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Political Communication and Violence in the Israel-Palestine Conflict: A Comparative Study

Mohammed Yassin Abesha

PhD Fellow, School of International Development and Cooperation, University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China; mamila643@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Israel-Palestine conflict, enduring for more than a century, is deeply intertwined with political communication and violence, which serve as both drivers and consequences of the ongoing struggle. This paper delves into the competing narratives, media strategies, and forms of violence used by both Israeli and Palestinian actors, particularly during the recent escalation beginning in October 2023. Through the lens of comparative politics, this study examines how both sides utilize propaganda and violence to shape domestic and international opinions while perpetuating cycles of hostility and repression. Furthermore, the study proposes recommendations aimed at addressing these dynamics and offers potential pathways for conflict resolution. This paper emphasizes the importance of understanding the role of media, propaganda, and violence in shaping the future trajectory of this conflict and the prospects for peace.

KEYWORDS: *Israel-Palestine conflict, political communication, political violence, propaganda, comparative politics, 2023 escalation, conflict resolution.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Israel-Palestine Conflict

The Israel-Palestine conflict, with its origins rooted in the early 20th century, remains one of the most enduring and complex geopolitical disputes in modern history. The foundation of the conflict lies in competing nationalist aspirations, with the Jewish movement seeking a homeland in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine, and Arab Palestinians seeking independence and self-determination. The conflict was significantly shaped by the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which the British government expressed support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine (Mathew, 2013). This declaration heightened tensions between Jewish immigrants and the indigenous Arab population, setting the stage for future confrontations.

The conflict escalated dramatically in 1948 when the State of Israel was established, resulting in the first Arab-Israeli war and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, an event known as the Nakba, or "catastrophe" (Le More, 2008). Subsequent wars, such as the Six-Day War in 1967, further entrenched the conflict, with Israel capturing the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem territories that remain contested to this day. Despite numerous attempts at peace, including the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, the conflict persists, exacerbated by cycles of violence, failed negotiations, and shifting geopolitical landscapes.

The latest escalation, which began in October 2023, has been one of the most intense in recent years. Sparked by heightened tensions in Jerusalem, particularly around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Israeli settlement expansions in the West Bank, the conflict erupted into large-scale violence. Hamas, the militant group governing Gaza, launched a series of coordinated attacks on Israeli towns, leading to significant civilian casualties on both sides. Israel responded with widespread airstrikes on Gaza, further deepening the crisis. This recent conflict has drawn global attention and sparked renewed debate on the international stage regarding the intractability of the Israel-Palestine conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

The Israel-Palestine conflict is sustained not only by territorial disputes but also by the strategic use of political communication and violence. Both Israeli and Palestinian actors rely heavily on media strategies, propaganda, and violent actions to advance their political objectives, gain international support, and influence public opinion. Political communication plays a critical role in shaping how the conflict is perceived globally, while violence serves as both a means of resistance and repression. The cyclical nature of these elements; propaganda fueling violence, and violence reinforcing propaganda, has created a situation where peace seems elusive. This study seeks to explore how these factors interact, particularly in light of the recent 2023 escalation, and how they contribute to the continuation of the conflict.

General and Specific Objectives

General Objective

The overarching objective of this study is to explore the role of political communication and violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict, focusing on how these elements shape public opinion and contribute to the conflict's persistence. The study also aims to examine how the use of media, propaganda, and violence has evolved in light of recent escalations, particularly during the October 2023 conflict, and to propose policy recommendations for conflict resolution.

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the political communication strategies employed by both Israeli and Palestinian actors to shape domestic and international perceptions of the conflict, with a focus on the narratives used during the October 2023 escalation.

2. To examine the forms of political violence, including military operations, terrorism, and state repression, used by both sides in the conflict, and how these forms of violence are framed through media and propaganda.

3. To assess the impact of media framing, particularly the role of social media, in influencing global public opinion and diplomatic responses to the conflict.

4. To evaluate the effectiveness and consequences of state responses, including Israeli military actions and Palestinian resistance tactics, in exacerbating or de-escalating violence.

