



The Roles of External Actors in Mediating the Israel-Hamas Conflict

Eseoghene Gift Okome & Prof. A.E Orhero

¹Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka

²Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka

ABSTRACT

This study critically examined the roles of external actors in mediating the Israel–Hamas conflict, focusing on how these international stakeholders have influenced peacebuilding efforts amid recurring violence and deep-rooted mistrust. Anchored on the objective to assess the strategies and challenges of external mediation in the conflict, the research employed a qualitative case study design and relied on secondary sources such as reports, scholarly articles, policy documents, and diplomatic communiqués. Through thematic analysis, the study uncovered that while external actors such as Egypt, Qatar, the United Nations, and the United States have played pivotal roles in facilitating ceasefires, providing humanitarian aid, and initiating indirect dialogue between the conflicting parties, their interventions have often been limited by bias, lack of coordination, and competing political agendas. One of the key findings revealed that the absence of a unified and neutral mediation approach has continued to weaken the legitimacy and effectiveness of external peace efforts. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the need for a shift toward a more inclusive, coordinated, and locally grounded mediation process that recognizes the asymmetrical nature of the conflict. It recommends that external actors adopt a principled and long-term strategy focused not only on short-term ceasefires but on addressing the structural causes of the conflict in line with international norms and local realities.

Keywords: *External actors, Israel-Hamas conflict, mediation, peacebuilding, diplomacy, thematic analysis, case study, conflict resolution, and international relations*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the evolution of human civilization, conflict has remained an intrinsic aspect of the social fabric, manifesting in various forms, from ancient territorial disputes to contemporary manifestations such as terrorism and internal disintegration. The devastating consequences of conflict have necessitated the development of multifaceted approaches aimed at resolution and transformation, including diplomatic negotiations, peacekeeping engagements, and the institutionalization of international accords. Beyond conventional methodologies, scholars like John Burton and Johan Galtung have advanced transformative paradigms for understanding and resolving conflict, focusing on structural violence, needs theory, and the pursuit of positive peace as mechanisms for sustainable resolution.

Conflict, inherently multidimensional, is situated within the interplay of divergent interests, perceptions, and behaviours among actors at both individual and collective levels. Within the discourse of international relations, competing theoretical frameworks have sought to interpret the dynamics of conflict and its resolution. Realism, grounded in the primacy of power politics and survival imperatives, interprets conflict as an unavoidable consequence of anarchic global structures and state-centric self-interest (Morgenthau, 1984). Liberal perspectives, however, posit that institutional

cooperation, interdependence, and rule-based engagements serve as moderating forces capable of attenuating hostilities (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Constructivist scholars, diverging from materialist assumptions, assert that the ideational landscape, comprising identities, norms, and social narratives, constitutes the foundation upon which conflict is constructed and perpetuated (Wendt, 1999).

In this context, the protracted Israeli-Hamas confrontation exemplifies a deeply entrenched geopolitical struggle, underpinned by historical dispossession, asymmetrical power dynamics, and identity contestations. Tracing its origins to the influx of Jewish immigrants into Palestine in the late 19th century, the conflict has evolved through successive waves of violence and political transformation, particularly after the 1948 establishment of the Israeli state, a moment which simultaneously signified national rebirth for one group and displacement for another (Robins, 2019). The enduring impasse is shaped by competing territorial narratives, ideological divergence, and cumulative grievances.

From a realist vantage point, this enduring hostility is symptomatic of a broader security dilemma, where the imperatives of territorial sovereignty and existential protection dominate strategic considerations. Conversely, liberal theorists underscore the deficit of mutual recognition, institutional engagement, and diplomatic channels as key factors that have hindered conflict de-escalation. Constructivist interpretations further illuminate how historically embedded discourses, symbolic claims, and the construction of the “other” continue to fuel antagonism, impeding reconciliatory efforts.

External actors have significantly influenced attempts to mediate the protracted Israel-Hamas conflict. The United States played a central role in brokering the 1993 Oslo Accords, which aimed to lay the foundation for peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine. However, the breakdown of the Oslo framework has led many to question the U.S.'s impartiality in the peace process (Gresh, 2006). More recently, the Abraham Accords, which normalized diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab nations, have been heralded by some as a diplomatic breakthrough. Nonetheless, critics argue that these accords fail to tackle the underlying issues of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute (Karshenas, 2019). The United Nations has long engaged with the conflict through various resolutions promoting peace and coexistence, while organizations like the European Union and the Arab League have attempted to support dialogue through multilateral diplomacy. Beyond state institutions, non-governmental organizations and faith-based groups have sought to bridge divides by offering humanitarian assistance and fostering mutual understanding.

