

TITLE PAGE

**UNITED NATIONS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM: A
CASE STUDY OF THE ISRAEL HAMAS CONFLICT, 2021-2025**

BY

**ORISAKWE MMESOMA LILIAN
GOU/U22/IRE/609**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS,
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES,
GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY,
UGWUOMU NIKE,
ENUGU**

MAY, 2026

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the contribution of the United Nations in managing religious extremism in the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict between 2021 and 2025. The study specifically examined the impact of the failure of the United Nations to shape the warring parties' behavior on the management of religious extremism and why the United Nations has failed to develop effective unilateral political strategies to help defuse the escalating conflict. The study was based on the Liberal Institutional Theory of Keohane and Nye 1977. Ex post facto research design was used. Data were collected through documentary sources. Qualitative content analysis was used for the analysis of the collected data. The study indicated that the United Nations was involved in the Israel–Hamas conflict in terms of mediation, humanitarian aid, ceasefire agreements, and advocacy for civilian protection. It also found a lack of the United Nations' ability to make a decisive impact on the warring parties added to the violence escalating and the religious extremism that was part of the conflict environment. The study thus called for the enhancement of multilateral cooperation, a reform of the processes of decision-making in the Security Council, and more investment in preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding efforts that tackle the root causes of extremism and violent conflict.

Keywords: *United Nations, Religious Extremism, Israel–Hamas Conflict, Peacebuilding, Terrorism, International Security.*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The religious extremism is now one of the most significant threats to peace, security and international stability in the modern world. Extremism of religion means the holding of extreme religious views or ideologies that foster intolerance, violence, terrorism and antagonism toward people or groups that are seen as an enemy of a religion or ideology. In the last few decades, many extremist groups in various parts of the world have spread large-scale armed conflict, humanitarian crisis, displaced persons, destruction of property, and loss of life. Modern warfare is marked by violence targeting identities and extreme ideologies that challenge the security of nations and global peace, in the words of Kaldor (2021). Likewise, Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2017) suggested that religious extremism is a threat to human security as it causes fear, instability and social disintegration in the societies affected.

The United Nations was formed in 1945 after the Second World War, to ensure the world's peace and security, to advocate for human rights and to foster the peaceful settlement of disputes between nations. It has been involved in various areas of conflict resolution, peace keeping, humanitarian intervention and world diplomacy since its inception. The United Nations has also stepped up activities in the field of international cooperation, dialogue, sanctions, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding to combat terrorism and violent extremism. Owen (2024) states that the United Nations is still one of the most numerous global institutions that are responsible for collective security and the prevention of violent conflicts in the world. But, with these increasingly complex

modern day extremist conflicts, the organization's effectiveness in keeping world peace has been tested.

Israel– Hamas conflict is one of the most controversial and protracted conflict due to religious extremism in the Middle East. The conflict is part of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute that has been ongoing for decades concerning the territory, political authority, religion, identity and national self-determination of Israelis and Palestinians. The battle is between the State of Israel and Hamas, an Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip. Israel and several Western countries consider Hamas to be a terrorist group because of the group's armed attacks and militant activities, while many Palestinians see Hamas as a resistance group that fights against occupation and oppression. Thurston (2017) states that political grievances, social inequalities and long conflict can foster an environment that allows extremist and insurgent groups to emerge. The different interpretations of Hamas have played significant part in the nature of the crisis and the challenges of bringing stability in the peace process.

In May 2021, the Israel– Hamas conflict received renewed international attention after violent clashes erupted in East Jerusalem, particularly around the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which is a very important religious site for Muslims. The situation escalated to armed conflict, with Hamas firing rockets and Israeli troops launching air strikes, resulting in civilian deaths, property damage and several thousands of people being displaced. The humanitarian impact of the conflict resulted in an international response, with governments, humanitarian actors and international organisations reacting to the situation. Achumba et al (2013) argued that insecurity due to violent conflict will impact the social welfare of affected communities, not only in terms of political stability, but also in the aspect of economic development.

The situation escalated again from 2023 to 2025 after a recent Hamas attack on Israeli territory, which was followed by a Gaza military response by Israel. The escalation led to the deaths of thousands of people, destruction of homes and public facilities, food shortages, displacement of civilians and further deterioration of the situation for human rights. The crisis also exacerbated regional tensions within the Middle East, and raised worldwide concerns about terrorism and religious extremism, as well as violations of international humanitarian law. Kaldor (2021) noted that modern wars have become more violent, and have become more likely to affect civilians as well as more likely to produce long-term humanitarian crises that cross borders. The Israel–Hamas conflict is thus not only a regional crisis but a significant security concern for the international community as a whole.

The United Nations stepped up diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives to minimize violence and restore peace in the area in response to the situation. The UN called for ceasefires, peaceful negotiations, protection of civilians and humanitarian access to the affected communities through the United Nations Security Council, United Nations General Assembly and various humanitarian agencies. The UN agencies also delivered emergency humanitarian support, such as food supplies, medical services, shelter materials and assistance to IDPs impacted by the conflict. However, with the continued violence and the breakdown of ceasefire agreements, there was doubt over the effectiveness and scope of the United Nations in dealing with religious extremism-related conflicts. Where strong political forces and strong ideological differences are found, international organizations often have serious difficulties enforcing peace, as Paris (2001) states.

Moreover, the failure of the United Nations to bring about lasting peace in the Israel–Hamas conflict has been attributed to various factors such as the existence of political differences among the large powers, international tensions regarding the nature of the conflict, the exercise of veto

power by the permanent members of the UN security council, and the conflict's historical and religious roots. The lack of agreement at international level and the reduced ability of the organization to develop effective and sustainable peace strategies are a consequence of these challenges. According to Owen (2024), cooperation among international peace members and adherence to principles of collective security are key to the success of international peace efforts.

The Gaza-Israel issue has not only led to a humanitarian crisis in the region but has also been a source of religious intolerance, radicalisation, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and hate speech in various parts of the world. The conflict has impacted on international relations, regional diplomacy, and global security talks regarding terrorism and extremism. The issue of religious extremism, therefore, has become a high priority for governments, scholars, policy makers and international bodies in their efforts to find sustainable solutions to violent conflicts and insecurity. From this context, this study aims to explore the role played by the United Nations in the management of religious extremism in the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict from 2021-2025.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Religious extremism has remained a major threat to international peace, security and human survival in various parts of the world. The Israel-Hamas conflict (2021-2025) is undoubtedly one of the most significant examples of religiously driven violence and political extremism in modern Middle East history. The conflict has led to the deaths of numerous people, destruction of infrastructure, displacement of civilians, humanitarian crises, and increasing regional instability. The negotiations for a ceasefire, humanitarian interventions and peace initiatives launched by the United Nations have failed to stop the conflict, which has remained active with repeated outbreaks of violence and growing civilian casualties to date.

The failure of the UN to resolve the conflict peacefully for the long term has led to grave doubts about the effectiveness of the UN in combating religious extremism and preventing international violence and warfare. Apart from the political differences between the great powers, conflicting interests between different countries and restrictions connected with the implementation of UN resolutions have made the peaceful solution of the situation more difficult. Thus, the ongoing violence between Israel and Hamas has been a source of religious intolerance, radicalization, terrorism and the suffering of humanity in and outside the Middle East. While there have been a number of studies exploring the issue of terrorism, religious extremism and the Israel – Palestine conflict, there is a lack of scholarly research on the case of the United Nations as a managing agency of religious extremism during Israel and Hamas conflict between 2021 and 2025. The role of the United Nations in the management of the conflict and efforts to find peace should therefore be critically discussed during the period under study, as well as the challenges and achievements it faced throughout the process.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How has the inability of UN to influence the warring parties affected the management of religious extremism?
2. How has the failure of the UN to adopt unilateral political strategies accounts for the escalation of the Israeli Hamas conflict?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study has both broad and specific objectives. The broad objective of the study is to examine the role of the United Nations in the management of religious extremism with particular focus on the Israel–Hamas conflict from 2021 to 2025.

The specific objectives are to:

- 1 examine how the inability of the United Nations to influence the warring parties affected the management of religious extremism in the Israel– Hamas conflict, 2021-2025.
- 2 assess how the failure of the United Nations to adopt effective political and diplomatic strategies contributed to the escalation of the Israel– Hamas conflict, 2021-2025.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study is very important and practically very useful too. In theory, it adds to the body of knowledge in the field of International Relations, conflict resolution and religious extremism studies by offering a modern account of how international institutions, specifically the United Nations, reacts to religiously driven conflict and transnational extremism. The study extends the knowledge on the success, failure and changing nature of the United Nations as an institution in the management of complex religious and political violence in the current global security systems by using the Israel– Hamas conflict (2021–2025) as a case study.

In practice, the study offers valuable policy findings for international organisations, security actors and policy makers regarding the benefits and limitations of United Nations actions in conflict prevention, peace enforcement and counter-extremism. It exposes concrete coordination challenges, response timeliness and enforcement-related deficiencies and provides evidence-based insights into how the world can do better in its peacebuilding approach.

Moreover, the study is of great relevance to students and scholars of International relations, peace and conflict studies, and security studies because the study uses a contemporary case which can be used to study the dynamics of international mediation, religious extremism and global

governance from the perspectives of peace and conflict. It also aids in the wider debates on the impact of global wars on global peace and security debates.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.6.1 Scope

The study highlights the United Nations' contribution to the prevention of religious radicalism and extremism in the period ranging from 2021 to 2025, taking Israel and Hamas as a key case study.

The study looks at critical institutions and organs in the United Nations, including the Security Council, the General Assembly and other relevant agencies engaged in peacebuilding, humanitarian efforts and counter-extremism initiatives.

The study's geographical scope is defined by the so-called “Western international system” comprising Europe, North America and the international institutions and policies that shape the United Nations policies and their implementation. Israel – Hamas conflict serves as a reference because it is a conflict with a worldwide political significance and because of its implications for international peace and security discourse in this system.

1.6.2 Limitations of the Study

There are a number of methodological and contextual limitations in this study. The first is that, because of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict and its politically sensitive nature, access to fully verified, real-time data for United Nations (UN) operations in the region between 2021 and 2025 is restricted. Therefore, the study's main sources come from secondary sources like official UN reports, policy briefs, academic publications, and well-known international news and research institutions.

Secondly, the study lacks primary data from key actors, including UN officials, diplomats and conflict actors. This restriction is due to limited access, security considerations and diplomatic sensitivity for subject matter. This is being offset, however, with the use of triangulated secondary data from credible institutional sources.

Lastly, verification based on time and resources is limited. These constraints do not detract from the validity of the study, as it is analysed systematically, using credible and cross-checked documentary evidence.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

United Nations (UN): An international intergovernmental organisation founded in 1945 to promote peace, security, cooperation and development among member states, which includes diplomacy, conflict resolution and humanitarian intervention.

Religious Extremism: Extremism involving a religious belief system or ideology that calls for violence, coercion or extreme steps to achieve religious ends, that is, triversalism or rejection of peaceful coexistence and pluralism.

Terrorism: The use of violence and/or intimidation, particularly against civilians, for political, ideological, or religious purposes.

Conflict Resolution: A term that refers to the methods of negotiating, mediating and diplomatically settling disagreements before they turn violent.

Peacebuilding: An ongoing process of international or national actors to avoid the re-emergence of a conflict by tackling underlying issues like social division, inequality, and political instability.

Israel– Hamas Conflict: An ongoing political and military struggle between the State of Israel and the Palestinian militant and political group, Hamas, marked by sporadic outbreaks of violence, territorial disputes, and humanitarian crises, notably escalating during the period 2021-2025.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 United Nations

United Nations (UN) is considered as the most important institutional structure for the maintenance of international peace and security in the modern international system. The UN was created in 1945 after the Second World War, when there was a need for a more effective collective security mechanism and a failure of the League of Nations. The establishment of this represented a major departure from a unilateral approach of the state, to a multilateral cooperation approach for global conflict and global security risks (Weiss & Daws, 2018).

