



Power, Legitimacy, and Diplomacy: A Critical Analysis of Global Responses to the Palestine–Israel Issue

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<p>Abstract: The Palestine–Israel conflict remains one of the most enduring and complex geopolitical issues in modern international relations. This article critically examines the interplay of power, legitimacy, and diplomacy in shaping global responses to the conflict, with particular emphasis on the role of the United States, Arab states, and the United Nations. Drawing upon historical and contemporary scholarship, the study argues that the asymmetrical distribution of power has significantly influenced both the trajectory of the conflict and the nature of international interventions. The United States, often positioned as a mediator, has been widely critiqued for its strategic alignment with Israel, raising questions about impartiality and legitimacy in peace processes. Meanwhile, Arab states have demonstrated fluctuating engagement, shaped by regional politics and national interests, often limiting their collective effectiveness. The United Nations, despite its normative authority and legal frameworks, has struggled to enforce resolutions due to geopolitical constraints. By integrating historical analysis with critical perspectives, this article highlights the limitations of existing diplomatic mechanisms and underscores the need for a more balanced and inclusive approach. Ultimately, it argues that sustainable peace requires addressing structural inequalities and rethinking international accountability in conflict resolution.</p>	<p>Review Paper</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The Palestine–Israel conflict cannot be reduced to a simple dispute over land or borders; it is a deeply layered historical experience shaped by memory, displacement, and competing visions of nationhood. For many Palestinians, the conflict is inseparable from the lived reality of dispossession and exile that began in the early twentieth century and intensified with the events surrounding 1948. For Israelis, it is tied to a historical quest for security and self-determination, shaped profoundly by centuries of persecution culminating in the Holocaust. These overlapping yet divergent historical narratives have created not only a political impasse but also an emotional and moral one, where each side’s sense of justice appears incompatible with that of the other.

Scholars such as Rashid Khalidi emphasize that the conflict must be understood as a long historical process rather than a series of isolated crises. In *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, Khalidi (2020) frames the struggle as one shaped by successive phases of

external intervention—from the late Ottoman period to British colonial rule, and later to the geopolitical involvement of global powers. The British Mandate, in particular, introduced institutional and demographic transformations that laid the groundwork for future tensions, privileging certain political aspirations while marginalizing others (Khalidi, 2020). This colonial legacy did not simply end with the withdrawal of imperial authority; instead, it left behind structures and borders that continue to shape present realities.

At the core of the conflict lies a profound asymmetry of power that has influenced both conditions on the ground and the trajectory of international diplomacy. Israel, as a recognized state with a strong military and significant global alliances, particularly with the United States, operates from a position of relative strength. Palestinians, by contrast, have experienced fragmentation—geographically between the West Bank and Gaza, and politically between different leadership structures—which has limited their capacity to act as a unified actor on the global stage (Pappe, 2006).

This imbalance is not merely military; it extends to economic resources, control over territory, and access to international platforms where narratives are constructed and legitimized.

The question of legitimacy further complicates the conflict. Both Israelis and Palestinians claim historical, moral, and legal rights to the same land, drawing on different interpretations of history and international law. While Israel's legitimacy is anchored in international recognition and statehood, Palestinians continue to seek recognition of their right to self-determination and statehood, a claim that has received varying degrees of support in international forums (Finkelstein, 2018). These competing claims are not only debated in diplomatic arenas but are also embedded in everyday realities—checkpoints, settlements, and the ongoing question of refugees—which reinforce differing perceptions of justice and injustice.

Global diplomacy has played a decisive yet often contradictory role in shaping the conflict. The United States has been a central actor, frequently positioning itself as a mediator while simultaneously maintaining a strong strategic alliance with Israel. This dual role has led to criticism regarding the neutrality of its interventions, as U.S. policies have often been perceived as reinforcing existing power asymmetries (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). At the same time, Arab states have historically oscillated between confrontation and negotiation, influenced by regional politics, internal priorities, and shifting alliances. The normalization agreements of recent years illustrate how geopolitical interests can sometimes override longstanding ideological commitments to the Palestinian cause.

The United Nations, meanwhile, represents a different dimension of global engagement—one grounded in international law and multilateralism. Through resolutions, peacekeeping efforts, and humanitarian initiatives, the UN has sought to address both the political and humanitarian aspects of the conflict. However, its effectiveness has often been constrained by the political interests of powerful member states, particularly within the Security Council, where veto power can limit collective action (Quigley, 2010). As a result, the UN's role has been both significant and limited—capable of shaping discourse and norms, yet often unable to enforce meaningful change on the ground.

