
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Law, Power, and Language: A Comparative Study of Western Responses to the ICC's Netanyahu-Gallant Warrants

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the contrasting responses of the United States and the European Union to the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrants against Israeli officials Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant. It critically analyzes how legal, political, and strategic considerations shape the discourse of each actor, particularly in relation to international justice mechanisms. Employing a hybrid discourse analysis framework, the research integrates Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Teun van Dijk's Sociocognitive Approach. This interdisciplinary methodology facilitates a nuanced examination of the ideological, historical, and power-laden dimensions of political discourse. The data, drawn from official U.S. and EU statements and media reports (primarily Reuters and YouTube sources), is analyzed to uncover referential strategies, argumentation, perspectivation, framing, mitigation, ideology and power, discourse construction and historical contextualization. Findings indicate a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy: from upholding the language of law to prioritizing the language of power, rooted in national and strategic interests. This is exemplified by the U.S.'s rejection of the ICC's warrants, despite grave allegations of genocide in Gaza. In contrast, the EU maintains a consistent commitment to international law and multilateralism, reinforcing its role as a normative power within the global order. The study argues that these divergent responses signal a deeper geopolitical rupture within the Western alliance. This divide reflects the erosion of the post-WWII international system and suggests a transition toward a multipolar world where regional powers such as the EU, China, and Russia increasingly assert influence over global governance. Drawing on Gramsci's insights on transitional epochs, the research concludes that the growing tensions between power and law may define the contours of a new and uncertain era for international justice.

KEYWORDS

International Criminal Court; U.S.–EU Foreign Policy; Selective Justice; Political Discourse; Global Geopolitical Shifts

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 10 April 2025

PUBLISHED: 26 April 2025

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2025.6.4.22

1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, conflicts driven by political, religious, and historical narratives continue to shape global dynamics in the absence of clear regulations and adherence to international law. This is clearly evident in the Middle East, where longstanding disputes have fueled tensions and violence, as can be seen in the wars in Gaza and Lebanon between 2023 and 2025. The Israeli war on Gaza since October 7, 2023, has not only resulted in significant casualties and destruction but has also intensified a global media battle, influencing public perceptions through selective framing, biased reporting, and AI-driven propaganda (Alsemeiri, Elsemeiri, Carroll, & Aljamal, 2024). The framing of military actions, such as the portrayal of Israeli offensives as "retaliatory" and the suppression of Palestinian voices, exemplifies the power dynamics within international discourse (Amer, 2018).

The Gaza war highlights this gap, as ongoing civilian casualties and humanitarian violations occur despite international legal frameworks. The ICJ's ruling on South Africa's case against Israel further exposes this issue, recognizing the plausibility of genocide

while global powers remain divided on accountability. Another significant legal developments arising from the Gaza War 2023-2025 has been the International Criminal Court's (ICC) decision to issue arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant from Israel and Mohammed Daif and Ibrahim Al-Sinawr, Hamas leaders killed by Israel in the war (Ayoub, 2025). This move has exposed deep fractures within the Western alliance, particularly between the United States and the European Union. While both entities profess a commitment to human rights and international law, their reactions to the ICC's decision underscore fundamental differences in foreign policy and strategic priorities. Historically, the U.S. has been skeptical of the ICC's jurisdiction, especially regarding its allies, whereas the EU has largely supported the court's authority (Duthel, 2024). However, these responses are not merely legal positions but are deeply embedded in geopolitical interests and historical legacies, including postcolonial influences (Kuczyńska, 2024).

The selective application of international law by powerful states raises concerns about the credibility and legitimacy of global justice mechanisms, mainly in times of wars and military conflicts. The United States' rejection of the ICC's jurisdiction reflects its broader concerns over sovereignty and the potential implications for its foreign policy (Kersten, 2025). In contrast, while the EU has generally supported the ICC, internal divisions—such as Hungary's pro-Israel stance—highlight the complexity of European legal and political commitments (Szabados, 2024). This research explores the extent to which these responses are shaped by historical contexts, political interests, and legal considerations, ultimately questioning whether international law serves as a tool for justice or as an instrument of geopolitical strategy (Alsemeiri, Elsemeiri, Carroll, & Aljamal, 2024).

By examining the implications of these divergent responses, this study contributes to the broader discourse on the future of international legal norms, mainly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The reactions to the ICC's arrest warrants would signify a shifting global order, challenging the post-World War II international system dominated by Western-led legal frameworks. This research aims to assess whether these fractures indicate the decline of this order and the rise of a more multipolar international landscape.

2. Problem Statement

The issuance of ICC arrest warrants against Israeli leaders has magnified the divisions within the Western alliance, particularly in the contrasting responses of the United States and the European Union. Despite their proclaimed commitment to human rights and international justice, their differing stances on the ICC's rulings, in relation to the Israeli war on Gaza, highlight strategic and geopolitical divergences. The U.S. has rejected the court's legitimacy, prioritizing national security and diplomatic interests, whereas the EU has largely supported the ICC's authority, emphasizing legal principles and accountability. This divide raises critical questions about the role of historical, political, and legal factors, particularly the legacy of postcolonialism, in shaping these selective endorsements or rejections of international legal decisions. Such selectivity threatens the credibility of global justice mechanisms and poses broader implications for the international legal order. This study seeks to uncover the motivations behind these responses and their potential impact on international law, human rights, and the evolving geopolitical landscape.

3. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the contrasting responses of the United States and the European Union to the ICC arrest warrants against Israeli officials, analyzing the legal, political, and strategic factors that shape their positions.
2. To assess the impact of Western powers' selective engagement with the ICC on the legitimacy, credibility, and effectiveness of international justice mechanisms.

4. Literature review

4.1. The Role of the ICC in Global Justice

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was established under the Rome Statute in 2002 to prosecute individuals for crimes of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity (Weed, 2011). Numerous scholars have debated the effectiveness of the ICC, with some arguing that it represents a significant step toward global accountability (Bayz, 2024), while others critique it as a tool influenced by political interests. The ICC's jurisdiction and enforcement mechanisms remain limited, often leading to selective justice, as major powers like the United States do not recognize its authority over their own actions or those of their allies (Kumar, 2024).

The US and the European Union (EU) have long positioned themselves as defenders of human rights and international law. However, scholars highlight inconsistencies in their application of legal principles, especially regarding allies and adversaries (Parente, 2025). The US has historically opposed the ICC's jurisdiction over its military personnel and allies, citing concerns over

sovereignty, while the EU generally supports the ICC as a pillar of international justice (Douglas, 2021). This divergence reflects broader geopolitical interests rather than a commitment to universal legal norms (Groenleer, 2015).

4.2. Postcolonialism and Selective Justice

Postcolonial scholars argue that international legal institutions, including the ICC, are often wielded to maintain Western hegemony rather than serve impartial justice (Labuda, 2024). The disproportionate targeting of African leaders in ICC prosecutions has led to accusations of neocolonial bias (van Lin, 2023). The reluctance of Western powers to accept ICC rulings against Israeli leaders, while endorsing cases against other nations, further reinforces claims of selective justice (Esteves, 2024). This selective approach undermines the ICC's credibility and highlights the enduring influence of colonial legacies in shaping international law (Duthel, 2024).

4.3. The Gaza War and Humanitarian Law Violations

The ongoing war on Gaza has led to significant discussions on Israel's actions and their legal implications. Reports from human rights organizations such as (Amnesty International, 2023) and (Human Rights Watch, 2023) document the extensive targeting of civilians, destruction of infrastructure, and the use of starvation as a weapon—actions that potentially constitute war crimes and genocide under international law (Hasan & Buheji, 2024). Scholars argue that the ICC's warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant are an unprecedented move that challenges long-standing Western protection of Israel in legal forums (Zafar Abbas & Khan, 2024).

4.4. Reactions to the ICC Warrants

The reactions to the ICC's arrest warrants against Israeli leaders have been polarized. While Global South nations and international human rights organizations have largely welcomed the move as a step toward accountability, Western governments, particularly the US and some EU states, have condemned the decision, citing concerns over its legitimacy (Sabel, 2024). This divergence in reactions underscores deeper fractures within the Western alliance and raises questions about the future of international legal norms (Gwaya, 2024).

4.5. Implications for Global Governance

The ICC's decision and the reactions to it may signal a shift in the global order, challenging the post-World War II dominance of Western-led institutions (Dannenbaum & Dill, 2024). The growing influence of emerging powers such as China and Russia, coupled with increasing skepticism toward Western legal mechanisms, suggests a move toward a more multipolar world where alternative legal and governance structures gain prominence (Fiutowski, 2024). This shift may redefine the role of international law and its application in future conflicts.

5. Methodology

This study employs a hybrid discourse analysis approach, integrating Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 1999; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989; 1992; 2003), and Teun van Dijk's Sociocognitive Approach (van Dijk, 1998; 2008). This interdisciplinary framework enables a comprehensive examination of how discourse constructs power relations, ideological structures, and historical narratives in international politics. DHA is particularly valuable for historical contextualization, as it situates discourse within broader socio-political and historical developments, revealing how past narratives influence present representations. Additionally, DHA examines referential and predication strategies, which analyze how social actors and events are named and attributed with specific characteristics to shape their perceived legitimacy. Furthermore, DHA provides analytical tools for studying argumentation strategies, particularly topoi and justifications, which help uncover how political claims are legitimized through historical, moral, or legal reasoning. It also contributes to the analysis of intensification and mitigation strategies, assessing how statements are strategically strengthened or softened to influence public perception.

