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Colonial Legacies and Modern Struggles: Humanitarian Impacts in the Iran-Israel Conflict

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Abstract:

The Iran-Israel conflict represents an enduring struggle with deep-rooted implications for human rights, significantly impacting vulnerable populations such as women, children, and minorities. This study delves into various human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and attacks on civilians, underscoring the severe humanitarian consequences. Utilizing the framework of Social Constructivism, this research investigates how social identities and power dynamics influence and perpetuate the conflict. Symbolic Interactionism offers a lens to understand how marginalized groups experience and interpret the ongoing violence. Through Intersectionality, the study examines how overlapping identities exacerbate the vulnerabilities of women and minorities in conflict zones. A Postcolonial perspective provides historical context, framing the conflict within the enduring legacies of colonialism and the quest for self-determination, and highlights how dominant narratives have marginalized oppressed groups. The research critically assesses the effectiveness of international laws and humanitarian interventions, examining the roles of global entities such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court in promoting accountability. By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the study proposes strategies to enhance human rights protections, improve accountability, and bolster global humanitarian efforts, ultimately aiming to contribute to a more comprehensive approach to safeguarding human rights in conflict areas.

Keywords: Human Rights Abuses, Vulnerable Groups, Social Constructivism, Postcolonialism, International Law

Introduction:

Human rights are fundamental entitlements that belong to every individual, irrespective of their race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other characteristic. These rights encompass a wide range of freedoms and protections. The right to life and liberty ensures that individuals can live without the threat of arbitrary arrest or detention and guarantees a fair trial if accused of a crime. Protection against slavery and torture is crucial, ensuring that no one is subjected to forced labor or inhumane treatment, preserving human dignity. Freedom of thought and expression allows individuals to hold their own beliefs, voice their opinions, and practice their religion without fear of persecution. Furthermore, the right to education and employment is vital for personal growth and economic stability, providing everyone the opportunity to develop their skills and contribute to society. Non-discrimination is a cornerstone of human rights, ensuring that these entitlements are universally applicable and that no one faces unfair treatment based on inherent characteristics. Together, these rights create a framework that promotes equality, justice, and peace, ensuring that all individuals are treated with respect and dignity, and are protected from abuses that undermine their fundamental freedoms (United Nations, 2023a). A breach of human rights occurs when any of these essential rights and freedoms are denied. Such breaches can occur when human rights are inadequately protected or blatantly disregarded. They are widespread around the world. For example, certain leaders may hinder fair electoral processes, limiting citizens to vote for only a single candidate. Violations can be committed directly by the state or may result from the state's inability to prevent such abuses. Furthermore, human rights violations can also be carried out by non-state actors, including rebel groups, individuals, and corporations. (About Human Rights - Prisoners of Conscience, 2024). The Iran-Israel conflict, a protracted and complex geopolitical struggle, has far-reaching implications for human rights, particularly affecting vulnerable populations such as women, children, and minorities. The conflict is marked by a range of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and attacks on civilians, resulting in severe humanitarian consequences. This research seeks to delve deeply into these abuses, uncovering the mechanisms through which they occur and their impact on vulnerable groups. The conflict between Iran and Israel has led to significant human rights abuses. According to the United Nations, retaliatory military attacks between the two countries violate the right to life and must cease immediately (*Israel and Iran Must De-Escalate Conflict to Protect Human Rights, Warn UN Experts*, 2024). For instance, Israel attacked an Iranian consulate in Syria, resulting in casualties, and Iran responded with missile strikes. Both actions have been criticized for violating international law (Amnesty International, 2023). In examining the Iran-Israel conflict, this study employs several theoretical frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the human rights violations and the systemic factors that perpetuate them. The framework of Social Constructivism is utilized to explore how social identities and power dynamics shape the conflict, reinforcing cycles of violence and injustice. This perspective allows for an analysis of how societal norms and power structures influence the actions of both state and non-state actors within the conflict. Social constructivism

