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**The Collapse of Moral Authority in Global Governance: Rebuilding
Diplomatic Ethics in the Age of Power Rivalries**

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ABSTRACT

The study provides an understanding of the decay of Moral Authority in Global Governance. Furthermore, it provides an analysis of contemporary geopolitical conflicts that include the Africa's problems, the Sudan crisis, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the Israel-Palestine conflict. It also gives a summary of the escalating rivalry between the US and China, which highlights the diminished role of humanitarian standards in conjunction with diplomatic manipulation. This article's main argument is that major global powers will increasingly prioritize coercive interests over moral obligations, making it harder for many of the major international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to uphold international law, protect vulnerable civilians, and handle escalating levels of conflict. As selective sanctions, proxy support and arbitrary enforcement of legal standards are widening the gap between countries, the world is moving towards a new and bloc-based geopolitical structure. In this new structure, countries rely heavily on military alliances to provide them with the necessary security, rather than relying on multilateral approaches to achieve their goals. As a result, this geopolitical environment has created greater fragility for developing and underdeveloped countries, giving rise to an environment that presents a multitude of strategic opportunities for countries that adjust their diplomacy, build regional partnerships and adopt principled foreign policy positions. Ultimately, the article posits that diplomatic ethics, defined as a combination of power and moral restraint, must be re-established if the credibility of international conflict management is to be restored and a more stable global order is to be created.

Keywords: Global Governance, Moral Authority, Diplomatic Ethics, Power Rivalries, International Relations, Normative Challenges

Introduction

The term "global governance" is frequently used to refer to a variety of organizations, forces, and developments in international politics. Organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), the globalization of finance, trade, and production, the activism of transnational social movements (some of which are against globalization), multilateral efforts to stop global warming, and challenges to state sovereignty in the face of humanitarian crises are all under its jurisdiction. While many disagree about the more specific analytical and ethical issues and problems that it suggests, few are against the necessity of global governance and, in fact, for

better forms of such governance. The literature on global governance has advanced in recent years as a result of numerous efforts to define the term and place it within established socio-scientific methodologies and disciplinary discussions (Ba and Hoffmann 2005; Barnett and Duvall 2005). However, there hasn't been much focus on ethics' role in global governance. Both "poorly done" and "poorly understood" global governance exist, and moral issues and crises at the core of international politics are frequently misdiagnosed and ignored by academics and political figures. World events illustrate the consequences of neglecting ethics in global governance and the increasingly harsh policies of states pursuing their own interests. While diplomacy has always served national goals, today states often adopt strategies that escalate conflict and instability rather than promote peace. Because the actors and authority structures of international politics are motivated, justified, challenged, and criticized in relation to such ethical principles and objectives, ethics is essential to global governance. Diplomacy is inherently related to ethics because it involves managing international relations based on principles of justice, honesty, and mutual respect among nations (Craig N. Murphy, 2000 and Pattberg 2006).

Moral theory alone cannot address the question of how to best comprehend and resolve the moral conundrums that confront actors and authority structures; an ethics divorced from the realities of politics, no matter how contentious, is practically meaningless. Similarly, without an ethical conscience and creativity, it is impossible to comprehend the use of power, the challenges of making decisions, and the unfavorable consequences of global governance politics. No matter how difficult and unsolvable the moral conundrums we confront, a politics divorced from ethics is intolerable and harmful. As a result, politics and ethics are not fundamentally different from one another. Instead, they are mutually constitutive and symbiotic (Antonio Franceschet, 2009). The absence of a common ethical base means that there will never be lasting stability in any international structure. In order to rebuild moral authority one must consistently apply international law, create independent institutions and establish stronger political will among major powers that profess principles that they do not adhere to. This article will provide insight as to why the moral authority of global governance has diminished, and will provide recommendations as to how that ethical diplomacy will be restored in the world of intense competition between nations.

Literature Review

However, many political analysts view ethics as unimportant to the core dynamics of global governance. The importance of ethics to global governance is theoretically marginalized or ignored by mainstream realist and liberal perspectives on world politics. Realists believe that there is an ethical void at the core of global politics. Ethics is nothing more than "window dressing," or something to conceal or embellish what one has achieved through the abuse of power without considering what is right or wrong (Frost, 2004). Ethical diplomacy ensures that states engage in dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution with a commitment to moral standards, thereby sustaining trust and legitimacy in the international community. The practice of diplomacy grounded in ethics supports global governance by promoting norms that prioritize peace, human rights, and cooperative problem-solving over coercion or domination (PB, 2006).

Both established international norms and the principles of the United Nations are violated by humanitarian crises and the selective application of international law. To understand this, we can examine responses to the Syrian civil war, the plight of the Rohingya population, the Sudanese conflicts, the Palestine issue, and the Russia-Ukraine war, as well as the role of the ICC and states that tacitly support violence or genocide in various regions. These examples demonstrate that the ethical foundations of diplomacy are being compromised, and current diplomatic practices often

cause more harm than they resolve, undermining both responsibility and global stability (Dingwerth and Pattberg, 2006).

This volume offers a more comprehensive view of global governance politics by emphasizing ethics. The post-Cold War period was expected to bring stability and a stronger commitment to global norms, yet what we see today is almost the opposite. Conflicts have multiplied, international institutions appear weaker, and many states openly challenge the very rules they once supported. The moral authority of global governance has gradually declined, and this is visible in the inconsistent responses to humanitarian crises, selective enforcement of international law, and the overall failure of diplomacy to prevent or manage conflicts. These trends raise serious questions about how the international system is functioning and what has gone wrong with its ethical foundations. Global governance, or "what world government we actually have," has entered a new era marked by "hard times" as power spreads beyond its historically Western center. The world we live in is going crazy. Tensions in geopolitics are growing. Global issues are getting worse. And we don't seem to be able to unite to react. (Guterres Antonio, 2023).