In this context, the Palestine–Israel conflict emerges not only as a regional issue but as a reflection of broader global dynamics—where power, legitimacy, and diplomacy intersect in complex and often contradictory ways. Understanding this interplay is essential for any meaningful analysis, as it reveals why the conflict has persisted for so long and why efforts at resolution remain fraught with challenges.

Historical Context and the Question of Legitimacy

To truly grasp the depth of the Palestine–Israel conflict, one must step into the emotional and political atmosphere of the early twentieth century—a period marked not just by the collapse of empires, but by uncertainty, hope, and competing dreams of belonging. The decline of the Ottoman Empire did not simply redraw maps; it unsettled lives. Communities that had coexisted under imperial rule suddenly found themselves confronting new political realities shaped by distant powers, especially Britain and France.

It was within this fragile and transitional moment that the Balfour Declaration emerged in 1917. To many Jewish communities—especially those in Europe facing persecution—it symbolized hope, recognition, and the possibility of safety in a world that had repeatedly denied them both. Yet for the Arab inhabitants of Palestine, the declaration felt like a quiet but profound betrayal. It was not merely that a decision had been made without them; it was that their very presence seemed to be treated as secondary in determining the future of their own homeland. As Rashid Khalidi explains, the declaration exemplified a broader pattern of imperial disregard for indigenous political rights, embedding inequality into the very foundations of governance (Khalidi, 2020).

Under the British Mandate for Palestine, this imbalance became part of daily life. Policies regulating land ownership, Jewish immigration, and political representation were not abstract administrative decisions—they affected whether a farmer could keep his land, whether a village would grow or shrink, and whether communities could shape their own future. British officials often claimed neutrality, attempting to balance promises made to both Zionist and Arab leaders. But on the ground, neutrality was experienced as inconsistency and, at times, as silent favoritism. Palestinian voices were frequently sidelined, their political institutions weakened, and their aspirations deferred. What might appear in official records as bureaucratic governance was, for many Palestinians, an everyday experience of powerlessness.

The question of legitimacy, therefore, did not arise in a vacuum—it was born out of these unequal beginnings. For Jewish communities, particularly in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the establishment of Israel in 1948 represented far more than a political achievement. It was seen as a moral necessity—a refuge after unimaginable suffering. The idea of returning to a historic homeland, combined with international recognition through the United Nations, formed a powerful narrative of rightful statehood and survival. As Anita Shapira notes, Zionism was not only a political movement but also an emotional response to centuries of displacement and vulnerability (Shapira, 2012).

For Palestinians, however, the same moment is remembered as the Nakba—a catastrophe that fractured their society and reshaped their identity. Families were uprooted, villages were emptied, and a sense of permanence was replaced by exile. This was not just a historical event confined to the past; it became an inherited memory, passed down through generations in stories, photographs, and the keys to homes that no longer exist. As Ilan Pappé argues, the Nakba is not merely an episode but a continuing condition that defines Palestinian political consciousness (Pappé, 2006). Refugee camps, scattered across neighbouring countries, became not only places of shelter but also symbols of unresolved injustice.

Yet legitimacy in this conflict cannot be understood solely through competing historical claims. It is also shaped by narratives—by whose experiences are acknowledged and whose are overlooked. Edward Said famously argued that the struggle is as much about representation as it is about territory. In many Western narratives, Israel has often been framed through the lens of democracy and security, while Palestinian experiences have been filtered through the language of conflict and instability. This imbalance in representation does not just influence public opinion; it shapes policy decisions, media coverage, and even academic discourse (Said, 1979).

Language itself becomes a battleground. Words such as “security,” “terrorism,” “resistance,” and “occupation” are not neutral descriptors—they carry political and moral weight. To describe an act as “resistance” is to frame it as legitimate struggle; to label it “terrorism” is to delegitimize it entirely. As Benny Morris points out, even archival records—often considered objective—are shaped by the perspectives and priorities of those who produce them (Morris, 2004). Thus, history itself becomes contested terrain, where facts, interpretations, and silences all play a role.

At its core, the question of legitimacy in the Palestine–Israel conflict is deeply human. It lives in the memories of grandparents who recall lost homes, in the fears of parents seeking security for their children, and in the aspirations of young people imagining a different future. For Israelis, legitimacy is often intertwined with survival, recognition, and the right to exist without fear. For Palestinians, it is bound to justice, dignity, and the right to return or to live freely in their own state. These are not abstract principles—they are lived realities that shape everyday life.

Understanding this layered complexity requires more than a review of treaties and timelines. It demands an engagement with human experiences, with the emotions and memories that continue to define the conflict. Only by acknowledging both narratives—not as mutually exclusive, but as deeply intertwined—can one

begin to approach a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of legitimacy in this enduring struggle.