emphasizes the role of social interactions and shared understandings in shaping conflicts. For example, the Russia-Ukraine war can be analyzed through this lens by examining how conflicting identities and norms have escalated the conflict (Bernshausen & Bonacker, n.d.). Symbolic Interactionism offers another lens through which to view the conflict, focusing on the individual and collective experiences of marginalized groups. This approach highlights how these groups interpret and respond to the violence they endure, providing insight into the psychological and social impacts of the conflict on those most affected (MrSociology, 2023). Symbolic interactionism focuses on how individuals create and interpret meaning through social interactions. This perspective can be applied to understand how marginalized groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, navigate their social worlds and construct their identities (Nickerson, 2023). The study further incorporates the lens of Intersectionality to understand how overlapping identities, such as gender, race, and socio-economic status, compound the vulnerabilities of women and minorities in conflict zones. By examining these intersecting identities, the research sheds light on the multifaceted nature of discrimination and violence experienced by these groups. Intersectionality examines how multiple factors, such as gender, race, and class, intersect to shape individuals' experiences in conflict zones. This approach helps to understand the varied interests and needs of different groups and promotes inclusive peacebuilding efforts (Stavrevska & Smith, 2020). A Postcolonial perspective provides a historical context for the conflict, framing it within the legacies of colonialism and the ongoing struggles for self-determination. This viewpoint reveals how historical narratives and colonial power structures continue to influence contemporary dynamics, often silencing the voices of oppressed groups and perpetuating systemic inequities (Kimura, 2022). Additionally, this study critically evaluates the effectiveness of international laws and humanitarian interventions in addressing human rights abuses within the Iran-Israel conflict. By scrutinizing the roles of global institutions such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court, the research assesses their contributions to fostering accountability and protecting human rights (*Israel and Iran Must De-Escalate Conflict to Protect Human Rights, Warn UN Experts*, 2024). By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the study aims to propose strategies to enhance human rights protections, improve accountability, and bolster global humanitarian efforts. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to a more robust and comprehensive framework for safeguarding human rights in conflict zones, ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard and addressed.

Background

The contemporary state of Israel was founded in 1948, following the conclusion of the British Mandate in Palestine. This event triggered considerable conflict with Arab nations and resulted in the displacement of Palestinian communities. The establishment of Israel was largely influenced by Jewish nationalist movements and the repercussions of the Holocaust, which initiated a series of conflicts with neighboring Arab countries and positioned Israel as a significant entity in Middle Eastern geopolitics (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019).

Iran, with a rich history spanning millennia, underwent a profound transformation in its political framework due to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This revolution led to the ousting of the US-supported Shah and the creation of an Islamic Republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. This marked a pivotal change in Iran's interactions with Western nations, especially the United States and Israel, both of which had previously regarded Iran as a crucial ally. Since the revolution, Iran has maintained a contentious relationship with Israel, primarily concerning issues such as nuclear development, support for groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, and its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict..(Wikipedia Contributors, 2022)

The roots of the Iran-Israel conflict can be traced to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which established a regime under Ayatollah Khomeini that adopted a vehemently anti-Israel position. This government advocated for the dismantling of the "Zionist regime" and extended support to militant organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah through financial, logistical, and military assistance (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019a). Israel regards Iran's actions and statements, especially regarding its nuclear ambitions, as existential threats. This viewpoint has prompted Israel to undertake various pre-emptive actions. For example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed that Israel's retaliatory strikes in late October 2024 were aimed at degrading components of Iran's nuclear program. Furthermore, Israel has executed military operations against Iranian-affiliated targets in Syria and other locations, alongside cyber initiatives designed to disrupt Iran's nuclear capabilities. These measures are integral to Israel's overarching strategy to thwart Iran's development of nuclear weapons, which it perceives as a grave threat to its national security (Porat, 2024).

Geographical Position of Iran - Israel and Its Importance

Iran and Israel occupy strategically significant positions in the Middle East, playing a crucial role in shaping regional dynamics. Iran's central location allows it to share borders with Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Caspian Sea, and the Persian Gulf. This advantageous positioning enables Iran to exert control over essential energy routes, particularly the Strait of Hormuz, thereby enhancing its importance in matters of regional security. Conversely, Israel is situated on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, bordered by Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. Its geographical placement at the intersection of Africa and Asia grants it access to key trade routes, including the Suez Canal and the Red Sea..(Wikipedia Contributors, 2024)

The conflict involving Israel has undergone various phases. Initially, Iran acknowledged Israel in 1950; however, relations soured following the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The situation escalated during the 1990s, as Iran began to support organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, while Israel engaged in covert operations targeting Iranian interests (Wikipedia Contributors, 2022). This enduring proxy conflict has had a profound effect on the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

Recent developments:

On October 7, 2023, the Iran-Israel conflict escalated significantly when Hamas launched a major assault on Israel, resulting in widespread destruction and casualties. Israel retaliated with airstrikes on Gaza, causing thousands of civilian deaths and severe shortages of essential supplies. The conflict spread to Lebanon, where Hezbollah clashed with Israeli forces (Ferris & Lyons, 2024)

In 2024, Israel's attack on an Iranian diplomatic mission in Syria prompted Iran to launch a missile strike on Israel, marking a dangerous escalation and raising fears of a broader regional war (A Timeline of Recent Events That Led to Iran's Assault on Israel, 2024). This long-standing geopolitical struggle between Iran and Israel has profound implications for the Middle East and global political dynamics, contributing to ongoing regional instability (Britannica, 2024).

The conflict primarily arises from Iran's opposition to Israel and its policies, coupled with Israel's concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions and its backing of groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Over time, this hostility has transformed into proxy wars, cyber warfare, political tensions, and direct military confrontations (Britannica, 2024). A significant escalation occurred on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, resulting in substantial casualties. In response, Israel initiated extensive military operations in Gaza, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis (Ferris & Lyons, 2024). The situation escalated further in 2024 when Israel struck an Iranian diplomatic facility in Syria, prompting Iran to carry out a direct missile attack on Israeli territory for the first time. These events have intensified the conflict and drawn global attention to the serious human rights implications in the region (A Timeline of Recent Events That Led to Iran's Assault on Israel, 2024)

Human Rights Violation

The Iran-Israel conflict significantly affects human rights, impacting millions in the region. Civilians in Gaza, Lebanon, and Israel often endure military actions, facing indiscriminate assaults, unlawful killings, and torture from both state and non-state actors. Both countries are accused of detaining individuals, including activists and journalists, without due process, violating international norms. Freedoms of movement, expression, and assembly are severely restricted, especially in Gaza and the West Bank, with censorship and surveillance prevalent in Iran and, to a lesser extent, Israel. The conflict exacerbates humanitarian crises in Gaza and Lebanon, where blockades and violence lead to critical shortages of essential goods, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities (Britannica, 2024).

Contributing Factors to Human Rights Violations

International law, exemplified by instruments such as the Geneva Conventions, aims to safeguard civilians in times of armed conflict. Nevertheless, the enforcement of these laws is often inconsistent, leading to numerous violations that frequently go unpunished, thereby exacerbating further abuses (International Committee of the Red Cross, n.d.). Humanitarian interventions by international entities, including the United Nations and the Red Cross, are

essential for delivering aid; however, their initiatives are often obstructed by political challenges, security issues, and restricted access to the regions in need. The policies and strategies of both Iran and Israel, shaped by their respective domestic and international priorities, play a significant role in the ongoing human rights violations, complicating diplomatic efforts aimed at conflict resolution. Furthermore, media coverage is pivotal in influencing global perceptions and responses to the situation. Selective reporting can emphasize specific abuses while neglecting others, thus affecting international reactions and policy formulation.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach to examine human rights violations in the Iran-Israel conflict, focusing on international law and humanitarian interventions. It integrates historical analysis, case studies, and social science theories for a comprehensive understanding. The research includes a thorough literature review of academic articles, reports from organizations like the UN, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, as well as legal documents such as UN resolutions and the Geneva Conventions. This secondary data is crucial for understanding the conflict's historical context, the nature of the violations, and the effectiveness of international responses.

Theories

Different theories are available for this study but have some gaps

Theory	Main theme	Gaps	Relevance	Methodology	Underpinning theories
Constructivism	Constructivism emphasizes the role of social constructs, identities, and norms in international relations.	Often criticized for its lack of predictive power and difficulty in operationalizing norms	Helps in understanding how international norms and identities shape the actions of Iran and Israel, and how these norms influence perceptions of human rights violations.	Qualitative methods such as discourse analysis and case studies to explore how norms and identities are constructed and maintained.	Social Constructivism, Symbolic Interactionism
Critical Theory	Focuses on critiquing and changing society by	Focuses on critiquing and changing society by	Useful for examining the power dynamics and	Uses critical discourse analysis and ethnographic	Marxism, Frankfurt School

