

The Role of the United Nations and Its Agencies in the Israel-Hamas War

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ABSTRACT

Institutional Liberalism, an International Relations theory argues that international institutions play a significant role in influencing cooperation and peace among nations. Although criticized by some as unrealistic, the tenets of Liberal Institutionalism have contributed to the rising interest in the capabilities of international organizations like the United Nations (UN) in ensuring long-lasting international relations and peace among countries after the Cold War Era. This is due to their mediation ability that provides a ‘common ground’ for discussions among states while maintaining the common interest of each state actor. It is considering this tenet of Institutional Liberalism that we explore the role of the UN and some of its agencies in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war of 2023. The involvement of the UN in the Israeli-Palestinian tension dates back to November 29, 1947, when the UN General Assembly voted to divide Palestine into Jewish and Arab states with Jerusalem as its international city (Resolution 181- Partition Plan). However, the focus of this article is limited to the October 7, 2023, Israel-Hamas war, as the role of the UN and its agencies have been active in mediating international relations in a manner supported by the theory of Liberal Institutionalism. The agencies under consideration in this article include the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, International Court of Justice, UNHCR, UNRWA, UNESCO, UNICEF, and WFP. This article is, however, limited to a few UN agencies and, as such, gives room for further research as to the role of unexamined UN agencies as well as other international institutions in the ongoing 2023 Israel-Hamas war.

Keywords: Israel-Hamas War, Liberal Institutionalism, UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, International Court of Justice, UNHCR, UNRWA, UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP

INTRODUCTION

The role of the United Nations (UN) in the tension between Israel and Palestine dates to November 29, 1947, when the UN General Assembly voted to divide Palestine into Jewish and Arab states with Jerusalem as its international city (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023; BBC, 2024). In 1922, the League of Nations, commonly referred to as the ‘predecessor’ of the UN, positioned Palestine under the United Kingdom’s (UK) administration. The British Mandate later incorporated the Balfour Declaration of November 2nd, 1917, (a 67-word letter by Arthur

Balfour to Lionel Walter Rothschild) supporting the aspiration to make Palestine a “national home” for the Jews (Alsaafin, 2023; McGreal, 2023). This declaration led to a huge inflow of Jews into the region of Palestine, mostly from Eastern Europe, between 1922 and 1947 (United Nations, n.d.). Arabs resisted the massive immigration of the Jewish people and demanded independence or self-determination (Bazelon, 2024), leading to a rebellion in 1937. The UK, being unable to bring independence to a land now plagued by violence, turned the Palestine challenge over to the UN (United Nations, n.d.).

The UN investigated several alternative ways to manage the ethnic challenges in Palestine and decided to end the British Mandate by dividing Palestine into two distinct states (Palestine Arab and Jewish). This division of the land was known as Resolution 181- Partition Plan (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). While the Jewish leaders welcomed the plan, their Arab counterparts disapproved of the plan and did not implement it since it gave the Jewish state about 55% of Palestine, including the fertile coastal region (Alsaafin, 2023). Britain, being unable to resolve this dispute, withdrew from the area in 1948, resulting in the creation of the State of Israel by the Jewish leaders (BBC, 2024). The creation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, triggered the first Israeli-Arab war as armed forces from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt launched an attack on Israel (Bubola, 2023) that ended in 1949 with Israel emerging victorious. However, this conflict caused the displacement of about 750,000 Palestine often called the “Nakba, or catastrophe” (Bazelon, 2024), and the UN General Assembly in December 1948 passed Resolution 194 that gave the Palestine refugees the right to return (Alsaafin, 2023). Furthermore, Resolution 194 led to the partitioning of the area into three territories: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the State of Israel. In the decades that followed, the relationship between Israel and Palestine has degraded (Center for Preventive Action, 2024; Mbah et al., 2024).

