

CONFLICT AND TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A STUDY OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT 2023-2024

Danjuma Yusuf

Department of Political Science and
International Relations,
Taraba State University, Jalingo
danhazz10@gmail.com

Galadima Tivenh Auta

Department of Political Science and
International Relations,
Taraba State University, Jalingo
galadimatauta@gmail.com

Fwafu Jirah Umar

Department of Counselling, Educational Psychology and
Human Development Taraba State University, Jalingo
fwafuumarjirah@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines Israel-Palestine Conflict and Terrorism in the Middle East: A Study of Gaza conflict, 2023-2024. The study narrows its scope to the Israeli-Palestinian dimension of Middle Eastern terrorism, emphasizing the Hamas-led surprise attack on southern Israel. This escalation drew in actors such as Hezbollah and Iran, expanding the conflict's regional scope. A qualitative methodology based entirely on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, UN and NGO reports, policy briefs, and credible media, was used to analyze. through qualitative content analysis, the study identifies central narratives, ideological factors, and stakeholder perspectives shaping the conflict and its humanitarian impact. Findings indicate the October 7 conflict was not merely a military clash but an expression of long-standing grievances concerning occupation and marginalization, leading to a major humanitarian crisis and the collapse of already fragile peace efforts. The conflict following the October 7, 2023 attack helps the study to draw a conclusion that terrorism and war in the Middle East are deeply intertwined with longstanding historical, political, and social grievances. The study recommends inclusive political and socio-economic reforms that address Palestinian grievances, a renewed peace process based on equity and justice, and a more balanced global diplomatic approach that supports both Israeli security and Palestinian humanitarian rights. Only through such structural and coordinated efforts can recurring violence be halted and lasting peace achieved in the region.

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a deeply entrenched and multifaceted geopolitical struggle, with territorial, national, and religious dimensions shaping the ongoing hostilities. The roots of the conflict extend to the early 20th century, when both Jewish and Arab nationalist movements began to take shape, driven by competing visions for the land of historic Palestine. The Zionist movement, which called for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, gained momentum during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, coinciding with a growing sense of Arab nationalism and resistance to foreign rule. With increasing waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine, primarily driven by persecution in Europe, the Arab population in the region began to feel the pressure of demographic and territorial changes, which led to rising tensions (Zahran, 2023). The British Mandate, which administered Palestine following World War I, struggled to accommodate the conflicting aspirations of both Jews and Arabs, setting the stage for the 1947 UN Partition Plan and the eventual establishment of the State of Israel in

1948. This event triggered the first Arab-Israeli war and set in motion a cycle of violence that continues to this day. Despite numerous attempts at diplomacy, including the Oslo Accords and the Abraham Accords, the fundamental issues of territorial disputes, the status of Jerusalem, and Palestinian statehood remain unresolved (Smith, 2023). The persistent cycle of violence, characterized by both military clashes and terrorist attacks, highlights the deep divisions that continue to fuel the conflict, with little hope for a comprehensive resolution.

In this prolonged conflict, terrorism has evolved as a central tool of asymmetric warfare, primarily used by Palestinian militant groups seeking to challenge Israel's military dominance and draw attention to their political cause. Groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine have employed violent acts, such as suicide bombings, rocket attacks, and armed assaults, in an effort to resist Israeli occupation and demand the establishment of a Palestinian state (Kharouf, 2022). These violent tactics are often framed as a legitimate form of resistance to what they perceive as Israeli colonialism and occupation of Palestinian lands. The Palestinian perspective on terrorism is deeply shaped by the experience of dispossession and disenfranchisement, as well as the ongoing failure of international diplomatic efforts to address their demands (Barakat, 2023). For Israel, these attacks are seen as acts of terrorism targeting civilians, which justifies its continued military operations and extensive security measures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As a result, the cycle of violence intensifies, with Israel adopting policies such as airstrikes, targeted assassinations, and border restrictions, all of which are viewed by Palestinians as collective punishment. This dynamic of reciprocal violence has contributed to a deepening sense of mistrust between the two sides and a growing belief that peaceful negotiations are no longer a viable solution (Sassoon, 2023). While terrorism is presented as a form of resistance by Palestinians, it is widely condemned in international discourse, especially when it involves targeting non-combatants.