Global governance relies on international institutions to manage complex global challenges, but these organizations often face structural and ethical limitations. Although the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the International Criminal Court are intended to coordinate responses to transnational issues, power imbalances and procedural inefficiencies frequently limit their efficacy. Smaller and developing states, in particular, are often marginalized in decision-making processes, highlighting the uneven distribution of authority and influence. Empirical cases, including conflicts in Palestine, Sudan and Syria as well as disputes within the WTO, illustrate how institutional shortcomings can hinder effective governance and expose ethical gaps. This literature underscores the need to examine not only the structural functioning of global institutions but also the ethical principles that should guide their actions (Moloney and Stone 2019, p.104)

The most powerful nations in the world are the ones that dominate news headlines, occupy policymakers, and influence global economic trends. They closely monitor their military spending and foreign policy (Stone, 2013). At least some members of the international community either believe or worry that they will honor their commitments. On the international scene, these nations project their power. Power politics, which basically means pursuing national interests, refers to the ongoing struggle between states for influence, economic might, and strategic supremacy in the international arena. The Power sub-ranking is most likely based on an equally weighted average of scores from six factors related to a nation's power: a strong military, strong international alliances, strong exports, political influence, economic influence, and leadership (Acharya, 2017). The World Wars and the power struggle that ensued to create an international system could serve as a recent example of a global power struggle. Nuclear deterrence and proxy conflicts characterize the post-World War II bipolar world order, which was dominated by the US and the USSR. Emerging powers began to assert themselves in the international system during the post-Cold War era by shifting from regional power struggles to global competition. The broader features of contemporary power politics in the international system are defined by the intricate interactions between economic domination, military prowess, shifting power centers, and technological advancements. The rise of numerous actors to political and economic power, technological development, economic globalization, and geopolitical conflicts as nations vie for dominance in soft power, the military, and the economy have all shaped the current global order. Cooperation is hampered by competing interests and power struggles, despite the growing awareness of our shared responsibility to address global issues like inequality, cybersecurity, and climate change (Dr Talat Shabbir, 2020).

In today's world power politics, the United States, China, Russia, and the European Union still hold the most significant positions. There are a growing number of states that have been historically defined as "emerging powers"; examples of these states include India, Brazil, Turkey, Mexico, Indonesia, and South Africa. In addition, a number of other states that had previously been largely regarded as either entirely or mostly irrelevant to the economic, geopolitical, or diplomatic landscapes have recently gained much greater recognition as important actors on these fronts. The states of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iran, Nigeria, Vietnam, Ethiopia, South Korea, and Israel were among them. The fact that some states are becoming more significant in a domain-specific way rather than as a full-spectrum (or comprehensive) global power is also noteworthy. These states include but were not limited to Pakistan (primarily in terms of defense issues and regional security), Egypt (as an example of a state that has historically played a role in military and regional leadership), Kazakhstan (primarily in energy diplomacy), and Bangladesh-primarily due to its rapid economic development and growing importance in global labour markets (Critopher S. Chivvis, 2024; Magila, 2024).

Through unmatched military power, a highly developed and large economy, and a vast and ever-expanding alliance network, the USA continues to be a major supplier of global military power. The expectations created by the USA's foreign policy and military alliances are felt throughout much of the world. By creating an unprecedented amount of trade (both physical and virtual) with all but a very few countries in the world through a partnership with Pakistan and the other countries in the region, China is changing the global economy based on trade. Reports and strategic analysis conducted between 2024 and 2025 suggest that China's involvement with Afghanistan is expanding, with many analysts seeing this as part of the regional connectivity strategy established by the CEP (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), but they also warn that the legal and organizational aspects surrounding these projects are unclear and should be approached with caution when producing empirical research. While there are significant differences between member states within the EU, the EU still plays an important role in global politics and economics and continues to influence the rules and regulations surrounding the global governance system (Shabbir, 2024).

India, Brazil, Turkey, Mexico, Indonesia, and South Africa are all considered "Emerging Powers" that will alter the way "World Governance" is implemented around the globe. There are numerous other countries that have used these same ways of exerting influence; Saudi Arabia exercised energy diplomacy; however, the other countries exert their influence in many different ways, such as financial leverage, mediation, and Military Power - including Nigeria, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and South Korea. Countries like Qatar and Iran all have played some role in providing influence in certain areas of conflict, and so have Israel's economic and military capabilities. Although Pakistan is viewed as an "emerging security actor," it has not been traditionally viewed as a global economic powerhouse; this has changed with the emergence of geopolitical conflict and the building of Pakistan's defense industrial complex (such as the JF-17 Fighter Aircraft Program), along with the growing importance of Pakistan's "strategic relationship" with China. Thus, it is probably better to view Pakistan as a domain-specific emerging security actor than as a fully developed "emerging economy." (ISSRA, 2025).

Theoretical framework

Combining international relations theory with normative ethics, this research paper examines the interplay of power, the structure of institutions, and the ethical obligation of nations to cooperate for the common good. Drawing upon classical and modern realism, we can see that powerful nations compete with each other within the international system by exerting their influence over

weaker nations (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). Conversely, liberal institutionalists view institutions (such as the UN, WTO, and IMF) as being primarily responsible for regulating the behaviour of states, mediating disputes, and facilitating cooperation (Keohane, 1984). This research will examine how the moral legitimacy of international diplomacy and governance has weakened due to competing nation-states and their use of power. By providing an ethical perspective, we will use the theories outlined to evaluate how power politics, institutional capabilities, and the ethical responsibilities of states interact in today's world and offer justification for why it is critical that we rebuild the standards of ethical diplomacy in our multi-polar global community.

Research methodology

The research uses an analytical, qualitative, and normative methodology and develops conclusions about the state of global governance and state behavior through analyzing policy reports, publications by international organizations, and government documents. The formulation of conclusions on global governance and state behavior, as well as identifying historical and current power dynamics, will come from reviewing the academic literature (peer-reviewed) in international relations, ethics, and diplomacy and from analyzing historical case studies and current situations (for example, recent wars between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, and the relationship between Europe and Africa) that indicate some of the ethical and practical ramifications of power imbalances.

