

# Beyond Diplomacy: The Israel-Palestine Conflict as Geopolitical Concern and The International Sustainable Peacebuilding as A First Step Toward Resolution

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Palestinian-Israeli conflict stands out as one of the most complex on today's international scene, as well as the oldest unsolved conflict in the Middle East. The conflict has resulted in the horrible massacre of the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, military mobilization as a response, and a significant portion of profound humanitarian challenges on both sides. The current article will highlight a comprehensive view of the Israeli-Palestine enduring conflict and its impact in the international arena through a constructive narrative and peacebuilding approach. The qualitative method gives a thorough view of the hermeneutical approach and the engagement of external stakeholders to employ sustainable peacebuilding and democracy-building capacity as a first step toward an enduring solution.*

**KEYWORDS:** *conflict, constructive approach, sustainable peacebuilding, geopolitical concern, international stakeholders, democracy capacity building*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Arab-Israeli conflict refers to the state of political tension and armed clashes between the State of Israel and its Arab neighbors, particularly the conflict experienced with the Palestinian people, which the current work will discuss. The land of Israel and Palestine has been home to several civilizations throughout antiquity (Rubner,2019). It is known as the "*Holy Land*" due to its significance to the three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Rubner,2019). Added to this is their significant geopolitical relevance, considering that this part controls a large portion of the world's oil resources, which is fundamentally important for Western countries. Various research tried to understand the enormous significance of this conflict,

considering the geographical particularity of the territory that is in conflict (Newman& Visoka,2021; Rubner,2019; Gelpi,2017; Macdonald,2001). The conflict is regarded as one of the most prominent in the Middle East, capturing the attention of both global partners (Newman & Visoka,2021). The Palestinian-Israeli issue is one of the most complex on the international stage, and it has been unresolved for at least 100 years (Gur, 2024; Bigger, 2008; Macdonald, 2001). It is not a one-sided conflict between Israel and Palestine; rather, it is more comprehensive (Friedman, 2024). Scholars assert that it is the story of the Middle East, as there is a struggle between Israel and Iran, Syria, Yemen, and all the areas that have a "deal of darkness" against Israel and its right to exist (Friedman, 2024). As Rosenberg called it, it is a long-lasting conflict between “ *Enemies and Allies*” (Roserberg,2021). What happened on October 7, 2023, with the unexpected onslaught by Hamas and what is still happening now on the ground, is clear evidence of the savagery of employing "civilians as shields and guns" as the worst combat. Despite Israel, Hamas built their entire force underground to ensure that any attack on them would result in a massacre of people. The media, press, academics, and non-governmental organizations active in Gaza are all striving to undermine how Israel's attitudes are viewed in the international arena. Media and NGO organizations in the region have partnered with Hamas to convey the same view about the oppressor and the victims. Two weeks after the October 2023 attack, the worldwide system restored to its previous “status quo” state, portraying Israelis as occupants and Palestinians as victims. After initial sympathy, foreign organizations would assign responsibility to Israel, and it was only a matter of time until all the empathy would convert Israeli society and political hub into the "same as ever" civilian attackers(Senor,2024). Furthermore, Palestinian refugees have been one of the key "*concerns*" of Western countries since the early years of 1948, although little or no action to reduce it has been taken over time (Grossman,2024). The deaths of civilians and military personnel on both sides make the situation even more bleak and unbearable for the average European and (also) everyone else, especially considering the harvest times with the War in Ukraine and pandemics.

Despite its broad remit, it is impossible to provide an exhaustive assessment of the conflict in the Middle East here. As such, this paper will address only the Israeli-Palestinian one. Notwithstanding that, this article will not take positions or make arguments for or against any of the countries. It is not my purpose to provide any further arguments beyond those found in history, international diplomatic works, and other assessed resources regarding the evolution, current events, and the future to come of the conflict. Following a comprehensive assessment of articles, books, media resources, and empirical research, this article will highlight the numerous geopolitical perspectives on the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine using a constructivist approach. Constructivism is one of the most significant theoretical methods that research proposes for this type of conflict. Social and political realities are social creations resulting from human interaction and meaning processes. The paper will also provide an extensive overview of external stakeholders' hermeneutical approaches and potential solutions for long-term sustainable

peacebuilding construction and processes. A peacebuilding plan would undoubtedly include an inclusive process and a real commitment to fair play by all parties.

This is not only a "you" and "their" issue; it is an "all of us" issue! A constructive narrative in sustainable peacebuilding, as proposed in the following article, will serve as a basis for broader negotiations where both parties may coexist while also providing international allies, starting with the European Union (the region's greatest financial and political advocate), with an opportunity to preserve normalcy and propose inclusive and stable peacebuilding plans at a rapid time, as more than a time for "concrete and constant solutions" (CCS).

Although the future appears uncertain, an all-encompassing commitment of policies, international economic allies, security approaches, and religious and civil society would, of obviously, achieve a just and lasting peace for all sides by constructing a fair narrative in which respect for the coexistence and human rights and coexistence equality are prioritized (Smith et al.,2023).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The method of the current work is hermeneutical and qualitative. The research of this work has been established from a constructive approach, in which the conflict is analyzed from the viewpoint of geopolitical significance and perspective. The contradictions were and are usually the trigger for past and current conflicts. The deep structure of the conflicts relates to the history of the two parties to the conflict. That's why a historical analysis of the history of the two actors is important to be highlighted. The analysis is focused on the historical space of Israel and Palestine and the water dispute as a source and solution to the environmental peacebuilding of the conflict. In drafting this academic research, primary and second desk resources have been used, both in bibliographic terms and online resources.

