

THE SILENCE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE CASE OF PALESTINE: A THEORETICAL READING ON ABSTENTION AT THE UNSC

O SILÊNCIO NAS RELAÇÕES INTERNACIONAIS E O CASO DA PALESTINA: UMA LEITURA TEÓRICA SOBRE A ABSTENÇÃO NO CONSELHO DE SEGURANÇA DA ONU

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Abstract

While the reactions of states in times of crisis are frequently examined in the international relations literature, silence is often ignored. The study opens to discussion this gap in the literature by evaluating it through a theoretical framework. In the study, the multidimensional function of silence in international politics is discussed through the perspectives of realism, constructivism and feminist theory. Within the scope of the study, the resolutions of and the votes held by the United Nations Security Council on the Palestine question after October 2023, especially the abstentions of the USA, Britain and Russia are examined and evaluated in the context of silence. The results reveal that abstention is a preference for protecting national interests, expanding the field of diplomatic action, and managing international reputation, rather than mere neutrality. However, the Palestinian example shows that silence cannot be considered as a functional or legitimate foreign policy tool in all cases, and it may cause ethical and moral problems. This study positions silence as a new category in international relations and aims to examine its limits and vulnerabilities through the case of Palestine.

Keywords: International Law. Silence. Palestinian. UNSC. Abstaining Vote.

Resumo

Embora as reações dos Estados em tempos de crise sejam frequentemente examinadas na literatura de relações internacionais, o silêncio é muitas vezes ignorado. Este estudo busca preencher essa lacuna na literatura, avaliando-a por meio de uma estrutura teórica. Nele, a função multidimensional do silêncio na política internacional é discutida sob as perspectivas do realismo, do construtivismo e da teoria feminista. No âmbito do estudo, as resoluções e as votações realizadas pelo Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas sobre a questão palestina após outubro de 2023, especialmente as abstenções dos EUA, do Reino Unido e da Rússia, são examinadas e avaliadas no contexto do silêncio. Os resultados revelam que a abstenção representa uma preferência pela proteção de interesses nacionais, pela expansão do campo de ação diplomática e pela gestão da reputação internacional, em vez de mera neutralidade. Contudo, o exemplo palestino demonstra que o silêncio não pode ser considerado uma ferramenta funcional ou legítima de política externa em todos os casos, podendo causar problemas éticos e morais. Este estudo posiciona o silêncio como uma nova categoria nas relações internacionais e visa examinar seus limites e vulnerabilidades por meio do caso da Palestina.

Palavras-chave: Direito Internacional. Ciência. Palestino. Conselho de Segurança da ONU. Abstenção.



1 INTRODUCTION

Although the literature on international relations offers a broad perspective on the behavior of states, their foreign policy strategies and discourses, it has not adequately examined the situations in which they prefer to remain silent. However, global politics is shaped and constructed not only by elements of material power, but also through discourses, representations, and forms of silence which are often overlooked.

In international relations, states' adoption of the strategy of silence is based on various motivations, such as avoiding external pressures, creating an impression of neutrality, or balancing internal public opinion. This approach provides states with both flexibility in foreign policy and the opportunity to avoid directly being a party to complex international issues. However, this attitude may lead to the neglect of important ethical and normative responsibilities.

Acting only based on a focus of power, interest and balance factors is an issue that states should be criticized for. Especially in cases where moral responsibilities require, it is a necessity not to remain silent. In this context, it is stated that states should not only consider their interests in the international system, but also take into account normative obligations such as human rights and humanitarian intervention. Therefore, silence of the state comes to mean giving indirect consent to injustices and entering into moral complicity with perpetrators; it is argued that states, especially those that remain silent in the face of systematic violations of rights and genocide, implicitly justify these mistakes. Thus, silence is considered a violation of an ethical obligation.

Based on the research question, "Does the abstention of states in the UNSC reflect the silence of the international community as neutrality or as an evasion of moral/ethical responsibility?", the study aims to evaluate the silence attitudes of states in terms of moral/ethical responsibilities. In this context, the study was conducted by using qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis together. The basic data of the research consist of the draft resolutions, voting results and official statements of the permanent members on the Palestinian issue submitted to the UNSC after October 2023. These documents have been examined in order to reveal the political and normative justifications of the "silence" and "abstention" attitudes of the states.

The main argument of the study is that states prefer to remain silent in international crises in order to protect their interests and provide flexibility to their

actions; however, this strategy has the potential to conflict with ethical responsibilities and international norms, as seen in the recent votes on the Palestine question at the UNSC.

