

Editorial Note by the Editor-in-Chief: Two ongoing wars in the BSEM region

Within the last two years three wars have erupted in the BSEM region, two of them still ongoing, with disastrous real effects and ominous implications, internally, regionally, and globally, without foreseeable prospects for peace yet. Security conditions overall have deteriorated abysmally. The second issue of BSEMR (Vol. 1, Issue no. 2) arrives at a time when BSEM areas are badly hit by wars, which not only jeopardize regional peace and crucial Global Public Goods, but also foment escalation, even at a scale of a world war. In the culmination of the antagonistic era of *extreme neoliberalism* the value of life is diminishing. People routinely watch ‘live war atrocities’, bombardments of hospitals, civilian carnage on camera, in real time.

The deadly attack against kibbutzim and a music festival in Israel, by Hamas, on 7 October 2023, killed over 1,200 people, triggering the Israeli government and Defense Forces (IDF) counterattack. In this, over the last six months, 33,545 civilians were reported killed by IDF, in all types of violent operations, including the unprecedented *weaponizing of famine* through prohibiting access to survival nutrition for children-victims and refugees. Such relentless massacres cause not only humanitarian disaster and horrors, repeatedly described as *genocide*, but also a menacing routinisation of violence. Consequently, human life, peace, security, trade exchanges, intercultural activities, are all disrupted indefinitely.

In terms of the International Humanitarian Law,¹ such acts of devastation are contested as criminal. To the point, consecutive United Nations (UN) Security

¹ ‘All war involves a measure, however small, of violence. [...] it occurs between states or powers seeking to constitute themselves as states; as such it is recognized and regulated by

Council decisions and calls for ceasefire were issued, but blatantly disregarded. Crucially, two court injunctions were submitted to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague. The first by the state of South Africa against Israel, claiming that Israel is committing *genocide*. The second by the state of Nicaragua against Germany, as “complicit in this genocide”, because Israel imports circa 30% of its armaments from Germany, but also because the latter has discontinued financial contribution to UNRWA,² amidst this unprecedented war, thereby denying vital humanitarian support to Gaza victims.

1. **Jus ad Bellum-Jus in Bello**

At issue here is the ‘just war’ and the contradistinction between *Jus ad bellum* and *Jus in bello*.³ Although the state of Israel has a right to defend itself (*Jus ad bellum*), it is not justified to conduct it in totally devastating ways, against innocent civilians, as it is continuing to do against the Palestinians in Gaza (*Jus in bello*) and by obliterating Gaza’s basic life infrastructures. UN and independent source data about IDF strikes against civilians are as flabbergasting as they are lethal. They are equally perplexing, as regards Israel’s future, their global standing and legitimacy.

The wider implications of this Middle Eastern war are paralysing, as threats and fears of escalation into a generalized war are already widespread and rising. Indeed, we already observe the escalation of the conflict, with the attacks against

international law, which incorporates legal rules originating in traditional discussions of the just war.” Roger Scruton, *Dictionary of Political Thought* (London: Pan Books, 1982), 489.

² UNRWA: Acronym for ‘United Nations and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees’. UNRWA was established in 1949 and started operations in May 1950.

³ ‘Just war: Canon law distinguished *jus in bello* (justice in the course of war) from *jus ad bellum* (the just cause of war). A just cause may be pursued by unjust means – e.g. by the wholesale slaughter of non-combatants.’ (Scruton (no. 1) 244). Hence, the accusation of genocide.

Iran's consulate and the counterattacks of this country. The involvement of more states appears to be in the belligerents' strategic playing cards, if not induced.

In terms of fair international relations, this war betrays an acute divergence, if not a clash, between international law principles and real belligerent state conduct, in resolving conflicts. Undoubtedly, what surfaces is the total lack of principled international relations and the steep rise of cynical 'double standards', when comparing stances on the two currently ongoing war cases. Referring to Israel's attacks, an astonished Pope Francis exclaimed 'This is not war, it is terrorism', admonishing for peace actions, while political leaders, like Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, voice warnings for this war's impact on a world war outbreak.

However, the most determinant factors in the international relations of our time are not the international legal principles, but more pressing pragmatic objectives and even revisionist ambitions, or such 'lowest common denominator' desiderata as the maintaining of a balance of power and so, a viable international order.

2. Research Focus on the BSEM Region

Articles in this issue of BSEMR form critical investigations concerning aspects of war conduct, but also of corresponding state ideologies. Notably, the issue hosts three relevant research articles, two invited commentaries and a book review presentation.

To start, **Dr Theodoros Tsakiris** focuses on the rise of 'Erdoganism' in the guise of a fundamentally revisionist version of 'Islamism' as a determinant ideology of the Turkish state and including the questioning of the International Treaties underpinning modern Turkey. Erdogan's grandiose strategy was manifest early on during the 22 years of his leadership. However, the last eight years, since the 2016

Coup, have marked a crucial shift. Indeed, a turning point. **Dr Themistoklis Tzimas**, in his article entitled ‘**Uti Possidetis and the Armed Conflict in Ukraine**’, focuses on the modalities in which the international legal principle of ‘uti possidetis’ was implemented in relation to Ukraine, examining the extent to which it constituted a violation of self-determination, and whether legitimacy to the Russian ‘SMO’ could be considered as relevant. **Mr Yannis Chouvardas**, in his article ‘**The Role of Energy in the Strengthening of Turkey-Russia Relations, 2016-2021**’, analyses the energy-centered, mutually beneficial strategies of rapprochement between Russia and Turkey.

In the section of ‘Commentaries’, the ongoing contestable conflicts resurface. First, **Dr Rune Ottosen**, in his ‘**Gaza vs Libya: Mission Impossible for Norway’s Commitment to International Law**’, assesses the foreign policy standing of Norway on the Palestine-Gaza *versus* Israel conflict, comparing it to the corresponding stance on the war in Libya. On his part, **Dr Constantinos Alexiou** provides a historical overview of the religious-political ideology and the corresponding movement of Zionism which has conclusively led to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The issue also hosts a book presentation by **Dr Christos Frangonikolopoulos**, in which he discusses select chapters of the collective volume ‘**The New Eastern Mediterranean Transformed: Emerging Issues and New Actors**’, edited by Fotini Asderaki and Aristotelis Tziampiris.

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