

Israel-Hamas War: Report updated January 2, 2024

The war started after Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, in which 1,200 people were killed and about 240 others taken hostage. Months of heavy bombardment of Gaza has claimed over 22,000 lives, mostly women and children. Some 58,000 people in Gaza were wounded. Another 7,000 people were trapped under the rubble. A total of 172 Israeli soldiers have been killed and more than 900 have been injured. Since the start of the war, 506 servicemen and women have been killed.¹ International concern is growing at mounting casualties. There have been global protests against Israeli killings of Palestinian civilians.

After more than 12 weeks of the war, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) stepped up strikes in Gaza and has reduced much of the territory to rubble, killing thousands and plunging its 2.4 million people into a humanitarian disaster. The war has escalated beyond expectation.

The UN says 85% of Gaza's people - almost two million - have now been displaced. The U.N. has warned of the increased risk of hunger and disease, as desperate families shelter in makeshift tents against the winter cold.

The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees said nearly 1.8 million people are sheltering in or in the vicinity of its overcrowded installations in Gaza. The agency has also reported damage from attacks hitting 128 of its sites, with 142 of its personnel killed.

Meanwhile, there is a growing health emergency. The World Health Organization says that vaccines are crucial because of the conditions in which Gazans live. Thousands of people live together in overcrowded camps with very poor water conditions, poor hygiene, and very poor sanitation - these are all breeding grounds for various diseases.²

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the war until Hamas is crushed and the more than 100 hostages still held by the militant group in Gaza are freed. Israeli leaders have outlined a low-intensity campaign that focuses on remaining Hamas strongholds and could last for much of the year.³

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on December 30, 2023, that "the war is at its height". He said that the country must retake control of Gaza's border with Egypt, an area now crammed with civilians who have fled the carnage across the rest of the enclave. Retaking the border could also constitute a de facto reversal of Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, raising new questions over the future of the enclave and prospects for a Palestinian state. Washington said Israel should allow a Palestinian government to control Gaza when the conflict is over.⁴

Meanwhile, the IDF continued the raids across several areas of the occupied West Bank. Since October 7, at least 321 Palestinians have been killed by the IDF or Israeli settlers. More than 2,550 people have been arrested in the occupied territory since the Israel-Hamas war began.⁵ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based opposition war monitor, reported that the airstrikes hit a Syrian army artillery unit where members of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah were also stationed. The observatory said Israel carried out 76 attacks on Syrian territory in 2023.⁶ Israel also carried out air strikes on January 2, 2024, targeting Syria. Israel's military said earlier that it has hit sites in Syria following attacks launched toward northern Israel from Syrian territory.⁷

Israel announced on January 1, 2024, that the war has many months to go. It has signaled a new phase in its offensive in which the IDF would draw down forces inside Gaza this month and

shift to a months-long phase of more localized "mopping up" operations. Meanwhile, Hamas also showed its continued ability to target launching a barrage of rocket fire at Tel Aviv.⁸ The war between Israel and the Hamas is expected to last all of 2024.⁹

But ahead of a visit to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Israel is under growing international pressure to scale back the offensive. Blinken has urged Israel to do more to protect Palestinian civilians.

The unprecedented widespread death and destruction led South Africa to file a case against Israel at the ICJ, accusing it of "genocidal" acts that aim "to destroy Palestinians in Gaza." Israel rejected the accusations, calling them a "blood libel."¹⁰

South Africa asked The Hague-based court last week to issue an interim order for Israel to immediately suspend its military operations in Gaza. The case, if it goes ahead, will take years, but an interim order could be issued within weeks.

It's unclear what concrete effects an ICJ ruling against Israel would have, but it would likely isolate the country politically and economically.¹¹

Bianca Nobilo, in her article "Israel-Hamas war threatens to spill over, AI, and a seismic US election: 5 predictions for 2024", CNN, January 1, 2024, says:¹²

International pressure is mounting on Israel to limit the duration and intensity of its war amid a global outcry over Gazans being trapped in mortal danger, without critical supplies or access to healthcare, as the disease spreads through crowded humanitarian camps. Despite this, Israel has doubled down on its efforts and vowed its war on Hamas will rage for many months. The risk of a wider Middle East conflict escalating. There are increasing cross-border exchanges between the Iran-backed, Islamist paramilitary group Hezbollah and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) on the Lebanon-Israel border. Proxy attacks by Iran-backed factions in Iraq – like the recent strike on the US embassy in Baghdad - are becoming bolder and more common. And further attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on global shipping routes through the Red Sea and Suez Canal could make energy prices soar. There's also a risk of other extremist groups in the region being fueled by opportunism and/or grievances. Any formal normalization of ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, a deal that appeared close before October 7, is now off the table. The United States' early unequivocal support of Israeli attacks on Gaza has damaged the image it projects as a guarantor of human rights and international law – a reputational hit from which Washington is unlikely to recover in the short term, despite a decisive shift in tone. Going into 2024, the US and its allies must strike a balance between retaliation for and deterrence of proxy attacks, while keeping their responses under a threshold that would trigger a wider conflict.

Israel has been under pressure from the United States, its top ally, to shift to lower-intensity operations in Gaza and to protect Palestinian civilians. The Israeli military said on January 1, 2024, that its troops and aircraft "struck a series of targets in Lebanon, including terrorist infrastructure, military sites in which Hezbollah terrorists were operating, and launch posts."¹³

Israel has warned that, if Hezbollah does not back down, a full-on Lebanon war looms. Both Hamas and Hezbollah are backed by Iran, whose militant allies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen have also been carrying out longer-range attacks against Israel.

There have been at least 17 attacks on vessels the Houthis believe are linked to Israel or its allies, mostly without success. The Yemen-based group has targeted ships in the Red Sea in a show of support for Hamas. The U.S. December 31, 2023, sunk three Houthi boats in response to an attack by the Iran-backed militants on a 2023, container ship in the Red Sea.

Ten Houthi fighters were killed, and their death marks a new phase in the crisis.¹⁴

Tariq Kenney-Shawa in his opinion piece “Israel's Gaza strategy: Create facts on the ground that can't be undone”, published in Los Angeles Times on January 2, 2024, aptly argues that:¹⁵

For decades, Israel has established “facts on the ground” to expand and entrench its control of the West Bank while defying international condemnation. Now, after the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, Israel is using the same strategy to achieve a new goal: the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. By driving 2 million people from their homes, destroying critical infrastructure, and bulldozing huge swaths of land entirely, the new facts on the ground Israel is creating will render Gaza uninhabitable by the time the guns fall silent, leaving no other option but mass displacement...Now, the Israeli government is in the process of once again unilaterally reconstructing reality on the ground, and in doing so, destroying all hopes for a peaceful future. This time, it is not pursuing expansionist goals through settlement construction, although resettling Gaza may very well be the plan in the long term. In attempting to annihilate Hamas, Israel is wiping Gaza as we know it off the map and rendering it unlivable for the 2.3 million Palestinians who call it home. This is not the unfortunate outcome of war, but a calculated strategy to achieve the goal of maximum land with minimum Palestinians — consider this the new facts on the ground. Even before Israel's new onslaught, Gaza's infrastructure was crippled by more than 16 years of a suffocating Israeli blockade. More than 85% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has been internally displaced, with no safe place within Gaza to flee. If Israel's assault ended today, analysts estimate that more than 50% of housing in Gaza has already been severely damaged or destroyed.

Israel reportedly plans to flood Hamas' tunnel network with seawater, which risks permanently polluting Gaza's soil, contaminating its aquifers, and causing even more infrastructure collapse. ...Herein lies the menace of Israel's “facts on the ground” strategy. Israeli leaders have over the years achieved their expansionist goals by gradually, but steadily, carrying out practices widely abhorred by the international community and illegal under international law. In the West Bank, ethnically cleansing all Palestinians in one fell swoop would probably trigger regional and maybe even international intervention, but taking the land incrementally by constructing settlements as stubborn facts on the ground could achieve the same end with less blowback. Similarly, Israel does not need to kill Gaza's entire population all at once. All it must do is ensure the Gaza Strip is uninhabitable and the rest will follow. Israel can once again shrug its shoulders and point to the irreversible reality it created. It does not have to end this way. The international community, with the U.S. at its helm, could discard its facade of helplessness and leverage its ample economic and diplomatic tools to make it clear to Israel that the mass displacement of Palestinians is unacceptable, that Gazans must be able to return to their homes. Without intervention now, Israel will march ahead, as it did in the West Bank, systematically destroying the viability of all alternative solutions and ensuring another Nakba of historic proportions.

Earlier, the Biden administration had also sent messages to Iran and Hezbollah that the US would be prepared to intervene militarily if attacks were launched against Israel. On November 5, 2023, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin reiterated the US position that it was committed to deterring “any state or non-state actor seeking to escalate this conflict”. The S Central

Command, which covers the Middle East, said that an Ohio-class nuclear missile submarine had arrived in the region.¹⁶

Earlier, the World Health Organization director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was “very concerned” about the reports of connectivity outages in Gaza, as well as “heavy bombardments” of the territory, and called for all channels of communication to be restored “immediately”. “Without connectivity, people who need immediate medical attention cannot contact hospitals and ambulances,” he said.