To outline a potential conflict transformation, the work will conclude with some solution ideas for sustainable and democracy peacebuilding capacities as a solution for enduring peace.

The historical background of an enduring conflict: a geopolitical concern.

The conflict in the Middle East has evolved: at the beginning, it was largely focused on the confrontation between Israel and its Arab neighbors, with the Palestinian cause being one more among others. Over time this gained greater importance, becoming the central part of the conflict, which explains the change in political terminology and address (Macdonald,2001). The Palestinian-Israeli conflict must be analyzed from a multiple perspective due to its complexity which includes political, economic, military, and religious factors. The Middle East has been a source of conflict throughout history due to its strategic location, between East and West, and for having been the cradle of the first civilizations (Bigger,2008). At the end of the 19th century,

Zionism began to gain importance, defined as a nationalist movement in the context of imperial impetus and the emergence of various nationalist movements throughout Europe (Poliakov,1975). Its fundamental objective is the creation of a Jewish and democratic State by promoting “*the colonization of Palestine by Jewish agriculture and industrial workers*” (Poliakov,1975). Zionism derives from Zion (*Tzyion*), the mountain on which Jerusalem was built and where the Temple of King Solomon was located. The materialization of the movement was triggered at the First Zionist Congress, held in 1897 in Basel, where the lines of action were established, and the World Zionist Organization was established. Among the main debates was the choice of the territory where the Jewish State would be located, highlighting Argentina (numerous colonies of Jews who had emigrated from Europe), Uganda (a British colony), Madagascar, or Cyprus. However, they decided that Palestine (at the hands of the Ottoman Empire) was the place chosen for its religious importance, being, according to the Bible, “*the Promised Land*”: territory that belonged to them and where “*they had the right to return.*”(Shimoni,2007). The father and founder of modern political Zionism was Theodor Herzl, who brought together the various currents of the movement with the common goal of creating a Jewish State. “*The origin of the Palestinian-Israeli issue is not a confrontation between two historically neighboring peoples fighting for territory nor between two nationalist movements. It is, primarily, a process of Zionist settler colonialism active today.*” (Shimoni,2007). Starting in 1882, the succession of large waves of arrivals of Jewish immigrants to Palestine called “*Aliyah*”, began (Bocco,2009).

The situation in the Middle East was unstable, the Ottoman Empire was increasingly fractured, and an imminent breakup was perceived. This is why communications with the British army began, at the hands of Thomas Edward Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia. Meanwhile and secretly, Great Britain and France signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), where they decided how to divide the territory once the Ottoman Empire was defeated. In this way, Great Britain ensured maritime control with certain coastal areas and access to India: the jewel of the British Empire. A year later, the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia and made the Agreement public. This, added to the Balfour declaration, in which British Secretary Arthur Balfour supported the creation of “*a Jewish home in Palestine*”, caused an atmosphere of tension and hostility in the Middle East (Liverani,2006; Patai& Sachar,1977). This action was taken as a betrayal by the Palestinian people, who celebrated the First Palestinian National Congress and requested the rejection of the Balfour Declaration and the independence of Palestine. While for the Israelis it was a key moment in the consolidation of their State. In 1920, the Supreme Council of the San Remo Peace Conference designated the Mandate of Palestine to the United Kingdom and, two years later, in July 1922, it was authorized by the Council of the League of Nations (Krämer,2009). In the following years, discontent increased due to the British Mandate in Palestine with various mobilizations and compromises with the Yishuv (Krämer,2009).

The political changes caused events such as “*The Hebron Massacre*” (08/23/1929) that ended the Jewish presence in the city and the exponential growth of the Haganah (Krämer,2009). These acts

led to an irreversible breakdown of relations between Palestinians and Jews. Furthermore, there was the Great Revolt declared by the Arab High Committee due to the refusal to continue paying taxes, lack of representation, and a protest of the constant arrival of Jewish immigration. It took place between 1936 and 1939, where what began as a general strike progressively changed into an armed insurrection against the Jews and the Mandate (Krämer,2009). The consequences of these acts were horrible, but they served to make the British aware of the magnitude of the problem they were experiencing (Liverani,2006). To try to solve the situation, a series of commissions were launched from the Mandate (*Peel Commission, Woodhead Commission, and St. James Conference*) in which different partitions of the territory were proposed. All the proposals were rejected by both Palestinians and Jews. After the failure of these attempts, the White Paper was published from London in which another attempt was made to regulate and limit migration. However, this did not please the Jews who saw how anti-Semitic pressure was increasing in Europe (D'Acunto et al.,2018). After World War II, a new form of conflict between the Arab countries and Israel began to rise. With the Arab defeat in 1948, it was widely believed that the Arab leaders and monarchs at that time were disloyal and labeled as "*servants of colonialism*" (Patai & Sachar,1977). Egypt further contributed to the instability by restricting Israeli ship navigation through the Suez Canal and Strait of Tiran.

The Sinai Campaign or Suez Crisis in July 1957 involved Great Britain, France, Egypt, and Israel. Fearing the loss of control over the canal and oil resources, Britain, France, and Israel responded. Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula, while Britain and France attacked by air and sea. UN intervention halted Israel's advance, and international pressure led to the withdrawal of British and French troops from Egypt, seen as a neocolonial operation in the conflict, Egypt emerged victorious, maintaining control of the Suez Canal, and strengthening Nasser's leadership. This led to further radicalization and solidified the United States' role in the region (Chamberlin,2017). In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was created, aiming to unify Palestinians against Israeli occupation and represent them internationally. The organization challenged Israeli rule and became a key player in regional and international politics (Teitelbaum,2019). Israel's political and military tensions with Arab countries persisted, leading to the expulsion of United Nations (UN) forces from the Gaza Strip by Egypt. This triggered the Six-Day War or Naksa Palestine on June 5, 1967. Lasting six days, the Israeli army achieved a decisive victory and occupied territories including the Gaza Strip, West Bank, East Jerusalem, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. Consequently, the Green Line was rendered ineffective, consolidating Israeli control over the occupied areas (Rowley & Taylor,2007).

