

Assessment of the Israel-Palestine War (2023-2025): Counter-Conflict Reactions

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ABSTRACT

This research examines counter-conflict reactions to the Israel-Palestine war, focusing on the escalation from October 2023 through 2025. Employing conflict transformation theory and realist security frameworks, the study analyzes strategic responses from primary belligerents, regional actors, and international institutions through qualitative content analysis. Findings reveal multidimensional counter-reactions characterized by military escalation, humanitarian intervention attempts, diplomatic fragmentation, and legal accountability mechanisms. Israel's security doctrine emphasizes preemptive defense and territorial control, while Palestinian resistance combines armed and political strategies. Regional powers pursue proxy engagement and normalization recalibration, whereas global institutions demonstrate selective enforcement of international law. The analysis identifies systemic failures in conflict resolution architecture and persistent power asymmetries. Recommendations include strengthening multilateral enforcement mechanisms, addressing root causes of occupation, and developing inclusive peace frameworks recognizing legitimate security concerns while upholding human rights and international humanitarian law.

Keywords: Israel-Palestine conflict, counter-conflict reactions, conflict transformation, international humanitarian law, regional security

INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Palestine conflict represents one of the most protracted disputes in contemporary international relations, with historical roots extending over a century. The October 2023 escalation, marked by unprecedented cross-border operations and subsequent military responses, catalyzed renewed examination of counter-conflict reactions from state and non-state actors across multiple geopolitical scales. Understanding these reactions requires systematic analysis engaging with structural, strategic, and humanitarian dimensions of asymmetric warfare in contested territories.

Counter-conflict reactions encompass the spectrum of responses deployed by belligerents, regional stakeholders, and international institutions to manage, contain, escalate, or resolve armed conflict. In the Israel-Palestine context, counter-reactions manifest through military operations, diplomatic initiatives, legal proceedings, humanitarian interventions, and information campaigns, each influenced by historical grievances, territorial disputes, and competing claims to sovereignty and security.

This study addresses critical research questions: What strategic counter-conflict approaches have Israel and Palestinian factions employed? How have regional powers calibrated responses to balance competing interests?

What roles have international institutions played in conflict mitigation or perpetuation? What patterns emerge regarding effectiveness of different counter-reaction modalities?

This investigation holds significance for conflict studies scholarship, international relations theory, and practical peacebuilding efforts. Empirically, it documents a critical escalation period with profound humanitarian consequences. Theoretically, it tests propositions regarding security dilemmas, asymmetric warfare dynamics, and institutional capacity for conflict intervention. Practically, insights may inform more effective approaches to addressing intractable conflicts characterized by power asymmetries and competing nationalist narratives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly literature on the Israel-Palestine conflict spans multiple disciplines. Historical analyses trace origins to competing nationalisms in late Ottoman Palestine, the British Mandate period, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and subsequent Palestinian displacement (Khalidi, 2020; Shlaim, 2023). These works emphasize how foundational events created enduring narratives of victimhood and legitimacy contests complicating contemporary resolution efforts.

Literature on conflict dynamics examines violence cycles through various theoretical lenses. Realist scholars emphasize security dilemmas wherein Israeli concerns about existential threats and Palestinian resistance to occupation create self-reinforcing patterns of mistrust and militarization (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). Constructivist analyses highlight how identity formation and narrative construction perpetuate conflict by rendering compromise politically costly (Bar-Tal, 2013). Critical security studies scholars critique asymmetric application of international law enabling continued occupation while criminalizing resistance (Khalili, 2013).

International response literature reveals patterns of selective engagement and enforcement failures. Studies document how Cold War dynamics, post-9/11 counterterrorism frameworks, and great power competition shaped international approaches (Pressman, 2003). United Nations scholarship analyzes gaps between Security Council resolutions and implementation mechanisms, attributing enforcement failures to veto-wielding permanent members' strategic interests (Falk, 2017).

Regional dimension literature examines how neighboring states and non-state actors influence conflict dynamics. Scholarship on Egypt and Jordan explores peace treaty implementation and border management roles (Lynch, 2016). Studies of Iranian and Gulf state involvement analyze proxy support networks and normalization politics (Juneau, 2015). Lebanese Hezbollah's evolution illustrates how sub-state groups develop strategic autonomy while maintaining ideological alignments with Palestinian causes (Daher, 2019).

Recent literature on the 2023 escalation emphasizes unprecedented features including scale of civilian casualties, humanitarian access restrictions, and acceleration of legal accountability mechanisms through International Criminal Court proceedings (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Gaps in existing literature include limited systematic analysis of counter-conflict reaction patterns across multiple actor categories simultaneously and insufficient attention to how reactions reinforce structural conditions enabling conflict perpetuation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research employs conflict transformation theory as its primary analytical lens, supplemented by realist security frameworks. Conflict transformation theory, developed by scholars including John Paul Lederach and Johan Galtung, distinguishes between conflict resolution aimed at immediate violence cessation and conflict transformation focused on addressing root causes, structural conditions, and relationship patterns sustaining conflict (Lederach, 1997).

