

**OCTOBER
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THE CILIRD WAY

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF CILIRD



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Governance
Race Intensifies**



**Diplomatic
Manoeuvres**



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Letter from the Editorial Board

With the release of the second edition of the CILIRD Newsletter, we find ourselves not at a conclusion, but in the midst of an evolving conversation. What began as an idea has grown into a shared space — one that reflects both continuity and change in the fields of international law, relations, and diplomacy.

Each contribution in this edition speaks to the dynamism of our times, capturing how global challenges, shifting power structures, and new technologies reshape the way we think about law and international cooperation. Through diverse perspectives, we continue to seek clarity amid complexity, and dialogue amid difference.

This publication stands as a testament to the curiosity and commitment of our contributors and readers alike. It is our hope that these pages not only inform but inspire to think critically, engage meaningfully, and explore further.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Here's to reflection, exchange, and to the ever-expanding world of ideas we continue to build together.

*— The Editorial Board of the Centre for International Law,
International Relations and Diplomacy*

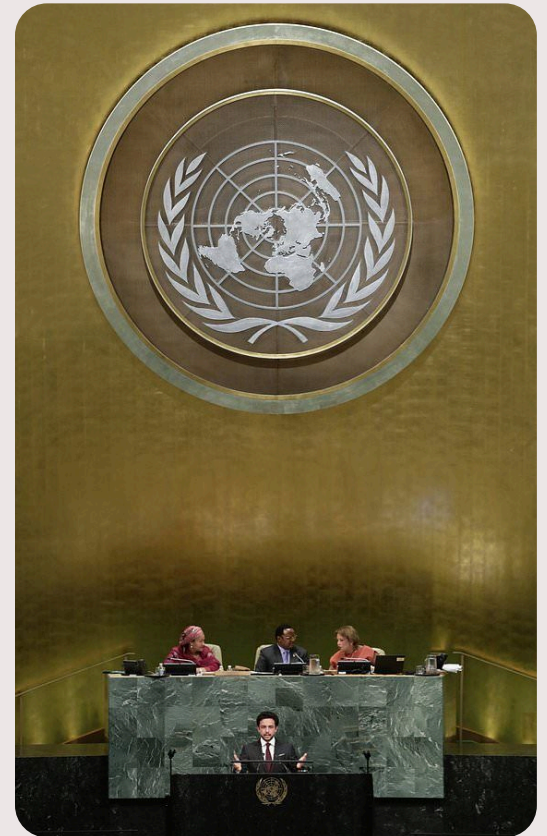


MAJOR NEWS

September & October 2025

The UN at 80: A Test of Relevance in a Multipolar World

The 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September was set against a backdrop of profound global challenges, testing the very institution designed to manage them. The high-level week was dominated by a palpable sense of urgency, with Secretary-General António Guterres opening the debate with a stark warning about the "age of chaos" and the fraying of the international order. A central, and deeply contentious, theme was the continued push for reforms in the UN Security Council (UNSC). The G4 nations—India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan—renewed their collective call for permanent membership, arguing that the current structure is an anachronism that no longer reflects 21st-century geopolitical realities. As reported by The Hindu, India's External Affairs Minister emphasized that a more representative Council is essential for the UN's own credibility. However, the old divisions persisted, with the Uniting for Consensus group, led by Pakistan and Italy, voicing strong opposition. Beyond structure, the substance of discussions was heavy. The war in Ukraine and the ongoing situation in Gaza remained key flashpoints, with leaders delivering sharply divided addresses. The atmosphere was one of a diplomatic battleground, where multilateralism was both the prescribed cure and a patient in critical condition. The outcome of this session suggests that while the demand for a more equitable global governance system is louder than ever, the path to achieving it remains fraught with entrenched national interests.



Climate Finance Takes Centre Stage : The Aftermath of the COP29 Baku Summit

The critical issue of climate finance dominated international diplomacy throughout September, following the landmark decisions made at COP29 in Baku. The core achievement from Baku—the establishment of a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance—shifted the debate from negotiation to implementation. Developed nations are now under intense scrutiny to detail how they will mobilise the pledged funds, which are aimed significantly at supporting the Global South's adaptation and mitigation efforts. As analysed in The Indian Express, a key development in September was the formation of a "High-Level Expert Group" by the UN and the World Bank to create a transparent framework for tracking these financial flows. This move is seen as a direct response to long-standing demands from countries like India for clarity and accountability. However, significant friction points emerged. Disagreements persist on the mix of grants versus loans, with developing nations arguing that over-reliance on loans would exacerbate their debt burdens. Furthermore, the role of private sector financing and multinational development banks in meeting this goal has become a major point of discussion in international forums like the G20 working groups. The diplomatic chatter throughout the month reflected a cautious optimism, tempered by the immense challenge of turning a political agreement into tangible financial support for those on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Global Supply Chains : The New Diplomatic Chessboard

The fragility of global supply chains was once again exposed in late September, becoming a central theme in bilateral diplomatic engagements. A major cyber-attack on one of the world's largest port operators, disrupting logistics from Rotterdam to Singapore, sent shockwaves through governments and boardrooms. This event forced a rapid escalation of diplomatic talks on "collective cyber resilience" for critical infrastructure. Meanwhile, the ongoing disruptions in key shipping lanes, including the persistent tensions in the Red Sea and low water levels in the Panama Canal due to climate change, have pushed the cost of global freight upward. As reported by The Indian Express, this has had a direct impact on economies like India, affecting both export competitiveness and domestic inflation. In response, diplomats have been busy forging smaller, more resilient "supply chain alliances." These are not broad free-trade agreements, but targeted pacts focusing on securing access to critical minerals, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals. For instance, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), though progressing slower than anticipated, saw renewed diplomatic parleys in October, as partner nations seek viable alternatives to traditional, vulnerable maritime routes. This trend underscores a strategic pivot from efficiency to security in economic planning, making supply chain management a core subject of international diplomatic discourse.