CDA complements this analysis by focusing on discourse construction, particularly through its examination of linguistic structures, power asymmetries, and textual organization. CDA is also instrumental in analyzing framing and in-group/out-group dynamics, exposing how discourse establishes social divisions and legitimizes dominant ideologies. Fairclough's approach to discourse and power informs the study of ideology and power, highlighting how institutions use discourse to reinforce authority and maintain control over public narratives. Furthermore, Van Dijk's Sociocognitive Approach provides insight into perspectivation (positioning of speakers and actors) by examining how ideological structures and mental models shape discourse production and interpretation. This theory helps reveal how discourse constructs particular viewpoints, influences audience perception, and

establishes authority through specific positioning strategies. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, this study constructs a comprehensive methodological framework for analyzing how law, power, and discourse interact in shaping responses to international legal mechanisms. The integration of DHA, CDA, and van Dijk's Sociocognitive Approach highlights the strategic, ideological, and historical dimensions of discourse, revealing how political narratives are constructed, justified, and contested in global debates.

5.1. Data Collection

To ensure a rigorous analysis, this study will collect data from both primary and secondary sources, focusing on official governmental statements and media-reported reactions. The primary sources for data collection include:

1. Reuters – As a globally recognized and reputable news agency, Reuters provides access to official statements and media-reported reactions from U.S. governmental departments, spokespersons, and political figures. Additionally, Reuters will serve as a key source for examining statements from Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.
2. YouTube – Given the increasing role of digital media in the dissemination of governmental communications, YouTube will be utilized to source official video statements from U.S. officials, spokespersons, and political representatives, as well as from Josep Borrell. This will allow for an analysis of both the linguistic and non-verbal elements of their discourse.

By analyzing both direct governmental statements and their representations in media narratives, this study ensures a comprehensive dataset that captures the complexities of U.S. and EU discourses on the ICC's decisions. The combination of HCDA and diverse media sources will enable a critical investigation of the language, historical framing, and political motivations underlying the responses of these international actors.

6. Data analysis

6.1. Referential & Predicational Strategies (Naming & Attributing Characteristics)

The referential and predicational strategies employed by the U.S. and the EU in their discourse on the International Criminal Court (ICC) are critical in shaping the narratives and justifications surrounding the court's involvement in Israeli war on Gaza. These strategies determine how the ICC, its decisions, and the actors involved are portrayed, influencing the way these parties are perceived by their domestic and international audiences. The referential strategies focus on how key entities—like the ICC and Israeli officials—are named and characterized, while the predicational strategies assign specific attributes or qualities to them. The contrasting use of these strategies by the U.S. and the EU is reflective of their respective positions on the ICC, with the U.S. seeking to delegitimize the court and the EU aiming to reinforce its legitimacy and impartiality.

a) U.S. Officials: Delegitimizing the ICC & Humanizing Israeli Leaders

U.S. officials employ negative referential strategies that aim to undermine the legitimacy of the ICC, painting it as an overreaching institution driven by political motivations. By using terms such as "outrageous" and framing the ICC's actions as an attack on Israel, the U.S. seeks to delegitimize the court and deflect criticism of Israeli actions. This delegitimization strategy is a core aspect of the broader discourse constructed by the U.S. that centers around the notion of national sovereignty and the belief that external judicial bodies should not interfere in matters of national security or foreign policy.

The use of the term "**outrageous**" by President Biden when discussing the ICC's arrest warrants serves to emphasize the U.S. rejection of the ICC's authority (Reuters, 2024). This emotive language aims to provoke outrage among the U.S. public, signaling that the U.S. is unwavering in its defense of Israel. Biden's use of this language frames the ICC's involvement as unjust and politicized, casting the institution in a negative light. The U.S. portrayal of the ICC as an illegitimate body is further amplified by the framing of the ICC's actions as politically motivated. This strategy is meant to delegitimize the ICC's impartiality and impartial pursuit of justice, thereby diminishing its moral and legal standing on the global stage.

Additionally, the humanizing of Israeli leaders is another critical aspect of the U.S. discourse. By referring to the accused as "**senior Israeli officials**," the U.S. emphasizes their importance and respected status, subtly distancing them from any criminality (Reuters, 2024).

. This rhetoric frames the individuals involved as legitimate political figures rather than war criminals, thus invoking sympathy and reinforcing their legitimacy in the eyes of the U.S. public and global audience. In this manner, U.S. discourse positions Israel and its leaders as being above reproach and as victims of an unjust, politically motivated legal process.

In the statement from the National Security Council: ***"The United States fundamentally rejects the Court's decision to issue arrest warrants for senior Israeli officials,"*** the phrase "fundamentally rejects" underscores the U.S.'s absolute and principled opposition to the ICC's decision (Reuters, 2024). This statement, and similar remarks from President Biden, clearly reflect a strategic discourse designed to maintain Israel's moral standing and protect its interests, as well as to uphold the U.S.'s role as Israel's most important ally.

b) EU Officials: Legitimizing the ICC & Emphasizing Legal Obligations

In stark contrast, EU officials utilize positive referential strategies to emphasize the ICC's legitimacy, independence, and authority, positioning the court as a respected and neutral institution committed to global justice. These strategies align with the EU's broader commitment to international law and the rule of law as fundamental pillars of its foreign policy. The EU's discourse frames the ICC not only as an essential mechanism for accountability but also as a body that must be respected and adhered to, regardless of political alliances or national interests.

