

Beyond Gaza and Jerusalem: Why the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict Still Matters for Global Order

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Introduction

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict cannot be understood merely as a regional dispute confined to the Middle East. Rather, it represents a persistent fault line in the contemporary international system, one that continues to shape global diplomacy, security alignments, normative debates, and public opinion across regions (Gupta, 2018; Alpher & Khatib, 2004). Despite repeated diplomatic initiatives and international mediation efforts, the conflict remains unresolved, underscoring both the limits of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the structural challenges embedded in protracted disputes (Bercovitch & Lamare, 1993; Nuseibeh, 2000). Building on existing scholarly analyses, including recent work examining the conflict's historical evolution, international dimensions, and future trajectories, this commentary situates the Israeli–Palestinian conflict within broader debates on global governance, international legitimacy, and the changing nature of world politics (Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013; Lee & Hocking, 2010).

Historical Legacies and the Persistence of Competing Narratives

At the core of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict lies a deeply entrenched clash of historical narratives and nationalist aspirations. The conflict emerged from the late Ottoman and British Mandate periods, when overlapping promises, colonial governance, and demographic transformations created the foundations for long-term contestation (Cattan, 1969). The 1947 UN Partition Plan and the subsequent establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 did not resolve competing claims to land, sovereignty, and political identity; instead, they institutionalised a conflict that has endured for more than seven decades (Adams, 1992; Ferguson, 1973).

What distinguishes this conflict from many others is not merely its longevity, but the way in which historical grievances continue to be actively mobilised in contemporary politics. Memory, trauma, and identity remain central to political discourse on both sides, reinforcing zero-sum perceptions and limiting political space for compromise (Khouri, 2010; Rodinson, 1973). For external actors, these deeply rooted narratives complicate mediation efforts, as diplomatic solutions often struggle to address existential fears and symbolic claims tied to territory, religion, and statehood (Marleku & Emini, 2016).

International Actors and the Limits of External Mediation

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has long been internationalised, drawing sustained involvement from major powers and multilateral institutions. The United States, the United Nations, the European Union, and, historically, Russia have all played prominent roles in shaping diplomatic initiatives and security arrangements. Yet, despite this extensive engagement, international mediation has yielded limited durable outcomes (Nuseibeh, 2000). This raises important questions about the effectiveness of great-power diplomacy in deeply asymmetric conflicts. While the United States has positioned itself as a central broker, its strong strategic alignment with Israel has often undermined perceptions of neutrality (Congressional Research Service, 2021). Meanwhile, UN resolutions Resolution 181 (1947) and Resolution 242 (1967), though normatively significant, have suffered from weak enforcement mechanisms, highlighting the structural constraints of international law when confronted with geopolitical interests (Ismael & Ismael, 2011). The European Union’s experience further illustrates the challenge: despite substantial financial contributions and rhetorical support for a two-state solution, internal divisions and limited hard power have constrained its influence (Lee & Hocking, 2010). Collectively, these dynamics suggest that external actors, while indispensable, cannot substitute for genuine political will among the primary parties themselves (Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013; Alpher & Khatib, 2004).

Contemporary Political Fragmentation and Security Dilemmas

Current political conditions in Israel and the Palestinian territories further complicate prospects for peace. Israeli domestic politics have become increasingly polarised, with the growing influence of nationalist and religious parties narrowing policy options on territorial compromise (Feldman, 2025; Gupta, 2018). On the Palestinian side, political fragmentation, most notably the divide between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza, has weakened collective bargaining capacity and undermined governance legitimacy (Ismael & Ismael, 2011). Security remains the dominant lens through which both societies interpret the conflict. Israeli policy discourse prioritises deterrence, counterterrorism, and regional threat perceptions, while Palestinians experience security primarily through the realities of occupation, mobility restrictions, and economic precarity (Schleifer, 2006). These competing security paradigms reinforce a cycle of mistrust, where actions taken by one side to enhance security are perceived by the other as existential threats (Marleku & Emini, 2016).

Global Implications: Diplomacy, Radicalisation, and Norm Contestation

The implications of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict extend far beyond the Middle East. At the global level, the conflict continues to influence diplomatic alignments, fuel transnational activism, and shape debates on international norms such as self-determination, human rights, and the laws of war (Gupta, 2018). For many societies in Asia, Africa, and the Global South, the Palestinian question resonates with broader postcolonial experiences and perceptions of injustice in the international system (Aouragh, & Chakravartty 2016). The conflict is frequently cited in discussions about

selective application of international law and the unequal treatment of state and non-state actors. These perceptions matter, as they affect the legitimacy of global institutions and the credibility of rule-based order, issues of particular relevance to small and middle powers in Southeast Asia such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore that depend on international norms for strategic stability (To & Liow, 2025). Moreover, the conflict has been repeatedly instrumentalised by extremist groups as a symbolic rallying point, linking local grievances to global narratives of resistance (Marleku & Emini, 2016).

Media, Technology, and the Battle for Narrative Control

One of the most significant transformations in recent years has been the role of media and digital technologies in shaping perceptions of the conflict. Traditional media framing, often influenced by geopolitical alignments, now competes with social media platforms that enable real-time dissemination of images, testimonies, and counter-narratives (Taufiq, Alam & Dermawan, 2025). This digitalisation of conflict has democratised information but also intensified polarisation. Competing claims, misinformation, and emotionally charged content circulate rapidly, influencing public opinion and, increasingly, foreign policy debates in democratic societies (Morse & Pratt, 2025; Alpher & Khatib, 2004).

For policymakers, this creates an environment where domestic pressures driven by online mobilisation can constrain diplomatic flexibility. At the same time, digital platforms, such as social media, have empowered civil society actors, human rights organisations, and grassroots movements to internationalise the conflict in new ways (Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013). This underscores the growing importance of non-state actors in global politics and challenges state-centric approaches to conflict management (Lee & Hocking, 2010).

Rethinking Peace: Beyond the Two-State Orthodoxy

While the two-state solution remains the dominant diplomatic framework, its feasibility has come under growing scrutiny. Continued settlement expansion, territorial fragmentation, and political realities on the ground have led many analysts to question whether the conditions for a viable Palestinian state still exist (Lovi, 2025). Alternative proposals, ranging from confederal arrangements to rights-based one-state models, reflect growing frustration with diplomatic stagnation (Alpher & Khatib, 2004; Marleku & Emini, 2016). However, these alternatives face profound political, demographic, and ideological obstacles. From a policy standpoint, the erosion of a credible peace horizon risks entrenching a de facto one-state reality marked by inequality, instability, and perpetual conflict (Ismael & Ismael, 2011).

Conclusion

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains a critical test case for international conflict resolution, global governance, and the resilience of the rules-based order. Its persistence highlights the limits of power, diplomacy, and international law when

confronted with deeply rooted historical grievances and asymmetrical realities. The conflict offers sobering lessons about the long-term costs of unresolved disputes and the dangers of allowing political stalemate to become normalised. While the region is geographically distant, the normative, diplomatic, and security implications are anything but remote.

Ultimately, any sustainable path forward will require not only political courage from the primary parties but also a rethinking of international engagement, one that prioritises accountability, inclusivity, and long-term conflict transformation over crisis management. Until then, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict will continue to cast a long shadow over regional stability and the global order alike.

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The views of the authors in this commentary are his own and do not represent the official position of the AllAD or any organization.

Suggested Citation:

Ismail, R. (2025). *Beyond Gaza and Jerusalem: Why the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict Still Matters for Global Order*. AllAD Commentary, No. 1 July-August 2025.

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