

# The A-Level Politics Example Bank

## 20 Examples for Global Politics

### What is the Example Bank?

The Example Bank is a collection of 20 examples that each cover multiple topic areas within Global Politics. More than half are drawn from events of the past three years, reflecting the rapid changes in global affairs since 2023. Every example has been chosen because it can be used in a wide range of questions rather than one topic area.

The goal is to learn 20 examples so well that you can use them in response to questions you have never seen before.

Each example appears in the Quick Reference Index showing which areas it fits. Before doing a question, scan the index, identify which examples are most relevant to the, and make sure you can use them analytically rather than just recounting what happened.

### How each entry is structured

What happened: the core event or episode with precise detail, key statistics, and dates.

How to use this analytically: four to six labelled points showing how to apply this example to different types of question.

Each point names the concept and explains the analytical move.

Use for: topic tags showing every question area this example can address.

### How to learn and use the bank

Learn one example per week. Read the entry, cover it, and reproduce the key facts and the analytical points from memory.

Then test yourself by asking: how would I use this in an essay on realism? On the UN? On sovereignty?

The strongest answers combine two examples that illuminate the same question from different angles. The pairings guide at the end of this bank shows which combinations produce the most powerful arguments.

**Knowing an example is not the same as knowing how to use it. The analytical points in each entry are as important as the factual content.**

## Quick Reference Index

No.	Example	Use for questions on...
01	Ukraine War: Hard Power, Sovereignty, & UN Failure (2022 to now)	Realism, hard power, UN Security Council, sovereignty, NATO, polarity, refugees
02	Gaza, UN Security Council Vetoes, and R2P (2023 to 2025)	UN, veto power, R2P, ICC, human rights, realism, North-South divide
03	Trump's Second Term: US Withdrawal from Global Institutions (2025)	US hegemony, realism, global governance, Paris Agreement, WHO, NATO, soft power
04	ICC Arrest Warrants: Putin and Netanyahu (2023 to 2024)	ICC, international law, sovereignty, human rights, double standards, R2P
05	NATO Enlargement: Finland and Sweden (2022 to 2024)	NATO, collective security, hard power, sovereignty, realism vs liberalism
06	COP29 Baku and the Climate Finance Deal (2024)	Climate governance, UNFCCC, North-South divide, sovereignty, multilateralism
07	The BRICS Expansion and the Shift to Multipolarity (2023 to 2024)	Polarity, multipolarity, BRICS, emerging powers, North-South divide, global governance
08	US-China Trade War and Tariff Escalation (2018 to 2025)	WTO, economic governance, realism vs liberalism, hard power, globalisation
09	China's Belt and Road Initiative (2013 to present)	Soft power, economic globalisation, emerging powers, North-South divide, dependency
10	COVID-19, the WHO, and Global Health Governance (2020 to 2022)	WHO, non-state actors, global governance, sovereignty, North-South divide
11	The Paris Agreement: Multilateralism and Its Limits (2015 to present)	Climate governance, sovereignty, North-South divide, multilateralism, non-state actors
12	Syria, R2P, and the Failure of Humanitarian Intervention (2011 to 2018)	R2P, UNSC, sovereignty, humanitarian intervention, realism, hard power, refugees
13	Amnesty International and Universal Human Rights (1961 to present)	NGOs, non-state actors, human rights, universalism, ICC, soft power
14	The Rohingya Genocide and the ICJ (2017 to 2023)	ICJ, Genocide Convention, sovereignty, R2P, human rights, UNSC, NGOs
15	IMF Structural Adjustment and the Global South Debt Crisis	IMF, economic governance, North-South divide, dependency theory, SAPs
16	China's Rise and the Decline of US Unipolarity (2000 to present)	Polarity, US hegemony, hard power, soft power, BRICS, emerging powers, realism
17	MSF and NGO Humanitarian Action in Conflict Zones	NGOs, non-state actors, humanitarian intervention, human rights, sovereignty
18	Brexit and the Limits of European Regionalism (2016 to 2020)	Regionalism, EU, sovereignty, economic globalisation, liberalism vs realism
19	The WTO, Doha Round, and Multilateral Trade (1995 to present)	WTO, economic governance, multilateralism, North-South divide, dependency theory
20	UNHCR and the Global Refugee Crisis (2015 to present)	UNHCR, refugees, sovereignty, human rights, NGOs, globalisation, North-South divide

## Topic Coverage Grid Y = this example is relevant

A = State and globalisation B = Global governance: political C = Global governance: economic D = Human rights  
E = Environmental F = Power and developments G = Regionalism and EU H = Theories (realism/liberalism)

No.	Example	State/Global	Gov:Political	Gov:Economic	Hum Rights	Environ	Power	Region/EU	Theories
01	Ukraine War	Y	Y				Y		Y
02	Gaza and UNSC		Y		Y				Y
03	Trump 2.0 Withdrawals	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y		Y
04	ICC Warrants				Y				Y
05	NATO Enlargement		Y				Y		Y
06	COP29 Baku					Y			Y
07	BRICS Expansion			Y			Y		Y
08	US-China Trade War			Y			Y		Y
09	China Belt and Road	Y		Y			Y		
10	COVID-19 and WHO	Y	Y	Y					Y
11	Paris Agreement	Y				Y			Y
12	Syria and R2P		Y		Y		Y		Y
13	Amnesty International				Y				
14	Rohingya and ICJ		Y		Y				
15	IMF and SAPs			Y					Y
16	China's Rise						Y		Y
17	MSF and NGOs				Y				
18	Brexit and EU	Y						Y	Y
19	WTO and Doha Round			Y					Y
20	UNHCR and Refugees	Y			Y				

## Example 01 Ukraine War: Hard Power, Sovereignty, and UN Failure (2022 to present)

### What happened

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, violating Ukrainian sovereignty and international law. Russia deployed over 150,000 troops in the initial assault. The UN Security Council attempted ceasefire resolutions but Russia vetoed them. The UN General Assembly passed a non-binding resolution condemning the invasion with 141 states in favour and only 5 opposed. Western states provided Ukraine with over \$200 billion in military and financial aid by 2024, but refused direct NATO military intervention. Over 6 million Ukrainian refugees fled abroad, creating the largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War Two. By 2025, the conflict had entered its third year with territorial lines largely frozen in eastern and southern Ukraine.

