

PALESTINE/ISRAEL UN RESOLUTIONS CORPUS (PIURC): DESIGN AND PILOT STUDY OF DISCOURSE PATTERNS

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Abstract: *This paper introduces the Palestine/Israel United Nations Resolution Corpus (PIURC), a data set comprising UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions related to the Palestine/Israel conflict. The corpus provides a valuable resource for analysing the role of the UN in shaping the discourse around this conflict. The paper details the data selection process, limitations, and potential extensions of the corpus. It demonstrates how standard corpus linguistic and text analysis methods, including the analysis of word frequency and text dispersion, can reveal key patterns such as lexical frequencies and thematic variations, offering insights into the evolving discourse on human rights and geopolitical issues. The PIURC enables future interdisciplinary research, contributing to a deeper understanding of the United Nations' role in the Palestine/Israel conflict and its broader implications. Potential extensions to the corpus include incorporating resolutions from Special and Emergency Sessions of the General Assembly, as well as texts in languages other than English. These additions would enhance the data set's comprehensiveness, further supporting nuanced analyses of the UN's discourse and decision-making processes in this and other geopolitical contexts.*

Keywords: Palestine-Israel conflict; international law; corpus linguistics; word frequency; discourse patterns.



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1 Introduction

The Palestine-Israel conflict has endured over nearly 80 years, and the current war in Gaza has put this conflict on an even more lethal scale. Across the history of this conflict, the United Nations has played a crucial role. Israel was brought into being through a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in November 1947 (A/RES/181(II)A-B), which recommended the creation of two separate states out of the territory of Mandatory Palestine. Over the following decades, the General Assembly of the United Nations in its regular sessions would pass 671 resolutions specifically about this conflict, while the Security Council would pass 75 resolutions. This body of resolutions is a unique set of documents that offer a window into mechanisms of international law that have shaped the modern history of Israel and Palestine and the ongoing violence associated with this territory.

While international law has shaped the history of Israel and Palestine and this conflict, new research argues that at the same time, this conflict has had a significant influence on shaping international law. In a recent book on the history of two 20th-century conflicts – Palestine-Israel and the Vietnam War – it has been argued that the violence of this conflict should be seen as not simply an exception to the ‘intended legal order of 1945’ (Falk 2023: ix). Instead, it has been a ‘source of new norms of international law’ (Falk 2023: ix). As such, the Palestine-Israel conflict is a significant ongoing conflict in the context of the shaping and application of international law, and UN Resolutions on this conflict have played a central role in the history and interpretation of this conflict.

In addition, as a form of international engagement with a geopolitical event, UN resolutions arguably do more than attempt to change the course of some international conflict. Von Billerbeck (2020: 477) argues that ‘numerous studies show how institutions of global governance use discourse to generate legitimacy for themselves and their actions by communicating and projecting their relevance, effectiveness, and appropriateness’. In other words, the resolutions should be examined not only in terms of the conflict’s geographic context but also for their broader discursive effects, particularly as ‘a form of institutional self-legitimation that is key to its ability to function’ (ibid: 478).

Building on the understanding of the broader discursive effects of UN resolutions, the specific case of the Palestine/Israel conflict demonstrates how such resolutions not only shape international discourse but also provide a substantial body of text ripe for detailed examination. Collaborations between the fields of law and linguistics, including corpus linguistics, have increased in recent years (Solum, 2017; Goldfarb, 2017; Phillips and Egbert, 2017; Solan, 2020; Mouritsen, 2017). These developments include the use of established corpora to consider or resolve legal questions, as well as the creation of corpora of specifically legal documents, such as the corpus of US Supreme Court Opinions, a corpus of State Conventions on the Adoption of the US Constitution, corpora of US case law and early statutes, and a new Corpus of US State Statutes (Egbert and Wood, 2023). The development of an open accessible corpus of UN resolutions on the Palestine/Israel corpus offers a new resource for a variety of disciplines interested in examining the role of the UN concerning this conflict, as well as the potential discursive effects of the way this conflict has been constructed through these resolutions.