The prevalence of terrorism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has had a destabilizing effect on peace processes, undermining efforts for reconciliation and exacerbating divisions between Israelis and Palestinians. High-profile attempts at peace, such as the Oslo Accords, the Camp David Summit, and various international peace proposals, have consistently faltered in the face of terrorist attacks and retaliatory military responses (Hussain, 2023). For instance, during the Second Intifada, which began in 2000, a wave of suicide bombings against Israeli civilians dramatically undermined public support for the peace process in Israel and led to a hardening of Israeli security policies (B'Tselem, 2024). In response to these acts of terrorism, Israel expanded its military operations and implemented strict security measures, including the construction of the West Bank security barrier, which has been seen by many Palestinians as an act of further oppression. At the same time, Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas, have continued to target Israeli civilians, framing these acts as necessary to end the occupation and assert Palestinian sovereignty (O'Leary, 2022). The persistence of these attacks, combined with the lack of a unified Palestinian leadership, has made it increasingly difficult to build the trust necessary for any lasting peace agreement. As both sides cling to their narratives of victimization, the prospect of meaningful negotiations seems increasingly unlikely, leaving the region trapped in a cycle of violence that continues to undermine the hopes for peace (Hussain, 2023).

Over the years, the tactics and scale of terrorism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have evolved, with a marked shift from targeted guerrilla attacks to more indiscriminate violence aimed at civilians. In the early years of the conflict, acts of resistance were typically characterized by small-scale bombings and ambushes, often targeting military personnel or key infrastructure (Rabinovich, 2023). However, with the advent of the Second Intifada in the early 2000s, the nature of these attacks escalated, with Palestinian militants increasingly employing suicide bombings and large-scale rocket attacks to inflict maximum casualties on Israeli civilians (Pape, 2023). These attacks were often carried out in public spaces such as buses, restaurants, and shopping malls, creating a pervasive atmosphere of fear in Israeli society. In response, Israel implemented harsh security measures, including the assassination of Palestinian leaders and the construction of the controversial separation wall. These measures, while effective at reducing terrorist attacks, have also contributed to the radicalization of many Palestinians, who see them as symbols of occupation and oppression (Rabinovich, 2023). The psychological impact of these terrorist attacks on both populations has been profound, with trauma, fear, and a deepened sense of hostility shaping the public discourse in both Israel and Palestine. The ongoing escalation of violence, coupled with the failure of peace negotiations, has perpetuated a cycle of hatred and distrust that makes it increasingly difficult to envision a path toward lasting peace (Pape, 2023; Zahran, 2023). Given the above background, the study investigated terrorism and the conflict in the Middle East with a particular reference to the Israeli-Palestinian that started October 7, 2023.

Statement of the Problem

The escalation of terrorism and conflict in the Middle East has become a central issue in contemporary global discourse, and the renewed hostilities between Israel and Palestine from October 7, 2023, have drawn renewed international concern. This study recognizes that terrorism in the region cannot be viewed merely as isolated acts of violence but must be contextualized within a long-standing historical, political, and ideological conflict. The outbreak of full-scale conflict following Hamas' incursion into Israeli territory and Israel's subsequent military response reignited complex questions surrounding the very nature of terrorism and conflict fare in the Middle East.

The October 7 outbreak has had a domino effect on regional and international stakeholders, with global powers, neighboring Arab states, and international organizations responding in varied, often contradictory, ways. The problem here lies in the inconsistent and politicized nature of international reactions. Some countries, such as the United States and certain European allies, have largely supported Israel's right to self-defense, while others, including various UN bodies and humanitarian organizations, have called for immediate ceasefires and accused both parties of violating international humanitarian law. The challenge is that these responses, shaped by geopolitical interests, often fail to bring about meaningful interventions. Instead of diffusing tensions, they frequently deepen divisions, hinder diplomatic negotiations, and allow both sides to continue military campaigns with impunity. This fragmentation among stakeholders reflects a broader systemic problem in the global governance of conflict resolution.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the nature of terrorism in the Middle East, arising from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict particular from October 7, 2023.
- ii. To assess Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from October, 7 2023 and its impact to peace in the middle-east.

