

Role of Palestinian Women in Peace Negotiations during Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations

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Israel-Palestine conflict origin is traced back to the Balfour Declaration, with subsequent events leading to ongoing violence and suffering in the region. During the conflicts, the United Nations, through Resolution 1325, has emphasized the importance of involving women in peace processes. The present research aimed to analyze the role of women peacemakers in conflict zones, particularly in the Israel-Palestine conflict. By utilizing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, the research focused on the contributions of women to peace and security dialogues. The study addressed the role women played in the Palestine-Israel peace negotiations, as well as the effectiveness of implementing WPS strategies in these regions. Data was collected from organizations working on WPS in conflict zones using Google Forms. The researchers also conducted a desk review of accessible literature and analyzed the data using descriptive analysis. The findings indicated that the participation of women in peace negotiations significantly

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increased the likelihood of achieving lasting agreements. This research promotes gender equality by ensuring women's rights and representation in political and legislative spheres. Furthermore, it emphasizes supporting women's political engagement through targeted training programs, financial assistance, and addressing societal norms that hinder women's participation, as well as advocating for their inclusion in peace-building efforts.

Keywords: *Conflict, Peace Building, Palestine, Israel, Women, Peace and Security.*

INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the world's longest-standing political issues, with its origins rooted in the tensions between Arabs (Palestinians) and Jews, which began with Jewish settlements in Palestine during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bashir, 2024). This situation is linked to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during World War I (Renton, 2007; Gutwein, 2016). The conflict escalated with the 1917 Balfour Declaration by the British government, which promised a homeland for Jews in Palestine (Weintraub, 2017). Recently, one of the most tragic aspects of this conflict has been the death of 9,000 innocent women.

Scholars on Feminist International Relations began to address peace and security from a gendered lens in the late 1980s, (Tickner, 2019). In October 2000, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution

1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) was officially launched (Kirby & Shaford, 2016a). Stone (2014) reported the study conducted by Laura Stone at Seaton Hall University, that likelihood of successful agreement increases from 15% to 35% where women's participation is present in international affairs and peace negotiations.

The advancement and equality of women are central themes of Resolution 1325 and its successors. However, the term 'women' in WPS is more open to interpretation than merely increasing women's numerical participation would suggest. It encompasses the diversity of women seeking greater political voice and includes various gender arrangements involving both men and women (Kirby & Shaford, 2016a). There is a pressing need in international diplomacy to include women in the peace-making process.

This research focuses on women's security and their involvement in the peace process in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The study aims to identify issues that contribute to women's vulnerability, address their safety and security in wartime, and empower them to participate in peace negotiations and international dialogues.

Significance of research

The importance of this research lies in reinforcing the foundational elements of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, promoting the active participation of women in peace-making processes, and striving to eradicate gender-based discrimination within the

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international system. The WPS agenda shifts the global perception of women's roles, serving as a powerful instrument for transitioning from exclusion to self-determination, from gender inequality to equality, and from conflict and violence to security and peace. By advocating for gender equality and recognizing the value of women in reconciliation, peace, and security, the WPS agenda underscores the significance of women's contributions to these crucial areas.

Research objectives

The study addresses the following objective.

To analyze the perspectives on women's participation in the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Research questions

- What role has been played by the women in the Israel-Palestinian conflict?
- How to implement these (four pillars) in the conflict zones?

LITERATURE REVIEW

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325

In 2000, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1325, recognizing the evolving nature of warfare where civilians, particularly women, are increasingly targeted, and their participation in peace processes is often overlooked. This resolution emphasizes the disproportionate consequences

of violent conflict on women and girls and highlights the critical role of women in the efforts towards peacebuilding. UNSCR 1325 asserts that peace and security initiatives are more effective and sustainable at the time when women equally take part in the prevention of conflict, delivering relief.

On October 28, 2002, on the second anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325, the then Secretary-General (SG) of the UN Mr. Kofi Annan addressed the UNSC. The GS highlighted the lack of women's involvement in peace talks and called for a reversal of this trend, suggesting the appointment of UN mediators to address the issue. Emphasizing the benefits of increasing women's roles, he stated, "Just as your efforts can advance gender equality, gender equality can enhance the likelihood of your success."