A corpus of UN resolutions on the Palestine/Israel conflict was initially assembled to explore how terms related to the body of international law regulating armed conflict—such as ‘law of war,’ ‘law of armed conflict,’ and ‘international humanitarian law’—have influenced state practices, particularly through the passing of UN Resolutions (Crawford, Lukin, and Mowbray, 2023). This conflict was chosen as the case study for its longevity through the period since the end of World War II. But this data set has much more to offer. In this paper, we present this

corpus, detailing the decisions made in its creation, the processes required to show a fully ‘cleaned’ and accessible data set, and some initial examples of how researchers can explore this data set. We will refer to this data set as the Palestine/Israel UN Resolutions Corpus, or PIURC.

2 Methods

2.1 Description of the Corpus

The Palestine/Israel United Resolutions Corpus (PIURC) consists of all resolutions related to the Palestine/Israel conflict since the 1947 General Assembly resolution recommending the partition of Mandatory Palestine.

The unity of the corpus is derived from its registerial consistency (Halliday and Hasan 1985): that is, all texts are formal resolutions from the two UN Chambers, which have the functional role of affirming and recording a deliberative consensus by these bodies. At the same time, these two Chambers are differently organized: the Security Council has ‘primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security’ (Article 24, UN Charter), while the General Assembly ‘may consider general principles of cooperation in ...’ or ‘may discuss any questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security’ (Article 11). Given their different briefs and functions, their resolutions play distinct roles within the political ecosystem of the United Nations.

Table 1 presents an overview of the corpus, including the number of texts, number of tokens, and average word per text. Token counts are based on the tokenization parameters of AntConc (Anthony, 2024), which excludes punctuation from token counts (cf. Brezina and Timperley (2017) for a discussion of variable tokenization models).

Table 1: Overview of PIURC.

	General Assembly	Security Council
No of texts	671	75
Tokens	651,027	21,955
Average text length (tokens)	970	293

The General Assembly resolutions total 651,027 tokens, across 671 texts, giving an average text length of 970 tokens per text, while the 75 texts of the Security Council total 21,955 tokens, with an average text length of 293. Part of the distinct status of these two Chambers is exemplified in the different sizes of these data sets, as seen in Table 1. The General Assembly data set is nearly 30 times larger than the corpus from the Security Council, with an average text length over three times the average of Security Council texts. The corpus includes data from both Chambers, with each Chamber's data considered a sub-corpus.

2.2 Data Collection

The Palestine-Israel United Nations Resolutions Corpus was initially collected by a researcher with practical experience working at the United Nations, with a second researcher cross-checking the texts included in the corpus.

The General Assembly corpus begins with the resolution labelled ‘A/RES/181(II)A-B’, passed on 29 November 1947, recommending the partition of Mandatory Palestine. While there are earlier resolutions that debate the theme of the future of Palestine, including in the General Assembly’s first ‘Special Session’ held in May 1947⁷, a decision was taken to begin the corpus

⁷ Available from: <https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/special>

from the resolution which formally changes the course of the history of the 20th century by the recommendation to partition Mandatory Palestine. From this point, all resolutions pertaining to the conflict associated with this territory were collected to create this corpus, incorporating the 2nd to the 75th regular sessions of the General Assembly, i.e. up until the end of 2020.

The boundaries of the Palestine/Israel conflict are not rigid, requiring some selection decisions on which texts to include or exclude. As this conflict extended into other geographic territories, UN resolutions began to encompass this wider conflict, and resolutions were passed that pertained not only to Israel and Palestine but to other territories/nations as well. For example, some resolutions in the General Assembly refer to 'Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan'. In such cases, the resolution was included because it refers to the Palestine/Israel conflict. General Assembly resolutions on topics such as Israel's relations with other nations in the region (e.g. Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt) or on Israeli nuclear armament were excluded, as were resolutions dealing in minor administrative matters (e.g. A/RES/32/212-II - a resolution about the pension fund with staff working with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East).