Power Asymmetry and the Role of the United States

One of the most defining features of the Palestine–Israel conflict is not simply that two sides are in disagreement, but that they stand on profoundly unequal ground. This asymmetry is visible in the most immediate sense—military strength—but it also runs deeper, shaping economic opportunities, diplomatic voice, and even the ability to tell one’s story to the world. Israel functions as a consolidated, internationally recognized state with advanced technological capabilities, a highly organized military, and strong institutional stability. Palestinians, by contrast, experience political fragmentation across the West Bank, Gaza, and a widespread diaspora, which complicates both governance and representation. This uneven terrain affects not only the outcomes of negotiations but also the very possibility of entering negotiations as equals.

The asymmetry is not an abstract concept—it is lived. For Palestinians, it often translates into restrictions on movement, limited control over resources, and a constant negotiation with structures of authority that they do not fully command. For Israelis, it is tied to a different historical experience—one shaped by insecurity, regional hostility, and the perceived necessity of maintaining overwhelming strength for survival. These parallel but unequal realities create a conflict in which both sides feel vulnerable, yet one side possesses far greater capacity to shape the terms of engagement.

At the centre of this imbalance stands the United States, whose role has been both influential and deeply contested. Officially, the U.S. has long framed itself as a mediator committed to a peaceful resolution, most notably through initiatives such as the Oslo Accords and subsequent negotiations. However, many scholars argue that this self-image of neutrality is difficult to reconcile with the structural realities of American policy.

Rashid Khalidi (2014), in *Brokers of Deceit*, offers a compelling critique of U.S. diplomacy, arguing that American mediation has historically been embedded within a framework that privileges Israeli strategic interests. Rather than acting as an even-handed intermediary, Khalidi suggests that the United States has often shaped negotiations in ways that limit Palestinian political horizons. From this perspective, diplomacy becomes less about resolving asymmetry and more about managing it—keeping the process alive without fundamentally altering the imbalance of power (Khalidi, 2014).

This structural alignment is particularly evident in the realm of military assistance. The United States provides Israel with one of the largest and most consistent packages of military aid in the world. This

support includes not only financial assistance but also access to advanced defence technologies, joint military exercises, and intelligence cooperation. As John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt (2007) argue in *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, such assistance ensures that Israel maintains a qualitative military edge in the region. While this is often justified within the framework of ensuring Israeli security, it simultaneously reinforces the broader asymmetry between Israel and the Palestinians, who lack comparable institutional or military backing.

Yet the influence of the United States extends beyond material support. Diplomatically, it has played a decisive role in shaping how the conflict is discussed and addressed at the global level. Noam Chomsky (2015) highlights how U.S. policy has frequently acted to shield Israel from sustained international pressure, particularly in forums such as the United Nations. By influencing the language, direction, and outcomes of international debates, the United States contributes to a broader narrative in which certain actions are normalized while others are scrutinized more heavily (Chomsky, 2015).

Perhaps the most visible symbol of this diplomatic backing is the use of veto power in the United Nations Security Council. The United States has repeatedly vetoed resolutions critical of Israel, often arguing that such measures are unbalanced or counterproductive to peace. However, as Khalidi (2020) observes in *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, this pattern has significant implications for the credibility of international law. When enforcement appears selective, it risks undermining the legitimacy of global institutions themselves, reinforcing perceptions that justice is contingent on political alliances rather than universal principles (Khalidi, 2020).

The consequences of this perceived partiality are not confined to diplomatic arenas—they shape the emotional and psychological dimensions of the conflict. For many Palestinians, U.S. support for Israel is experienced not merely as foreign policy but as a continuation of structural inequality, reinforcing a sense of marginalization within the international system. It affects how hope is imagined, how resistance is articulated, and how trust in global institutions is eroded. On the Israeli side, however, U.S. backing is often seen as indispensable—a cornerstone of national security in a region marked by volatility and historical hostility. This divergence in perception further complicates efforts to build a shared framework for peace.

Moreover, the asymmetry reinforced by U.S. involvement has implications for the very nature of negotiations. Effective mediation requires not only procedural fairness but also the perception of fairness. When one party enters negotiations believing that the mediator is aligned with the other side, trust becomes fragile. Agreements reached under such conditions may

lack durability, as they are often seen as imposed rather than mutually constructed. This helps explain why many peace initiatives, despite moments of optimism, have ultimately struggled to produce lasting outcomes.

In a broader sense, the United States occupies a paradoxical position. It is both indispensable to any meaningful peace process and, at the same time, a source of scepticism for one of the parties involved. This dual role reflects the complexities of global power politics, where strategic alliances intersect with aspirations for justice and stability.

