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Navigating Humanitarian Inaction: Shifts in International Discourse on Gaza and Ukraine

Sümeyye Kaya Uyar¹ & Mustafa Yıldırım²

Abstract

This study empirically investigates how states rhetorically engage with international norms of civilian protection to mask selective humanitarian interventions in the UN General Assembly, as seen in the cases of Ukraine and Gaza. We show the selective nature of humanitarian intervention through a comparative analysis of international responses to two major ongoing crises: the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. Drawing on Robert Putnam's two-level game theory, the study examines how political leaders navigate the tension between international obligations—imposed by global norms and institutions such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)—and the domestic costs of taking concrete actions, such as civilian evacuations or military interventions. It argues that when states are unwilling to bear these costs, they seek a balance between maintaining a passive stance toward humanitarian crises and appearing actively engaged in civilian protection. To achieve this, states strategically shift international discourse toward more diplomatically manageable topics, such as humanitarian aid or peace talks, in order to obscure their reluctance to undertake more substantive measures. To empirically assess this phenomenon, the study conducts a qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting records from both crises. By identifying recurring themes—such as humanitarian aid, civilian evacuations, condemnations of aggressors, and calls for ceasefire—the paper demonstrates how states reframe discussions toward less contentious areas when they seek to avoid action. In contrast, the study also highlights how international discourse becomes more policy-oriented and proactive when states are willing to take concrete measures.

Keywords: humanitarian aid, Palestine, Ukraine, UNGA, selective humanitarianism

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Introduction

Humanitarian crises often place governments and international bodies in difficult positions, as they must balance domestic political pressures with international obligations to protect civilians. The principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and other international norms create expectations for decisive action, yet responses often vary based on geopolitical interests and domestic political realities as we have seen different approaches to war in Libya and Syria.

In the case of Ukraine, the international community rapidly mobilized a coordinated response, which included large-scale civilian evacuations, extensive refugee resettlement programs, and significant military and humanitarian aid. These efforts, motivated by both humanitarian concerns and strategic interests—particularly Europe’s desire to counter Russian aggression—reflect a proactive approach to civilian protection. The alignment of geopolitical goals and humanitarian action allowed for more robust international engagement. In contrast, the response to the ongoing conflict in Gaza has been more restrained. While humanitarian aid continues to flow into Gaza, there has been little international effort to resettle or evacuate civilians. Regional actors like Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon have resisted large-scale resettlement, citing concerns about regional stability, while global powers have refrained from more direct involvement. This reluctance to engage in more substantive measures highlights how states navigate humanitarian crises selectively, balancing their need to appear actively engaged in civilian protection while avoiding politically or economically costly actions.

This paper argues that when states are unwilling to bear the costs of more significant intervention, they seek a balance between maintaining a passive stance toward humanitarian crises and appearing actively engaged in civilian protection. To achieve this, states strategically shift international discourse toward more diplomatically manageable topics, such as humanitarian aid or peace talks, in order to obscure their reluctance to undertake more substantive measures, such as military interventions or refugee resettlement.

By applying Robert Putnam’s two-level game theory, this study explores how political leaders navigate the tension between international expectations and domestic constraints when responding to humanitarian crises. Through a qualitative content and thematic analysis of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting records, the paper demonstrates how states reframe discussions surrounding Ukraine and Gaza to align with their strategic goals, selectively highlighting certain issues while minimizing attention to more contentious topics. In doing so, the study contributes to a broader understanding of selective humanitarianism and how states manage international discourse to obscure inaction.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The selective nature of humanitarian intervention has long been a subject of debate in international relations. Scholars have sought to understand why the international community, including the United Nations (UN), responds more robustly to certain crises while appearing indifferent to others. Various theoretical perspectives have been developed to explain this phenomenon, focusing on a combination of humanitarian motives, strategic interests, and institutional dynamics. Robert Putnam’s two-level game theory, alongside insights from scholars of humanitarian intervention, offers a valuable framework for analyzing how states navigate the dual pressures of international and domestic concerns when deciding whether to intervene in humanitarian crises.