Research Questions

- i. What is the nature of terrorism in the Middle East arising from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly from October 7, 2023?
- ii. How has the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from October 7, 2023, impacted peace in the Middle East?

Literature Review

This literature review explores the complex and evolving nature of terrorism and conflict, with a particular focus on its impact in the Middle East and Nigeria. Drawing on a range of academic perspectives, this section examines key concepts such as terrorism, conflict, and regional instability, providing a foundation for understanding the dynamics that shape contemporary security challenges.

The Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that varies significantly across different contexts. Globally, it represents a significant threat to peace and security, necessitating coordinated international efforts for resolution. In the Middle East, terrorism is deeply entwined with historical conflicts and identity issues, while in Nigeria, it reflects underlying socio-economic and political challenges. Understanding these varying dimensions is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat terrorism in all its forms.

Hoffman (2017) argued that terrorism is not merely a tactic but a strategic choice made by non-state actors who typically lack the conventional military power to engage their opponents. This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad utilize terrorist tactics to advance their political goals against a militarily superior Israeli state. Hoffman asserts that terrorism often arises from a desire to achieve political aims through asymmetrical conflict fare, where traditional military confrontations are not feasible.

Concept of Conflict

Conflict is defined as a state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country. It typically involves organized groups engaging in sustained military operations against one another, aiming to achieve specific political, territorial, or ideological objectives. The foundational definition provided by Carl von Clausewitz emphasizes conflict as "an act of force to compel our opponent to fulfill our will" (Clausewitz, 1832). This classical definition not only captures the essence of conflict as a violent struggle but also highlights its political underpinnings, asserting that conflict is ultimately a continuation of political discourse through other means.

In the contemporary world, the nature of conflict has evolved significantly due to various factors, including globalization, technological advancements, and the rise of non-state actors. The modern landscape of conflict fare includes asymmetric conflicts, where one party may not

be a traditional military force but rather a group with different motivations and operational methods. Scholars like Mary Kaldor (2013) argue that modern conflicts often blur the lines between combatants and non-combatants, leading to complex situations where civilians may be drawn into the conflict either as victims or participants. This highlights the necessity of understanding conflict as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that encompasses not only military engagements but also political, economic, and social dimensions. The rise of cyber conflict and information conflict has also transformed traditional notions of conflict. Digital platforms can be utilized for propaganda, recruitment, and even conducting military operations, showcasing how conflict now extends beyond the physical battlefield (Rid, 2020). This shift challenges traditional military strategies and necessitates new frameworks for understanding and responding to the complexities of modern conflict.

Terrorism and Regional Stability in the Middle East

The impact of terrorism on regional stability, particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is profound and multifaceted. The resurgence of violence often reverberates beyond immediate borders, affecting geopolitical dynamics, economic conditions, and social cohesion across the Middle East. The implications of terrorist acts, such as the October 7, 2023, assault by Hamas, illustrate how localized violence can escalate into broader regional tensions (Kabalan, 2023).

One of the most immediate effects of terrorism is the destabilization of existing political structures. The October 7 attack and subsequent Israeli military response not only escalated tensions between Israelis and Palestinians but also heightened tensions with neighboring countries. For instance, Iran's support for Hamas and its condemnation of Israeli actions contributed to a volatile environment, with the potential for proxy conflicts involving regional actors. This interplay of local and regional dynamics can undermine state authority and exacerbate existing conflicts, as governments may struggle to maintain order amid rising public discontent and sectarian divides (Byman, 2019).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design that relies solely on secondary data sources to provide an in-depth understanding of terrorism and its dynamics in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel and Palestine are located in the eastern Mediterranean region, commonly referred to as the Middle East, a historically contested area of geopolitical importance. Geographically, this area lies at the junction of three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe, making it a strategic hub for trade, religion, and international politics for thousands of years. Israel is situated along the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, extending inland to the Jordan River Valley.