Subsequent resolutions

Kirby and Shepherd (2016a) highlighted six subsequent resolutions that have also deepened the agenda of the WPS program since 2000. These are as follows:

Table 1 Subsequent Resolution on Women's Peace and Security

Resolution Number	Year of Passing	Key Points
1820	2008	It advocates to strictly prohibits war crimes against women and not to use sexual violence (SV) as a tool for war and constitutes this as

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		a threat to the international peace.
1888	2009	This resolution speaks to strengthen the measures to prevent and respond the SV against women.
1889	2009	This resolution speaks up to make efforts of peace in the post-conflict areas and to make efforts of recovery in those areas.
1960	2010	This resolution speaks to enhancing the report and monitored the cases regarding women's violence.
2106	2013	This resolution tackled the problem of SV in conflict zones and emphasized the importance of empowering women during and after conflicts.
2122	2013	This resolution aimed to enhance women's involvement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives, with a specific focus on safeguarding the rights of women's advocates.

The four key pillars of the agenda on Women, Peace, and Security

According to Kirby and Shepherd (2016b), over the past fifteen years, the concerned areas have been reassessed multiple times. They have sometimes been categorized into three 'themes' (participation, protection, and the gender perspective), or four 'pillars' (identified in various

ways: some include prevention, besides the aforementioned, and peacekeeping, while others replace peacekeeping with recovery and relief, and some acknowledge the normative dimension) (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). The present research has conceptualized the following four pillars of the WPS agenda.

1. Participation
2. Protection
3. Prevention
4. Relief and Recovery

Women's involvement in the Peace Process

A significant development has been observed in South Sudan. Since the violence erupted in December 2013, the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan has been actively working to include women in conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts. In 2015, Alokiiir Malual made history as the first woman to sign a peace agreement in the country. By 2018, she was one of seven women to sign a revitalized peace agreement, with support from the UN. In 2022, UN peacekeeping efforts ensured that 41% of participants in local peace initiatives were women.

Whereas in Cyprus, during the ongoing efforts to reach a political settlement, the peacekeeping mission has facilitated the coming together of women from the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. These initiatives leverage shared traditions to build new connections and address the longstanding divide. The mission also supported a peacebuilding program that provided youth, especially young women, with skills in inclusive

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peacebuilding, enabling new and underrepresented perspectives to emerge.

In addition, In the Central African Republic, where violence resumed in 2012, the peacekeeping mission has promoted the inclusion of women in local peace and reconciliation committees, achieving a 35% female representation in 2023, up from 20% in 2019. The mission's support of women's organizations led to the creation of 12 "Circles of Peace." Through these circles, 300 trained women actively promote peace and social cohesion in their communities.

The political participation and empowerment of Palestinian women

In 1990, the Bisan Centre in Jerusalem held a conference on Palestinian women and the Intifada, marking a key moment for Palestinian feminism and coinciding with political changes like the Madrid negotiations and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA). This era saw initial optimism about women's involvement in building a democratic state, but the PA's lack of commitment to gender inclusion led to limited progress in women's political participation.

During the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, Palestinian women played a significant role in resisting Israeli occupation, with some sacrificing their lives. Despite this, their political influence remained constrained. Feminists and civil society organizations worked to improve women's roles, using legal and social strategies to address

gender issues. For instance, according to a report on Gender, Women, Peace, and Security by, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UN (2024), women hold only a small percentage of decision-making positions in government and the judiciary.

The importance of women's political participation lies in ensuring democratic representation and equality. In 1996, some Palestinian women achieved success in legislative elections, but overall representation remains limited. Achievements include a 20% quota for women in local councils and the Legislative Council, but gender disparities persist.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a constructivist (interpretive) research approach, which is based on inductive reasoning and utilizes qualitative methods. According to Crotty (1998), constructivism is the belief that reality and knowledge arise from human activities within specific contexts. Consequently, the researchers operated within the broader framework of interpretivism during their study. Following Neuman's (2013) recommendation, they used purposive sampling to select participants. These participants were identified by examining their profiles on the websites of organizations involved in the field of women, peace, and security, particularly concerning the Palestine-Israel conflict. Profiles were evaluated based on peace efforts, and fifty-five national and international participants were chosen to receive Google Forms. The tool featured both open and closed-ended questions. The

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research aimed to emphasize the participants' perspectives on the situation as much as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Before commencing the research, it is essential to identify, address, and make the researcher aware of ethical issues (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009 & Neuman, 2007). The researchers adhered to ethical guidelines and provided a brief introduction to the study. Participants informed voluntary consent was obtained before they completed the Google form. For this purpose, researchers added a consent letter at the start of the Google form followed by the questions framed using literature on the four pillars of women's peace and security. A follow-up reminder was sent to participants who had not responded after two weeks. Following an additional week, the collected data was downloaded and prepared for analysis. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

Creswell (1998) describes qualitative data analysis as a process involving the sorting and development of tentative codes and themes. Starting from raw data (textual or visual), the process evolves to reflect the participants' perspectives. Creswell (1998) envisions this as a path where researchers move progressively through analytical circles.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The participants who responded to the Google forms ranged from master's to PhD level. Few of them had been

working on the women's peace and security agenda, while the remaining were currently involved in it. The participants belonged to diverse backgrounds, i.e., researchers, academicians, and independent analysts. They had expertise in International Relations, Human Rights, and Peace and Security.