Three dimensions inform this analysis. Structural transformation addresses asymmetric power relations and institutional arrangements creating grievances. Relational transformation focuses on perceptions, attitudes, and interaction patterns including dehumanization and trust-building. Cultural transformation engages underlying values, narratives, and identity constructions shaping how groups interpret threats and coexistence possibilities.

Applied to Israel-Palestine, conflict transformation theory highlights how counter-conflict reactions may either challenge or reinforce structural occupation, relational antagonism, and cultural exclusivism. Military responses increasing territorial control intensify structural asymmetries. Diplomatic initiatives excluding affected populations perpetuate relational damage. Information campaigns emphasizing security threats without acknowledging legitimate grievances sustain cultural divisions.

Realist theory complements this framework by explaining why actors pursue short-term security maximization over long-term transformation. Realism posits that states operate in anarchic international systems prioritizing survival, leading to security dilemmas where defensive measures by one party trigger countermeasures by others (Waltz, 1979). This dual theoretical approach enables nuanced analysis recognizing both strategic rationality

within actors' perceived constraints and systematic evaluation of whether reactions advance genuine transformation or perpetuate violence cycles.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative content analysis methodology, systematically examining texts, policy documents, institutional reports, and scholarly analyses to identify patterns in counter-conflict reactions (Krippendorff, 2018). Data sources include primary materials from governmental bodies, international organizations, humanitarian agencies, and legal institutions. Israeli government communications and Palestinian Authority documents provide insight into respective security doctrines. United Nations reports, International Criminal Court proceedings, and human rights organization investigations document institutional and legal dimensions.

Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books published between 2020-2025, ensuring contemporary relevance while incorporating historical context. Database searches using keywords including "Israel-Palestine conflict," "Gaza," "humanitarian intervention," and "regional security dynamics" identified relevant literature prioritizing methodological rigor and analytical balance.

Analysis proceeded through iterative coding identifying thematic categories: military-security responses, diplomatic initiatives, legal accountability mechanisms, humanitarian interventions, and regional power dynamics. Comparative analysis across actor categories revealed convergences and divergences in reaction patterns. Limitations include potential source bias in official documents, language constraints regarding Arabic and Hebrew sources, and incomplete evidence due to the conflict's ongoing nature.

Analysis and Findings

Israeli Counter-Conflict Reactions

Israeli responses centered on military operations framed within security doctrine emphasizing preemptive defense, deterrence through overwhelming force, and elimination of militant infrastructure. Military campaigns in Gaza involved extensive aerial bombardment, ground incursions, and siege tactics restricting humanitarian access. Israeli officials characterized operations as defensive responses to attacks targeting civilians, justified under international humanitarian law provisions allowing military necessity and proportionality in self-defense (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Strategic objectives included dismantling Hamas military capabilities, preventing future attacks, and reasserting deterrence credibility. Tactics targeted tunnel networks, weapons facilities, and command structures, alongside control of population movement. International criticism focused on disproportionate civilian casualties, collective punishment allegations, and humanitarian law violations including attacks on medical facilities and civilian infrastructure (Amnesty International, 2024). Israeli responses emphasized Hamas use of civilian areas for military purposes, complicating distinction requirements.

Israeli diplomatic strategy pursued bilateral engagement with supportive states, particularly the United States, while resisting multilateral forums perceived as hostile. Rejection of International Criminal Court jurisdiction reflected broader skepticism toward international legal mechanisms. Information campaigns emphasized security threats, historical persecution, and democratic values to maintain international support.

Palestinian Counter-Conflict Reactions

Palestinian responses encompassed armed resistance by militant factions, primarily Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, alongside diplomatic and legal strategies pursued by Palestinian Authority and civil society organizations. October 2023 operations represented significant tactical escalation involving coordinated crossborder attacks and hostage-taking. Hamas framed actions as legitimate resistance to occupation, drawing on international law provisions regarding self-determination (Hamas Political Bureau, 2023).

Subsequent strategies involved sustained militant activities despite capability degradation, seeking to prolong conflict and maintain political relevance. Hostage retention provided negotiating leverage for prisoner exchanges. Palestinian Authority pursued diplomatic channels emphasizing statehood recognition, International

Criminal Court accountability mechanisms, and United Nations forums. However, internal Palestinian divisions between Hamas and Fatah complicated unified strategic response.

Palestinian counter-reactions reflected asymmetric power dynamics requiring unconventional tactics against militarily superior opponent. While armed resistance garnered international attention, it provided justifications for Israeli military responses and complicated Palestinian diplomatic efforts emphasizing victimization and international law violations.

Regional Actor Counter-Reactions

Regional responses revealed complex calculus balancing ideological commitments, security concerns, and political calculations. Egypt maintained border control and mediation role, facilitating limited humanitarian access while preventing refugee flows into Sinai. Egyptian engagement reflected competing priorities: avoiding destabilization, maintaining Israeli peace treaty, and addressing domestic political pressures. Jordan similarly balanced peace treaty obligations with domestic solidarity where majority-Palestinian population expressed strong support for Gaza.