Josep Borrell's statements, such as ***"the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court are binding under international law,"*** underscore the legally binding nature of ICC decisions, emphasizing that these rulings cannot be disregarded or politicized (Kambas, 2024). By framing the ICC's decisions as binding and rooted in international law, Borrell is reinforcing the notion that the EU's commitment to the court's decisions is not a matter of choice but a legal obligation. This framing constructs the ICC as an impartial, legally grounded institution that must be adhered to by all states, reinforcing the EU's commitment to upholding international norms over strategic alliances or national interests.

Borrell further legitimizes the ICC by describing it as a ***"legal body formed by respected people who are the best among the profession of judges."*** This assertion positions the ICC as an institution founded on the highest standards of professionalism and integrity, distancing it from accusations of political bias (Kambas, 2024). The emphasis on the impartiality of the ICC is a direct counter-narrative to the U.S. portrayal of the court as politically motivated and overreaching. By highlighting the professionalism and neutrality of the judges involved, the EU seeks to cement the ICC's role as a legitimate, respected global institution tasked with delivering justice without political influence.

Moreover, the EU's consistent refrain that ***"the European Union and its member states are obligated to implement the decisions of the ICC in accordance with the Rome Statute"*** positions the EU as a defender of the international legal order. By using the phrase "this is not optional," Borrell underlines the EU's view that adhering to the ICC's rulings is an indispensable part of global governance (Kambas, 2024). This stands in direct opposition to the U.S. stance, which privileges its national interests over adherence to international law. The EU's discourse places legal obligations above political calculations, reinforcing its identity as a defender of multilateralism and global justice.

6.2. Argumentation Strategies (Topoi & Justifications)

In the debate surrounding the ICC's arrest warrants, the U.S. and EU present divergent lines of argumentation that reflect their ideological and legal priorities.

c) U.S. Justifications: The Topos of Injustice & Sovereignty

The U.S. anchors its argument in the topos of injustice, portraying the ICC's actions as unfair and politically charged. For instance, President Biden condemned the arrest warrants as ***"outrageous"*** (Biden), operating within this topos by framing the court's actions as an example of international bias authority (Reuters, 2024). Additionally, the U.S. invokes the topos of sovereignty, as exemplified by Senator Lindsey Graham's warning: ***"We should crush your economy because we are next"*** (The Express Tribune, 2024). This extreme language constructs the ICC as a direct threat to U.S. sovereignty, suggesting that compliance with the ICC could set a dangerous precedent. Graham's rhetoric positions the ICC as an external entity that could undermine the power and autonomy of U.S. allies, underlining the U.S.'s prioritization of its national interests. Further, the U.S. justifies Israeli military actions within the topos of defense. President Biden stated: ***"We reject the ICC's application against Israeli leaders...it's clear Israel wants to do all it can to ensure civilian protection"*** (Mortman, 2024). This framing of Israel's military response as an act of self-defense

against Hamas argues that Israel is morally justified in its actions, positioning the ICC's investigation into Israeli leaders as a misstep that fails to consider the context of self-defense.

d) EU Justifications: The Topos of Legal Obligation & Global Justice

On the other hand, the EU leans on the topos of legal obligation to justify its unwavering support for the ICC. Josep Borrell emphasized: **"The arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court are binding under international law"** (Kambas, 2024). This framing presents legal obligation as non-negotiable, reinforcing the idea that international law must be respected regardless of political considerations. Borrell's statement constructs the ICC as a body whose decisions are grounded in legal duty, creating a moral obligation for states to comply. Moreover, the EU positions the ICC as the cornerstone of global justice. Borrell's emphasis on the ICC as *"the only way of having global justice"* (Borrell) not only elevates the court's role but frames the EU as an impartial advocate for justice. This contrast between the U.S. and the EU highlights the differing priorities: while the U.S. focuses on sovereignty and self-interest, the EU emphasizes global justice and the enforcement of international law (Kambas, 2024).

6.3. Perspectivation (Positioning of Speakers and Actors)

How the U.S. and EU position themselves in relation to the ICC, Israel, and Hamas reflects their broader ideological commitments.

a) U.S. Positioning: Defender of Israel and Delegitimizing of the ICC

U.S. officials' discourse on the ICC is not just about rejecting its authority but about positioning themselves as the defenders of Israel and challengers to the ICC. President Biden's statement, **"we reject the ICC's application against Israeli leaders,"** is a clear assertion of U.S. support for Israel (Mortman, 2024). By rejecting the ICC's authority, the U.S. implicitly suggests that Israel is beyond reproach and deserving of protection from international legal scrutiny. This positioning of Israel as a moral ally goes beyond legal arguments. The U.S. aligns itself with Israel not just as a strategic partner but also as a moral defender, reinforcing the notion that Israel's actions are justified or at least exempt from international justice processes. This reflects the U.S.'s longstanding political and ideological commitment to Israel's sovereignty and security.