Putnam's theory, first introduced in his seminal 1988 paper *Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games*, offers a useful model for understanding state behavior in international crises. According to Putnam, state leaders operate on two levels simultaneously: at the international level (Level I), they negotiate with other states and organizations to form agreements, while at the domestic level (Level II), they must ensure that these agreements are politically and financially viable. This balancing act is particularly visible in responses to humanitarian crises, where international expectations often clash with the domestic costs associated with intervention—whether those costs are financial, political, or social.

At the international level, pressure is not only exerted by other states but also by international norms and institutions, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), international human rights law, and humanitarian conventions like the Geneva Conventions. These norms set expectations that states must act to prevent or mitigate atrocities such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. While not always legally binding, these frameworks create moral and political obligations, shaping the behavior of states by establishing what is considered acceptable or unacceptable in the face of humanitarian crises. For example, R2P compels states to protect civilian populations from mass atrocities, creating a sense of responsibility within the global community to intervene when a state fails to protect its own citizens. In addition to norms, international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the International Criminal Court (ICC), and various human rights bodies play a role in enforcing these principles, generating further pressure on state leaders to conform to global standards. This can take the form of diplomatic engagement, economic sanctions, or even military intervention. As a result, states must navigate the expectations of the global community, international organizations, and legal frameworks when deciding how to respond to humanitarian crises.

On the domestic level, state leaders face significant costs when considering how to respond to international pressures. These costs can be financial, such as the expense of military intervention, refugee resettlement, or humanitarian aid delivery. They can also be political: domestic opposition might arise from groups who oppose military involvement, fear the economic burden of hosting refugees, or resist reallocating national resources to foreign conflicts. Public opinion, electoral pressures, and domestic political alignments also factor into whether international agreements or interventions will be politically sustainable. Thus, leaders must balance the international pressures created by norms and institutions with the domestic costs of action. This tension helps explain why states sometimes adopt selective responses to humanitarian crises. While international norms may push for intervention, domestic concerns can lead leaders to favor less costly or politically contentious alternatives, such as providing humanitarian aid without engaging in military action or refugee resettlement. Putnam's two-level game framework is particularly useful for understanding this dynamic, showing how international commitments are often shaped by what is feasible within the constraints of domestic politics.

In the broader literature on humanitarian intervention, constructivist scholars argue that the rise of international norms around human rights and humanitarianism has significantly reshaped the global response to crises since the end of the Cold War. Finnemore (2003) and Wheeler (2000) highlight how these norms, which prioritize the protection of civilians and the prevention of atrocities, have contributed to a growing willingness among states and international institutions to intervene in humanitarian emergencies. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, adopted in 2005, further codified these principles, establishing the obligation of the international community to intervene in cases of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity (Bellamy, 2010).

However, many scholars argue that humanitarian motives alone are insufficient to explain intervention decisions. Mason and Wheeler (1996) and Beardsley and Schmidt (2012) contend that humanitarian impulses are often interwoven with other strategic considerations, complicating the decision-making process. States may publicly express solidarity with victims of conflict, but their actual responses may be constrained by domestic political and financial concerns or broader geopolitical interests. This is where Putnam's two-level game theory becomes particularly relevant: leaders must simultaneously navigate the international pressure to uphold humanitarian norms and the domestic political and financial realities that may limit their ability to act.

Realist scholars take a more materialistic view of intervention, emphasizing the role of power, security, and strategic interests. Waltz (1979) and Mearsheimer (2003) argue that states act primarily to protect their own interests, intervening in crises only when doing so aligns with their geopolitical goals or helps maintain regional stability. Feste (1992) supports this view, suggesting that interventions often serve as foreign policy tools to project power or protect alliances. Empirical studies by Neack (1995) and de Jonge Oudraat (1996) similarly find that spillover effects from crises, such as refugee flows or the risk of regional destabilization, are often key triggers for intervention. In these cases, humanitarian concerns may be present, but they are often secondary to concerns about maintaining security and influence.

Empirical research further shows that the strength of the target state's military or its alliances plays a significant role in determining whether intervention occurs. Doyle and Sambanis (2006) and Mullenbach (2005) argue that states with strong military capabilities or significant geopolitical ties—especially with powerful actors such as the permanent members of the UN Security Council—are less likely to face intervention. States may calculate that the risks of intervention are too high if the target state has the capacity to resist militarily or politically. Again, this aligns with Putnam's two-level game theory, as leaders must consider the domestic political and financial costs of engaging in a potentially costly or unpopular intervention, even if there is international pressure to act.