In this context, in the first part of the study, the current literature on the subject will be discussed and the deficiencies will be mentioned. In the second part, the phenomenon of silence will be discussed on the theoretical plane; the power and interest-centered approach of realism, the identity and emphasis on norm of constructivism, and the approach of feminist theory that makes the social and gendered dimensions of silence visible are discussed. In the third part, the draft resolutions and votes of the UNSC on the Palestine question after October 2023 will be examined in light of the specified theoretical framework. In particular, the abstaining attitudes of the USA, Britain and Russia were analyzed and how these behaviors gained meaning in the perspective of silence will be discussed. It has been shown that abstaining votes are not simple neutrality; on the contrary, they are a choice in terms of protecting interests, expanding the field of diplomatic maneuver and managing the international image.

Ultimately, the study concludes with a general evaluation and recommendations on how silence can be addressed more globally in foreign policy analyses in light of the findings obtained. Thus, it contributes to the positioning of silence as a functional diplomacy practice in international politics on both theoretical and empirical levels.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, we will examine how silence is conceptualized in the literature and will discuss when and in what contexts it becomes a meaningful attitude. The aim is to establish the theoretical basis of the subject and to map out the approaches in the literature. Although many studies have been conducted on the explicit political statements and discourses of states, silence has long been neglected as a meaningful conduct or a form of communication (Döhmann, 2025; Banks, 2019; Krepon et al., 1999). However, recent literature has begun to consider silence not only as a withdrawal from discourse, but also as an indirect message, a political action and a strategic attitude (Harlow, 2018).

In this context, silence is considered as a kind of "negative discourse"; that is, it is an attitude that does not produce discourse, but realizes discourse in other ways (Bilgin, 2008). Especially in times of security and crisis, states can use silence both to take position and to create strategic uncertainty (Hansen, 2013). In this context, implying

neutrality is a consciously preferred tool for creating a bargaining chip or avoiding conflict.

Katariina Kaura-aho (2021) defines silence as a form of protest against hegemonic speech patterns and conceptualizes it as a means of resistance that enables the birth of alternative forms of communication and solidarity. Silence thus becomes a meaningful practice of discourse that both the power and the opposition can use.

In the legal context, Danae Azaria (2025) considers the silence of states as an influential factor on the formation and evolution of international norms. Silence is subject to legal interpretations such as acquiescence or implicit dispute, indicating that it is a practice directly involved in the functioning of international law.

With its methodological dimension, Schweiger and Tomiak (2022, p. 625) emphasize that silence should be examined not only theoretically but also in detail, and recommend the use of interdisciplinary tools for analysis. Similarly, Zarpli and Zengin (2022) empirically examined the reasons for states to remain silent in the face of human rights violations and showed that foreign policy interests (e.g. economic dependence, military cooperation, strategic partnerships) shape this attitude.

Michael Freedon (2022) identifies seven different modalities of silence, treating it as the bearer of inexpressible thoughts and political taboos. Similarly, Mónica Brito Vieira (2020) and Mihaela Mihai (2020) state that silence can become a strategic imperative in conditions of oppression, exclusion or surveillance, and therefore, claims of representation must be critically challenged.

But silence is not always a functional or innocent behavior. James Fearon (1997) argues that silence can weaken deterrence in foreign policy signaling, while Donohue (2024) and Weiss (2017) consider silence in the face of great injustices as a form of moral complicity. In such cases, silence can sometimes mean escaping responsibility and contributing to the continuation of injustices.

Morse and Coggins (2024, p. 516) state that states at the UN often express their positions through 'abstention' or 'non-voting'. This approach refers to the strategy of states to exert influence in international decision-making processes without being visible. Visualizing this conceptual distinction with a table will contribute to a better understanding of the subject.