These territories were under Israeli control, limiting Palestinian political rights, and civil liberties, such as freedom of expression, press, and political association. The Nakba exodus exemplifies Israeli racial classification in those years (Raidi,2021). The victory excited the Jewish diaspora, boosting migration and nationalism, especially among the Soviet Union. They, unlike earlier immigrants, quickly adjusted to Israel's thriving economy (Al-Haj,2002). In 1973, Egypt and Syria

made a surprise war with Israel through the Suez Canal during the Yom Kippur War. Although successful initially, Israel counterattacked and recaptured territory (Handel,1977). In 1974, the PLO was recognized as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by the Arab League (Teitelbaum,2019). The conflict between both nations remained severe since 1976 when the Israeli State took thousands of hectares of Palestinian territory to establish Jewish communities. This led to great indignation among the Palestinian population, who organized a general strike and massive protests throughout the country (Rowley & Taylor,2006). In 1978, peace negotiations began, and Israel signed the *Camp David Accords* with Egypt. As a result, Sinai was returned to Egypt and the Suez Canal opened for Israeli ships.

However, in 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon to expel the PLO, leading to a civil war and the PLO's relocation to Tunisia (Biancani,1988). The first Intifada (1987-1991) was a crucial event, revealing the reality of the Palestinian people through civil resistance, including strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations (Pappè,2006). The Palestinian protest sought freedom, political and economic autonomy, and an independent state. HAMAS emerged from this protest as a political and military movement rooted in the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Carridi,2023). The Madrid Conference (1991) and Oslo Accords of 1993 were a result of these demonstrations, offering a potential solution to the conflict (Pappè,2006). The "*Declaration of Principles*" signed in Washington between Israel and the PLO marked the start of negotiations on the Provisional Self-Government Agreements. The stable environment deteriorated due to Israeli settlements, lack of progress on borders and Jerusalem, failure to address the right of return for Palestinian refugees (see the UN Resolution 194, Art.11), lack of trust, and escalating violence (Benveniští, 1993). One approved provisional agreement granted autonomy to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The second Intifada that began in 2000 was a response to Israel's repressive actions(Hanieh,2002). Jerusalem has endured centuries of religious conflicts, and its status is still one of the sources of the enduring dispute between Israel and Palestine. The status of Jerusalem and its divisions, including the separation wall called the " have always sparked disputes. This 630-kilometer-long wall was built in 2002, separating East Jerusalem from the West Bank. The Gaza Strip has also been a conflict zone since Israel's unilateral withdrawal in 2005, facing constant blockades by Israel and Egypt (Hanieh,2002). Notable episodes of violence include the First Gaza War (2008-2009), referred to as Operation "*Cast Lead*," and the deadliest conflict Operation "*Protective Edge*" in 2014. It is also worth mentioning here the "*Operation Swords of Iron*" which is still in course between Israel and Gaza (Dalsheim,2015; Stein,2012). Regarding the Palestinian political dynamics, the current leadership is still in the hands of Mahmud Abbas. The PLO chief was often attacked for his political benevolence and permissiveness in the occupation of Israel (Migdalovitz & Congressional Research Service, 2007). Even the social-economic development in Palestine is largely affected by the continued conflicts with Israel. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace (2023), the State of Palestine is in the 160 Global Rank for the Human Development Index (HDI)from a total of 190 countries. Both Israel and Palestine deteriorated in their Global Peace Index in 2023. Palestine is in the 134 places with a decrease of

4 points while Israel stands in the 143 places with a decrease of 8 points (see Global Peace Index,2023).

The controversy of water and land between the two states in the international market. Water is coined "*the oil of the 21st century*," and this resource is becoming a factor of strong and enduring instability(Fergusson,2023). It is necessary to pursue policies that, on the one hand, tend to encourage cooperation to make it prevail over conflict (as has already happened in the past), and on the other, create a climate of mutual trust(Parsons & Salter,2008).

In recent years, in the most advanced countries, water policies have been based on a criterion of qualitative rather than quantitative management of resources, in harmony with the principles of sustainable development (Barraqué, 2003). To prevent waste and damage from mismanagement, policies aim to promote international cooperation to resolve hydro conflicts and harness water as a strategic resource for regional development and employment (Beck et al.,2014). To evaluate cooperation in the Jordan River as one of the significant sources of the enduring conflict between Israel and Palestine, historical events and failed attempts at inter-regional water collaboration starting from the 1950s to the Oslo negotiation process must be analyzed ( Fergusson,2023; Allan,2002; Allan,1998). Water disputes between countries are viewed as zero-sum games, where gains for one mean losses for another. This is especially evident when there is interdependence at the water level, risking ineffective allocations and conflicts, as seen in the Middle East with Israel, the Palestinian National Authority, Iraq-Iran, Turkey-Syria, and Syria-Iraq relations (Allan,2002). The Jordan River drainage basin is a single large body of water that expands from southern Anatolia to northeastern Africa, including the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias), the Jordan Valley, and the Dead Sea.