This article is focused on the recent Israel-Hamas war that began on October 7, 2023. The government of Israel announced that without warning, Hamas executed a multi-faceted attack on Israel towns, an open-air music festival, and armed forces bases, causing the death of approximately 1,200 Israeli people and 240 hostages (including infants) taken by Hamas (Livni & Gupta, 2023; Mbah et al., 2024). This attack caused Israel to retaliate by means of air, sea, and ground, sparking a war that has led to thousands of deaths and an unbearable humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza (Ebrahim, 2024). As of February 29th, 2024, the Palestinian Ministry of Health proclaimed that the war had killed at least 30,000 persons, 70% being women and children. Additionally, about 70,000 persons have been wounded and 1.7 million (80% of the population) have been displaced (Smith & Da Silva, 2024). As of June 4, 2024, a total of approximately 36,479 Palestinians have died and 82,777 have been wounded. During the same timeframe, approximately 1,139 deaths have been reported in the Israeli camp, including a dozen Israeli captives held by Hamas in Gaza (Rowlands & McCready, 2024). The devastating humanitarian situation in Gaza has attracted the attention of aid groups, Arab nations, and the UN, with the UN continuing to insist on a ceasefire to permit the delivery of necessities of life like water and medical supplies (Ebrahim, 2024).

The Theory of Liberal Institutionalism, which emphasizes the role of international institutions in fostering international relations (peace) between nations, will be used to review the role of the UN and some of its agencies in the Israel-Hamas war of 2023. The agencies include the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, International Court of Justice, United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THEORY OF LIBERAL INSTITUTIONALISM

There has been an ongoing debate between proponents of realism and neoliberalism over the capability of international institutions to maintain collaboration between states (Nuruzzaman, 2006). Although Liberal Institutionalism or Internationalism seems to be the topic of greater interest to scholars, media debates, and socio-political disputes; it has a history of generating heated debates in the 1970s about its validity as an alternative to Realism (Devitt, 2011). Moravcsik (1992) and Johnson and Heiss (2018) consider Liberal Institutionalism and Realism as theories based on political assumptions in International Relations whose relevance has caused ongoing disputes for any of the countries that adopt them.

Liberal Institutionalism is considered a significant challenge to realism which suggests a pessimistic evaluation of the role of international institutions in ensuring international cooperation. Institutional Liberalism, unlike realism, postulates that international institutions can aid states to cooperate and is optimistic about their capability/ability to achieve such cooperation (Grieco, 1988, p. 486). It is a theory that postulates the necessity for institutional arrangements to initiate and preserve relations between states. In other words, it “presumes that domestic and international institutions play central roles in facilitating cooperation and peace between nation-states” (Johnson & Heiss, 2018, p.1). Liberal Institutionalism is one of the reasons why there has been an increased interest in the ability and potentiality of international institutions, especially the UN, to ensure sustainable international relations and peace in the aftermath of the Cold War era. Although this aspect of theory has been criticized by realistic theorists like John Mearsheimer as a “false promise” (Mearsheimer, 1994), several liberal international relations proponents uphold the significant role of international institutions in advancing international partnerships or liaisons. This is due to their influence as mediators in providing a ‘common ground’ for discussions between states while maintaining the common interest of each state actor (Nuruzzaman, 2008).

Moravcsik (1992), in his book “Liberalism and International Theory,” views Liberal Institutionalism through three arguments. In the first argument, he stipulates that the central insight distinguishing liberal international relations theory is based on the idea that states are part of both domestic and international civil societies. He calls that “an aggregation of individual and voluntary groups.” This basic insight is the expression of three assumptions common to liberal writings on international relations: the fundamental actors in world politics are individuals and privately constituted groups with autonomous preferences; governments represent the same subset of domestic social actors; and interstate behavior is shaped primarily by the pattern of state preferences, not state power. Andrew Moravesik’s second argument is based on the fact that liberal assumptions are used to derive a wide range of otherwise apparently unrelated hypotheses in international relations and comparative politics, including classical Liberal claims about the effects of democracy, equality, and commerce, neo-functionalism theories of integration and institutions, second-image reserved approaches to domestic policy formation, hypothetical connections between nationalism and war and hypotheses linking social equality and foreign policy. He considers these Liberal theory variants

as capable of offering a coherent and broadly applicable theory of international politics. In his third argument, Andrew Moravcsik argues that when applying a Liberal model to international institutions, it is noticeable that Liberal support for strong international regimes is carefully qualified.