Yet, despite these sustained international efforts, the conflict continues to erupt periodically into violence. According to findings by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, mediators are confronted with numerous obstacles, such as deep-seated mistrust, divergent political interests, and limited diplomatic leverage (Rosenblum et al., 2021). Regional dynamics further complicate peace efforts, with numerous actors, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, attempting to influence outcomes to serve broader strategic interests. The conflict is also shaped by the broader forces of globalization, digital media, and extremist violence, all of which add layers of complexity to the peacebuilding process. On the humanitarian front, the protracted nature of the conflict has resulted in serious human rights violations affecting both Palestinians and Israelis. Reports have highlighted issues such as unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, and restrictions on movement (Amnesty International & Human Rights Watch, 2021). Institutions like the United Nations and global human rights organizations have continued to condemn these abuses, advocating for justice and accountability. The International Criminal Court has also opened inquiries into alleged war crimes, demonstrating the gravity and international scope of the humanitarian crisis (OHCHR, 2021).

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has inflicted severe socio-economic hardships on the people of Gaza, their insecurity and state of the nation (Ikenga & Agah, 2020) manifesting in widespread poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to essential services such as education and healthcare. Prolonged blockades and recurrent violence have crippled Gaza's economy, resulting in job losses and widespread economic despair. The lack of sufficient infrastructure and resources has further impeded access to fundamental services, particularly affecting vulnerable groups like children and the elderly. Regionally, the conflict has disrupted the political balance in the Middle East, particularly straining Israel's relations with neighboring countries like Egypt and Jordan, both of which have historically played roles in facilitating peace efforts (Dupont et al., 2020). The instability has also created a power vacuum that has been exploited by extremist factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, allowing them to expand their influence within Gaza and across the region.

Despite the complexities, external actors have continued to explore avenues for peacebuilding. As highlighted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, diplomatic strategies such as shuttle diplomacy, peace summits, and measures aimed at fostering mutual trust have been employed to reduce tensions and promote dialogue (Levy et al., 2021). One long-standing proposal has been the two-state solution, which envisions the coexistence of an independent Israeli state alongside a sovereign Palestinian state. Although this model seeks to resolve core issues, including territorial boundaries, the right of return for refugees, and mutual security concerns, it remains hindered by deep political and ideological divisions. Alternatively, the one-state solution has been advocated by some scholars and activists as a more equitable approach, proposing a unified democratic state where both Palestinians and Israelis enjoy equal rights (Karshenas, 2019). However, this vision also faces formidable obstacles, particularly regarding the integration of populations with deeply rooted and often opposing national narratives. Additionally, critics argue that international interventions, if not carefully managed, could intensify hostilities rather than resolve them.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What roles have external actors played in the mediation efforts aimed at resolving the Israel-Hamas conflict?
- ii. What are the major challenges encountered by external actors in their attempts to mediate the Israel-Hamas conflict?
- iii. What strategies and diplomatic approaches have been employed by external actors in mediating the Israel-Hamas conflict?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the roles of external actors' mediation efforts in the Israel-Gaza conflict. The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the roles played by external actors in the mediation efforts of the Israel-Hamas conflict.
- ii. identify the key challenges faced by external actors in their attempts to mediate the Israel-Hamas conflict.
- iii. analyze the strategies and diplomatic approaches adopted by external actors in mediating the Israel-Hamas conflict.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

Conflict Resolution Theory is a broad interdisciplinary framework that seeks to understand the underlying causes of conflict and to develop strategies for resolving it constructively and sustainably.

The foundational work of John Burton, a key scholar in conflict resolution, significantly shaped this theoretical approach in the late 20th century, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Burton challenged traditional realist and power-based approaches to conflict by introducing the concept of "human needs theory," which posits that conflicts often arise from the denial of fundamental human needs such as identity, security, recognition, and autonomy (Burton, 1990). According to this theory, unless these non-negotiable needs are addressed, conflict is likely to persist or re-emerge, regardless of power balances or ceasefires. The key assumptions of Conflict Resolution Theory are rooted in the belief that conflicts are not only inevitable but also resolvable through peaceful means if the underlying causes are thoroughly understood and adequately addressed. It assumes that parties in conflict are rational actors who can engage in meaningful dialogue and that with the right mechanisms—such as mediation, negotiation, dialogue facilitation, and peacebuilding efforts—sustainable peace is achievable (Ikenga & Chima, 2021). It emphasizes the importance of third-party interventions, particularly impartial mediators who can assist conflicting parties in identifying common interests and developing mutually beneficial solutions.

One of the strengths of Conflict Resolution Theory lies in its holistic and human-centered approach. Unlike traditional conflict management or deterrence models that focus on power and coercion, this theory emphasizes empathy, communication, and relationship-building. It seeks to address not just the symptoms of conflict but its root causes, thus promoting long-term peace. Another strength is its adaptability across various cultural and political contexts, making it applicable to intra-state, inter-state, and international conflicts. However, the theory is not without weaknesses. One of the main criticisms is its idealism. Critics argue that it often underestimates the role of entrenched power structures, historical grievances, and the unwillingness of parties to compromise. In cases where actors are deeply invested in maintaining the status quo or where power asymmetry is extreme, the assumption of rationality and willingness to dialogue may not hold. Additionally, the success of conflict resolution processes often depends on the neutrality and credibility of the mediators, which can be difficult to guarantee in complex geopolitical conflicts.