To date, the basin is politically distributed between five states: Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the future Palestinian state (Mimi & Sawalhi, 2003). Throughout history, resources in the basin have caused conflict, primarily in the Jordan River valley. Since the 1950s, Israelis and Jordanians have contended for exclusive control of Jordan River resources (Selby,2005). Water possession and control are yet vital for Israel's security in the Middle East, without regional allies(Parsons & Salter,2005). The water conflict, rooted in Israel's National Water Project since the birth of the state of Israel (1948), caused tensions between Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, straining diplomatic relations. The water dispute in the Jewish-Arab world is characterized by the distrust that now governs the difficult relations between these people in decades of clashes and violence(Selby,2005). One of the fundamental issues for fair geopolitical management is the lack of available data and common objectives regarding water resource exploitation (Fergusson,2023). The 2007 clashes occurred between the Palestinian movement Hamas and Al-Fatah, causing separation between Gaza and the West Bank. In a de facto separation, Gaza was controlled by Hamas, and the West Bank was controlled by Al-Fatah. This led to increased violence and isolation in Gaza (Schanzer & Pipes, 2008). At the same time, Israel, to protect itself, launched the "*Summer*

*Rain*" operation against Gaza (Hadad,2019). These events have done nothing but further strain the living conditions of the Palestinian population (Schlütter,2005). In the operation, Israel suspended supplies of water, fuel, and electricity worsening living conditions for Palestinians. The scarcity of water and political fragmentation in the Palestinian territories intensify the critical situation (Schlütter,2005; Selby,2005). Gaza's energy sector is strongly reliant on Israeli policy, and its seclusion of the territory, along with armed clashes, heightens the conflict's destructive potential (Hjelm et al.,2019). To address the ongoing stalemate in the Middle Eastern political scene and the water resource issues, an international water resolution and cooperation system is necessary. This initiative is vital for ensuring the long-term sustainability of resources, the development of an effective neighborly system, and the constructive peacebuilding process (Al-Masri et al.,2021).

### **The Issue of Settlement**

Israel's settlement policy sparks numerous clashes even today. B'Tselem reports over 200 settlements established in the West Bank (1967-2016) (Busbridge,2017). 127 of these are recognized officially, while 100 illegal outposts lacking approval but endorsed by the government exist. Security measures in Hebron and East Jerusalem, where clashes occur, exclude Palestinians. Palestinian residents in occupied areas face Israeli laws, restrictions, and limited freedom of movement and access to their lands. Israeli-Hebrew names, often derived from the Bible, are given to settlements in Palestinian-Arab towns. Beth-El, located northeast of Ramallah, is an example (Crooke et al.,2017). These settlements are illegal under humanitarian international law, violating the Geneva Conventions. The construction of the security fence in 2004 reaffirmed that settling Palestinian territories is against international law and could be considered a war crime (Rowley & Taylor,2006). As for the Convention, the settlements violate equality, self-determination, standard of living, and freedom of movement. Israel argued the Geneva Convention doesn't apply to the West Bank and Gaza as Jordan or Egypt didn't own them. This view is unique to Israel. Economic reasons drove settlements around Jerusalem and the Green Line (Veracini,2013). Not just in Jerusalem, settlers receive active support for political purposes. In the West Bank, the wall shifted to favor settlers while roads were built in Palestinian areas where Palestinians face restrictions. Settlers have become more radicalized, likely influenced by the clearing of settlements in Gaza in 2005 (Yiftachel,2006). Doubts arose about Israel's decision-making abilities, leading to increased retaliatory attacks by settlers against Palestinians and acts of violence against peace activists and government institutions. The government avoided confrontations with settlers, who aimed to assert their influence and intimidate critics through actions like slashing tires (Yiftachel,2006). Evacuating West Bank settlements may result in bloodshed due to fears and ongoing settlement construction even in the current time. From 1967 to August 2022, there were an estimated 56,500 demolitions in the Occupied Territory. As for data on the presence of settlers in 2023, there were 441,600 in the West Bank and 220,000 in Jerusalem (see EU Representative Office in the West Bank and Gaza,2023). Although Israeli settlers were always seen as a source of bursting conflict, they are not the cornerstone of the enduring war between the two nations as more than a matter of land is a matter of being!



### **The Black October 2023: fifty years after the Yom Kippur War.**

Hamas governs the Gaza Strip and is one of the main political parties in Palestine. The conflict did not stop over time, as there continued to be a constant struggle of war and murders. The violence and the atmosphere of tension mean that the situation is on the verge of collapse, exemplified by the fact that in the first six months of 2023, more than a hundred Arabs have already died in Israel, while last year's figures recorded 35 deaths (see the Times of Israel,2024). This increase in violence was also very significant in 2022, whose numbers had not been reached since the second Intifada in 2005. As revealed in the Congressional Research Service (2024), on October 7, 2023, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) launched surprise attacks on Israel from Gaza. The unprecedented scale of violence against innocents and civilians shocked Israelis and all the international public included terrific figures of sexual violence as currently confirmed by the UN. Intelligence and operational failures are debated as potential causes, with some citing missed signals and over-reliance on technology (Congressional Research Service,2024). Israel declared war on Hamas and formed an emergency unity government. Initially, supplies to Gaza were halted. Israel's military has mobilized troops, bombarded Gaza from the air, and undertaken ground operations. Around 1.7 million of Gaza's 2.1 million people have been displaced, facing significant humanitarian challenges (see BRIEFING,2023). Hamas and other Gaza-based militants have fired rockets indiscriminately into Israel. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) now controls certain areas in northern Gaza while conducting operations further south, aiming to target Hamas and its leaders, including their extensive tunnel network. As of February 5, 2024, data over 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals and more than 27,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, with over 60% of housing units destroyed or damaged (see the Times of Israel,2024). The war is still in progress, and it is still not clear enough how international diplomacy and the region's policy will assist in a peacebuilding and enduring process.