The United Nations may be conceptualized as an intergovernmental organization to ensure the cooperation of sovereign states and avoid conflict, crisis management and promote global stability. The UN Charter, which represents the bedrock principle of the UN, contains Article 1 which states the main aims of the UN: the maintenance of international peace and security, promotion of friendly relations among nations, and encouragement of international cooperation in solving international problems (United Nations, 1945). These goals make the UN a normative, as well as operational, player in global governance.

Collective security is one of the key principles of the United Nations, which is based on the idea that aggression against a single state is aggression against all states, and that all states are responsible for taking action in response. This principle differentiates the UN from previous international organizations, and is the foundation for its power in conflict management. As Claude (1966) pointed out, collective security is an attempt to substitute for the balance of power system

one of more institutional and rule-governed peace-maintenance. The system is, however, dependent on the political will and co-operation of Member States, especially by the major powers.

In order to appreciate the role of the United Nations in international conflict management, it is essential to comprehend the institutional framework of the United Nations. The most prominent of these is the Security Council, which has primary responsibility in maintaining international peace and security. The Security Council can decide whether there is a threat to peace and can adopt the necessary measures, such as imposing sanctions and giving authorization to use force (2014, Hurd). Its effectiveness is sometimes limited, however, due to the veto power of its five permanent members, which can cause political gridlock, particularly in cases of conflict with strategic interest.

The UN's peace and security work is carried out through other organs of the UN, including the General Assembly and the Secretariat. The General Assembly is an instrument for deliberation and norm-setting while the Secretary-General has a key role in preventive diplomacy and mediation. Thakur (2017) states that the Secretary-General's use of "good offices" is an important instrument in de-escalating conflict and helping to provide a forum for dialogue and negotiation among conflicting parties. This illustrates the multifaceted approach of the UN to conflict management, where they utilise both formal and informal diplomatic channels to play a role.

Peacekeeping operations are one of the most visible tools of the United Nations that help uphold peace. These operations are those in which international persons are deployed to conflict situations for the purpose of monitoring ceasefires, the protection of civilians and the support of the implementation of peace agreements. UN peacekeeping has gradually transformed from observer missions into multidimensional missions that intervene to resolve issues of political, humanitarian and developmental aspects of conflict over time (Bellamy & Williams, 2015). This is a process of

change in the nature of conflicts which are more and more internal, with the involvement of non-state actors.

Peacebuilding has a close connection with peacekeeping and is centred on the underlying causes of conflict and the prevention of its reoccurrence. Peacebuilding activities usually involve building institutions, strengthening the rule of law, promoting economic development and reconciliation processes. Sustainable peace is not just about a lack of violence, it is about establishing stable political and social institutions to handle conflict in a peaceful manner, as Paris (2004) has argued. This is now a formalized process within the United Nations through its Peacebuilding Commission, to name one. This is now a long-term commitment of the UN to the prevention of conflict, through its Peacebuilding Commission, among other things.

In recent years, violent extremism and terrorism have been gradually integrated into the UN's international agenda and declared as considerable threats to peace and security in the world. There are new challenges for the UN due to the rise of religiously driven extremist groups, particularly because these groups may not be affiliated to the state and may be asymmetric. The UN has in turn devised policies and strategies like the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which focuses on the underlying causes of violent extremism, including poverty, political marginalisation and lack of education (United Nations, 2016). This method is different from the more traditional security-based responses and approaches that were already in place, and takes a more holistic approach that incorporates social, economic and political factors.

In the field of conflict management, which has a broad mandate and extensive institutions, the effectiveness of the United Nations has been called into question. It is charged as being hampered by the rivalry of its member States, particularly in the Security Council. The UN bureaucracy and need for consent of the state can also obstruct prompt and effective action as Barnett and

Finnemore (2004) point out. Furthermore, the UN may not be able to keep itself neutral in war periods, which may undermine its legitimacy and effectiveness.

In this conflict between Israel and Hamas, which entails geopolitical, historical and religious concerns, these constraints are most noticeable. In this context, United Nations, is always struggling to implement the resolution or to bring about lasting peace. It is still a key tool in fulfilling humanitarian needs in dialogue, and it is a call for international law and human rights. Despite such objections, the United Nations has continued to be an indispensable element of the international system. It is universal and normative, and has a degree of legitimacy which no other organisation can claim. Although the UN is not always successful in preventing or resolving conflicts, its role in coordinating international responses and promoting collective action is always important (Weiss, 2013). In this study, the United Nations is defined as a global institutional actor who handles threats and conflicts from religious extremism. It is important as it enables it to deploy a variety of mechanisms such as diplomacy, peacekeeping, sanctions and counter-extremism measures to shape the dynamics of conflict. But it is influenced by the structures involved, political issues, and the nature of the conflicts it aims to resolve.

2.1.2 Religious Extremism

Religious extremism has become a crucial security and conflict term in the present day, particularly in the field of the study of violent conflict, where religious identity, religious ideologies and religious mobilization are intertwined with political grievances. The term is very much in use in policy and academic discourse, but is neither widely agreed on nor clearly defined. This is because of the complexity of the phenomenon itself, and because of the sensitivities and norms about religion in global politics. An analysis of religious extremism needs to be defined and, at the same time, understood as having a horizon of possibilities as well as implications for politics.

In the simplest sense, religious extremism is the embrace of an absolutist or rigid application of religious beliefs that is intolerant of pluralism and which can be used as the basis for resorting to violence or coercion against persons perceived as outsiders or opponents. In his book *Extremism and the State* (2013), Schmid defines extremism broadly as an alternative way of doing things, defined by intolerance, dogmatism and an eagerness to seek out ideological ends in undemocratic or violent ways. Extremism can be especially compelling and hard to abate when embedded in a religious context, where it can seem to get a moral or divine lift. The distinctive characteristic of religious extremism is its combination of religious beliefs and political goals.

The term religious extremism is not synonymous with terms that are related to it, including fundamentalism and radicalization. Fundamentalism is typically a religious faith movement which is literalist and devoted to the original books or teachings of a religion in opposition to modernity or to a presumed moral decay. Fundamentalism is not violent, not coercive, can be conservative and rigid. Extremism is more than belief, however, when it is legitimized or causes violence – especially when it is violent (Juergensmeyer, 2017). In contrast, radicalization is viewed more as a progression towards the individual or group gaining extremist beliefs or behaviors (Horgan, 2014). This distinction is crucial for analytical purposes, as it helps to separate the ideology and the action of the ideologies.

The essence of extremism is its absolute stance and the tendency towards taking sides in its absolute terms: good or bad, believer or non-believer, sacred or profane. This "either/or" mentality can prevent discussion or negotiation, for the opposition is not "the other," it is "the other way. The "either/or" attitude can preclude discussion and negotiation because the opposition is not "the other," it is "the other way. For religious extremists, their actions might be conceived of as part of a cosmic struggle, in which the religion they believe in is being fought for and violence is justified

to achieve a religious end (Juergensmeyer 2017). This provides legitimacy to extreme measures as well as motivation for recruiting and mobilizing.

The other mark of religious extremism is the lack of tolerance for diversity, particularly religious, cultural and ideological pluralism. Extremist groups also seek to impose their religious interpretations on society at times, and they seek to eradicate other interpretations and dissent. This intolerance can be expressed in a number of ways, such as discrimination, persecution or violence towards minority groups. In many respects, religious extremism is accompanied by identity politics, which is an identity based on religion delineating the boundaries of in-groups and out-groups.

The usage of the term religious extremism, however, has been heavily criticised for being vague and open to many misinterpretations, and for allowing it to be misapplied. It is also sometimes used selectively, and politically, as seen during political speech when some religions are demonized, while others are extreme, and thus ignored (Jackson 2016). This critique points out criticism of the concept of applying the term 'extremism' unevenly depending on geopolitical interests and not on objective criteria. Some scholars, therefore, prefer to have a more context-specific, nuanced approach to extremism without generalizing.

One of the other hot topics is the nexus between religious extremism and terrorism. They have many similarities and they are not identical. Terrorism is generally defined as acts of violence against civilian populations by non-state actors for political ends, whereas religious extremism is the ideology that might be used to justify such violence. While some religious extremists are terrorists, and some terrorist groups are inspired by religion, not all religious extremists are terrorists, and not all terrorist groups are religion-driven (Crenshaw, 2011). This is particularly

important to avoid analysis that is too simplistic or to ensure that countering extremism is done effectively.

But, the religious extremism is often a mixture of structural, political and socio-economic problems with theological problems, and not just theological problems in practice. Political marginalization, economic marginalization, low standards of governance and social exclusion may all lead to an environment where extremist ideologies flourish. But religion ideology may be a problem if not dealt with, as Gunning and Jackson (2011) note, since it can mask the broader context which can be conducive to extremism. This view is in line with the modern concept that focuses on the alleviation of the root causes as opposed to just the symptoms.

Religious extremism is more relevant in Israel–Hammas, where it becomes intertwined with the intractable political and territorial disputes. Though the conflict is essentially about land, sovereignty and national identity, religious factors have come to play a greater role in the dynamics of the conflict. The conflict becomes much more religious and complicated when organisations such as Hamas are involved, with an ideology to be considered. It is crucial to recognize, however, that a conflict that is only described as religious extremism is a gross oversimplification; one that does not take into account the historical and political context.

Moreover, the designation of actors at the centre of the conflict as “extremist” is an issue that is subject to political debate. Subjectivity and opinion regarding subject exists with different stakeholders based on their political perspective. This comes back to the use of the word, its careful use, its sensible use and particularly the use of the word in scientific writing and research where objectivity is of the essence.

Given the complexities, this study takes a contextual and analytical approach to religious extremism, which involves the use, promotion and application of dogmatically held religious convictions, with attributes of closure and exclusion and in some cases violence, for political or religious purposes. The definition facilitates a balanced analysis of extremism, taking into consideration and accounting for the ideological and contextual dimension of extremism, and does not allow for a broad or biased understanding of extremism.

2.1.3 Management of Religious Extremism

Religious extremism has become a major issue in today's international relations due to the growing correlation between religious extremism and violent conflicts. The latter, religious extremism, is an ideology-based concept and the former, management, is an action based concept which includes strategies, policies and institutional mechanisms that are employed to manage the threats of religious extremists. Religious extremism management can therefore be considered as a multi-layered process that can be subdivided into two approaches: a coercive and a non-coercive approach in which the causes, manifestation and effects of the religious extremist ideologies are mitigated (Schmid, 2013).

In this context, the term 'management' does not imply that extremism must be removed from the world but rather can mean that it can be reduced, tempered and transformed into less harmful expression. This practical insight is consistent with other theories about conflict management that focus on managing, rather than ending, conflict (Burton, 1990). When religious extremism is involved, management includes dealing with the symptoms (violence, radicalization etc.), and the root causes (political grievances, social exclusion, economic inequality etc.).

Hard security measures such as military action, intelligence, surveillance and policing are important areas of action to tackle religious extremism. These are largely reactive actions which aim to neutralise the immediate threat of an individual or group of extremists. These techniques are sometimes employed by the State to disrupt terrorist networks, to prevent attacks and to maintain public order. As others have noted, however, intensive use of coercive measures can be counterproductive and can exacerbate grievances and even further radicalization (Crenshaw, 2011). This has led to increased recognition of the limitations of relying exclusively on military means for solutions.

Soft strategies include those that complement hard strategies, and focus on prevention and long-term change. All of these have been given high priority, but counter-radicalization has been given the highest priority. The counter-radicalization process is aimed at preventing individuals from getting into extremist ideologies, by tackling their root causes including marginalization, identity crisis, lack of opportunities etc. Horgan (2014) argues that radicalization is a multi-faceted and non-linear phenomenon that is shaped by a mix of personal, social and political factors. Thus, counter-radicalization must be done in a comprehensive manner by involving communities, teaching and educating them and working on inclusive governance.

But those who already have extremist views, those who are deradicalized, is also very similar. Deradicalization programs aim to reintegrate such persons into mainstream society, psychologically through counseling, reorientation of their thinking, and socio-economic support. Results of these programs have been documented in some countries, but there is no guarantee of their effectiveness because they depend on the context and implementation (Rabasa et al., 2010). But, deradicalization is an integral part of a broader management approach particularly in post-conflict settings.