Institutional factors also play a critical role in understanding selective interventions. Path dependence, as explored by Mullenbach (2005) and von Hippel (1996), helps explain why prior international involvement in a crisis can create institutional pressures to continue or escalate engagement. Once the international community, including the UN, commits resources to a crisis—whether through peacekeeping missions, sanctions, or diplomatic efforts—there is often a strong institutional incentive to stay involved to protect prior investments. Binder's (2015) work further elaborates on this idea, noting that substantial prior involvement in a crisis often leads to further intervention because disengagement could undermine the legitimacy of international institutions.

The role of media attention in shaping intervention decisions has also been explored extensively in the literature. The "CNN effect," as discussed by Gilboa (2005) and Robinson (2011), suggests that intense media coverage of humanitarian crises can create public pressure for governments and international institutions to intervene. This effect is particularly pronounced in democratic states, where leaders are more responsive to public opinion. However, Jakobsen (2000) and Binder (2015) argue that media attention alone is insufficient to explain intervention decisions. While media coverage may contribute to the pressure to act, it does not necessarily drive the decision to intervene, as leaders must still weigh domestic political risks and international strategic interests.

Binder's (2015) analysis complements these broader debates by offering a configurational explanation of selective humanitarian intervention. Using fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to examine 31 humanitarian crises between 1991 and 2004, Binder demonstrates that no single factor can explain the international community's responses to these crises. Instead, he argues that interventions result from a combination of factors, including the scale of human suffering, prior institutional involvement, spillover effects, and the military strength or weakness of the target state. This configurational approach reflects Putnam's theory by showing that state leaders must balance multiple pressures—humanitarian, strategic, and domestic—when deciding whether to intervene.

The concept of a "win-set" in Putnam's theory is particularly relevant here. The win-set refers to the range of acceptable outcomes in international negotiations that can also be ratified at the domestic level. In the context of humanitarian intervention, leaders must calculate whether international actions—such as military involvement or accepting refugees—are politically viable at home. For example, states may resist accepting refugees despite international pressure to do so if there is significant domestic opposition to such a policy. This tension between international expectations and domestic political realities is evident in the contrasting responses to the Ukrainian and Palestinian refugee crises. While Europe was more willing to accommodate Ukrainian refugees due to political and cultural affinities, the situation in the Middle East, particularly with Palestinian refugees, remains far more complex and quite unreachable.

Overall, integrating Putnam's two-level game theory with the literature on humanitarian intervention provides a more comprehensive understanding of why the international community, including the UN, responds selectively to crises. Humanitarian considerations, while important, are often tempered by strategic interests, institutional pressures, and domestic political constraints. Leaders must navigate these intersecting factors, balancing international norms with the political realities of their domestic audiences. This theoretical framework, supported by empirical research, helps explain the complex nature of decision-making in humanitarian crises and sheds light on how discourses designed according to states' position on taking action.

Data Collection Methods

This study employed a qualitative content analysis of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting records related to the Palestinian and Ukrainian conflicts. We selected records for analysis based on the timeframes corresponding to the beginning of each conflict: October 7, 2023, for Palestine, and February 24, 2022, for Ukraine. For the Palestinian conflict, the analysis was conducted up to September 24, 2024, as we stopped at this point to begin the analysis and writing of the paper. Similarly, for the Ukrainian conflict, we analyzed records from the first year of the conflict, stopping on February 24, 2023. This timeframe allowed us to capture a comprehensive view of the international community's early responses to both crises. In total, 35 meeting records were analyzed for Palestine and 38 for Ukraine, comprising over 2,500 pages of discussion transcripts. The analysis of the UNGA meeting records serves to empirically demonstrate how the international community, through its official discourse, reflects this selective humanitarianism in practice.