Regarding the Security Council, only resolutions specific to both Israel and Palestine were included. Due to sometimes unclear titles, all resolutions were manually reviewed for corpus inclusion. For example, while seven resolutions were passed in 1967 with the title 'The Middle East', none of these refer to Palestine and thus were all excluded. In 1968 several resolutions with the same title were passed, with three containing wording about the Palestine/Israel conflict (namely, reference to 'Jerusalem'), which were included in the corpus. Over the next few years, the title 'The Middle East' gave way to more specific resolution titles, such as 'Israel-Syrian Arab Republic' or 'Israel-Egypt', making clear the topical focus of the resolutions. Resolutions with these titles fell outside the parameters of the data collection and were therefore excluded. Meanwhile, Security Council resolutions related to the Palestine/Israel conflict began to be titled either with explicit reference to Palestine or to the 'Territories occupied by Israel'. The Security Council passed its first resolution in 1948. The data collection period was extended until the end of 2020, although the Security Council passed the final resolution on this topic in 2016. From 2017 to 2020, while the Security Council passed no further resolutions on Israel and Palestine, the General Assembly passed 59, nearly 95,000 words. This contrast reflects, in part, the different thresholds for the passing of a resolution in these two Chambers: the Security Council requires the support of the nine members including the five permanent members to pass (UN Charter, Chapter V, Article 27), while in the General Assembly a resolution can be passed by a two-thirds majority (UN Charter, Chapter IV, Article 18).

The General Assembly holds regular sessions, as well as 'Special Sessions' and 'Emergency Sessions'. While the resolutions on the Palestine/Israel conflict passed by Special or Emergency Sessions of the General Assembly are relevant, these resolutions are not yet included in this data set. The research team has plans to extend the corpus to include these resolutions, as well as to extend the timeframe beyond its current limit of December 2020, up to the end of 2024.

Within these parameters, the data was retrieved from the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library⁸. A total of 671 resolutions were collected from the General Assembly, while the relevant resolutions from the UN Security Council number 75. The total count for the General Assembly reflects changes in how resolutions were numbered over this historical period. Before 1996, it was common for some resolutions to encompass separate parts, designated by letters. For example, the 36th Regular Session of the General Assembly passed a resolution numbered 147, which has 7 separate parts, labelled 'A-G'. Since 1996 (the 51st Regular Session),

⁸ Available from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/>

the General Assembly has not passed any further multipart resolutions on the Palestine/Israel conflict. For the resolution count in this corpus, we based our tally on the UN's system, despite this change.

All resolutions were manually downloaded in .pdf format, then converted to .txt format through a Python script and cleaned with regular expressions. Despite this technological assistance, problematic files, such as those in double columns with a French version side-by-side, or those with lower scanning quality, had to be manually treated. Extraneous information in the files, such as plenary dates at the end of the file, headings, and footnotes, were removed. Metadata was organised in one spreadsheet for each section comprising, in this order: the resolution date, the resolution name, the file name, the file extension, and the title (which the UN website calls “topic”, e.g. “Assistance to the Palestinian people”).

2.3 Measurements: Word frequency and text dispersion

Once the data is available in this fully searchable format, researchers have many options in terms of what has been labelled ‘corpus-driven’ and ‘corpus-based’ approaches McEnery and Hardie 2012: 5-6 (see further their discussion in Chapter 6). As the authors note, this binary does not hold in practice, but is useful for distinguishing between approaching data without a specific hypothesis and searching the data in connection with a research question informed by knowledge of its historical and cultural context. This section presents some initial outputs from the corpus, drawing on word frequencies and text dispersion, using AntConc (Anthony 2024), Juxtorpus (Sun et al. 2024), and #Lancsbox X (Brezina and Platt 2024). The analysis conducted here tends towards the ‘corpus-driven’ mode of inquiry, i.e. we extract some initial findings from the data without beginning from any particular research hypotheses. The aim is to present some techniques for the study of this data set as an indication of its potential for interdisciplinary research.

2.3.1 Statistics: Word frequency

A standard method in corpus linguistics is to examine lexical frequencies in a data set and to consider their frequency relative to the corpus as a whole (McEnery and Hardy 2012: 49). Given that the resolutions are likely to display some variation between the two Chambers, Figure 1 compares the two data sets using a word cloud generated by the Juxtorpus tool to display highly frequent terms in these resolutions.