### How to use this analytically

**Hard power and realism:** Russia's action directly illustrates the realist argument that states use military force to advance national interests; the invasion confirms that hard power remains the ultimate arbiter of international disputes, challenging liberal faith in institutions.

**UN Security Council failure:** Russia's veto demonstrates the fundamental weakness of the P5 veto system: when a permanent member is the aggressor, the Security Council cannot fulfil its collective security mandate, as Morgenthau's realism would predict.

**Sovereignty and intervention:** The invasion is a direct violation of the UN Charter's prohibition on aggression; the debate about whether to intervene more directly tests the boundaries of state sovereignty and when international law justifies or requires intervention.

**Polarity and the world order:** The war has accelerated debate about the shift from US-led unipolarity to multipolarity: China's tacit support for Russia, BRICS reactions, and the Global South's refusal to sanction Russia illustrate the limits of Western hegemony.

**Realism vs liberalism:** Realists point to the war as confirmation that international anarchy forces states to rely on military power; liberals note that 141 states condemned the invasion and argue the rules-based order has shown more resilience than realists predicted.

**Use for:** Hard power   Realism vs liberalism   UN Security Council   Sovereignty   NATO   Polarity  
Collective security   Refugees

## Example 02 Gaza, UN Security Council Vetoes, and the Limits of R2P (2023 to 2025)

### What happened

Following Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023 that killed approximately 1,200 Israelis, Israel launched a military operation in Gaza that resulted in over 47,000 Palestinian deaths by early 2025 and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. The USA vetoed multiple UN Security Council resolutions calling for a ceasefire, blocking collective action. The International Court of Justice ruled in January 2024 that there was a plausible case for genocide and ordered provisional measures. The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Gallant in November 2024 for alleged war crimes. Over 140 states had recognised Palestinian statehood by 2024. The conflict exposed deep divisions between Western states and the Global South.

### How to use this analytically

**UN Security Council and veto:** US vetoes demonstrate how the P5 veto blocks action even against overwhelming global opinion, showing that collective security depends entirely on great power agreement: when a great power protects an ally, the UNSC is paralysed.

**R2P and double standards:** The international failure to intervene decisively illustrates the selective application of the Responsibility to Protect, supporting critics who argue R2P is applied to adversaries but not to Western allies, undermining its legitimacy.

**ICC effectiveness and limits:** Netanyahu's arrest warrant illustrates both the ICC's expanding normative reach and its enforcement gap: without a police force, the court depends on state cooperation, and powerful states simply ignore warrants that inconvenience them.

**North-South divide:** Near-universal condemnation by Global South states and the Arab world, contrasted with Western positions, illustrates the political divisions in global governance: international institutions reflect power, not just law.

**Realism vs liberalism:** The conflict shows how great power interests (US support for Israel) override liberal humanitarian norms in practice, supporting the realist argument that states act from interest rather than principle in international affairs.

**Use for:** UN Security Council    Veto power    R2P    ICC    Human rights    Realism    Sovereignty    North-South divide    ICJ

## Example 03 Trump's Second Term: US Withdrawal from Global Institutions (2025)

### What happened

On his first day back in office on 20 January 2025, Trump signed executive orders withdrawing the USA from the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization. He announced 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico and additional tariffs on China, threatening to exit the WTO's dispute settlement system. He threatened to withdraw from NATO if member states did not meet the 2 percent GDP defence spending target. The USA suspended most foreign aid programmes and withdrew from several UN bodies. Trump described his approach as America First, explicitly rejecting the post-1945 liberal international order. The withdrawals were the most significant single-term challenge to multilateral institutions since their creation.

### How to use this analytically

**US hegemony and the liberal order:** Trump's withdrawals represent the most fundamental challenge to the post-1945 rules-based order from within: the USA created the institutions it is now abandoning, showing that the liberal order depends on continued US commitment rather than its own internal logic.

**Realism in practice:** Trump's explicit adoption of realist foreign policy, prioritising national interest over multilateral obligation, provides a direct real-world illustration of realist theory in action at the level of the world's most powerful state.

**Global governance fragility:** The fact that one election can destabilise multiple global institutions simultaneously demonstrates how dependent global governance is on great power support: liberal institutionalists had not anticipated the principal architect becoming the principal obstacle.

**Climate governance:** The second US withdrawal from Paris illustrates how national sovereignty can undermine collective environmental action: sub-national actors such as US states like California must fill the federal gap, showing the role of non-state and sub-state actors.

**Soft power decline:** Trump's explicit rejection of soft power in favour of hard economic coercion has long-term implications for US global influence: allies question US reliability, shifting the balance of influence towards China and other powers.

**Use for:** US hegemony Realism vs liberalism Global governance Paris Agreement WHO NATO Soft power Polarity Sovereignty

## Example 04 ICC Arrest Warrants: Putin and Netanyahu (2023 to 2024)

### What happened

The ICC issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin in March 2023 for the alleged war crime of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children. In November 2024, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza. Neither Russia nor Israel recognise ICC jurisdiction. South Africa, as an ICC member state, faced legal questions about whether it would be obliged to arrest Putin if he visited. Several Western states expressed discomfort about the Netanyahu warrant before confirming their obligation to enforce it. The US, which is not an ICC member, criticised the Netanyahu warrant as unjustified.