Johnson and Heiss (2018) also considered Liberal Institutionalism as an assumption made within the context of international relations; they, however, denote that the best way to comprehend Liberal Institutionalism theory will be to understand the roots of Liberal Institutionalism. They widely elaborate on the conceptual and real-world roots of Liberal Institutionalism. Concerning the conceptual roots of Liberal Institutionalism, these authors elaborate exhaustively on the three linked prescriptions propounded by Immanuel Kant in his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*. In Kant's theory, within the internal context, each state should embrace a republican form of government in which legislative power and executive power are separated. Such domestic institutions make war more difficult to wage because the citizenry, who bear much of the cost, would need to grant its approval. In the external context, these republican states should bond together in a pacific federation whose members renounce the right to wage war with one another. Such international institutions facilitate trade and other linkages that would make war even more damaging for its perpetrators. In the universal context, individual "citizens of the world" who conduct themselves peacefully should be free to travel and do business in states other than their own. Once states are restrained at the domestic and international levels, their citizens are more likely to respect the rights of other states' citizens, further reducing the impetus for inter-state conflict. Denoted as being the origin of the present liberal world order by Johnson Heiss (2018), the real-world roots of Liberal Institutionalism are the backbone behind the creation of international organizations and unions (UN, EU, AU, World Bank) to consolidate the desire of a world free from conflict and cold wars, but rich in international cooperation and free trade zones.

Amid the failures of these unions and cooperation to materialize and maintain a Kantian perception of Liberal Institutionalism, Devitt (2011) questions whether Liberal Institutionalism is an alternative to realism or is just maintaining the status quo. According to Rebecca Devitt, Institutionalism's focus on international organizations and international regimes is incredibly important in the study of international relations and can make a significant contribution to International Relations theory in the future. She continues by asserting and aligning with Evans (2008) that the development of norms and principles, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and humanitarian intervention, question the validity and sanctity of state sovereignty, whilst advocacy networks and domestic politics have a major impact on how states act on the world stage. To the aforementioned assertion, Devitt (2011) suggests that the role international organizations play in international relations is changing and becoming more not less significant. Concerning the global world economy, she considers that the globalization of world affairs has had a major impact on international relations theory, and it is this that institutionalism must adapt to. Devitt believes that taking on an institutional perspective that places emphasis on the structure of international society and focuses on the importance of institutions as advocates of norms and values such as human rights, and which also takes into consideration domestic politics and outside players such as global movements, would go a long way in combating criticisms that it is just another theory in the rationalistic paradigm.

However, the prevalence of international conflicts and tension have questioned the theory of Liberal Institutionalism, thus affirming the tenets of realism much like in the 1970s. Yet, the survival of international systems has led to a new perspective of Liberal Institutionalism which agrees with some of the tenets of realism, arguing that “even if the realists are correct in believing that anarchy constrains the willingness of states to cooperate, states nevertheless can work together and can do so, especially with the assistance of international institutions” (Grieco, 1988, p.486). It is on this tenet that we explore the role of the UN and some of its agencies in the ongoing October 2023 Israel-Hamas war in the subsequent sections.

The Role of the UN General Assembly in the Israel-Hamas Conflict

October 27th, 2023, is a date that will be indelibly etched on the annals of history. The date marks the most recent escalation in the conflict between Israel and Palestine, which has deteriorated into one of the largest-scale humanitarian crises in the 21st century. In the face of individual-, community-, and national-level devastation has spiraled out to impact regional and global geo-political, security, economic, social-structural, ethical, and religious dialogues, amongst others culminating in the voices of many calling for change. Several of these voices will be explored in this paper.

One of these voices is the UN General Assembly, whose purpose is to provide a forum for multilateral dialogue on international issues addressed in the UN Charter and also generate international or global policy (United Nations, 2024a). In the face of the recent Israeli-Hamas conflict, the UN General Assembly passed several non-binding resolutions. The first of these resolutions focused on October 27, 2023, and called for a truce between the parties involved so that they could address the humanitarian crisis (UN General Assembly, 2023a; United Nations, 2023a). In December of 2023, this resolution was followed up with another calling for a humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages in the conflict (UN General Assembly, 2023b). In April of 2024, the UN General Assembly called for additional rights to be granted to Palestine within its permanent observer state, which would allow it to co-sponsor resolutions and amendments and to be seated in the assembly (United Nations, 2024b). Throughout the current conflict, the UN General Assembly has called for desistence of the conflict and for the international community to address the humanitarian crisis underway in Israel-Palestine (United Nations, 2023b).