	addressing power structures and inequalities.	addressing power structures and inequalities.	structural inequalities that underpin human rights violations in the conflict.	methods to uncover hidden power structures and societal inequalities.	
Feminist Theory	Examines international relations through the lens of gender, highlighting the role of women and gendered power relations.	Sometimes criticized for focusing too narrowly on gender at the expense of other factors.	Can provide insights into how gendered power dynamics influence human rights violations and humanitarian responses in the conflict.	Employs qualitative methods such as interviews, participant observation, and narrative analysis to explore gendered experiences and perspectives.	Gender Studies, Intersectionality
Postcolonial Theory	Analyses the lasting impacts of colonialism and imperialism on current international relations	May be seen as overly focused on historical context, potentially neglecting contemporary dynamics	Helps in understanding the historical context of the Iran-Israel conflict and how colonial legacies influence current human rights issues.	Utilizes historical analysis, archival research, and ethnography to explore the impacts of colonialism and imperialism.	Postcolonialism, Subaltern Studies
Human Security Theory	Shifts the focus from state security to the security of individuals, emphasizing human rights and development.	Can be criticized for being too broad and difficult to measure.	Helps in understanding the historical context of the Iran-Israel conflict and how colonial legacies influence current human rights issues	Uses case studies, interviews, and participatory research methods to assess the impact of conflict on human security.	Human Development Theory, Capability Approach

Theoretical frameworks which have been applied to the data are:

Symbolic Interactionism originated from the American philosophical tradition of pragmatism in the late 19th century and was notably advanced by George Herbert Mead in the early 20th century. Mead's influential work, particularly his publication *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), is regarded as a cornerstone of this theoretical framework. Herbert Blumer, a protégé of Mead, introduced the term "symbolic interactionism" in 1937 and expanded upon the theory (Fine & Sandstrom, 2011). Meanwhile, Social Constructivism, formulated by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in the early 20th century, highlighted the critical role of culture and social interaction in cognitive development (Berkeley Graduate Division, 2019).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory established a foundation for comprehending how knowledge is formed through social exchanges (Hoose, 2020). The field of postcolonialism emerged as a significant area of academic inquiry in the mid-20th century, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, concentrating on the cultural, political, and economic ramifications of colonialism and imperialism. Influenced by scholars from formerly colonized nations, this theory critiques the enduring impacts of colonialism (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019a). Foundational works such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) analyze Western interpretations of Eastern cultures and the power dynamics inherent in the construction of cultural knowledge (Azim, 2001). Prominent figures like Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha have played significant roles in its evolution. Postcolonialism aims to deconstruct colonial assumptions, contest prevailing Western narratives, and elevate the voices of marginalized communities, striving to rectify the power imbalance between colonizers and the colonized (Drew & Gabunia, 2023).

Intersectionality facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which various forms of oppression—such as race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status—interact and exacerbate the experiences of marginalized populations, including ethnic minorities, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals. This analytical framework is essential for understanding how these overlapping identities create distinct vulnerabilities to human rights abuses and affect the efficacy of humanitarian efforts and international legal frameworks. Social Constructivism offers valuable insights into the ways in which human rights norms and violations are shaped by diverse actors involved in conflicts, including governments, international organizations, and local communities. This viewpoint highlights the significance of cultural, social, and political contexts in forming perceptions of human rights, thereby elucidating the varying narratives and rationales that inform policy choices and international reactions to human rights violations. Lastly, Postcolonialism provides a critical perspective for analyzing the legacy of colonialism and its lasting effects on current power relations, particularly regarding the Iran-Israel conflict. This framework aids in understanding how historical colonial frameworks have influenced the conflict, as well as the actions of postcolonial states and resistance movements. It also reveals how colonial histories persist in shaping international law and global humanitarian efforts.

Limitations

The study acknowledges potential limitations, including the availability of reliable data, the subjective nature of qualitative analysis, and the challenges of accessing conflict zones for firsthand data collection. By employing this methodology, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the humanitarian impact of the Iran-Israel conflict and offer actionable recommendations for improving international responses to human rights violations in conflict zones.

Problem statement:

The Iran-Israel conflict has caused serious human rights abuses, especially affecting vulnerable groups like women, children, and minorities. Despite international laws and humanitarian efforts, these violations continue, worsening the crisis and increasing inequality. The conflict is influenced by complex issues such as social identities, power imbalances, and historical legacies, which fuel violence and injustice. This research aims to explore the causes of these human rights violations through different lenses, including how social identities, personal experiences, and historical factors shape the conflict. It also looks at the effectiveness of international laws and humanitarian aid, focusing on the role of global organizations like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court in holding perpetrators accountable. The main problem is that international efforts have not been successful in protecting human rights and delivering justice to those suffering most. This study seeks to find ways to improve accountability, protect human rights better, and strengthen global humanitarian responses in conflict areas.