Senator Lindsey Graham's statement, **"We should crush your economy because we are next,"** goes further, indicating that the U.S. views any challenge to Israel's immunity as a threat to its own sovereignty and global influence (The Express Tribune, 2024). Graham is not only defending Israel but also framing the ICC's investigation as an existential threat to U.S. interests. This statement highlights a broader geopolitical strategy: the U.S. sees its role in global politics as one that cannot be challenged by international institutions that may undermine its alliances or interests. The "crush your economy" remark portrays a hegemonic positioning where U.S. power and sovereignty are prioritized over international cooperation or justice mechanisms.

b) EU Positioning: Guardian of International Law & Neutral Arbiter

In contrast, the EU positions itself as a neutral arbiter dedicated to preserving international law. Rather than taking sides in the Israel-Hamas conflict, the EU emphasizes the ICC's legal mandate. Josep Borrell's statement that the ICC's rulings are a *"legal obligation"* (Borrell) underscores this position, presenting the EU as a supporter of justice and international norms, without the emotional and moral entanglements that characterize the U.S. approach. The EU is presented as upholding legal integrity, positioning itself as a neutral force in global justice. This neutrality is central to the EU's discourse, as it distances itself from direct political involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By framing the ICC's actions as an issue of legal compliance rather than political judgment, the EU attempts to maintain credibility as a defender of justice on the global stage, reinforcing its commitment to international law above national interests.

6.4. Intensification/Mitigation Strategies

The rhetorical strategies of intensification and mitigation reveal the degree of emotional commitment and urgency behind the statements of both the U.S. and EU.

a) U.S. Strategy: Intensification for Maximum Impact

The U.S. employs intensification strategies by actively delegitimizing the International Criminal Court (ICC) and positioning its actions as flawed and politically driven. Statements such as Biden's claim that the ICC's process was **"troubling"** and Blinken's

outright rejection of the ICC's "**no equivalence of Israel with Hamas**" reflect the U.S. attempt to frame the court's actions as biased and unjust (Reuters, 2024). This framing aligns with the broader narrative that the court is overreaching and politically motivated. Additionally, the U.S. fortifies its opposition with moral and political justifications, painting Israel as a responsible actor with a primary focus on civilian protection. Biden's statement that "what's happening is not genocide" directly rejects the allegations made by the ICC, reinforcing the U.S. stance that Israel's actions are justified. These strategies serve to intensify the rhetoric against the ICC, presenting it as a threat to U.S. allies' sovereignty and undermining its legitimacy on the global stage.

b) EU Strategy: Mitigation to Preserve Credibility

In contrast, the EU adopts mitigation strategies, focusing on the ICC's legitimacy and role as an impartial legal body. The EU's rhetoric, particularly through the words of Josep Borrell, employs neutral and procedural language, emphasizing that the ICC's rulings are a matter of legal obligation, and EU member states cannot choose to ignore them. Borrell stresses that the decision was made by a court and must be respected, drawing attention to the ICC's legal obligations under international law rather than engaging in political debate. This strategy serves to position the ICC as an objective, rule-based institution rather than a politically charged entity. The EU's consistent reinforcement of the ICC's status as a respected legal body formed by "**respected people**" aims to further solidify the court's credibility.

The EU seeks to depoliticize the situation by framing its position as one rooted in legal compliance rather than political alignment, presenting its support for the ICC as a commitment to upholding international justice. Additionally, Borrell asserts that "**we cannot undermine the International Criminal Court. It is the only way of having global justice,**" reinforcing the idea that the ICC plays a crucial role in ensuring justice on a global scale. He further emphasizes that "**they're not political. It's a legal body formed by respected people who are the best among the profession of judges,**" thus solidifying the court's credibility and reinforcing its legitimacy (Reuters, 2024). Through these strategies, the EU defends the ICC's authority while downplaying any potential political controversies surrounding its decisions.

6.5. Ideology and Power: Underlying Beliefs and Structures in Discourse

The discourse surrounding the ICC arrest warrants exposes contrasting ideological commitments that guide the United States' and European Union's approaches to global governance, power, and international law. These ideologies influence how each entity navigates national sovereignty, multilateral frameworks, and strategic alliances.

a) U.S. Ideology: Sovereignty, Power, and Strategic Alliances

The U.S. prioritizes national sovereignty, strategic partnerships, and military dominance over adherence to multilateral legal frameworks, particularly when it comes to its relationship with Israel. This is reflected in its framing of international issues, where geopolitical concerns take precedence over legal obligations. The U.S. rejects external judicial oversight, particularly from the ICC, asserting that its allies, especially Israel, should not be subject to international prosecution. U.S. discourse constructs Israel's security as integral to American interests, often justifying the rejection of international law when it conflicts with national security concerns. For example, Biden's statement, "**We will always stand with Israel against threats to its security,**" underscores the unconditional nature of the U.S.-Israel alliance and frames Israel's security as a U.S. priority, further justifying the dismissal of the ICC's involvement (U.S. Mission Israel, 2024). Similarly, Lindsey Graham's statement, "**If you try to help the ICC, we're going to sanction you,**" reflects the U.S. view of the ICC as an existential threat, emphasizing power over legal norms (The Express Tribune, 2024).