5. To propose practical recommendations aimed at promoting conflict resolution, with a focus on improving political communication, fostering balanced media coverage, and addressing the root causes of violence and inequality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Comparative Politics Approach

The comparative politics approach provides a valuable framework for analyzing the Israel-Palestine conflict by highlighting the similarities and differences between various political systems and conflicts. Lijphart (1971) emphasizes the importance of comparative methods in identifying patterns across different conflict scenarios. In the case of Israel-Palestine, the conflict is marked by stark power asymmetry, where Israel, a recognized state with a powerful military, faces a stateless Palestinian population relying on both non-violent resistance and guerrilla tactics. This asymmetry plays a crucial role in shaping the political communication strategies and the forms of violence used by both sides (Lustick, 1993).

Comparative politics also offers insights into how media and propaganda are used in conflicts to shape public perception. Almond (1958) argues that media systems play a significant role in creating and reinforcing narratives, particularly in asymmetric conflicts where one side seeks to frame its actions as legitimate defense, while the other portrays its resistance as justified. In this context, the comparative politics framework allows for a deeper understanding of how Israeli and Palestinian actors use political communication to navigate the power imbalances and gain international support.
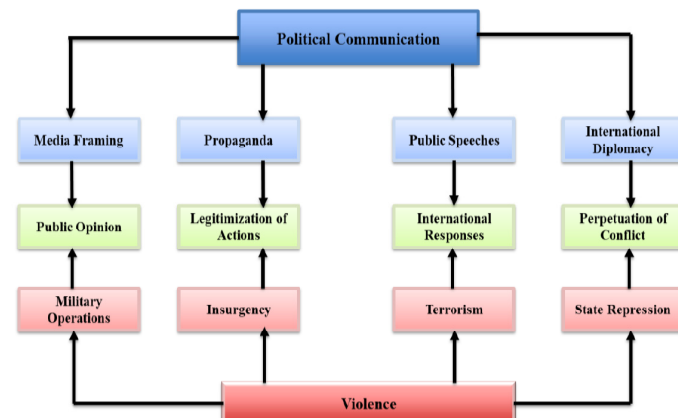
Political Communication and Violence as a Conceptual Framework

Political communication, broadly defined, refers to the strategic use of media, speeches, and propaganda to influence public opinion and achieve political objectives (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In conflict situations, political communication is often used to justify violence, frame the actions of opponents as illegitimate, and rally domestic and international support. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, both Israeli and Palestinian actors have developed sophisticated media strategies that play a central role in shaping the conflict's trajectory.

Israeli political communication frequently emphasizes themes of security, terrorism, and the existential threat posed by Palestinian militant groups like Hamas. Israeli media and government communications often frame military actions as necessary for the protection of Israeli civilians, portraying the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) as a defensive force combating terrorism (Wolfsfeld, 2018). This framing is reinforced by Israeli media outlets, which frequently highlight the threat of rocket attacks from Gaza and the need for preemptive strikes to safeguard Israeli lives.

On the other hand, Palestinian political communication focuses on themes of occupation, resistance, and human rights violations. Palestinian actors, particularly Hamas and other militant groups, use media to portray their actions as legitimate resistance against Israeli occupation, emphasizing the humanitarian toll of Israeli airstrikes and military operations. Palestinian media outlets, including social media platforms, play a crucial role in disseminating images of civilian casualties and the destruction of infrastructure, which are used to rally international support and condemn Israeli actions (Jamal, 2000). Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have become key battlegrounds for public opinion, where hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack and #SaveSheikhJarrah mobilize global audiences and influence international discourse (Klajnowska, 2023).

Chart 1. Political Communication and Violence Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's Computation based on Framework (2024)

The above chart illustrates that political communication and violence form a mutually reinforcing cycle in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Media framing, propaganda, public speeches, and diplomacy shape public opinion and legitimize actions, while acts of violence, such as military operations and terrorism, intensify these narratives. This dynamic perpetuates the conflict, with shifts in public perception and international responses fueling a continuous cycle of hostility, making the conflict more difficult to resolve.

Existing Studies on Political Communication and Violence

Existing research on political communication in the Israel-Palestine conflict highlights the strategic use of media and propaganda by both sides. Wolfsfeld (2004) and Jamal (2000) emphasize how Israeli and Palestinian actors frame their actions within competing narratives of self-defense and resistance. Israeli media often portrays the conflict through a lens of national security, emphasizing the threat posed by Palestinian terrorism and justifying military actions as defensive measures. In contrast, Palestinian media focuses on the humanitarian consequences of Israeli military operations, portraying Palestinians as victims of occupation and aggression.