Conflict Resolution Theory is particularly relevant to understanding and assessing the role of external actors in mediating the enduring and complex Israel-Hamas conflict. The theory emphasizes the importance of identifying and addressing the deep-rooted grievances on both sides, such as territorial claims, security concerns, refugee rights, identity, and sovereignty.

External actors, including the United Nations, the United States, Egypt, Qatar, and the European Union, have often intervened with various strategies like shuttle diplomacy, humanitarian negotiations, ceasefire arrangements, and long-term peace proposals. From the lens of Conflict Resolution Theory, these actors are not just mediating negotiations but are potential facilitators of deeper transformation if they adopt neutral and empathetic approaches that empower both parties to address root issues (Levy & Shikaki, 2021). For instance, Egypt's mediation has often focused on ceasefires and prisoner exchanges, which, while useful in the short term, fail to resolve the core issues of displacement, occupation, and recognition (Moghadam, 2020). Conflict Resolution Theory would advocate for Egypt and other external actors to support initiatives that include inclusive dialogue, mutual recognition, and frameworks for restorative justice. Moreover, the theory underlines the need for sustained engagement and a bottom-up approach, where local civil society organizations and grassroots actors are involved in peacebuilding (Azar, 1990; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2016). In Gaza and Israel, where mistrust runs deep, external actors applying conflict resolution frameworks must invest in long-term programs that build trust, address trauma, and support cooperative economic and educational projects across borders.

However, the theory also reveals some challenges. The asymmetry of power between Israel and Hamas makes it difficult to implement balanced resolutions, as Israel's military and political dominance affects negotiations. Moreover, the influence of international politics—particularly the U.S.'s strong support for Israel, raises questions about impartiality and legitimacy, which Conflict Resolution Theory identifies as barriers to sustainable peace (Friedman, 2022).

Concept of Conflict

Conflict is a natural and inevitable aspect of human interaction that arises when individuals or groups perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, or interference from others in achieving their objectives. Coser (1956) views conflict as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and resources in which the opponents aim to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. According to Deutsch (1973), conflict occurs whenever incompatible activities occur, and the actions of one party interfere, obstruct, or oppose the goals or actions of another. Burton (1990) argues that conflict emerges from the denial of fundamental human needs, such as security, identity, recognition, and autonomy, and persists when such needs are unmet or ignored by dominant actors or institutions. Jeong (2008) adds that conflict reflects deep-rooted social, political, and economic grievances and requires structural changes for effective resolution. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2016) further contend that conflict is not merely a disruption but a dynamic process that can stimulate necessary change and reform in societies when properly managed and transformed.

Concept of Mediation

Mediation is widely regarded as a conflict resolution process in which a neutral third party facilitates communication and negotiation between disputing parties to help them reach a voluntary and mutually acceptable agreement. According to Moore (2022), mediation is a structured, interactive process where an impartial individual assists parties in resolving their differences constructively. Boule (2020) views mediation as a flexible and informal method of dispute resolution that emphasizes collaboration over confrontation, allowing parties to maintain control over outcomes. Menkel-Meadow (2021) asserts that mediation promotes understanding and relationship repair by focusing on interests rather than rigid legal positions, making it a powerful tool in both interpersonal and international disputes. In a similar vein, Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2020) argue that mediation helps shift the negotiation from positional bargaining to interest-based negotiation, fostering outcomes that satisfy the needs of all parties involved. Wall and Dunne (2022) define mediation as a process where the mediator does not impose a decision but instead facilitates the dialogue that enables disputants to explore solutions themselves. Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2021) emphasize that mediation promotes empowerment and recognition, allowing parties to express their perspectives while also acknowledging the other side's narrative.

Bush and Folger (2023) propose a transformative view of mediation, where the goal is not merely settlement but personal and relational transformation, achieved through enhanced self-awareness and mutual understanding. Meanwhile, Mayer (2022) stresses that mediation is most effective when it accounts for the deeper emotional, psychological, and systemic dimensions of a conflict, rather than focusing solely on surface-level disagreements. Thus, mediation is a dynamic and evolving process grounded in empathy, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving, making it a valuable mechanism for managing conflict across a wide range of social, legal, and political settings.