The heads of all major United Nations agencies and international charities issued a joint statement calling for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire” in Gaza, calling the situation “horrific” and “unacceptable.”¹⁷

The UN said on November 5, 2023, that 88 staff members from its Palestinian refugee agency have been reported killed, which it said was “the highest number of United Nations fatalities ever recorded in a single conflict”.¹⁸

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Blinken made a whirlwind Middle East tour focused on aid for the Palestinians and backing “humanitarian pauses” in the fighting. He went to Israel, the occupied West Bank, Jordan, Iraq, Cyprus, and Turkey. The US diplomat has been facing a chorus of Arab calls to support an immediate ceasefire.

Meanwhile, Turkey, which is allied to the Palestinians but also has ties with Israel, has said it is recalling its ambassador to Israel and breaking off contacts with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israel sees Hamas as an existential threat and has vowed to annihilate it after several inconclusive wars dating back to 2007.

Netanyahu has remained firm on his position, vowing that “there won’t be a ceasefire until the hostages are returned”.

“Let them remove this from their lexicon. We are saying this to our enemies and our friends,” the right-wing premier said after meeting troops.¹⁹

Earlier, Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said Israel’s war with Hamas could draw in other regional forces, but Conrucus said Israel’s position was “very defensive” and soldiers have “only been responding to attacks from Hezbollah”.

On November 1, 2023, communications and internet services were cut off in the enclave again. This was the second such blackout in the besieged territory in less than a week.²⁰

Israel has launched indiscriminate and relentless airstrikes while blacking out communications and internet services in the Palestinian territory.

Israel has repeatedly warned Gaza residents to evacuate northern areas and while many have gone south, many have stayed.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed international calls for a “humanitarian pause” in fighting to enable emergency aid deliveries to civilians suffering from critical shortages of food, medicine, drinking water, and fuel.²¹

Israeli airstrikes hit a densely populated refugee camp in the Gaza Strip on October 31, 2023, in which four hundred were killed. A barrage of Israeli air strikes on a densely populated refugee camp near Gaza City has drawn condemnation from governments and NGOs across the globe. Ireland's foreign minister Micheál Martin has said in a statement that he is "deeply shocked" by the number of casualties caused yesterday by an Israeli airstrike on the Jabalia camp in northern Gaza.²²

Martin wrote:²³

I am deeply shocked by the high number of casualties following the bombing by Israel yesterday of the Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza. Ireland has made clear on many occasions that Israel's right to defend itself must be within the parameters of International Humanitarian Law. We now urgently need a humanitarian ceasefire and a significant scaling up of humanitarian access to get vital supplies to civilians. We cannot wait any longer.

Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, has issued a strongly worded statement stressing that he is "appalled" by casualties at the Jabalia refugee camp and that "laws of war and humanity must always apply."²⁴

He wrote:²⁵

Building on the EU Council's clear stance that Israel has the right to defend itself in line with international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of all civilians, I am appalled by the high number of casualties following the bombing by Israel of the Jabalia refugee camp. UNSG António Guterres reminded us of that IHL [international humanitarian law] cannot be applied selectively, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution. The right to self-defense should always be balanced by the obligation to spare civilians to the greatest extent possible.

Laws of war and humanity must always apply, including when it comes to humanitarian assistance. With the unfolding tragedy in Gaza, the European Union has been calling since last week for humanitarian corridors and pauses for humanitarian needs.

With each passing day, as the situation becomes increasingly dire, this is more urgent than ever. The safety and the protection of civilians is not only a moral but a legal obligation.

The brutal attack on the hospital in Gaza on October 17, 2023, created an immense outpouring of public support for the Palestinian cause. Demonstrations were held in several countries across the globe. The Arab and Muslim public opinion turned against the US as it saw the Biden administration as complicit in the Israeli aggression and its relentless attacks on Gaza. The public believes that Biden was encouraging Israel in its aggression against the Gazans. Israel wants to conduct a brutal ethnic cleansing of the Gazans. A forced movement of Gazans south will lead to another Naqba, a reference to the first forced dislocation of Arabs in 1948. Most of the Western media is supporting Israel fully and wholeheartedly, as expected.

The October 7 attacks come after months of surging violence between Palestinians and Israelis, with the long-running conflict now heading into uncharted and dangerous territory. Questions remain over how the Israeli military and intelligence apparatus appeared to fail miserably in one of the country's worst security failures. The debate has started on how

Israel and the US were caught off-guard by the Hamas attacks of October. There are many reasons.

The intelligence agencies were over-dependent on technology as compared to human intelligence.

Sheer complacency, even hubris in general on the part of both the U.S. and Israeli governments and other institutions as well.

Netanyahu was distracted by the internal crisis caused by his judicial reform agenda and the significant public challenges he met on that score. Similarly, Biden was distracted by his domestic challenges: the Ukraine war, the economy, and Republican challenges.

Biased input from think tanks, media, and other sources of public debate in both countries.

The violation of the sanctity of the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem was an insult to the Arabs and the Muslims.

The total siege of Gaza was becoming unbearable, and the economy was in bad shape. The youth were unemployed and frustrated by the loss of economic opportunity.

Hamas had to protect its credentials of being a liberating force for the Gazans.

The Gazans were on their own and could not depend on anyone else to come to their rescue. The Arabs and Muslims had betrayed them. So, they had to act with their backs on the wall. So, to speak.

Today, there are increasing concerns the conflict could spill out into the region that was raised on October 8, 2023, when the Lebanese group Hezbollah claimed responsibility for targeting three Israeli sites in an area known as Shebaa Farms, using missiles and artillery. Lebanon considers the area as Israeli-occupied.²⁶ Iranian threats of entering the war somehow if the Gaza situation deteriorates further must be taken seriously. It can and will open the South Lebanon theater of war. The Iranian-Hamas-Hezbollah nexus will be established in that eventuality. Iran cannot let Israel dismantle Hamas in Gaza. Israel and the US are aware of this eventuality. The elimination of Hamas by Israel is not possible at all. Given the public support of Hamas in the Global South, the US will not be eager to enter yet another war in the Middle East. It was American hubris that led to its defeat in Afghanistan after two decades of war against the Taliban, a rag-tag militia at the most. Americans recall their Iraq misadventure and are very reluctant to get embroiled in yet another war, not of their own making. The American foreign policy establishment also realizes the changed nature of asymmetric warfare and the salience of nationalism as a potent force in global politics. Further entanglement of the US well-advanced Islamic fundamentalist forces in the greater region, which had been defeated after decades of bloody and expensive wars. Therefore, the US will be overly cautious in intervening again in the region for the sake of Israel's security. Arab and Muslim resilience can be expected down the road. The further escalation of the war in Lebanon and Syria will spell disaster not only for Israel but also for the US. Both Russia and China can be expected to increase their assistance to the Arab resistance forces like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah aligned with Iran, which has a history of providing support to these groups. Most importantly, the US is distracted because of internal politics and Ukraine's war and would want the war to end soon enough, weeks not months at the best. The US has a

convergence of national interest with local powers like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and even Pakistan to contain the war to Gaza only. An escalation of war can get out of control and get into a messy situation very quickly. The US does not want that to happen. Only the US can stop Israel from eliminating Hamas from Gaza, as announced by its leadership. Circumstances demanding prudence over reckless behavior with Israel are bent upon now. The world is now polarized between support for Israel and against it. The US cannot support an outright invasion of Gaza and a bloody ethnic cleansing project without a cost and profound consequences. Therefore, the US should earnestly work for a cease-fire. Gaza cannot be occupied again by Israel and is ruled directly as a total and absolute ruling power. Neither can the Hamas be marginalized. At best it can be weakened. The hardline Israeli government will make more enemies as the Arab and Muslim world creates greater sympathy for the helplessness, pitiable living conditions, wretched poverty and even further weakening the population of the 2.3 million people of Gaza. The October 7 Hamas attacks did not happen in thin air. There is a history of Israeli expansionism, aggression, human rights violations, and sheer subjugation of Gazans since 2006. Gaza is an open-air prison for all practical purposes where Israel controls all aspects of life there. Plus, fighting between the two sides has surged in the past two years. The violence was driven by frequent Israeli military raids in Palestinian towns and cities, which Israel has said are a necessary response to a rising number of attacks by Palestinian militants on Israelis.

Global public opinion is already shifting against Israel. The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly has called for a pause in the war. The public in the US and the UK also want it now. The consequences of a hurried and ill-thought war on the region would be disastrous. Wars are nothing but politics by other means, the great strategist Clausewitz taught us. However, the Gaza war has not been thought out clearly by both the US and Israel.