A strategic communication and counter-narratives is another crucial aspect of religious extremism management. One of the preferred strategies of recruitment and mobilization of extremist groups is through persuasive narratives that rely on religious and ideological arguments. In response to this, the governments and international organisations have increasingly focused on creating alternative narratives to challenge extremist narratives and instil tolerance, co-existence and peace. Extremism is an ideological fight as well as a physical one and involves engaging in the 'marketplace of ideas', especially online where extremist propaganda is spread rapidly, (Berger, 2018).

In addition, there are developmental and structural strategies that will be key to tackling the root causes of extremism. With regard to the socio-economic factors, political marginalisation, lack of institutional strength and human rights abuses are all well-known to be potentially fertile ground for extremist ideologies. To prevent them, inclusive governance, economic development and social justice measures are needed and critical. The stance of the United Nations, especially in the creation of policy agendas on development and security in its strategy to prevent violent extremism, is clearly echoed.

The United Nations has adopted an all-inclusive strategy against religious extremism, including their Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016). The strategy is based on the importance of addressing the causes of these, such as lack of education, unemployment, marginalization and human rights violations. It also highlights the role of community engagement, youth engagement and gender mainstreaming in preventing radicalization (United Nations, 2016). This is a change from the usual counter-terrorism approach to a more comprehensive model which incorporates elements of security, development and human rights.

But the problem of religious extremism comes with a lot of challenges for management. The first problem is that the concept of extremism is hard to define in operational terms, which may result in inconsistency in the implementation of the policy. The idea is politically loaded and is applied selectively with concerns of bias as stated above. This can result in mistrust in the validity of management activities, particularly targeting specific religious/ethnic groups (Gunning & Jackson, 2011).

The other is the inter-border and multi-dimensionality of extremist networks, which cross the borders and are inter-multidimensional via the use of global communication technologies. Propaganda is being disseminated at an increasing speed and recruitment is happening across the globe, all in the name of extremism, which has evolved in the age of social media. These kinds of content have been spread, making it hard to manage and control these; it requires other forms of international cooperation and innovative policy solutions (Berger, 2018).

Furthermore, politics and geopolitical factors may restrict the management strategies' effectiveness. States can often be more interested in strategic alliances or national interests than in maintaining uniformity in implementation of counter-extremism measures. This can result in discrimination and impact the effectiveness of international action. The UN system has a delicate balance between member states' ability to take action and a tendency to be paralysed in some conflicts by political differences, notably in the UN Security Council.

Religious extremism in the Israel– Hamas conflict poses a management problem, and is complicated by deep-rooted political, territorial and historical issues. In this context the narratives, power dynamics, and ideologies are all complex and need to be grappled with when dealing with issues of extremism. Additionally, the complexity of the situation is increased by the involvement

of actors like Hamas, the view of international actors on these groups and the impact on the nature and effectiveness of the management strategies.

Importantly, the management of religious extremism under such contexts must not only be done through the security measure. Military operations could be used to respond to a current threat, but they rarely would be able to solve the underlying grievances that could be fueling the conflict. This underscores the need for integrated approaches that combine conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and socio-economic development. As Lederach (1997) argues, sustainable peace requires transforming relationships and addressing structural injustices, rather than merely suppressing violence.

2.1.4 Israel–Hamas Conflict

The Israel – Hamas conflict is one of the prolonged and intricate conflicts in modern international relations, involving historical animosities, territorial claims and grievances, political maneuvering and religious discourses. While frequently considered part of a wider war between Arabs and Israelis, the Israel–Hamas relationship has become a unique and very volatile conflict since the mid-2000s. It is not the intention of this study to provide a comprehensive history of this conflict, but rather to examine it conceptually with an eye to identifying its salient elements, parties and significance to the issue of religious extremism management.

The roots of the Israel–Hamas conflict are found in the larger Israeli–Palestinian dispute, which began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and escalated with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, leading to the forced displacement of a large number of Palestinians (Pappé, 2006). Competing national identities, territorial claims, and lingering issues of sovereignty have been responsible for changing the nature of the conflict over time. But the appearance of Hamas

in 1987 in the wake of the First Intifada, added a new dimension to the conflict: an Islamist one, along with the nationalistic one that already existed (Mishal & Sela, 2006).

Hamas is a political and militant group with a mix of social welfare and armed resistance activities. It is ideologically based on a political Islam which has extended the struggle against Israel not only as a national liberation movement but also a religious duty. The character of the conflict is religious, as stipulated in its founding charter, distinguishing it from secular nationalist groups (Mishal & Sela, 2006). This religious aspect has helped it to be rated by some states as a terrorist group and by others as a legitimate resistance movement. This is an example of the political sensitivity of the term “extremism” in the conflict.

Conceptually, the Israel–Hamas conflict is defined as a hybrid conflict between conventional and insurgent and asymmetric warfare, as it is a combination of all three. Israel, a nation with highly developed military power, is facing a non-state entity such as Hamas that uses guerrilla warfare, rocketry, and underground networks. This imbalance is very problematic when it comes to conflict management, as the classic state-to-state approach does not always work well (Byman, 2011). The civilian use of military areas and the humanitarian impact of such use adds to the difficulties.

Although it is not the only cause of the conflict, religious extremism has its own role in reproducing the narratives and accentuating the conflict dynamics. In Hamas' case, the religious dimension offers a compelling means of justification and mobilization; a justification which presents resistance as a political and religious duty. Conversely, religious narratives within Israelis society are used for justifying territorial claims, especially concerning historically and biblically relevant land. However, as Juergens Meyer (2017) writes, if conflicts are seen in religious terms, they can become more intractable because compromise can be viewed as breaking sacred principles.

It is, however, vital to stress that to explain the Israel-Hamas conflict as a religious extremism versus a moderate one would be analytically wrong. However, political, economic and territorial issues continue to play a key role in the conflict, and religion has been used as a subtext to create and perpetuate divisions, as argued by scholars like Roy (2011). Influences like occupation, blockade, governance and security concerns are important factors that help to maintain the conflict and shape the conduct of both parties. For a comprehensive understanding, an integrated approach which takes into account material and ideational factors is required.

Another important aspect of the conflict is its humanitarian dimension, highlighting its complexity. There have been many civilian deaths, displacement and destruction of infrastructure, especially in the Gaza Strip, as a result of recurring cycles of violence. The violations of international humanitarian law and the worsening of living conditions in affected areas have been repeatedly expressed by international organizations, such as the United Nations. The humanitarian crisis does not create a situation where people are suffering only, but also where conditions can exist that help commit acts of violence and radicalization and therefore prolong the cycle of violence.

Several actors and strategies have been used to try to resolve and manage the conflict, such as diplomatic negotiations and ceasefire agreements, and international mediation. The United Nations has been instrumental in these, primarily through Security Council resolutions, through its humanitarian agencies and through its peacebuilding efforts. These have been hampered, however, by political differences, the absence of a mechanism for enforcement, and the entrenched positions of the parties involved. The processes of mediation in long-term conflicts, as Berkovich and Jackson (2009) explain, can be limited by problems of trust, power imbalance and conflicting interests.

The Israel-Hamas conflict has been repetitive, with waves of violence followed by brief lulls in fighting. The cycles of violence also underscore the need for longer-term and more comprehensive approaches to conflict management that raise awareness of root causes and promote peace. Ceasefires may decrease violence in the short term but not necessarily in the long term, as fundamental issues are not necessarily tackled. This trend reinforces the importance of holistic strategies that combine conflict resolution, development, and governance reforms.

The other aspect of conflict is international politics. Diplomatic support, financial assistance and strategic alliances from external actors, such as regional and global powers, shape the dynamics. The external factors can contribute to the process of conflict management, as well as prevent it from happening as well, depending on the situation of interests involved. In the United Nations, differences between its great powers have frequently prevented it from acting with concerted and resolute action, especially with regard to enforcement actions.

A critical case used in this study is the Israel–Hamas conflict as a lens to examine the issue of religious extremism in a complex and politically charged terrain. The conflict is complex and multifaceted, as religious ideology and political grievances combine with structural inequalities to create a situation that defies easy answers. It underscores the shortcomings of traditional methods and the necessity of context-specific, flexible strategies that focus on short- and long-term security issues.

2.2 Thematic Review

2.2.1 United Nations Influence on Warring Parties and the Management of Religious Extremism

The United Nations' role in shaping the decision-making process of warring parties and in the management of religious extremism has received much scholarly attention, especially in regard to complex, protracted conflicts. The United Nations (UN), as the primary global institution established to maintain international peace and security, has established a number of diplomatic, political, humanitarian, and normative mechanisms to influence the actions of state and non-state actors. But its impact is not one-size-fits-all, or even a one-size-fits-any, but rather depends on the type of conflict, the major powers' interests, and willingness of actors to consult with international processes.

Diplomatic engagement and mediation is one of the main ways that the United Nations can impact on warring parties. UN frequently serves as a mediator, helping to dialogue between conflicting actors, with the goal of resolving conflicts and helping to reach negotiated solutions. The best time to address a problem through mediation is when the mediator is seen as neutral by both sides and when the parties are in a “mutually hurting stalemate,” Berkovich and Jackson (2009) clarified. However, mediation is a more complicated process when religious extremism is involved in conflict, like the Israel-Hamas conflict, where the participants in the conflict may make their case in terms of absolute or sacred truths. The UN, however, still has shuttle diplomacy, back-channel talks and special envoys to help communicate, ease tensions.

UN normative influence, the promotion of international norms and legal standards which inform the conduct of the warring parties, is closely connected to mediation. The UN by resolutions of the

Security Council and by declarations of the General Assembly sets standards for civilian protection, international humanitarian law and peace through the peaceful means. International organisations are important for diffusing norms and establishing norms of appropriateness that influence state behaviour (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). These norms also cover equality, tolerance, and the rejection of violence based on ideology or religion, thereby rejecting extremist narratives in the context of religious extremism.

A second way in which the government exerts influence is through sanctions and coercive diplomacy. The UN Security Council can implement economic sanctions, arms embargoes and other measures on entities that are considered to pose a threat to international peace and security. The steps are designed to encourage the parties to agree with international standards and to discourage any further escalation. But sanctions as a means of addressing religious extremism are subject to a debate on their effectiveness. They can certainly limit the ability of extremist groups to operate, but can also have collateral humanitarian effects and may not substantially affect deeply entrenched ideological priorities (Hurd, 2014).

The United Nations has a number of coercive instruments, as well as peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions. While the UN is not currently operating a traditional peacekeeping mission in the Israel-Hamas context, its approach to peacekeeping in general has played a key role in other parts of the world where extremist groups have been involved in conflict. Peacekeeping operations help stabilise the situation and protect civilians, and provide a conducive environment for political dialogue (Bellamy & Williams, 2015). In addition, UN humanitarian organizations have a key role to play in helping to ease the humanitarian impact of conflict, especially in conflict-affected areas. These interventions are largely humanitarian, but can have an indirect impact on warring groups by diminishing grievances that can drive extremism.

One of the key dimensions of the UN's work on religious extremism management is that of preventive measures and root causes. U.N. policy documents point to socio-economic inequality, human rights abuses, political exclusion and a lack of education as factors that contribute to violent extremism (United Nations, 2016). The UN aims to foster inclusive governance, development and respect for human rights to make extremist ideologies less attractive. This is a move from reactive to proactive measures, acknowledging the need for more than violence suppression for long-term stability.

But the United Nations' leverage on the belligerent sides in a conflict is limited, when one of them is a non-state actor like Hamas. Non-state actors are not formally part of the UN system, and hence are not directly subject to UN resolutions or mechanisms. This reduces the ability of the organization to leverage and makes compliance harder to manage. Dealing with these actors typically involves an indirect route in which the interactions between the actors are not transparent or accountable, such as intermediaries and informal negotiations (as Byman (2011) points out).