The Weakening Dollar and the Quiet Rise of Financial Multipolarity

September witnessed significant tremors in the global economic architecture, challenging the long-held dominance of the US dollar. A key development, closely tracked by The Hindu's business section, was the expansion of the BRICS bloc's Unified Payment System. Originally conceived by Russia, the system is being actively adopted by new members like Ethiopia and Iran, and is seeing increased interest from several ASEAN nations seeking to insulate their trade from potential Western sanctions and dollar volatility. This is not merely a technical shift but a profound geopolitical one, representing a concerted push towards de-dollarization. Concurrently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) concluded its annual meeting with mixed messages. While it revised global growth projections slightly upwards, it issued strong warnings about "geoeconomic fragmentation" – the splitting of the world into competing economic blocs. The IMF Managing Director highlighted that the weaponization of financial networks and the move towards alternative payment systems, while understandable for some nations, carry systemic risks that could reduce the efficiency of global trade and investment. This creates a complex dilemma for diplomats and economic policymakers: how to navigate a world where the pursuit of financial sovereignty by some could inadvertently undermine collective economic stability.

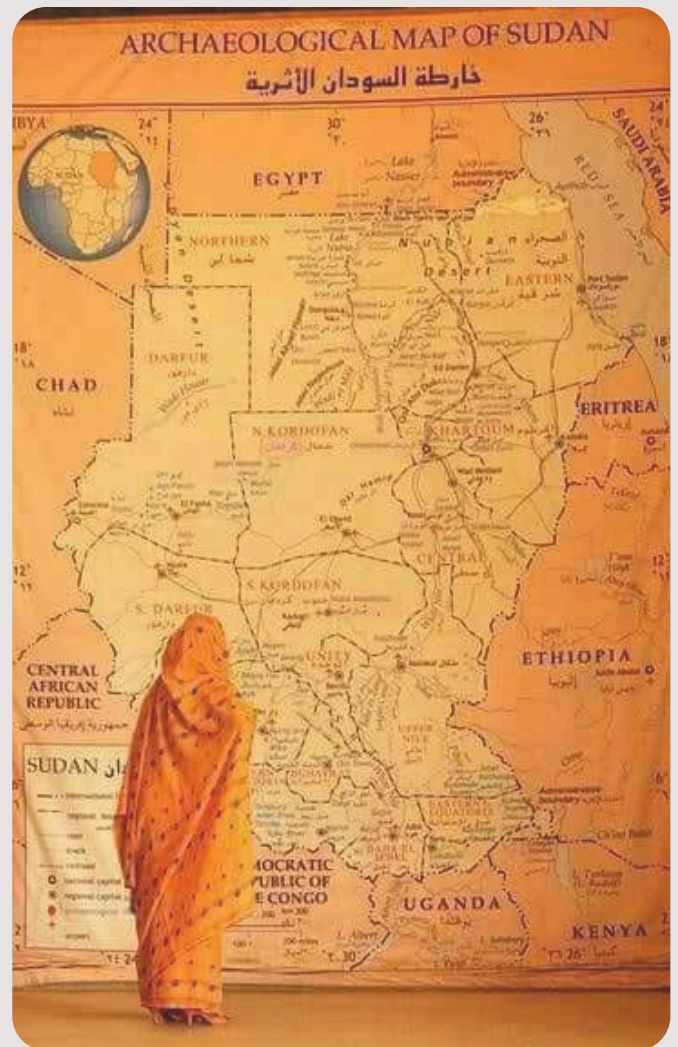
The South China Sea: A Simmering Cauldron

The strategic waters of the South China Sea remained a hotspot in September and early October. Tensions flared significantly following a series of confrontations between Chinese coast guard vessels and Philippine resupply boats near the Second Thomas Shoal. Unlike previous encounters, these incidents were marked by the alleged use of new "acoustic weapons" and powerful water cannons, causing serious damage to Philippine vessels and minor injuries to crew members. As per analyses in *The Hindu*, this escalation prompted an immediate and strong response from Manila, which invoked its Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States. The U.S. State Department issued a statement reaffirming its "ironclad" commitment to the Philippines, leading to a joint naval patrol exercise in the region by mid- October. This action drew sharp condemnation from Beijing, which accused the U.S. of "stoking regional tensions." The situation has forced ASEAN members into a difficult diplomatic position, with countries like Vietnam and Indonesia watching warily. The incidents have effectively put the region on a higher alert, demonstrating how localized disputes can rapidly draw in major powers and threaten broader regional stability.



The Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Process: A Delicate Hope

A significant, though fragile, diplomatic breakthrough emerged from the South Caucasus in early October. Following months of quiet, back-channel negotiations mediated by the European Union, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan announced an agreement on the initial demarcation of a segment of their shared border. This step, though technical, is profoundly symbolic, representing the first tangible progress on border issues since the 2020 war. Reports in *The Indian Express* highlighted that this was a classic example of "technocratic diplomacy," where experts from both sides, away from the media glare, worked on maps and land surveys to find a mutually acceptable line. However, the path to a comprehensive peace treaty remains daunting. Critical issues, most notably the status and rights of the ethnic Armenian population in the Karabakh region and the establishment of unimpeded transport corridors, are still unresolved. The international community, including Russia and the West, is watching closely, as a stable peace between Yerevan and Baku would significantly alter the geopolitical and energy transit landscape of the region. For now, diplomats are cautiously optimistic, treating the border demarcation as a vital confidence building measure in a long and painful process.



Sudan Conflict: A Deepening Humanitarian Catastrophe

The conflict in Sudan escalated dramatically in September, with the RSF paramilitary group consolidating control over the strategic city of El Fasher in Darfur. This has triggered a massive new wave of displacement, adding to what was already the world's largest internal displacement crisis. As reported by *The Hindu*, aid agencies are describing a "catastrophic" famine-like situation, with access to humanitarian corridors being systematically blocked by warring factions. Diplomatic efforts, led by regional bodies and the UN, have stalled, leaving millions cut off from food and medical aid. The international community's response has been criticized as woefully inadequate, raising urgent questions about the mechanisms for civilian protection in modern conflicts.