Global Governance's History and Decline

The decline in global governance reflects deeper changes in diplomatic practice. To understand this shift, it is necessary to revisit the origin of diplomacy and examine how early diplomatic principles shaped-and now struggle to support-the modern international system. The European system of states is often compared to the beginnings and evolution of diplomacy. According to this perspective, it is linked to the emergence and consolidation of the state system's forms and practices following the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which put an end to the Thirty Years War. Nonetheless, the history of diplomacy and its institutions is far longer, more intricate, and has been traced back to some of the earliest human societies. Diplomacy has been viewed as a response to a set of needs and requirements, specifically the need to establish communication channels between communities and the mediation of separateness between them, rather than being linked to a particular historical period. Therefore, one of the most well-known aspects of modern diplomacy the use of resident ambassadors predates its application in the contemporary European context by about 3000 years. The earliest records of what we would now consider to be formalized diplomatic practices can be found in what is now the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East around 2500 BC.

From early diplomatic traditions to the Westphalian settlement and the later evolution of multilateral institutions, diplomacy was built on certain natural patterns: dialogue before force, mutual respect for sovereignty, balanced interests, and agreements that reflected shared principles. Scholars like Henry Kissinger emphasize that diplomacy only works when there is a minimum level of moral consensus, meaning states accept limits on their power and recognize the necessity of compromise. Today, these natural patterns are breaking down. International power shifts have always been a challenge to global governance. Emerging powers can occasionally become supporters of the system after gaining access to the club institutions of dominant powers. An early example was France's admission as a fifth great power into the Concert of Europe in 1818, just

three years after the French Revolution's global conflict came to an end (Matthew D. Stephen, 2025).

After World War II, when it became evident that Germany and Japan would be essential in the new global rivalry with the Soviet Union, they were quickly assimilated into the Western institutional order. However, in each of these instances, the emerging powers had to undergo reconstruction and institutional inclusion in order to become states with interests comparable to those of the established powers after being initially vanquished by force of arms. In the end, "the existence of shared interests is the most fundamental basis for incentives to form international regimes." Power shifts are likely to increase tensions and result in institutional contestation and rivalries when these common interests are absent. A useful analogy is the Cold War of the 20th century. It became impossible to integrate the Soviet Union into the postwar Western institutional order due to fundamentally different interests rooted in Soviet domestic arrangements, and attempts to include the Eastern bloc countries in organizations like the IMF and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) ultimately failed (Andreas Nölke, 2015).

The rivalries of the Cold War soon severely limited the effectiveness of the international organizations that the Soviet Union and the Western powers did share, most notably the United Nations and its Security Council. The United States' change in stance from one of ambivalence and inconsistency to one of outright hostility is a significant contributing factor to the deterioration of global governance. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (also known as the "Iran nuclear deal"), the Paris Climate Agreement, the World Health Organization, the Universal Postal Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, and the United Nations Human Rights Council are just a few of the international agreements and organizations that the United States has withdrawn from under the Trump administration. Additionally, it has threatened to withdraw from the WTO, NATO, and NAFTA. According to Donald Trump, these establishments are a component of the "ideology of globalism," which needs to be rejected. The second Trump administration is depriving the United States of many of its instruments of international influence, including the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, in addition to pulling out of global governance organizations (Bernd Debusmann Jr. and Amy Walker, 2025).

At the moment, the WTO seems helpless to prevent the United States from rejecting the principles of a liberal multilateral trade regime and starting trade wars with all of its major trading partners. In the fields of health governance and climate change, there are similar instances of multilateral organizations failing in their primary responsibilities as a result of the new systemic heterogeneity. In the case of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, switching from legally binding targets to voluntary commitments was the only way to maintain a shared commitment to reducing emissions. Instead of inspiring international cooperation toward a shared objective, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a brief collapse in international cooperation. Major powers and their allies' blatant disregard for international law is another sign of the deterioration of global governance. Major powers seem to be challenging the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of states, which are essential components of the international legal order (Matthew D. Stephen, 2025).

Land warfare, including annexations and nuclear threats, has returned to Europe as a result of Russian aggression. With little support from international law, China makes questionable territorial claims in the South China Sea. The president of the United States has suggested evicting the Palestinian population from the Gaza Strip and acquiring the land as part of "a real estate development for the future," while the country has threatened to use economic and military force

to increase its territory. There is a proliferation of discourses linking great power sovereignty to dominance over others. International tribunals and courts have been asked to decide states' obligations under the Genocide Convention and the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea, but the states in question have rejected and ignored their rulings, creating a confusing development for international law (*Ibid*).

Global Power Politics

Global power politics is currently being reshaped by 5 structural factors. First, there is competition and rivalry between the United States (US) and China. Second, there are numerous regional instabilities throughout the globe which are creating conflicts that may last indefinitely. Third, there are issues related to the geopolitics of energy. Fourth, the idea of the 'weaponization of goods and technologies', which refers to using goods and technologies against others, is occurring throughout the world. Fifth, there is a continuous failure of multilateral governance.

Competition between the US and China takes place across a number of areas: military, trade, and technology. This type of competition has direct implications on economies globally, including:

- 1) The concept of shifting supply chains where companies are moving away from relying on having a single source of product.
- 2) The potential for increasing tariffs between countries, which will in turn be a burden for both the suppliers/customers and the potential for more regional trading blocs.
- 3) The decoupling of technological development, mainly in semiconductors and telecommunications, from both countries, which is likely to inhibit and increase costs for both countries, and create fragmentation of global standards.