What comes next? Can Hamas be defeated, as claimed by Israel? Since Hamas is more than a militant organization, it is an ideology with deep roots in Gaza. Therefore, it is very doubtful that it can be defeated. For argument's sake, even if it is defeated, what will replace it? Direct military rule by Israel will further complicate matters in the enclave. On October 31, 2023, Blinken said the United States and other countries were looking at "a variety of possible permutations" for the future of Gaza if Hamas fighters are removed from control.²⁷

Most importantly, the Muslim world will turn against both the US and Israel even further. The devastation of Gaza will create an upswing in anti-American sentiment in the Arab and Muslim world. Even though Muslim and Arab governments are not supporting Hamas, the people are doing it. Global electronic media, especially social media, is a new phenomenon that is affecting public sentiments to turn against Israel. Notwithstanding Western claims to the contrary, the Global South is siding with the Palestinian cause. Israel is poised to overreact which like the US after 9/11 will make the greater Middle East a more volatile and dangerous region. Such a development will weaken the US. In short, a fallout in a prolonged war will prove disastrous for the entire region and will result in the rebirth of Islamic fundamentalism. No one would want that to happen. The path to a two-state solution, as hinted by President Biden, is possible provided there is a quick cease-fire and an end of hostilities. However, the Israeli momentum of war cannot be easily stopped even by the US itself. Therefore, weeks of bloodshed can be seen in the Gaza

and North Israel border with Lebanon. It all depends on Israel and its staunch American backer. The Biden administration is trying to contain the spread of the war through another round of intense diplomacy where Secretary Blinken again visits the region on January 3. It is talking with Saudi Arabia, and other allies, to achieve that purpose. However, the constant pro-Israel policy of the US is creating an imbalance in approach to the issue. The US fails to fully comprehend the viewpoints of the Palestinians, and their Arab and Muslim supporters. Although the Biden administration talks about the eventuality of a Two-State Solution it is seen as just lip service to global demand, empty rhetoric, and only plain talk to stall for Israel to subjugate the Palestinians completely. Given its outright and tremendous support for Israel, the credibility of the US is diminishing in the region, as well as in the overall Global South.

The war, if not contained now, will have a significant impact on the entire region. Already, the war has escalated beyond Palestine and has involved Yemen and Lebanon. Today Hamas has the support of Iran, Pakistan Türkiye, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Qatar. Russia and China also support Hamas. Many Arab governments do not support Hamas, but their people do. It is not only the Arab people but also those of the larger Islamic world that support Hamas. The reason for that support is the humiliation and anger felt by Hamas from Israeli atrocities, especially the late desecration of the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and the exceptionally long occupation of Palestine in general. The Western media is mostly biased in favor of Israel and does not show the true sentiments of the Arab and Muslim peoples of the region.

What is likely to happen in the future?

Appeals for restraint came from around the world, though Western nations stood by Israel.²⁸

The US may provide direct military assistance to Israel in the shape of targeting the Hamas leadership and in any rescue attempts of the 199 hostages, especially Americans. It is already getting sucked into the war as the US military has earmarked approximately 2,000 service members for a potential deployment to Israel. If deployed, the troops would not be used for combat but would be assigned to advise and offer medical support to their Israeli counterparts, among other tasks, the newspaper said.

When the situation in the Gaza Strip deteriorates significantly, Hezbollah may step into the war in southern Lebanon.

A new push for the establishment of the Palestinian state may well occur after the warring sides are exhausted.

Only after Israel has achieved its strategic objectives, as it defines itself, will the war end and not before. The US only wants to contain the war, not end it any time soon. It might last for the year, as indicated by the Israeli leadership already. Notwithstanding the global condemnation, Israel will not stop until it has achieved its stated objectives. There will then be a cease-fire and an exchange of Israeli POWs and Palestinian prisoners. Qatar, Egypt, and Türkiye will facilitate this exchange.

Having been seemingly defeated, Hamas will make peace with Israel. This will happen from weakness and sheer exhaustion more than anything else. However, the conflict will rupture again after some years.

From 1948 to 2023, Israelis have been forcibly expelling Palestinians from their homes. Much earlier, Israeli actions were shocking indeed. The Israeli army told 1M+ Palestinians in northern Gaza they had 24 hours to leave their homes. Palestinians from Gaza say that a suggestion to open a safe corridor for them to flee to Egypt's Sinai region would be a repeat of their mass exodus in what they refer to as the "Nakba," or catastrophe, in 1948 when at least 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes by Israel.

Meanwhile, the OIC has failed to voice the aspirations of the Muslim world. The organization is composed of 57 Muslim countries with a population of 1.5 billion or so. It miserably failed to come to the assistance of the hapless Gazans in their time of sheer anguish and distress. Although the Muslims themselves have supported Hamas at the popular level. However, the Muslim governments are paralyzed in inaction and caution. The OIC can pressurize the Biden administration to get much-needed humanitarian assistance flowing into Gaza. But that is hoping too much as the Islamic world faces an acute crisis of leadership. When the OIC holds an emergency summit of heads of government, they can unite on a one-point agenda: getting humanitarian aid flowing into Gaza through the Rafah gate. No one is mentioning military assistance, just humanitarian aid. But that is asking too much from a timid and feckless Islamic leadership. It is both feasible and doable. We are running out of time, though.

The debate today is what happens after the war ends.

The US proposed a reformed Palestinian Authority to come back to Gaza. Blinken told a US Senate hearing earlier that it would "make the most sense" for an "effective and revitalized Palestinian Authority to have governance and ultimately security responsibility for Gaza." But he added: "If we cannot do that, there are other temporary arrangements that may include several other countries in the region. It may include international agencies that help provide security and governance." But this is rejected by Israel's right. They want Israel to have full security authority.²⁹ The US doesn't want Israeli reoccupation of the Gaza enclave and will eventually force Israel out of the territory but not before its destruction.

Some other proposals are making the rounds.

There is one for a multinational force to administer Gaza for a transitional period of two years until a Palestinian security force attains the capacity to assume the tasks of maintaining security. Another more realistic proposal is for something like the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) peacekeeping body that supervises the implementation of the security provisions of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. None of the 13 participating nations in MFO are from the region.

The US is once again talking of the Two-State Solution. However, the US does want Israel to destroy Hamas at an acceptable price. The hard question is whether that can be achieved. Most analysts believe that is not possible.³⁰

Most importantly, though the US supports Israel, its long-term national interests diverge from it. While Israel views Hamas as an existential threat to be eliminated, the US does not. The Biden administration is trying to shore up an alliance against Russia, Iran, and China. While both the US and Israel want to evade a larger regional war, Israel is "willing to take more risks in pursuit of defeating Hamas".³¹ Thus, the two allies differ on the endgame of the war. Given the global support for a Two-State Solution project, the US can be expected to go for it even though Israel does not want it at all.

The only solution to the conflict is the implementation of the universally agreed UNSC resolution 242 and UNSC resolution 338. A two-state solution can bring peace to the region. Nothing else will work. Gaza is an occupied territory that must attain its freedom. Despite the growing crisis, President Joe Biden has failed to restrain Israeli aggression. Despite global demands, he is not calling for a cease-fire in Gaza. Earlier, Biden called for eliminating Hamas and has reiterated time and again America's deep commitment to Israel's defense. Biden's blind support of Israel is not a sensible foreign policy stance as it fails to take into consideration both the aspirations of the Palestinians and the interests of other regional actors.

A balanced approach to the Palestinian issue by the US and Israel can bring peace to the region. The US is not the preeminent global superpower anymore and therefore must behave in that fashion. The Global South and many political groups in the West itself are now advocating permanent regional peace that can be attained by the establishment of an independent sovereign Palestinian state. It is about time. Self-denial on the part of both the US and Israel does not help at all. The Biden administration is trying to prevent the Gaza war from spreading further. However, it is not pressuring Israel for a ceasefire. Even if the US can achieve its objective, Israel is going to lose in the end. The world will hold the US as complicit in Israel's war crimes. Likely the war shall galvanize the Islamic radicals in a manner unlike before. This time the world electronic media is showing the destruction of the Gaza Strip as never before. The barbarity of the Israeli strikes in the enclave has galvanized a global reaction as never before. Continued bloodshed and destruction of the Palestinians shall spell disaster for the region and beyond. Bold actions are required now to prevent that eventuality.

The previously neglected Two-State Solution urgently needed to be enacted now. Only that can usher into regional peace. However, the Biden administration will not act and that will be tragic, indeed. The people of the Middle East region deserve better. Peace and justice must be prioritized over war.

Earlier World Reaction

Earlier diplomatic activities included Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates each condemning Israel's airstrikes on the Jabaliya refugee camp. The three Arab states noted the dangerous and escalating conditions in Gaza.

Saudi Arabia condemned "in the strongest way possible the inhumane targeting by the Israeli occupation forces of the Jabalia refugee camp."³²

Qatar said the strikes were undermining its mediation efforts to secure the release of more than 200 captives held by Hamas in Gaza.

"The expansion of Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip to include civilian objects, like hospitals, schools, population centers, and shelters for displaced people, is a dangerous escalation in the course of confrontations, which would undermine mediation and de-escalation efforts," Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

The United Arab Emirates said it "reaffirmed the need for an immediate ceasefire" and "underscored that indiscriminate attacks will result in irreparable ramifications in the region".

Egypt also said it "strongly condemns Israel's inhumane targeting of an entire residential square in Jabalia camp in northern Gaza that left hundreds killed and injured" while Yemen called on "the international community to take an immediate stance to stop these crimes."³³

Pakistani Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar similarly urged the international community to play its role in ending such attacks.

"Yesterday's air raid on Jabalia camp, where hundreds of lives were lost, including women and children, was a stark reminder of ongoing Israeli brutalities and war crimes in Gaza," Kakar said in a statement.

