemplifies selective enforcement, where Muslim-majority Iran—lacking P5 protection—faced aggression without collective UN defence, while Gulf States received rapid diplomatic and legal backing.

Comparative Analysis

Across cases, the P5 veto emerges as the decisive impediment: U.S. protection of Israel, Russian defence of Syria, and Western alignment with Gulf monarchies. Muslim-majority states lack comparable veto leverage within the Council, whose composition reflects 1945 geopolitics rather than contemporary demographics (OIC represents ~1.8 billion people).

Additional factors exacerbate failure:

- (1) Sovereignty norms inhibit preventive intervention;
- (2) Post-Libya R2P scepticism among non-Western powers;

(3) Resource constraints on peacekeeping (e.g., underfunded missions in Sahel Muslim-majority states); and

(4) Internal divisions within the OIC itself. While the UN succeeded in Bosnia (protecting Muslim populations via eventual NATO action) and Kuwait, these exceptions highlight selectivity rather than consistent protection.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The UN's failure to protect Muslim countries against war is not anecdotal but systemic, rooted in an antiquated Security Council structure that privileges great-power consensus over universal security. This erodes the organisation's legitimacy and fuels perceptions of bias in the Global South.

Reforms should include: (1) voluntary P5 veto restraint on mass-atrocity situations (building on French-Mexican initiatives); (2) expansion of permanent seats to include OIC representation; (3) strengthened General Assembly emergency powers under the "Uniting for Peace" resolution; and (4) robust funding for early-warning and preventive diplomacy. Without such changes, the UN risks becoming a "colossal failure" akin to its predecessor, the League of Nations. Future research could quantify veto impacts via econometric analysis of conflict duration in Muslim-majority vs. non-Muslim states or examine emerging multipolar alternatives (e.g., BRICS mediation). Ultimately, protecting Muslim countries and all states requires moving beyond 1945 architecture toward genuine collective security.

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