To identify key themes in the discussions, we employed a keyword frequency search, analyzing frequently used terms, bigrams (two-word phrases), and trigrams (three-word phrases) to detect patterns in the language used by country representatives. This approach allowed us to systematically determine which topics were most emphasized in the discussions without the need for manual coding. By searching for common and recurrent terms, we could identify the major

points of focus for each conflict. Keywords such as "humanitarian aid," "civilian evacuations," "refugee crises," "calls for ceasefire," and "condemnation of aggressors" emerged as central to the discourse.

Once these keywords and phrases were identified, they were grouped into broader thematic areas based on their context and frequency within the discussions. The analysis revealed five dominant themes: humanitarian aid and support, civilian evacuations and refugees, condemnation of aggressors, calls for ceasefire, and geopolitical implications. This keyword-driven approach provided a structured and objective way to determine the key issues in the UNGA meetings and allowed us to compare the international community's responses to the Palestinian and Ukrainian crises. The prominence of these themes—and the differences between the two conflicts—demonstrates how international responses are shaped by selective humanitarianism.

The first theme, humanitarian aid and support, emerged as a dominant topic in both conflicts. This theme covered discussions on the delivery of essential supplies, such as food, medicine, and shelter, to civilians caught in conflict. Given the dire humanitarian situations in both regions, this topic was consistently highlighted, often with calls to maintain aid corridors. The second theme, civilian evacuations and refugees, addressed the international community's response to displaced populations. In the case of Ukraine, this theme was prominent due to the large-scale evacuation efforts and coordinated international support for refugee resettlement. In contrast, the records concerning Palestine revealed a reluctance to address evacuations, with the focus on keeping Palestinians in place and delivering aid within Gaza. This difference underscored how the two conflicts elicited varied international responses to the issue of civilian displacement.

The third theme, condemnation of aggressors, was prominent in both contexts but differed in intensity. While Israel's actions in Gaza were condemned, the discussion often focused on humanitarian aid rather than taking punitive measures. In the Ukrainian conflict, Russia's invasion was condemned more strongly, with many countries emphasizing violations of international law and backing these statements with sanctions and calls for accountability.

The fourth theme, calls for ceasefire, was mentioned in both conflicts but served different purposes. In Palestine, ceasefires were typically framed as temporary measures to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid, while in Ukraine, ceasefires were part of broader diplomatic efforts to end the conflict. This difference reflected the international community's approach to ceasefires as either short-term humanitarian solutions or steps toward long-term peace.

Finally, the fifth theme, geopolitical implications, reflected concerns about the broader regional and global consequences of the conflicts. In Palestine, the discussions often centered on the destabilizing effect that large-scale refugee flows could have on neighboring countries, such as Egypt and Jordan. In Ukraine, the focus was on the global implications of the conflict, including its impact on energy markets, European security, and the strategic consequences for global alliances.

The frequency and context in which these themes were discussed provided insight into the different ways the international community responded to the two crises. For example, while humanitarian aid was mentioned frequently in both contexts, the issue of civilian evacuations received far less attention in Palestine than in Ukraine. By focusing on the most frequently mentioned keywords and recurring themes, this analysis sheds light on how states positioning themselves and their possible active or passive actions by using certain discourse. This comparative framework allows for a deeper understanding of the selective humanitarianism and discourse development based on certain political concerns of states.

United Nations General Assembly Meetings as a Primary Data Source

We relied on United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meetings as the primary data source for this study because they provide a globally representative and legitimate platform for understanding international responses to humanitarian crises. The UNGA is one of the most inclusive international bodies, with all 193 member states having equal representation. This inclusivity allows us to capture a diverse range of perspectives on the Palestinian and Ukrainian conflicts, ensuring that the analysis reflects the views of not only major global powers but also smaller, less prominent states. By examining UNGA records, we are able to gather a balanced and comprehensive view of how the international community approaches these crises.

In addition, the transparency and accessibility of UNGA meetings make them a reliable and verifiable data source. As these meetings are publicly documented, we are able to access detailed accounts of how different nations articulate their positions on humanitarian aid, refugee protection, and conflict resolution. This transparency ensures that our content analysis is grounded in official, publicly available records, making it suitable for academic research. The structured nature of the discussions also allows us to identify recurring themes and patterns in how states respond to these conflicts.