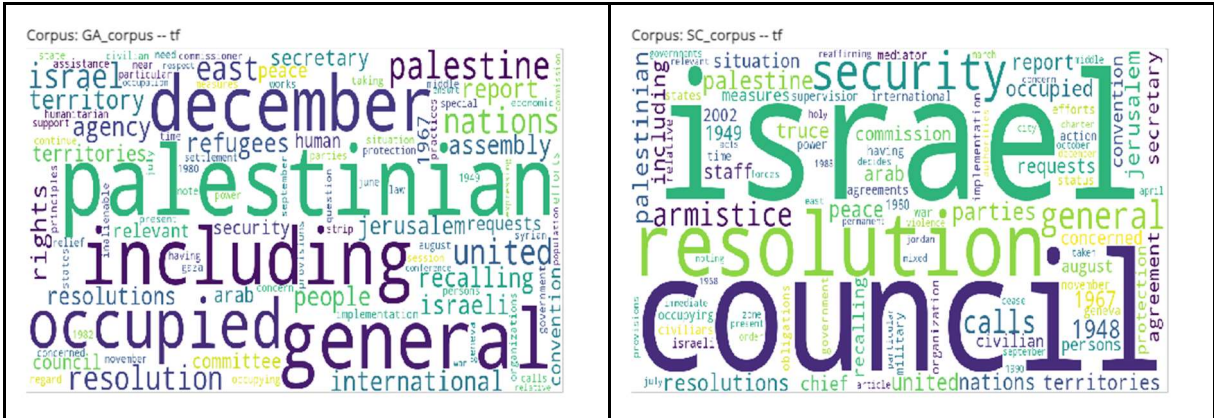


Figure 1: Word cloud of high-frequency terms for General Assembly corpus (left) and Security Council corpus (right).

Figure 1 shows slight differences in topical preferences between the two data sets, with a smaller, more dominant set of lexical items in the Security Council than in the General Assembly.

To examine these two data sets more closely, Table 2 displays the 25 most frequent content items for the General Assembly and the Security Council, ranked by normalised frequency (words per million).

Table 2: Top 25 content words in the General Assembly and the Security Council ranked by frequency.

Rank	GENERAL ASSEMBLY (n=671)			SECURITY COUNCIL (n=75)		
	Item	NormFreq	NormRange	Item	NormFreq	NormRange
1	Palestinian	12372	0.81	Israel	1523.57	0.73
2	general	9087	1.00	council	10384.88	1.00
3	including	8109	0.80	resolution	9428.38	1.00
4	December	7599	0.89	security	9200.64	1.00
5	occupied	7585	0.77	general	6331.13	0.68
6	Palestine	7282	0.74	armistice	5875.66	0.24
7	united	62276	0.96	calls	5192.44	0.71
8	nations	6224	0.96	Palestine	4919.15	0.48
9	israel	5794	0.79	Palestinian	4782.51	0.40
10	east	5548	0.83	parties	4600.32	0.51
11	resolution	5273	0.90	resolutions	4327.03	0.61
12	International	4810	0.75	Jerusalem	4190.39	0.45
13	agency	4708	0.30	united	4190.39	0.64
14	refugees	4448	0.39	including	3962.65	0.52
15	recalling	4415	0.93	nations	3962.65	0.61
16	territory	4355	0.60	occupied	3871.56	0.35
17	Israeli	4339	0.71	peace	3826.01	0.48
18	people	4325	0.65	territories	3552.72	0.33
19	rights	4320	0.66	truce	3552.72	0.36
20	report	4293	0.92	report	3370.53	0.60
21	assembly	4207	1.00	Arab	3233.89	0.40
22	Jerusalem	4186	0.53	requests	3142.79	0.61
23	resolutions	3997	0.84	secretary	3142.79	0.47
24	secretary	3540	0.84	staff	3097.24	0.23
25	territories	3316	0.50	chief	2915.05	0.20

The cut-off of 25 is arbitrary—the aim is to illustrate what a comparison of top-ranking words across these two Chambers can reveal. The term ‘content items’ refers to open-system lexical items (e.g., ‘Palestine’, ‘resolution’), which contrasts with closed-system items belonging to grammatical paradigms (e.g., ‘the’, ‘of’, ‘an’) (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Table 2 also displays a normalised text dispersion metric, range, which shows the proportion of the texts in which each lexical item appears in the two subcorpora. A normalised range of one (1) means that the lexical item appears in every text in the corpus. As Gries (2020: 100) notes, corpus linguistics is an ‘inherently distributional discipline’, and while overall frequency is a significant measure of a lexical item’s behaviour in a data set, this measure needs to be balanced by reference to text dispersion, i.e., the presence of a lexical item across the set of texts that constitute the corpus.