Ultimately, the asymmetry of power in the Palestine–Israel conflict is not a static condition—it is continuously reproduced through political, military, and diplomatic practices. The role of the United States is central to this process. Any serious attempt to move toward a sustainable resolution must grapple with these structural realities, addressing not only the visible dimensions of conflict but also the deeper imbalances that shape how each side experiences, understands, and responds to it.

Arab States: Between Solidarity and Strategic Interests

The Palestinian question has long stood at the emotional and political heart of the Arab world. For many ordinary people across the region—from bustling cities like Cairo and Damascus to smaller towns and villages—Palestine is not simply a distant geopolitical issue; it is deeply tied to questions of identity, dignity, and historical memory. Generations have grown up hearing stories of displacement, resistance, and loss, making Palestine a powerful symbol of shared Arab consciousness. This explains why, in moments of crisis, public demonstrations in Arab capitals often erupt with remarkable intensity, with Palestinian flags raised alongside national ones, signalling a unity that transcends borders.

Yet, when we shift our gaze from the streets to the corridors of power, the picture becomes more complex. While Arab leaders have consistently expressed solidarity with Palestine in speeches and official declarations, their actions have often reflected a different set of priorities. As Rashid Khalidi (2020) insightfully argues, the Palestinian cause has frequently been used as a political instrument—invoked to strengthen domestic legitimacy or assert regional leadership rather than to produce sustained, coordinated action. In times of internal unrest or political fragility, regimes have turned to Palestine as a unifying narrative, one that resonates deeply with public sentiment and helps redirect attention away from pressing domestic issues such as unemployment, corruption, or political repression.

This dynamic was particularly visible during the height of Arab nationalism in the mid-20th century.

Leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser positioned themselves as champions of the Palestinian struggle, framing it as part of a broader anti-imperialist movement. While such rhetoric galvanized public support and fostered a sense of collective purpose, the actual outcomes often fell short of expectations. Military defeats, especially in 1967, exposed the limits of rhetorical unity and revealed deep structural weaknesses within the Arab political system. The gap between promise and performance began to erode public confidence, even as the symbolic importance of Palestine remained intact.

A key reason for this inconsistency lies in the internal divisions that have long characterized the Arab world. As Fawaz A. Gerges (2018) explains, the so-called “Arab Cold War” was marked by intense ideological competition between conservative monarchies and revolutionary republics. These rivalries were not merely abstract disagreements; they shaped foreign policy decisions, alliances, and even military strategies. In such an environment, the Palestinian issue, rather than serving as a unifying cause, often became entangled in broader struggles for regional influence. Competing visions of leadership—whether led by Egypt, Iraq, or later Saudi Arabia—meant that coordination was frequently sacrificed in favour of national ambition.

Even beyond ideological divides, each Arab state has had to navigate its own unique set of constraints and priorities. Geography, in particular, has played a crucial role. Countries like Jordan and Egypt, which share borders with Israel, have faced immediate security concerns that other Arab states could afford to view more abstractly. For them, war was not just a matter of solidarity but a direct threat to national stability. This helps explain why both countries eventually chose to sign peace agreements with Israel—Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. As Avi Shlaim (2000) notes, these decisions were driven less by a rejection of the Palestinian cause than by a pragmatic recognition of geopolitical realities. Stability, economic recovery, and regime survival often took precedence over ideological commitments.

At the same time, economic considerations have increasingly shaped Arab policies in recent decades. With globalization and the growing importance of international markets, many Arab states have sought to diversify their economies and attract foreign investment. In this context, prolonged conflict has come to be seen as a liability rather than an asset. The normalization agreements under the *Abraham Accords* illustrate this shift clearly. Countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain justified their decisions by pointing to strategic benefits, including access to advanced technology, enhanced security cooperation, and stronger ties with global powers. As Marc Lynch (2020) argues, these agreements reflect a broader transformation in regional politics, where state interests

are increasingly defined by pragmatic calculations rather than ideological solidarity.

However, this shift has not erased the symbolic power of Palestine. Across the Arab world, public opinion continues to express strong support for Palestinian rights. Social media campaigns, cultural expressions, and grassroots movements keep the issue alive in everyday discourse. This creates a kind of dual reality: while governments pursue policies shaped by national interests, societies continue to uphold Palestine as a moral and emotional cause. The tension between these two levels—state and society—adds another layer of complexity to Arab engagement with the conflict.