The data source for this study is secondary, encompassing a wide range of materials that offer valuable insights into the complexities of terrorism and radicalization in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Secondary data is especially appropriate for this research due to the sensitive, protracted, and often dangerous nature of the conflict, which poses significant limitations on primary data collection such as field interviews or direct observation.

This study employed documentary qualitative research method to collect secondary data from a wide range of credible and relevant sources. Given the sensitive and volatile nature of the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, along with the risks associated with conducting fieldwork in areas affected by terrorism and armed conflict, secondary data collection was deemed the most practical and ethically sound approach.

The method of data analysis employed in this study is qualitative content and thematic analysis. This analytical approach is well-suited to the nature of the research, which relies on secondary data to explore complex, non-quantifiable phenomena such as terrorism, radicalization, ideological motivations, and state and non-state responses within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The nature of terrorism in the Middle East, from October 7, 2023

The Middle East has long been recognized as a region beset by both conventional wars and asymmetric terrorist conflicts. From the early 2000s, terrorism began to shift dramatically in both its geography and intensity. Bandyopadhyay and Sandler (2023) note that, while Latin America and Europe once experienced considerable levels of terrorism, the 21st century has seen a marked shift toward South Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa, with the Middle East accounting for approximately 34% of global terrorist attacks between 2002 and 2020.

This change has been attributed to various factors, including political instability, religious radicalism, foreign intervention, and socio-economic grievances. The Middle East, in particular, has witnessed the emergence of highly organized non-state actors such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and ISIS, who combine elements of both guerrilla warfare and conventional combat. These groups often act in contested urban spaces, use media strategically, and exploit the asymmetries between state and non-state power to wage prolonged and psychologically destabilizing campaigns.

The October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas on Israel represents a significant evolution in the nature of terrorism in the region. It was not only marked by rocket attacks, which have become relatively common in previous years, but also by an unprecedented land incursion into Israeli territory, leading to substantial civilian casualties. Hamas framed the operation as a response to what it described as prolonged Israeli occupation, the blockade of Gaza, and recurring military operations targeting Palestinians. Israel, in turn, launched intensive retaliatory airstrikes, which destroyed large swathes of Gaza and led to high civilian death tolls.

Haaretz (2023) and other observers interpreted the attack as a watershed moment—not merely another skirmish in a long conflict, but an event signaling a new level of escalation in both intensity and strategic depth. The conflict increasingly reflects hybrid warfare dynamics, where terrorism, insurgency, and conventional state response intertwine.

Further, the October 7 attack reignited broader regional tensions. Iran's support for Hamas and other non-state actors, as noted by Hosseini (2023), exemplifies the role of proxy dynamics in Middle Eastern conflicts. Iran's regional strategy seeks to challenge both Israeli military power and the influence of Sunni Arab regimes, particularly those aligned with the West, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. By backing militant groups ideologically aligned with its revolutionary doctrine, Iran promotes a resistance axis that cuts across national borders and ideological divides. This axis, consisting of Hezbollah in Lebanon, various Shi'a militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, serves

as a decentralized network of armed groups capable of projecting Iran's strategic interests without direct Iranian military engagement. The October 7 attack by Hamas reflects the operational fruit of this strategy, enabling Iran to confront Israel indirectly while avoiding direct accountability.