### **EU approach towards two-state resolution: why did it never work?**

The context in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict developed was marked by the extermination of six million Jews at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust. This made Western countries feel indebted to them and allowed the rise of Zionism (D'Acunto et al.,2018). Faced with this situation and being "*a people without Land*" Jews became a strong rival for the Palestinians (Liverani,2006). The birth of the European Economic Community (EEC) in parallel to the development of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (the first of the two Arab-Israeli wars having already occurred in 1948) explains that this was one of the first international conflicts in which the recently inaugurated European project was implicated (Bouris et al.,2018). However, during the first three decades of the EEC's life, the absence of a single community position became evident. For example, in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, France and Italy condemned Israel and sided with the Arabs, while Germany and Holland supported Israel(Bouris et al.,2018). The European inability in 1967 to address the conflict led to the 1969 Hague Summit, which gave birth to a naïve political cooperation mechanism (Bicchi et al.,2017). The absence of a concerted voice in the EEC continued to be evident within the United Nations General Assembly, where the European

organization expressed its abstention when the matter discussed was not the subject of consensus among its Member States (Bouris et al.,2018). It would not be until 1973 that the nine members of the European Council would express for the first time a kind of “*collective European position*” by showing themselves in favor of the recognition of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, in contravention of the American position. The European position shifted in June 1980 when the EEC members adopted the “*Venice Declaration*”, expressing the official stance on the conflict (Yacobi & Newman,2008.). The document recognized “*the right to existence and to the security of all the states in the region*”, constituting the germ of the commitment to the so-called “two-state solution” and declaring, once again, the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people.

The declaration recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of Palestine (that is, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip) and condemned Israel's occupation and settlement policy in the OPT since 1967, prioritizing UN resolutions and international law(see the EU Declaration for Palestine,1980). In the same decade, the Council of Ministers held in Brussels in 1988 expressed the prudent position of the European Community (EC) about the proclamation of the State of Palestine in the same year, reflecting the still-existing dichotomy between the Mediterranean countries and the rest of the Member States. Despite expressing a prudent position on the State of Palestine, the EC had little influence in subsequent events like the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, the Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995, and the Camp David Peace Summit in 2000 (Yacobi & Newman,2008). The US remained the only accredited mediator in these efforts. To increase its political impact, the Community became the largest provider of aid to Palestine in the 1990s and promoted the “*Barcelona Process*” to strengthen economic ties with various countries in the Mediterranean basin, including Israel and Palestine (Yacobi & Newman,2008). However, the Member States chose not to pursue more active diplomacy at the political level to maintain their transatlantic relations with the United States. This subordination to the US role is still an obstacle for the current Union to have a genuine impact on the conflict. The then High Representative for the CFSP (current High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (ARAEPS), Javier Solana, participated in the Sharm-el-Seikh Peace Conference (2000) and the Middle East Quartet or “Madrid Quartet” (2002), increasing European political influence in the peace process. In 2005, the European Commission (EC) took the initiative to send the first of two missions within the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP)- EU BAM Rafah, expressing European aspirations for peace and security (Yacob & Newman,2008). The failures of the CFSP system and coordination problems of Member States were evident. In 2006, France, Italy, and Spain launched an initiative for pacification, but it lacked Council approval. The EC supported the failed Annapolis Process in 2007, which committed parties to implement the Roadmap for Peace. This had been adopted by the Madrid Quartet which placed special emphasis on the institutional and economic boost of Palestine for the sake of its future consolidation as a State (see the Joint Understanding Statement,2007). However, the Union rejected the Deal of the Century proposed by Donald Trump in 2020 due to opposition to illegal

Israeli settlements in the OPT, as expressed by Josep Borrell, the current ARAEPS (Akgül-Açıkmeşe et al., 2023).

What the European Union is attempting to achieve in the Middle East now is a desire for stability rather than actual stability (Abrams, 2002). The front lines of a new conflict after Ukraine and the pandemic have rendered European diplomacy challenging just before the general elections. Diplomatic communication channels are losing their potency. However, beyond diplomacy, there are undoubtedly humans. Israelis and Palestinians dislike war, living during it while suffering from the consequences of conflict (Gur, 2024). Furthermore, the United Emirates, Egypt, and Turkey's strategic goals for long-term growth exclude a continuing perspective on conflict. Even Iran, Jordan, and Lebanon would not benefit from anything from the war but political instability, gradual economic damage, and an uncontrolled influx of refugees (Schwartz, 2020). Refugees that, unlike in the past, Europe could no longer accommodate due to internal differences and the geopolitical factors of Ukraine and Africa. We all want peace because it is the only survival way (Grossman, 2024). The issue is how we're supposed to get there! The Palestinian leadership rejected proposals for a long-term agreement that included the establishment of two nations (Israel and Palestine) in 1993 and 2008. Not everyone who understands the need to establish a sovereign state fully supports it. As noted by Gur (2024), the difficulty with Western allies is not that they continue to seek an accord between the two states, but rather how this solution should be produced in an inclusive way that ensures the right to exist for all. Most strategies to achieve peace and the formation of two nations, including the 10-step plan recently defined by the Head of European Diplomacy, need to make it apparent to stakeholders and the public how the Palestinian state will be formed to be able to represent a truly democratic place, free of leaders with radical corrupt tendencies, and, most importantly, to develop a society that can "accept positively and unconditionally" the existence of the other (Israel). Should the United Emirates' proposal to create a healthy Islamic society and all-round construction in Gaza (see Abrahams Accord, 2023), the allied powers and the UN's proposal for a technical government created by them, the creation of a new political class in Gaza through the existing old class or a half old and half new class (half corrupt and half not), or even Netanyahu's proposal for the so-called "state minus" be considered for the two-state solution (see the Times of Israel, 2017)? Would it be more beneficial for Palestine to have a territorial state with political rights but no military power, with the latter retained by Israel, or would it be better to develop a new society from the foundations up, which appears impossible to achieve in today's conditions (Senor, 2024)?