Ultimately, the story of Arab states and the Palestinian question is one of contradiction and adaptation. On one hand, there is a deeply rooted sense of solidarity that has endured for decades, sustained by shared history, culture, and collective memory. On the other hand, there are the hard realities of international politics, where survival, stability, and strategic advantage often dictate decision-making. This duality has had significant consequences. As Khalidi (2020) emphasizes, the inconsistency of Arab support has weakened the Palestinian position on the global stage, making it more difficult to present a unified front in negotiations and allowing external powers to dominate diplomatic processes.

Understanding this tension is essential for any meaningful analysis of the Palestine–Israel issue. It reminds us that regional politics are rarely driven by a single logic; instead, they are shaped by the constant interplay between ideals and interests, between what states say and what they ultimately do. In this sense, the Arab engagement with Palestine is not simply a story of failure or betrayal, but a reflection of the broader challenges faced by states operating in a complex and often unforgiving international system.

The United Nations: Normative Authority vs Political Constraints

The United Nations has long functioned as the central platform where the global community seeks not only to manage conflict but also to define what justice should look like in deeply contested spaces such as Palestine–Israel. From its earliest involvement, the UN attempted to translate competing historical claims into a structured legal framework. The *United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine (1947)* represented one of the first major efforts by the international community to impose an orderly solution on a volatile and emotionally charged situation. While the plan ultimately failed in implementation, its significance lies in establishing a critical precedent: that international legitimacy could be constructed through multilateral agreement rather than unilateral force (Pappé, 2006).

Over time, the UN evolved into more than just a diplomatic forum—it became a norm-producing institution. Through repeated resolutions, debates, and reports, it articulated a moral and legal vocabulary centered on self-determination, human rights, and the inadmissibility of acquiring territory by force. These principles were not abstract ideals; they were codified in numerous resolutions passed by both the General Assembly and the Security Council. For instance, resolutions condemning Israeli settlement expansion and affirming Palestinian rights contributed to what scholars like John Quigley describe as an “architecture of legitimacy,” in which Palestinian claims are anchored in widely recognized international legal norms (Quigley, 2010).

Yet, beneath this carefully constructed normative framework lies a more complex and often frustrating reality. The UN’s authority is, in many ways, moral rather than coercive. It can declare, recommend, and condemn—but it cannot independently enforce. General Assembly resolutions, though symbolically powerful, lack binding force. Even Security Council resolutions—legally binding in principle—depend heavily on the willingness of member states to implement them. This creates a persistent gap between what is legally affirmed and what is politically possible.

This tension becomes especially visible when examining the role of major powers. As Rashid Khalidi argues, the Palestinian question has never been shaped solely by legal norms; rather, it has been deeply influenced by the geopolitical priorities of powerful states (Khalidi, 2020). In practice, this means that international law often operates within boundaries set by political interests. When those interests’ conflict with legal principles, enforcement tends to falter.

A central structural limitation of the UN lies in the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council—the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France. This mechanism, originally designed to maintain balance among great powers, has frequently resulted in paralysis. In the context of Palestine–Israel, the United States has repeatedly used its veto to block resolutions critical of Israel. Consequently, even when there is broad international consensus, decisive action becomes nearly impossible. As Richard Falk notes, this reflects a broader reality: global governance is not a neutral legal order but a system where power asymmetries are institutionalized and reproduced (Falk, 2014).

The UN’s dependence on its member states further complicates its position. It lacks its own independent military, relies on voluntary funding, and depends on states to carry out peacekeeping and enforcement measures. This structural dependency means that the organization cannot act autonomously. Instead, it mirrors the collective will—and often the

divisions—of its members. For example, while UN agencies such as UNRWA provide critical humanitarian assistance and document human rights violations, they are ultimately limited to alleviating symptoms rather than resolving the root causes of the conflict.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the UN’s role is the gap between principle and practice. On paper, the international legal position appears relatively clear: occupation is unlawful, settlements are illegitimate, and Palestinians possess a right to self-determination. However, these principles remain only partially realized on the ground. As Noam Chomsky observes, the repeated failure to enforce UN resolutions has contributed to a growing scepticism toward international institutions, particularly among those directly affected by conflict (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015).

This contradiction is not merely theoretical—it is deeply human. For many Palestinians, UN resolutions represent recognition, dignity, and the hope that their struggle is acknowledged by the world. These documents carry symbolic weight; they affirm that their claims are not invisible. Yet, when such recognition does not translate into meaningful change, it can also generate frustration and disillusionment. The UN, in this sense, becomes both a source of moral validation and a reminder of unfulfilled promises.

Ultimately, the Palestine–Israel case reveals a fundamental truth about the nature of international institutions. The United Nations possesses the ability to define norms, shape global discourse, and legitimize claims, but it lacks the independent power to enforce those norms. Its effectiveness is inseparable from the political will of its member states—particularly the most powerful among them. As long as strategic interests outweigh legal and ethical commitments, the tension between normative authority and political constraint will persist.