Gries (2020) defines text dispersion as ‘the degree to which occurrences of a word are distributed throughout a corpus evenly or unevenly/clumpily’ (Gries 2020, p. 99). Although text

range is a ‘crude’ measure because it does not take into account ‘how large the corpus parts are in which occurrences of a word are attested nor does its computation include how many occurrences of a word are in one corpus part’ (Gries 2020, p. 101), the very different sizes of these subcorpora make statistical measures of text dispersion variation problematic. A z-test, for instance, is an unsuitable statistical test due to the very different data set sizes, and other statistical methods would incur the same issue. The dispersion measure inherently accounts for corpus size differences (Gries, 2020), enabling direct comparisons regardless of varying corpus sizes. Furthermore, it is important to note that these subcorpora are not mere samples but are constructed from the entirety of texts that meet the specified parameters.

3 Results and Discussion

Interpreting the empirical results from word frequency and text dispersion data in the previous section requires grouping semantically related terms to consider their contribution to the meanings being made in these texts.

First of all, the set of lexical items includes words that reflect the general register parameters on these texts, for instance, the name of the United Nations or one of its chambers, (e.g. ‘security’, ‘council’, ‘general’, ‘assembly’), those that reference the name of this speech act (‘resolution’, ‘resolutions’), those that refer to the lead bureaucrat of these chambers (‘secretary’, ‘general’, and ‘chief’ [of] ‘staff’). These will likely feature as high-frequency words in resolutions on any of the issues that come before these UN chambers, and signal features of the mode of these texts as written, stand-alone, bureaucratic documents, and of the tenor relations as texts which constitute the ‘voice’ of the United Nations and its functionaries.

Table 3: Comparing lexical items of people and place in the General Assembly and Security Council.

	General Assembly		Security Council	
	Rank	Dispersion	Rank	Dispersion
Palestinian	1	81%	8	48%
occupied	5	77%	16	35%
Palestine	6	74%	8	48%
Israel	9	79%	1	73%
refugees	14	39%	-	-
territory	16	60%	-	-
Israeli	17	71%	-	-
people	18	65%	-	-
Jerusalem	22	53%	12	45%
territories	25	51%	18	33%
Arab	-		21	40%

These general register parameters set the stage for identifying key lexical items that reflect the specific context and function of the resolutions, providing insight into the dominant themes within the UN discourse. Beyond these terms, two key lexical categories specific to this conflict emerge: lexis construing ‘people’ and ‘place.’ Table 3 outlines the lexical items related to people and places from the top 25 list, categorised by their occurrence across the two UN chambers. Items are listed in order of their rank based on overall frequency, using the word rank list from the General Assembly data. For example, the word ‘Palestinian’ ranks number 1 in the General

Assembly, and appears in 81% of the UN resolutions from this chamber. By comparison, this word ranks at 8 in the Security Council, and appears in just under half of the resolutions passed by this council. While shared terms highlight overarching concerns, unique terms point to divergent focuses of each chamber. Table 3 shows the similarities in the lexical choices across these chambers, with both chambers making use of the lexical items ‘Palestinian’, ‘occupied’, ‘Palestine’, ‘Israel’, ‘Jerusalem’, and ‘territories’. Figure 2 is a bar graph comparing these items by their text dispersion across the two subcorpora: the subcorpora are more alike in their usage of the terms ‘territories’, ‘Jerusalem’ and ‘Israel’, but more contrasting in their use of the terms ‘Palestine’, ‘occupied’, and ‘Palestinian’.

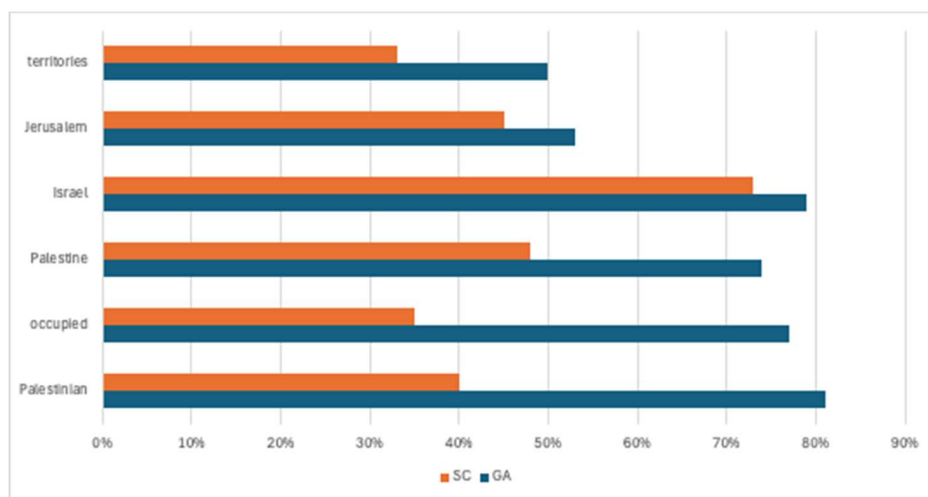


Figure 2: Shared frequent lexical items compared by text dispersion across the General Assembly (GA) and Security Council (SC).

