

In Trump's World There Is No Morality, No Limits, and No Shared Responsibility. This Is Bad for Israel

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Israelis, wrapped in joy and relief after the release of the hostages from Hamas captivity and the end of the war in Gaza, are thanking the person they believe delivered this achievement:

President Donald Trump (according to last month's survey by the Israel Democracy Institute, 95 percent of the public believe the U.S. president "contributed somewhat" or "contributed greatly" to reaching the agreement). Trump's success—through coercion, blunt threats, and force-based diplomacy—against the background of a weakened international system, demonstrates how the American president is dismantling that very system from within.

Since returning for a second term, Trump has undermined the three pillars of the global order: international consensus, international law, and the multilateral system of institutions such as the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and international courts. Trump does not view these as essential coordinating mechanisms but as shackles to be broken. He is dragging international relations back to the era before World War I, to the age of the "imperial principle," in which states were free to wage war, conquer territory, and demand recognition of their actions in the name of "the natural right of the strong."

On February 4, 2025, Trump signed an executive order directing the United States to withdraw from the UN Human Rights Council and to re-evaluate its participation in other international organizations. "The U.S. will not participate in the Human Rights Council and will not seek election to this body," Trump said, viewing multilateral partnerships as a burden rather than an asset. He approaches international relations the same way he approaches business: every cooperation must yield immediate benefit. No values, no institutional commitment—only interests. In doing so, Trump is dismantling one of the foundational pillars of the global order: the consensus that grants legitimacy to law, to values, and to the boundaries between permissible and forbidden.

Throughout both his terms, Trump has openly derided the international legal system. On February 6, 2025, he signed an order imposing sanctions on judges and staff of the International Criminal Court (ICC), arguing that the court crossed “red lines” by daring to investigate alleged crimes committed by U.S. or Israeli citizens. In effect, Trump declared that international law does not apply to those powerful enough. Human rights organizations described this step as “a betrayal of the international justice system,” and more than 60 countries issued a joint statement affirming: “We reaffirm our unwavering support for the independence, impartiality, and integrity of the International Criminal Court.” But Trump was unfazed. For him, the law is just a recommendation.

Thus, the principle of force becomes the supreme principle. Trump believes that military power, economic pressure, and personal threats are the only effective tools in international relations. He uses them freely and views them as legitimate weapons of policy. Institutions such as the UN Security Council, designed to deter states from acting unilaterally, are losing their influence not only because of the American veto but because Trump is drying up their budgets, reducing U.S. participation, and declaring: “The U.S. will not cooperate with institutions that try to harm our national interests.” The Security Council and the UN are becoming toothless bodies, with the United States—the same nation that built this system after World War II—leading its dismantling.

A profound transformation is taking place before our eyes: instead of collective responsibility—unilateral force; instead of diplomacy—threats; instead of law—interests. “Trump was right about the UN—your world order is over,” read the headline of a supportive article on the Modern Diplomacy website. This triumphant statement illustrates the depth of the shift: the global order, designed to protect the weak from the strong, is collapsing.

Trump is effectively returning the world to an older historical pattern. Before 1914, no international institutions existed to prevent one state from attacking another. Whoever could—conquered. Whoever weakened—was devoured. The world was built on empires. The global social contract that delegitimized conquest emerged as a lesson from the horrors of two world wars, which proved that without rules—destruction is total.

Trump, in many ways, embodies the opposite: he seeks to return humanity to an era when empires traded territories through wars and diplomacy was merely a tool for gaining temporary advantage. “The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must,” wrote Thucydides 2,400 years ago. Trump has simply turned this saying into official policy, as reflected in his threats toward Canada and Denmark, his declared consideration of drone strikes against drug cartels inside Venezuela and Mexico, and his trade policies in which agreements are reshaped or canceled at will rather than by established norms.

This same logic is visible in the Gaza–hostage affair. Trump intervened not only out of a desire to promote regional stability but also to prove that American power can still impose solutions. His intervention is driven not just by regional interests but also by personal prestige. He seeks to be remembered as the leader who produced dramatic Middle East peace agreements—an accomplishment with electoral value in the U.S. and symbolic weight in his pursuit of the Nobel Peace Prize.

To achieve this, Trump became personally involved and even dispatched an expanded diplomatic team to Israel that has been acting *de facto* as a substitute for the Israeli government on the international stage: managing the contacts with Arab states, supervising the implementation of the agreement with Hamas, and signaling to the world that the sole address for negotiation on Gaza is Washington—not multilateral institutions.