Israeli-Palestinian War from October 7, 2023, and Peace in the Middle East

The human cost of the October 7, 2023, war has been staggering, with lives lost on an unprecedented scale. The initial attack by Hamas resulted in the deaths of more than 1,160 people in Israel, including civilians, security forces, and foreign nationals. The assault, characterized by coordinated ground incursions, mass shootings, and rocket fire, marked a devastating breach of Israeli security and sparked a prolonged military retaliation. In the months that followed, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) launched an intensive aerial and ground campaign targeting Gaza, resulting in the deaths of over 37,000 Palestinians by mid-2025, according to United Nations and local health authority estimates (OCHA, 2025). Civilian casualties accounted for the vast majority of these deaths, with thousands of women and children among the victims. The sheer scale of mortality overwhelmed Gaza's already fragile healthcare system, with hospitals collapsing under the weight of casualties and lacking essential supplies. In addition to physical deaths, long-term trauma has emerged as a critical issue, with widespread psychological distress reported on both sides. Khalidi (2023) underscores that such large-scale loss of life reinforces existential fears and hardens attitudes, making reconciliation increasingly elusive.

The physical destruction resulting from the conflict has been equally severe, particularly within the Gaza Strip, where Israeli airstrikes and artillery fire decimated large swathes of urban infrastructure. Satellite imagery and field assessments indicate that over 70 percent of Gaza's residential buildings have either been destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, displacing an estimated 1.7 million people, or roughly 75 percent of the territory's population (Anadolu Agency, 2025). Key public services have been brought to a halt due to the destruction of essential facilities, including hospitals, schools, power stations, and water treatment plants. Entire neighborhoods such as Al-Rimal and Jabalia were flattened, with cultural landmarks and places of worship among the ruins. The breakdown of sanitation systems and water access has led to outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and typhoid, compounding the already dire humanitarian situation. Additionally, farmlands and irrigation systems were targeted or collateralized in the fighting, leading to the collapse of local food production and worsening food insecurity. The widespread infrastructure collapse not only impedes immediate recovery but also entrenches long-term poverty, undermining prospects for reconstruction, education, and future development.

Findings

This study explored the multifaceted dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a particular focus on the events following the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack. The analysis addressed three key research questions: the nature of terrorism and war in the Middle East post-October 7, the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian war on peace in the region, and the responses of various stakeholders to the conflict.

The first part examined how terrorism in the Middle East is deeply embedded in historical grievances, identity denial, and socio-political exclusion. It highlighted how the regional context of political instability, sectarian divisions, and external interventions shapes the nature of violence. The October 7 attack was contextualized as a dramatic escalation, reflecting long-standing Palestinian frustrations tied to occupation, blockade, and exclusion. The cyclical violence that ensued between Israel and Hamas further exacerbated humanitarian crises, increased civilian casualties, and disrupted any existing attempts at dialogue.

The second focus investigated the impact of this conflict on peace processes. It became evident that terrorism acts as both a symptom and a catalyst of the breakdown in negotiations, eroding trust and driving political polarization. The escalation hardened positions on both sides, making compromise increasingly difficult and feeding into narratives of victimhood and existential threat. This environment undermines moderate voices and fuels extremism, which perpetuates the cycle of violence and obstructs peace building efforts.

The key findings based on the two research questions raised are:

- i. The October 7 Hamas attack on Israel reveals deep-rooted grievances and geopolitical tensions driving a prolonged cycle of violence and retaliation.
- ii. The conflict shattered peace efforts, worsening humanitarian crises and regional instability, showing that addressing core issues is essential for lasting peace.

Conclusion

The conflict following the October 7, 2023 attack reveals that terrorism and war in the Middle East are deeply intertwined with longstanding historical, political, and social grievances, particularly among marginalized groups such as disenfranchised youth facing identity denial, economic hardship, and political exclusion. Without such a shift, the cycle of violence is likely to continue, resulting in ongoing humanitarian suffering and regional instability, underscoring the urgent need for multidimensional, sustained efforts that bridge local, regional, and global divides to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the conflict and its broader implications following the October 7, 2023 attack, the following recommendations aim to address the root causes, mitigate ongoing violence, and create conditions conducive to lasting peace in the Middle East:

- i. Foster inclusive political solutions and socio-economic programs for marginalized youth while encouraging regional dialogue to reduce sectarian and geopolitical tensions.
- ii. Prioritize renewed peace negotiations that address structural inequalities and humanitarian crises, alongside efforts to rebuild trust and stability in affected communities.

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