There are many indicators of rising global instability. To start off, the impacts of humanitarian emergencies on a large scale (refugee movements) and disruption in the economy due to ongoing conflicts (in countries like Ukraine/Russia, Palestine) will continue to put pressure on the systems and people's ability to aid one another during times of crisis. Secondly, there have been several examples of violations of humanitarian principles, such as the abduction of humanitarian personnel, their detention and actions taken at sea to disrupt the movement of aid and protest flotillas; this has the effect of complicating and further complicating the legal/ethical ramifications of providing assistance to those in need of humanitarian aid. (Ocha Report, 2023). Additionally, a regional-level crisis in Sudan demonstrates how the involvement of external parties, like the UAE, in both political and military strategies creates further levels of instability throughout the region. The recent escalation in Israel's military actions that have affected both Lebanon (to a limited degree) and Syria/Yemen adds to the geopolitical and humanitarian dimensions of such conflicts. Finally, instances of people mobilizing to express solidarity with the Palestinian people and other victims of human rights abuses are an important development in the growth of widespread public scrutiny and the new reality of transnational protest movements. Instances of mass demonstrations in Europe and other parts of the world illustrate the challenges individuals in positions of authority face when attempting to maintain legitimacy in conducting business on behalf of "the blind and deaf" while receiving public scrutiny. Balanced strategic diplomacy and enhanced multilateral cooperation along with adaptable institutions are essential for successfully confronting this era's myriad complex challenges (Morgan M. M. ,2025). To this end, states must strategically design their agenda to create principled engagement and pragmatic coordination on issues surrounding climate change, peacebuilding, economic stability, security threats and many others. Redefining diplomacy in the 21st Century will also require integrating moral responsibility into state behaviour but remaining cognisant of the realities of the geopolitical world. The choices that US makes regarding alignment with other states particularly on very high-profile conflicts (ex: Syria,

Ukraine, etc.) are also positioned at a reputational risk by how states such as China may use them diplomatically to gain leverage over the US. Due to the relatively rapid rate at which China's economy has grown over the past several decades as well as inconsistencies perceived in US policies, it offers an opportunity for China to capitalize on eroding Western credibility. Therefore, it is critical for states to utilize international institutions (UN) to promote enhanced thinking, collective actions and legitimacy. Therefore, a stable, rules-based just international system must be guided by a commitment towards fairness, mutual respect and equitable solutions. Thus, there is a global call to ensure that the world becomes stable, inclusive and prosperous. (Stewart Patrick, 2025).

Collapse of Moral Authority

The ethical foundation of global governance is being increasingly compromised by the desire for power and influence from developed nations. Historically, many world powers have presented themselves as the "civilizing" nations that struggle for the common good as they use their might to establish global values. The disconnect between ideologies about what constitutes appropriate behavior and how nations actually go about this is creating great divides and will ultimately jeopardize a regime's legitimacy. Diplomacy has always been an inherent part of the human experience in that it provides constructive means by which to resolve differences and create a positive order of relationships among state actors (Peter Van Ness, 2012). The lawlessness of the actions directed toward Palestinians will soon spread to other regions as evidenced by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's apparent goal to destabilize the region indefinitely in his effort to stay in office. The ideology of the government of Israel is clearly revealing its message that the Palestinian people are to be exterminated, and they themselves are responsible for their destruction (Luigi Daniele, 2025).

"There is no greater tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield of law and in the name of justice," noted the French philosopher Montesquieu. He warned centuries ago that this would happen, and today it is sadly true. Once those in power lose sight of their limitations, and those in power think 'accountability' is for textbooks, not them; not only do they dishonor the dignity of the citizens, but they also create an environment that will draw the citizen's anger. History has shown us that the outcome of this arrogance will not end well for those who rule; however, this outcome rarely ends well for those who are ruled. The destruction of authority is often met with the destruction of order.

Recent events in South Asia serve to remind us of our own local circumstances. In Sri Lanka, years of economic mismanagement and corruption led to bankruptcy; this resulted in ordinary Sri Lankans storming the Presidential Palace and forcing their long-term leader to flee the country. In addition, on more than one occasion people in Bangladesh have taken to the streets to express their frustrations with the government's poor governance, rampant corruption and lack of democracy. These protests over issues such as the fall of Suharto in 1998, to the latest widespread protests against proposed laws viewed as infringing upon civil liberties, have caused significant upheaval in Indonesia. In addition, the country of Nepal has seen its share of changes; it has gone from being under a monarchy, to a civil war, to its current fragile republicanism, and the people there have often been seen taking their frustrations onto the streets as a way of stating their rejection of incompetent rulers. These efforts to express anger and frustration have been rooted in justifiable anger, but they also show the lack of a moral compass when authority fails: the absence of a defined moral direction when authority collapses results, instead, in chaos, rather than the establishment of a new order (H.M. Nazmul Alam, 2025).

The death of over 130 Palestinian children on a single day has created the largest one-day child death toll in Palestine in years (potentially the worst Israeli military operation against Palestine based on child victimization by the Israeli military in Palestinian history), and UNICEF has condemned this. Additionally, despite an all-time high in child's crime against children by the United States and all other Western countries, (including a recent case where the United States took action against a country for genocidal acts against children), the vast majority of Western countries have continued to refuse to take legal action in any of these cases, even though they are taking action on other ICJ cases (including genocide cases against other countries). Hypocrisy and racist double standards continue to dominate how Israel treats Palestinian children, treating them with less regard as human beings than they do any other child (Luigi Daniele, 2025).

Power has been the driving force behind the growth of civilization; it is power that created unit forms of government and societal organization, and it is power that created social order. Provided power was consolidated and maintained for use against an external entity or threat, the unit form of society existed as a secure and reliable means of community and a structure for societal growth. From the development of the first city-state in Mesopotamia to the rise of today's nation-states, people have lived under the shadow of rulers; positive aspects of rulers' authority have been to create an environment of stability; however, the negative aspects have been to restrict /control / oppress freedom and create corruption and rebellion against rulers' authority. Authority can be viewed from two perspectives the perspective of authority over individuals; and the perspective of authority over collective groups (ie: societies of people). Thus, through time, the rationale for creating and maintaining authority is the balance between individual and collective freedoms on one side and accountability on the other side. Currently, the concern for both the individual and the collective is that the cycle of authority will accelerate; and that eventually authority will cease to exist altogether, creating a world in which authority (i.e., rulers) will no longer be able to provide legitimacy for the exercise of their power. It is a temptation to believe that this fear is unwarranted, given current global governance structures, international governance structures, and more complex forms of governance than have ever existed. However, the reality is that as developments in all these areas continue to be documented and additional complications related to these developments are created, the cracks in the foundations of government will continue to widen. (H.M. Nazmul Alam, 2025).