Variables

Dependent Variable

Human Rights Violations: This includes the various forms of human rights abuses reported in the Iran-Israel conflict, such as unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary detention, and restrictions on freedoms (e.g., freedom of movement, expression).

Independent Variables

International Law: The frameworks and conventions of international law applicable to the conflict, including the Geneva Conventions, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and other relevant treaties and resolutions.

Humanitarian Response: The actions and interventions of humanitarian organizations and international bodies aimed at addressing and mitigating human rights violations in the conflict zone. This includes the effectiveness and scope of aid provided, advocacy efforts, and response strategies. Humans right violation, Iran-israel violations, civilians, international law.

Relationship between these variables:

The relationship between international law, humanitarian response, and human rights violations in the context of the Iran-Israel conflict is interconnected. International legal frameworks like the Geneva Conventions and ICCPR aim to protect civilians, but their enforcement is often weak, particularly when powerful states are involved. As a result, human rights violations persist, with states justifying actions under claims of self-defense or national security. Humanitarian organizations respond to these violations by providing aid, such as food and medical assistance, but their efforts are frequently hindered by blockades, restrictions, and attacks on aid workers. The severity of human rights violations directly drives the need for humanitarian intervention. Legal frameworks also govern humanitarian operations, but violations of these laws by conflicting parties limit the delivery of aid.

Humanitarian organizations not only deliver aid but also document abuses and advocate for accountability, although they face significant challenges in addressing widespread violations. Overall, these variables are deeply intertwined, where violations lead to humanitarian crises, which require stronger enforcement of international law to ensure the protection and accountability of civilians.

Discussion and Analysis

Humanitarian crisis caused by conflict

The Iran-Israel conflict has had profound impacts on vulnerable groups and civilian populations across the region. Civilians in Gaza and Lebanon have faced widespread displacement and severe humanitarian crises. For instance, the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas and subsequent Israeli airstrikes resulted in thousands of civilian casualties and significant shortages of essential supplies like food, water, and medical aid (Nada & Barron, 2024). In Lebanon, clashes between Hezbollah and Israeli forces have displaced over 150,000 people, including more than 62,000 civilians from northern Israel and over 92,000 from southern Lebanon (Byman et al., 2024). Women and children are particularly vulnerable in conflict zones. In Gaza, approximately 90% of the population has been internally displaced, with half of them being children. They face acute shortages of water, food, fuel, and medicine. The ongoing violence has also resulted in thousands of children being killed or injured (Petrossian, 2024). In Iran, the conflict has exacerbated the repression of minorities and activists, with the government detaining individuals without due process, including activists, journalists, and suspected militants (Writer, 2023).

The broader civilian impact includes severe humanitarian crises, particularly in Gaza and Lebanon. Blockades, sanctions, and ongoing violence have resulted in acute shortages of essential goods and services, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations (Petrossian, 2024). Sanctions, trade restrictions, and economic blockades have devastating impacts on ordinary citizens in both Iran and Israel, exacerbating poverty, unemployment, and access to basic necessities, compounding the humanitarian toll of the conflict (Writer, 2023).

Cause and Effect of the Conflict

Iran views Israel as a significant threat to its national security, maintaining ideological hostility and supporting proxy groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Conversely, Israel perceives Iran as a strategic rival and a threat to its existence, taking measures to counter Iranian influence through military strikes and espionage operations (Zimmt, 2024).

Both Iran and Israel have engaged in retaliatory military attacks. For instance, Israel attacked an Iranian consulate in Syria, resulting in the deaths of Iranian generals and other military officers. Iran responded with missile and drone strikes on Israel. These attacks have been criticized for violating international law, including the right to life and the prohibition on the use of force against another state. The conflict has resulted in civilian casualties, including

children, prompting the UN to call for de-escalation to protect human rights (United Nations, 2024).

Human rights organizations have expressed significant concerns about the conflict. UN experts have called for an immediate de-escalation, highlighting that retaliatory military attacks violate the right to life and must cease immediately, emphasizing that both Israel and Iran have committed actions that could be considered violations of international law (United Nations, 2024). Some reports have noted the silence of Iranian human rights organizations regarding the conflict, raising questions about their priorities and independence, especially given the severe humanitarian impact (Tzabiras, 2024).