At the same time, Trump made clear the constraints he is imposing on Jerusalem: he warned that if Israel uses the momentum to annex territories in the West Bank, it will lose U.S. support entirely. This is not merely a tactical statement but a substantive condition: cooperation on the hostage release and regional coordination in exchange for halting annexation moves that would undermine America’s ability to operate in the region.

“We made it happen because we made them fear the consequences,” Trump told Fox News, speaking about the cease-fire. He did not hide that he used threats as a diplomatic tool. “You talk, you threaten, and then they move. That’s how you make deals.”

In his view, even human life is merely another element in a power game. Indeed, the achievement of the hostage release has been turned into a propaganda tool. The families of the

hostages, desperate for results, praise “the man who brought the children home,” but historically speaking, Trump merely exploited the collapse of international mechanisms to reinforce his position as the sole mediator. He did not save the system—he demonstrated that he can function without it.

The implications extend far beyond the Middle East. When a U.S. president treats international courts, the UN, or global agreements as adversaries, he sends a worldwide message. In a world without institutions that can prevent invasions, annexations, or unilateral declarations, every country is free to choose what suits it.

When the leader of a superpower boasts that “there is no international law—only national interest” and sends the aircraft carrier Gerald Ford to the shores of Venezuela, he sets a model for imitation. Russia, China, Turkey, and even smaller states—all are gaining legitimacy to ignore the rules. The result is a system of sophisticated anarchy, in which each state defines justice for itself.

This approach is not just ideological—it is strategic. Trump knows that a fragmented international system allows him easier control: no Security Council, no human-rights reports, no laws limiting arms exports or mandating economic sanctions. Meanwhile, the American public is drawn to the old-new idea of “America First,” even if it means “the world can wait.” As the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) noted, “Trump’s address to the UN General Assembly on September 23 endangers the benefits of global cooperation.” He simply prefers a world without institutions to a world in which America, as global leader, must uphold rules and goals, such as those related to climate.

On the eve of the New York mayoral election, Trump offered another illustration of his cynical use of power. He attacked the Democratic candidate, Zohran Mamdani (who won nonetheless), calling him “the communist Mamdani,” and explicitly threatened—according to *The Guardian*—that “if a communist candidate wins the New York mayoral race, I doubt I’ll transfer federal funds beyond the bare minimum required to my first and beloved city” (Nov. 3).

The next day, Trump repeated the message on Fox News, saying: “Candidates who prefer the UN over America will not get a single penny from me when I’m in the White House.” Even in

this seemingly local intervention, his coercive worldview is evident: using public funds as a means of pressure, portraying civic elections as an ideological struggle between “patriots” and “traitors,” and further eroding the checks and balances of federal institutions.

The problem is that the system cannot survive without the necessary institutions and balances. History shows that when there are no powerful mediating institutions, wars return, and scholars already warn of a “systemic U.S. withdrawal from global commitments.” Small states will try to arm themselves; middle powers will seek regional alliances; agreements will be replaced by secret and dangerous understandings. This is not a return to simplicity but a return to the danger of renewed escalation and violence.

Thus, at the very moment the world seeks a diplomatic solution in Gaza, Trump signals the opposite: not negotiation but coercion; not law but force. He determines whom to reward and whom to deter according to his immediate interests, using power rather than international law, replacing the idea of an international community with the logic of the jungle. If states adopt his approach, even the release of the hostages will become a precedent of coercive politics, not of human reconciliation.

In 2018, I wrote in Haaretz about this emerging trend in Trump’s policy: “The next U.S. presidential election (2020) will determine the direction of the world—toward an ice age in international relations or toward thawing.” After a short respite under Joe Biden, we have returned to the ice age in full force. But this time, the ice is not just a metaphor for diplomatic frost—it is a moral freeze. In a world where Trump sets the rules, there is no morality, no limits, no shared responsibility. Only interests.

If this policy continues under Trump or his successor, or under leaders such as Putin, Erdoğan, or others, the world may enter a period in which each state acts according to its power rather than the law. Israel, which now feels grateful to the president who brought the hostages home, may soon discover that in the long run it will be the one paying the highest price for the collapse of the international order. In a world without security for small states, without shared values, without law, and without accountability, no one will be there to stop whoever comes next—Israel included. Nothing lasts forever.