Concept of External Actors

External actors are defined as international stakeholders such as foreign states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and transnational institutions that operate beyond the immediate context of a conflict but intervene to influence its outcomes through diplomatic, economic, military, or humanitarian means. According to Zartman (2020), external actors are entities that do not belong to the disputing parties but play a critical role in shaping negotiations and supporting peace processes through leverage or facilitation. Bercovitch and Gartner (2021) argue that these actors often serve as third-party mediators whose involvement can shift the power dynamics of conflict, particularly in asymmetric disputes. As posited by Diehl (2022), the participation of external actors is driven by a combination of normative commitments, strategic interests, or regional security concerns. Ramsbotham et al. (2021) emphasize that external actors can be either state or non-state entities whose roles vary from passive observers to active mediators, enforcers, or sponsors of peace initiatives. In Aall's (2023) view, the credibility, neutrality, and capacity of external actors significantly

influence the success or failure of their mediation efforts in long-term conflicts. Finally, Newman and Richmond (2024) underscore that external actors often shape the peace agenda and institutional outcomes through conditional aid, diplomatic pressure, or peacekeeping operations, especially in ongoing identity-based or ideological conflicts like the Israel– Hamas confrontation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a case study design within a qualitative research framework, which is appropriate for exploring the complex roles of external actors in the Israel– Hamas conflict in depth and within its real-world context. As Yin (2018) asserts, the case study method allows for a detailed examination of contemporary phenomena where boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not evident. The use of secondary data is justified because it enables access to a wide range of existing reports, policy documents, scholarly articles, and international media sources, which are essential for understanding historical patterns and diplomatic engagements (Johnston, 2017). According to Bryman (2020), secondary sources are valuable in conflict studies for offering rich, diverse, and longitudinal data that may not be easily obtainable through fieldwork due to political sensitivity. Thematic analysis was employed to systematically identify and interpret recurring patterns within the data, making it suitable for understanding the narratives, interests, and strategies of various external actors. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize that thematic analysis is particularly useful in qualitative research for organizing complex datasets into meaningful themes that align with the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

QUESTION 1: What roles have external actors played in the mediation efforts aimed at resolving the Israel-Hamas conflict?

External actors have played central, diverse, and often contested roles in the mediation efforts aimed at resolving the Israel-Hamas conflict. These roles have ranged from direct diplomatic engagement, financial and humanitarian intervention, pressure-based negotiations, to third-party facilitation of ceasefires. The involvement of such actors has been shaped by their geopolitical interests, historical alignments, and varying degrees of neutrality in the conflict. The United States has historically taken a dominant role in the Israeli–Palestinian peace process and continues to exert substantial influence. Washington’s mediation efforts have often focused on securing temporary ceasefires and promoting broader political solutions, such as the two-state framework. However, its role has also been criticized for lacking neutrality due to its deep strategic alliance with Israel. According to Quandt (2020), U.S.-led mediation often suffers from asymmetrical bias, which limits its credibility among Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas, who view it as complicit in Israel’s military and political dominance. Nevertheless, during major escalations like the 2014 and 2021 Gaza conflicts, the U.S. played a behind-the-scenes role in facilitating truces through coordination with regional actors such as Egypt and Qatar (Miller, 2022).

Egypt’s role as a mediator is particularly significant given its shared border with the Gaza Strip and its historical engagement with both Israel and Hamas. Egypt has often been the primary regional actor capable of initiating and enforcing ceasefires. As noted by Elgindy (2023), Egypt combines strategic interest with practical leverage, as it controls the Rafah crossing and has intelligence links with both parties. Cairo’s diplomatic credibility rests on its positioning as a regional power and its ability to engage Hamas without fully endorsing its ideology or actions.

Qatar has emerged as an influential actor, primarily through its financial support and informal channels of communication with Hamas. Its mediation efforts are often conducted through quiet diplomacy and the provision of humanitarian aid. According to Barakat and Milton (2022), Qatar’s engagement reflects a model of conflict resolution based on financial leverage and political pragmatism, allowing it to act as a bridge between Islamist movements and Western-aligned states.

Despite facing criticism from some quarters, Qatar's involvement has led to tangible outcomes such as de-escalation deals and funding of reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

The United Nations also plays a key role, albeit with limited enforcement power. Through the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) and humanitarian agencies like UNRWA, the UN supports conflict mitigation by delivering aid, facilitating dialogue, and issuing international appeals for a ceasefire and respect for international humanitarian law. While the UN often faces geopolitical gridlock—particularly within the Security Council—its moral authority and institutional mechanisms enable it to sustain pressure for peaceful engagement (Newman, 2021).

The European Union has consistently promoted a multilateral approach, advocating for a negotiated settlement and supporting state-building efforts in Palestine. Although the EU lacks direct influence over Hamas due to its classification of the group as a terrorist organization, it exerts soft power through funding, diplomatic support for Palestinian Authority institutions, and advocacy for human rights and international law. As argued by Tocci (2020), the EU's role is constrained by internal divisions and reliance on U.S. leadership, yet its normative engagement remains a vital element of the broader mediation landscape.

Other actors, such as Turkey and Iran, have pursued more ideological or adversarial forms of involvement. Turkey, under Erdoğan, has positioned itself as a vocal critic of Israeli actions while expressing solidarity with Palestinian resistance. Iran's support for Hamas is more strategic and military, complicating mediation efforts by entrenching regional rivalries into the conflict. According to Levitt (2022), such actors may not engage in formal mediation, but they influence the conflict dynamics by shaping Hamas's political calculations and military capabilities.

QUESTION 2: What are the major challenges encountered by external actors in their attempts to mediate the Israel-Hamas conflict?