Table 1

Literature Review Summary Table

Source	How is Silence/Unresponsiveness Handled?	Implications/Layered
Katariina Kaura-aho (2021), <i>Politics of Silence..</i>	Silence, as a communicative, aesthetic and autonomous practice, is seen as an active form of protest and alternative communication against dominant speech patterns.	By showing that silence is an active form of communication and resistance with political meaning, it provides a re-evaluation of silence in international relations and political studies.
Azaria (2024), <i>Inferring a 'dispute' from state silence</i>	It argues that the silence of states can be considered as an indicator of a conflict, and that this silence can have legal consequences in connection with the behavior of states.	The relationship of silence with balance of power, reputation and articulation states that staying silent is making a cost/benefit calculation in order to protect the state's interest.
Schweiger & Tomiak (2022), <i>Researching Silence: A Methodological Inquiry</i>	It deals with how silence should be a subject of research and, what to make of silence and how to analyze it.	Silence refers to the unseen aspect of state behavior. It examines the normative and discursive context of silence through methodological tools.
Zarpli & Zengin (2022), <i>Shame, endorse, or remain silent?</i>	It shows that silence is influenced by factors such as trade dependence, political affinity, regime type, and internal human rights record.	Silence is often a preference stemming from an orientation to protect economic and other interests. Silence is conceptualized as an interest-based, calculated foreign policy behavior.
Freedon (2022), <i>Seven Modalities of Silence</i>	It treats silence as a multi-layered structure that carries meaning in political thought.	It defines seven different modes of silence; these modes show that silence can be a form of exclusion, suppression, or expression, and not just absence.
Rosch (2022), <i>Realism, the War in the Ukraine, and the Limits of Diplomacy</i>	In some cases, Western states prefer silent or limited response instead of direct military or harsh response.	It sees the silence of states not as passivity but as a choice shaped by realist concerns. Silence is positioned within balance of power, calculations of interest, and normative uncertainties.
Bilgin, (2008), <i>Thinking past "Western"</i>	It interprets state silence as "negative discourse" that serves identity building, not a discursive gap.	Silence is used for preserving national narratives, not assuming responsibility, and controlling memory.
Hansen, (2013), <i>Security as Practice</i>	Silence is not just absence in discourse, but a tool.	It is defining silence not as a deficiency, but as active and a discourse practice. This approach gives an important perspective to the field of security studies and discourse analysis.
Vieira, (2020), <i>Representing Silence in Politics</i>	Silence is not absence in politics; it is a meaningful presence. It's representation should be evaluated depending on the reason for the silence and the will of the represented.	It questions the legitimacy of representation claims made with concepts such as "silent majority". It raises the question of how much those who represent reflect the interests of those who are truly silent.
Morse & Coggins (2024), <i>Your silence speaks volumes</i>	It argues that states intentionally do not participate in some critical voting at the UN and that this is a choice.	Silent absence is a foreign policy choice that is different from abstaining or voting in UN votes.
Fearon, (1997), <i>Signaling Foreign Policy Interests</i>	States' silence in communicating their foreign policy preferences carries significant risks in terms of reliability and deterrence.	States should use signals such as tying hands or sinking costs instead of silence to increase their reliability.
Donohue, (2024), <i>Silence as complicity</i>	The silence of the state means giving indirect consent to injustices and entering into moral complicity with perpetrators.	It emphasizes that silence is not only an attitude, but also a violation of an ethical obligation.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The meaning and function of silence are interpreted in different ways depending on the theoretical perspective from which it is viewed. In this chapter, the political and normative dimensions of silence will be discussed in detail on the basis of perspectives of realism, constructivism and, critical and feminist approaches. Although silence is traditionally seen as a gap in international relations, current approaches define it as an effective form of discourse and a means of communication (Azaria, 2025). Silence, which assumes functions such as reducing diplomatic tension or avoiding conflict, is also considered as a structural phenomenon shaped by power asymmetries and representation problems in times of crisis (Doty, 1996; Vieira, 2020).

Realism is one of the basic approaches that explains state behavior in international relations on the axis of power, interest and security. In the anarchic system, states are in a constant power struggle to survive and protect their interests (Dunne & Schmidt, 2020, p. 131). In this context, states shape all foreign policy decisions – including silence – on the basis of national interest. For some approaches in the realist literature, silence is not weakness, but a preference for maintaining the balance of power and avoiding conflicts (Feng & Ruizhuang, 2006, p. 109). Especially in times of crisis or when international norms are violated, silence is preferred both to maintain existing alliances and to avoid the costs of direct intervention. Thus, silence serves the long-term interests of states as a reflection of political accounts such as non-interference and unresponsiveness (Starski, 2016, p. 17). Silence is part of this interest-driven approach, as realist theory assumes that states act only under direct threat. However, this understanding reveals the ethical limits of realism by giving secondary importance to human rights and international law (Lebow, 2009). Thus, silence reflects the harmony of realism with the power-based logic and the critical aspects of the theory.