In this way, the UN’s role in the conflict is both indispensable and limited. It provides the language of justice, but not always the means to achieve it. And it is within this uneasy balance that the broader challenges of global governance become most visible.

Diplomacy and the Crisis of International Mediation

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the Palestine–Israel conflict have, for decades, been presented as hopeful turning points—moments when history might bend toward peace. From the cautious optimism of the early 1990s, when leaders shook hands on the White House lawn, to later negotiations and normalization agreements, each initiative carried the weight of expectation. For many observers and participants alike, these were not merely political events but deeply emotional milestones, symbolizing the possibility of coexistence after generations of conflict. Yet, as time has passed, a pattern has emerged: diplomacy has often

generated temporary frameworks rather than transformative solutions. The repeated cycle of negotiation, breakdown, and renewed attempts has led many to question whether the problem lies not only in the conflict itself but in the very structure of international mediation.

At the core of this crisis is a profound imbalance of power that shapes every stage of negotiation—from agenda-setting to final outcomes. As Rashid Khalidi (2014) argues, diplomacy in this context has often functioned less as a neutral mechanism for resolving disputes and more as a tool for managing them. This distinction is crucial. When negotiations occur between actors with vastly unequal resources and political leverage, the process itself cannot be fully neutral. One side enters discussions as a recognized state with military strength, economic stability, and international alliances, while the other negotiates from a position marked by displacement, occupation, and limited sovereignty. This asymmetry inevitably influences what can be demanded, conceded, or even discussed. In such a setting, diplomacy risks normalizing inequality rather than resolving it.

This structural imbalance becomes particularly visible when examining the key issues that have remained unresolved over decades.

Territorial Sovereignty remains one of the most contentious and complex aspects of the conflict. Diplomatic agreements have frequently deferred definitive decisions about borders, instead creating interim arrangements that divide territory into administrative zones. While these measures were initially framed as stepping stones toward a final settlement, they have often resulted in increased fragmentation. The lived reality for many Palestinians is one of discontinuity—geographically, politically, and economically. Edward Said (2000) poignantly critiqued this process, suggesting that such arrangements risk reducing the concept of statehood to a symbolic gesture rather than a meaningful political reality. A state, in this sense, becomes less about sovereignty and more about limited administrative autonomy under external constraints.

Equally significant is the issue of Refugee Rights, which touches upon deeply personal histories of loss, displacement, and identity. For millions of Palestinian refugees and their descendants, the question of return or compensation is not merely a political demand but a matter of historical justice and collective memory. Yet, diplomatic initiatives have consistently postponed addressing this issue, often categorizing it as too sensitive or complex. Ilan Pappé (2006) emphasizes that this deferral is not neutral; rather, it perpetuates a condition of unresolved injustice. By side-lining the refugee question, diplomacy risks alienating a significant

portion of the affected population, thereby undermining the legitimacy of any proposed settlement.

The Status of Jerusalem further illustrates the limitations of incremental diplomacy. Jerusalem is not only a city but also a symbol—of faith, identity, and political aspiration. Its significance transcends borders and resonates deeply with multiple communities. Despite this, negotiations have frequently treated Jerusalem as a “final status” issue, postponing substantive discussion. However, realities on the ground continue to evolve, making future agreements increasingly difficult. Avi Shlaim (2001) argues that delaying decisions on such a central issue erodes trust between parties and diminishes confidence in the peace process. When the most symbolic and contentious issues are left unresolved, the entire framework of negotiation appears fragile.

Beyond these substantive challenges, the structure of international mediation itself raises critical questions about legitimacy and fairness. Effective mediation requires not only neutrality but also the perception of neutrality. However, many diplomatic efforts have been criticized for privileging certain narratives while marginalizing others. When negotiations are perceived as externally imposed or biased, they struggle to gain acceptance among the populations they are meant to serve. This disconnect between diplomatic processes and lived realities creates a legitimacy gap—agreements may exist on paper, but they lack the social and political foundation necessary for implementation.

The role of major international actors further complicates this landscape. Mediators are often not detached facilitators but stakeholders with their own strategic interests. These interests can shape the priorities, language, and outcomes of negotiations. As a result, diplomacy may be perceived less as a pursuit of justice and more as an exercise in geopolitical management. This perception weakens trust and reinforces scepticism among those directly affected by the conflict. When people feel that their voices are secondary to global political calculations, the credibility of mediation efforts diminishes.