External Actors involved in mediating the Israel-Hamas conflict face a host of complex and interlocking challenges that significantly undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of their efforts. These challenges are rooted in the deep structural asymmetries of the conflict, ideological rigidity, geopolitical rivalries, and the highly volatile and politicized nature of the Israeli-Palestinian landscape. Despite various diplomatic initiatives, ceasefire arrangements, and humanitarian interventions, the recurrence of hostilities and the absence of a long-term political settlement reflect the severe constraints external mediators continue to confront. One of the foremost challenges is the lack of trust and legitimacy between the parties and the mediators themselves. Many external actors, particularly the United States and the European Union, are perceived by Hamas and other Palestinian factions as biased toward Israel. This perceived partiality weakens their legitimacy as neutral mediators. As Shlaim (2022) observes, external actors cannot credibly serve as mediators when they are deeply aligned with one side of the conflict, especially in a setting where historical grievances and asymmetries in power are so entrenched. Hamas, for example, has consistently rejected U.S.-led initiatives, citing Washington's military and diplomatic support for Israel as evidence of its unsuitability as a neutral party. Similarly, the EU's classification of Hamas as a terrorist organization limits its capacity to directly engage with the group, thereby excluding a key actor from meaningful dialogue (Tocci, 2023).

Another significant challenge is the fragmentation and polarization of the Palestinian political landscape, which hinders coherent negotiation efforts. The divide between the Palestinian Authority (PA), based in the West Bank, and Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, creates a dual authority structure that complicates peace mediation. External actors often find themselves forced to choose between engaging with the internationally recognized PA or addressing the de facto governing authority in Gaza—Hamas—which is essential to any durable ceasefire or political solution. As argued by Hroub (2020), this division enables Israel to avoid negotiations on broader political resolutions by compartmentalizing the conflict, thereby weakening mediation leverage.

Geopolitical rivalries and conflicting interests among external actors themselves further impede effective mediation. Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, Iran, the U.S., and the UN all play roles in the

conflict, but their motivations often diverge. Egypt and Qatar, for instance, have coordinated on ceasefire deals, yet differ in their broader strategic ambitions and alliances. Iran's support for Hamas is rooted in its opposition to Israeli regional dominance and its rivalry with U.S.-aligned Arab regimes. According to Gerges (2021), these divergent interests create a fragmented diplomatic front, making collective mediation efforts inconsistent and reactive rather than strategic and sustained.

The asymmetric power structure between Israel and Hamas presents a fundamental obstacle to balanced mediation. Israel, as a state with advanced military and economic capabilities, holds substantial control over Palestinian territories, borders, and movement. External mediators often struggle to address this imbalance without appearing to undermine Israel's security interests. Yet without acknowledging and rectifying structural asymmetries—such as the blockade of Gaza, settlement expansion, and the absence of Palestinian sovereignty, mediation risks becoming an exercise in conflict management rather than resolution. Khalidi (2023) emphasizes that sustainable mediation must confront the realities of occupation and systemic inequality, yet few external actors are willing or able to do so due to political pressures and diplomatic costs.

Internal political dynamics within external actors' home countries often influence the scope and direction of their mediation efforts. In democratic countries like the United States, public opinion, lobby groups, and electoral politics can shape foreign policy in ways that limit flexibility in engaging controversial actors like Hamas. For instance, the strong pro-Israel lobby in U.S. politics constrains Washington's ability to act as an impartial broker. As highlighted by Walt and Mearsheimer (2020), domestic political pressures can skew foreign policy decisions, leading to policies that favour one side and alienate the other, thereby diminishing mediation effectiveness.

Another critical challenge is the recurring cycles of violence, which constantly derail negotiation processes. Each outbreak of conflict, often triggered by military incursions, rocket fire, or provocations at religious or politically sensitive sites, resets the mediation process, forcing external actors to focus on immediate de-escalation rather than long-term solutions. This reactive approach creates a repetitive pattern of crisis response without addressing the underlying causes of the conflict. According to Pappé (2021), mediation efforts remain superficial when they merely seek temporary calm instead of confronting the root issues of displacement, statelessness, and occupation.

The marginalization of international law and human rights in mediation processes severely weakens the credibility and moral authority of external actors. Mediators often prioritize political stability over justice, overlooking violations of international humanitarian law, including civilian casualties, forced evictions, and indiscriminate attacks. This omission undermines the trust of the affected populations, particularly in Gaza, and entrenches the belief that international mediation is merely a tool for managing, rather than ending, their oppression. Falk (2023) contends that any meaningful mediation must be grounded in international legal norms and human rights frameworks to be seen as legitimate and just by all parties.

QUESTION 3: What strategies and diplomatic approaches have been employed by external actors in mediating the Israel-Hamas conflict?