The Role of the UN Security Council in the Israel-Hamas Conflict

The UN Security Council is another component of the UN whose mandate is the maintenance of international peace and security (United Nations, 2015). The Security Council mandate can entail investigation, mediation of conflict, issuance of ceasefires, dispatching peacekeeping forces, imposing sanctions, embargoes, travel bans, or blockades, severance of diplomatic relations, and the organization of military action among several state actors, among other actions (United Nations, 2015). Since October 7, 2023, the UN Security Council has passed several binding resolutions regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The first of the resolutions was passed on November 15, 2023, by 12 of the 15 UN Security Council members (with the UK, the United States, and Russia abstaining) (UN Security Council, 2023a). This first resolution called for adherence to international law, access to humanitarian aid and services including making routes for aid to enter the conflict zones safely, and the release of all hostages. A little over a month later, the December 22, 2023, resolution was passed

by 13 of the 15 UN Security Council members (with the United States and Russia abstaining) that reiterated the call for increased access to humanitarian aid, including the routes available for the aid to enter conflict zones, as well as the release of all hostages (UN Security Council, 2023b). The March 25, 2024, resolution that was passed by 14 of the 15 UN Security Council members (with the United States abstaining (Blinken, 2024)) demanded a cessation of conflict during the month of Ramadan which was intended by the Council to set the stage for conflict transformation into a sustainable ceasefire. Additionally, the resolution called for the release of all hostages, unmitigated access to humanitarian supplies and resources, and compliance with international law for detainees (UN Security Council, 2024). In April 2024, the UN Security Council voted on whether Palestine would be granted member status in the United Nations, with the vote vetoed by the United States, leaving the nation in a permanent observer state (UN Affairs, 2024; UN News, 2024).

Throughout the current Israeli-Hamas conflict, the role of the UN Security Council has been one of guidance, providing a third-party lens in viewing the conflict and supporting the need to address the consequences inflicted on the humanity that we all share. While the UN has condemned the Hamas attack, they have had and continue to play a mediated role in the conflict by calling for humanitarian aid and ceasefires in the region as prescribed by the theory of Liberal Institutionalism. This means that of the potential responses outlined in the group's mandate, the UN Security Council has not escalated to exerting power over the parties involved through international sanctions, enforcing peacekeeping measures, or engaging in coordinated military campaigns.

The Role of the International Court of Justice in the Israel-Hamas Conflict

A third voice that will be explored is that of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), whose mandate includes settling legal disputes regarding issues of treaty interpretations, international law, and breaches of international obligation and reparations thereof (International Court of Justice, 1945). In December of 2023, South Africa began proceedings against the nation of Israel, alleging that their actions violated the Genocide Convention (International Court of Justice, 2023). The court responded with demands that Israel abides by the articles of the Genocide Convention, preserve any evidence of malfeasance in said regard, and not limit humanitarian aid to conflict zones. This was followed, in May 2024, with a court order for Israel to suspend its military campaign in Rafah (Gupta, 2024).

As with the other voices from the UN cited above, the ICJ has focused on the humanitarian crisis, censuring genocidal tactics and calling for a ceasefire as the conflict has escalated. However, aside from critical assessment, there is little the court can do to enforce decisions thereby making their role that of the monitor of the ethics and morals of the conflict for the globe.

The Role of UNHCR in the Israel-Hamas War

A fourth voice explored in this article is that of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This is an international organization operating in about 135 countries that provides basic survival necessities like shelter, food, water, and medical amenities to displaced persons fleeing from war or persecution (Azia, n.d.). Nevertheless, this agency focuses on non-Palestine refugees given that there is a separate agency called the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that was created to serve solely

Palestinian refugees (Dyer, 2024). Despite UNHCR's affiliation with non-Palestine refugees, it has voiced its concerns about the Hamas-Israel war.

In a speech made 48 hours following the Hamas attack on Israel to the Executive Committee in Geneva by Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Grandi highlighted the potential humanitarian crisis that could emerge from this attack. However, he noted that as of then, UNHCR was not mandated to handle the immediate humanitarian effects of the conflict despite its active presence in the area (UNHCR US, 2023). In a briefing on May 30th, 2024, to the Security Council, Grandi emphasized the ravaging impact of the refugee crisis worldwide, the exhaustion of aid workers, and the disrespect to basic war rules. He stressed the importance of ensuring the safety of civilians in Gaza because, according to international law, civilians are not to be forced out of the territory by the "occupying power" while adding his voice in support of those calling for immediate ceasefire, freedom of captives and complete recommencement of humanitarian relief (United Nations, 2024a).