Iranian responses combined material support for Hamas and Hezbollah with rhetorical solidarity, framing conflict within broader regional resistance axis. However, direct Iranian military engagement remained limited, suggesting strategic caution regarding escalation risks. Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, demonstrated normalization recalibration. While Abraham Accords signatories maintained formal ties, public criticism of military operations and suspension of normalization progress reflected domestic and regional political pressures.

Lebanese Hezbollah engaged in limited northern border operations demonstrating solidarity while avoiding fullscale war, balancing organizational commitments against Lebanese domestic fragility. Regional actors thus pursued restrained engagement protecting interests while signaling positions.

International Institutional Counter-Reactions

United Nations responses highlighted Security Council paralysis contrasted with General Assembly activism. Security Council resolutions faced vetoes from permanent members with divergent strategic interests, particularly United States support for Israel preventing comprehensive condemnation or enforcement measures (United Nations Security Council, 2023-2024). General Assembly resolutions calling for ceasefire demonstrated broad international sentiment but lacked binding enforcement power.

International Criminal Court prosecutor's applications for arrest warrants against Israeli and Hamas leaders represented potentially significant accountability mechanism, testing Court's capacity to address powerful state actors and non-state groups simultaneously (International Criminal Court, 2024). However, enforcement remained dependent on state cooperation, limiting practical impact. International Court of Justice proceedings addressing occupation legality and genocide allegations represented another legal front potentially influencing international law interpretations.

Humanitarian organizations faced unprecedented access restrictions, with relief operations severely constrained by security conditions and border closures. International counter-reactions thus demonstrated fragmented approaches reflecting underlying geopolitical divisions rather than coherent conflict management strategy.

DISCUSSION

Analysis reveals counter-conflict reactions characterized by strategic rationality within actors' perceived constraints yet collectively producing outcomes perpetuating rather than transforming conflict dynamics. Israeli security-maximizing responses, while comprehensible through realist lens emphasizing threat perceptions, generated humanitarian consequences undermining long-term security through regional antagonism and Palestinian radicalization. Military operations achieved tactical objectives regarding militant capability degradation but failed to address underlying drivers rooted in occupation and blockade conditions.

Palestinian counter-reactions demonstrated strategic logic combining armed resistance for political relevance with diplomatic advocacy for international legitimacy. However, asymmetric power dynamics constrained effectiveness, with armed resistance providing justifications for Israeli military responses while diplomatic efforts struggled against great power politics. Regional actor responses reflected risk-averse positioning prioritizing stability over transformation, with rhetorical solidarity addressing domestic pressures but substantive interventions risking escalation costs.

International institutional counter-reactions exposed systematic failures in conflict resolution architecture. Security Council paralysis reflected structural features where powerful states prioritize strategic interests over international law enforcement. Legal mechanisms demonstrated potential for accountability but faced enforcement challenges and political resistance.

Applying conflict transformation framework reveals that prevailing counter-reactions insufficiently address structural, relational, and cultural dimensions necessary for sustainable peace. Structural asymmetries in military power and territorial control intensified rather than diminished. Relational dimensions characterized by dehumanization and mistrust deepened through violence cycles. Cultural dimensions emphasizing existential threats remained entrenched, complicating leadership capacity to pursue compromise.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This assessment reveals complex interplay between strategic calculations, structural constraints, and normative commitments shaping actor responses. Findings demonstrate that while individual reactions may reflect rational pursuit of perceived interests, collectively they perpetuate violence cycles and humanitarian suffering while failing to address root causes or advance sustainable peace.

Conflict transformation theory illuminates why current approaches prove insufficient. Absent interventions addressing structural occupation, relational antagonism, and cultural exclusivism, tactical de-escalation remains temporary. Alternative approaches require political courage, sustained commitment, and fundamental reconsideration of security paradigms.

Recommendations emerge at multiple levels. For primary parties, cessation of violence, humanitarian access restoration, and good-faith negotiations toward political solutions respecting legitimate security concerns while ending occupation remain essential. Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and Palestinian state establishment within internationally recognized borders would address structural dimensions. Palestinian unity government incorporating diverse factions could enhance negotiation credibility.

Regional actors should move beyond rhetorical solidarity toward substantive engagement supporting political solutions, including economic incentives and security guarantees. International institutions require fundamental reform strengthening enforcement mechanisms and ensuring consistent application of international law. Strengthening International Criminal Court capacity and conditioning military assistance on human rights compliance could enhance accountability.

Scholarly research should continue developing theoretical frameworks capturing asymmetric conflict complexities and conducting comparative analyses identifying successful transformation cases. Ultimately, the Israel-Palestine conflict demonstrates that military solutions to political problems prove unsustainable. Transformation requires acknowledging mutual humanity, addressing historical injustices, and constructing political frameworks enabling dignity, security, and self-determination for all peoples.

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