Global Pandemic Accord Talks Stumble

Critical negotiations for a landmark World Health Organization (WHO) pandemic accord faced significant setbacks in late September, missing a key interim deadline. As covered by The Indian Express, disagreements between developed and developing nations on two key issues—pathogen sharing and equitable access to vaccines and treatments—proved insurmountable. Wealthier nations are hesitant to mandate the sharing of virus samples without guaranteed access to resulting pharmaceuticals, while low and middle-income countries demand a firm commitment that lifesaving resources won't be hoarded during a crisis. This deadlock threatens to leave the world as vulnerable to the next pandemic as it was to COVID-19, underscoring the deep-seated trust deficits in global health governance.



The AI Governance Race Intensifies

Following the European Union's pioneering AI Act, September saw a flurry of diplomatic activity as nations scrambled to shape the global governance of artificial intelligence. A U.S. led coalition, including several key Indo-Pacific partners, advanced a framework emphasizing "light-touch" regulation and innovation. Simultaneously, a UN-led working group struggled to find consensus on a more binding international code. As analyzed in The Indian Express, the fundamental divide lies between a rights-based approach, championed by the EU, and a security-and-innovation focused model, promoted by the U.S. and China. This fragmentation risks creating a splintered regulatory landscape, complicating international cooperation and setting the stage for technology becoming a new front in geopolitical competition.



—Rishima Bisht is a sophomore at Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law and a member at CILIRD



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The West's Gradual Shift on Recognizing Palestine

-Yashasvi Maharshi

For decades, Western governments broadly avoided unilateral recognition of a State of Palestine, instead conditioning it on a negotiated settlement with Israel. But the landscape is now shifting—not just because of abiding strategic and moral considerations but also because of recent diplomatic momentum and growing humanitarian and political pressure. Recently, several key Western nations moved to recognize Palestinian statehood, and the United Nations took significant steps to frame the issue in fresh terms. These events mark a turning point in the West's posture on Palestinian recognition, reflecting changing global norms and domestic political realignments. At the root of the shift lies a philosophical reevaluation: Western states are increasingly faced with the tension between the "rules-based international order" that they preach and the lived realities of occupation, humanitarian crisis, and failed peace processes. As public opinion hardens, and as the war in Gaza persists, recognition of Palestine appears not just symbolic, but part of a wider reckoning with values such as self-determination, equality, and justice.

From Diplomatic Caution to Political Courage

In recent weeks, the diplomatic ice has cracked. On 21 September 2025, the governments of Canada, Australia and United Kingdom officially recognised the State of Palestine — joining a wave of recognition that included France, Belgium and others around 22 September. Before this unpacking, as of September 2025 about 156 of the 193 UN member states had recognised Palestinian statehood — a significant majority though still excluding major Western powers like the United States.

The move came amidst deepening public outrage in parts of Europe and elsewhere over the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, the expanding settlement enterprise in the West Bank, and the perceived failure of the decades-old peace framework. One analysis described recognition as "a major foreign-policy shift for key allies of Israel" that breaks with past practice. Indeed, in September 2025 the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the so-called New York Declaration—drafted by France and Saudi Arabia—and voted 142-10 to push for a Palestinian state alongside Israel, tied to a governance model excluding Hamas.

These steps are important not only for the recognition numbers in themselves, but also because they point to a change of policy from "recognition only after a negotiated peace" to "recognition as part of the peace process". Many Western states now regard the recognition of Palestine as a form of leverage – a means by which to pressure Israel and breathe new life into the moribund two-state paradigm.

However, caution remains. Key players like the United States continue to oppose unilateral recognition, viewing it as possibly counter-productive. Moreover, some analysts caution that recognitions—even this wave—are still largely symbolic unless backed up by concrete pressure: arms embargos, trade sanctions on settlements, diplomatic consequences for Israel, humanitarian access improvements—and genuine follow-through. On the political side of the equation, the Western shift is also a reflection of changing internal dynamics: younger voters less wedded to Cold War alignments, growing Muslim- and Arab-diaspora electorates in Europe and the Anglosphere, and rising



frustration with the long stalemate in the Middle East. According to one analysis, domestic politics in countries such as Australia, the UK and France played a greater role than pure foreign-policy calculation.

For the Palestinians, these recognitions provide renewed hope — not that statehood is immediately realised but that external legitimacy is shifting and the terms of debate are being reframed. A commentary noted: "On 21 September ... Canada, the UK and Australia joined 147 other countries in recognising the state of Palestine... This marks a major foreign policy shift for key allies of Israel."

Nevertheless, risks remain. Israel strongly opposes this move: its government labels recognition as a reward for terror and has threatened to speed up settlement or annexation in retaliation. Without concurrent pressure on Israel to halt occupation-driven policies, recognition may remain largely symbolic or, worse, trigger harsher responses. As one NGO stated in October 2025, "Recognition must be accompanied by action ... the unfolding humanitarian crisis due to these actions is well known and documented."