The Role of UNRWA in the War

While the UNHCR exists to serve non-Palestinian refugees worldwide, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a separate aid agency that was created in 1949 by General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) to serve exclusively Palestinian refugees who were displaced in the 1948 and 1967 Israel-Arab wars. It has a staff of about 30,000, 13000 of which live in Gaza, and it provides medical and educational assistance to about 5.9 million Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and the West Bank (Dyer, 2024). It is the major humanitarian donor for Gaza in the 2023 Israel-Hamas (Burridge et al., 2024). But UNRWA is facing a funding watershed since its major global donors like the United States have cut donations based on "terror" allegations following Israel's accusation in late January 2024 that 12 of its staff were involved in the attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023 (Al Jazeera, 2024; Lederman, 2024). These employees were accused of assisting Hamas stage the attack that started the war or having helped in the days after the war began (Bergman & Kingsley, 2024). While the UN responded by acting against the involved employees, it also opposed the move to defund the UNRWA (Al Jazeera, 2024). The agency's reputation and future have been threatened since this allegation (Burridge et al., 2024). The 12 UNRWA staff got their employment immediately terminated by the UNRWA Commissioner-General as per staff policies and the UN Secretary-General designated the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to investigate this allegation (UNRWA, 2024). Certain experts are skeptical if the United Nations can effectively investigate itself (Lederman, 2024).

The Israeli accusation of UNRWA caused the agency, which greatly relies on donor funding for its humanitarian operations (food, water, medical aid, and shelter), to lose 16 donor countries (UN Affairs, 2024). The amount cut by donors is about \$450 million (Borger, 2024). Nevertheless, during the last week of April 2024, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini announced that most of the donor countries "have come back," giving the agency adequate funds that could last till the end of June 2024 (UN Affairs, 2024). The EU and Canada are part of those who have resumed funding the UNRWA, and the agency has consented to let officials from the EU screen their staff for any potential extremist ties while the U.S. Congress has voted to stop funding for a minimum of a year (Burridge et al., 2024). Whereas the UK has restrained, Germany is only funding the agency's humanitarian activities outside Gaza (Borger, 2024). To have a replacement strategy, the UNRWA Commissioner-General launched an appeal

of about \$1.2 billion to meet emergency needs in Gaza and the West Bank (UN Affairs, 2024). Over 170 UNRWA staff have lost their lives since the start of this war, and a dozen schools, including its headquarters in Gaza, have been hit by Israel's armed forces (Burridge et al., 2024).

The Role of UNICEF in the War

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), whose humanitarian mission is to equitably assist children caught in crisis worldwide (1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child), is partnering with UNWRA to increase its access in Gaza to ensure the prioritization of children in humanitarian operations. Its activities in Gaza include the provision of portable drinkable water, containment of malnutrition in children, provision of medical resources and vaccines for hospitalized children, mental health/ psychosocial support, and facilitating supply chains like the delivery of fuel to power water plants and hospitals as well as other necessities (UNICEF, 2023; UNICEF, 2024b). UNICEF is working with partners to help the children emotionally, given that the impact of the war is not just physical, and all the children need mental health/ psychosocial assistance as deduced by the agency (Ferguson & Su, 2024). Less than three weeks into the conflict that started on October 7th, 2023, UNICEF reported the loss of about 2,360 children and about 5,364 children injured (Al Jazeera, 2023). UNICEF has emphasized the fact that there is no longer any safe place for children in Gaza as the war has taken a damaging toll on children, with over 14,000 children reported dead and several thousand injured, as stated by the Palestinian Ministry of Health. Also, the statistics reported show that children make up half of the 1.7 million persons reported in the Gaza Strip as internally displaced. Such displacement has caused children to lose their parents, homes, and other close relatives due to multiple displacements (UNICEF, 2024a).