It was observed that they did not find it smooth while working in this domain. They highlighted issues like personal safety, security risks, and lack of access to the relevant forums. Further, most of them found it highly challenging while only a few shared that it was less challenging. The participants' perspective on women's inclusion in the peace-making process was also rated as positive and encouraging. They highlighted two cases where women were successfully involved in peace and security initiatives i.e. Muna Al kurd and Dr Hannan Ashwri incidents were shared.

While sharing their views, the participants said that social media, academic forums, and collaborations of different organizations were effective proven strategies for raising awareness of the importance of including women in the peace-making process. In addition to these, the participants also viewed that promoting the inclusion of women in the peace process, providing them with a conducive environment, highlighting women's under-representation in the different relevant forums, and advocating for their inclusion could result more positively.

The desk review of the existing literature also highlighted similar concerns. It was evident that the

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women worked as better negotiators in peace-making efforts. The likelihood of success increases with the addition of women in the process. Feminists argued that both peace and security are deeply gendered concepts. Security is associated with masculinity (militarized concept) while peace is with femininity where women are considered as protection seekers (Tickner, 2019).

Women's participation in the Israel conflict

This analysis examines the roles of women in Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations since the Madrid Conference in 1991, highlighting the role of Dr. Hanan Ashrawi representing the Occupied areas while Israel, Mrs. Tzipi Livni represented. The said females have transitioned from peripheral roles to becoming prominent figures in the peace negotiations, challenging the predominantly male-dominated environment and making significant contributions to peace efforts over the past two decades.

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi is a distinguished figure in Palestinian politics and civil society. She began her career as a professor of English literature and currently serves as the Chairperson of the Executive Committee of MIFTAH. She is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Legislative Council. Between 1991 and 1993, Ashrawi was the official spokesperson for the Palestinian Delegation to the Middle East peace process. During the 1991 Madrid Conference, she played key roles on the

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Leadership and Guidance Committee and the Executive Committee of the delegation.

Tzipi Livni

She was a lawyer and politician who currently leads the largest party in the Knesset named Kadima, and serves as the opposition head. She is notably the first woman. Livni made history as the first female leader of the opposition in Israeli history. She previously served as the Foreign Minister of Israel in 2007 and was appointed by Ehud Olmert , the then of Isreal to to lead the delegation for talks.

Obstacles and challenges to women's political participation in Palestine

The political fragmentation between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, compounded by Israeli occupation, has led to widespread frustration and apathy among Palestinians, including women. This disillusionment has resulted in decreased faith in political participation and a decline in party engagement. Women are particularly affected by the lack of attention to their needs by political parties and the general perception that they are less capable of leadership. Cultural norms and customs further marginalize women, with some supporting harmful practices and others opposing women working outside the home.

The Israeli occupation, with its oppressive practices and restrictions on movement, severely limits Palestinian women's ability to participate politically. Internal political divisions and patriarchal attitudes within

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parties also hinder women's involvement. Economic hardships, including high poverty and unemployment rates among women, restrict their access to political processes and decision-making roles.

Historically, Palestinian women have been involved in political and social actions since the early 20th century, from protesting British policies to participating in military and political activities. Lavee, David, and Azaiza (1997) noted cross-cultural differences between Israeli and Palestinian families regarding their perception of the situation, types of concerns and stressors, coping responses, dyadic interaction patterns, and intrafamily processes. Sharoni (2012) found that women working for justice and peace in the region form a critical mass that can significantly influence conflict transformation and envision post-conflict realities. Despite considerable efforts and some progress, challenges such as limited representation and political fragmentation between the West Bank and Gaza Strip persist. Additionally, women's involvement in diplomacy and political parties continues to reflect existing disparities.

CONCLUSION

International Civil Society Organizations should arrange delegation visits abroad for Palestinian women, enhancing their access to decision-makers in other countries and amplifying their voices and priorities in international decision-making. Additionally, they should establish

partnerships with local women-led civil society organizations to gain deeper insights into the situation on the ground and create opportunities to address women's priorities and needs in peace-building efforts.

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