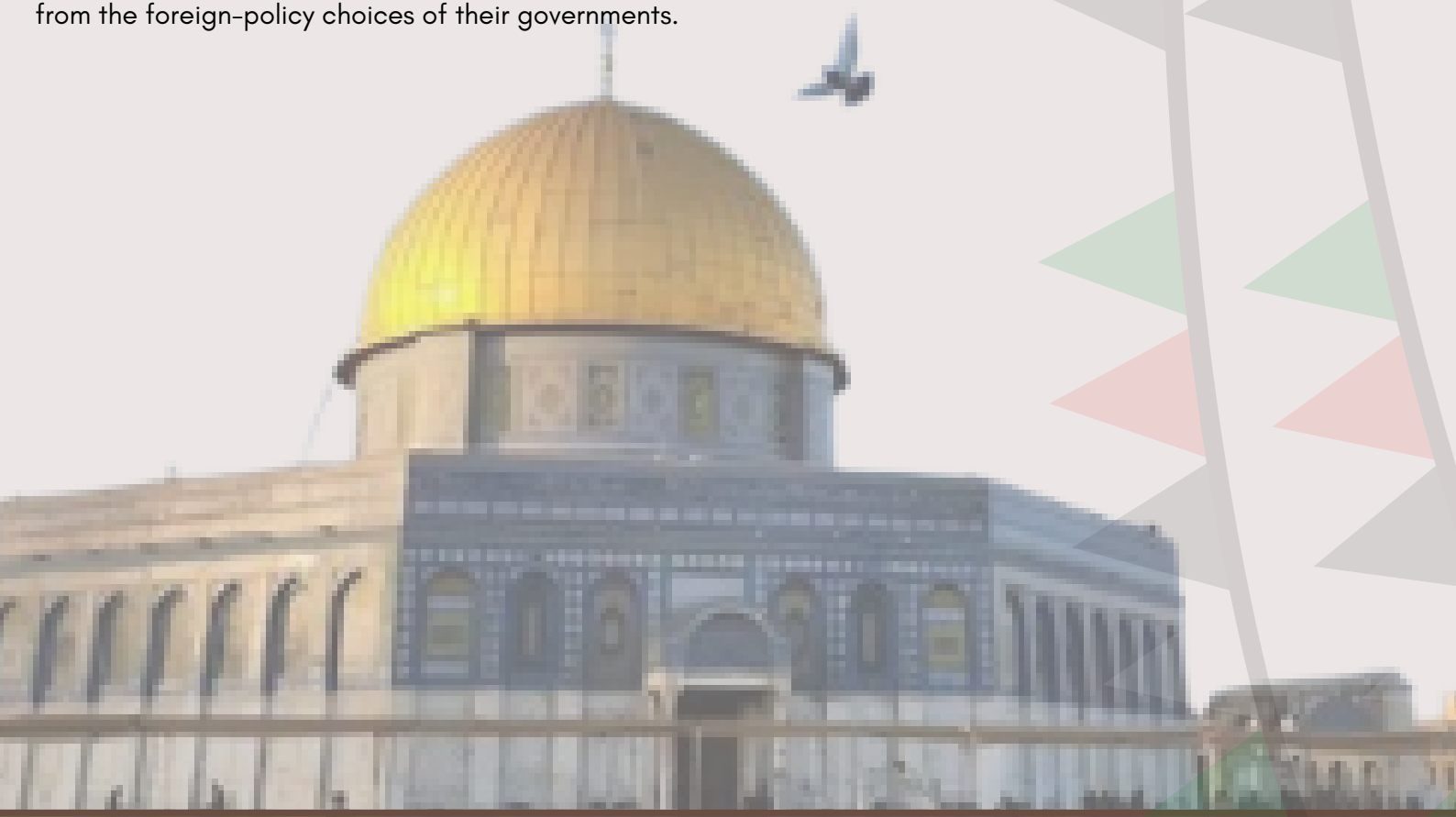
A Moral Awakening and the Re-ordering of Global Narratives

The West's recent shift on Palestinian recognition is philosophical just as much as it is diplomatic. It reflects a broad moral and generational awakening: Western publics are increasingly unwilling to separate their ideals—human rights, equality, self-determination—from the foreign-policy choices of their governments.

he narrative of "Israel alone as the defender" is supplemented—if not challenged—by the recognition that occupation, displacement, and statelessness contradict the values that the West claims to champion.

For example, the framing of the September 2025 recognitions by major Western states has underlined that recognition is not "against Israel" but "for peace", an affirmation of Palestinian dignity alongside Israeli security. This shift is partly driven by the comparison of Western responses: while the invasion of Ukraine drew a sharp and immediate reaction, Palestinians have faced occupation, displacement, and statelessness for decades with far less urgency from the West. The new tone suggests that norms will be applied more consistently.

Geopolitically, the shift also underlines the Western concern about marginalisation in a more multipolar world. As the Global South and states outside the traditional Western bloc mobilise around Palestinian rights, the latter's governments risk losing diplomatic credibility unless they respond in kind. The recognition wave of September 2025 signals an attempt to reassert moral authority.



Still, the philosophical pivot is incomplete: recognition by itself cannot end occupation, rebuild Gaza, or overturn Israel's military dominance. The real test now is whether recognition is followed with sustained pressure, by the creation of meaningful Palestinian governance structures, by accountability mechanisms and by a genuine revival of the two-state pathway—or whether it will be confined to a symbolic gesture. As the NGO community puts it: "Recognition must come with action."

Conclusion

The West's gradual shift to recognizing Palestine in September and October 2025 reflects much more than routine diplomacy; it signals a reordering of international norms, domestic politics, and moral narratives. The main Western states have made a shift from diplomatic caution toward political courage in recognizing the State of Palestine as part of the peace process, rather than just its outcome. Yet, the road ahead is full of hurdles: real peace will require much more than mere recognition, and Israel's denial, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and persistent structural imbalances remain formidable barriers. Ultimately, this shift speaks to a larger truth: the Palestinian question is no longer just a regional dispute; it is a mirror into the values of the West. Recognition thus becomes not only an act of diplomacy but also one of credibility and an ethical signpost in an emerging world order.

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INTERNATIONAL LAW

Rights in Limbo:

The Conflict Between National Barriers and International Promises

-Shameer Kasim, Phd Researcher

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol were created to ensure that those fleeing persecution would never again be left without protection. However, more than 70 years later, refugees continue to exist in a world where legal promises and political realities rarely converge. The cornerstone of the Convention, Article 33, enshrines the principle of non-refoulement, the fundamental rule that no refugee shall be returned to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened. On paper, it is one of the strongest guarantees in international law. In practice, however, it is one of the most compromised. The essential problem lies like international law itself: treaties like the Refugee Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) are not enforceable laws but rather guiding frameworks that rely on the political will and interpretation of states. This weakness turns what should be a rule of protection into a matter of discretion. The international community has built an architecture of principles without an enforcement engine. Within this vacuum, domestic laws, governed by electoral politics, public sentiment, and national security narratives, take control. Domestic law is territorial; it responds to voters, not victims. Reflects anxieties about borders and identity, not the universality of human rights. International law, by contrast, speaks to moral obligations that transcend borders. The clash between the two, between the law of humanity and the law of sovereignty, has created a devastating paralysis.

