"Between individuals, as between nations, respect for the rights of others is peace."
-Benito Juárez

Topic A: "Protection of civilians in armed conflict regarding the Israeli and Hamas conflict."

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a multifaceted and protracted dispute spanning several decades, encompassing key issues such as Israeli & Palestinian rights, territorial disputes, and security concerns. The blockade of the Gaza Strip since 2007, to curb rocket attacks, has faced international condemnation for its collective impact on the civilian population. The subsequent exchange of thousands of rockets between Hamas and Israel in May 2021 escalated tensions, resulting in significant casualties and highlighting the complexity and volatility of the conflict. On 7 October 2023, Hamas announced the start of what it called "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood", stating it had fired over 5,000 rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Furthermore, the Israeli Defense Forces formally declared war against Hamas, and the Israeli defense minister announced a total blockade on Gaza.

In the context of the current hostilities in Gaza and Israel, violations of international law have been committed by all parties to the armed conflict, some of which amount to war crimes (HRW, 2024). More than 27,478 Palestinians and 1,200 Israelis have been killed since October 7, 2023, the majority of whom are civilians. 130 Israelis and foreigners have been kidnapped by Palestinian armed groups. Blockage to Gaza is preventing Palestinians from getting food and medicines.

The decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a source of regional instability and humanitarian crisis. De-escalating tensions and achieving a durable ceasefire are essential, but the path remains complex and fraught with challenges.

Establishing open communication channels and building trust are crucial for overcoming years of mistrust and animosity. Confidence-building measures can play a critical role, such as joint economic projects, cultural exchanges, and educational programs that foster empathy and understanding (Abu-Nimah, 2003). Engaging faith-based organizations and civil society groups can also create spaces for grassroots dialogue and cooperation (Bar-On, 2006).

Various ceasefire proposals exist, including a two-state solution, a one-state solution, and confederation models. Assessing feasibility requires considering historical context, current

realities, and potential for acceptance by both sides. The two-state solution, widely endorsed by the international community, faces challenges due to settlement expansion and disagreements on borders and Jerusalem. One-state solutions raise concerns about minority rights and potential for domination by one group over the other. Confederation models propose separate states with shared institutions, but complexities in implementation and power-sharing remain (Lustick, 2019).

Even seemingly feasible proposals can face significant obstacles. Historical narratives, political polarization, and external actors with vested interests can all hinder progress. Lack of trust, fear of concessions, and domestic political pressures can further complicate implementation. Addressing these obstacles necessitates addressing the root causes of the conflict, ensuring inclusivity in negotiations, and garnering strong regional and international support (Sabri, 2011).

Third-party mediation can be instrumental in facilitating dialogue, bridging communication gaps, and brokering agreements. The United Nations, regional actors like Egypt and Jordan, and non-governmental organizations can play important roles. Effective mediation requires impartiality, credibility, and the ability to understand the perspectives of all parties involved (Dumper, 2014). Peacekeeping forces can contribute to stabilizing the situation, monitoring ceasefire violations, and protecting civilians. However, their effectiveness depends on clear mandates, impartiality, and cooperation from all parties.

The UN has a long history of proposing solutions in complex and protracted conflicts. Like in 1974, following Turkish intervention, the UN deployed a peacekeeping force and facilitated negotiations for a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, a model with similarities to some confederation proposals for Israel and Palestine. Or in 2016, when the UN played a key role in mediating a peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC rebel group. The agreement focused on addressing the root causes of the conflict, including land reform and political participation, and included a ceasefire and disarmament process.

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