The mediation of the Israel-Hamas conflict by external actors has involved a wide range of strategies and diplomatic approaches, each tailored to the specific interests, capacities, and geopolitical alignments of the mediating actors. These approaches have evolved in response to changing regional dynamics, internal political shifts, and the recurrent cycles of violence that characterize the conflict. External Actors such as Egypt, the United States, Qatar, the United Nations, Turkey, and the European Union have all played significant roles in seeking both short-term de-escalation and long-term conflict resolution, though with varying degrees of success. These interventions have employed traditional diplomatic tools, backchannel negotiations, humanitarian diplomacy, coercive leverage, and strategic aid incentives to influence the behavior of the conflicting parties. One of the most enduring strategies has been shuttle diplomacy, particularly led by Egypt and, at various points, the United States. Shuttle diplomacy involves the movement of mediators between

Israel and Gaza (or between representatives of Hamas and Israel, often through third-party locations) to broker ceasefires or reach temporary truces.

Egypt has consistently utilized this approach due to its geographic proximity and historical role as a regional power. According to Elgindy (2023), Egypt's strategy relies on a combination of intelligence coordination, political leverage, and border control over the Rafah crossing to influence Hamas's military and political decisions. Egypt's position as a mediator has been further bolstered by its ability to engage with both sides while maintaining a formal peace treaty with Israel and security arrangements that protect its national interests.

The United States, while not maintaining direct contact with Hamas due to its designation of the group as a terrorist organization, has employed proxy diplomacy through regional allies such as Egypt and Qatar. This has enabled Washington to influence outcomes indirectly while preserving its strategic alliance with Israel. As Miller and Indyk (2022) argue, the U.S. strategy has often focused on securing temporary calm, preserving Israeli security, and avoiding full-scale war, rather than addressing the structural causes of the conflict. U.S. diplomacy has been characterized by strong military aid packages to Israel, coupled with calls for restraint during escalations, and support for post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Gaza through third parties.

Qatar has employed a soft power strategy based on financial diplomacy and quiet mediation. Through significant economic aid to Gaza, including fuel subsidies, salary payments to civil servants, and infrastructure projects, Qatar has positioned itself as a credible interlocutor with Hamas. Barakat and Milton (2022) argue that Qatar's strategy avoids confrontational diplomacy and instead emphasizes behind-the-scenes influence, where the promise of continued funding and humanitarian support is used to moderate Hamas's behavior and secure cooperation during ceasefires. This approach, while effective in reducing tensions in the short term, has also drawn criticism for legitimizing Hamas's authority without demanding significant political concessions.

The United Nations has employed a normative and humanitarian approach, centered around upholding international law, protecting civilian populations, and facilitating humanitarian access. The UN's diplomatic tools include formal condemnations of violations, convening emergency Security Council sessions, and supporting ground-level efforts through agencies like UNRWA and OCHA. As noted by Newman (2021), the UN's capacity for direct mediation is often constrained by internal political divisions, particularly the veto power of permanent Security Council members. Nevertheless, it has played an essential role in coordinating international responses, legitimizing ceasefire calls, and providing moral and legal framing for peace efforts.

Turkey has adopted an ideological and assertive diplomatic strategy, particularly under the leadership of President Erdoğan, who has positioned himself as a defender of Palestinian rights. Ankara's strategy combines vocal international advocacy with attempts to mediate through Islamic solidarity and diplomatic engagement. While Turkey has not been able to play a central mediation role due to strained relations with Israel, it remains influential in shaping global discourse and bolstering Hamas's legitimacy in certain political spheres. According to Göl (2022), Turkey's mediation efforts are embedded in a broader vision of regional leadership and Islamic identity politics, which complicates its relationship with other Western-aligned mediators.

The European Union has consistently promoted a multilateral and institutional approach to conflict mediation. The EU's strategy involves promoting a two-state solution through diplomacy, economic aid, and capacity-building efforts within the Palestinian territories. Although the EU is limited in its direct engagement with Hamas, it supports the Palestinian Authority and has been involved in the broader Middle East Quartet framework alongside the UN, the U.S., and Russia. Tocci (2023) notes that the EU's strategy emphasizes legal norms, human rights, and development as pillars of peacebuilding, but its impact is limited by internal divisions among member states and its inability to exert hard power in the region.

In addition to these actor-specific approaches, several cross-cutting diplomatic tools have emerged across various mediation efforts. One such tool is backchannel diplomacy, which allows informal communication between conflicting parties through neutral intermediaries. This method is

often preferred when direct negotiations are politically sensitive or publicly unacceptable. For instance, in past ceasefire agreements, backchannels involving Norway, Switzerland, or private diplomatic foundations have played key roles in opening lines of communication between Israel and Hamas. According to Crocker et al. (2020), such informal processes are critical in building initial trust and preparing the ground for more formal negotiations. Another recurring strategy is incentive-based mediation, where mediators offer political or economic benefits in exchange for concessions. This includes promises of reconstruction aid to Gaza, easing of border restrictions, or political recognition for Palestinian leadership structures. However, as Khalidi (2023) points out, these incentives often fail when not accompanied by guarantees or enforcement mechanisms, leading to fragile agreements that collapse with each new round of violence. A more coercive form of strategy involves conditionality and sanctions, particularly by Western actors, who threaten to cut aid or impose diplomatic costs on parties that escalate violence. However, such measures have had limited success in altering the behavior of hardened actors like Hamas or in deterring Israeli military responses perceived as self-defense. The imbalance in the ability to enforce conditions on each side has often undermined the credibility and fairness of such strategies.