Power Politics, Civilizing Narratives, and the Ethical Gap

During the Cold War, the two superpowers promoted the notion of their rivalry as having a moral purpose. The United States saw itself as the defender of democracy and liberty; while, China viewed itself as the protégé of anti-imperialism. However, over time, the ethical reasoning behind these power struggles began to deteriorate. The United States justified its use of military force and counter-terrorism efforts in terms of freedom; However, the events at Abu Ghraib and the detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay revealed a large gap between what the government stated were its values, and its actual behaviour on the ground (Van Ness, 1985). In the contemporary world, the power struggle between the United States and China continues to erode each nation's ability to claim the moral high ground. Although both countries officially support global humanitarian efforts, such as supporting humanitarian efforts, climate diplomacy and development initiatives, their institutional leaders often take a more transactional approach than an ethical one. When there is a major power presence within an international organisation, there is the potential for a lack of trust and respect for the organisation by members participating with that major power. (Lenz & Viola, 2025).

Ethical, Institutional, and Legitimacy Costs

Using morality as an instrument undermines the legitimacy of institutions. The credibility of global governance is based on how states view these Institutions'; as tools and coordinates of power; if that is the case, credibility/distrust of global governance is reduced. Research shows that, when states perceive that rival powers strongly influence the decision-making process of Global International Institutions, public confidence decreases. It should be noted that this disintegration of Institutional credibility goes beyond the mere "procedural"; it is indicative of a more profound moral crisis: namely, institutions failing to align their ethical framework with the political realities of their time. (Keohane & Buchanan, 2006).

Diplomatic Challenges in the 21st Century & Impact on Developing States

In the current era (the 21st Century), Diplomacy has many challenges because it is not only changing in terms of Power Dynamics but also eroding the Moral Foundations of Diplomacy's ethical basis. For example, the expansion of Crisis Diplomacy beyond just Inter-State Wars to cover Public Health Crises, Climate Change, Digital Threats, and Non-State Actors on a transnational level creates a demand for state flexibility with respect to who has legitimacy in International Affairs. States are no longer the only principal entities with diplomatic authority; today Multi-Stakeholder Diplomacy includes Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Corporations, and Super-National Organizations creating a situation termed by Scholars as "Diplomatic Inflation." The growth in the number of Participants in the Diplomatic Process creates a stress on Traditional Diplomatic Frameworks (Shi, 2024).

Simultaneously, as Great Powers such as the USA and China re-emerge into competition, the practice of diplomacy has reverted back to a Realist approach (Batool, 2024), emphasising an instrumentality view of Diplomacy as opposed to being a moral tool. Alliances, commercial agreements; and International institutions are now being developed through a lens of 'Zero-Sum Competition' in contrast to Realist Theory; States will prioritise their strategic survival and ability for influence before adhering to any shared moral norms.

This is particularly detrimental for Developing and Less Developed States, as the competition between the Great Powers leads to smaller States being coerced into block alignments, thus compromising their Sovereignty and forcing them to pick between competing Great Power Patrons. The formation of diplomatic options for smaller states continues to dwindle, as the Great Powers will dictate Norms; Aid and Institutional Access for these smaller states. Additionally, as the application of Moral Virtue will be selectively applied by Great Powers, Developing Nations risk exclusion from decision-making processes, while still being most affected by the Economic or Humanitarian fallout from these decisions. The emergence of such Asymmetrical Diplomacy creates greater Global Inequality, which leaves many without meaningful recourse when their interests are subordinated to the Strategic Designs of the Great Powers.

Contemporary Power, Moral Hypocrisy, and Diplomatic Erosion

The recent geopolitical upheavals illuminate a deeply troubling pattern: while power rivalries intensify, the moral authority of major powers particularly the United States is being shaken, and this erosion has profound implications for smaller states and the concept of ethical diplomacy because of ongoing genocide. A. The term "genocide" has both legal and sociological connotations. Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish Polish legal scholar, first used the term "genocide" in 1944. "The term does not necessarily signify mass killings," according to Lemkin. He clarified that the term "genocide" more frequently refers to a concerted effort to destroy the fundamental pillars of national groups' existence, causing them to wither and perish like blighted plants. The people's culture, language, national sentiments, religion, and political and social institutions may all be forcibly dismantled in order to achieve the goal. It could be achieved by eliminating every

foundation for one's own safety, freedom, health, and dignity. The machine gun can always be used as a last resort when all other options have failed. Genocide targets a national group as a whole, and attacks on individuals are merely incidental to the eradication of the group to which they belong (Raphael Lemkin, *Genocide*, 1945).

Ottomans; Stalin's expulsion of Jews, Chechens, and Ingush Tartars from the USSR; the expulsion of Hungarians and Jews from Romania; and Italy's attempts to drive Slovenes and Croats off the Dalmatian coast. Ten Attempts to exterminate the Tutsi population in Rwanda in 1994 and Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995 resulted in successful prosecutions of individuals for genocide. Many well-known human rights experts, activists, and academics have asserted that Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people has amounted to genocide (Martin Shaw & Omer Bartov, 1948).

Israel's 50-year aggressive occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, far surpasses the type of occupation that inspired the development of international law's occupation regulations. Some human rights experts, such as Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, have warned of an "incremental genocide" of Palestinians and the eventual annihilation of the Palestinian people as a national group due to the seemingly permanent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Michael Ratner, the late president of the Center for Constitutional Rights Board and human rights attorney, also accused Israel of "incremental genocide" against the Palestinian people: "There's no doubt again here, this is 'incremental genocide,' as Ilan Pappé says." The murders, the appallingly terrible living conditions, the expulsions from Lydda in 1947 and 1948, when at least 700 Palestinian villages were destroyed, and the ongoing expulsions from that time until now have all been going on for a long time (Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé ed.; Haymarket 2015). "I want to emphasize today [that] these killings are part of a broader set of inhuman acts by Israel constituting international crimes, carried out by Israel over many years, going back to at least 1947 and 1948," he continued (Ilan Pappé and William 2010).