The fundamental issue with the two-state solution is how it will be implemented in a context where one party has historically rejected it and that party is still led by an entity that the other party and the international arena define as radical and terrorist. Who will lead Gaza, Hamas, Fatah, Palestine, Israel, or the UN so that this critical geopolitical region is not transformed into a source of war and human casualties (as Israel asserts)? The UN, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the USA all agreed on the need for two nations, but no specific strategy for building Gaza has emerged. A

practical proposal in this regard was made by the present article, which is also backed by other studies, arguing that the first step towards the establishment of peace and dual legal status is the sharing of water resources as a sustainable peace. Furthermore, the Israeli and Palestinian parties to the conflict can consider the following proposal: unconditional acceptance of each other's right to exist (Grossman,2024)! An even more critical step is the "cleansing of society in Gaza" of radical influence and the determination to eradicate Israel. In essence, an embracing and fraternal Islamic community must be established, as Islam itself addresses! The demilitarization and eradication of Hamas as a dominating entity on the ground, in addition to changing the mindset of Gaza's population, should be the first steps towards shifts and the end of the war. The conflict and war will genuinely end when there is no more warfare-mongering propaganda and non-acceptance of the other from Palestine, and when the EU and the West is willing to recognize that more serious action is required to end 100 years of strife and suffering! This may begin with a constructive narrative and negotiations for territorial water security, then proceed to capacity building in political and management terms in Gaza and Palestine.

### **The significance that the conflict plays in today's Europe**

The active role of the Union in the region finds its legal basis in Title V of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Part Five of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), within the framework, to achieve the objectives set out in Art. 21.2 of the TEU (especially highlighting its section c), relating to the maintenance of peace and conflict prevention) (see Title V, art.21 of TEU and Part Five of TFEU) . And it is precisely this last objective that the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense, of March 21, 2022, refers to, when underlining “*the need for the EU to increase investment in the peace and stability of the Middle East* (see the European Council,2022)”, implicitly classifying the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as one of the open fronts of the current CFSP. The Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007 and entered into force in 2009, represented an obvious turning point in the institutional configuration of the CFSP (Miller,2016). The European response mechanisms to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were substantially altered between the launch of the two largest military operations by Israel, which triggered two wars in Gaza: “*Operation Cast Lead*” (2008-2009) and “*Operation Protective Edge*” (2014). Thanks to the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Union would, at least in theory, be able to project a more centralized and coordinated foreign policy.

Today, the main institution in charge of expressing the European voice is the Foreign Affairs Council (CAE), through formal conclusions prepared by the “Maghreb-Mahrek” Working Group(see the Union for the Mediterranean,2024), under the constant supervision of the Political and Security Committee (CPS) as defined by art. 38 of TEU. Also worth highlighting is the role of the Ad hoc Working Party on the Middle East Peace Process (COMEP), made up of experts on the conflict from each Member State, which examines the Commission's legislative proposals before being sent to the CAE. The European Union's political position on the Middle East Peace Process began with the Venice Declaration in 1980. It was further developed through the Berlin

and Seville Declarations in 1999 and 2002 (see the Presidency Conclusions, Annex V,2002). The Council Conclusions from June 20, 2016, and the Parliament's resolution from December 9, 2022, are the Union's main points regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The European commitment has historically focused on the "*two-state solution*," seen as the most effective way to resolve the conflict (see the EU Resolution, 2022). The Resolution calls for the creation of two sovereign and democratic States living peacefully and securely, rejecting the idea of a single-state solution. The Union advocates for an agreement between the parties to end the claims of both Israelis and Palestinians. This required ending the Israeli occupation of the OPT, recognizing Israel as the occupying power, and acknowledging the territories originally assigned to Palestine by UN Resolution 181 (II) (see the UN Resolution for Palestine,1947). In terms of territorial delimitation, there was a commitment to agree on borders based on the lines from June 4, 1967 (before the "Six-Day War"), with some allowed modifications. It was important to clarify the status of Jerusalem as the "*future capital of the two States*" to achieve the "two-state solution". Although its territory was classified as a separate entity under UN administration, Jerusalem is now a major conflict point, claimed by both parties. The Union would only recognize changes to Jerusalem's borders if agreed upon by both parties, but all the efforts failed due to the rejection of both sides to the commitment (Crooke et al.,2017). The 2022 European solution guarantees parties' autonomy in resolving conflicts, respecting Security Council Resolutions, Madrid principles, and the Road Map for Peace. It also supports the United Nations Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and deems Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as illegal according to international law, and the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion (see the Advisory Opinion of the Court of Justice,2003). Paragraph E of the 2022 EU Resolution focuses on security, where the Union aims to cooperate in preventing terrorism and threats to Israel while respecting its right to protect citizens according to international law. The Union also strived to uphold Palestinian sovereignty, end occupation, and aid in the development of its own police and judicial institutions through initiatives like the EU Police and Rule of Law Mission for the occupied Palestinian territory (EUPOL Mission and COPPS). The fact that the Union today expresses a clear position regarding the conflict does not diminish the possibility of its Member States proclaiming, in the exercise of their sovereignty, their considerations in this regard. A dichotomy exists between Member States preferring led military action (e.g., the Netherlands) and those seeking autonomy (e.g., Italy, France, and Germany). This inconsistency contrasts with the EU's advocacy for a two-state solution. Given that the recognition of States is a political act solely within the authority of states, the European rhetoric promoting a Palestinian State lacks practical effectiveness as not all EU member states recognize the State of Palestine. As for the 2023 stance, the EU proposed a 10-step roadmap that will employ a "Preparatory Peace Conference" with the participation of the EU, the US, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Arab League, and the United Nations. The EU plan aims to propose a multi-lateral agreement for an immediate "*cease of fire*" and permanent "*two-state*" solution between the parties. A "Peace Day Effort" Conference will be held for this international agreement, once the cease-fire takes place (see Brzozowski et al., 2024). Of course, a Conference cannot do what is needed to be done on the ground today! Nevertheless, it might help all