### How to use this analytically

**International law and sovereignty:** The warrants demonstrate that international law now reaches sitting heads of government, but also that enforcement depends entirely on state cooperation: without a police force, the ICC cannot compel the arrest of leaders from non-member or powerful states.

**Double standards debate:** The contrast between Western support for the Putin warrant and discomfort with the Netanyahu warrant directly illustrates the accusation that international law is applied selectively, undermining its claimed universality.

**ICC effectiveness and limits:** The warrants show the ICC's normative reach as a deterrent and accountability mechanism while illustrating its practical limitations: enforcement depends on political will, which fluctuates with state interests.

**Universal human rights vs sovereignty:** The cases raise the fundamental question of whether human rights law can override sovereign immunity: realists argue great powers are effectively immune from international justice; liberals argue the warrants represent progress in accountability norms.

**Realism vs liberalism:** Realists argue the warrants are largely symbolic since powerful states face no real consequence; liberals argue they contribute to a developing norm of individual accountability that will, over time, constrain state behaviour.

**Use for:** ICC International law State sovereignty Human rights R2P Realism vs liberalism Double standards Accountability

## Example 05 NATO Enlargement: Finland and Sweden (2022 to 2024)

### What happened

Finland formally joined NATO on 4 April 2023, becoming its 31st member, and Sweden joined on 7 March 2024 as the 32nd member. Both countries had maintained decades of military non-alignment as a cornerstone of their foreign policy. The applications were triggered directly by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Finland shares an 830-mile border with Russia, making this the largest expansion of NATO's eastern frontier since the Cold War. Russia threatened military and political consequences. Turkey delayed Sweden's application over concerns about Swedish policy on Kurdish groups before approving it after bilateral negotiations. The enlargement doubled the length of NATO's direct border with Russia.

### How to use this analytically

**Collective security and realism:** Finland and Sweden's rapid pivot from neutrality to collective security shows that even liberal democracies respond to security threats in realist ways: when hard power is threatened, states seek alliances rather than relying on international norms.

**NATO post-Cold War relevance:** The enlargement demonstrates that NATO remains a vital hard power security alliance, directly challenging arguments made in the 1990s and 2000s that it had lost its strategic purpose after the Soviet Union dissolved.

**Russian miscalculation:** The enlargement is the precise opposite of Russia's stated strategic objective, illustrating how aggressive use of hard power can produce outcomes that reduce rather than increase national security: a key realist insight about the security dilemma.

**Sovereignty and security:** The decision illustrates how states trade some degree of sovereignty for collective security, pooling defence commitments in return for the deterrent effect of Article 5, showing sovereignty is a flexible concept in practice.

**Realism vs liberalism on alliances:** Realists see NATO as a power-balancing alliance against Russian power; liberals see it as an extension of a democratic security community: the enlargement provides evidence for both interpretations simultaneously.

**Use for:** NATO Collective security Hard power Sovereignty Realism vs liberalism US hegemony Polarity Security dilemma

## Example 06 COP29 Baku and the Climate Finance Deal (2024)

### What happened

The UN Climate Change Conference COP29 was held in Baku, Azerbaijan in November 2024. After two weeks of negotiations, developed countries agreed to provide 300 billion dollars per year in climate finance to developing nations by 2035. Developing countries led by India and the G77 had demanded 1 trillion dollars per year, arguing this was the minimum needed. The deal was widely condemned by developing nations as grossly inadequate. The IPCC's sixth assessment report found that current national commitments would lead to approximately 2.7 degrees Celsius of warming by 2100, well above the 1.5 degree target set in Paris. The anticipated US withdrawal from Paris under Trump further complicated the negotiations and reduced confidence in the framework.

### How to use this analytically

**Global governance and collective action:** COP29 illustrates both the achievement of multilateral governance (189 nations agreeing within a framework) and its fundamental weakness: commitments remain voluntary, targets are missed, and major emitters can exit with no legal consequence.

**North-South divide:** The gap between the 300 billion offered and the 1 trillion demanded illustrates the structural inequality in climate negotiations: poorer nations face the worst impacts and have the least capacity to adapt, yet are expected to accept the lowest level of support.

**Sovereignty as an obstacle:** The voluntary nature of nationally determined contributions demonstrates that state sovereignty is the principal constraint on effective global environmental governance: states cannot be compelled to cut emissions or provide finance.

**Realism vs liberalism:** Liberals point to the Paris-COP framework as evidence that multilateral cooperation on existential challenges is possible; realists argue the gap between commitments and action confirms states will always prioritise short-term national interest over collective long-term obligation.

**Non-state actors:** The role of NGOs including Greenpeace and Oxfam in COP29 negotiations illustrates how non-state actors can set the agenda and hold states to account, even without formal decision-making power.

**Use for:** Climate governance UNFCCC COP North-South divide Sovereignty Non-state actors Realism vs liberalism Environmental governance

## Example 07 The BRICS Expansion and the Shift to Multipolarity (2023 to 2024)

### What happened

At the BRICS summit in Johannesburg in August 2023, the bloc invited six new countries to join: Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Argentina. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE formally joined on 1 January 2024 (Argentina declined under its new government). Expanded BRICS collectively represents approximately 45 percent of the world's population and around 35 percent of global GDP by purchasing power parity. The bloc is led by China and Russia and its expansion is explicitly framed as a counterweight to Western dominance of institutions such as the G7, IMF, and World Bank. The BRICS New Development Bank had approved 32 billion dollars in loans by 2023. BRICS members began discussions about alternatives to dollar-denominated trade.

### How to use this analytically

**Polarity and multipolarity:** The BRICS expansion is the most significant institutional expression of the shift away from US-led unipolarity: nine major states, including the world's two most populous nations, have formally aligned outside Western-led governance structures.

**Emerging powers and institutional challenge:** BRICS represents a challenge to the G7/IMF/World Bank order, illustrating dependency theory arguments that Western-controlled institutions reflect and reinforce the interests of developed states at the expense of the developing world.