b) EU Ideology: Multilateralism, International Law, and Global Governance

In contrast, the European Union is deeply committed to multilateralism, legal obligations, and institutional integrity, reflecting its belief in the importance of international law and global governance. The EU portrays itself as upholding legal frameworks like the Rome Statute, framing compliance with ICC rulings as both a moral and legal duty. It emphasizes the depoliticization of justice, presenting the ICC's decisions as based on legal necessity rather than political considerations. Unlike the U.S., which prioritizes strategic alliances, the EU values the ICC's autonomy, positioning it as a legitimate global institution regardless of political alignments. Josep Borrell's statement, "**The European Union and its member states are obligated to implement the decisions of the ICC in accordance with the Rome Statute, and this is not optional, but a legal obligation,**" reinforces the EU's commitment to ensuring that international law takes precedence over political interests, standing in stark contrast to the U.S.'s more realist approach (Kambas, 2024).

6.6. Framing & In-Group/Out-Group Dynamics

Framing strategies employed by the U.S. and the EU construct in-group and out-group dynamics, reinforcing alliances, moral distinctions, and legitimacy claims. These dynamics shape the perceptions of Israel, the ICC, and other global actors.

a) U.S. Framing: “Us vs. Them” – Israel and Its Allies vs. the ICC

The U.S. constructs a moral and strategic alliance with Israel, positioning it as a legitimate and protective actor while portraying the ICC and Palestinian civilians as out-group adversaries. Biden’s statement, “***There is no equivalence between Israel and Hamas,***” emphasizes the stark contrast between Israel’s actions and those of Hamas, reinforcing the narrative that Israel is a responsible actor operating within the bounds of defense and protection. The U.S. further emphasizes that “***Israel wants to do all it can to ensure civilian protection,***” which frames Israel’s actions as motivated by a desire to protect civilians from harm, rather than perpetuate violence. This rhetoric reinforces the idea of Israel as the in-group, framed as an ally to the U.S., and a nation committed to safeguarding its own population while acting with moral responsibility. By rejecting the ICC’s actions as unfair and unjust, the U.S. aligns itself with Israel, placing it within a shared moral and security framework.

In contrast, the U.S. uses the ICC and Palestinian civilians as part of its out-group, framing them as external forces that challenge Israel’s legitimacy. The ICC is depicted as an overreaching institution undermining Israel’s rights and sovereignty. The narrative further positions Palestinian civilians within the same adversarial frame, as part of the broader critique of the ICC’s actions, which are seen as biased and politically motivated. By constructing Israel as the in-group and casting the ICC, along with its supporters, as the out-group, the U.S. reinforces a dichotomy of “us versus them,” where Israel’s defense actions are justified and supported, while the ICC’s interventions are framed as illegitimate and politically driven. This framing not only solidifies the U.S.-Israel alliance but also delegitimizes the role of international institutions like the ICC in holding Israel accountable, reinforcing the perception that Israel’s actions are beyond reproach.

b) EU Framing: Legitimacy Through Global Justice & Legal Obligations

In contrast, the EU constructs an in-group based on adherence to international law and global justice, positioning the ICC as a legitimate global institution and placing those who oppose it in the out-group. Josep Borrell’s statement, “***It is the only way of having global justice,***” frames the EU and the ICC as advocates for universal justice, positioning those who reject the court as undermining global governance (Reuters, 2024). This discourse subtly portrays the U.S. and Israel as part of the out-group, framing their opposition to the ICC as morally and legally untenable, further emphasizing their role as obstacles to justice and global legal order.

6.7. Discourse Construction: Framing the ICC

Both the U.S. and EU construct discourse that influences the public’s perception of the International Criminal Court (ICC). They use linguistic strategies and ideological positioning to either affirm or challenge the ICC’s role and authority in global justice.

a) U.S. Discourse Construction: Undermining the ICC

The U.S. employs discourse to frame the ICC as an overreaching, politically biased institution that undermines both U.S. and Israeli interests. Biden’s statement, “***We reject that. We will always stand with Israel against threats to its security,***” exemplifies this approach, positioning the U.S. and Israel as defenders of security, while rejecting the ICC’s authority. This framing paints Israel as a legitimate actor under threat, and the ICC’s actions as unjustified interference. The rhetoric further undermines the ICC by portraying it as an external body that does not understand the complexities of Israel’s security concerns, delegitimizing its role in pursuing accountability.

In addition, Lindsey Graham’s remark, “***we are next,***” emphasizes the perceived threat that the ICC represents to U.S. sovereignty, reinforcing the idea that the court’s actions could set a precedent that undermines U.S. national interests. The U.S. constructs the ICC and its supporters as an out-group—posing a direct challenge to U.S. and Israeli security interests—while positioning the U.S. and Israel as the in-group, defenders of sovereignty and security. This framing highlights the U.S.’s focus on national self-interest, placing it in opposition to international legal mechanisms and weakening the ICC’s authority on the global stage.

b) EU Discourse Construction: Reinforcing the ICC's Authority

On the other hand, the EU constructs discourse that supports the ICC's role as a neutral and legally binding institution essential for upholding international law. Josep Borrell's statement, "**The decision was not political but made by a court,**" emphasizes the EU's firm stance that the ICC's decisions are the result of a judicial process, not political maneuvering. This underscores the impartial nature of the court, positioning the ICC as an objective institution grounded in law, rather than as a tool of political agendas (van den Berg & Al-Mughrabi, 2024). By framing the ICC's actions as judicial, Borrell implicitly challenges the U.S.'s portrayal of the court as politically motivated, positioning the EU as a defender of an impartial, rule-based system.