"Such reprehensible acts can never be condoned or forgotten," he said. "The world must act now to end this carnage."³⁴

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called on Muslim states to cease oil and food exports to Israel to stop the bombardment of Gaza during a speech on Wednesday, according to Iranian state³⁵

Three South American countries have severed ties with Israel in response to the country's ground offensive in Gaza. Chile and Colombia recalled their ambassadors to Israel on Tuesday, citing humanitarian concerns for Gaza civilians.

"If Israel does not stop the massacre of the Palestinian people, we cannot be there," Colombian President Gustavo Petro said on X, formerly known as Twitter.³⁶

Bolivia cut diplomatic relations with Israel and called for the country to end its military offensive. During a news conference on October 31, 2023, Bolivia's deputy foreign minister Freddy Mamani said the country "decided to break diplomatic relations with the Israeli state in repudiation and condemnation of the aggressive and disproportionate Israeli military offensive taking place in the Gaza Strip."

UN demands Israel, and Hamas follow international humanitarian law.

In a statement on October 31, 2023, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said he was "deeply alarmed" by the intensifying conflict in Gaza and the rising number of civilian casualties. Guterres demanded that Israel and Hamas abide by international humanitarian law.

"Protection of civilians on both sides is paramount and must be respected at all times," Guterres said.

Guterres singled out "the expansion of ground operations by the Israel Defense Forces accompanied by intense air strikes, and the continued rocket fire towards Israel from Gaza."

He also reiterated that the conditions in Gaza are a humanitarian crisis and called the level of aid getting into the Palestinian territory "completely inadequate."

Meanwhile, without naming Jabalia, some states have begun to distance themselves from Israel. Bolivia has cut diplomatic ties while neighbors Colombia and Chile recalled their ambassadors for consultations.

"We are horrified by the news coming from Jabalia camp where high numbers of people have reportedly been killed by an Israeli airstrike," Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF), whose staff was at al-Shifa Hospital, where many of the wounded were treated, wrote on the X social media platform.

"Young children arrived at the hospital with deep wounds and severe burns. They came without their families. Many were screaming and asking for their parents," MSF nurse Mohammed Hawajreh said.³⁷

UK-based Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) said Tuesday's attack should be a "wake-up call".

"This attack marks a new low and should serve as a wake-up call to world leaders and politicians everywhere," said Melanie Ward, MAP's chief executive.

"Their meek requests for compliance with international law are being ignored entirely," she added. "Israel has instead increased the ferocity of its indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. One child is being killed every 10 minutes as a result and entire families obliterated."

Although more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians have fled their homes, several hundred thousand remain stranded in the north, where Israeli troops and tanks have advanced on multiple sides of Gaza City.

An Israel army statement said the air strikes on Jabalia had killed Ibrahim Biari, a Hamas commander, whom it said was "pivotal" in the planning and execution of the deadly attacks on October 7 into southern Israel, which set off the latest Israel-Gaza conflict. Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem denied any senior commander was in the camp.³⁸

Three South American countries have severed ties with Israel in response to the country's ground offensive in Gaza. Chile and Columbia recalled their ambassadors to Israel on October 31, 2023, citing humanitarian concerns for Gaza civilians.

"If Israel does not stop the massacre of the Palestinian people, we cannot be there," Colombian President Gustavo Petro said on X, formerly known as Twitter.³⁹

Bolivia cut diplomatic relations with Israel and called for the country to end its military offensive. During a news conference Tuesday, Bolivia's deputy foreign minister Freddy Mamani said the country "decided to break diplomatic relations with the Israeli state in repudiation and condemnation of the aggressive and disproportionate Israeli military offensive taking place in the Gaza Strip."

UN demands Israel, and Hamas follow international humanitarian law.

In a statement on October 31, 2023, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said he was "deeply alarmed" by the intensifying conflict in Gaza and the rising number of civilian casualties. Guterres demanded that Israel and Hamas abide by international humanitarian law.

"Protection of civilians on both sides is paramount and must be respected at all times," Guterres said.

Guterres singled out "the expansion of ground operations by the Israel Defense Forces accompanied by intense air strikes, and the continued rocket fire towards Israel from Gaza."

He also reiterated that the conditions in Gaza are a humanitarian crisis and called the level of aid getting into the Palestinian territory "completely inadequate."

Meanwhile, the UN and other aid officials said a public health crisis engulfs Gaza. Hospitals struggled to treat casualties as electricity supplies petered out. Today, food, fuel, and basic supplies are running scarce.

More than 3,450 children have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war and the number is rising every day, UNICEF spokesperson James Elder said on October 31, 2023. The threat goes beyond Israeli bombs. More than one million children in Gaza are also facing an acute water crisis, Elder said, calling infant and child deaths from dehydration a growing threat. And he said the psychological trauma the youths in Gaza are facing is creating a long-term cost to communities for generations to come. "Gaza has become a graveyard for thousands of children," Elder said, adding that the territory is "a living hell for everyone else."⁴⁰

Panic and fear have surged inside Gaza, where over one million people are displaced, and where communications went dark for days after Israel cut internet lines, although connectivity had gradually returned early October 29, 2023. The Israeli army said "stage two" of the war started with ground incursions in late October 27, 2023.⁴¹

"We've entered a new phase in the war," Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said on October 28, 2023. ⁴² On October 29, 2023, Benjamin Netanyahu said that the ground offensive in Gaza is "only the beginning" and confirmed it is entering the "second stage of the war". The prime minister added that the war will be "long and difficult" but said the country is prepared for this. He added that Israel is fighting its "second war of independence," as he said: "We always said never again - never again is now. "Israel's defense minister Yoav Gallant said retrieving the hostages "is not a secondary mission, this is a mission of supreme importance" as he gave a final ultimatum to the Gazans to leave for the south of the strip.⁴³

Many believed that the consequences of the large-scale ground operations in Gaza would be catastrophic, and thousands more civilians would die.

Israeli airstrikes hit the refugee camp for a second day. The toll from the November 1, 2023, strikes was not immediately known.

Meanwhile, dozens of people with foreign passports entered the Rafah crossing from Gaza to Egypt. It was the first time that foreign passport holders have been allowed to leave the besieged territory since the start of the Israel-Hamas war more than three weeks ago.

Communications and internet services were gradually being restored after the second major cut in five days, according to Paltel, the main service provider. Humanitarian aid agencies have warned that such blackouts severely disrupt their work in an already dire situation in Gaza.

This war is the deadliest of five Gazan wars.

The humanitarian crisis is worsening for the 2.4 million people trapped in the Gaza enclave. More than one million Palestinians, half of Gaza's population, have fled their homes since the war began.

The US, Qatar, and Egypt have been working to open the Rafah crossing into Egypt to allow people to come and go.

Finally, Egypt allowed 81 Gazans who were severely wounded in the weeks of bombardment to enter Egypt on November 1, 2023, to complete treatment.

The World Health Organization has welcomed Egypt's decision to accept 81 injured and sick people from the Gaza Strip for treatment, and reiterated its call for "urgent, accelerated access for humanitarian aid – including fuel, water, food and medical supplies – into and throughout the Gaza Strip."⁴⁴

Gaza's residents are also grappling with shortages of food, water, and medicine due to Israel's blockade of the enclave. Only a few aid trucks have crossed into Gaza since the opening of the Rafah crossing point last weekend.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on October 28, 2023, that Gaza's "still functioning hospitals are on the verge of collapse" amid a lack of electricity and medical supplies.

"The immediate imperative must be to save lives and preserve humanity, including by ensuring hospitals can operate in safety," ICRC said in a statement.

It said its medical team that arrived on October 27, 2023, in Gaza, is not enough to address the "tragedy unfolding."⁴⁵

"It is unacceptable that civilians have no safe place to go in Gaza amid the massive bombardments, and with a military siege in place there is also no adequate humanitarian response currently possible," said the ICRC president. "This is a catastrophic failing that the world must not tolerate."

ICRC reiterated that it continues dialogue with relevant parties "to find solutions to the most pressing humanitarian issues, such as protecting civilians and helping the wounded."

The Palestinian health ministry had earlier said twelve hospitals and thirty-two health care centers were forced out of service due to Israeli bombing or lack of fuel and medical supplies.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the UN overwhelmingly calls for aid truce between Israel and Hamas

The US has made "real progress" in the last few hours in negotiations to secure a safe passage for Americans and other foreign nationals who wish to leave Gaza, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Israel on November 3, 2023, for meetings with members of the government and then make other stops in the region, the department said.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned on October 29, 2023, that the situation in Gaza is declining rapidly as he repeated desperate appeals for a ceasefire to end the "nightmare" of bloodshed. He said that:⁴⁷

The situation in Gaza is growing more desperate by the hour. I regret that instead of a critically needed humanitarian pause, supported by the international community, Israel has intensified its military operations. The number of civilians who have been killed and injured is unacceptable. The world is witnessing a humanitarian catastrophe taking place before our eyes... More than two million people, with nowhere safe to go, are being denied the essentials for life -- food, water, shelter, and medical care -- while being subjected to relentless bombardment. I urge all those with responsibility to step back from the brink. I reiterate my appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages, and the delivery of sustained humanitarian relief at a scale that meets the needs of the people of Gaza... We must join forces to end this nightmare for the people of Gaza, Israel, and all those affected around the world.