There are also views on realism not always seeing silence as a rational choice. Neorealists often attribute silence to a lack of power or limited diplomatic capacity. According to Waltz, states should establish an active balance of power for security; silence indicates inadequacy (Waltz, 1979). In addition, criticisms of realism state that the power-oriented approach ignores normative responsibilities, and silence is an ethical escape, especially in human rights violations (Linklater, 1992). Morgenthau (1949, p. 165) often sees silence as a lack of capacity and knowledge rather than a strategic

preference. Donnelly (2002), on the other hand, emphasizes that realism explains state behavior with power and security calculations, and that silence is a lack of defense or uncertainty. Allison (1971) states that silence is caused by bureaucratic obstacles and coordination problems, while Lee (2018) associates it with a lack of military, political or economic capacity.

While there are different views on silence in realism, constructivist theory explains the behaviors of actors in international relations not only with material interests, but within the framework of social structures shaped by shared norms, values and identities (Wendt, 1999). Constructivism says that what is spoken in international relations shapes reality and meaning. Silence, on the other hand, gains importance when the dominant rules and thoughts are not questioned, and helps to maintain these rules and form the identities. Alexander Wendt's statement "anarchy is what states make of it" reveals that the roles and behaviors of actors in international relations are built through social interactions, not predetermined (Wendt, 1992, p. 392). In this context, silence can be read not only as the state of not speaking, but also as a result of identity and normative positioning.

According to the constructivist approach, silence, as part of the normative order and identity construction, is an active power practice that is the product of social and discursive structures (Hopf, 2010). According to Emanuel Adler (1997), relationships in the world are formed by the conversations of people and groups and the rules they set. In international relations, these conversations and rules shape how countries behave and understand each other. Janice Bially Mattern (2005) emphasizes that within the framework of the concept of "representative power", discourse shapes not only what is expressed, but also what is left silent. While Lene Hansen (2013) states that security is built by highlighting certain identities and narratives and silencing others, Bilgin (2008) defines silence as an active discursive production process within the framework of power relations and norms. Thus, silence occupies an important place in international relations as a functional means of both adapting to the dominant norms and reproducing these norms.

Critical and feminist approaches bring new epistemological and methodological perspectives to international politics by examining phenomena excluded by traditional analyses such as silence, exclusion, and invisibility. Feminist theory focuses on gender relations with the critique of male-dominated knowledge structures and redefines the

concepts of security and power (Tickner, 1992). Critical theory, on the other hand, aims to make the repressed voices visible by questioning the dominant power structures. (Hobson, 2007; Cox, 1981).

Feminist international relations theory treats silence as the vehicle of power and the result of gender-based exclusion. Sylvester (2002) argues that issues such as war, peace and security should be analyzed through women's everyday experiences. Silence, in this context, is the expression of trauma, loss, and resistance along with repression. Enloe (2014, pp. 22-23) defines women's invisibility in international politics as a structural silencing mechanism. For feminist theory, silence is an important political narrative both as a product of power and as a form of resistance (Parpart, 2010).

As a result, silence acquires various meanings from different theoretical perspectives in international relations, and this multidimensional approach provides a deeper understanding of the subject. Therefore, it is important to evaluate different theoretical approaches together when conceptualizing silence.

4 ANALYSIS OF ABSTENTION AND VETO BEHAVIORS IN UNSC VOTES DURING THE PALESTINIAN CRISIS

When evaluated within the framework of the concepts of power, identity and discourse, the silence and abstention observed in the UNSC's votes on the Palestinian crisis is a concrete reflection of the hegemonic structures and power relations in international relations. These attitudes are associated with the political conducts and visibility strategies of international actors, shedding light on multi-layered power relations and representation problems in global politics.

In addition to the international political repercussions of the Palestinian crisis, the humanitarian situation in the region has also had profound and bitter effects. The conflicts that began in October 2023 have led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Palestine. As a result of Israel's airstrikes and ground operations against Gaza, tens of thousands of civilians lost their lives and hundreds of thousands were left homeless. Basic services such as hospitals, schools and infrastructure have been targeted and access to humanitarian needs has been denied (Human Rights Council, A/HRC/59/26, 2025). Despite the existence of such a heavy humanitarian scene, the UNSC, which has been involved in the process since the beginning of Israel's attacks, has been ineffective in

preventing the worsening humanitarian crisis with the decisions it has taken or “failed” to take, despite its responsibility to ensure international peace and security.

The basis of this ineffectiveness is that some permanent members of the UNSC abstain, and in particular the US exercises its veto in favor of Israel. These attitudes show not only political dysfunction, but also a clear violation of international normative responsibility. Abstention, while often justified by claims to neutrality, is essentially a form of silence that preserve geopolitical interests and balances of power. In this context, international reactions to the Palestinian crisis are the concrete expression of maintaining power relations and avoiding responsibility.