Further reinforcing this view, Borrell asserts, "**The states that signed the Rome convention are obliged to implement the decision of the court. It's not optional,**" Josep Borrell," highlighting the EU's commitment to upholding legal norms and the rule of law. This statement is not just a claim of duty but a clear assertion that compliance with the ICC is a legal obligation, not a matter of political choice. The EU emphasizes that international law must be upheld for global order to be maintained, framing the ICC as essential to this order (Kambas, 2024).

6.8. Historical Contextualization: The Roots of Divergent U.S. and EU Positions

The historical relationship between the U.S. and the ICC is marked by **deep skepticism**, particularly when the court's jurisdiction challenges U.S. sovereignty or foreign policy interests. Since the ICC's establishment, the U.S. has refused to recognize its authority over American nationals, fearing that its soldiers and officials could be subject to politically motivated prosecutions. This skepticism was institutionalized through measures such as the **American Service-Members' Protection Act (2002)**, which sought to shield U.S. personnel from ICC jurisdiction. More recently, the Trump administration escalated this stance by imposing **sanctions on ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda** when the court investigated alleged U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan. This historical pattern explains the U.S.'s immediate dismissal of ICC rulings that conflict with its strategic interests, reinforcing its broader ideological commitment to **national sovereignty over international legal mechanisms**.

In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, U.S. support for Israel as a strategic ally is pivotal. The U.S. views Israel's security as a cornerstone of its broader Middle East policy, with any legal scrutiny of Israeli actions often seen as an attack on both Israeli and American interests (Chomsky, 1999). Israel, in this context, is viewed not just as a regional ally but as a military aircraft carrier in the Middle East, helping to assert American dominance in the Arab world. Israel functions as a large base in the region, a central point for U.S. influence, surrounded by the broader Arab world.

In contrast, the EU has been a **consistent supporter of the ICC**, positioning the court as a pillar of global justice and accountability. The EU has actively promoted ICC jurisdiction as a means of upholding **international law and human rights**, integrating support for the court into its broader commitment to **multilateralism**. However, the EU's position is not without contradictions. While the bloc officially backs the ICC's decisions, **internal divisions occasionally emerge**, particularly in cases involving politically sensitive issues. For instance, **Hungary's alignment with Israel**, despite ICC rulings, demonstrates how some EU member states prioritize geopolitical alliances over legal commitments. These inconsistencies reveal the limits of the EU's unity in enforcing international legal standards.

The historical context shaping current reactions is clear: the **U.S.'s rejection of ICC jurisdiction** stems from its long-standing reluctance to be bound by supranational legal bodies, reinforcing its unilateralist approach to global governance. Meanwhile, the **EU's support for the ICC** reflects its broader ideological commitment to a **rules-based international order**, even as internal disagreements complicate its ability to enforce legal principles uniformly. These historical trajectories continue to shape contemporary transatlantic discourse on the ICC, highlighting the enduring tension between power politics and legal accountability.

7. Discussion

The analysis reveals a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy, where the language of power is increasingly overshadowing the language of law and justice. Historically, the U.S. has been skeptical of international legal frameworks, particularly when they challenge its sovereignty or strategic interests. The 2002 American Service-Members' Protection Act (ASPA) exemplifies this stance. The recent U.S. rejection of the ICC's arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant further illustrates this trend, signaling that geopolitical interests now take precedence over adherence to international law, even in the face of clear allegations of genocide in Gaza by these Israeli leaders.

This transformation in U.S. policy mirrors findings in recent studies. (Jayaram & Munro, 2024) argue that U.S. foreign policy is increasingly focused on safeguarding national and strategic interests rather than advocating for the universal application of international law. Similarly, (Mercille, 2008) suggests that the U.S. selectively engages with international legal frameworks, only when they align with its broader geopolitical objectives. (Buzan, 2004) also emphasizes that power politics, rather than legal considerations, often drive U.S. actions, especially when international norms conflict with national security concerns.

In stark contrast, the European Union (EU) has consistently supported the ICC's decision to issue arrest warrants against Israeli leaders. Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, has repeatedly affirmed the legitimacy of the ICC, underscoring the EU's unwavering commitment to multilateralism and international law. This is echoed by Çolak (2021), who highlights the EU's steadfast support for the ICC, even in the face of opposition from certain member states, such as Hungary. (Sjursen, 2023) further emphasizes that the EU's support for global justice mechanisms positions it as a key advocate for international legal accountability. This commitment to multilateralism and the rules-based international order is a cornerstone of the EU's foreign policy.