UNGA meetings are particularly relevant for this study because they often focus on key issues like humanitarian aid and refugee protection, which are central to the Palestinian and Ukrainian crises. As a forum where countries discuss the moral and political dimensions of humanitarian issues, the UNGA provides valuable insights into how states balance their international obligations with domestic concerns. The records from these meetings allow us to explore the strategic narratives that shape international responses, especially in terms of refugee acceptance and humanitarian intervention.

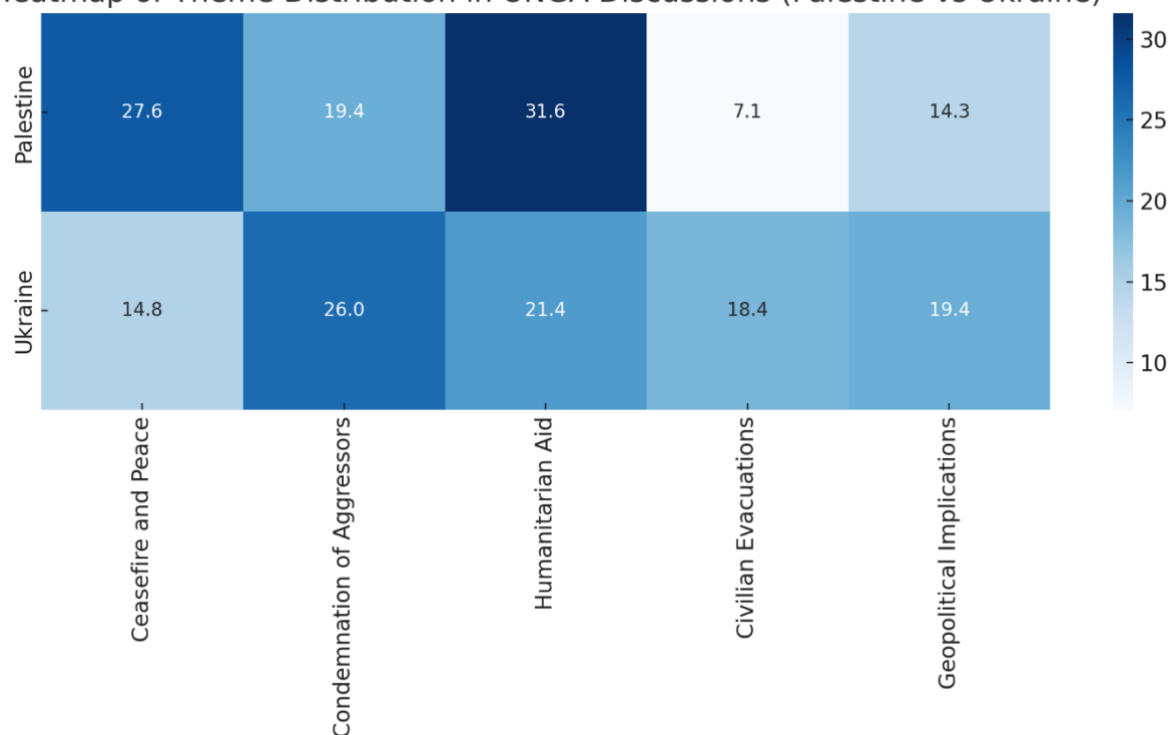
Furthermore, using UNGA records allows us to compare the international community's response to both the Palestinian and Ukrainian conflicts in a systematic way. The consistency in the structure of the meetings ensures that similar themes—such as humanitarian aid, civilian evacuations, and geopolitical concerns—are addressed across discussions on both crises. This comparability is essential for conducting the thematic analysis that forms the core of our study, as it enables us to explore how responses to these two crises diverge.

Comparative Study: Thematic Analysis of UNGA Responses to the Crises in Palestine and Ukraine

This analysis provides a thematic comparison of how the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) discussed and responded to the humanitarian crises in Palestine and Ukraine, based on UNGA meeting records. By categorizing the discussions into several key themes—Humanitarian Aid, Civilian Evacuations and Refugees, Condemnation of Aggressors, Calls for Ceasefire, and Geopolitical Implications—this study highlights the different approaches to these crises.