In order to understand the concrete effects of the silence, the voting results of the UNSC draft resolutions on Palestine from October 2023 were analyzed. This study, which was conducted on accepted and non-accepted drafts, reveals the role of abstention and veto behaviors in the deepening of the humanitarian crisis.

Table 2

Voting and Attitude Analysis in UNSC Palestinian Resolutions After 2023

Date	Resolution or Draft	Featured Items	Conclusion	Vote Distribution Veto / Abstention
October 16 2023*	Call for humanitarian ceasefire by Russia	Emergency ceasefire, release of hostages, access to assistance...	Not accepted	USA- Veto UK-Abstained
October 18 2023*	Brazil proposes “cessation of hostilities”	Ensuring safe and unhindered crossing of aid to Gaza...	Not accepted	USA-Veto Russia- Abstained, UK- Abstained
October 25 2023*	Russia calls for ceasefire	Allowing aid to enter the blockaded Gaza Strip...	Not accepted	USA-Veto UK-Veto
November 15, 2023**	UNSC Resolution 2712	Cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians...	Accepted	Russia- Abstained UK-Abstained USA-Abstained
December 22, 2023***	UNSC Resolution 2720	Supervision of crossing of aid, UN coordination...	Accepted	Russia- Abstained, US- Abstained
February 20, 2024****	Call for ceasefire by Algeria	Release of hostages and delivery of humanitarian aid..	Not accepted	USA-Veto UK-Abstained
March 25 2024*****	UNSC Resolution 2728	Calling for a ceasefire during Ramadan and releasing the hostages..	Accepted	USA-Abstained
June 10, 2024*****	UNSC Resolution 2735	The three-stage ceasefire plan and the	Accepted	Russia- Abstained

		security of humanitarian aid...		
September 18 2025*****	Denmark's call for ceasefire	Proclamation of ceasefire, release of hostages and humanitarian aid in Gaza	Not accepted	USA-Veto

The table was prepared by the author.

* <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142507>

** Resolution 2712 (2023). <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4027698?v=pdf>

*** Resolution 2720 (2023). <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/security-council-resolution-s-res-2720-22dec2023/>

**** UN Security Council <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/security-council-meeting-coverage-20feb2024/>

*****Resolution 2728 (2024). [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2728\(2024\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2728(2024))

*****Resolution 2735 (2024). <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/res-2734-2024>

***** <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/security-council-press-release-18sep25/>

The UNSC is the only international body empowered to make binding decisions to ensure global security. For the adoption of resolutions, at least 9 out of 15 members must vote affirmatively and none of the permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA) must exercise the right of veto (UN Charter, 27). Although veto power is not clearly defined in official texts, it is the most important element that determines the political validity of resolutions (Nowre & Mahal, 2024). Abstaining votes, on the other hand, do not prevent decision-making and are generally a strategy preferred by permanent members when they do not want to directly oppose (Rothwell et al., 2014). This mechanism shows that UNSC resolutions are shaped not only by the majority of votes, but also by global balances of power.

In light of these explanations, according to the table, the USA has been the main actor influencing the decision-making process in UNSC votes, mostly by veto or abstention votes. The USA, which directly prevented the process by vetoing the calls for a humanitarian ceasefire in the early stages, adopted a policy of silence in the following period by more abstention.

From a realist perspective, the USA position is based specifically on the goal of maintaining its strategic partnership with Israel. In this context, the USA tries to prevent the threats that the resolutions may create in order to protect regional power balances, ensure their security and increase their influence. The constructivist approach, on the other hand, evaluates the USA's attitude not only as an interest-based strategy, but also in the context of identity and norm production. The fact that the USA describes itself as “the guarantor of Israel's security” reveals the identity building behind its foreign policy behavior and this identity plays a central role in legitimizing its attitudes and discourses

in the international arena. Feminist theory, on the other hand, analyzes the USA's silence through abstention in the context of violence against civilians and lack of humanitarian aid. This perspective emphasizes that the needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups are systematically neglected in decision-making processes, evaluating the USA's attitude as a gendered practice that ignores social impacts.