UN Human Rights chief Volker Turk meanwhile warned thousands more civilians could die if Israel presses a major ground offensive."

Given the way military operations have been conducted until now... I am raising alarm about the catastrophic consequences of large-scale ground operations in Gaza and the potential for thousands more civilians to die," he said. "There is no safe place in Gaza and there is no way out."⁴⁸

Thousands of Gaza residents broke into warehouses and distribution centers of the United Nations Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) grabbing flour and "basic survival items", the organization said on Sunday.

"This is a worrying sign that civil order is starting to break down after three weeks of war and a tight siege on Gaza," the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said in a statement.

One of the warehouses, located in Deir al-Balah, is where UNRWA stores supplies from the humanitarian convoys crossing into Gaza from Egypt.

Aid supplies to Gaza have been choked since Israel began bombarding the densely populated Palestinian enclave on October 7. UNRWA has said that its ability to help people in Gaza has been completely stretched by air strikes that have killed more than fifty of its staff and restricted the movement of supplies.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Hamas was ready to release the captives if Israel freed all the Palestinians held in its prisons. at too."⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Israel struck targets in the occupied West Bank, Syria, and Lebanon and traded fire with Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group.

The cross-border skirmishes have killed at least fifty-eight people in Lebanon, mostly Hezbollah combatants but also four civilians. At least four people have been killed on the Israeli side, including one civilian.

The unrest has displaced 29,000 people across Lebanon, according to the International Organization for Migration.⁵¹

There are now fears that violence will spread across the volatile region. Israel has signaled that a ground offensive into Gaza will be "far more comprehensive and ferocious than any previous conflict with Hamas."⁵²

On October 22, Iran's senior diplomat, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, issued a warning about the violence spreading. He stated that if Israel and Washington did not "immediately stop the crime against humanity and genocide in Gaza "the region would go out of control".⁵³

However, just hours after the Pentagon moved to step up military readiness in the region, Washington declared it would not hesitate to intervene in the event of any "escalation".

"If any group or any country is looking to widen this conflict and take advantage of this very unfortunate situation that we see, our advice is: don't," US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said.⁵⁴

A top official with Iran Hezbollah vowed on October 21 that Israel would pay a high price whenever it starts a ground offensive in the Gaza Strip and said on October 21 that his militant group based in Lebanon already is “in the heart of the battle.”

On October 22, Netanyahu said Israel would react more fiercely than it did during its short 2006 war with Hezbollah, which is based in Lebanon.

“If Hezbollah decides to enter the war, it will miss the Second Lebanon War. It will make the mistake of its life. We will cripple it with a force it cannot even imagine and the consequences for it and the Lebanese state are devastating,” the Israeli leader said.⁵⁵ Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant warned the war with Hamas could take months. “It will take one month, two months, three months, and at the end, there will be no more Hamas,” Gallant said.⁵⁶

Israel’s defense minister, Yoav Gallant, said on October 19, 2023 “I am tasked with leading us to victory...We will be precise and forceful, and we will keep going until we fulfill our mission.”⁵⁷ Soon after Gallant’s statement, Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said: “This is our darkest hour.”

Israel has called up 360,000 reservists and amassed a huge army around Gaza’s narrow coastal strip. It is also reinforcing defenses on the northern border against the possibility of an attack from Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁵⁸

This time Israel aims “to go in and clean it and to eliminate Hamas from the roots, not only militarily, but also economically, its administration. Everything should go away.”

“That’s the idea now and we are getting prepared for that,” the official said and warned: “It will not be clear cut and it will not be as short as we would like as Israelis. It will be a prolonged campaign. It will take time.”⁵⁹

The Jordanian foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, said: “All the indications are that the worst is coming. The catastrophe will have painful consequences in the coming periods. Diplomatic efforts, Safadi added, had failed to fend off the conflict.”⁶⁰

Earlier, the Israeli army was preparing troops for an “expanded arena of combat,” the IDF said in a statement on October 14, 2023. The preparations have placed “an emphasis on significant ground operations.”

Hamas has shown a level of military capability far beyond what was previously thought, and it is probably well-prepared for the next phase of the war.

Gaza is being “strangled” by Israel’s siege and aerial bombardment. Human rights groups have said Israel’s complete siege on essential goods entering Gaza violates international law, as Palestinian civilians warn food, water, and fuel supplies are running out. The United Nations (UN) and humanitarian groups have pleaded for the military stranglehold on Gaza to be eased, to allow supplies of water, food, fuel, and medicines to enter. European Union foreign ministers are meeting on October 23 to discuss ways to help vital aid get into Gaza, particularly fuel after two convoys entered over the weekend.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that “in normal times, without war, one hundred trucks enter Gaza every day. So, twenty is not enough.”

Borrell said the emphasis must be on getting power and water-providing desalination plants running again. "Without water and electricity, the hospitals can barely work," he told reporters in Luxembourg, where the meeting is taking place.

He said the ministers will also look at ways to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in the long term.

"The great powers have forgotten about the Palestinian issue, thinking it was going to be solved alone, or it does not matter. Yes, it matters," Borrell said.⁶¹

Two aid convoys arrived in the Gaza Strip over the weekend through the Rafah crossing from Egypt. Israel said the trucks carried food, water, and medical supplies. Israel has not allowed fuel, which is critically needed for water and sanitation systems and hospitals. The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees says it will run out of fuel in Gaza in three days.

"Without fuel, there will be no water, no functioning hospitals, and bakeries. Without fuel, aid will not reach many civilians in desperate need. Without fuel, there will be no humanitarian assistance," Philippe Lazzarini, the UNRWA Commissioner-General, said.

The first delivery of aid that was allowed to cross into Gaza from Egypt on Saturday did not include any fuel.

"Without fuel, we will fail the people of Gaza whose needs are growing by the hour, under our watch. This cannot and should not happen," Lazzarini said.

He called on "all parties and those with influence" to allow fuel into Gaza immediately while ensuring that it is only used for humanitarian purposes.⁶²

On a visit to Cairo, the UN secretary-general, António Guterres, said: "We need food, water, medicine, and fuel now. We need it at scale, and we need it to be sustained, it is not one small operation that is required."

The threat of a ground assault on top of the constant airstrikes, now threatens to cut off even this slim lifeline to Gaza at any moment.⁶³

"Due to the scarcity of water, UNRWA [the UN relief agency] in some locations ... is being forced to ration down to providing one liter of water per person per day. Bear in mind that the minimum by international standards should be fifteen liters, and they are getting one – and they are the lucky ones."⁶⁴

Top UN humanitarian official Martin Griffiths on October 18, 2023, said the situation in Gaza was dire, with hospitals overwhelmed. "The pace of death, of suffering, of destruction," he said, "cannot be exaggerated."⁶⁵

Desperately needed international aid piled up on October 20, 2023, near Gaza, with Palestinians in dire need of food and water after relentless bombing by Israel, still reeling from the bloodiest attack in its history. Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas after the group launched an attack from the Gaza Strip on October 7. In response, Israeli warplanes have leveled entire city blocks in Gaza in preparation for a ground invasion they say is coming soon.

The United Nations says more than one million of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced and that the humanitarian situation is worsening by the day.

A third convoy of aid trucks entered the Rafah crossing from Egypt on Monday bound for the besieged Gaza Strip, an aid worker and two security sources have told Reuters.

On October 21 and October 22, 34 trucks passed through. The number of trucks in Monday's convoy was like each of those days, the aid worker and security sources said. UN officials say about one hundred trucks would be needed daily to meet essential needs in Gaza.⁶⁶

The United Nations (UN) said on October 20, 2023, that the initial assistance delivery into the besieged Gaza Strip through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt should happen "in the next day or so." The Rafah crossing is the only route into Gaza. Israel had agreed to allow aid to enter after a request from its ally the United States. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing with Gaza on October 20, 2023, to oversee preparations for the delivery of aid to the war-torn enclave. Guterres said there was an "absolute need to have these trucks moving as soon as possible and as many as necessary", adding that "this must be a sustained effort".⁶⁷

"We are not looking for one convoy to come but we are looking for convoys to be authorized in a meaningful number to have enough trucks to provide support to Gaza's people," the UN chief said.⁶⁸

The Egyptian foreign ministry has accused "Western media" of targeting the country about the Gaza humanitarian crisis.

On the social media site X, formally known as Twitter, the Egyptian foreign minister said the media were "Promoting displacement scenario, holding Egypt responsible for the Crossing closure despite Israeli targeted attacks and refusal of aid entry and recently insinuating Egypt's responsibility for obstructing third-country nationals exit."⁶⁹

It added: "Rafah crossing is open, and Egypt is not responsible for obstructing third-country nationals exit." A subsequent tweet said: "The opportunity is available tomorrow to change course and awaken the conscience."

Desperately needed international aid piled up on October 20, 2023, in Egypt near Gaza, with Palestinians in dire need of food and water after

The UN says more than one million of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced and that the humanitarian situation is worsening by the day.

The situation inside Gaza is "beyond catastrophic", said Sara Alzawqari, UNICEF spokesperson for the Gulf. "Time is running out and the numbers of casualties amongst children are rising."⁷⁰

But fears of a wider conflagration are growing, with Israel announcing plans to evacuate the northern city of Kiryat Shmona after days of clashes with Hezbollah fighters along the border with Lebanon.