Figure 1: Comparative Mentions of Themes in Palestine and Ukraine

Heatmap of Theme Distribution in UNGA Discussions (Palestine vs Ukraine)



As shown in **figure 1**, in the discussions about Palestine, humanitarian aid was the most frequently mentioned theme. The focus was primarily on ensuring the delivery of essential resources like food, water, and medical supplies to Gaza, where the civilian population is heavily affected by the ongoing conflict. Ceasefires were negotiated to enable the safe passage of humanitarian aid, but no real momentum was developed for civilian evacuation. The representative from Egypt emphasized: “We must ensure that aid corridors remain open, and that humanitarian supplies—particularly food and medicine—continue to flow into Gaza for as long as this crisis continues. The people of Gaza are in desperate need, and the international community must do its part to deliver this aid effectively” (UNGA, 2023). In contrast, the focus on humanitarian aid in the context of Ukraine was accompanied by a robust civilian evacuation effort. Discussions often highlighted how the international community had mobilized to ensure that both aid and safe passages were secured for Ukrainians fleeing conflict areas. Humanitarian corridors were not only intended to deliver supplies but also to evacuate civilians. The European Union’s representative noted: “We have already delivered billions in aid to the people of Ukraine, and we have worked to ensure that humanitarian corridors are in place so civilians can flee the violence. Our collective response must continue to prioritize not only aid but also the protection of those most vulnerable to the ongoing aggression” (UNGA, 2023). In the Palestine crisis, humanitarian aid is largely contained within Gaza, with no comparable international support for civilian evacuations. By contrast, in Ukraine, aid efforts are directly tied to evacuation initiatives, demonstrating a more active approach to protecting civilians from conflict zones. This difference reflects the broader geopolitical and regional dynamics that influence international responses.

The theme of civilian evacuations was significantly downplayed in the Palestine discussions. While there were humanitarian efforts to deliver aid, there was a reluctance to address the idea of relocating civilians or accepting Palestinian refugees. Countries in the region, particularly Egypt and Jordan, resisted the idea of allowing large numbers of refugees into their countries, framing this as part of their opposition to further displacement of Palestinians from their homeland. The

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) categorically rejected any forced displacement of Palestinians: “We stand united against any attempts to forcibly displace Palestinians from their territories, as such actions would further legitimize the illegal Israeli occupation. Our duty is to ensure their survival in their homeland, not to enable their exile” (UNGA, 2023). States are reluctant to engage in large-scale evacuation and resettlement of Palestinian civilians due to a combination of geopolitical, historical, and regional factors. For neighboring countries like Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, accepting more Palestinian refugees poses significant risks to their political stability, economic capacity, and social cohesion. These countries already host large numbers of Palestinian refugees and have been grappling with the broader refugee issue for decades. Allowing more Palestinians to resettle would exacerbate existing pressures on their resources and potentially destabilize their internal politics. Additionally, these states are concerned that facilitating Palestinian evacuation could be interpreted as undermining Palestinian claims to their land and right of return, further entrenching Israel’s position. As a result, they prefer to keep refugees within Gaza and focus on humanitarian aid rather than risk the political consequences of resettlement.

For European countries and other global powers, the reluctance to support Palestinian evacuations stems from geopolitical considerations and the delicate nature of Middle Eastern politics. While Europe quickly mobilized to help Ukrainian refugees, reflecting both humanitarian concerns and strategic interests in countering Russian influence, the Palestinian issue is far more politically sensitive. Many Western nations have strong alliances with Israel and other key players in the region, and supporting resettlement efforts for Palestinians could strain these relationships. Furthermore, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict carries a long history of territorial and political tensions, making refugee resettlement a highly controversial issue. Consequently, although capable of assisting, European countries steer international discussions toward less contentious issues such as humanitarian aid and ceasefires, avoiding the politically charged topic of evacuating and resettling Palestinian civilians.