**China's soft power strategy:** China's use of BRICS and the New Development Bank as instruments of economic diplomacy is a direct challenge to US economic hegemony, illustrating how emerging powers use economic statecraft as soft power.

**Realism and power balancing:** From a realist perspective, BRICS represents states balancing against US power in the classic pattern described by balance-of-power theory; from a liberal perspective, it represents a fragmentation of the rules-based order.

**North-South divide and alternative governance:** BRICS includes major Global South states and positions itself as an alternative to the Western-dominated post-1945 order, giving developing nations a collective voice in shaping the terms of global governance.

**Use for:** Polarity Multipolarity Emerging powers BRICS North-South divide Global governance Soft power Realism vs liberalism US hegemony

## Example 08 US-China Trade War and Tariff Escalation (2018 to 2025)

### What happened

The US-China trade war began in 2018 when President Trump imposed tariffs of 25 percent on 34 billion dollars of Chinese goods. China retaliated with equivalent tariffs. By 2020, over 550 billion dollars of goods were subject to tariffs. Biden maintained Trump's tariffs and added restrictions on Chinese semiconductor exports (the 2022 CHIPS Act). Trump's return in 2025 saw tariffs escalate to 60 percent or more on a wide range of Chinese products. The USA effectively paralysed the WTO's appellate body by blocking new appointments from 2017 onwards. Despite the trade war, US-China trade reached 575 billion dollars in 2023, demonstrating the persistence of economic interdependence alongside strategic rivalry.

### How to use this analytically

**WTO and the limits of economic governance:** The US decision to impose tariffs outside WTO dispute settlement procedures, and then paralyse the appellate body, demonstrates how great powers can undermine multilateral economic governance when institutions no longer serve their interests.

**Realism and economic nationalism:** The trade war directly illustrates the realist argument that states prioritise national economic interest over the liberal ideal of free trade: when competition for strategic advantage becomes acute, economic interdependence does not prevent conflict.

**Interdependence and tension:** The fact that trade remained at 575 billion dollars despite the trade war challenges the simple liberal argument that interdependence prevents conflict: states can be simultaneously interdependent and strategically hostile.

**Technology as hard power:** Semiconductor export restrictions represent a new form of hard economic power, using technology leadership as a geopolitical weapon: a significant development in the concept of hard power beyond its traditional military definition.

**Hegemonic stability theory:** The US abandonment of its role as guarantor of free trade raises questions about whether the liberal economic order can survive without the hegemonic power that created and sustained it, supporting hegemonic stability theory.

**Use for:** WTO Economic governance Realism vs liberalism US hegemony Hard power Economic globalisation North-South divide Multipolarity

## Example 09 China's Belt and Road Initiative (2013 to present)

### What happened

China launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, a global infrastructure investment programme covering over 140 countries by 2023. Total BRI investment exceeded 1 trillion dollars by 2023, covering ports, railways, roads, and pipelines across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Critics accused China of debt-trap diplomacy, pointing to Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, leased to China in 2017 after Sri Lanka could not service its debt. Italy withdrew from BRI membership in 2023, the only G7 state to have joined. The G7 launched a rival Global Gateway initiative in 2021, pledging 600 billion dollars in infrastructure investment by 2027. The BRI has become a central instrument of Chinese foreign policy and soft power projection.

### How to use this analytically

**Soft power and economic statecraft:** The BRI is China's primary instrument for building global influence through economic investment, showing how economic power functions as soft power: recipient states develop political and commercial ties that align their interests with China's.

**Dependency theory:** Critics argue the BRI creates new patterns of economic dependence on China, reproducing at a global scale the dynamics described by dependency theory: poorer states gain infrastructure but at the cost of long-term financial and political dependency.

**Emerging power challenging Western order:** BRI directly challenges the World Bank and IMF development finance model, creating an alternative institutional track outside the Bretton Woods system and demonstrating the resources available to an emerging superpower.

**North-South divide:** BRI targets developing nations across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, filling a genuine infrastructure gap that Western institutions have not addressed and building Chinese influence in exactly the regions where the North-South divide is most acute.

**Liberal vs realist interpretations:** Liberals see BRI as building the economic interdependence that reduces conflict; realists see it as strategic power projection by a rival superpower disguised as development cooperation.

**Use for:** Soft power China Economic globalisation North-South divide Emerging powers Multipolarity Dependency theory IMF and World Bank

## Example 10 COVID-19, the WHO, and Global Health Governance (2020 to 2022)

### What happened

COVID-19, declared a pandemic by the WHO on 11 March 2020, killed over 7 million people officially, with estimates of 15 to 20 million excess deaths globally. The WHO's initial response was criticised for being too deferential to China in the early stages, delaying the pandemic declaration. President Trump announced US withdrawal from the WHO in July 2020, citing Chinese influence; Biden rejoined in January 2021. The COVAX facility, designed to ensure equitable vaccine distribution to developing countries, distributed 2 billion doses by end of 2022 but failed to close the gap with wealthy nations. Vaccine nationalism saw wealthy states secure surplus supplies while low-income countries waited months or years for access.

### How to use this analytically

**IGOs and global governance limits:** The WHO's performance illustrates the tension between its mandate to coordinate global health responses and its inability to compel state compliance: when states act in national self-interest, even a global health emergency cannot override sovereignty.

**Non-state actors:** Pharmaceutical companies (Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna) were critical non-state actors in the global response, raising fundamental questions about the role of private for-profit actors in the provision of global public goods.

**Sovereignty vs global governance:** Vaccine nationalism demonstrated that states prioritise national populations even during a global emergency where cooperation would have been more efficient overall, directly illustrating the realist argument about state self-interest.

**North-South divide:** COVAX's failure to achieve equitable vaccine distribution reproduced the North-South divide in acute form: wealthy states could afford to buy their way to the front of the queue while developing nations waited.