Research on political violence, such as the work of Hoffman (2017) and Merari (1990), explores the psychological and strategic dimensions of violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Hoffman's analysis of terrorism and insurgency tactics highlights how Palestinian militant groups use violence not only to achieve political goals but also to communicate defiance and resilience to both Israeli and international audiences. Merari's work on suicide terrorism delves into the motivations behind such acts, emphasizing how violence is often framed as a necessary response to the asymmetry of power between Israel and the Palestinians.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative politics methodology, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the political communication and violence strategies employed by Israeli and Palestinian actors. The research draws on a wide range of primary sources, including media reports, speeches, government documents, and social media content, as well as secondary sources such as academic literature and international reports from organizations like Human Rights Watch and UNRWA. The study focuses on the October 2023 escalation to provide a contemporary understanding of how political communication and violence are being used to shape the conflict in real time.

Data collection involved content analysis of media reports from Israeli and Palestinian outlets, as well as international news sources such as CNN, Al Jazeera, and the BBC. Social media analysis was conducted to examine how hashtags, images, and videos are used to mobilize global public opinion. The analysis also included a review of policy documents, speeches by Israeli and Palestinian leaders, and reports from international organizations monitoring human rights violations in the conflict.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Competing Narratives and Propaganda

Israeli and Palestinian actors have developed sophisticated communication strategies that play a central role in shaping how the conflict is perceived both domestically and internationally. Israeli propaganda focuses on national security, terrorism, and the existential threat posed by Hamas and other militant groups. Following the October 2023 Hamas attacks, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu framed Israel's military response as a necessary defensive measure to protect Israeli citizens from terrorism (Netanyahu, 2023). Israeli media outlets such as *Israel Hayom* and *The Jerusalem Post* have reinforced this narrative, emphasizing the threat posed by rocket attacks from Gaza and the need for Israel to take preemptive action to safeguard its civilians.

On the Palestinian side, propaganda centers on the themes of occupation, resistance, and human rights violations. Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups frame their actions as legitimate resistance against Israeli occupation, highlighting the humanitarian consequences of Israeli airstrikes. Palestinian media outlets, including *Al-Aqsa TV*, play a critical role in disseminating images and videos of civilian casualties, destroyed homes, and damaged infrastructure in Gaza, which are used to generate international sympathy and condemn Israeli actions (Jamal, 2000). Social media platforms have become essential tools for Palestinian actors to bypass traditional media outlets and communicate directly with international audiences. Hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack and #SaveSheikhJarrah have been widely used to draw attention to the plight of Palestinian civilians and to mobilize protests around the world (Klajnowska, 2023).

Media Strategies and Public Opinion

Media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion about the Israel-Palestine conflict, both in the region and globally. International media outlets like *CNN*, *Al Jazeera*, and *BBC* often shape global perceptions of the conflict through their coverage, framing, and narrative emphasis. Israeli media strategies tend to focus on terrorism, portraying military operations as necessary for the survival of the state (UNRWA, 2024). During the 2023 escalation, Israeli media highlighted the existential threat posed by Hamas, justifying airstrikes on Gaza as a proportional response to rocket attacks. Israeli communication also emphasized technological advancements such as the Iron Dome, portraying Israel's defense measures as legitimate responses to external aggression (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Conversely, Palestinian actors have increasingly turned to social media as a platform for shaping international perceptions. In contrast to traditional media, which may

be constrained by editorial policies or political biases, social media offers a more direct avenue for disseminating Palestinian narratives. Real-time sharing of images and videos from Gaza, particularly those depicting the aftermath of Israeli airstrikes, has had a significant impact on global opinion. Social media campaigns have also mobilized protests and diplomatic pressure against Israeli actions, particularly in Western countries where public opinion can influence government responses (Klajnowska, 2023).

Forms of Political Violence

The October 2023 escalation saw Hamas launch one of its most coordinated and large-scale attacks on Israeli towns in recent years. These attacks, involving rocket fire and ground incursions, led to significant casualties and widespread destruction. Israel's military response was swift and overwhelming, with airstrikes targeting key infrastructure in Gaza. The asymmetry in military power between Israel and Hamas is stark, with Israel's advanced technological capabilities, including the Iron Dome defense system, significantly mitigating the impact of Hamas rocket attacks. However, the humanitarian toll of Israeli airstrikes on Gaza has been severe, with many civilians killed or displaced (Gunning, 2023).