For refugees, this conflict is not an academic concern but a lived reality. Imagine Omar, a young man from Syria, who flees imminent danger in his home country. After weeks of perilous travel, he lands in France by boat, seeking protection and safety. Under the principle of non-refoulement, he cannot be sent back to persecution. Yet, when Omar reaches France's shores, his fate does not depend on international law but on French domestic procedure. He is detained for questioning, subjected to layers of administrative review, and forced to wait for months while his asylum claim is "processed." Every stage is framed as legal necessity, yet together they form a bureaucratic maze that traps him between two worlds neither safely accepted nor legally protected. The contradiction between international promises and national implementation leaves people like Omar stranded in a state of uncertainty, where survival is suspended by paperwork and legality. Across Europe, this pattern repeats. In Greece and Italy, refugees encounter overcrowded camps, slow adjudication, and limited access to counsel. In northern states like France or Germany, procedural rigidity and tightened definitions of "credible fear" result in rejections that disregard the humanitarian spirit of the Refugee Convention. The Common European Asylum System (CEAS), designed to harmonize procedures, instead exposes the inequalities of burden-sharing, leaving frontline states overwhelmed while others retreat behind policy rhetoric.



Courts like the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union have ruled that push-backs, arbitrary detentions, and inadequate reception conditions violate international norms. Yet rulings without enforcement are whispers against the machinery of state power. Domestic courts invoke “national interest” or “security necessity,” effectively neutralising humanitarian law within political boundaries. Law becomes conditional, compassion bureaucratized. What was intended as a shield for the persecuted has turned into a selective filter through which only the politically acceptable may pass. The persistence of this duality—between international obligations and national control—reveals a profound flaw in the moral architecture of modern refugee protection.

International law aspires to impartiality, but without coercive power it relies entirely on voluntary compliance. Domestic systems, meanwhile, convert that voluntary spirit into selective adherence, treating humanitarian protection as a policy option rather than a legal duty. This is where the greatest tragedy unfolds: law begins to speak two languages— one of universal rights and one of sovereign exception. For the refugee, these competing vocabularies produce confusion and despair. Refugees do not live in the theoretical realm of international norms; they live within detention centres, temporary shelters, and administrative waiting rooms. Their existence becomes an endurance exercise. Asylum systems that should offer clarity and safety instead generate ambiguity and fear.

Even as global compacts proclaim solidarity, border fences rise higher, asylum processes slow further, and narratives of deterrence replace those of protection. Governments justify these measures as pragmatic, but pragmatism at the cost of humanity is not governance—it is abdication. The international community’s reliance on “soft law,” moral persuasion, and voluntary cooperation has proven insufficient to confront the hardened politics of exclusion. Refugee law cannot thrive in the absence of accountability. True reform begins not with rewriting treaties but with re-imagining implementation. What the refugee protection regime needs is a mechanism that bridges global promises with national responsibility. Regional bodies like the European Union could establish independent monitoring mechanisms for non-refoulement compliance, publish transparent violation reports, and tie funding incentives to humanitarian performance. States must invest in legal-aid networks so that asylum seekers can navigate complex systems without dependence on state-appointed lawyers who may lack neutrality.



Technological innovations, such as mobile-based legal-aid platforms and rights-information systems, can bring accessibility and transparency to the process. Most importantly, legal education must evolve: future jurists and policymakers must be trained not only in procedural law but in the ethical imperative that underlies it. Law is not merely a system of control; it is a reflection of a society's conscience. A state that hides behind legal loopholes to deny safety does not preserve sovereignty it diminishes it. The question that every student of international law and politics must now confront is both moral and urgent: Are these laws truly protecting refugees, or merely protecting states from their obligations? The uncomfortable answer lies in the distance between text and reality.

Treaties and conventions provide the vocabulary of compassion but not its practice. Domestic systems enforce procedures that often nullify the spirit of those words. Refugees live in the tension between these two frameworks—recognized in theory, rejected in fact. Their silence in the face of legal complexity is not consent; it is exhaustion. They are made to wait, to prove, to justify their existence within structures that already presume their unbelonging. And in that waiting, the meaning of protection evaporates. The silence that follows is not absence; it is the sound of law failing its purpose. It echoes across camps, borders, and courtrooms where the language of humanity is spoken in whispers while the rhetoric of sovereignty shouts from podiums. International law, once conceived as a moral compass, risks becoming a ceremonial vocabulary—recited, respected, and ignored. The world does not need new promises; it needs the courage to honour the old ones. Until the distance between international promise and domestic practice is bridged, refugees will remain citizens of nowhere, protected by words but abandoned by systems.

—Shameer is a Phd Researcher at the Department of Sociology and Law, Magna Graecia University, Italy





VOICE OF THE youth

The AI Cold War :