The UK, though not as influential as the USA, had a notable influence on the process by vetoing it twice in the October 25 vote. Considering this attitude of the UK from a realist perspective, it is based on the aim of maintaining political harmony with the Western bloc; in this context, silence serves to avoid risk and maintain the current status quo. The constructivist approach, on the other hand, considers Britain's abstention, its historical identity and its normative stance in foreign policy as a form of preservation. The fact that it chose not to directly be a party in order not to contradict the discourses of “international law advocacy” and “human values” is an example of silence compatible with the normative identity that Britain has built. Feminist theory, on the other hand, interprets this silence as a continuation of the sense of avoidance of responsibility and militarized security in the face of humanitarian crises experienced by women and civilians.

Russia's policy on Palestine is more complex and multidimensional, while the attitudes of the USA and the UK in the votes reflect the general approach of the Western bloc. Although Russia plays an active role in some periods by submitting draft resolutions, it prioritizes uncertainty in its foreign policy strategy by choosing to abstain during critical decisions (for example, votes 2712, 2720 and 2735). This approach shows Russia's tendency to manipulate the means of legitimacy by reinterpreting the normative space in line with its own interests, rather than directly opposing international norms. Therefore, Russia's attitude is a move that serves both the purpose of increasing its influence in the region and ensuring a geopolitical balance of power against the Western bloc.

From a realist perspective, Russia's abstaining attitude on the subject of Palestine is seen as a rational and balancing strategy against the unilateral policies of the West in line with the balance of power and maximization of interests, which reflects Russia's effort to position itself as an alternative actor to Western hegemony through identity building and normative discourses. As an advocate of a multipolar international order, Russia justifies its own normative stance by criticizing the West's double standards,

especially in texts with an emphasis on “humanitarian aid.” Feminist theory, on the other hand, considers Russia's silence as a reflection of masculine and militarized foreign policy; it draws attention to the exclusion of civilians and vulnerable groups. In this context, Russia's attitude is not only interest-based; it contains multi-layered and sometimes contradictory meanings in the axes of rationality, identity and gender.

China and France, with their support for the UNSC resolutions, show a different attitude from the silence and abstention of other permanent members. This attitude is shaped by the foreign policy priorities of both actors and their search for international legitimacy. In this context, positive votes can be considered as a strategy to produce legitimacy rather than an ethical stance.

Ultimately, silence and/or abstention, used as a tool in international relations, loses its legitimacy in deep humanitarian crises such as Palestine. Such attitudes make power asymmetries, identity-based positioning and normative power struggles in the international system visible.

5 EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the abstention behaviors in the UNSC votes on the Palestinian crisis through the concept of silence in the context of international relations theories. The findings go beyond classical realist approaches, which indicate that states make decisions based only on rational interest maximization, and reveal that silence is also shaped by normative, identity and social dynamics.

The abstentions and vetos of the UNSC on the Palestinian crisis show how the international community has developed a structural indifference to basic humanitarian demands. The systematic use of the veto by the USA in line with strategic partnership relations, the UK's preference for abstention in the name of political harmony, Russia's attempt to balance between normative uncertainty and interest-based pragmatism, China's distant approach to intervention through the principle of sovereignty and France's tendency to have silence in the face of action while defending human values in discourse clearly reveal the inconsistency and selectivity in the approach of great powers to international norms.

When evaluated at the theoretical level, these silences are interpreted as rational preferences in realism, instrumentalization of norms for political purposes in

constructivist terms, and inadequate consideration of gender and vulnerability in terms of feminist theory. Thus, silence in international relations turns into a power mechanism that suppresses the voices of the victims and reproduces inequalities in the shadow of geopolitical priorities. In this context, veto and abstention are not only an attitude, but also an expression of normative collapse and maximization of interest based on power politics.

The Palestinian case shows once again that the UNSC and the international peace-security architecture in general do not have the capacity to produce a timely, effective and equitable response to humanitarian crises in its current form. The dependence of decision-making processes on power-based hierarchical structures deeply undermines the legitimacy of the Council and paralyzes the international community's ability to intervene in the crisis. Moreover, this structure implements human rights and humanitarian protection norms only when they are compatible with power policies; it reduces norms claiming universality to selective practices.

Therefore, silence in international relations can no longer be legitimized as the pursuit of neutrality or balance. Rather, these silences are deliberate strategies to protect the interests of powerful actors, systematic ways of evading normative responsibility and institutionalized forms of rendering grievances invisible.

As a result, this study positions silence as a strategy based on power politics, not neutrality, and reveals the limits of this strategy through the example of Palestine. It also sees abstention as a complex attitude that exposes the tension between power politics and ethical responsibility in the international system, rather than just as neutrality.

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Authors' Contribution

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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