Moreover, the reliance on incremental, step-by-step approaches has contributed to a cycle of partial solutions without addressing root causes. While such approaches are often defended as pragmatic, they can also function as mechanisms of delay. Each interim agreement creates new realities on the ground, which in turn reshape the parameters of future negotiations. Over time, the process itself becomes self-perpetuating. Diplomacy continues, but resolution remains elusive. This has led some scholars to argue that the peace process has become an end in itself rather than a means to achieve a just settlement.

In human terms, this prolonged process has tangible consequences. It affects daily lives, shapes identities, and influences how future generations understand the conflict. For many, diplomacy is no longer associated with hope but with repetition and disappointment. The language of peace persists, but its realization seems increasingly distant. Ultimately, the crisis of international mediation in the Palestine–Israel conflict reflects both the complexity of the issues and the limitations of existing diplomatic paradigms. Without addressing structural inequalities, ensuring genuine inclusivity, and confronting core issues directly, diplomatic efforts are likely to continue producing fragile outcomes. What is needed is not simply more negotiation, but a rethinking of how negotiation itself is conducted—one that prioritizes equity, accountability, and mutual recognition. Only through such a reimagining can diplomacy move beyond managing conflict toward genuinely resolving it.

Human Dimensions and the Politics of Representation

Beyond the formal arenas of diplomacy, treaties, and territorial negotiations, the Palestine–Israel conflict unfolds most profoundly in the intimate spaces of human life—within homes, memories, and everyday struggles. It is a conflict that is lived as much as it is debated, carried not only in official documents but in the stories whispered across generations, in the silences of loss, and in the resilience of communities determined to endure.

For Palestinians, the experience of dispossession—commonly referred to as the *Nakba* (catastrophe) of 1948—remains a deeply embedded collective memory that transcends historical chronology. It is not confined to the past but continues to shape present realities and future aspirations. As Edward W. Said argued, Palestinian identity itself has been profoundly shaped by exile, fragmentation, and the struggle for representation. Families often preserve the memory of their lost villages through oral histories, keys to abandoned homes, and the naming of new generations after ancestral places. These practices are not merely symbolic; they serve as acts of cultural survival and resistance against erasure (Said, 1988).

Life in refugee camps—whether in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, or Jordan—illustrates the paradox of permanence within displacement. What were once intended as temporary shelters have evolved into densely populated urban spaces marked by both hardship and social cohesion. Within these camps, identity is continuously negotiated: children grow up inheriting not only the trauma of displacement but also a strong sense of belonging to a homeland they have never seen. Rashid Khalidi emphasizes that this intergenerational transmission of memory sustains a political consciousness that resists normalization of exile, even as

daily life is shaped by economic precarity, restricted mobility, and periodic violence (Khalidi, 2020).

On the Israeli side, historical consciousness is equally powerful and deeply rooted in collective trauma. The memory of centuries of antisemitism, culminating in the Holocaust, forms a central pillar of Israeli identity and statehood. For many Israelis, the establishment of the state represents not only political sovereignty but also a moral and existential necessity—a refuge in a world perceived as historically hostile. As Avi Shlaim notes, this sense of vulnerability has profoundly shaped Israeli political culture, fostering a security-oriented mindset in which threats—both real and perceived—are interpreted through the lens of historical survival (Shlaim, 2000).

This deeply ingrained insecurity often translates into public support for stringent security measures, including military operations, checkpoints, and surveillance systems. While these measures are framed domestically as essential for protection, they are experienced by Palestinians as mechanisms of control and restriction. Thus, the same actions are embedded in two radically different narratives: one of defence and survival, the other of domination and dispossession. These parallel yet conflicting perceptions illustrate how historical memory shapes not only identity but also political behaviour.

The politics of representation plays a decisive role in mediating these human experiences on the global stage. As Said (1988) powerfully argued, the question of Palestine is inseparable from the question of narrative—who has the authority to define reality, whose voice is heard, and whose suffering is legitimized. International media coverage, political discourse, and even academic scholarship often reduce the conflict to binary frameworks: victim versus aggressor, terrorism versus self-defence, security versus resistance. Such simplifications obscure the lived complexities of individuals and communities, flattening nuanced human experiences into easily digestible categories.

Ilan Pappé further highlights how historical narratives themselves are constructed within power structures, often privileging certain perspectives while marginalizing others. The writing of history, in this sense, becomes a political act—one that can either reinforce dominant narratives or challenge them by recovering silenced voices (Pappé, 2006). Competing historiographies thus play a central role in shaping both domestic and international understandings of the conflict.