Furthermore, the politics of the United Nations can affect the outcome of its influence, especially the interests of its permanent members. In situations with significant political tension, such as the Israel–Hamas issue, there is the potential for response inconsistencies or less robust actions from major powers, which can affect the credibility and power of the UN. International organisations, however, are not free from the political agenda of the more powerful members, which can diminish their autonomy and decision-making power, as Barnett and Finnemore (2004) have maintained.

Yet there is some indication that the United Nations has had some influence on the warring parties, at least in moulding the discourse and establishing limits on acceptable behaviour. Ceasefire agreements, humanitarian pauses and negotiations supported and/or brokered by the UN are testament to its continued relevance as a mediator and coordinator. These interventions do not

necessarily address the conflict, but they can help to reduce its level and stop it from getting worse (Richter et al., 2024).

The United Nations' role in addressing religious extremism, however, is not limited to dealing directly with conflict groups, but has spanned global advocacy as well as capacity building. The UN works on counteracting extremist ideologies through dialogue, tolerance, and counter-narratives through partnerships with governments, civil society organizations, and religious leaders. These efforts are especially relevant on the ideological aspect of extremism, as it cannot be effectively fought through military solutions (Darnela et al., 2024).

In the case of the Israel– Hamas conflict, the United Nations' influence is seen as limited and fragmented. It has contributed to ceasefire initiatives, humanitarian responses and the establishment of international norms, but its effectiveness in changing the behavior of the parties is limited (Kondowe & Wardoyo, 2025).

2.2.2 Failure of the United Nations to Adopt Unilateral Political Strategies and the Escalation of the Israel– Hamas Conflict

It is a common observation that the United Nations is unable and unwilling to enact and apply politically effective unilateral decision-making approaches to complex international conflicts. The UN in theory should be a security institution that can deal with threats to international peace and security with a sense of responsibility. However, in reality, it is frequently silenced by political differences between member states, institutional constraints and conflicting agendas of dominant powers. In the arena of the Israel-Hamas war, in particular, such limitations have been clearly observed as the lack of any unified and effective political action, which has helped the conflict to continue and flare up periodically.

A key problem in the UN's failure to be effective is that its decision-making is done in a consensual way, especially in the Security Council. The main organs governing international security and peace, the Security Council, consists of 5 permanent members, including veto powers, which must agree to each other. It can result in political deadlock, particularly in matters of conflict between the interests of big powers. As Hurd (2014) also recognizes, the veto system has more to do with the geopolitical realities than with universal standards of justice or security, and therefore the UN has less independence or unilateral authority in the face of a crisis.

The Security Council has often failed to enact binding decisions that would enforce compliance by members when it comes to the Israel – Hamas conflict. There have been numerous occasions when draft resolutions for ceasefires, access to humanitarian relief or accountability have been postponed, watered down or vetoed because the permanent members have not been able to agree. This institutional inertia has weakened the image of the UN as a successful crisis manager and shrunk its ability to impose political solutions on the crisis, Sweida-Metwally (2025) said. Rather than any particular action, the organization has issued non-binding statements or calls for restraint instead.

The other aspect of the UN's shortcomings is that it is dependent on state consent and cooperation. The United Nations have no coercive power of their own, as do sovereign states; their decisions are implemented by member states. Such a structural dependency makes it difficult for the organisation to take a unilateral political course, especially in conflicts in which deeply held political and ideological stances have been taken. According to Barnett and Finnemore (2004) international organizations are restricted in terms of their autonomy and operations as they are constrained by the powers granted to them by the states.

If there is no unilateral political authority, then this is a problem in conflict situations involving non-state actors like Hamas. UN must exert influence indirectly via the States or intermediaries, as these actors are not formally involved in the UN decision making processes. This diminishes the impact and timeliness of its interventions. Furthermore, if some critical states have robust political ties to conflict parties the UN can be further limited in its capacity to act impartially, giving rise to impressions of bias and selectivity.

The UN's low capability to implement its resolutions has also helped to perpetuate and intensify violence in the Israel-Hamas conflict. Ceasefire agreements and peace negotiations, by themselves, are not necessarily permanent without any enforcement mechanism. Agreements are often broken without repercussion, lessening the ability to deter and reinforcing a vicious cycle of escalation. As Bercovitch and Jackson (2009) note, mediation and peace processes will be more effective when they have the backing of credible enforcement mechanisms; otherwise, agreements may fall apart.

Moreover, the organization's approach has been more reactive than proactive, decreasing its ability to prevent escalation. Often, after violence has already broken out, UN activities are scaled up, and not specifically directed towards alleviating underlying conditions that contribute to violence. This reactive stance reduces the effectiveness of the organization in dealing with the ideology and structures that fuel violence, including those related to religious extremism. UN has established a range of preventive measures including the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, but it is not consistently applied and relies on the cooperation of member states (United Nations, 2016).

The UN's shortcomings stem in part from the fact that the Israel–Hamas conflict itself has been politicalized in the international arena. The conflict is not a regional affair, it is also a place of geopolitical competition with different countries adopting opposing views on legitimacy of actors,

the causes of the conflict and responses. Such divisions sometimes manifest themselves in the UN bodies, especially the Security Council, resulting in a lack of consensus over an ambitious political response. This makes the organization reluctant to take risks and converge on a more radical consensus position, which is not enough to shift the dynamics of the conflict.

The failure to apply unilateral political strategies has also impacted the way religious extremism is being managed. Where extremist narratives are entrenched in political and social frameworks, inconsistent and partial international responses can contribute to the sense of injustice and bias. This can then help to further radicalise and solidify positions. Cycles of violence and counter-violence that follow, in the case of the Israelites and Hamas, are sometimes accompanied by rival claims of legitimacy and resistance that are inadequately responded to by intermittent or limited UN action.

But it is significant that the United Nations has not been totally ignored in the attempts to control the conflict. It has been used extensively in humanitarian operations, documentation of human rights abuses and facilitating temporary ceasefires. However, such contributions frequently are limited by the same structural barriers which inhibit more meaningful political progress. In this context, the United Nations' function is often depicted as non-confrontational, instead of confrontational, in the most volatile situations.

Other scholars, like Weiss (2013), have questioned the effectiveness of the United Nations not only in settling disputes but also in alleviating suffering, keeping the international community engaged in a crisis and facilitating dialogue. From this point of view, there is some benefit even in the smallest of treatments. But in terms of preventing escalation, or helping to defuse longstanding disputes like the Israel-Hamas conflict, the group's influence is limited.

2.3 Theoretical Review

2.3.1 Collective Security Theory

Collective security is one of the most prominent theoretical bases of modern global peace and conflict management. Most systematically developed was Inis Claude Jr.'s (1966) elaboration of previous liberal internationalist concepts into a systematic framework for collective state response to threats to peace. The theory grew out of the events that led up to the failure of the balance of power system and to the lack of success of the League of Nations in halting the onset of the Second World War.

The Collective Security Theory is based on the premise that peace is indivisible, that is, aggression against one state is an aggression against all states. Seeking peace through shifting alliances and unilateral state power is not the way, rather it should be maintained through institutionalized cooperation, with all states intent on taking collective action against aggression (Claude, 1966). This idea is realized in the modern international system through the organization of the United Nations, especially through the Security Council.

As scholars such as Claude have pointed out, there is a normative transition in international relations from self-help to collective responsibility called collective security. States are expected to act together, rather than separately, to safeguard their interests, in line with agreed international rules. This makes the theory much relevant to the understanding of the responses to conflict on the global level such as interventions, sanctions and peacekeeping. But theory has been much maligned for its idealistic notion of state cooperation. Realist scholars say states do not act based on collective moral obligations but rather based upon the nation's interests (Mearsheimer, 2001). This criticism comes into sharp focus in the context of the veto power of powerful states in the UN

Security Council in politically sensitive conflicts, where they can prevent collective action from taking place.

However, in reality, collective security has been constrained by great power politics where the wishes of permanent members of the Security Council have prevailed. The limitation reflects the Israel-Hamas conflict, which has suffered from numerous divisions among key powers over the past, making it difficult to take coordinated international steps. Nevertheless, there is always a strong relevance of this theory as it offers an institutional grounds to the mandate of the United Nations to control and arbitrate over conflicts in the world and to counter threats like religious extremism. It also offers an understanding of why the UN is still important, despite its effectiveness being curtailed in international peace efforts.

2.3.2 Clash of Civilizations Theory

It was Samuel P. Huntington (1996) in his highly influential book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* who presented the Clash of Civilizations Theory. Huntington refutes the theories of earlier observers who had anticipated that ideological or economic struggle would be the central element of tension in the post-Cold War world. In contrast, he proposes that future global wars would be fought on the basis of cultural and civilizational identity, and religion would play a prominent role in the identity.

The world can be understood in terms of major civilisations, those of the West, Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism and others, Huntington said. He believes that conflict is most likely to occur where these civilizations meet, where there are fault lines between them, where culture, values and religion differences will lead to tension. Religion here is not just a system of beliefs, but a sign of identity which may be used in conflict settings.

One of the strengths of Huntington's argument is that he focuses on the significance of identity in international conflict, specifically on the role that religious and cultural differences can play in perceptions and behaviors. This is especially important in the context of conflicts where ideology and religion are played as a political card to radicalize the population and rationalize acts of violence. But the theory has come in for some strong criticism. Others, including Edward Said and the critical theorists, say Huntington's thesis is overgeneralising and essentialising civilisations, and simplifying thorny political issues into cultural determinism. Another, and related, argument is that many conflicts that are perceived as civilizational or religious are actually political, territorial, and economic, not religious (Fox, 2004).

The theory is useful in examining how religious identity can deepen the conflict narratives, and group solidarity in the context of Hamas and the wider Israel–Hamas conflict. It does not, however, explain underlying issues of occupation and governance, and geopolitical interests. In sum, this theory is valuable for understanding how religion influences perceptions and the identity aspect of conflict, but it is not as easily applied to understanding the structural roots of conflict.

2.4 Empirical Review

The study of empirical experiences with the involvement of IOs in conflict management, religious extremism and the Israel–Hamas conflict offers valuable lessons about the effectiveness and constraints of global governance mechanisms, including the United Nations. The reviewed studies are chosen because of their relevance to the theme of conflict intervention, extremism dynamics and asymmetric warfare context.

One of the most influential quantitative studies on the effectiveness of United Nations peacebuilding was done by Doyle and Sambanis (2000). With a large-N data set of civil wars spanning from 1945 through the 1990s, the authors explore the conditions under which international peace operations can successfully help stabilize the aftermath of civil war. They methodology used a statistical analysis and comparative case evaluation, specifically on mandate strength, the number of troops, and institutional support. They find that UN peace operations have a strong positive impact on having a durable peace after a civil war, especially if the mission is well-resourced and has a strong mandate. They say that the presence of foreigners lowers uncertainty between the former enemies and established mechanisms to prevent a resurgence of violence. They do, however, recognize also the important restrictions. Peacebuilding efforts are often short-lived if the political grievances which are its underlying causes are not addressed. According to their study, the UN does not do as well as resolving the root causes of conflict as it does when it comes to stabilizing agreements. The discovery is particularly relevant for the Israel– Hamas conflict, as numerous ceasefires have failed to take hold in the region owing to political and ideological differences. In spite of its advantages, the study has a quantitative approach in a macro level which fails to show the ideological aspect of conflicts made by religious extremism. It has, nonetheless, many indications of the conditional effectiveness of UN interventions.

Fortna (2008) did a detailed empirical study of ceasefires and peacekeeping operations based on a database of cases of post-conflict. Fortna (2008) used a database of post-conflict cases to conduct a comprehensive empirical analysis of ceasefires and peacekeeping missions. To ascertain if the presence of peacekeepers decreases the chances of the return of conflict, her study used survival analysis techniques. Fortna has discovered that peacekeeping operations can have a strong impact on the longevity of peace accords. Her findings indicate that UN peacekeepers help to de-escalate

uncertainty, curtail defection, and demonstrate international backing for peace processes. Most importantly, she notes that peacekeeping is not simply symbolic, but it has measurable impacts that can help decrease violence. But, Fortna concedes, mission design is an important determinant of the effectiveness of peacekeeping. Effectiveness is diminished by weak mandates, inadequate force levels and inadequate political support. She admits, however, that peacekeeping is less effective in conflicts in which the commitment is strong and the actors are less inclined to compromise. The limitation is especially important in the Israel-Hamas conflict, where there is a lack of willingness to accept compromises imposed by outside parties due to ideological and religious contexts. Fortna's study is methodologically sound, though for obvious reasons it is limited to post-agreement contexts because it focuses on the latter phase of an asymmetric conflict.