Obstacles faced by Humanitarian Aids

Humanitarian aid faces significant obstacles in delivery due to blockades, military operations, and bureaucratic hurdles imposed by conflicting parties. Aid convoys are often delayed or denied entry, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The safety of humanitarian workers is a major concern, as they are at risk of being targeted or caught in crossfire, further impeding aid delivery. Humanitarian aid provides immediate relief, but ongoing conflict disrupts efforts, making sustainable improvements challenging. Long-term solutions require continuous aid and efforts to address the root causes of the conflict. The destruction of infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, and water supply systems, severely impacts civilians, and rebuilding these essential services requires stability and cooperation (Petrossian, 2024).

Human Rights Organizations' Efforts in Addressing the Iran-Israel Conflict

International humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions, aims to protect non-combatants during conflicts. Key principles include distinguishing between combatants and civilians, proportionality in the use of force, and the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks. However, both Iran and Israel have been accused of violating these principles, targeting civilian areas and causing significant casualties and destruction. Enforcement of international humanitarian law remains problematic, with the International Criminal Court (ICC) facing jurisdictional challenges and political impediments to investigations and prosecutions. Neither Iran nor Israel is a party to the Rome Statute, limiting the ICC's ability to intervene directly. Accountability mechanisms, including the United Nations and the ICC, often struggle due to lack of cooperation from states involved in the conflict and political dynamics within the UN Security Council (United Nations, 2024).

Several human rights organizations have been actively involved in addressing the Iran-Israel conflict and its impact on human rights. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has frequently called for de-escalation and highlighted violations of human rights by both Iran and Israel. UN experts have condemned retaliatory military attacks and emphasized the need to protect the right to life (Israel and Iran Must De-Escalate Conflict to Protect Human Rights, Warn UN Experts, 2024). The Centre for Human Rights in Iran

(CHRI), along with 42 other human rights groups, has urged the UN Human Rights Council to establish an independent mechanism to investigate and report on serious crimes and human rights violations in Iran, especially in the context of protest crackdowns (jasmin, 2022). IFEX, a global network of organizations, has reported on the silence of Iranian human rights groups amid escalating tensions with Israel. The report discusses the challenges these groups face, including pressure from the Iranian government and dependency on external funding (Tzabiras, 2024). These organizations play a crucial role in documenting abuses, advocating for victims, and pushing for international accountability and legal action to protect human rights in conflict zones.

Overall Effectiveness

The effectiveness of international laws and humanitarian aid in the Iran-Israel conflict is significantly limited by several factors. First, non-compliance and enforcement issues undermine the protective framework established by International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Both Israel and Iran have been accused of violating key principles of IHL, such as the protection of civilians and proportionality in the use of force. The lack of adherence to these laws, coupled with difficulties in holding accountable those responsible for violations, weakens the ability of international law to safeguard vulnerable populations. Second, political and security barriers pose major challenges to the delivery and impact of humanitarian aid. Political dynamics, such as the rivalry between the parties involved, and security concerns, including the risk of aid convoys being targeted or blocked, make it difficult for relief efforts to reach those in need. Lastly, addressing the humanitarian crisis requires comprehensive approaches that go beyond immediate relief. Long-term strategies are necessary to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict, rebuild critical infrastructure, and ensure sustained support for affected communities. Without such strategies, the situation remains precarious, and humanitarian efforts face continual setbacks. These challenges highlight the limitations of both international law and humanitarian aid in effectively addressing the crisis and protecting civilian populations in the region.

Analysis

1. Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism focuses on how individuals and groups interact and derive meaning through symbols, language, and shared understanding. In the context of the Iran-Israel conflict, symbolic interactionism highlights how perceptions, identities, and narratives are constructed and communicated, often in ways that escalate violence and affect vulnerable groups.

Identity Construction: Both Israel and Iran, as well as their respective allies, construct identities around symbols of national security, religious ideologies, and historical narratives. These symbols are deeply embedded in their understanding of "us vs. them" and often influence public opinion and government policy.

Collective Memory and Trauma: The violence in Gaza, Lebanon, and other regions feeds into a cycle of trauma and collective memory. In places like Gaza, children and civilians may grow up with a deep symbolic understanding of their situation as part of a historical struggle, which shapes their view of the "other" (Israel) and their own identity.

Negotiation of Meanings: Human rights organizations and international bodies play a role in redefining symbols of violence and oppression. The symbolic interaction between these entities and the affected civilian populations can impact the global understanding of the conflict, influencing calls for justice and intervention.