**Realism vs liberalism:** The pandemic illustrated both the necessity and the difficulty of global cooperation: liberals point to the eventual development and sharing of vaccines; realists point to vaccine nationalism as confirmation that states act from interest, not solidarity.

**Use for:** WHO Non-state actors Global governance Sovereignty North-South divide Globalisation Realism vs liberalism IGOs

## Example 11 The Paris Agreement: Multilateralism and Its Limits (2015 to present)

### What happened

The Paris Agreement was adopted at COP21 in December 2015 by 196 parties, setting a target of limiting global warming to 1.5 to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. States submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that are voluntary and not legally binding. The USA signed under Obama, withdrew under Trump in 2017, rejoined under Biden in 2021, and withdrew again under Trump in 2025. The IPCC's sixth assessment report found that current NDCs put the world on track for 2.7 degrees of warming. The Green Climate Fund aimed at 100 billion dollars per year by 2020 for developing nations, a target not met until 2022. Paris remains the most ambitious multilateral climate framework ever agreed.

### How to use this analytically

**Liberal multilateralism:** Paris represents the highest achievement of multilateral environmental governance, involving virtually every state and establishing a framework for collective action on climate: a liberal internationalist achievement of the first order.

**Sovereignty as an obstacle:** The voluntary nature of NDCs is not a design flaw but a political necessity: binding targets would have prevented key states from signing. It illustrates that effective global governance requires sovereign states to consent, limiting what can be achieved.

**Climate justice and North-South divide:** The 100 billion dollar climate finance commitment, long delayed, reflects the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities: developed states caused the problem and must fund adaptation in developing states.

**Non-state actors and sub-national actors:** Paris shows both the necessity of state agreement and the role of cities, businesses, and NGOs in driving ambition beyond national commitments: when the US federal government withdrew, Californian policy and US cities maintained significant domestic action.

**Realism vs liberalism:** Realists argue voluntary frameworks without enforcement will always produce inadequate action because states free-ride; liberals argue Paris has catalysed unprecedented investment in renewable energy and normative change that realism alone cannot explain.

**Use for:** Paris Agreement UNFCCC Climate governance Sovereignty North-South divide Multilateralism Non-state actors Realism vs liberalism

## Example 12 Syria, R2P, and the Failure of Humanitarian Intervention (2011 to 2018)

### What happened

Syria's civil war began in 2011 with protests against Assad's government. Over 500,000 people were killed and 5 million fled as refugees by 2018. The Assad regime used chemical weapons confirmed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, including the Ghouta attack in 2013 that killed approximately 1,400 people. Russia and China vetoed multiple UN Security Council resolutions that would have authorised action. The USA, UK, and France conducted limited airstrikes in 2017 and 2018 without UN authorisation. Russia intervened militarily in support of Assad from 2015. Syria represented the most significant failure of the Responsibility to Protect since its adoption at the 2005 World Summit.

### How to use this analytically

**R2P and its limits:** Syria is the defining case study for R2P failure: mass atrocities including chemical weapons attacks met with no effective international response because great power interests (Russian support for Assad) blocked UN action.

**Sovereignty as a shield:** Russia's use of sovereignty and non-interference arguments to protect Assad demonstrates how the norm of non-intervention can be exploited to prevent accountability: sovereignty serves as both a principle and a political tool.

**Realism on intervention:** The failure to act in Syria supports the realist argument that states will not sacrifice national interests for humanitarian principles; Russia's intervention demonstrates states act for strategic reasons (naval bases, regional influence) rather than humanitarian ones.

**Hard power and proxy conflict:** Syria became a proxy conflict with Russia, Iran, Turkey, Turkey, and the USA all pursuing national interests, illustrating that in anarchic systems, humanitarian crises become theatres of great power competition.

**UNSC reform argument:** Syria strengthened the case for Security Council reform by demonstrating concretely how the P5 veto allows permanent members to shield allies from accountability, preventing the UN from fulfilling its stated humanitarian mandate.

**Use for:** R2P UN Security Council Veto power Sovereignty Humanitarian intervention  
Realism vs liberalism Hard power Refugees

## Example 13 Amnesty International and the Campaign for Universal Human Rights (1961 to present)

### What happened

Amnesty International was founded in 1961 by British lawyer Peter Benenson. By 2023, AI had over 10 million members in 150 countries and an annual budget exceeding 400 million euros. AI has documented war crimes in Ukraine (providing detailed evidence used by the ICC), described Israeli treatment of Palestinians as apartheid in 2022, documented China's treatment of the Uyghur minority, and campaigned on the death penalty in the USA. AI played a key role in advocacy that contributed to the creation of the ICC in 1998. Its campaigns have contributed to the release of hundreds of prisoners of conscience and changes to domestic law in multiple countries. AI operates on the principle that human rights are universal, indivisible, and applicable to all states regardless of political system.

### How to use this analytically

**NGOs and global governance:** AI illustrates how NGOs can shape global human rights norms through documentation, advocacy, and lobbying, exercising significant influence without any formal state power: a primary example of how non-state actors operate in the international system.

**Universal vs cultural relativism:** AI's universalist position (one standard for all states) is contested by governments that argue human rights norms are culturally specific or represent Western imperialism: the tension between universalism and relativism runs through all AI's work.

**Non-state actors bridging civil society and law:** AI's documentation of atrocities in Ukraine and Gaza has been used directly by the ICC and ICJ, showing how NGOs provide the evidentiary base that formal institutions need but cannot produce through their own means.

**Soft power and norm diffusion:** AI has contributed to embedding human rights norms in international law over six decades, illustrating how NGOs exercise normative soft power that gradually shapes the behaviour even of states that resist it.

**Limits of NGO influence:** Despite AI's decades of work, abuses it documents continue in Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, illustrating that NGO influence is real but limited: states can document, publicise, and shame, but not compel.