Technology, Power, and the Future of Global Order

-Ayanna Prakash

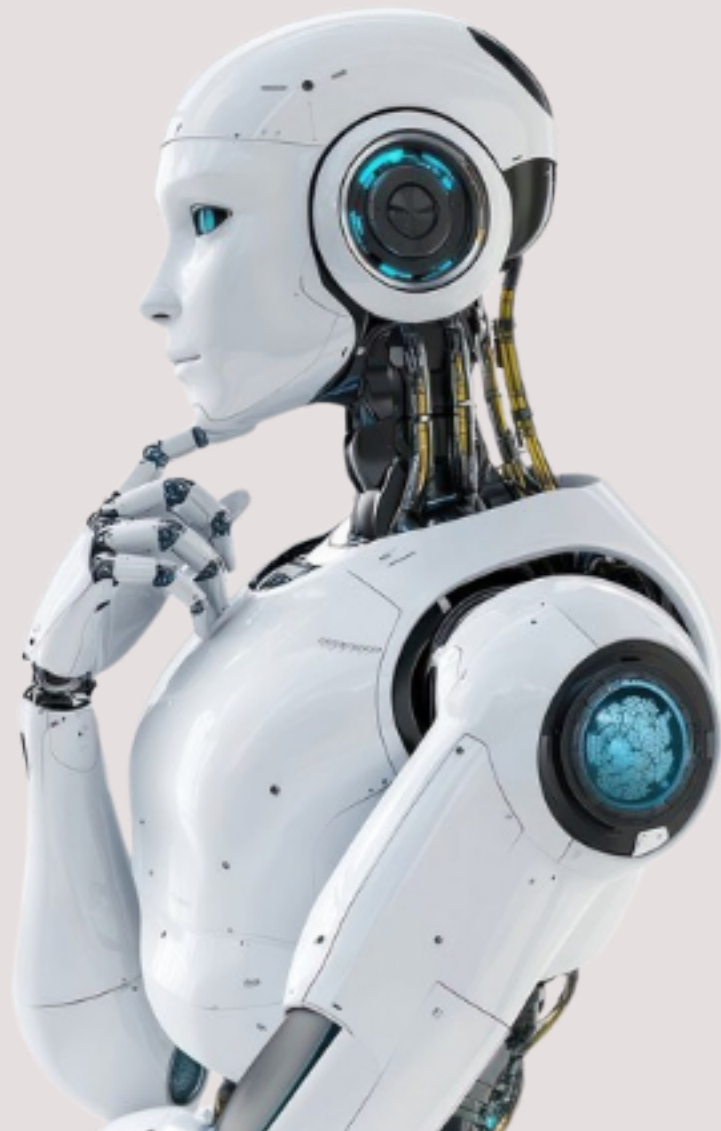
When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, many believed the era of ideological confrontation had ended. The Cold War — fought through proxy wars, espionage, and nuclear deterrence — had left the world weary of great-power rivalry. Yet, three decades later, a new struggle has emerged — one fought not with missiles or ideology, but with algorithms, semiconductors, and data. This new contest, often called the “AI Cold War,” is redefining the global balance of power. At its core are two superpowers — the United States and China — racing to dominate artificial intelligence (AI). But beyond technology and trade, this competition raises fundamental questions in international relations and international law: Who governs global AI? What norms should regulate it? And what happens when technological power outpaces ethical restraint?

AI as the New Arena of Power Politics

In traditional international relations, power was measured in military might, territory, or industrial strength. Today, it is increasingly measured in technological capability — particularly in AI. Artificial intelligence has become the strategic resource of the 21st century, shaping how nations compete, cooperate, and project influence. It is both a tool of economic development and a weapon of national security. Unlike nuclear arms, AI is a dual-use technology: the same algorithms that recommend music can analyze military intelligence or guide autonomous drones. In this landscape, the U.S. and China represent two competing models of digital power. The U.S. emphasizes market-driven innovation and open research ecosystems, while China follows a state-directed strategy, embedding AI into governance, surveillance, and economic planning. Each reflects broader IR traditions — liberal internationalism on one side, state-centric realism on the other.

Technological Dominance and Competing Strategies

According to the Stanford AI Index Report (2023), the United States attracted around \$67.2 billion in private AI investment, compared to China’s \$7.8 billion. Moreover, about 73% of large language models (LLMs) were developed in the U.S., while China accounted for about 15%. American firms like Open AI, Google DeepMind, and Microsoft dominate in proprietary AI systems — maintaining control through intellectual property rights and private-sector leadership. This aligns with a liberal IR framework emphasizing private innovation and global governance through norms and transparency.



China, meanwhile, is guided by a 2030 plan to become the world leader in AI, using centralized state investment and vast data resources. Its approach reflects a realist paradigm — using AI as an instrument of national power, internal stability, and global influence. By 2024, Chinese firms were leading in open-source AI development, providing freely modifiable models that extend their technological reach across developing nations.

Thus, while the U.S. wields influence through innovation and investment, China projects power through accessibility and integration — a contest between technological liberalism and digital sovereignty.

The Chip War

Every major AI system relies on semiconductors, the “digital DNA” of modern computing. Control over this supply chain has become a central issue in economic statecraft — the use of economic tools for strategic goals. The U.S., aware of its dependence on Taiwanese and South Korean chipmakers, enacted the CHIPS and Science Act (2022) — committing about \$280 billion to domestic semiconductor production and innovation. Of this, \$52.7 billion went to manufacturing and workforce development, spurring over \$200 billion in private-sector investment by 2024. Simultaneously, Washington imposed export restrictions on advanced chips to China to prevent their use in military AI and surveillance. Beijing, in response, accelerated its technological self-reliance, investing heavily in domestic fabrication.

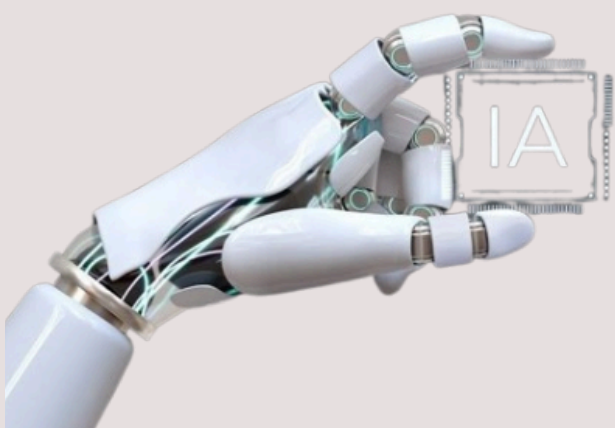
In IR terms, this is a classic case of security interdependence: the very global supply chains that foster cooperation also generate vulnerability. The semiconductor race mirrors the arms races of the Cold War, though fought in clean rooms instead of missile silos.