2. Social Constructivism

Social constructivism asserts that much of human behavior, knowledge, and social structures are not inherent but socially constructed through interactions, discourse, and cultural practices. This theory is particularly useful in analyzing the ideological underpinnings of the Iran-Israel conflict.

Constructed Realities of Threats: Both Israel and Iran have socially constructed narratives around their national security and ideological survival. For Iran, Israel is seen as a strategic threat and a symbol of Western imperialism and regional dominance, while Israel views Iran as an existential threat due to its nuclear ambitions and support for hostile proxy groups.

International Norms and Law: International humanitarian law (IHL) and the Geneva Conventions themselves are socially constructed norms that are only effective if states accept and adhere to them. In the Iran-Israel conflict, the lack of adherence to IHL by both parties shows how international norms are contested and sometimes ignored in the pursuit of political or military goals.

Socialization of Conflict: Social constructivism also focuses on how states, actors, and civil society are socialized into certain behaviors and practices. For example, international bodies like the UN, human rights groups, and state actors like the U.S. or EU contribute to shaping the discourse around the conflict. This influences how issues like civilian casualties, blockades, and violations of human rights are framed in global media, diplomatic dialogues, and legal forums.

3. Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism examines the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on power dynamics, identity, and the long-lasting impacts on formerly colonized regions. This framework helps understand the broader geopolitical context of the Iran-Israel conflict, especially in terms of historical grievances, power imbalances, and ongoing struggles for autonomy and recognition.

Colonial Legacies: The creation of Israel and the subsequent Palestinian displacement are deeply rooted in colonial history, specifically the British Mandate in Palestine and the role of colonial powers in reshaping the Middle East. The postcolonial context underscores the

historical grievances that fuel the conflict and the perception that Israel is a product of Western imperialism.

Exacerbation of Inequality: The ongoing human rights violations and the blockade of Gaza, as well as Lebanon's instability, can be viewed through a postcolonial lens as part of a broader pattern of neocolonial control and exploitation. The economic sanctions on Iran and the displacement of civilians are often seen as ways in which powerful states continue to control and undermine the sovereignty of less powerful, formerly colonized nations.

Resistance and Agency: Postcolonial theory also highlights the agency of oppressed groups. For instance, Iran's support for groups like Hezbollah and Hamas can be seen as forms of resistance against what is perceived as Western imperialism and a challenge to the neocolonial order. However, this resistance often comes at the expense of civilian populations, especially in Gaza and Lebanon, who bear the brunt of retaliatory military actions.

Cultural and Political Hegemony: In postcolonial terms, the way Israel and Iran frame their struggles — as survival against existential threats or as struggles for national identity and sovereignty — is part of a broader narrative of resistance to foreign domination and the desire for political autonomy. The human suffering and displacement in Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran are seen as symptoms of global power imbalances and imperialistic legacies.

Conclusion: Theoretical Insights

Symbolic Interactionism reveals how the meanings attached to symbols (like national identity, terrorism, or sovereignty) contribute to the construction of the conflict, shaping how civilians and leaders understand and respond to violence and trauma.

Social Constructivism provides a framework for understanding how the conflict is socially constructed through ideological narratives, international norms, and the actions of states and global institutions, offering insights into how the international community might influence or address the crisis.

Postcolonialism highlights the historical roots and power dynamics that underlie the conflict, showing how colonial histories and neocolonial practices continue to affect vulnerable populations, with ongoing struggles for autonomy, self-determination, and justice. In all, these theories offer complementary lenses to understand the multifaceted and deeply entrenched nature of the Iran-Israel conflict, its impact on vulnerable populations, and the international legal and humanitarian responses.

Findings

The research uncovered a deeply troubling humanitarian landscape in the Iran-Israel conflict, characterized by widespread civilian suffering and systemic human rights violations. The conflict has resulted in massive population displacement, with approximately 90% of Gaza's population internally displaced and over 150,000 people displaced in Lebanon. Vulnerable

groups, particularly women and children, bear the most significant burden, experiencing severe shortages of essential resources including food, water, and medical supplies. The study revealed extensive human rights violations, including indiscriminate attacks, unlawful killings, arbitrary detentions, and systematic repression of minorities and activists. Humanitarian aid efforts face substantial obstacles, including military blockades, bureaucratic impediments, and significant safety risks for aid workers, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

The research exposed critical limitations in international legal frameworks, highlighting the challenges of enforcing human rights protections in complex geopolitical conflicts. International humanitarian laws and institutions like the International Criminal Court struggle with jurisdictional constraints, political impediments, and inconsistent enforcement. The conflict is deeply rooted in historical, ideological, and power-based dynamics, transcending a simple bilateral dispute and reflecting broader regional and global tensions.