With the shortage of UNICEF staff in Gaza incorporated with the unbearable challenges and risks they faced, the agency postulates that the loss to UNWRA will mean a loss to the whole humanitarian response in Gaza, hence causing children to pay for the unconscious acts of adults. It, therefore, calls for all international actors to adhere to international humanitarian and human rights laws to ensure that children are protected and emphasizes that these kids need an immediate ceasefire on humanitarian grounds (UNICEF, 2024b). A total of US\$263.3 million is needed by UNICEF in the State of Palestine for humanitarian provisions (UNICEF, 2024c). To ensure the continuity of its humanitarian activities, UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) has recently called for aid totaling about US\$9.3 billion to help over 1.47 million helpless children and their relations worldwide (UNICEF, 2024d).

The Role of UNESCO in the War

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has not given a deaf ear since the Israel-Hamas war began on October 7, 2023, and the first Hamas attack in which thousands of Palestinian and Israeli civilians lost their lives, including media workers and journalists. After various attacks on media personnel, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the professional organization representing journalists at the United Nations since 1953, pensively called on the Director General of UNESCO, the UN agency responsible for the protection and safety of journalists, to ensure that journalists in the region, both national and foreign, can perform their mission in total safety (International Federation of Journalists, 2023). Statistics from the IFJ and Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reveal that over 100 journalists and media staff, most Palestinians, have lost their lives within the first seven months of this war in Gaza, but the Government Media Office in Gaza stated the death toll as over 140.

In tribute to the fallen journalists, the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, awarded the press freedom prize to all Palestinian journalists covering this war for their courage in hard and dangerous situations in Gaza (Al Jazeera and News Agencies, 2024).

In response to the attacks on several journalists since the start of this war on October 7, 2023, and to ensure the safety and independent execution of the profession, the Director-General of UNESCO called on all parties (regional and international) to immediately respect and enact international law. This is in alignment with the UN Security Council Resolution 2222/2015 and international humanitarian law that protects journalists, media staff, and their professional assets as civilians and are immune to attacks while covering conflicts (Mallard, 2023). Apart from its concerns for journalists and media staff, UNESCO is greatly worried about the loss of Gaza's cultural heritage found in historic buildings due to the lack of resources, conservation policies, and security. Statistics from the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT) affirm that as of February 21, 2024, about 22 protected zones have been destroyed in Gaza including a museum, three archaeological sites, and five worship centres (Middle East Monitor, 2024). By April 8, 2024, a total of about 43 areas were confirmed destroyed, doubling the amount previously confirmed by UNESCO (Adams, 2024). Hence, UNESCO asked all parties involved in this conflict to follow the 1954 Hague Convention that prevents the damaging of cultural heritage in times of war (Middle East Monitor, 2024).

UNESCO has equally voiced its concerns on the effect of the Israel-Hamas war on students and educational workers in the Gaza Strip as it demands the preservation of educational facilities that usually as areas of shelter for civilians during wartime as prescribed by international law. As of late October 2023, UNESCO reported that over 625,000 students and 22,500 teachers were in very susceptible conditions including the destruction of over 200 educational institutions. The agency condemns these attacks as a violation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601 which protects schools and educational professionals in times of war (Merlo, 2023). To uphold its educational mandate, UNESCO partnered with the Teacher Creativity Centre to start a pilot program in October of 2023 to offer mental health and psychological services to children and their parents/caregivers in eight shelters in the regions of Khan Younis and Rafah to help these kids process their emotions, fears and ensure stress relieve (UNESCO News, 2024).

The Role of WFP in the War

Like most UN agencies, The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) immediately voiced its deep concerns about the deteriorating conditions in Israel and the State of Palestine following the October 7, 2023, attack (UN World Food Programme, 2023). WFP was among the five agencies that called the condition in Gaza "catastrophic" in a joint statement with the World Health Organization (WHO) (Cursino, 2023). This agency raised concerns about the impact of the war on civilians, most especially helpless children, due to the increasing challenges of food access fueled by the disruption of food distribution and food production. Therefore, WFP called on all parties to respect the tenets of humanitarian law by allowing safe and unrestricted humanitarian access to affected areas as it prepares to reach out to these areas as soon as conditions are favorable (UN World Food Programme, 2023). During a meeting with negotiators in Cairo seven months into the war, WFP stated that Gaza is witnessing a "full-blown famine" that is expanding throughout the strip quickly. Over 1.9 million persons have been involuntarily displaced, with several hosting camps lacking access to sufficient hygiene or

food, as per the UN's report. Over 2.2 million persons are at risk of famine, and about 30 children have already lost their lives due to dehydration and malnutrition in Gaza (Magramo et al., 2024).