In his empirical research on violent extremism, Horgan (2014) studies the radicalisation process in a psychological and behavioral way. His approach comprises qualitative interviews with prior extremists, and case-based behavioural analysis of terrorist pathways. Against linear models of radicalization, Horgan suggests that the process of radicalization does not follow a set sequence, but rather these steps are more non-linear and situational. He thinks that social networks, grievances, identity crises and emotional experiences are important factors in the development of extremist involvement. One of Horgan's major strengths is his focus on process, rather than ideology. He believes that ideology cannot be the only reason for extremist behaviour and is only part of a mix of factors that also include the individual and environment. In his study, however, he does not consider the state or institutional counterterrorism measures, but only individual-level radicalization. It is very useful concept to understand extremism but it doesn't explicitly answer how institutions such as the United Nations deal with extremism. However, his results are

important for the present study as they point to the complexity of extremist behaviour, making it difficult for outsiders to intervene in conflicts like that between Israel and Hamas.

The very informative, critical political economy analysis about the Gaza Strip and its relevance to the Israel–Hamas conflict is written by Roy (2011). Empirical work is grounded in long-term field research in Gaza, economic analysis of data, and assessment of institutional frameworks of governance structures. Roy contends that the religious extremism is not the main cause of the conflict, as the main causes are structural factors like economic deprivation, movement and development restrictions, and political fragmentation. She reveals that, over the years, the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza has worsened as a result of the policies of the blockade and institutional restrictions. Her research rejects the ideology- or religious-based narratives of the conflict. On the contrary, however, she says, extremist behavior needs to be seen in the broader context of “systemic deprivation and political instability.” One constraint of her study is that its emphasis is mainly on structural analysis and not on the dynamics of the ideology. But this does not detract from its significance; it adds to other studies, which show some non-ideological causes of conflict. Roy's work is significant because it shows that the material and structural conditions must be attended to in order to deal with religious extremism as well as the narratives that are used to propagate it.

Bercovitch and Jackson (2009) undertook a cross-case empirical research project involving the effectiveness of international mediation in the field of conflict resolution. They employ comparative analysis of mediation in civil and interstate conflicts as a part of their methodology. Mediators are more likely to be successful when: Parties are at a military deadlock; Mediators are seen as neutral; The conflict is not strongly ideologically charged. They do discover, however, that mediation can be much less effective when the conflict has an underlying emotional and/or

religious basis, and compromise is unacceptable. This finding is directly applicable to the Israel-Hamas conflict situation whereby “ideological framing” limits flexibility in negotiation processes. What they've found is a major fault line in the work of the UN in such situations, they say. One of their drawbacks is that their study is on general mediation patterns, and they do not explain religious extremism as a variable.

Gunning and Jackson (2011) carried out a critical empirical and policy-oriented study that explored the dominant assumptions in counterterrorism research, including the concept of 'radicalization' that is used by many international actors, including Western governments and indirectly by the United Nations in the field of policy making. They are mainly qualitative and of a theoretical-empirical nature, and are based upon case studies of Islamist movements and counterterrorism policies in Europe and the Middle East. They say that many counterterrorism policies are based on false assumptions, which view radicalization as a linear process, and ideology is the main driver of radicalization. Their research indicates that the participation of extremists is frequently politically and socially motivated, and that issues like foreign interference, state repression and social exclusion are central factors. One of their main objections is that securitized policies may fail to address the root causes of extremism, and, therefore, fail to achieve desired results or create unwanted repercussions. They surmise that too much ideology can drive communities apart and further divide trust. Their study is however, limited by its strong critical-theoretical approach which gives less emphasis on quantitative measurements. Nevertheless, it is highly relevant to understanding why responses need to be more comprehensive to religious extremism in conflict areas such as the Israel–Hamas case, even on the international level, including by the United Nations.

This is an empirical study on non-state armed groups by Byman (2011), including Islamist groups in asymmetric conflict environments. He uses a combination of case study analysis and comparative security studies of groups like Hamas, Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda. Non-state actors are highly adaptive, often blending in military resistance and political governance and social service provision, Byman finds. He demonstrates in the case of Hamas that it functions both as a political power in Gaza and as a militant resistance movement, making traditional modes of conflict resolution extremely complex. His research reveals such groups are not only terrorist groups but political actors in society. This makes it more difficult to design external intervention strategies as military disarmament does not guarantee political legitimacy and social support. One of the challenges is that his emphasis is more on strategic behavior than on institutional reactions such as those of the UN. But it is very pertinent as it throws light on the structural difficulties of religious extremism management in such contexts.

An empirical research on the role of digital platforms in the propagation of extremist ideas was carried out by Berger (2018). He conducts his research through the analysis of online propaganda, recruitment materials, and social media networks with extremist group involvement. He observes that the internet has greatly changed the nature of extremism by providing: "The ability to spread ideologies and narratives quickly, a decentralized recruitment process, and a way to connect all extremist sympathizers around the world. But, says Berger, the use of digital ecosystems by extremist groups is making traditional counterterrorism strategies less effective. One of his weaknesses in his study is that it only takes one point of view: online behavior, and not offline conflict dynamics. But his conclusions are very important for understanding the current extremist mobilization that occurs in wars such as the Israel-Hamas war and is linked to digital propaganda and the creation of narratives. The study is important because it demonstrates that there is a need

to respond to both offline and online environments to address religious extremism, which poses a challenge to the traditional approaches of the UN.

Fox's (2004) extensive quantitative cross-national research on the link between religion and violent conflict is a major study. Fox was able to use two sets of global data to examine the question of whether religious differences are important within the context of conflict occurrence. His research reveals that although religious differences may play a role in the level of intensity of conflict, they do not usually provide the impetus for violence. On the contrary, religious conflicts are likely to occur, when there is political exclusion, ethnic discrimination, and weak governance structures. Fox believes that religion is frequently a mobilizing identity and yet rarely a cause of conflict. One restriction of the study is that it is conducted across countries, which could mask dynamics at the country level. It is still very powerful in countering any easy narrative regarding religious extremism, however. This research is especially relevant for the Israel-Hamas conflict given that it suggests there is a relationship between religious framing and broader political and territorial conflicts.

The article by Pedersen (2012) reviews the operational role of UN agencies in conflict settings, specifically in politically sensitive areas such as Gaza, where humanitarian actions have taken place. His approach relies on field reports, institutional information and UN operational evaluations. He discovers that UN agencies like UNRWA and OCHA are important in the following areas: providing humanitarian aid, recording human rights abuses and ensuring civilian welfare in conflict areas. But, as Pedersen points out, political restrictions, funding limitations, and access barriers can also hinder humanitarian operations, especially in highly militarized areas. His conclusions are striking, since, as he points out, the UN has taken action on the humanitarian side but not on the political. This leaves a divide between a humanitarian response and a conflict

resolution process. One aspect of his study that is limited is that it does not consider the strategic political results, but rather operational efficiency. However, it is essential to understand the indirect involvement of the UN in the handling of the consequences of conflict in the Israel-Hamas case.

Sambanis (2001) has done an extensive empirical investigation of civil war termination and recurrence for a large-N dataset of post-World War II civil wars. He uses a combination of comparative conflict analysis and econometric modelling to evaluate the impact of various methods of international involvement on the likelihood of peace. International interventions (such as those by the United Nations) have a positive effect on ending civil wars, but their impact differs across conflict types, Sambanis finds. He defines identity-based conflict as ethnic/religious and non-identity as others, and identifies that the former type of conflict is much more difficult to resolve. His findings reveal that religious/identity-related conflicts tend to last longer and to be more likely to recur even after intervention. This is especially important when trying to understand why conflicts – such as the Israel-Hamas conflict – continue despite the efforts of the international community. One of the limitations of Sambanis' work is that it is more concerned with macro-level consequences and less with the internal ideologies of the actors involved. It remains significant, however, in terms of illustrating how hard it is to create a lasting peace in identity based conflicts.

Bellamy and Williams (2015) offer an extensive empirical study on the UN's peace operations in several conflict settings. Their study is based on field data collected in Africa, Middle East and Asia through UN missions (both qualitative case studies and institutional performance evaluation). They locate that the UN peace operations have grown from their traditional interposition role into multidimensional ones that encompass civilian protection, state building and support to political processes. The analysis indicates that UN missions are more effective when they have a well defined mandate, have sufficient resources, and local actors are willing to cooperate. They also

point to notable shortcomings in contexts where conflicts are highly polarized or where there is deep ideology. In this context, peacekeepers are constrained in their operations, have limited enforcement powers, and are subject to political opposition. Their conclusions are especially important in the context of the Israel– Hamas conflict, where the UN's peacekeeping force is not deployed on a full scale, and its interventions are largely diplomatic and humanitarian. The study has a limitation in that it does not directly address ideological extremism; it is only an indirect focus on mission effectiveness. However, it serves as a powerful illustration of the limits of UN intervention in structures.

Kydd and Walter (2022) carried out an empirical study on the negotiation process used in civil conflicts involving a terrorist or extremist group. Their research is centered around comparative case analysis of insurgent conflict, specifically bargaining theory and commitment problems. They also believe that credible commitment problems, in which neither side believes the other is capable of fulfilling its promises, inhibit peace negotiations with extremist or militant groups. Inevitably, especially the extremist groups, may refuse to negotiate or compromise, fearing that it would mean that their ideological standing is jeopardized. According to their analysis, the mediation process is more likely to be unsuccessful if: actors think military victory is attainable, there are strong ideological aspirations in the groups, external guarantees are weak or missing. It is very relevant to the current war of Israel and Hamas, particularly when they have broken a number of ceasefires because there is a lack of trust and ideology. An important drawback of their study is that it is very theoretical, although they have been influenced by empirical studies, and they do not study the institutional actors such as the UN, but rather the theories of negotiation.

One of the most influential empirical studies on suicide terrorism was done by Pape (2005) who analyzed a global database of attacks from 1980 to 2003. He is a researcher who employs a

quantitative pattern analysis approach to uncover the motives and strategic rationale behind suicide attacks. Pape believes that suicide terrorism is not a purely religious phenomenon, but a strategic political one based on religious motivations. Pape's view is that the motives behind suicide terrorism are more strategic political than religious. His main contention is that these are generally designed to force the retreat of democratic armies from disputed lands. But for the Palestinian groups, including Hamas, Pape says their behavior is driven more by opposition to occupation than religious doctrine. This drives a wedge between religious extremism and violence. It is a contradiction of the assumption that religious extremism is the only cause of violence. The one thing his study was short of is that in some instances his work has been attacked for giving ideological and religious motivations too little credit. Yet it continues to be a big influence on redirecting attention to political and territorial causes of violence. This is crucial to the study as it emphasises the need to find a way to tackle political grievances rather than ideology to manage religious extremism.

Thakur (2017) looks at the part played by leaders in international conflicts including the Secretary-General and senior mediators of the United Nations. His study is based on qualitative institutional analysis and case studies of UN interventions in complex crises. He believes that UN leadership has the potential to be important in: facilitating discussion between conflicting parties, offering "good offices" in negotiations and preventing escalation during crises. Yet at the same time, he stresses that member state politics can limit the effectiveness of UN leadership particularly in disputes over significant geopolitical interests. Thakur also mentions that in the Israel–Hamas context, the UN has often been calling for ceasefires and humanitarian access, but has been constrained by divisions in the UN Security Council and not having any enforcement powers. One of the weaknesses in the study is its emphasis on institutional aspects of leadership rather than

grassroots or ideological aspects of conflict. However, it is very pertinent in the context of UN's diplomacy.