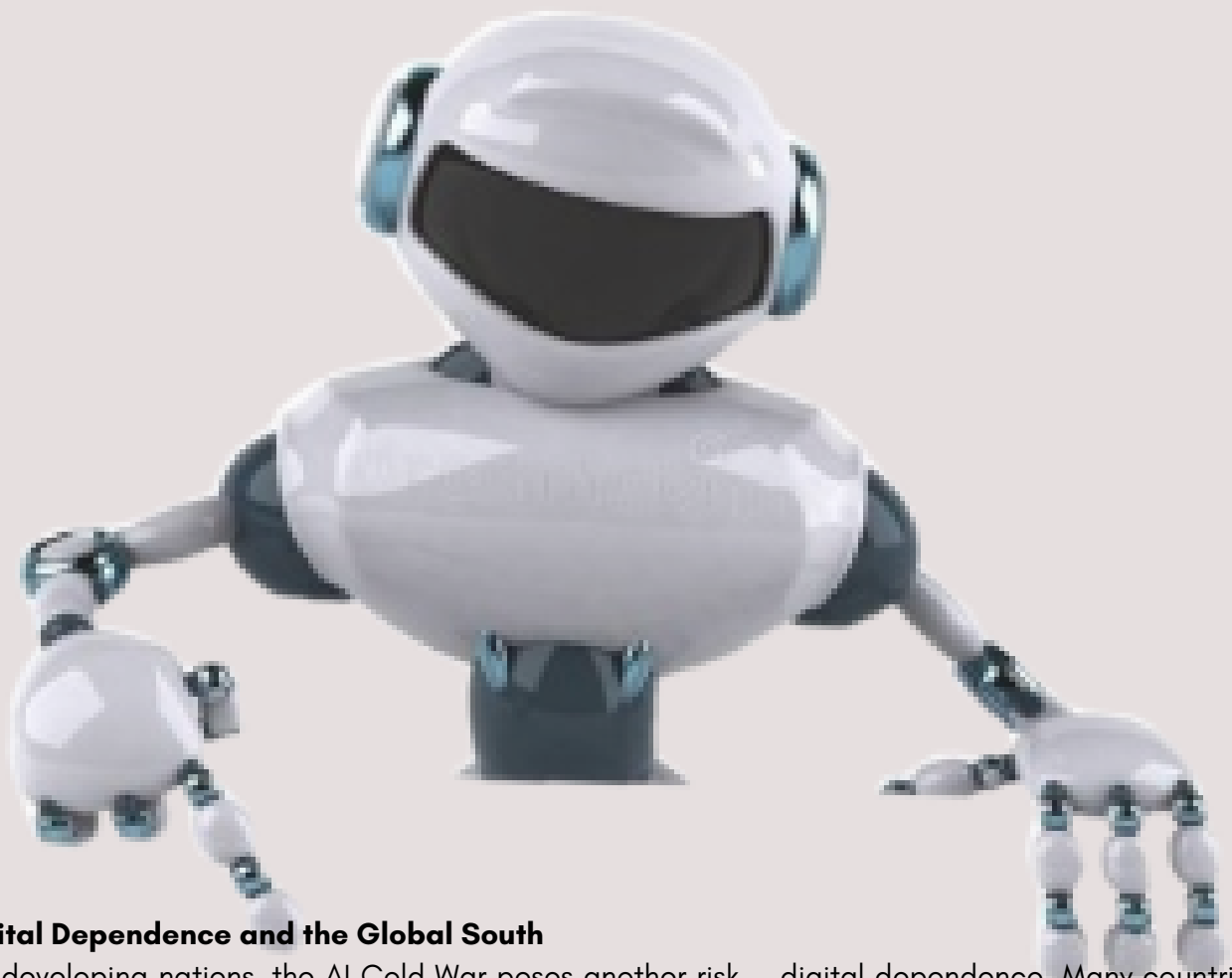
AI Governance and Global Norms

Beyond economics, the AI Cold War is a battle over norms and rule-making — a central theme in international relations. Whoever leads in AI will not just dominate technology ; they will shape global standards of data governance, ethics, and human rights. The U.S. model promotes voluntary ethical principles, transparency, and human oversight. The Chinese model emphasizes state control, collective stability, and technological sovereignty. This division resembles the ideological split of the 20th century — capitalism vs. communism — but this time, the battlefield is digital governance. Through initiatives like the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI) and the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, Western nations are attempting to build multilateral frameworks to ensure responsible AI use. China, meanwhile, promotes alternative digital governance models through the Digital Silk Road, exporting AI infrastructure to partner states. In IR terms, this reflects the tension between liberal institutionalism — building global norms through cooperation — and neo-realism, where states prioritize national advantage.

The International Law Gap

From a legal standpoint, AI development poses challenges that current international law struggles to address. Existing treaties — such as the UN Charter or the Geneva Conventions — were drafted for a human-centered, analog world. Today, AI blurs legal boundaries. If an autonomous weapon misfires, who is liable — the programmer, the commander, or the state? If an algorithm discriminates in lending or sentencing, how do we determine legal accountability when decisions are machine-generated? So far, international efforts remain fragmented. The UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021) and the EU AI Act mark progress toward regulation, but they lack binding force under international law. There is no global treaty defining the rights and obligations of states in AI development or use — leaving what scholars call a “legal vacuum in cyberspace.” This vacuum invites not only ethical risks but also potential violations of international humanitarian law, as autonomous systems enter military operations without clear accountability frameworks.





Digital Dependence and the Global South

For developing nations, the AI Cold War poses another risk – digital dependence. Many countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia rely on imported AI technologies from either U.S. or Chinese firms. This dependency can create new forms of technological asymmetry, mirroring postcolonial power dynamics. Instead of territorial control, dominance now operates through data flows and algorithmic infrastructure. This raises critical issues of digital sovereignty – the right of states to control their data and technological ecosystems. In IR, this challenge sits at the intersection of dependency theory and technological globalization, reminding us that innovation without inclusion risks deepening inequality.