Conclusion

The Iran-Israel conflict represents a deeply complex and multifaceted geopolitical struggle with profound humanitarian implications that extend far beyond bilateral tensions. Rooted in historical, ideological, and power-based dynamics, this conflict has created a persistent cycle of violence that disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations, particularly women, children, and minority groups. The research reveals that the conflict is not merely a series of isolated incidents, but a complex interplay of social, political, and historical forces that have systematically undermined human rights and perpetuated humanitarian crises.

Theoretical frameworks including Symbolic Interactionism, Social Constructivism, and Postcolonialism provide critical insights into understanding the conflict's deeper mechanisms. These perspectives illuminate how constructed narratives, historical traumas, and power dynamics shape perceptions, fuel tensions, and contribute to ongoing violence. Symbolic Interactionism highlights how identity construction and collective memory play crucial roles in maintaining conflict, while Social Constructivism demonstrates how ideological narratives and international norms are continuously negotiated. Postcolonialism offers a crucial lens for understanding the lingering effects of colonial legacies and power imbalances that continue to fuel tensions.

The humanitarian toll of this conflict is staggering, with widespread displacement, severe resource shortages, and systematic human rights violations becoming normalized aspects of everyday life for millions of people. Both state and non-state actors have been implicated in perpetuating cycles of violence, with international legal frameworks proving inadequate in preventing or effectively addressing these ongoing abuses. The research exposes the limitations of current international mechanisms, highlighting the urgent need for more robust, comprehensive approaches to conflict resolution and human rights protection.

Moving forward, addressing the Iran-Israel conflict requires a fundamental reimagining of diplomatic and humanitarian strategies. This necessitates a shift from reactive, militaristic approaches to proactive, human-centered interventions that prioritize dialogue, mutual understanding, and the protection of civilian populations. International stakeholders must develop more nuanced, collaborative approaches that address the root causes of conflict, challenge existing power structures, and create sustainable pathways to peace.

Ultimately, the resolution of this conflict demands a commitment to recognizing the shared humanity of all individuals affected by these prolonged tensions. It requires breaking down ideological barriers, challenging deeply ingrained narratives of conflict, and creating spaces for genuine dialogue and reconciliation. The research underscores that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through military might or political maneuvering alone, but through a comprehensive approach that prioritizes human rights, empathy, and mutual understanding.

The Iran-Israel conflict serves as a critical case study in the complex dynamics of international relations, human rights, and humanitarian intervention. It demonstrates the intricate ways in which historical, political, and social forces intersect to create and perpetuate human suffering. By continuing to analyze, understand, and challenge these dynamics, there remains hope for transforming this long-standing conflict into an opportunity for meaningful dialogue, mutual understanding, and ultimately, sustainable peace.

Recommendations

To address the multifaceted challenges presented by the Iran-Israel conflict, a comprehensive and nuanced approach is essential. First, international bodies must prioritize strengthening accountability mechanisms, ensuring robust investigations and meaningful consequences for human rights violations. This requires overcoming current political barriers and developing more effective enforcement strategies for international humanitarian law. Second, there is an urgent need to develop long-term, sustainable strategies for conflict resolution that go beyond immediate military or political interventions.

Humanitarian aid efforts must be significantly enhanced, with a focus on creating safer, more efficient delivery mechanisms that prioritize civilian protection and essential resource access. This includes developing more resilient infrastructure, establishing protected corridors for aid delivery, and creating robust international monitoring systems. Additionally, promoting direct dialogue and mutual understanding between conflicting parties is crucial, with emphasis on addressing historical grievances and underlying power dynamics that perpetuate the conflict.

The recommendations also stress the importance of a holistic approach that integrates diplomatic, humanitarian, and legal strategies. This involves supporting local and international organizations working to protect human rights, providing comprehensive support for displaced populations, and creating platforms for cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. Ultimately, the goal is to shift from a reactive to a proactive approach in

conflict management, prioritizing human dignity, rights, and shared humanity over political and ideological divisions.

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