**Use for:** NGOs Non-state actors Human rights Universalism ICC Soft power Realism vs liberalism Global civil society

## Example 14 The Rohingya Genocide and the ICJ (2017 to 2023)

### What happened

Myanmar's military conducted a mass killing campaign against the Rohingya Muslim minority in 2017, driving over 700,000 people to Bangladesh. The UN described it as a textbook example of ethnic cleansing; estimates put the death toll at over 10,000 in the initial weeks. Gambia brought a case to the ICJ in 2019 under the Genocide Convention. In 2020, the ICJ issued provisional measures requiring Myanmar to protect the Rohingya. Myanmar's military coup in February 2021 further complicated international responses. China and Russia blocked Security Council action. By 2023, the ICJ case continued, with Myanmar's military government refusing to cooperate. Over 1 million Rohingya remained in refugee camps in Bangladesh by 2024.

### How to use this analytically

**ICJ and international law:** The case illustrates both the existence of mechanisms to address genocide and their severe enforcement limitations: the ICJ can issue binding provisional measures but has no means of compelling compliance from a state that refuses to cooperate.

**Sovereignty vs human rights:** Myanmar claimed non-interference in internal affairs; the ICJ's jurisdiction asserted the primacy of the Genocide Convention over sovereignty arguments, representing a significant but contested development in international human rights law.

**R2P selectivity:** The international community's failure to prevent the atrocities illustrates the selective application of R2P: where Chinese interests in Myanmar were at stake, collective action was blocked, showing that R2P is applied strategically, not consistently.

**UNSC failure:** China and Russia's block on Security Council action demonstrates that geopolitical interests determine when collective security functions: Myanmar's close relationship with China provided effective immunity from UNSC response.

**NGOs and documentation:** Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and UNHCR provided the documentation that formed the basis of the ICJ case, showing how NGOs are indispensable to international legal proceedings even though they cannot themselves bring cases.

**Use for:** ICJ Genocide Convention Sovereignty R2P Human rights UN Security Council NGOs International law Refugees

## Example 15 IMF Structural Adjustment and the Global South Debt Crisis

### What happened

The IMF's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), implemented across Africa, Latin America, and Asia from the 1980s, required recipient countries to liberalise trade, privatise state assets, cut public spending, and deregulate in exchange for loans. Studies documented increased infant mortality and reduced access to education and healthcare in SAP countries. By 2023, 60 percent of the world's poorest countries were in debt distress. Zambia defaulted on its debt in 2020, the first African nation to do so in decades; Sri Lanka faced economic collapse in 2022. The IMF's governance structure gives the USA an effective veto, holding 16.5 percent of voting rights against a blocking threshold of over 15 percent. Calls for IMF reform have grown from developing nations and NGOs.

### How to use this analytically

**Economic governance and North-South divide:** The IMF's SAP history is the central case for the argument that global economic governance reflects and reinforces the interests of developed countries: the conditions attached to loans require developing states to adopt economic models that serve creditor, not debtor, interests.

**Dependency theory:** SAPs are cited by dependency theorists as evidence that international economic institutions perpetuate structural dependence of developing nations: rather than enabling development, they lock poor states into commodity export models that benefit wealthier economies.

**IMF reform debate:** The USA's effective veto and the dominance of Western interests in IMF governance is the central argument for structural reform; the BRICS New Development Bank was created partly as a response to this structural bias.

**Realism vs liberalism on economic governance:** Liberals argue the IMF provides essential financial stability and access to capital; realists and structuralists argue it enforces a power structure that serves Northern interests and restrains Southern development.

**NGO critique and advocacy:** Oxfam, Jubilee Debt Campaign, and other NGOs have been central to campaigning for debt relief and IMF reform, securing the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) initiative in 1996 and continued advocacy for reform.

**Use for:** IMF Economic governance North-South divide Dependency theory Structural Adjustment Non-state actors Globalisation Sovereignty

## Example 16 China's Rise and the Decline of US Unipolarity (2000 to present)

### What happened

China's GDP grew from 1.2 trillion dollars in 2000 to approximately 18 trillion dollars in 2023, making it the world's second-largest economy. China overtook the USA in manufacturing output in 2010 and has become the largest trading partner of over 120 countries. China's military budget grew to 225 billion dollars in 2023 (second only to the USA's 858 billion). Xi Jinping, in power since 2013, pursued an assertive foreign policy including militarisation of the South China Sea, pressure on Taiwan, and the BRI. The USA's share of global GDP fell from approximately 31 percent in 2000 to around 25 percent in 2023. China launched the BRICS development bank, the BRI, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as alternatives to Western-dominated development finance.

### How to use this analytically

**Polarity and unipolarity in decline:** China's rise is the central evidence for the argument that the post-Cold War unipolar moment is ending: no other development in global politics better illustrates the shift from US-led unipolarity to a more contested multipolar order.

**Hard and soft power combined:** China combines growing military hard power with economic soft power through the BRI, the AIIB, and trade relationships, mirroring the strategy the USA used to build its hegemony: a state can project influence through both simultaneously.

**Power transition theory and realism:** Realists predict conflict as a rising power challenges a dominant one (the Thucydides Trap identified by Graham Allison); liberals argue economic interdependence can manage the transition if institutions adapt to accommodate China's legitimate interests.

**Democratic vs non-democratic power:** China demonstrates that economic success and global power do not require liberal democratic governance, challenging the liberal argument about the democratic peace and the assumed link between development and democratisation.

**Emerging powers and governance reform:** China uses its growing power to demand reform of institutions like the IMF and WTO, which were designed by and for Western interests, illustrating how shifts in material power eventually translate into demands for institutional change.

