

HBKU Flagship Research Grant Program 3rd Cycle– Project Highlight

Project Title:

Transformative Global Governance Led by Non-Western Small and Middle Powers: *The Cases of Qatar and South Africa in Pursuing Peace and Justice in a Fractured World*

Research Team:

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Executive Summary

The ongoing genocide in Gaza, following the October 7, 2023 attack, has escalated into one of the most consequential geopolitical emergencies in recent history. Israel's actions—marked by widespread destruction, civilian targeting, and mass atrocities—have revealed deep flaws in the post-WWII international system and the so-called rules-based order. This research contends that Gaza is not merely a humanitarian or regional crisis, but a “critical juncture” that could reshape global governance.

The study proposes a framework of “transformative global governance” centred on structural justice, historical redress, and plural agency. Grounded in Global South perspectives, it seeks to transcend traditional North–South divides by examining the roles of non-Western small and middle powers—particularly Qatar and South Africa in reshaping global governance. Unlike larger states such as China and India, constrained by conventional power politics, Qatar and South Africa have set global norms through their constructive, innovative engagements informed by Islamic ethics and international law.

By analysing these two countries' interventions during the Gaza conflict and assessing the role of artificial intelligence in the crisis, the research illustrates how non-Western small and middle powers are capable of exercising their agency to resist great power hegemony, paving the way to a more multipolar, justice-oriented international order.

Expected Outcome

This study will develop a **theoretical framework** for *transformative global governance* rooted in Global South perspectives, emphasizing justice, historical redress, and plural agency. It will produce **comparative case studies** on Qatar and South Africa's norm-shaping roles in the Gaza crisis and **analyze AI's impact** on conflict dynamics. Outputs include **peer-reviewed publications, policy briefs,** and **forums** engaging scholars and policymakers. The research aims to inform institutional reform and contribute to **global governance policy discourse** on a more inclusive, multipolar global order that challenges Western-centric governance models and highlights innovative approaches from non-Western small and middle powers.

Flagship Area, keywords, tags:

Global Transformation, Transformative Global Governance; Gaza Genocide; October 7, 2023; Mass Atrocities; Critical Juncture; Post-WWII Order; Islamic ethics; international law; artificial intelligence (AI); Global South; North–South divide; Qatar; South Africa



Figure 1 Qatar Challenging Israel at the International Court of Justice, February 2024



Figure 2 Palestinians struggle to get donated food at a community kitchen in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip, in May, 2025. Photograph by Jehad Alshrafi / AP

Figure 3 Flowchart of Gaza Crisis Impact on Global Governance Policy