stakeholders to understand how to implement the idea of long-term peace and most and foremost how to build a New Gaza and a new perspective for both sides!

**Prospective analysis for a fair solution via long-term viability.**

The analysis of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is very complex with various theories and approaches that offer different perspectives for its understanding. The constructivist approach is the most used in international relations regarding conflict (Popov,2017). How the material world works influences how people interact with it in a dynamic and normative way. It is intrinsically related to how the behaviors, interests, and identities of political stakeholders are socially constructed based on collective meanings and shared interpretations of the world in which one resides. Furthermore, as scholars argue in this model, the use of language as a tool to interpret social reality is fundamental, due to the capacity of the dominant discourse to influence and modify interests in society (Bernshausen & Bonacker, 2011). The constructivist approach considers that discourse is not only a communication tool, but also a factor that interferes in the identification of problems, the definition of solutions, and the implementation and evaluation of changes. To understand this conflict from the constructivist approach, it is necessary to analyze the power that intersubjective understandings, material resources and practices of the subjects involved (Palestinians and Israelis) have in the formation of social structures. With the repeated practices of these structures, identities are created, in which the interests of those involved are seen, they are intrinsic to the historical context of each one. These identities are constructed from dominant narratives that are based on historical memory that corroborates their positions and actions (Boege, 2006). The logic of epistemic change refers to how principles are governed by transformations and the evolution of knowledge focusing on the idea that knowledge is not static and must be modified as more evidence is found or other approaches are developed. Regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the constructive approach relates to the understanding of a dominant narrative from which identities were generated, which determined how the subjects involved have pursued and still pursue their interests. This dominant narrative is the Zionist one, legitimizing the Israeli strategy of settlement construction to colonize Palestinian territory. This ideological basis, as has already been explained, is based on the need that the Jewish people had to create a national home. Named “the Promised Land” in the Jewish Bible; the Tanakh and located in what is known as the Holy Land, according to Hebrew tradition this is a promise of a territory that is theirs and where they “*have the right to return*”, “*the Eretz Yisra'el*” or Land of Israel (Huss,2017). Zionism refers to the Promised Land with a meaning of Jewish identity and spirituality.

From the creation of this dominant idea and, therefore, of its identities, a way of thinking applicable to society was established with norms, values, and patterns that influence the creation of social structures such as the Kibbutz (Shimoni,2007). The narrative of political Zionism includes different aspects: *ideologically, building and perpetuating a primarily Jewish state; territorially, the Land of Israel as a symbol of cohesion and unity for the Jewish people, materializing the territorial dispute with the Palestinians; and demographically, only Jewish*

*population for Israel. Putting these aspects into practice results in the construction of colonies on Palestinian territory.* The construction of these colonies became a symbol, it began in 1977, with the victory of the Israeli right and they were in Gush Etzion (between Jerusalem and Hebron). Three years later, in 1980, they annexed the eastern section of Jerusalem, which according to their hegemonic narrative they wanted to be a “*single and indivisible capital.*” In the international context this did not have the same acceptance as it had in the past; added to the ethnic cleansing that it implied and the conditions in which the Palestinian population lived in which neither citizenship nor human rights were recognized. However, it was not a problem since it followed the Israeli policy of *fait accompli*, where colonies are a central foundation that was institutionalized in 1967, with the victory in the Six-Day War. In 2002, the Road Map aimed to improve the situation by freezing settlements, yet Palestinians were still blamed without consideration of their forced violent responses.

The constructivist theory in this regard points out the danger of a rhetorical discourse about the war in which the parties have no intention of listening to each other, nor of allowing themselves to be convinced by any argument (Khoury,2016). In the negotiations, neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians listen to each other since they are governed by the “*rational logic of maximizing profits,*” self-imposing it on the “*logic of the argument,*” where the best argument would prevail, and an agreement could be reached that guarantees a solution. for both States (Javadikouchaksaraei et al., 2015).