In addition to these shared high-frequency lexical items, some words only appear in the General Assembly's top 25 lexical items, for example, the words ‘refugees’ and ‘people’. In the Security Council sub-corpus, the terms ‘refugees’ and ‘people’ have low visibility, appearing in 2.6% and 12% respectively of the texts in the Security Council. This finding suggests a closer preoccupation in the General Assembly with the impact of this conflict on the people who have lived through it. These results can be further interpreted by considering the lexical item ‘rights’ (as ‘rights’ pertain to categories of people) which appears only in the General Assembly's top 25, ranking at 19 and found in 66% of the General Assembly resolutions. A search of this term in the Security Council corpus shows the word ‘rights’ to have a much lower contribution, where it has a normalised frequency of about 15% of this metric in the General Assembly corpus (637 v 4320), and a much lower text dispersion (13% v 66%).

To understand the evolution of ‘rights’ within General Assembly resolutions, a closer examination of its timeline is necessary. Using the timeline tool in Juxtorpus, Figure 3 traces this term ‘rights’ across the timeline of the General Assembly data set. While there are a small number of usages around 1950, the term came to feature in General Assembly resolutions from 1970 onwards, referring to ‘human rights’ and ‘inalienable rights’, and increased over time.



Figure 3: The terms ‘rights’, ‘human rights’ and ‘inalienable rights’ in the General Assembly corpus.

To capture a slightly wider context for the usage of the term ‘rights’ in General Assembly resolutions, Figure 4 shows the top 50 collocates of this term, using #Lancsbox X, with the following collocation parameters: Log Dice ≥ 6 ; L5-R5; C5; NC5 (Brezina et. al, 2015).

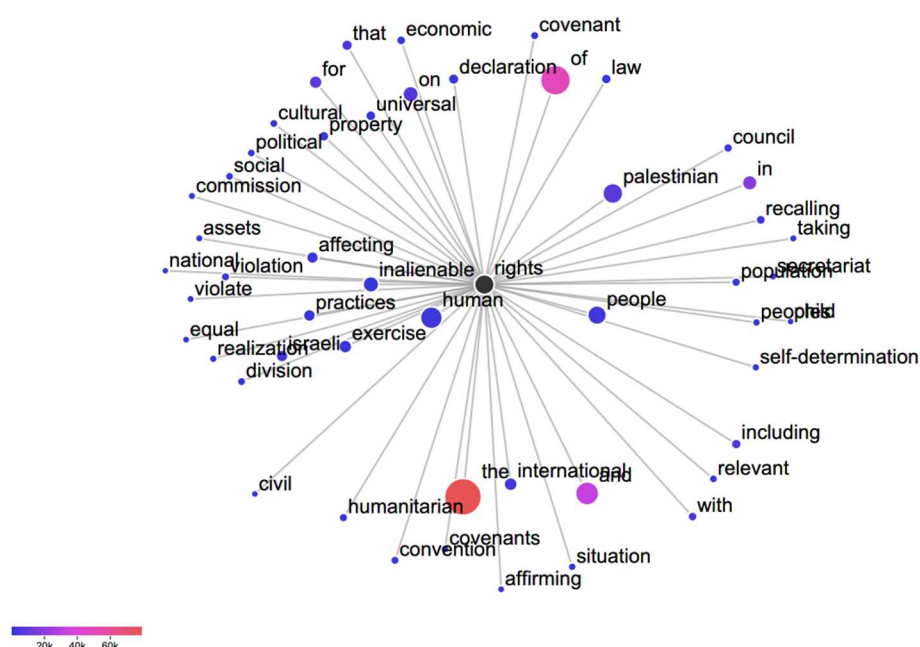


Figure 4: Top 50 collocates of ‘rights’ in the General Assembly sub-corpus.

