

Milestone I:  
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

ILyea Shanz  
PS690-T301 Democracy, Gender, & Reform Ac (2255-1)  
April 04, 2025

*Legal Challenges to Israeli Settlements in the West Bank: International Law,  
Geopolitics, and the Failure of Enforcement*

***Proposed Topic and Justification***

For my term paper, I intend to examine the legal challenges posed by Israeli settlements in the West Bank and assess why international legal mechanisms have largely failed to produce meaningful enforcement or policy change. The core research question guiding this study is: *To what extent do Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank violate international law, and why have legal challenges failed to alter the situation on the ground?* I hypothesize that although the settlements violate international humanitarian law—specifically Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant UN Security Council resolutions—the absence of robust enforcement mechanisms, combined with geopolitical protections from powerful states such as the United States, has rendered these legal challenges largely symbolic.

This topic interests me because it presents a well-defined and legally grounded aspect of one of the most enduring and contentious conflicts in modern geopolitics. It is a manageable and focused topic that allows for critical analysis of international law, case law, United Nations documents, and scholarly legal commentary. Rather than surveying the entirety of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I will narrow the scope to a legal analysis of settlements in the West Bank, with particular attention to their expansion post-1967, their treatment under the ICJ Advisory Opinion (2004), and the repeated—but largely ineffectual—efforts by the United Nations and other international actors to challenge their legality.

I plan to support my analysis using a range of sources, including international legal documents (such as the Geneva Conventions and ICJ rulings), UN Security Council resolutions, and academic publications by legal scholars and international relations experts. The paper will not

only assess whether the settlements violate international norms but also explore how power politics have influenced the effectiveness of legal mechanisms in addressing such violations. This approach will allow me to move beyond a descriptive summary of the conflict and instead critically evaluate the structural limitations of international law in contested zones of sovereignty.