The contrasting approaches of the U.S. and the EU underscore a growing division within the West. As noted by (Alsemeiri, Elsemeiri, Carroll, & Aljamal, 2024), this divide reflects a broader fracture within Western powers, with the U.S. adopting a more selective approach to international justice based on its national interests, while the EU remains dedicated to upholding global norms of accountability. (Groenleer, 2015) suggests that the U.S. and EU's divergent stances on the ICC are indicative of deeper geopolitical shifts, where the U.S. prioritizes power politics, and the EU seeks to maintain a stable, multilateral international order.

This growing and unexpected rift between the U.S. and the EU is more than a diplomatic disagreement. It signals a broader transformation in global power relations. (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & & Rahim, 2017) argue that the increasing divergence in foreign policy priorities between Western powers reflects the transition from a unipolar world dominated by the U.S. to a more multipolar global system. In this new system, regional powers like the EU, China, and Russia are asserting their influence, often challenging U.S. dominance. As a result, the ICC's role in global justice is becoming more complex, as it must navigate these competing interests in an ever-shifting geopolitical landscape.

This transformation is reminiscent of Antonio Gramsci's famous quote: "*The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born; now is the time of monsters.*" Gramsci's observation about the collapse of established systems and the emergence of new, often disruptive forces captures the essence of the current global order (Youvan, 2024). Just as Gramsci's words preceded the outbreak of World War II, the present geopolitical shifts—marked by the U.S.'s retreat from multilateralism and the EU's steadfast commitment to international law—may signal the dawn of a new and potentially tumultuous era. The growing division between the U.S. and the EU, along with the rise of regional powers, suggests that the world is on the cusp of a significant transformation, possibly leading to a new global conflict.

This evolving situation highlights a critical juncture in international relations, where the language of law is increasingly sidelined by the language of power. As the U.S. and EU navigate their diverging paths, the future of global governance and international justice remains uncertain, shaped by the competing priorities of major powers in an increasingly multipolar world.

8. Conclusion

This analysis underscores a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy, where power dynamics now overshadow adherence to international law, particularly in the case of the ICC's arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant. The U.S.'s selective approach to international law reveals its focus on national security and strategic interests, while the European Union remains committed to upholding international legal norms. This growing divide reflects broader geopolitical shifts, signaling the potential transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order. These changes indicate a collapse of the post-World War II international system, which was originally built on human rights and international law, highlighting the increasing challenges facing global governance and international legal frameworks. In response to the shift in U.S. foreign policy, several actions should be taken. First, it's important to examine how the rise of regional powers like the EU, China, and Russia is reshaping international law and governance. This will help adapt legal frameworks to new global dynamics. Second, addressing the selective application of international law by Western powers, especially the U.S., is crucial to restoring the legitimacy of global justice mechanisms like the ICC. Lastly, there is a need to reassess the decline of the post-WWII international system and explore new frameworks that can uphold human rights and international law. These actions will provide key insights into the future of global governance and legal systems.

9. Limitations

This analysis offers a nuanced comparison of U.S. and EU discourse on the ICC's arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant. Though, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, our data set was confined to official statements and mainstream media excerpts (primarily Reuters) along with a selection of YouTube clips. This reliance on publicly archived statements may omit informal or behind-the-scenes diplomatic communications that could shed further light on decision-making processes. Second, the hybrid discourse framework (DHA, CDA, Sociocognitive) is inherently interpretive and contingent on the researchers' coding decisions. Although we employed established coding schemes and inter-coder checks, some degree of subjectivity in categorizing topoi or framing devices remains. Third, our temporal window—October 2023 through early 2025—captures only the initial phases of reaction; as the situation evolves, subsequent statements or policy shifts (for example, follow-up EU Council communiqués or U.S. Congressional hearings) may reveal additional or even contradictory discursive trends. Finally, we focused exclusively on two Western actors, thereby setting aside reactions from non-Western states, regional organizations, and civil society groups whose perspectives could nuance or contest our West-centric findings. Taken together, these constraints suggest that our conclusions about "power versus law" in Western responses should be viewed as a first step, rather than a definitive account.

10. Recommendations for further studies

Based on these limitations, we could suggest future research could address these gaps in some ways. Future research should broaden the analytical scope to encompass non-Western actors, such as Global South governments, the African Union, and Middle Eastern regional organizations and adopt a mixed-methods design that integrates corpus-based content analysis of official and social-media discourse with semi-structured interviews of diplomats and ICC practitioners. Moreover, applying the Discourse-Historical, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Sociocognitive framework to additional ICC cases such as the South Africa v. Israel ICJ referral, Ukraine warrants, and earlier African prosecutions will test the validity of the "power versus law" thesis across diverse geopolitical contexts and not only in the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. Complementary impact assessments linking identified discursive strategies to measurable outcomes (e.g., sanctions imposition, aid reallocation, treaty renegotiations) would furnish empirical evidence of the causal pathways through which international legal rhetoric influences state behaviour.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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