Key Middle East players Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt and Jordan's King Abdullah II have warned the conflict could spread and condemned what they said was the "collective punishment" of Gazans.⁷¹

On October 17, 2023, Israel conducted a vicious attack on a hospital in Gaza in which five hundred people were killed. The region remained volatile in the aftermath of an Israeli air strike

at Gaza's Al-Ahli al-Arabi hospital on October 17, 2023, which Palestinian officials said killed 471 people.⁷²

Israeli Defence Forces have said the cause was a rocket fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, while Hamas says the blast was caused by an Israeli airstrike.

The explosion at the hospital happened hours before US President Biden landed in Israel to show America's solidarity with the Jewish state. The strike's heavy death toll led to the cancellation of what was supposed to be the second leg of Biden's Middle East peace mission: a meeting in Amman with Sisi, Jordan's King Abdullah, and the head of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, Mahmoud Abbas.

Demonstrations erupted in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian West Bank, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and elsewhere amid outrage across the Middle East over the hospital attack.

UN experts on October 19, 2023, expressed outrage against the deadly strike at Al Ahli Arab Hospital and a school in Gaza, terming these "unspeakably cruel" Israeli actions as "crimes against humanity". Five hundred civilians were martyred in the Israeli air attack, triggering a global outcry. The strike followed two warnings issued by Israel that an attack on the hospital was imminent if people inside were not evacuated.

Gaza has been hit by a relentless barrage of Israeli fire in retaliation for a Hamas attack on October 7, which Israel says killed at least 1,400 people, mostly civilians.

Israeli bombing has since killed at least 3,785 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, most of them being civilians, according to the Gaza health ministry.

In a strongly worded statement, the UN experts said the missile attack on the health facility was an "atrocious" and that they were "equally outraged" by the deadly strike on the same day on a school located in Al Maghazi refugee camp that sheltered some 4,000 displaced people, as well as two densely populated refugee camps.⁷³

They raised serious humanitarian and legal concerns over Israel tightening its 16-year siege of the enclave and its population and long-standing occupation, depriving 2.2 million people of essential food, fuel, water, electricity, and medicine.

An estimated 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza, are in desperate need of prenatal and postnatal care, while the number of internally displaced people across the Gaza Strip is estimated at around one million.

They recalled that the UN Security Council has repeatedly condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, which is prohibited under international humanitarian and criminal law.

"The unlawful denial of humanitarian access and depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival is also a violation of international humanitarian law," the experts warned.⁷⁴

The UN experts called for the protection of all humanitarian workers after the World Health Organization (WHO) documented more than 136 attacks on health care services in the occupied Palestinian territory, including fifty-nine attacks on the Gaza Strip, which resulted in the death of at least sixteen health workers since October 7.

Israeli bombardment on Gaza has also killed fifteen staff of the United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA) and four Palestine Red Crescent paramedics in an ambulance. An ambulance driver of Magen David Adom in Israel lost his life while driving to treat injured people.

“The complete siege of Gaza coupled with unfeasible evacuation orders and forcible population transfers, is a violation of international humanitarian and criminal law. It is also unspeakably cruel,” the experts said.

They recalled that the willful and systematic destruction of civilian homes and infrastructure, known as ‘domicide,’ and cutting off drinking water, medicine, and essential food is prohibited under international criminal law.

“We are sounding the alarm: There is an ongoing campaign by Israel resulting in crimes against humanity in Gaza. Considering statements made by Israeli political leaders and their allies, accompanied by military action in Gaza and escalation of arrests and killing in the West Bank, there is also a risk of genocide against the Palestine people,” they noted.

“There are no justifications or exceptions for such crimes. We are appalled by the inaction of the international community in the face of belligerent warmongering,” the experts said.

“The Gazan population, half of whom are children, have already suffered many decades of unlawful brutal occupation and lived under the blockade for 16 years,” the experts said.

“It is time to immediately cease fire and ensure urgent and unimpeded access to essential humanitarian supplies, including food, water, shelter, medicine, fuel, and electricity. The physical safety of the civilian population must be guaranteed,” the experts said.

“The occupation needs to end and there must be reparation, restitution, and reconstruction, towards full justice for Palestinians,” they said.⁷⁵

As rage at the hospital carnage spread throughout the Middle East, the White House backed the Israeli claim that it was not behind the bombing.

The Biden administration said that a current intelligence assessment showed Israel was “not responsible” for the explosion at a Gaza hospital. Hamas Hamdan has praised the cancellation of a summit in Jordan between Arab governments and the US President. He called for Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank and Israel to “rise against the Zionist enemy and clash with it in all cities, villages, and camps.”⁷⁶

UN experts have expressed outrage against the deadly strike, terming these “unspeakably cruel” Israeli actions as “crimes against humanity.”

Meanwhile, international agencies warn millions more face dwindling supplies of water, food, and fuel - even before a looming Israeli ground invasion.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli military leaders have signaled their intent to destroy Hamas and eradicate the threat it poses.

Several notable Hamas figures have already been killed in air strikes. The bombardment, coupled with an Israeli order to evacuate north of the Gaza Strip that borders Israel, has forced more than a million Palestinians to flee their homes south of the enclave, according to the UN agency serving Palestinian agencies (UNRWA).

No place was safe for the more than two million Palestinians on October 19, 2023, as Israeli bombs slammed across Gaza, including parts of the Palestinian territory that Israel had declared as "safe zones."

"Israeli Air Forces continued to strike southern areas despite the directive for people in #Gaza to move south," the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) said. The agency said at least fourteen of its staff had been killed and nine more wounded – adding that the "actual number is likely to be much higher".⁷⁷

Israel says it is attacking Hamas militants wherever they hide in Gaza and has accused the militants of taking shelter among the civilian population.

International aid agencies have called for aid to urgently be allowed into the territory, and for Gaza's border with Egypt to be open to allowing civilians to leave.

World Health Organization (WHO) regional director Ahmed Al-Mandhari said Gaza was barreling toward "real catastrophe".

"There are 24 hours of water, electricity, and fuel left," he said.

Washington has backed Israel's right to strike back at Hamas, but it has also urged measures to ease the impact on ordinary Palestinians caught in the crossfire.

Israel has issued an ultimatum to more than one million people in northern Gaza that they should flee ahead of an expected ground offensive.

Entire families, young children, and the elderly have packed whatever belongings they can to flee to the southern Gaza Strip, bedding down in any available space, indoors and out.

In the city of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza, the normal population of 400,000 has doubled. Thousands more Palestinians have massed at the Rafah border crossing with Egypt to flee.

In Gaza, it was said morgues were overflowing, and corpses wrapped in white body bags were even being stored in an ice cream truck.

But Gazans are effectively trapped, with neighboring Arab nations fearful that if Palestinians leave the Strip, they could be permanently exiled.

In Israel, about 500,000 people have been displaced or evacuated from communities around the Gaza Strip and Israel's northern border with Lebanon, the Israeli military said on October 17, 2023. Repeated fires in recent days along Israel's northern border with Lebanon have claimed lives on both sides and compounded fears of a regional spillover from the war.

Hamas's military wing has said the group was holding two hundred people, with about fifty more held by other "resistance factions and in other places."

The US and Israel have agreed on a plan to allow aid into Gaza, the US secretary of state has announced, after marathon nine-hour talks with Israeli leaders.

Relief convoys that have been waiting for days in Egypt were this morning headed towards the Rafah border crossing with the besieged Palestinian enclave of Gaza, aid officials said, though it is not clear when they will be allowed through.

Blinken did not elaborate on the aid plan but acknowledged Israeli concerns that Hamas may seize or destroy aid entering Gaza or prevent it from reaching people in need.

Israel has bombed the border crossing from Gaza to Egypt in recent days, and it is not immediately clear how aid convoys will safely cross.

Hospitals in Gaza are overflowing as doctors are running out of supplies. Food and water are being strictly rationed, and two million people have been living without electricity.

The UN has warned that thousands of people will die if aid does not get through soon.

Khan Yunis is overflowing with hundreds of thousands of displaced people who followed Israeli instructions to flee their homes and head south for safety. Rafah is additionally crowded with people who have foreign passports and have repeatedly been told they will be able to leave through Egypt.

At least 49 Palestinians were killed in overnight Israeli strikes that hit homes in Khan Younis and Rafah, Gaza's interior ministry said this morning.

Israeli forces are considering plans to launch a ground strike on Gaza, and as basic supplies run out, Gazans are desperately trying to flee the war zone.

The United Nations said in early October 17, 2023, that since the Israeli order to evacuate the northern part of the Gaza Strip, the number of internally displaced people may have reached one million. About 500,000 Israelis have been evacuated and displaced, according to IDF.

UN aid chief Martin Griffiths says the health system and hospitals in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip are "collapsing."

An Israeli air strike has damaged a building at the Rafah crossing into Egypt, which remains closed despite hopes it could allow aid in and some people out.

As the humanitarian situation worsens – with a million people now displaced in Gaza – discussions are focused on how to ensure that assistance will go to ordinary civilians and will not reach Hamas, which governs the territory.