The number and type of civilian deaths in Gaza have prompted grave allegations. According to Amnesty International's analysis, Israel's military operations may amount to genocidal acts because by October 2024, over 42,000 Palestinians had died, including over 13,300 children, and entire multigenerational families had been wiped out. These findings reveal not only the horror of war but also the boundaries of accountability: strong states that back Israel continue to shield it from serious international criticism in spite of numerous reports of indiscriminate targeting and infrastructure destruction. In view of the aforementioned, PCHR determines that Israel's actions toward Palestinians in the Gaza Strip—through its state apparatus and all individuals and entities that support it, act under its direction, control, or influence—constitute genocide. For more than 15 months, Israel has violated Articles II (a), (b), (c), and (d) of the Genocide Convention by killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, purposefully subjecting Palestinians in Gaza to conditions of life intended to cause their physical destruction in whole or in part, and preventing births (PCHR, 2025).

As such, these actions were carried out specifically with the intention of destroying Palestinians in Gaza. Israel has continuously broken the terms of the ceasefire, continuing its siege of Gaza and carrying out additional violent acts. Israel has continued to kill civilians, destroy Gaza, and severely restrict the flow of necessary supplies into the Gaza Strip since hostilities resumed. Food, tents, and mobile homes are examples of humanitarian aid that has been severely restricted or denied. Israel's continued intention to eradicate the Palestinian population in Gaza through a combination of military violence, deprivation, and denial of fundamental rights is demonstrated by this flagrant disregard for Palestinian lives.

Due to worsening malnutrition and the collapse of healthcare and sanitation services, one in five babies in the Gaza Strip are now born underweight or prematurely, putting both newborns and their mothers at grave risk. Approximately 11,000 pregnant women are at risk of starvation, and another 17,000 require immediate medical attention due to acute malnutrition. More than 1.5 million people still receive domestic and drinking water from UNICEF and its partners, albeit at severely reduced levels because of the fuel shortage. In the West Bank, incidents of settler violence, forced relocation, and demolitions have persisted, and curfews and stricter travel restrictions have hampered access to healthcare and education as well as livelihoods (UNICEF,2025).

The key player in this conundrum is the United States, Israel's biggest supporter. The United States has given Israel military assistance totaling at least \$17.9 billion during its Gaza campaign since October 2023. Additionally, 1,700,000 children require humanitarian aid. 3,300 thousand. People in need of humanitarian aid, 1,900,000 displaced people (90% of Gaza's population), and 95.4% damage to 538 school buildings in Gaza (UNICEF, 2025). Financing for missile defense systems like the Iron Dome and David's Sling is part of this enormous support, which strengthens a militarized alliance that many critics claim permits impunity. Analysts have long pointed out that much of U.S. military aid comes with strings: under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Israel is required to purchase U.S.-made weapons, meaning the aid functions not simply as charity but also as a mechanism to sustain the American defense-industrial base (Aljazeera,2025).

This connection begs the question of why the United States is being criticized for its hypocritical behavior rather than for its defense of human rights. The US has presented itself as a defender of international norms and human rights, but it also contributes enormous resources to the conflict, where civilian casualties are disproportionate and accountability is, at best, nonexistent. This discrepancy is highlighted in a recent report published by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the US State Department. They found that some Israeli military units that receive US support may have engaged in activities that are in violation of Human Rights and were in violation of "Leahy Laws" prohibiting US support from being provided to military units found to have committed serious human rights abuses. The continuing disconnect of the moral rhetoric associated with the support of US military aid to Israel vs. the real-world implications discredits the USA from being recognized as an ethical global leader.

Statements of Israeli's Personals:

1. Yoav Gallant, the Israeli Minister of Defense, declared that Israel would cause decades of devastation in the Gaza Strip. "We will change the face of reality in the Gaza Strip 50 years from now; what was is not what will be, we operate with full force," he declared. Yoav Galant called Palestinians "human animals" in a video statement posted on the Knesset's official YouTube channel on October 9, 2023. He also declared a complete siege of the Gaza Strip, purposefully depriving all of its residents of the necessities of life: "We are imposing a complete siege on the city of Gaza." Everything is closed, including fuel, food, water, and electricity. We are acting in accordance with the fact that we are fighting against human animals.
2. Israeli President Isaac Herzog stated that "Israel will do whatever it takes, with an iron fist, to change the reality," indicating that there would be no restrictions on the use of force. Herzog intensified his rhetoric on October 13, 2023, sending a clear message to the IOF that all Palestinian civilians were legitimate targets by effectively equating them with enemy combatants: "Unequivocally it is an entire nation out there that is responsible."

It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not involved. It is absolutely not true.”

China and other rising powers recognize this inconsistency and use it to encourage countries in the Global South to view American behaviour with distrust. In a growing body of literature, Chinese commentators accuse America of having a double-standard moral order when it comes to the Middle East. The recent escalation of global outrage over civilian suffering in Gaza has only enhanced China's ability to represent itself as the defender of non-interference and sovereignty. By emphasizing these values, China is enabling itself to increase its reputation as a soft power with developing countries that are sceptical about the morality of the West.

Sudan, the UAE, and the Legal Avoidance of Accountability

Similar to the situation in Gaza, Sudan is another tragic example of a state going to the International Court of Justice to accuse the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of supporting the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary militia that has killed numerous ethnic groups and forced a large number of people into other states by using tactics like assault and sexual violence against the Masalit people. Based only on the case's dismissal and the UAE's reservation to Article IX of the Genocide Convention, the ICJ denied jurisdiction over the matter. The court's ruling has left unanswered the substantive issues surrounding Sudan's claims of genocide against the UAE. Sudan has raised strong political and diplomatic arguments and many feel these claims represent a major failure of international law to hold those culpable for atrocities accounted for through the mechanisms of international justice. The consequences of such a decision are far-reaching and damaging to the credibility of the international justice system as it relates to holding governments, corporations and individuals accountable for the crimes of war against their own citizens and the citizens of other nations (Wikipedia).