Conclusion

The AI Cold War represents more than a technological rivalry – it is a test of global governance, ethics, and law. The United States and China embody two competing futures: one shaped by market freedom and innovation, the other by state coordination and control. Both offer progress, and both carry peril. For international relations, this race illustrates how power is evolving from territory to technology, from weapons to algorithms. For international law, it signals an urgent need for new norms and treaties to ensure AI development respects human rights, accountability, and the rule of law. Ultimately, the challenge before humanity is not about who leads in AI, but how that leadership is exercised. In the 20th century, the world built nuclear treaties to prevent catastrophe. In the 21st, it must build digital treaties to prevent the misuse of intelligence itself. If the last Cold War was about survival, this one is about responsibility. The real victory will not belong to the nation that builds the most powerful machine – but to the one that ensures that machine serves humankind.



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passionate about International
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DIALOGUE

Interview

DESK

Interview Questions



Q **Diplomacy is often seen as the preserve of seasoned state actors. How do you conceptualise diplomacy in the twenty-first century, and what distinctive contribution do you believe emerging youth leaders can make to that tradition?**

Although diplomacy and global governance often require certain intellectual and academic competencies to participate in spaces where voices, projects, and needs can be heard, over time we have seen how people from very diverse backgrounds have increasingly found a place in the international arena. This has allowed global challenges and community needs to be represented in a more genuine and coherent way.

Finding sustainable solutions requires involving all relevant actors: young people, minorities, community leaders, and anyone capable of expressing and representing a legitimate need. In my experience, I have had the opportunity to participate in global institutions where not only highly credentialed professionals are present, but also artists, athletes, young leaders, and individuals with valuable skills to communicate the realities they face.

I believe that this ability to express oneself clearly and assertively is the number one competency for anyone who wishes to contribute in the diplomatic field. Young people, in particular, must learn to use effective communication tools, whether through art, a well-crafted speech, or specialized knowledge, to ensure their message reaches key actors. Throughout my journey, I have witnessed how these non-traditional actors have secured a place in global spaces and made their voices heard, enriching and transforming diplomacy in the twenty-first century.

The most challenging aspect of working at the intersection of law and diplomacy is finding the right way to communicate a message clearly and effectively. Being present in these spaces requires us to translate our recommendations into terms that key actors can understand, embrace, and put into practice. Reaching consensus and building sustainable solutions is often a long and complex process. Therefore, one of the greatest challenges is ensuring that these recommendations are actually adopted and have a tangible impact within international decision-making arenas.

Q **What has been the most rewarding project or diplomatic engagement in your career so far?**

The most rewarding project for me was my participation in 2023 in Voices of Buenaventura, with a French association (AEDH) managing international projects.

One of these initiatives took place in Buenaventura, Colombia, a region deeply affected by violence, armed conflict, and drug trafficking, where the rights of women and children were constantly being violated. These communities were being instrumentalized by the conflict, and their voices remained unheard.

I had the opportunity to bring this issue to institutions such as the European Parliament, the United Nations, and other French, international, and Colombian bodies, raising awareness of the situation and presenting clear recommendations for key actors to consider and act upon. This was a profoundly rewarding experience, as I understood that our role was crucial: to become the voice of those who could not speak freely and to open spaces for listening and action within the international and governance spheres.

Q **How do you see international cooperation evolving in response to global crises such as climate change or humanitarian emergencies?**

From my perspective, international cooperation in the face of crises such as climate change or humanitarian emergencies is currently in a period of stagnation. Too often, proposed solutions remain at the discussion table and become more theoretical than practical, raising concerns about the real effectiveness of international organizations.

This presents a major challenge for the next generations: we know that violence can never be the yet we must find more reactive, concrete, and effective solutions. Climate change is already here, armed conflicts persist, wars continue, and diplomacy and negotiation alone do not always deliver effective outcomes. Communities urgently need us, and we carry the responsibility of amplifying their realities and turning them into action.

This issue resonates with me on a very personal level, as I believe it is one of the most severe humanitarian crises currently affecting Latin America. Unfortunately, beyond raising awareness and supporting through local organizations, real solutions can only be provided by the national authorities of Colombia, Panama, and other states in the region.

Q In an era of complex geopolitics and shifting power balances, what is, in your view, the deeper purpose of youth representation at institutions such as the United Nations? Is it just symbolic presence or something more transformative?

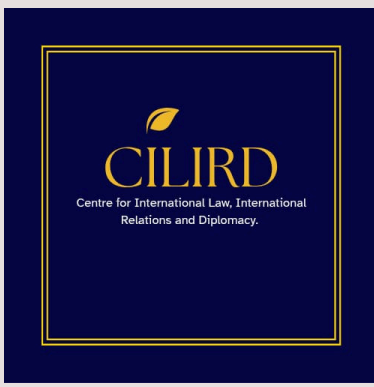
I believe that youth representation in institutions such as the United Nations holds symbolic value, but it does not always translate into concrete solutions for communities. These forums often serve more as spaces for networking and exchange than as platforms for transformative action. That is why I believe young people must go further: not limiting ourselves to formal institutions, but also using every available tool, social media, digital platforms, blogs, and grassroots projects, to shed light on pressing issues and ensure they receive the attention they deserve. While being present in international institutions is important and can create an echo, true transformation will come from our ability to innovate in communication, to make our voices heard, and to directly involve communities in shaping solutions.

Q At the Global Youth Summit for Change, what concrete moments do you think required real diplomacy? Was it persuading, compromising, or building a coalition across differing national priorities? If you could walk us through any one example?

During this summit, more than negotiating or compromising, what truly took place was listening and collective building. I believe this is also an essential part of diplomacy: the ability to listen, to understand, and to learn from other contexts, situations, needs, and community experiences. It is not always about reaching an immediate agreement or achieving a concrete outcome. Sometimes the most valuable contribution is to take the time to listen, to acknowledge others' skills and perspectives, and to learn from them in order to enrich our own vision and strengthen collective efforts.

Q Transnational migration routes through Colombia, such as the Darien Gap, are becoming flashpoints for humanitarian and security concerns. How might youth-led diplomacy influence regional cooperation on this issue?

~ Valentina Velasquez, an International Public Law professional, has experience in international cooperation and project management at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Société nationale de protection de la nature. She also represented Colombia at the Global Youth Summit for Change 2025 at the United Nations in Geneva.



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