To move beyond these limitations, it is essential to foreground the everyday realities of those living within the conflict. Humanizing the issue requires shifting attention from abstract political categories to lived experiences. It means recognizing that behind every statistic lies a personal story: a Palestinian child

navigating life under blockade in Gaza, an Israeli family seeking shelter during rocket attacks, a farmer separated from their land by barriers, or a parent grappling with fear and uncertainty about the future. These stories reveal not only suffering but also resilience—the capacity to maintain dignity, community, and hope in the face of adversity.

Khalidi (2020) argues that understanding these lived experiences is crucial for grasping why the conflict persists despite numerous diplomatic efforts. It is not merely a dispute over land or borders but a deeply entrenched struggle over identity, justice, and historical recognition. Similarly, Shlaim (2000) suggests that sustainable peace cannot emerge solely from political agreements; it requires a mutual acknowledgment of humanity, where both sides feel that their histories, fears, and aspirations are genuinely recognized.

Humanizing the conflict therefore demands a fundamental shift in perspective. First, it requires acknowledging the coexistence of multiple narratives—not as mutually exclusive claims but as parallel realities shaped by distinct historical experiences. Second, it calls for resisting reductionist representations that dehumanize individuals by subsuming them under political labels. Third, it emphasizes the importance of universal principles—human rights, dignity, and justice—that transcend national and ideological divisions.

Ultimately, the Palestine–Israel conflict is as much a struggle over meaning and memory as it is over territory and sovereignty. By centering human experiences and critically examining the narratives that shape global perceptions, it becomes possible to move toward a more empathetic and comprehensive understanding. Such an approach does not resolve the conflict in itself, but it creates the intellectual and moral conditions necessary for imagining a future grounded in coexistence, recognition, and shared humanity.

CONCLUSION

The Palestine–Israel conflict stands as one of the clearest examples of how power, legitimacy, and diplomacy do not always move in harmony, but often pull in different directions. At its core, the conflict reveals a troubling reality: international politics is rarely guided solely by moral principles or legal norms. Instead, it is deeply shaped by strategic interests, alliances, and the uneven distribution of power. This imbalance has repeatedly limited the ability of global actors to respond in ways that are both fair and effective.

The role of the United States illustrates this tension vividly. While presenting itself as a mediator in peace processes, its long-standing strategic alignment with Israel has often raised questions about neutrality and fairness. This has not only affected the credibility of

mediation efforts but has also contributed to a broader perception among Palestinians and many in the Global South that international diplomacy operates with double standards. When one party is seen as enjoying consistent political, military, and diplomatic backing, the very idea of a balanced negotiation becomes difficult to sustain.

At the same time, the Arab world's response has been far from unified. Historical rivalries, shifting alliances, and domestic priorities have fragmented what might otherwise have been a cohesive regional stance. Some states have moved toward normalization with Israel, prioritizing economic or security interests over collective political pressure. While these decisions may reflect pragmatic statecraft, they have also diluted the strength of regional advocacy for Palestinian rights, leaving a sense of political isolation among Palestinians themselves.

The United Nations, often viewed as the custodian of international law and legitimacy, has faced its own limitations. Despite passing numerous resolutions affirming Palestinian rights and calling for peaceful solutions, its capacity to enforce these decisions remains constrained. Power imbalances within the international system—particularly the influence of veto-wielding states—have often prevented decisive action. As a result, the UN's role, though symbolically important, has frequently fallen short in practical terms, reinforcing the perception of an international order that struggles to uphold its own principles.

For meaningful progress to emerge, a deeper transformation is required. Mediation frameworks must be re-evaluated to ensure genuine impartiality and inclusivity. This means going beyond traditional power brokers and incorporating voices that have historically been marginalized, especially those directly affected by the conflict. Without this shift, diplomacy risks remaining an elite-driven process disconnected from realities on the ground.

Equally important is the need for greater accountability in international politics. Violations of human rights and international law must be addressed consistently, regardless of the actors involved. Selective enforcement not only undermines trust but also perpetuates cycles of resentment and resistance. A rules-based order can only function if its rules are applied universally.

Addressing structural inequalities is perhaps the most challenging yet essential step. The conflict is not only about territory but also about disparities in power, mobility, resources, and recognition. Without confronting these deeper imbalances, any political agreement is likely to remain fragile and incomplete.

Ultimately, the path to peace lies in reconciling power with legitimacy. Agreements imposed without a

sense of justice may achieve temporary stability, but they cannot secure lasting peace. Legitimacy grows from fairness, recognition, and dignity—elements that cannot be negotiated away or substituted with strategic convenience. In this sense, the future of the Palestine–Israel conflict depends not only on diplomatic negotiations but on a broader reimagining of how justice is understood and pursued in international relations.

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