Blinken also said the US had secured assurances from Israel about allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza but did not give details on when and how. Diplomatic talks about the possibility of reopening the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza are still ongoing.

Meanwhile, more than one million people have been displaced inside Gaza, one of the world's most densely populated territories. Talks of a humanitarian corridor allowing aid to enter and people inside Gaza to exit have repeatedly broken down.

In Gaza, more than 400,000 displaced people in Gaza's south crowded into schools and other facilities of the U.N. agency for Palestinians. However, the agency said it has only one liter of water a day for each of its staff members trapped in the territory.

"Gaza is running out of water, and Gaza is running out of life," said UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini, calling for a lifting of the siege. "We need this now."

Hospitals are expected to run out of generator fuel in the next 24 hours, meaning life-saving equipment like incubators and ventilators will stop functioning and put thousands of lives at risk, the U.N. said.

Yet doctors and many hospital staff have refused to evacuate, saying it would mean deaths for critically ill patients and newborns on ventilators.

In northern Gaza, unknown numbers remained, either unwilling or unable to leave. Hamas urged people to ignore the evacuation order. The Israeli military on Sunday released photos it said showed a Hamas roadblock preventing traffic from moving south.

Much earlier, Israel bombed a communications tower in the besieged territory and cut off electricity to the strip's sole power plant. The actions are part of the "total siege" Israel has implemented.

The bombings and the siege have left the Gaza Strip without reliable internet or electricity. This has made the work of journalists – already risky and challenging in a war zone – even harder.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), at least 15 journalists have already been killed in the Gaza Strip since October 7.⁷⁸

The UN says its agencies have supplies at the ready to move into southern Gaza, while the EU is launching a humanitarian air bridge operation in Egypt that will bring supplies to the enclave, the European Commission president said.

The director of Gaza's water authority said on October 16, 2023, that water supply had not yet been restored to the enclave. The WHO warned that people in Gaza face an "imminent" public health crisis, saying the limited amount of water is creating a desperate situation as the lives of more than 3,500 patients in 35 hospitals are at immediate risk. The organization also called for "unobstructed access for humanitarian aid into Gaza."⁷⁹

More than 1,000 people are missing under the rubble of buildings that were destroyed by Israeli air strikes in Gaza, the Palestinian civil defense team said. In a statement, the civil defense team said many others were pulled alive from the rubble, 24 hours after the buildings were struck.

According to the government office in Gaza 254 Palestinians were killed in the past 24 hours. About 64 percent of all those killed were women and children. Thirty-seven medical staff, including doctors, nurses, and paramedics, were killed.

As thousands massed on the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, Netanyahu ruled out a temporary ceasefire to allow aid supplies in or foreigners out. On the evening of October 16, 2023, strikes hit an area near the crossing. The presence of hostages is complicating any ground offensive involving tens of thousands of regular Israeli troops and reservists, who are massed at the border waiting for the order to go in. Israel has also been demanding that hostages held by Hamas should be freed. Hamas said as many as 250 people were being held in Gaza.

Additionally, aid agencies called for vital humanitarian supplies to be allowed into the Gaza Strip, warning time was running out to save millions of people as water supplies dried up and food and fuel stocks dwindled. The regional director of the World Health Organization, meanwhile, gave a stark warning about the situation. "There are 24 hours of water, electricity

and fuel left" in Gaza, he said. If aid is not allowed in, doctors will have to "prepare death certificates for their patients," he added. The European Union will launch a humanitarian air corridor to Gaza through Egypt, with the first flights expected soon European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

Humanitarian aid intended for more than two million Palestinians is waiting to be transported through Egypt, although the Rafah border crossing in southern Gaza remains closed, preventing the delivery of aid, including food, water, and fuel, after repeated Israeli air attacks on it. Despite the diplomatic momentum, the Rafah crossing remains closed.

The WHO has also documented dozens of attacks on medical facilities in Gaza, which have killed at least twelve health workers.

Moreover, Israeli authorities announced a total blockade on Gaza, preventing fuel and other basic supplies from entering the territory. More than 1 million people, including hospital patients, have been ordered by Israel to leave northern Gaza, a demand the United Nations has characterized as "impossible".

Politics of the War

Arab Gulf states on October 28, 2023, warned Israel against further ground operations in the Gaza Strip, with Saudi Arabia denouncing land incursions as "unjustified" and Oman condemning possible "war crimes".

Saudi Arabia "condemns and denounces any ground operations carried out by Israel due to the threat they pose to the lives of Palestinian civilians", the kingdom's foreign ministry said in a statement.⁸⁰

It cautioned against "the danger of continuing to carry out these blatant and unjustified violations of international law against the brotherly Palestinian people", warning of "serious repercussions for the stability of the region".

Qatar's Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said on X, formerly Twitter, that an "Israeli ground escalation would have dire consequences for civilians and devastating humanitarian and economic impacts."

Oman accused Israel of committing "war crimes" in Gaza and warned against any further ground maneuvers.

The escalation in Israel's "brutal war on the Gaza Strip constitutes war crimes and crimes against humanity," said a foreign ministry statement carried by the official Oman News Agency.

Oman too warned of the destabilizing effects of a large-scale land invasion, while Qatar said, "a ground escalation" would risk "the safety of civilians and hostages in Gaza".

A Qatari foreign ministry statement expressed "complete rejection of the indiscriminate bombing of the Gaza Strip and the attempts to forcibly displace its people".

Qatar's top diplomat said, "mediation efforts to release civilian hostages" and to "end the war" were ongoing.

The United Arab Emirates, which established diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020 as part of the US-brokered Abraham Accords, "condemned the ground operations by Israel", said a foreign

ministry statement. Abu Dhabi demanded "an immediate ceasefire to ensure that civilians and civilian institutions are not targeted", it added.

"The urgent priority is to end the escalation of military operations and protect civilians."

Kuwait charged that "any ground invasion of Gaza... will prove that the Israeli occupation is determined to continue committing crimes against the brotherly Palestinian people", according to a foreign ministry statement.

The six-member Gulf Cooperation Council condemned the military escalation in Gaza as a "violation of international law," urging an immediate end to hostilities.

On October 29, 2023, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced the West as "the main culprit" behind the bloodshed. "The main culprit behind the massacre unfolding in Gaza is the West," he told a massive pro-Palestinian rally of several hundred thousand people in Istanbul.

His comments prompted Israel to announce it was recalling all its diplomats from Turkey.⁸¹

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in an extraordinary meeting in Jeddah on October 18, 2023, termed the attack on the al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza a "war crime", strongly rejecting the Israeli claims that it was not behind the bombing.

The extraordinary meeting of the OIC Executive Committee was held in Jeddah on October 18, 2023, the same day when US President Biden was in Israel to show solidarity with the Jewish state, and his country vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have condemned the Israeli atrocities.⁸²

To rub the salt in the Palestinians' wounds, Biden endorsed Israeli claims that its forces didn't bomb the hospital. But the OIC meeting, co-chaired by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, challenged the Israeli and US version and squarely blamed Tel Aviv for the "brutal" attack.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani strongly condemned the Israeli atrocities.

"Israel's indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity," he said.⁸³

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki, who was also attending the executive meeting, accused Israel of "intentionally" bombing the hospital, saying that the Gaza Strip's residents were being subjected to genocide.

A joint communique issued after the meeting strongly criticized the UN Security Council for failing to prevent the humanitarian catastrophe, but more importantly, launched a broadside against the Israeli backers for their "double standards." The statement held Israel's backers responsible for encouraging the Jewish state to commit atrocities with impunity. But the most significant part of the joint statement was the OIC's rejection of Israeli claims on the Gaza hospital massacre.⁸⁴

The OIC, as per the joint statement, strongly condemned the blatant targeting by Israel's brutal occupation forces of al-Ahli Hospital in the Gaza Strip that killed at least 500 innocent sick, injured, and displaced civilians.

The OIC's joint communique stressed that the hospital bombing represented "a war crime, extermination, and a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, ethics, and international and humanitarian instruments".⁸⁵

It urged the international community "to act swiftly and to hold the Israeli occupation forces accountable for these heinous war crimes against the Palestinian people and humanity at large, calling for immediate intervention to halt the massacre".

"Israel, the occupying power, bears full responsibility for the fate of civilians in the Gaza Strip and the real tragedy they are subjected to under bombardment, siege, and starvation, without electricity, food, or clean water, while being forced to abandon their homes," it said.⁸⁶

It also denounced Israel for its "policy of indiscriminate collective punishment that it applies in a flagrant violation of international law and international humanitarian law, as well as its legal responsibilities as the occupying power by the Geneva Conventions".

The OIC underscored the importance of preserving the lives of all civilians. It also demanded an end to the military escalation, lifting of the siege on the Gaza Strip, and contributing urgently to the entry of relief and humanitarian aid for civilians.

President Joe Biden secured an agreement with Israel on October 18, 2023, to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza while supporting the Israelis' contention that they were not behind the deadly explosion at a Gaza City hospital.

Humanitarian assistance, along with \$100 million in new U.S. funding for Gaza and the West Bank announced by Biden, could provide a critical lifeline to Palestinians in the besieged territory where water, food, fuel, and medicine are in desperate need.