In Ukraine’s case, civilian evacuations were a central element of the international response. Neighboring countries like Poland, Germany, and other EU nations quickly mobilized to accommodate millions of Ukrainian refugees. The response was swift and coordinated, with UNGA discussions repeatedly highlighting the success of these evacuation efforts and calling for continued international support for refugee resettlement. The Polish representative stated: “We have opened our borders to more than 4 million Ukrainian refugees, providing them with shelter, medical care, and education. This is not just a humanitarian duty; it is a moral obligation to protect those who are fleeing from Russian aggression” (UNGA, 2024). The difference in approaches to civilian evacuations is striking. In Ukraine, international support for evacuations was widespread and actively promoted, with neighboring countries stepping up to absorb millions of refugees. In Palestine, however, the focus remained on keeping civilians in place, with aid directed at Gaza rather than creating opportunities for civilian relocation. This reflects a selective humanitarianism, shaped by regional fears of long-term destabilization and political costs associated with accepting refugees.

Condemnation of Israel’s military actions in Gaza was frequent, though it was often paired with calls for humanitarian assistance rather than more assertive international actions. Countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Qatar voiced strong opposition to Israeli military operations, framing them as violations of international law. However, these condemnations rarely led to concrete actions such as proposing international sanctions or coordinated interventions to enforce ceasefires or facilitate civilian evacuations. The Indonesian representative stated: “The

destruction of Gaza by Israeli forces is a violation of every tenet of international law. We stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine and demand that the international community hold Israel accountable for these war crimes” (UNGA, 2023). The condemnation of Russia was more widespread and assertive in the Ukraine crisis. Many Western nations, particularly the United States and European Union countries, framed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a clear violation of international law and sovereignty. These condemnations were accompanied by sanctions, military aid to Ukraine, and calls for Russia’s international isolation. The United States emphasized: “Russia’s unprovoked and brutal invasion of Ukraine is a flagrant violation of the UN Charter. We will continue to support the Ukrainian people in their fight for sovereignty and ensure that Russia faces severe consequences for its aggression” (UNGA, 2023). While both conflicts saw condemnation of aggressors, the international community’s response to Russia was far more direct and action-oriented. In Palestine, condemnation was often symbolic, with limited international willingness to impose punitive measures or enforce meaningful actions against Israel. By contrast, the condemnation of Russia was backed by substantial international action, including sanctions and military support to Ukraine.

Calls for a ceasefire were common in the discussions related to Palestine, but these calls were often framed as temporary solutions to allow for humanitarian access rather than long-term steps toward peace. Multiple ceasefires were brokered to facilitate the delivery of aid, but there was little discussion about using ceasefires as a springboard for renewed peace talks or a political solution. The Saudi Arabian representative stated: “We urgently call for an immediate ceasefire to stop the violence and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches Gaza. However, this must be the first step toward a just solution that respects the rights of the Palestinian people” (UNGA, 2023). In Ukraine, calls for a ceasefire were also significant, but they were often tied to diplomatic efforts for a political resolution. Countries like China consistently emphasized the need for peace talks and diplomatic negotiations to end the conflict, suggesting that a ceasefire should be the first step toward a broader resolution to the war. The Chinese representative highlighted: “We continue to call for an immediate ceasefire and the resumption of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine. The conflict must be resolved through diplomacy, and both sides must commit to finding a peaceful solution” (UNGA, 2023). In both contexts, ceasefires were seen as essential for halting violence, but the Palestinian discussions focused more on temporary pauses for humanitarian purposes, while in Ukraine, ceasefires were part of a broader conversation about peace negotiations. The emphasis on long-term peace in Ukraine reflects the international community’s willingness to push for a political resolution, whereas the Palestinian ceasefires are more focused on providing short-term relief.

The geopolitical concerns surrounding Palestine often center on the fear of destabilizing neighboring countries through large-scale displacement. Countries like Jordan and Egypt are particularly wary of absorbing more Palestinian refugees, which influences their preference for focusing on humanitarian aid within Gaza rather than encouraging civilian relocation. The broader Middle East dynamics, including the historical context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, play a significant role in shaping the international response. The Jordanian representative warned: “Further displacement of Palestinians would have a destabilizing effect on the region, and we cannot afford to absorb another wave of refugees. The international community must work to keep Palestinians in their homeland and provide them with the support they need there” (UNGA, 2023). In Ukraine, the geopolitical implications are also significant, particularly regarding European security and global energy markets. The discussions frequently highlighted the ripple effects of the conflict, including sanctions against Russia, disruptions to global energy supplies,

and the strategic consequences of the war for NATO and the EU. The German representative noted: “The war in Ukraine is not just a European issue—it threatens global security and stability. We must ensure that Russia’s actions do not go unpunished, and we must continue to support Ukraine’s right to defend itself” (UNGA, 2024). Both conflicts carry significant geopolitical implications, but the nature of these concerns differs. In Palestine, the focus is on avoiding the destabilizing effects of refugee flows, whereas in Ukraine, the emphasis is on the broader global security implications, including energy disruptions and military alliances. The geopolitical concerns in Ukraine have led to more direct international interventions, including military aid, whereas in Palestine, the focus remains on managing the conflict’s impact within the region.