The account shows how political alliances, legal tactics and the limitations of existing institutions interact to delay or circumvent justice for those who are already marginalized. The message that this case sends to smaller and weaker states, is that unless moral norms coincide with the interests of those in power, they may be enforced only to the benefit of greater powers. Rather than establishing an appropriate program for the repatriation of refugees, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has developed a sophisticated covert military campaign in support of one party in the decomposing Wars of Sudan. In accordance with information presented by multiple sources from the U.S. government and the governments of many European nations and several African nations, the UAE has been transporting supplies, weapons and drones, along with treating wounded combatants, into Sudan and then transporting the most severely injured to one of its military hospitals, primarily located on emirate "air cargo airports." Beginning in June, the UAE has regularly used military transport aircraft to supply cargo to the airfield, which is located just beyond the empire of Sudan along the Chad-Sudan border. Additionally, the UAE has also transported severely injured combatants into its remote medical facilities located in Chad. The activities of the UAE reinforce that it has become to American allies in the G.C.C. a significant military player in Africa, owing to the vast sums of wealth and sophisticated military assets that it brought to bear. It's the latest example of how the UAE has, through its enormous resources, become a formidable military power both within and outside its stated boundaries. (Christoph Koettl and Eric Schmitt,2023).

Evidence in Sudan indicates that it is supporting the Rapid Support Forces, or R.S.F., a potent paramilitary organization accused of atrocities and connected to the Russian mercenary group Wagner. Since April, the R.S.F. has been fighting the country's regular military in a civil war that has displaced over four million people and killed 5,000 civilians. However, the Emiratis maintain

that their action at the Sudanese border is entirely humanitarian. The Emirati state news agency has released pictures of the shining field hospital since planes started to arrive in the Chadian town of Amdjarass. It claims that since July, more than 6,000 patients have received treatment there (Ibid).

Videos show Emirati officials renovating schools, donating goats, and placing aid packages outside straw huts in neighboring villages. They've even planned a race for camels. The Emiratis claim that their goal is to aid Sudanese refugees, many of whom are escaping horrific ethnic violence in the Darfur region. In reality, the refugee crisis is located several hundred miles to the south, where 420,000 recently arrived Sudanese are crammed into expansive camps in appalling conditions after a two-day drive over dirt roads and the desert. The leader of the Rapid Support Forces, Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan, also known as Hemeti, a former militia commander from Darfur with a reputation for brutality and longstanding ties to the Emirates, is actually receiving military support from the United Arab Emirates under the guise of an aid mission (Declan Walsh, 2023).

Bloc-based geopolitical hierarchy (Russia-Ukraine Issue)

The geopolitical arrangement of Russia and China against the United States and Europe has been clearly delineated as a new bloc-based structure that challenges the existing post-Cold War system. Western sanctions against Russia have forced Moscow to turn to Beijing for most of its technological needs; according to U.S. intelligence estimates, 90% of Russia's microelectronics and critical machine tools are sourced from China. Additionally, China is supplying Russia with Dual-use goods, such as optics, CNC machine tools, and microchips that aid in Russian war production, are products with both military and civilian uses. Evidence also exists that some of the rare metals (gallium and germanium), which are vital for munitions manufacture, have been sold by Chinese companies to the Russian government, thereby strengthening the Russian military-industrial complex in violation of existing sanctions.

China and Russia are rapidly strengthening their military and diplomatic relationship, creating the foundation for an informal, anti-West bloc through the implementation of a "no-limits" strategic partnership. From the perspective of the United States and Europe, this is more of a transactional relationship and less of an ideological alliance, but both result in a weakening of the moral authority of Western-supported multilateral institutions. In fact, the European Parliament has publicly expressed concern that the export of sensitive dual-use items by China to Russia undermines the European Union's export control systems, and that Beijing is increasingly viewed as an enabler of Russian aggression.

Russia's dependence on China, China's balancing of the conflicting demands of independent strategic autonomy and perceived global legitimacy, and the United States' opposition to both through sanctions constitute a complex triangle of tension. This is symptomatic of an impending realignment of the global blocs, where countries will no longer exist in a single or unified world based upon liberal principles or norms, but instead, are forming their alliances based on power considerations. As such, moral accountability has become secondary to strategic necessity. In addition to all of this, the practice of diplomacy may evolve into a battlefield itself; with the ethical basis of diplomatic relationships transformed into another tool of power, thereby diminishing the concept of global governance to mere competition for larger platforms as competing moral narratives rather than true universal goods.

US-China Rivalry and the Weaponization of Moral Narratives

In addition, the increasing tensions between the United States and China are not just about power but have also created moral dilemmas. The diplomatic and intellectual communities in China are

using the recent events in Gaza and the selective nature of US international justice to illustrate how hypocritical the American-led system of morality is. These types of arguments strengthen China's appeal to Global South nations, who feel left behind by the moral superiority of Western nations. In a similar vein, China can assert that its ascent to prominence is founded on the values of justice, sovereignty, and refraining from meddling in the internal affairs of other countries while simultaneously pursuing its own national objectives. Beijing may be capitalizing on a growing need among developing nations to establish a new moral framework independent of Western dominance by portraying itself as a defender of sovereignty and refraining from meddling in the internal affairs of other countries.

This new paradigm creates both risks and opportunities. It will create more fragmentation in the international system, cause greater polarization between competing norms and values, and turn the process of multilateral diplomacy into a contest of competing narratives based on each nation's respective position of power. International institutions must either become the defenders of universal ethical principles or fall victim to being used primarily as platforms for the dissemination of propaganda and the promotion of instrumental moral ideals.