**Use for:** Polarity Multipolarity US hegemony Hard power Soft power BRICS  
Emerging powers Realism vs liberalism Democratic peace

## Example 17 MSF and NGO Humanitarian Action in Conflict Zones

### What happened

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), founded in 1971, operates in over 70 countries providing emergency medical care in conflict zones and disease outbreaks. Its annual budget in 2023 was approximately 2 billion euros, with 96 percent from private donations to maintain independence. In 2015, a US airstrike destroyed MSF's hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killing 42 people; MSF called it a war crime and demanded an independent international investigation. In Gaza from 2023, MSF had to suspend operations multiple times due to strikes on hospitals and declared it had never witnessed such systematic targeting of healthcare in its history. In Yemen, MSF operated throughout a decade of conflict. MSF's refusal of government funding is a deliberate choice to protect its ability to criticise all parties, including Western governments.

### How to use this analytically

**NGO independence and humanitarian principles:** MSF's refusal of government funding and insistence on independence illustrates the model of a non-state actor that maintains legitimacy by operating outside state interests: its credibility as a critic depends on its financial independence.

**Non-state actors and sovereignty:** MSF's operations in conflict zones raise questions about sovereignty and the right of NGOs to operate without host government consent: the humanitarian principle of access asserts a claim against state sovereignty that is contested but increasingly accepted.

**Humanitarian law and accountability:** The Kunduz airstrike and attacks on MSF facilities in Gaza illustrate how international humanitarian law is violated even by states with sophisticated legal systems, and how NGOs can hold states to account in the court of public opinion.

**Hard power and civilian harm:** Attacks on MSF facilities illustrate the tension between military objectives and the laws of war, raising questions about whether international humanitarian law provides meaningful protection in practice or only in theory.

**NGOs as agenda-setters:** MSF's public denunciations of abuses by all parties, including the USA and Israel, illustrate how NGOs can set the agenda and force accountability discussions that states would prefer to avoid, exercising real influence without formal power.

**Use for:** NGOs Non-state actors Humanitarian intervention Human rights Sovereignty  
Hard power International law R2P

## Example 18 Brexit and the Limits of European Regionalism (2016 to 2020)

### What happened

The UK voted to leave the EU on 23 June 2016 with 51.9 percent for Leave. The UK formally left the EU on 31 January 2020, the first state ever to exit the bloc. Brexit required the UK to leave the single market and customs union. By 2023, estimates suggested UK trade with the EU had fallen by approximately 15 percent relative to counterfactual projections. The EU remained one of the world's largest trading blocs with a GDP of over 17 trillion euros and 27 member states in 2024. Brexit was substantially driven by sovereignty concerns: the argument that EU membership required pooling too much authority with supranational institutions. The EU continued to develop after Brexit, with new post-COVID recovery fund mechanisms and expanded qualified majority voting.

### How to use this analytically

**Regionalism and sovereignty:** Brexit is the defining modern case study for the tension between regional integration and state sovereignty: it demonstrates that even highly developed, economically beneficial integration creates political backlash when citizens feel sovereignty has been pooled too far.

**Liberal vs realist views on regionalism:** Liberals argue regional organisations create stability and prosperity through complex interdependence; the Brexit vote and subsequent trade data both illustrate realist arguments about the primacy of national sovereignty and the economic costs when states reassert it.

**Economic costs of de-globalisation:** Post-Brexit trade data showing a 15 percent decline relative to trend illustrates the economic cost of withdrawing from regional integration, providing strong empirical support for the liberal argument about the benefits of interdependence.

**Limits of neo-functionalism:** Brexit tests the neo-functionalist theory that economic integration inevitably deepens political integration (the "spillover" effect), showing that political resistance can reverse integration and that functional logic does not automatically override political will.

**EU as a model for global governance:** The EU remains the most advanced example of sovereignty pooling and regional governance: its structures (single market, common currency, common foreign policy) provide a model against which liberal arguments about supranational governance can be assessed.

**Use for:** Regionalism EU Sovereignty Economic globalisation Liberalism vs realism  
Nation-state Interdependence Global governance

## Example 19 The WTO, Doha Round, and the Limits of Multilateral Trade (1995 to present)

### What happened

The WTO was established in 1995, covering 164 member states and regulating the majority of world trade. The Doha Development Round, launched in 2001 to improve trading prospects for developing countries, collapsed in 2008 after developed nations refused to reduce agricultural subsidies and developing nations rejected proposed liberalisation terms. The WTO's appellate body, which hears trade disputes, was effectively paralysed from 2017 when the USA blocked new appointments, creating a backlog of unresolved cases. The US-China trade war saw both sides impose tariffs in violation of WTO principles with limited effective response. By 2023, the WTO dispute settlement backlog had grown substantially and the organisation's authority was in question.

### How to use this analytically

**Economic governance and North-South divide:** The Doha failure illustrates the fundamental tension between developed countries (protecting agricultural subsidies worth hundreds of billions of dollars annually) and developing countries (seeking market access): global economic governance cannot resolve this structural conflict of interest.

**Multilateralism under pressure:** The WTO's paralysis shows how great power withdrawal (US blockade of the appellate body) can disable multilateral institutions: the organisation functions only as long as the most powerful members choose to be constrained by its rules.

**Sovereignty vs global economic law:** The WTO's inability to enforce its dispute rulings against the USA demonstrates that sovereignty ultimately limits the reach of international economic law: powerful states can violate rules if the cost of compliance exceeds the cost of defection.

**Dependency theory and trade:** The Doha failure supports dependency theory: developing countries could not obtain fair terms because the negotiating structure reflected the power of developed states, confirming that institutions designed by the powerful serve the powerful.

**Realism vs liberalism:** Liberals argue the WTO has facilitated unprecedented growth in global trade since 1995; realists argue the trade war shows states use institutions instrumentally and abandon them when national interest dictates.