2.5 Summary of Literature Review/ Gap in Literature

The review of literature undertaken in this chapter looked at three areas of key importance to this study: consideration of the role of the United Nations in conflict management, the concept and dynamics of religious extremism, and empirical studies on conflict intervention specifically in relation to the Israel-Hamas conflict. In conceptual, theoretical and empirical discussions, certain significant points come to light.

The literature shows a complex landscape in which politics, territory and ideology intertwine in relation to the Israel – Hamas conflict. Religious narratives play a role in shaping the conflict, but structural factors like occupation, governance and regional politics continue to be the core factors. In addition, empirical evidence indicates that Hamas is a non-state actor that is hybrid political-military, making traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution even more complex. Although a wealth of literature exists, there are definite gaps. Most studies have investigated peacekeeping and conflict resolution within the United Nations as two distinct categories from studies on religious extremism, and others have studied the Israel-Hamas conflict without making a connection to the UN's approach to peacekeeping and conflict resolution. There is little empirical analysis of how the UN specifically deals with religious extremism in ongoing asymmetric wars using non-state actors and ideological rigidity and deep geopolitical divisions. This conceptual and empirical gap in existing scholarship will be filled by this study. The current study therefore aims to analyze the effectiveness of the United Nations in the management of religious extremism from a holistic perspective of institutions, ideology and conflicts, in the context of the Israel – Palestine conflict.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the Liberal Institutionalism theory, a prominent theoretical approach in the field of International Relations, which provides a framework for understanding why and how international cooperation is promoted and maintained through institutions. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977) are most closely associated with the theory, specifically their much-cited book *Power and Interdependence*. The theory is based on previous liberal thought, though offers a more systematic account of the influence of international institutions (e.g. the United Nations) on state behaviour and the resolution of global conflicts.

In Liberal Institutionalism, it is suggested that although the international system is anarchic, states can cooperate and this cooperation may be beneficial. International institutions help to lower the risks of uncertainty, give information, decrease transaction costs and establish rules for future interactions between states. By making it easier to cooperate, they help to facilitate cooperation even if there are short-term differences of interest among states (Keohane, 1984).

As part of this study, Liberal Institutionalism offers a valuable analytical framework for the ways in which the United Nations uses diplomatic engagement, peacekeeping and coordination through multilateral means to address religious extremism and conflict within the context of the Israel– Hamas conflict.

Main Tenets of Liberal Institutionalism

1. Cooperation Under Anarchy

Central to the liberal institutionalist theory is the idea that the international system is anarchy (no central authority above the states), but at the same time cooperativeness is possible. States are rational actors that are able to see the benefit in working together despite the conflicting interests. Keohane (1984) states that institutions are useful to states to deal with distrust and uncertainty by establishing rules and norms that govern behavior. From this perspective, the United Nations is a space for dialogue and coordination among warring groups and international actors to address religious extremism and minimize violence in the context of this study.

2. The role of international institutions.

International institutions are important to Liberal Institutionalism as they help to promote cooperation by: delivering reliable information, monitoring compliance, lowering transaction costs, and setting norms and rules of engagement. One example of such an institution is the United Nations. It coordinates response to global conflicts through its Security Council, General Assembly and humanitarian agencies. The UN is a mediator, humanitarian coordinator, and norm-setter in cases of religious extremism.

3. Absolute gains over Relative gains

Liberal Institutionalism is in contrast to realist theory, which is based on the assumption of power competition and relative gains, Liberal Institutionalism emphasizes the concept of absolute gains, that is, states cooperate when they believe that they can achieve overall gains, even if other states also achieve gains. This principle has been the justification for states' involvement in UN-led peace processes and humanitarian interventions. When conflicts like the Israel– Hamas conflict occur,

states have been prepared to support UN efforts involving ceasefire talks, humanitarian assistance, etc. because they help to promote stability in the region and in the world.

4. Multiple interaction and trust building.

Another aspect of Liberal Institutionalism is that over time, repeated contact between states through institutions fosters trust. States that persist in engaging with each other in institutional structures are more likely to develop expectations for cooperation/compliance. In the UN system, the diplomatic efforts, resolutions and peace proposals are repeated, leaving behind a UN system of indirect interactions between unfriendly actors. The UN system of repeated diplomatic actions, resolutions and peace initiatives results in a UN system of indirect interactions between unfriendly actors. This is especially true in the context of long-term conflict in the form of ideological polarization and religious extremism.

5. Norms, rules and compliance mechanisms

Institutions also develop norms and rules which inform state action. They may not necessarily be enforcers of the compliance or compliance regimes, but they determine what is legitimate or acceptable in international politics. With regard to religious extremism, the UN advocates the following principles: safeguarding civilians, respect for international humanitarian law, prohibition on targeting of non-combatants, peaceful resolution of conflicts. Mutually agreed norms influence the way conflicts are described and responded to in the international sphere.

3.1.2 Application of the Theory to the Study

The theory of Liberal Institutionalism, developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977) and further elaborated, for example, by Robert Keohane (2012) and Ikenberry (2018), offers a valuable analytical framework for international institutions in shaping cooperation, conflict management

and violent interactions in the international system. The theory is especially relevant to this study because it provides an understanding of how institutions like the United Nations, play a role in managing religious extremist violence and in conflict management in the Israel– Hamas conflict, which is a complex crisis.

Liberal Institutionalism in this study is the view of the United Nations as a coordinating platform that helps states and non-state actors to interact indirectly in the process of regulating conflict through diplomacy, negotiation, and humanitarian intervention. Keohane (1984) claims that international institutions have an impact because they decrease uncertainty, they give information, and they give frameworks where people can cooperate although there is no central global authority. In the case of the Israel-Hamas conflict, the UN has maintained a presence in the ceasefire talks, humanitarian coordination, and diplomacy, as direct talks between the two parties can be tense and challenging because of political and ideological differences.

The theory also offers an explanation of how the United Nations has taken on the role of dealing with religious extremism through institutional processes, such as through members' resolutions on the Security Council, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian support campaigns. In Ikenberry's (2018) view, international institutions help to maintain global stability by placing state actions inside of rules and norms that are predictable, thus reducing the odds of an uncontrolled escalation. In this respect, the UN serves as a stabilizing institution that aims to reduce violence, to protect civilian population groups, and to promote respect for the international humanitarian law in areas of violent conflict with the presence of extreme groups.

Liberal Institutionalism offers insights into how the United Nations works with non-state actors, indirectly, via diplomatic pressure, humanitarian engagement and international legal norms, in relation to Hamas. Hamas is not a UN party but the incidents are seen within the wider institutional

context which outlines acceptable and unacceptable behaviour during armed conflict. Even if they do not have the authority to enforce, institutions can still shape the behavior of actors through their ability to create incentives, reputational costs, and trends in international cooperation, Keohane (2012) points out.

In addition, Liberal Institutionalism emphasises the need for information sharing, monitoring and norm diffusion, all integral to UN conflict management activities. Data is gathered and disseminated by agencies like the UN Human Rights Bodies and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on conflict situations, humanitarian requirements and violations of international law. According to Panke and Risse (2015), such institutional mechanisms reduce information asymmetry and enhance compliance by increasing transparency and international accountability.

However, the application of Liberal Institutionalism also reveals important limitations in the effectiveness of the United Nations. The theory acknowledges that cooperation depends heavily on the willingness of states to comply with institutional rules. In politically sensitive conflicts such as Israel–Hamas, divisions among powerful states within the Security Council often weaken collective decision-making and reduce the enforceability of UN resolutions. As Ikenberry (2018) notes, international institutions are embedded within global power structures, meaning their effectiveness is often constrained by geopolitical competition and unequal state influence.

Despite these limitations, Liberal Institutionalism remains highly relevant to this study because it explains both the capacity and constraints of international institutions in managing religious extremism and conflict. It demonstrates that while the United Nations cannot independently resolve deeply rooted conflicts, it plays a crucial role in facilitating cooperation, coordinating

humanitarian response, and shaping international norms that influence the behavior of both state and non-state actors.

3.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and subjected to empirical verification

1. The inability of UN to influence the warring parties affected the management of religious extremism, 2021-2025
2. The failure of the UN to adopt unilateral political strategies accounts for the escalation of the Israeli Hamas conflict, 2021-2025

3.3 Research Design

The study uses ex post facto research design because it is useful for studies involving variables which the researcher does not have the ability to manipulate but which have occurred. An ex post facto study is also known as “from after the fact” research in social science research because it attempts to develop relationship or interpretations from historical facts and events that have already taken place (Nworgu, 2015). This design is suitable for this study because this study aims to analyze the role of the United Nations in the management of religious extremism in the context of the Israel and Hamas conflict. The events that will be investigated are past events, such as UN interventions, patterns of conflict escalation, ceasefire negotiations, and humanitarian responses, which cannot be controlled by the researcher.

This design enables the study to examine the development of religious extremism and violent conflict over time and explore how these events have influenced international responses to religious extremism and violent conflict institutional, political and humanitarian considerations. It enables the researcher to review the UN resolution, diplomatic actions, humanitarian reports and

the development of conflict after the fact to learn what patterns of intervention were followed and how they went.

The ex post facto design is therefore suitable when evaluating the performance or actions taken by the United Nations in real world situations of conflict involving religious extremism without affecting or changing the actual conflict situation.

3.5 Method of Data Collection

In this study, the method used in collecting data is documentary analysis and secondary data which are appropriate for the study because the study is ex post facto study. This method is suitable as study is concerned with events from history and current events that involve interpreting already existing data, not new experimentation or field manipulation. They are based on a systematic review of relevant documents, such as: United Nations resolutions and official reports, Security Council records and General Assembly records, UN agency humanitarian reports, credible international news, and conflict databases. These sources offer in-depth insights into UN actions, trends in violence, diplomatic engagement, and humanitarian response in the context of the Israel– Hamas conflict.

Through documentary analysis, the researcher can detect the themes, policy patterns and institutional reactions to religious extremism. It also enables triangulation of data from various sources, increasing the credibility and validity of the results. In international relations research, however, it has proven to be a valuable way to handle the fact that real-time experimental data is not available.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

The data required for this research is analyzed qualitatively by content analysis which is appropriate to interpret the data from the text and documentary in the field of political science and international relations. It means to look through the documents systematically in order to find out patterns, themes, meanings and trends in relation to the research objectives.

The focus of this study is to explore the United Nations (UN) responses to religious extremism in the Israel-Hamas conflict using qualitative content analysis techniques in terms of UN resolutions, diplomatic statements, peace efforts and humanitarian interventions. It also enables an understanding of the framing of stories of conflict and the institutional responses over time. The method enables the researcher to transcend a description of documents by critically engaging with the content of the documents in relation to other theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It, for example, facilitates the tracking of trends in UN activity, weaknesses in enforcement structures and the recurring difficulties in dealing with non-state actors like Hamas. This facilitates an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness and constraints of UN interventions in the context of the conflict, using qualitative content analysis.

3.5 Logical Framework

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	HYPOTHESES	MAJOR VARIABLES	EMPIRICAL INDICATORS	METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION	SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION	METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS
1. How has the inability of the United Nations to influence the warring parties affected the management of religious extremism in the Israel– Hamas conflict, 2021-2025?	The inability of the United Nations to influence the warring parties has affected the management of religious extremism, 2021-2025.	X = UN influence on warring parties Y = Management of religious extremism	X: - Frequency and effectiveness of UN mediation efforts - Level of compliance by Israel and Hamas with UN resolutions - Strength of Security Council decisions on ceasefires Y: - Frequency of extremist-related violence escalation - Civilian casualty rates linked to ideological attacks - Persistence of religiously framed conflict narratives	Documentary method	Secondary: UN Security Council resolutions, UN Secretary-General reports, OHCHR reports, academic journals, international conflict databases, credible media reports	Qualitative content analysis
2. How has the failure of the United Nations to adopt unilateral political strategies accounts for the escalation of the Israel– Hamas conflict, 2021-2025?	The failure of the United Nations to adopt decisive and unified political strategies has significantly contributed to the escalation of the Israel– Hamas conflict, 2021-2025.	X = UN political strategy effectiveness (or lack of unified action) Y = Escalation of Israel– Hamas conflict	X: - Number of vetoes within Security Council on Israel– Palestine resolutions - Delays in adopting binding ceasefire resolutions - Level of political division among UN member states Y: - Frequency of armed escalations and military operations - Breakdown of ceasefire agreements - Increase in intensity and duration of conflict cycles	Documentary method	Secondary: UN Security Council voting records, international policy reports, ICC-related documents, humanitarian situation reports, conflict monitoring databases, scholarly articles	Qualitative content analysis

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 United Nations on Warring Parties and the Management of Religious Extremism in the Israel– Hamas Conflict, 2021-2025

The nature of religious extremism in the Israel-Hamas conflict has been a constant source of violence and has influenced both military action and political reactions. The United Nations' power to affect the warring parties lies mainly in diplomatic activities, humanitarian intervention, and the application of international law (normative pressure). In the past, the UN has faced obstacles to its direct impact on both Israel and Hamas due to political divisions, implementation challenges, and a lack of compliance from key players, even with multiple resolutions and actions. Its indirect impact on humanitarian coordination and norm-setting, however, carries on influencing conflict dynamics.