### **The concept of Sustainable Peacebuilding as a first step prospective tool for solution**

The concept of Peacebuilding belongs in its modern meaning to the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung(Holm, 1996). Peacebuilding requires an approach strategy that aims to overcome the modes of action that involve the use of violence present at the different levels of associated living. It also aims to indicate an alternative path to the risks of division and to enhance the potential for peace. Another concept of peace, sustainable peacebuilding refers to all those processes and activities involved in the attempt to resolve armed conflicts and promote lasting peace (Lopez Cardozo,2019). In the Middle East, sustainable and environmental peacebuilding can surpass political and cultural limitations by focusing on the environmental needs of local communities (Ide et al.,2918). Non-governmental organizations in Israel, Jordan, and Palestine collaborate on various environmentally focused initiatives, offering sustainable and long-term solutions for conflict resolution. This approach is particularly effective in ecologically proximity territories beyond borders and serves as a soft-skill diplomacy (Fergusson,2023; Ide et al.,2018; David & Passarelli,2005). Water issues are important in this territory and pose difficulties for both countries. Although the water war is not the root of the Arab-Israeli conflict or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it can be used as a prominent peacebuilding strategy. The conflict for territory and water involves demographic, ideological, and religious strategies (David & Passarelli,2005). NGOs in the region focus on environmental peacebuilding and projects, including the Jordan River basin. Cooperation between parties is crucial for sustainable dialogue. Another option is a regional water resources

market (exemplified by Harvard Middle East Water,1998) (see the Middle East Initiative,2024) involving experts from Jordan, Israel, and Palestine. This project highlights the social, economic, and political value of water, often surpassing its private value. The first major conclusion of Harvard Middle East Water was that at least until 2020 it was not necessary to develop any desalination project but to resort to decarbonizing, recycling, and transporting water resources. Indeed, the pandemic worsened the situation, and the project is still not fulfilled. It is necessary, therefore, to create a global water infrastructure management and peaceful politics for the Middle East to develop border systems and a sustainable peacebuilding process that would serve as a constructive path to overall peacebuilding.

### **Conclusive Remarks**

The present article tried to highlight a comprehensive view of the Israeli-Palestinian enduring conflict and its impact in the international arena through constructive qualitative research. After a throughout historical examination, the question of settlements, water, and land-power was described. A significant focus was given to the sustainable peacebuilding system as a good alternative for an enduring solution. The Israel-Palestine conflict sheds light on its complex and multi-layered nature. Understanding conflict requires explaining terms in peace and conflict research. Conflicting parties have different objectives, particularly regarding territory, borders, Jerusalem, settlements, and water distribution. These contradictions have caused numerous conflicts in the past and continue to fuel violent clashes. The conflict itself has resulted in the displacement of a significant portion of Gaza's population, humanitarian challenges, and profound geopolitical concerns. Both sides have engaged in military operations, with casualties on both sides. The water conflict also frustrates Palestinians due to limited access to this vital resource, posing a threat to their existence. Israelis also fear water contamination and tightly restrict Palestinian access to its basins considering water as a matter of sensitive national security. All these events shaped collective memories, distorting the pure view of history, and creating a selective narrative. The effects of these events are crucial for what happens next. The Israeli population views all Arab neighbors as a constant threat due to their collective memory of the Holocaust in Germany (Bakan & Abu-Laban,2010). Palestinians on the other hand, faced exile and their homes being taken over or destroyed, fueling negative feelings and a sense of inferiority. Unable to enforce their interests, Palestinians resorted to terrorism and political movements such as HAMAS to achieve their goals, including the attack of October 2023 (Berti,2015; Harker,2011; Gupta & Mundra,2005). The Oslo Peace Accords, while signed by the rulers, hold little value as they did not involve Israelis and Palestinians. Since then, there have been few peaceful actions or willingness for dialogue. The two-state solution is perceived as the way to end the conflict, but it would require compromise and a real willingness to exist. In addition, despite many efforts to promote peace and the two-state solution, the international stakeholders, especially the EU, failed because of their controversies (Chaban et al.,2019). However, to achieve a form of peacebuilding, a constructive ecological water distribution system plan, and border delineation should be pursued. However, without constructive dialogue, none of the solutions can be implemented. Historical



events must be processed correctly and not be the only view of history. It is vital that the EU “impose” a peacebuilding system and a status quo for a two-state solution and peace capacity building. It is important even though to teach children in both sites to challenge biases and promote peaceful coexistence. A perspective of sustainable peacebuilding as proposed in this paper, is just a first step towards a “new order” of co-existence between Israel and Palestine (Sucharov,1998). Recognizing each other’s characteristics in terms of the right to be and the end of the warfare mindset with a new political democracy-building in Gaza is a constructive narrative that should be implemented by all the stakeholders for an enduring peace-to-be-region.

### **Limitations of the study**

The complexity of assessing geopolitical conflict concerns is challenging due to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict spanning at least 76 years. In the present research, I aimed to establish a positive narrative perception for a prospective peacekeeping alternative that would enable the region and its closely connected international partners to return to the status quo.

This study, however, was unable to address all the elements that this issue might have addressed and therefore had limitations that should be considered in future studies:

- *First*, this study is qualitative and analytical-hermeneutic, and it does not include data from sociometric and psychometric categories on the effects of conflict in the population.
- *Second*, an overview of the economic, social, security, or defense effects was beyond the aim of the present article and therefore not addressed here.
- *Third*, the constructive solution alternatives suggested in this paper cannot be measured empirically because the conflict is still ongoing, and it is hard to quantify the costs of the direct and indirect influence on international relations stability.

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### **Abbreviations**

Ad hoc Working Party on the Middle East Peace Process (COMEP)

European Community (EC)

European Commission (EC)

European Economic Community (EEC)

European External Action Service (EEAS)

EU Police and Rule of Law Mission for the occupied Palestinian territory (EUPOL Mission and COPPS)

Foreign Affairs Council (CAE)

Israel Defense Forces (IDF)

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

Political and Security Committee (CPS)

Treaty on European Union (TEU)

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)

United Nations (UN)

United Nations Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)

United States of America (USA)

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