The thematic analysis reveals that the international response to the crises in Palestine and Ukraine differs markedly in terms of both focus and intensity. The study’s findings show that when states resist accepting refugees, they shift the focus of international discourse to other themes. The comparison of UNGA discussions on the Palestinian and Ukrainian crises reveals that humanitarian aid, ceasefires, and geopolitical concerns dominate discussions when resettlement is politically undesirable. While humanitarian aid is a common theme in both cases, the Ukrainian conflict has prompted a more proactive approach to civilian evacuation, condemnation of aggression, and ceasefire negotiations, reflecting the geopolitical interests of powerful Western countries. In contrast, the Palestinian crisis is largely managed through containment strategies, focusing on keeping civilians in place through humanitarian support, with less emphasis on refugee relocation or long-term political solutions. This selective humanitarianism underscores the influence of regional dynamics and political interests on shaping the international response to these two conflicts.

Conclusion

This study reveals how the international community's responses to humanitarian crises are shaped by the reluctance of states to engage in politically costly measures, such as refugee resettlement. By comparing the global reactions to the Palestinian and Ukrainian crises, it becomes clear that when states resist taking concrete steps, they steer international discourse toward themes that are politically and diplomatically easier to manage, such as humanitarian aid, ceasefires, and peace talks. This selective focus underscores the complex interplay between domestic political concerns and international obligations in shaping humanitarian actions.

The response to the Ukrainian crisis demonstrates how global powers can mobilize quickly when concrete steps align with strategic interests, resulting in proactive efforts to influence the situation on the ground. By contrast, the Palestinian crisis has been met with a more contained approach, where aid delivery within Gaza is prioritized, but more politically contentious actions, such as refugee resettlement, are largely avoided. This pattern reveals a broader tendency within the international community to avoid actions that may generate higher political or economic costs, leading to inconsistencies in humanitarian responses. The divergence in international responses to these crises raises fundamental questions about the consistency and fairness of global humanitarianism. It exposes significant gaps in global solidarity, particularly in the application of internationally shared norms, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and universal human rights. While humanitarian motives are often invoked, strategic interests and domestic political considerations heavily influence how and when these norms are enforced, highlighting a disjunction between rhetoric and action. The selective nature of humanitarianism, as evidenced in both cases, suggests that the international community must reassess its approach to crisis response. Political dynamics, while inevitable, should not overshadow the urgent need for

comprehensive, equitable, and consistent humanitarian responses. Temporary measures, such as aid deliveries, cannot substitute for long-term solutions that prioritize the protection of civilians. Effective responses to humanitarian crises require a stronger commitment to structural and sustainable solutions, including conflict resolution, refugee resettlement, and genuine efforts toward peacebuilding, rather than merely addressing the immediate symptoms of conflict.

This paper highlights how states develop their international discourse around humanitarian crises, selectively framing their actions in ways that align with their political objectives. By analyzing United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meetings across five key thematic areas, the study reveals how states use international discourse to manage their humanitarian obligations selectively. This discourse not only reflects states' intentions but also shapes international perceptions of their humanitarian commitments.

In conclusion, this study calls for a fundamental rethinking of how international bodies and states engage with humanitarian crises. Policymakers must recognize the need for a more consistent and principled approach that goes beyond short-term humanitarian aid and addresses the root causes of crises. Future research should focus on identifying mechanisms that hold states accountable for selective humanitarianism and exploring ways to strengthen international institutions to ensure that humanitarian norms are applied more uniformly. Without such changes, the international community risks perpetuating a system where political expediency overrides the protection of human rights and the genuine alleviation of suffering.

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