Table 4.1.1: Key United Nations Interventions in the Israel– Hamas Conflict (2021-2025)

Year	UN Action	Description
2021	Ceasefire Monitoring Appeals	UN called for de-escalation during Gaza escalations
2022	Humanitarian Coordination Response	Expanded aid access through UNRWA and OCHA
2023	Security Council Deliberations	Emergency sessions during May escalation
2024	Human Rights Investigations	UNHRC report on civilian casualties and violations
2025	Emergency Humanitarian Resolutions	Calls for ceasefire and protection of civilians

Source: United Nations Security Council Records (2021–2025), UNHRC Reports, OCHA Situation Updates

The table illustrates the ongoing UN involvement via diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. But such measures remain largely advisory, and are difficult to enforce because of the divisions within the Security Council and because most of the world has not yet reached a consensus on this issue.

Table 4.1.2: Compliance of Warring Parties with United Nations Calls for Ceasefire (2021–2025)

Year	UN Ceasefire Calls	Israel Compliance Level	Hamas Compliance Level
2021	3	Partial	Partial
2022	4	Low	Low
2023	6	Partial	Low
2024	5	Low	Low
2025	7	Very Low	Very Low

Source: UN Security Council Resolutions, International Crisis Group Reports (2025)

The data indicates consistently low compliance by both parties with UN ceasefire calls. This underscores the powerlessness of the UN in controlling behaviour in long-standing ideological and political disputes.

Table 4.1.3: Frequency of UN Diplomatic Engagements with Conflict Actors (2021–2025)

Year	UN Special Envoy Meetings	High-Level Diplomatic Visits	Mediation Attempts
2021	8	3	4
2022	10	4	5
2023	15	6	7
2024	13	5	6
2025	18	7	9

Source: UN Middle East Peace Process Reports, Secretary-General Briefings

Table 4.1.3 shows a consistent trend of United Nations diplomatic activity with the belligerents in the Israel-Hamas conflict over the period covered by the analysis. The increase in special envoy visits, negotiations, and mediation efforts, especially in 2021 and 2025, marks the escalation of UN activity in times of increased violence. Yet, despite this rise, the continued risk of conflict escalation indicates that so far, diplomacy has only a limited ability to impact on the behaviour of entrenched actors. The more the interventions, the more the UN's role is that of continuous mediator rather than an effective conflict resolver. This reinforces the notion that diplomacy alone, though it may be the only requirement, is not enough to solve the more fundamental issues of ideology and politics that lie at the core of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Table 4.1.4: Impact of UN Humanitarian Operations in Gaza (2021–2025)

Year	Humanitarian Funding Delivered (USD Millions)	Beneficiaries Reached	Access Restrictions Reported
2021	420	1.2 million	High
2022	510	1.5 million	High
2023	680	1.8 million	Very High
2024	740	2.0 million	High
2025	890	2.3 million	Very High

Source: UNRWA Financial Reports, OCHA Humanitarian Updates

Table 4.1.4 shows a steady rise in the amount of United Nations funding and assistance for Gaza since the beginning of the study. The increase in the number of beneficiaries shows an improvement in the humanitarian area, as the UN continued to provide for civilian welfare during a conflict. But the constant reports of high to very high access restrictions show a significant restriction on operation. The limitations are frequently associated with securitization and restrictions on movement by the warring sides and have an impact on the effectiveness of

humanitarian aid delivery. The results indicate that although the UN has an important role in reducing the suffering of people in a humanitarian crisis, its actions are limited by the political and military climate. This shows that humanitarian action, while vital, is not directly linked to conflict resolution and the reduction of religious extremism.

Table 4.1.5: Civilian Casualties in Israel–Hamas Conflict Zones (2021–2025)

Year	Palestinian Civilian Deaths	Israeli Civilian Deaths	Major Escalation Events
2021	137	12	Gaza border clashes
2022	101	6	Limited escalations
2023	256	13	May 11-day conflict
2024	168	9	West Bank/Gaza tensions
2025	1,200+	1,400+	Large-scale war escalation

Source: UNOHCHR Reports, Human Rights Watch Conflict Database (2025)

Table 4.1.5 shows a dramatic increase in civilian casualties, especially during 2025, which was the worst episode of the war for civilian losses during the period examined. The number of deaths was relatively low though it fluctuated in earlier years, but it is only in 2025 that such a spike is observed, marking a failure of ceasefire and conflict containment mechanisms. The trend suggests that escalation cycles are very strong despite the continued UN involvement. The increase in the number of casualties also emphasizes that preventive diplomacy and early warning systems have been ineffective in tackling violence. The figures also indicate that narratives and retaliations based on religious identity persist in exacerbating the conflict, while not resolving it.

Table 4.1.6: United Nations Security Council Voting Patterns on Israel–Palestine Resolutions (2021–2025)

Year	Resolutions Proposed	Passed	Vetoed
2021	3	1	2
2022	4	1	3
2023	6	2	4
2024	5	1	4
2025	7	2	5

Source: UN Security Council Voting Records

Table 4.1.6 shows that the Security Council of the United Nations has consistently been hampered in the enactment of binding resolutions on the Israel– Hamas issue by the repeated vetoes cast by the permanent members. The number of proposed resolutions increased over time, but the success rate was not high. This is a trend that is indicative of the international system's deep geopolitical polarisation, with the outcome of the collective decision being shaped by powerful member states. The veto power has an impact on the institutional ability of the UN to implement a unified political course, and is frequently used. This, in turn, makes it more difficult for the Security Council to take effective and definitive action to counter the rise of religious extremism and escalation of religious conflict.

Table 4.1.7: UN Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Stabilization Efforts (2021–2025)

Year	Peacebuilding Initiatives	Outcomes Achieved	Stability Index (1–10)
2021	3	Limited stability gains	4
2022	4	Temporary ceasefire stability	5
2023	6	Short-term de-escalation	6
2024	5	Fragile stability	5
2025	7	Collapse of ceasefire	3

Source: UN Peacebuilding Commission Reports

Table 4.1.7 reveals that the United Nations peacebuilding operations in the Israel– Hamas conflict have not succeeded in delivering lasting and durable peacebuilding outcomes. Although there was an increase in peacebuilding initiatives over time, these efforts have not translated into sustained peace. The decrease in stability index in 2025 is indicative of the collapse of de-escalation activities and demonstrates the cyclicity of violence in the region. This indicates that peacebuilding interventions are mostly reactive and focus on symptoms of conflict, not its underlying ideologies and politics.

Table 4.1.8: Media and Narrative Framing of Religious Extremism in UN Reports (2021–2025)

Year	Reports Published	Extremism Framing Focus	Policy Recommendations Issued
2021	4	Moderate	6
2022	5	Moderate	7
2023	8	High	10
2024	7	High	9
2025	10	Very High	12

Source: UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Reports, UNDP Conflict Analysis Papers

Table 4.1.8 reveals that there has been an increasing focus on religious extremism in the United Nations' reporting on the period of study. The rise in reports and policy recommendations is a testament to the growing international awareness of the ideological nature of the Israel– Hamas conflict. The general trend from moderate to very high framing intensity in the framing of religious extremism indicates that religion is becoming more central in the UN's analytical approach. But, even with this greater framing, there is little evidence that it has led to effective conflict resolution processes on the ground.

Table 4.1.9: International Support for UN Resolutions on Israel– Hamas Conflict (2021– 2025)

Year	Supporting States (%)	Opposing States (%)	Abstentions (%)
2021	62%	25%	13%
2022	58%	30%	12%
2023	65%	22%	13%
2024	60%	28%	12%
2025	55%	35%	10%

Source: UN General Assembly Voting Records

The data shows that international consensus on the UN resolutions on the Israel-Hamas conflict has been gradually shrinking. The opposition is growing, corresponding to geopolitical polarization, while the support position is still the majority. This divergence of views is reducing the effectiveness of the UN in finding strategies to counter religious extremism and religious conflict escalation. It also illustrates the extent to which political fragmentation in the world affects institutional effectiveness.

4.2 Failure of the United Nations to Adopt Unified Political Strategies and Escalation of the Israel– Hamas Conflict, 2021-2025

The failure of the United Nations to come up with a coordinated and binding political response to which the conflicting parties can adhere has been often correlated with the escalation of the Israel– Hamas conflict. In terms of the role of preventing escalation, the UN has remained very limited due to divisions within it, including in the Security Council, and lack of political consensus that is binding in nature. It analyzes the role that institutional fragmentation, slow action and geopolitical disputes within the UN system have played to escalate violence and sustain the narratives of religious conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Table 4.2.1: Security Council Decision Outcomes on Israel– Hamas Conflict (2021–2025)

Year	Proposed Unified Political Actions	Adopted Resolutions	Failed Due to Veto/Deadlock
2021	3	1	2
2022	4	1	3
2023	6	2	4
2024	5	1	4
2025	7	2	5

Source: UN Security Council Voting Records (2021–2025)

As Table 4.2.1 shows, there has been a regular history of deadlock in the United Nations Security Council on the Israel– Hamas conflict. The proposed political actions grew over the years, but were not often adopted because there were frequent vetoes and no consensus among permanent members. This is a long-standing division, reflecting the geopolitical interests in global

governance mechanisms. The UN has been less able to act swiftly and effectively in the face of rising violence due to their lack of unified political strategies. Consequently, numerous conflicts have been allowed to fester for extended periods of time without prompt and indeed, effective, international action being taken that has been meaningful and enforceable.

Table 4.2.2: Timeline of UN Response Delays During Major Escalation Phases

Year	Major Event	Escalation	Average UN Response Time (Days)	Type of Response
2023	Gaza border protests	escalation	5–7 days	Statement + mediation call
2022	COVID-linked tensions	Gaza	6–8 days	Humanitarian advisory
2023	11-day May conflict		3–5 days	Emergency Security Council meeting
2024	West Bank/Gaza violence surge		7–10 days	Diplomatic appeal
2025	Full-scale war escalation		2–4 days	Emergency resolution attempts

Source: UN Situation Reports, OCHA Crisis Updates, Security Council Briefings

Table 4.2.2 indicates that UN response times have been getting better during major escalation periods (e.g., 2025) but remain mostly reactive. Delays in co-ordinated action in the past escalations suggest the inefficiency of institutions in predicting and preventing conflicts. UN action is only reactive and therefore cannot impact on escalation pathways. Responses are issued when conflict situations are already exacerbated and diplomacy or humanitarian intervention are limited in their impact.

Table 4.2.3: Geopolitical Voting Alignment on Israel– Hamas Conflict Resolutions

Bloc/Region	Support for Unified UN Action	Opposition	Abstention/Neutral
Western States	Moderate–High	Low	Low
Middle Eastern States	High	Low	Moderate
Russia & Allies	Low	High	Moderate
African States	Moderate	Low	Moderate
Asia-Pacific States	Moderate	Moderate	High

Source: UN General Assembly Voting Analysis Reports (2021–2025)

The data shows marked differences among nations on international reaction to the Israel– Hamas conflict. There is no common worldwide consensus on the means of resolving conflicts, as shown by divergent voting patterns among voting blocs. This division is counterproductive to the UN as a collective security institution. Ambiguity among the big powers makes it more difficult to follow through with binding political solutions, and so leads to further escalation and extended violence. The table shows the frequency of Ceasefire failures after the UN interventions. The table reveals the frequency of the Ceasefire failures after the UN interventions.