Rebuilding Diplomatic Ethics in the Age of Power Rivalries

The reconstruction of ethical diplomacy is vital in the current environment due to the political, military, and economic realities. A new era of ethical diplomacy must be rebuilt by moving from current transactional alliances to re-establishing ethical diplomacy based on norms that protect all people regardless of their regime, therefore ensuring accountability and institutional legitimacy at greater levels than ever before, which may violate the principles of geopolitics. Re-establishing the credibility and validity of accountability measures such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) requires reform of these institutions and reforms that remove great powers from influencing the ICC and the ICJ, as have occurred in the world today (New Powers and International Law, 21st Century).

Middle Powers and multilateral institutions can also play an important role in this rebuilding of ethical diplomacy by acting as normative mediators to bridge the gap between middle powers and great powers. States that occupy a subordinate position compared to great powers may also have a considerable advantage compared to great powers because of their positional influence, and by acting as brokers of cooperation and maintaining moral norms they may be able to facilitate cooperation among non-great powers to achieve expectations for mutual aid (Cooper, 1997; see also Oman's Niche Diplomacy). Also, in contrast to the current zero-sum logic of competition that dominates the global political landscape between the developed and developing countries, coalitions of diplomats among developing countries that are based on normative solidarity should be established, thereby reaffirming the principle that cooperative international relations can be and should be founded upon moral principles instead of on power (i.e., re-establishing the principles of international cooperation).

Finally, ethical diplomacy must be institutionalized not only in policy but in practice. Diplomats should view their roles not just as representatives of national interest, but as custodians of a global moral order reclaiming diplomacy as a practice of responsibility and moral leadership in a fractured world. Only by doing so can the international system recover the legitimacy and trust that have been eroded by decades of power politics.

Conclusion

The moral authority that once pervaded the international system has vanished in the twenty-first century. As a result, the foreign policies of the major or dominant powers China, Russia, and the United States have increasingly prioritized their strategic goals over their moral obligations. The

major powers are now more likely to utilize forms of influence which may be seen as unethical (selective sanctions, military assistance and coercive diplomacy) in order to achieve their objectives. Examples of this are found in the genocide occurring between Israel and Palestine, the war occurring between Russia and Ukraine, and a conflict between Sudan and the UAE, each of which has had a significant impact on the deterioration of humanitarian norms as well as the stagnation of international institutions. However, there is also a moment of opportunity for states that continue to strategically realign their diplomatic efforts based on consistency versus transactionalism. States can form new alliances, enhance their international reputation and participate in new geopolitical groupings. For those states that are developing or underdeveloped this means a greater danger due to greater exposure to the effects of power competition, but the same constitutes an opportunity for those states to rebuild credibility and position themselves as credible emerging powers through principled diplomacy. This is a clear warning to the US; by continuing to support the actions of others that lack moral credibility it jeopardizes its comparative advantage and increases the likelihood of the emergence of alternative leaders or powers, particularly China. Ultimately, rebuilding ethical diplomacy in a time of competition is not simply aspirational it is an imperative for any state seeking to gain relevance, legitimacy and stability long term.

Findings and Recommendations

According to the research, the current state of global governance has shifted due to a collapse of the existing norm with the emergence of selective morality. Geopolitical rivalries, along with institutional paralysis, have been highly influential in the current state of governance. As such, the use of diplomatic efforts by major powers has been increasingly used as a weapon to coerce, rather than build partnerships, leading to a win/loss outcome for the parties involved and thus disregarding the humanitarian principles that formed the foundation for diplomacy to begin with. The current wars in Israel-Palestine, Russia-Ukraine, and Sudan illustrate the gap that now exists between international laws and how they are being applied by states; as well as the failure of global institutions to enforce accountability or prevent states from using unlawful military force. The fragmentation of global power has also resulted in the existence of competing bloc structures; consequently, major states are creating regional and international alliances with smaller states to provide for their collective security rather than through the establishment of a multilateral system of governance. The developing world carries the most weight from this fragmentation; experiencing an economic disruption, humanitarian strain, and a significantly reduced opportunity for diplomatic activity. However, developing countries can leverage new opportunities to create strategic partnerships, engage in normative diplomacy, and develop regional cooperation to elevate their status and their influence globally.

The conclusions of this research demonstrate that the erosion of moral principles is not simply an ethical crisis; rather, it is a significant change in the structure of the future of global diplomacy and global distributions of power.

- 1) Provide Ethical Diplomacy: Humanitarian Norms and Legal Obligations at the forefront of Foreign Policy
- 2) Enhance multilateral institutions by implementing reforms at the UN, International Criminal Court, and UN High Commissioner for Refugees to strengthen enforcement, accountability, and transparency.
- 3) Establish Bloc-Neutral Partnerships to deliver Flexible Capacity and Sovereignty and Stability for Developing Countries Over Time.

- 4) Develop Systematic Conflict Prevention Mechanisms to Mitigate Major Power Interference in Developing Countries with Monitoring, Early Warning, and Rapid Response Systems.
- 5) Support Competition between Great Powers on Sanctions, Military Assistance, Cyber Warfare, and Conflict Related Technologies through responsible Norms.
- 6) Provide Humanitarian Protection for Humanitarian Corridors and Medical Facilities and Civilian Infrastructure to Promote Legal Enforceability from Vulnerability.
- 7) Expand The Diplomatic Capacity of Developing Countries Through Professional Development, Regional Alliances, Multilateral Negotiation Forums, and International Training Programs.
- 8) Strengthen Strategic Communication to Rebuild Public Trust in Diplomacy, Counter the Negative Impact of Disinformation, and Reinstate her Moral Integrity.
- 9) Reform to Enable Greater Inclusive Global Governance and Increase the Voice of Developing Countries in Global Decision-Making Processes.
- 10) Reinforce Economic Diplomacy as a Tool of Stability, to Avoid Coercive Dependency, and to Facilitate Sustainable Development Partnerships.

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