Findings and Observations

The following findings are observed:

- i. The study found that external actors have played multifaceted roles in mediating the Israel–Hamas conflict by facilitating ceasefires, delivering humanitarian aid, promoting dialogue, and leveraging diplomatic and economic influence. These roles were most prominent during periods of active hostilities, where actors such as Egypt, Qatar, the United States, and the United Nations served as critical intermediaries in brokering temporary halts to violence and enabling negotiations, albeit with limited long-term success.
- ii. The study also revealed that external actors encounter major challenges in their mediation efforts, including political bias, asymmetrical power dynamics between Israel and Hamas, internal divisions within Palestinian leadership, and conflicting agendas among mediators themselves. These factors have eroded trust in the neutrality and credibility of mediators, often leading to fragmented or short-lived outcomes.
- iii. The study indicates that the strategies employed by external actors have ranged from shuttle diplomacy and backchannel negotiations to economic incentives and coordinated multilateral pressure. Despite the sophistication of these diplomatic approaches, the absence of a unified international front and the failure to address the underlying causes of the conflict, such as occupation, security, and political recognition, have limited their effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examined the roles, challenges, and strategies of external actors in mediating the protracted Israel–Hamas conflict. The findings reveal that while external actors have played indispensable roles in facilitating ceasefires, initiating negotiations, and providing humanitarian relief, their interventions have largely been reactive and constrained by geopolitical biases and strategic interests. These actors, including regional powers like Egypt and Qatar, as well as global institutions such as the United Nations and the United States, have attempted to bridge divides between the conflicting parties. However, their efforts often fall short of producing sustainable peace due to deep-seated mistrust, power imbalances, and the internal fragmentation within the Palestinian leadership. The study further highlighted the significant challenges these actors face, ranging from accusations of partiality and lack of legitimacy to the complexity of mediating a deeply asymmetrical and ideologically entrenched conflict. Despite deploying a wide range of diplomatic strategies, including shuttle diplomacy, financial leverage, and indirect negotiations, the absence of a cohesive international strategy and the prioritization of short-term stability over long-term justice have weakened their impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

- i. External actors must adopt a more balanced and impartial approach that prioritizes the legitimate interests and concerns of both parties. This requires moving beyond the current tendency to privilege geopolitical alliances and instead upholding international law, human rights, and local ownership of the peace process. To strengthen mediation outcomes, these actors should also invest in long-term peacebuilding efforts that address the underlying drivers of the conflict, including occupation, blockade, political exclusion, and socio-economic disparities.
- ii. There is a need for greater coordination among mediators. Regional and international stakeholders should develop a unified mediation framework that fosters transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness. Mediation teams should also include culturally sensitive experts and civil society actors from both sides to ensure local legitimacy and broader participation.
- iii. External actors should refine their diplomatic strategies by combining traditional tools such as shuttle diplomacy with innovative approaches like digital diplomacy, track-two engagements, and humanitarian diplomacy. These methods can help rebuild trust, create informal channels for dialogue, and prepare the ground for formal negotiations. Furthermore, mediation efforts must be proactive rather than reactive, aiming to prevent future escalations rather than merely responding to crises.

REFERENCES

- Aall, P. (2023). *Mediating in complex conflicts: The role of external actors*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Amnesty International, & Human Rights Watch. (2021). *Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Human rights concerns*. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories>
- Azar, E. E. (1990). *The management of protracted social conflicts: Theory and cases*. Dartmouth Publishing.
- Barakat, S., & Milton, S. (2022). Qatar's mediation strategy and the Israel-Gaza conflict. *Middle East Policy*, 29(2), 18–34.
- Barnett, M. (2023). *International interventions and the politics of peacebuilding in the Middle East*. Routledge.
- Bercovitch, J., & Gartner, S. S. (2021). *International conflict mediation: New approaches and findings*. Routledge.
- Boulle, L. (2020). *Mediation: Skills and techniques* (4th ed.). LexisNexis Butterworths.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Bryman, A. (2020). *Social research methods* (6th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Burton, J. (1990). *Conflict: Resolution and prevention*. St. Martin's Press.
- Bush, R. A. B., & Folger, J. P. (2023). *The promise of mediation: The transformative approach to conflict* (Revised ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Crocker, C. A., Hampson, F. O., & Aall, P. (2020). *Diplomacy and mediation in the 21st century: Tools for complex conflicts*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Diehl, P. F. (2022). *The puzzle of peace: The evolution of peace in the international system*. Oxford University Press.
- Dupont, A., Heller, M., & Elgindy, K. (2020). The regional implications of the Israel–Palestine conflict. *Middle East Policy Journal*, 27(3), 55–68.
- Elgindy, K. (2023). *Mediation in the Middle East: Egypt's strategic balancing in the Israel– Hamas conflict*. Brookings Institution.