**Use for:** WTO Economic governance Multilateralism North-South divide Dependency theory Sovereignty Realism vs liberalism US hegemony

## Example 20 UNHCR and the Global Refugee Crisis (2015 to present)

### What happened

The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide reached 117 million by the end of 2023, the highest ever recorded by UNHCR. The Syrian refugee crisis drove over 1 million people to Europe in 2015. The Ukraine conflict added 6 million refugees from 2022. Afghanistan generated 6.1 million refugees. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines refugee status but enforcement is non-binding. UNHCR had a budget of 10.7 billion dollars in 2022 but faced a gap of several billion dollars. The EU's response in 2015 exposed deep divisions, with Hungary building a border fence and Germany accepting over 1 million refugees. Turkey hosted 3.6 million refugees, Iran 3.4 million, and Pakistan 1.7 million, demonstrating that the burden falls primarily on developing nations.

### How to use this analytically

**Sovereignty vs humanitarian obligation:** The refugee crisis illustrates the fundamental tension between the sovereign right to control borders and legal obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention: states assert sovereignty to close borders while the Convention asserts non-refoulement as an absolute obligation.

**Non-state actors and protection:** UNHCR, MSF, and NGOs were often more effective than states in providing immediate protection, illustrating both the indispensability of non-state actors and their fundamental limits: they depend on state permission to operate.

**Globalisation and migration:** Mass displacement illustrates how conflicts and climate change produce cross-border flows that states cannot fully control: a direct challenge to the realist model of absolute sovereignty and a confirmation of the liberal argument about growing interdependence.

**North-South divide in burden-sharing:** Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan host more refugees than the entire EU combined, yet the political debate focuses on flows to Europe: the crisis illustrates how the North-South divide shapes not just economic governance but the allocation of humanitarian responsibility.

**Realism vs liberalism on migration:** Realists argue states will always prioritise national interest and border control over international obligation; liberals argue the scale of displacement requires burden-sharing based on capacity to absorb, not proximity to conflict.

**Use for:** UNHCR Refugees Sovereignty Human rights NGOs Globalisation North-South divide Realism vs liberalism Humanitarian intervention

## Using the Bank in Essays

### Knowing an example is not the same as knowing how to use it.

This section shows the difference and provides the pairing guide for combining examples for maximum analytical impact.

## Worked Example: The Ukraine War in Three Different Essays

### Q: Evaluate the view that realism better explains state behaviour since 2000 than liberalism. [30]

**Use for realism:** Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine is the most powerful recent evidence for the realist argument. Motivated by national security concerns (NATO expansion) and the desire to reassert regional dominance, Russia used hard military power despite the near-certainty of international condemnation. The realist would note that 141 UN votes condemning the invasion had zero effect on Russian behaviour: states respond to power, not norms. The invasion confirms Morgenthau's claim that states act to maximise power and security in an anarchic system.

**Use against realism / for liberalism:** The counterpoint is that 141 states voted to condemn Russia, a coalition that imposed unprecedented sanctions and provided over 200 billion dollars to Ukraine. Liberals would argue this shows the international community retaining unity even under pressure. The fact Russia has failed to achieve its objectives after three years might suggest that the international rules-based order has proved more resilient than realism predicted.

### Q: Examine the role and effectiveness of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security. [12]

**Use for UN failure:** The Ukraine war is the clearest modern evidence for UN ineffectiveness. Russia's veto blocked all Security Council ceasefire resolutions, demonstrating that collective security is structurally impossible when an aggressor state holds a permanent veto. The UN Charter's prohibition on aggression (Article 2(4)) was violated without consequence, confirming the realist argument that the UN cannot enforce its own rules against great powers.

**Qualifying argument:** The General Assembly's 141-5 vote and the UN's role coordinating humanitarian response shows the organisation retains legitimacy and some capacity to act. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission has documented war crimes and its reports have been used in ICC proceedings, showing the UN system as a whole functions even when the Security Council does not.

## Most Productive Example Pairings

Pair	Examples	What this argument enables
01 + 02	Ukraine War and Gaza	Both show the UNSC veto blocking collective security but in different configurations (Russia vetoing on Ukraine, US vetoing on Gaza). Together they show P5 veto abuse is systemic, not exceptional, and that R2P fails whenever great power interests are involved.
03 + 07	Trump withdrawals and BRICS expansion	Both demonstrate the same shift from different directions: the USA retreating from the liberal international order it built, while China and the Global South build alternative institutions. Together they make the multipolarity argument at its most powerful.
06 + 11	COP29 and Paris Agreement	COP29 is the latest iteration of what Paris set in motion. Together they show the trajectory of climate governance: significant multilateral achievement but systematic failure to match ambition with action. The gap between the 1.5 degree target and 2.7 degree trajectory is the core analytical point.
09 + 15	China BRI and IMF SAPs	Both are models of development finance with dependency implications. Using them together allows analysis of whether Chinese lending through BRI reproduces the dependency patterns of IMF SAPs or offers a genuinely different model of development partnership.
12 + 14	Syria and Rohingya	Both are failures of R2P where great power interests (Russia and China respectively) blocked UNSC action. Together they make the argument that R2P is not a reliable norm but a selective political tool: used when there is no great power objection, ignored when there is.
13 + 17	Amnesty International and MSF	Two different NGO models: AI works through documentation, advocacy, and norm diffusion; MSF works through direct humanitarian action. Together they illustrate the full range of non-state actor activity and the different ways NGOs exercise influence in global politics.
08 + 19	US-China trade war and WTO/Doha	Both show the failure of liberal economic governance through US unilateralism: the Doha failure showed multilateral trade rules could not overcome great power interests; the trade war showed the USA actively bypassing WTO rules. Together they make the realist argument about economic governance compellingly.

The goal is not to have a different example for every question. The goal is to know 20 examples so well that you can bring any of them to bear on any question, adjusting the analytical angle to fit. A student who truly knows these 20 examples can answer every question that has ever appeared on Global Politics with confidence.