The use of political violence by both sides serves not only as a means of achieving immediate military objectives but also as a way of communicating strength, resilience, and defiance. For Israel, military operations are framed as necessary actions to protect its citizens from terrorism, while for Hamas, violent resistance is portrayed as a legitimate response to the occupation. This cyclical dynamic of violence reinforces the narratives on both sides, making the conflict even more difficult to resolve (Hoffman, 2017).

State Responses and Repression

The Israeli state's response to Palestinian violence, particularly during the 2023 conflict, has involved a combination of military operations, targeted assassinations of Hamas leaders, and the expansion of security measures in the West Bank and Gaza. These actions have drawn both domestic support and international criticism. Netanyahu has defended these measures as essential for maintaining national security and protecting Israeli citizens from terrorism, while international human rights organizations have raised concerns about the disproportionate impact of Israeli military actions on Palestinian civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Palestinian responses, particularly those led by Hamas, have framed their violent actions as legitimate resistance to Israeli occupation and state repression. The blockade of Gaza, in place since 2007, has been a focal point of Palestinian grievances, with many Palestinians viewing the blockade as a form of collective punishment. Non-violent forms of resistance, such as protests and international advocacy, have also played a role in challenging Israeli policies, but

these efforts are often overshadowed by the ongoing cycle of violence.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This study demonstrates the significant role that political communication and violence play in perpetuating the Israel-Palestine conflict. Both Israeli and Palestinian actors use media strategies and propaganda to shape public opinion, justify their actions, and gain international support. The forms and actors of political violence, including military operations, insurgencies, and state repression, significantly influence the conflict's dynamics. The October 2023 escalation highlights how deeply entrenched these dynamics are, with both sides relying on narratives of defense and resistance to justify their use of violence.

Implications for Understanding the Conflict

The roles of political communication and violence are crucial for understanding the intractability of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The narratives propagated by both sides reinforce hostility and mistrust, making it difficult to envision a peaceful resolution. Media coverage, particularly on social media, has further polarized international public opinion, complicating efforts to mediate the conflict. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is essential for policymakers, international mediators, and peacebuilding organizations seeking to address the root causes of the conflict.

Challenges and Opportunities for Resolution

While the conflict presents significant challenges due to entrenched narratives and cycles of violence, there are opportunities for resolution. International mediation, grassroots peacebuilding efforts, and balanced media reporting could help reduce hostility and foster dialogue. Addressing the underlying issues of inequality and repression, particularly the economic deprivation in Palestinian territories, will be crucial for achieving a lasting peace. However, this will require both sides to move beyond entrenched narratives and embrace compromise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening International Mediation: International organizations, particularly the United Nations and the European Union, must take a more active role in mediating peace talks between Israel and Palestine, ensuring that both sides adhere to international law and human rights standards. Increased pressure on both sides to engage in meaningful negotiations could help break the current impasse.

Promoting Balanced Media Coverage: Media outlets should strive for more balanced coverage of the conflict, avoiding narratives that reinforce extremist views. Efforts should be made to promote collaborative media initiatives between Israeli and Palestinian journalists, which could foster greater mutual understanding and reduce polarization.

Supporting Grassroots Peace Initiatives Grassroots: initiatives that bring Israeli and Palestinian civilians together should be expanded. Programs such as educational exchanges, joint economic ventures, and peacebuilding workshops can help build trust and reduce hostility at the community level.

Leveraging social media for Peacebuilding: Social media platforms should be used to promote peacebuilding and dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian communities. International NGOs can support campaigns that encourage constructive engagement and counter the spread of extremist narratives, particularly in the aftermath of violent escalations like the 2023 conflict.

Addressing Structural Inequalities: International efforts should focus on addressing the structural inequalities that contribute to the perpetuation of the conflict. Economic development in Palestinian territories, improved access to resources, and increased political participation could help reduce support for violent resistance and foster a more stable environment for peace negotiations.

Enhancing Governance Transparency: Both Israeli and Palestinian leadership should be encouraged to adopt more transparent and accountable governance practices. Reducing corruption, increasing inclusivity in political processes, and ensuring that governance is responsive to the needs of all citizens can help create a more conducive environment for peace.

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