In January of 2024, WFP announced that it was forced to halt the supply of food assistance to North Gaza due to the chaotic situation and violence in that region. This announcement was not welcomed by Hamas as it criticized the agency's move as a "dangerous development" and called for a resumption of humanitarian responsibilities as prescribed by international law to save Palestinians from starvation (The New Arab Staff, 2024). A report titled Nutrition Vulnerability and Situation Analysis- Gaza suggests that nutrition evaluations conducted on children in both shelters and healthcare centers in the north of Gaza show that 15.6 percent, that is, 1 in every 6 children under 2 years of age, is suffering from severe malnutrition. Evaluations in the southern region of Gaza, where aid has been more available, show that 5 percent of the children under 2 years of age who were screened suffer extreme malnourishment. These troubling statistics reinforce this region's need for access to humanitarian aid to prevent the worst scenarios (UN World Food Programme, 2024). WFP's Executive Director, Cindy McCain, stated that the agency is calling for a cease-fire and "unfettered access" to the affected area (Magramo et al., 2024)

CONCLUSION

The theory of Liberal Institutionalism as an opposition to realism provides an optimistic view of the role of international institutions in fostering international cooperation among nations (Grieco, 1988). In other words, it proposes that both local and international organizations play key roles in ensuring cooperation and peace among nations (Johnson & Heiss, 2018). Even though Social Constructivism, a theory of International Relations highlights the effects of human actions on the world, hence, the need for 'rules' to guide these actions by attaching consequences to them, it also agrees with the role of international organizations and not state actor in influencing our behaviors (Mbah et al., 2023). Although criticized by some as unrealistic (Mearsheimer, 1994), the tenets of Liberal Institutionalism have contributed to the rising interest in the capabilities of international organizations like the United Nations in ensuring long-lasting international relations and peace after the Cold War Era (Nuruzzaman, 2008). This positive contribution is seen as Liberal Institutionalism served as a theoretical foundation of this exploration of the role of the United Nations and its agencies in the ongoing October 2023 Israel-Hamas war. Our contribution to the limited scholarly research articles on the topic has been made to highlight the potentiality of this theory in light of these events.

The role of the UN as an international institution in the tension between Palestine and Israel dates back to 1947 when its General Assembly voted in favor of partitioning Palestine into Jewish and Arab states- Resolution 181: Partition Plan (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). However, the focus of this article is limited to the October 7, 2023, Israel-Hamas war, as the role of the UN and its agencies have been active in mediating international relations in a manner supported by the theory of Liberal Institutionalism. The UN General Assembly, whose main aim is to facilitate multilateral dialogue among nations on international issues, has passed several non-binding resolutions since the start of this war (UN General Assembly, 2023a). The UN Security Council, whose purpose is to uphold international peace and security, has passed several binding resolutions (UN Security Council, 2023a). The International Court of Justice

(ICJ), with the responsibility of settling disputes, has been in session since the South Africa Genocide Convention allegations in December 2023 (International Court of Justice, 2023).

Although UNHCR's focus is on non-Palestinian refugees worldwide, Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, has not been silent about the humanitarian crisis caused by this war. UNRWA, which is the official agency solely focused on Palestinian refugees, has been active in the area since its creation in 1949 and is currently facing a funding crisis due to the loss of major funding countries as a reaction to Israel's allegation of the agency's staff involvement in the October 7, 2023, attack (Al Jazeera, 2024; Lederman, 2024). Meanwhile, UNICEF and WFP have voiced serious concerns about the impact of this war on vulnerable children and their close relatives as they face famine due to restricted access to humanitarian aid as well as the emotional consequences of the war on these children as they work to also provide mental health/ psychosocial assistance. UNESCO has frowned at the attacks on journalists, media staff, media assets, schools, and education workers, and the destruction of Palestine's cultural heritage in the Gaza area as a violation of international law. This article is, however, limited to a few UN agencies and, as such, gives room for further research as to the role of unexamined UN agencies as well as other international institutions in the ongoing 2023 Israel-Hamas war.

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