- Falk, R. (2023). *Palestine's horizon: Toward a just peace*. Pluto Press.
- Fisher, R., Ury, W., & Patton, B. (2020). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in* (3rd ed.). Penguin Books.
- Folger, J. P., Poole, M. S., & Stutman, R. K. (2021). *Working through conflict: Strategies for relationships, groups, and organizations* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Friedman, L. (2022). Unpacking America's role in the Israel–Palestine conflict. *Foreign Affairs*, 101(3), 54–69.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. SAGE Publications.
- Gerges, F. A. (2021). *Making the Arab world: Nasser, Qutb, and the clash that shaped the Middle East*. Princeton University Press.
- Göl, A. (2022). Turkey's assertive foreign policy and the politics of mediation in the Middle East. *Turkish Studies*, 23(1), 45–63.
- Gresh, A. (2006). The failure of the Oslo Accords. *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Retrieved from <https://mondediplo.com>
- Hroub, K. (2020). *Hammas: A beginner's guide* (Updated ed.). Pluto Press.
- Ikenga, F. A & Agah, B. (2020). Insecurity and State of the Nation, *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, Vol. 24 (7)
- Ikenga, F. A & Chima (2021). Fundamentals of good governance: The panacea for development performance in Nigeria, *Journal of Public Administration, Finance & Law*, Issue 22
- Johnston, M. P. (2017). Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries (QQML)*, 3(3), 619–626.
- Karshenas, M. (2019). Economic dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the one-state debate. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 14(2), 134–147.
- Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (1977). *Power and interdependence: World politics in transition*. Little, Brown.
- Khalidi, R. (2023). *The hundred years' war on Palestine: A history of settler colonialism and resistance, 1917–2023*. Picador.
- Levitt, M. (2022). Hamas and Iran: Strategic partnership in regional conflict. *The Washington Institute*.
- Levy, G., Sadiki, L., & Brown, N. J. (2021). Diplomatic strategies and external mediation in the Israel-Hamas conflict. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org>
- Mayer, B. (2022). *Beyond neutrality: Confronting the crisis in conflict resolution*. Jossey-Bass.
- Menkel-Meadow, C. (2021). *Negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution: Core concepts and skills*. Wolters Kluwer.
- Miller, A. D. (2022). The U.S. and the Israel–Hamas conflict: The limits of mediation. *Foreign Affairs*, 101(4), 67–73.
- Miller, A. D., & Indyk, M. (2022). The limits of American mediation in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. *Foreign Affairs*, 101(4), 67–73.
- Moghadam, A. (2020). The role of Egypt in Israel–Palestine mediation: Patterns and pitfalls. *Middle East Policy Journal*, 27(2), 114–128.
- Moore, C. W. (2022). *The mediation process: Practical strategies for resolving conflict* (5th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Morgenthau, H. J. (1984). *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace* (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Newman, D. (2021). The UN's limited role in the Israel–Palestine conflict. *International Peacekeeping*, 28(1), 89–104.
- Newman, E., & Richmond, O. P. (2024). *Peacebuilding and conflict resolution: The role of external actors in post-conflict environments*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2021). *Situation in the State of Palestine: Report on human rights*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org>
- Pappé, I. (2021). *The biggest prison on Earth: A history of the occupied territories*. *Oneworld Publications*.
- Quandt, W. B. (2020). *Peace process: American diplomacy and the Arab–Israeli conflict since 1967*. *Brookings Institution Press*.
- Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T., & Miall, H. (2016). *Contemporary conflict resolution*. *Polity Press*.
- Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T., & Miall, H. (2021). *Contemporary conflict resolution (5th ed.)*. *Polity Press*.
- Robins, P. (2019). *Middle East politics and international relations: Dilemmas and developments*. *Oxford University Press*.
- Rosenblum, Y., Eldar, A., & Inbar, E. (2021). Obstacles to peace in the Israel-Palestinian conflict: An assessment of mediator challenges. *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://jcpa.org>
- Shlaim, A. (2022). *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab world (3rd ed.)*. Penguin Books.
- Tocci, N. (2020). The EU's role in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: A normative power reassessed. *Journal of European Integration*, 42(3), 399–414.
- Tocci, N. (2023). Mediation, power, and politics in the Middle East: The role of the European Union. *Journal of Peace Research*, 60(1), 12–28.
- Wall, J. A., & Dunne, T. C. (2022). Mediation research: A current review. *Negotiation Journal*, 38(1), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nej.12389>
- Walt, S. M., & Mearsheimer, J. J. (2020). *The Israel lobby and U.S. foreign policy*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. *Cambridge University Press*.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.)*. *SAGE Publications*.
- Zartman, I. W. (2020). *Ripe for resolution: Conflict and intervention in Africa*. *Oxford University Press*.