To gain a deeper understanding of how ‘rights’ is situated in the discourse, we examine its most frequent collocates. Figure 4 shows a connection between ‘human rights’ and ‘inalienable rights’ in the context of the Palestinian people, as well as other terms related to that, such as ‘humanitarian’.

There are three further terms in the top 25 lexical items for Security Council resolutions that merit comment: ‘armistice’, ranking 8 and appearing in 24% of texts, ‘peace’, ranking 17 and appearing in 48% of texts, and ‘truce’, ranking at 19, and appearing in 36% of texts. These three terms all relate to ending or at least diffusing the intensity of the conflict. These terms provide insights into the specific ways the Security Council approaches the conflict lexicon. Using the timeline tool in Juxtorpus, we can compare the use of these terms over time as part of understanding their place in this subcorpus. It is reasonable to hypothesise that the terms ‘armistice’ and ‘truce’ are older and will belong in earlier resolutions, while the term ‘peace’ will have a greater temporal spread. Although the words ‘ceasefire’ and ‘solution’ do not appear in

the list, their semantic connection to these terms makes them relevant for comparison across the timeline of this data. Figure 5 shows the timeline of these terms as they appear in the Security Council between 1947 and 2020.

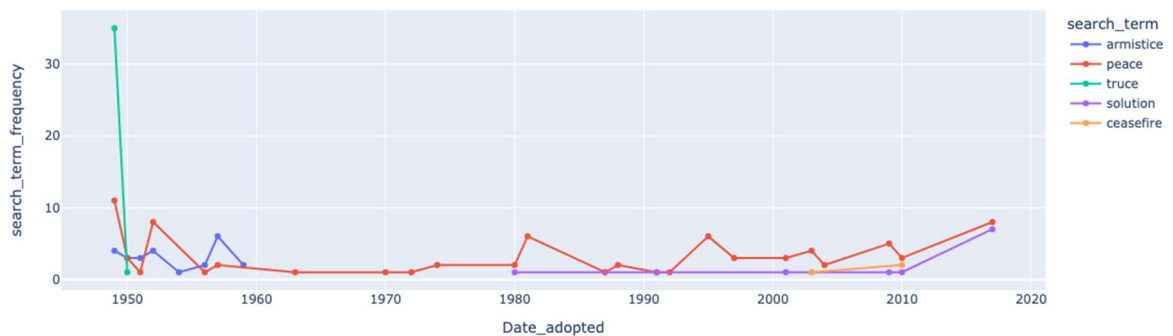


Figure 5: Occurrences of ‘armistice’, ‘peace’, ‘truce’, ‘ceasefire’ and ‘solution’ in the Security Council resolutions.

Figure 5 shows that the terms ‘truce’ and ‘armistice’ appear prior to 1960, while ‘solution’ began to be used from 1980, and ‘ceasefire’ from the 2000s. ‘Peace’ is a constant refrain through these resolutions. Unlike the General Assembly's focus on 'rights', the Security Council's terms reflect temporal shifts in conflict resolution strategies.

4 Conclusion

The Palestine/Israel United Nations Resolution Corpus (PIURC) offers significant potential for advancing research on the role of the United Nations in the Palestine/Israel conflict. By analysing patterns and trends within resolutions, the corpus provides a robust foundation for exploring key themes, such as human rights, international law, and conflict resolution. Its design fosters interdisciplinary collaborations, encouraging researchers from diverse fields to engage with the data and uncover new insights into this complex and enduring issue.

However, the corpus has some limitations that should be addressed in future updates. Resolutions from Special and Emergency Sessions of the General Assembly are not yet included, and the data set only contains English texts, despite the UN's six official languages. This focus on English reflects its predominant use in UN operations but narrows the scope of analysis and risks privileging certain perspectives. Plans are underway to expand the corpus, including additional resolutions and extending the timeframe to the end of 2024. These enhancements will increase its inclusivity and utility, making it an even more valuable resource for scholars and practitioners.

In its current form, the PIURC demonstrates the potential of corpus linguistic methods and text analysis tools to illuminate international governance and diplomacy. As the corpus evolves, it promises to facilitate richer, more comprehensive research and contribute to a deeper understanding of the United Nations' role in the Palestine/Israel conflict and beyond.

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