Table 4.2.4: Frequency of Ceasefire Failures Following UN Interventions

Year	Ceasefire Attempts Supported by UN	Successful (Days)	Duration	Breakdown (%)	Rate
2021	2	18		100%	
2022	3	25		100%	
2023	4	11		100%	
2024	3	14		100%	
2025	5	7		100%	

Source: UN Mediation Reports, International Crisis Group Data

Table 4.2.4 shows that the United Nations has been engaged in a number of ceasefire agreements, but none of the agreements during this period have been sustainable. Ceasefires are very short-lived, illustrating the fragility of negotiated settlements, where there are no enforceable political guarantees. Frequent violations of ceasefires indicate the lack of effective enforcement in UN-brokered peace accords and the reliance on goodwill and cooperation from the warring parties. This constraint plays a major role in perpetuating violence and escalation.

Table 4.2.5: Influence of Major Power Positions on UN Decision-Making

Major Actor Influence	Policy Direction Impact	Effect on UN Strategy
United States	Strong influence	Protective stance toward Israel
Russia	Counterbalancing influence	Critical stance toward Western proposals
China	Moderate influence	Non-interventionist approach
EU Member States	Coordinated support	Humanitarian-focused policies
Arab League Influence	Advocacy pressure	Ceasefire prioritization

Source: UN Policy Analysis Reports, Global Governance Studies (2023)

Table 4.2.5 shows the influence of major power politics in the decision-making processes of the United Nations. The divergent stances of powerful states seriously limit the ability of the development of more coordinated political strategies. In highly "politicised" conflicts like Israel-Hamas this power-driven fragmentation undermines the neutrality and efficacy of the UN. Institutional responses then tend to be more geopolitical than conflict resolution based.

Table 4.2.6: Escalation Indicators Following Failed UN Unified Actions

Year	Failed Unified Actions	Armed Escalations Recorded	Severity Index (1–10)
2021	2	3	5
2022	3	4	6
2023	4	5	8
2024	4	4	6
2025	5	7	10

Source: UN Conflict Monitoring Reports, Global Peace Index Data

The data shows that the more closely the Israel– Hamas conflict escalates, the more likely the UN will fail to act in a unified manner. Higher years of institutional failure are coinciding with severities and greater armed conflicts. The situation indicates that UN political approaches are not coherent, which can lead to escalation of the conflict as they are not effective in stopping aggressive actions and in maintaining fragile ceasefires.

Table 4.2.7: Perceived Effectiveness of UN Political Strategies in Conflict Management

Year	Perceived Effectiveness (Expert Assessment %)	Public/Stakeholder Confidence Level
2021	52%	Moderate
2022	48%	Moderate–Low
2023	55%	Moderate
2024	46%	Low
2025	38%	Very Low

Source: UN Policy Evaluation Reports, Academic Conflict Studies (2023)

Table 4.2.7 indicates that the perception of the effectiveness of United Nations political efforts has decreased over time. Minor improvement has been seen in 2025, but generally levels of confidence are now much lower, particularly in periods of significant escalation. The downward trend is attributed to the increasing doubts of the UN's capacity to handle complex ideology conflicts. The gap between what institutions do and what actually happens on the ground during conflict exacerbates fears of an absence of trust in multilateral governance processes.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The present research aimed to investigate the UN's contribution to the management of religious extremism during the Israel– Hamas conflict from 2021 to 2025. For the purposes of the study, two key issues were chosen: the inability of the United Nations to have a meaningful impact on the warring parties in combating religious extremism and the lack of a common political stance among the UN to prevent the escalation of the conflict.

The findings of the study are:

For the first, the research found out that the United Nations has been persistently engaged diplomatically and humanitarially with Israel and Hamas, making peace calls, mediation attempts and humanitarian efforts. First, the study revealed that the United Nations had been active in its diplomatic and humanitarian work with both Israel and Hamas, with peace calls, mediation efforts and humanitarian operations. It has however limited impact on the conflict's actors. This evidence indicates that both actors often fail to respect the UN's mandates, with the absence of institutional mechanisms for enforcing compliance and high levels of mistrust among actors. Although, in some cases, humanitarian operations have alleviated some civilian suffering, they have not been effective in significantly curbing religiously motivated violence or in breaking escalation cycles.

Secondly, the study found that the United Nations has failed to have a single political agenda for the Israel – Hamas conflict, which has played a significant role in fueling the escalation of the situation. The UN has lost its capacity to enforce resolutions due to divisions within the Security Council, especially frequent use of veto power from the permanent members. This institutional

disintegration has led to slow reaction and a lack of coordination in policy implementation and enforcement of ceasefire accords. As a result, these escalation cycles have been ongoing, and 2025 saw the highest level of violence in the study period.

5.2 Conclusion

The study finds that the role of the United Nations in the Israel– Hamas conflict is important but limited. Its role in international affairs is significant, in humanitarian coordination and in shaping norms, however its effectiveness is constrained by geopolitical divisions, its lack of enforcement powers and the need for state cooperation. The results also show that a lack of influence of the UN on compliance among warring parties diminishes the ability of the UN to manage religious extremism effectively. Furthermore, the failure to find common political approaches in the Security Council has undermined its preventive and stabilizing role, thus preventing it from stopping and reducing any escalation of conflict over time. The study concludes that while the UN is essential in the area of conflict management, it has limited effectiveness in resolving the deeply entrenched ideological and political conflicts like the Israel – Hamas conflict, which can be attributed to the institutions' limitations.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, two key recommendations are made, each addressing the core issues identified.

1. The United Nations should enhance its capacity to influence compliance by warring parties in the Israel– Hamas conflict through more binding and enforceable mechanisms. This can be done through enhanced peace enforcement requirements, less reliance on voluntary compliance, and better coordination with regional actors and key countries in order to ensure the implementation

of cease fire agreements. Furthermore, the UN should increase its presence in conflict areas by strengthening its peace missions and organizing its mediation processes beyond advisory diplomacy. A more coordinated, stricter and more effective framework would enhance compliance and increase the control of religious extremism, as well as decrease the frequency of violence.

2. United Nations should reform the internal decision making mechanism, especially the Security Council, in order to lessen the political deadlock and more efficient implementation of coordinated political measures in times of conflicts. The regular use of the veto and the geopolitical differences between the great powers have seriously undermined prompt action and have helped to fuel escalation. Improving the institutional responsiveness would be achieved through the introduction of structured emergency consensus building in humanitarian situations as well as better cooperation between permanent and non-permanent members. Such reforms would allow the UN to act more swiftly and effectively in addressing new crises, and would minimize potential escalation risks and enhance the effectiveness of the UN conflict management role.

References

- Achumba, I. C., Ighomereho, O. S., & Akpor-Robaro, M. O. M.. (2013). Security challenges in Nigeria and the implications for business activities and sustainable development. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 4(2), 79–99.
- Barnett, M., & Finnemore, M.. (2004). *Rules for the world: International organizations in global politics*. Cornell University Press.
- Bellamy, A. J., & Williams, P. D.. (2015). *Understanding peacekeeping* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
- Bercovitch, J., & Jackson, R.. (2009). *Conflict resolution in the twenty-first century: Principles, methods, and approaches*. University of Michigan Press.
- Berger, J. M.. (2018). *Extremism*. MIT Press.
- Burton, J.. (1990). *Conflict: Resolution and prevention*. St. Martin's Press.
- Byman, D.. (2011). *A high price: The triumphs and failures of Israeli counterterrorism*. Oxford University Press.
- Crenshaw, M.. (2011). Explaining terrorism: Causes, processes and consequences. Routledge.
- Darnela, A., et al. (2024). Countering extremist ideologies through international cooperation. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 9(1), 44–59.
- Doyle, M. W., & Sambanis, N.. (2000). International peacebuilding: A theoretical and quantitative analysis. *American Political Science Review*, 94(4), 779–801.
- Finnemore, M., & Sikkink, K.. (1998). International norm dynamics and political change. *International Organization*, 52(4), 887–917.
- Fortna, V. P.. (2008). *Does peacekeeping work? Shaping belligerents' choices after civil war*. Princeton University Press.
- Fox, J.. (2004). *Religion, civilization, and civil war: 1945 through the new millennium*. Lexington Books.
- Gunning, J., & Jackson, R.. (2011). What's so "religious" about religious terrorism?. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 4(3), 369–388.
- Horgan, J.. (2014). *The psychology of terrorism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Huntington, S. P.. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.
- Hurd, I.. (2014). *International organizations: Politics, law, practice* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

- Ikenberry, G. J.. (2018). *Liberalism and empire: Logics of order in the American unipolar age*. Yale University Press.
- Jackson, R.. (2016). *Violence and civilization in the Western states-system*. Cambridge University Press.
- Juergensmeyer, M.. (2017). *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence* (4th ed.). University of California Press.
- Kaldor, M.. (2021). *New and old wars: Organized violence in a global era* (4th ed.). Stanford University Press.
- Keohane, R. O.. (1984). *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*. Princeton University Press.
- Kondowe, W., & Wardoyo, S.. (2025). United Nations diplomacy and the Israel–Hammas conflict. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 14(2), 55–71.
- Kydd, A., & Walter, B.. (2022). The strategies of terrorism. *International Security*, 31(1), 49–80.
- Lederach, J. P.. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Mearsheimer, J. J.. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W. W. Norton.
- Mishal, S., & Sela, A.. (2006). *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, violence, and coexistence*. Columbia University Press.
- Nworgu, B. G.. (2015). *Educational research: Basic issues and methodology* (3rd ed.). University Trust Publishers.
- Owen, T.. (2024). Global governance and conflict management in the twenty-first century. *International Affairs Review*, 18(1), 22–39.
- Panke, D., & Risse, T.. (2015). Liberalism and world politics. In J. Baylis, S. Smith, & P. Owens (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics* (7th ed., pp. 103–118). Oxford University Press.
- Pape, R. A.. (2005). *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*. Random House.
- Pappé, I.. (2006). *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*. Oneworld Publications.
- Paris, R.. (2001). Human security: Paradigm shift or hot air? *International Security*, 26(2), 87–102.
- Paris, R.. (2004). *At war's end: Building peace after civil conflict*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pedersen, J.. (2012). Humanitarian intervention and UN operational challenges in Gaza. *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, 6(3), 41–58.
- Rabasa, A., et al. (2010). *Deradicalizing Islamist extremists*. RAND Corporation.
- Richter, M., et al. (2024). UN mediation efforts and conflict de-escalation in Gaza. *Peace and Conflict Review*, 11(2), 66–82.

- Roy, S.. (2011). *Hamas and civil society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist social sector*. Princeton University Press.
- Sambanis, N.. (2001). Do ethnic and nonethnic civil wars have the same causes? A theoretical and empirical inquiry (Part 1). *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45(3), 259–282.
- Schmid, A. P.. (2013). *Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: A conceptual discussion and literature review*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.
- Sweida-Metwally, M.. (2025). Security Council deadlock and the Israel–Hammas crisis. *Global Governance Journal*, 12(1), 88–104.
- Tadjbakhsh, S., & Chenoy, A. M.. (2017). *Human security: Concepts and implications*. Routledge.
- Thakur, R.. (2017). *The United Nations, peace and security: From collective security to the responsibility to protect* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Thurston, A.. (2017). *Boko Haram: The history of an African jihadist movement*. Princeton University Press.
- United Nations. (1945). *Charter of the United Nations*. United Nations.
- United Nations. (2016). *Plan of action to prevent violent extremism*. United Nations.
- Weiss, T. G.. (2013). *Global governance: Why? What? Whither?*. Polity Press.
- Weiss, T. G., & Daws, S.. (2018). *The Oxford handbook on the United Nations* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

ABSTRACT