

# FRACTURES

## INTERNATIONALIST TEACH-IN SUMMARIES

30 APRIL-18 JUNE 2025



## Is the 'liberal' post-WWII international order dying?

Summary of FRACTURES session 2, 7 May

Our second conversation was with:

- **Co-moderator: Meena Jagannath** from the Global Network of Movement Lawyers
- **Aslı Ü. Bâli**, Professor of International Law at Yale Law School
- **Shahd Hammouri**, Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights/University of Kent
- **Jomo Kwame Sundaram**, former assistant secretary-general at UN-DESA.

Content below

- Polls of audience
- Analysis of multilateral order
- Thoughts on strategy
- Recommended reading
- Some parting quotes

## How do you view the post WWII international order?

We did a couple of polls to test the temperature of the room. There is of course no single answer to these polls - and many in the chat said they would tick more than one - but they give a sense of the sentiment. 54% of those in the first poll called the 'WWII international order a colonial-dominated structure that entrenched the power of the Global North'



# Analysis on post WWII institutions and norms

- **Asli Bali** argued it was important to recognise that the design of **post-WWII order** with its asymmetries and built-in exceptions was a reflection of the global power structures of that time and the winners of the war. It was **designed to permit colonial interventions, support structural racism and protect US hegemony**. It's most obviously reflected today in the UN security council veto and the way it enables genocide in Palestine. The rhetoric of humanitarian intervention used by US and allies in the 1990s sometimes clouds this view for liberals, but it never acted contrary to imperialist interests. What's new today though is that the US has lost its capacity to command consent without coercion. In addition the rise of other powers economically could be an opportunity for the Global South to assert demands to redistribute global power in ways that could be less war-prone (although this is not guaranteed- see the emerging India-Pakistan conflict).
- **Jomo KS** argued that while the UN-led multilateral order reflected these inherent power imbalances, it also allowed for more representation of the global South, **and was an important site of interstate contention compared to the old colonial pre-WW2 colonial order**. It's not for nothing that the West pushed for the WTO to be outside the UN system reduce the scope of multilateralism and the UN's role. Even institutions like the IMF and World Bank were initially conceived as part of Roosevelt's post-war post-colonial order, and had more progressive possibilities initially, which have been deliberately eroded as they gradually became tools for the West, especially the US, to exercise domination. Social movements and resistance have also had an impact, as we saw in Seattle in 1999 where they supported Global South countries to resist corporate agendas.
- **Shahd Hammouri** said that **international humanitarian lawyer is premised on non-domination and non-exploitation** but its failure at this time with the genocide in Gaza shows how it failed because it **denies colonial history and colonised people**. It has allowed the language of humanitarianism, while perpetuating exploitation, even the livestreaming of a genocide.

## Thoughts on strategy going forwards

We did another poll which gave a sense of how the audience leaned in terms of strategy: Re-imagine!!



# Who spoke on what – a few initial key points by our speakers

- **Asli:** True decolonization requires redistribution of power beyond what the international system as presently constituted is likely to yield. Decolonisation in the mid-20th century ended up integrating injustices of the European state system – such as logics of racialized inclusion and exclusion, sovereignty without any reparation or redistribution for the massive transfers of wealth out of the Global South to the Global North. A true decolonization would need to begin from different premises — contesting the sovereign right to exclude; allocation of individual rights and responsibilities premised on belonging to a nation-state and participating in a state-based order. **Still we can only begin from where we are** and Asli agrees with Jomo that the **existing multilateral institutions are sites not only of domination but also struggle** and some Global South victories eg Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the UN General Assembly's various declarations from denouncing SA apartheid to Gaza. ICJ and the performance of the SA delegation crystallises the possibility of resisting from within while preserving the option of dismantling/deconstructing/reconstructing/reimagining from without.

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- **Jomo:** Need to have a variegated strategy towards multilateral institutions. For example, despite the limitations of the WHO, we must oppose Trump's and RFK Jr's effort to destroy it. Global South unity is important, but can also be regressive, for example in the Middle East where the UAE and Saudi Arabia bought an alliance of 40 countries to destroy Yemen, now the only remaining national bastion of resistance to Israel. With the WTO undermined by the US since Obama, the Trump tariffs are a reminder that the earlier agreed GATT system may be worth reviving instead of sticking to the WTO provisions which are more clearly biased to corporate interests, e.g., TRIPS. We need more flexible trade commitments recognising the varied circumstances and developmental needs of developing countries. Trump's simultaneous attacks on the rest of the world gives us a new **opportunity to build new alliances** as no one takes the current world order as guaranteed any more. This may, at times, mean allying with some countries on particular issues although we may not be aligned on other issues. Divide and rule should not just be an imperialist strategy, but can be deployed for resistance too. It also requires us to go beyond criticizing multilateral institutions and processes to better **articulating alternatives** of what we want instead. We must also be mindful of the likelihood of its realization before destroying elements of the status quo when the likely alternatives may well be worse.

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- **Shahd:** Palestine has become the litmus test for humanity. As lawyer has been deeply frustrating knocking on every possible door to stop an unfolding genocide and dealing with international bureaucracy that just wants you to wait in line. **But we have to use the legal system, even with its veneer of justice, to call out the inconsistencies, to draw on its language, to build alliances.** Hague Group is one such platform that has been difficult as it involves a whole world of diplomacy and compromise that is often inimical to justice, but focus now is on building country partners so it becomes a bloc of alternative power that can challenge entrenched power of Israel in alliance with the West.

## Further reading and listening

Asli's analysis and links:

- <https://betterorderproject.org/> and a [podcast interview](#) by Asli
- [ICJ Israel case explainer with Asli](#) (The Nation)
- [Beyond the Nation-State in the Middle East](#) (Boston Review)

- The Humanitarian paradox: why it requires [military] restraint (Quincy Institute)

Jomo has a great free op-ed service you can sign up to at: <https://jomodevplus.substack.com>

and you can also access old articles at <https://www.ipsnews.net/author/jomo-kwame-sundaram/>

Shahd:

- The Premise of Envisioning the End of the Illegal Israeli Occupation: The Palestinian Right to Self-determination as Decolonisation (AIHaq)
- Perspectives on international law and Palestinian liberation (LPE)
- It is time to move the UN and international law out of the West (Al Jazeera)
- UN experts warn international order on a knife's edge, urges states to comply with ICJ advisory opinion (OHHCR)
- M. Bedjaoui, Towards a new international economic order (UNESCO)

## And some parting quotes:



### Jomo Kwame Sundaram

‘We’re living in a really different time. This is an era of bullies and gangsters. But it’s creating a mess [in which] it’s even more important for us to offer and strategically support ongoing struggles for achievable alternatives.’



### Asli Bali

‘We need to find places where we can use the [current multilateral] machinery to resist, while retaining the deconstructive imagination and ambition to replace this machinery’

[www.tni.org/fractures](http://www.tni.org/fractures)