Biden and his administration said a U.S. assessment concluded Israel did not cause the blast at Al Ahli Arab Hospital. "Based on what I've seen, it appears as though it was done by the other team, not you," Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Hamas said the explosion killed close to five hundred and blamed an Israeli airstrike. The Israeli military denied the attack and released video, audio, and other information pointing to a missile misfire by Islamic Jihad, a militant group that sometimes cooperates with Hamas and is considered a terrorist organization by the U.S.

The hospital carnage sparked rage throughout the region, and Jordan canceled a summit scheduled for October 18, 2023, in Amman, where Biden was to meet with Jordan's King Abdullah II, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Since Hamas attacked Israel, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah in Lebanon have been exchanging gunfire for the previous few days.

Earlier, the United States and Israel had agreed to develop a plan that would enable humanitarian aid from donor nations and multilateral organizations to reach civilians in Gaza.

"Aid must begin flowing into Gaza as soon as possible," Blinken said in Tel Aviv.

"Israel's concern that Hamas may seize or destroy aid entering Gaza or otherwise prevent it from reaching the people who need it." He said "If Hamas in any way blocks humanitarian assistance from reaching civilians, including by seizing the aid itself, we will be the first to condemn it. And we will work to prevent it from happening again," he said.

Blinken said the agreement to work on the plan was done at the US request, and they "welcome the government of Israel's commitment to work on this plan."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned that the entire Middle East region was "on the verge of the abyss. Iran has warned Israel about the potential for the conflict to spread in the volatile region. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned that the entire Middle East region was "on the verge of the abyss."

There are deep fears that the conflict could spread to the Palestinian West Bank or Lebanon, drawing regional foes deeper into the conflict.

Israel on October 17, 2023, said it had launched strikes overnight on Hezbollah "terrorist" targets in Lebanon. Iran backs Hezbollah and Hamas but has denied any involvement in the October 7 attack.

Israel has warned about the potential for the conflict to spread in the volatile region. Iran on October 16, 2023, warned of a possible "pre-emptive action" against Israel "in the coming hours."

Secretary of State Blinken says Biden will emphasize that Israel has the "right and duty" to defend itself from Hamas.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says pro-Iranian groups in the region could pre-emptively act against Israel, even in the "coming hours"⁸⁷

Hamas's Qassam Brigades says that up to 250 captives are being held in Gaza and that it is prepared to release those with foreign nationalities as soon as "circumstances allow".

The WHO warns that there are only "24 hours of water, electricity and fuel left" in the besieged Gaza Strip as Israeli bombardment continues, killing hundreds more.

The Biden administration has said repeatedly there are no plans to send American troops to Israel. There is the potential for US involvement if a multi-front war breaks out. Earlier, Biden ordered a second U.S. aircraft carrier group into the eastern Mediterranean, bolstering what he and other officials have described as a deterrence posture. The military muscle is intended to send a signal to Iran to stay out. Yet behind the scenes, Biden and his team are discussing various possibilities should the crisis escalate. The Biden administration is determined to prevent the conflict from spreading beyond Israel's borders.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sought global cooperation against Hamas, claiming that the number of hostages held by freedom fighters and other Palestinian groups in Gaza has risen to 199 as of October 16, 2023

"The world must come together to destroy Hamas," said Netanyahu, who spoke in the Israeli Knesset today.

Additionally, Netanyahu urged Hezbollah and Iran not to "test" Israel in the north. Since Hamas attacked Israel, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah in Lebanon have been exchanging gunfire for the past few days.

On October 15, 2023, the Israeli army declared that it was prepared to begin a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip.

Russia reiterated its appeal for an "immediate ceasefire" in the Israel-Gaza conflict earlier today and urged officials to begin talks to resolve the violence.

"The main thing now in this environment is to immediately cease the fire and start the process of political settlement," Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said.

Earlier, Biden had told aides he was interested in going, as his presence would "demonstrate strong U.S. support" to Israel. But the "likelihood of escalating hostilities could mean that any future trip occurs during a particularly precarious point in the developing war. Hamas, a group the United States has designated a terrorist organization, would be more likely to take a provocative strike at a traveling president, according to one of the officials."⁸⁸

Earlier, it was planned that President Biden will push Egypt to open Gaza's border crossing which is now stalled, "undermining the evacuation of Americans and other foreigners stranded by the Israeli military's siege and the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave."⁸⁹ The meeting never took place, however.

Nahal Toos, in the good article "U.S. diplomacy meets Mideast reality, and it's not pretty," published in Politico, October 17, 2023, maintains that:⁹⁰

America's intense war-time diplomacy has so far failed to sway Arab countries in the Middle East — and President Joe Biden's expected visit to the region may not help.... The diplomatic struggle suggests that U.S. influence is receding in the region, where governments' interests often diverge from that of Washington and both Russia and China are vying for sway. And unequivocal U.S. support for Israel — as opposed to the more nuanced positions it often takes in Middle East flare-ups — may be one of the biggest barriers to better relations... Biden going there is going to send a clear message that the U.S. is on the side of Israel in this," said Jonathan Schanzer, a U.S. analyst with the Defense Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington. "It will anger some of the Arab world, but I think it will be important for the region to see the administration not waver." Officials and analysts warn against writing off the U.S. just yet.... To the Biden administration's disappointment — though not necessarily to its surprise — Arab countries have also been either measured or silent when it comes to denouncing Hamas by name. If they've explicitly criticized Hamas, such as the United Arab Emirates did, it's generally been in combination with statements urging both sides to stay restrained.... Biden has, in recent days, shifted his language away from unequivocal support of Israel after the attack to include concerns about protecting Palestinian civilians. He has also warned Israel that occupying Gaza may not be worth the cost. But Biden and the United States have long been seen as far more pro-Israel than pro-Palestinian, adding to grievances in the region.

Earlier on October 7, 2023, shooters from Hamas took scores of hostages after rampaging through southern Israeli communities and military bases, killing over 1,300 people. Israel's military says the group is holding 199 hostages in Gaza. Hamas says it has between 200 and 250.

Israel, which has bombarded Gaza with strikes that have killed hundreds of Palestinians, has said it would act to free the hostages while eliminating Hamas. The captives are believed to include nationals of countries including Thailand and Germany. Other countries have reported their citizens as missing. Israelis with dual nationality in countries including the U.S. are also believed to have been kidnapped.

Biden called Hamas' rampage in Israel "the worst massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust."

Hamas is believed to be holding 199 Israeli and foreign nationals' hostages in Gaza, the IDF's spokesperson Rear Adm. Dan Hegari said on October 16, 2023.

That number was revised up from the previous figure of 155, with many believed to be held in the warren of tunnels underneath Gaza.

On October 16, 2023, a spokesperson for Hamas' militant wing Al-Qassam Brigades said the number of hostages was between 200 - 250.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor to send desperately needed supplies into Gaza are ramping up, before the Israeli blockade causes the 2.3 million people there to completely run out of clean drinking water, food, fuel, and medicine. Aid agencies have warned the siege will result in an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe inside the Palestinian enclave.

"Gaza is being strangled and it seems that the world right now has lost its humanity," said United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, in an urgent plea for critical aid to be allowed in. "We all know water is life – Gaza is running out of water, and Gaza is running out of life."

Lazzarini said that "not one drop of water, not one grain of wheat, not a liter of fuel" has been allowed into Gaza for the past eight days and people trapped in the densely populated blockaded strip are desperate.

Limited water supply in Gaza has put the lives of more than 3,500 patients across thirty-five hospitals at immediate risk, the World Health Organization said on Monday, warning of an "imminent" public health crisis.

Hospitals in Gaza under a constant barrage of Israeli airstrikes face imminent shutdown due to a lack of fuel to run generators that pump water and keep lifesaving equipment such as ventilators and incubators operating, Palestinian Red Crescent Director General Marwan Jilani said. Fuel, he said, would run out very soon.

On the brink of collapse, hospitals have run out of painkillers and many Gazans are beginning to suffer from severe dehydration due to a lack of drinking water, according to medical NGO Médecins sans Frontières. Multiple aid agencies have said fuel and other necessities could.

The 50,000 pregnant women currently in Gaza – 5,000 of whom are due to give birth in the coming month – face a "double nightmare," said UN Population Fund (UNFPA)

representative Dominic Allen, who faces having their babies in unsanitary conditions and risking health complications while under the threat of bombs.

Compounding the critical situation are the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing their homes in northern Gaza and attempting to head south through the battered streets ahead of an Israeli offensive that the IDF said would include widespread strikes and “significant ground operations.”

UNRWA's Lazzarini said at least one million people were forced to flee their homes in one week alone and at least 400,000 displaced people are taking shelter in UN schools and buildings, but there is little space to cope with the numbers of displaced.

Earlier, Shtayyeh, the Palestinian prime minister, urged the international community to stop Israel's shelling and end the blockade. He warned against displacing people in Gaza and creating a new Nakba or “catastrophe,” reported on October 16, 2023.

Nakba refers to the period after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war when about 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from their homes in what is now Israel.

The Palestinian Health Ministry accused the Israeli military of “direct targeting of medical staff and their families.”

Frantic calls to open humanitarian corridors into Gaza have grown in urgency and number in recent days, with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Pope Francis, and several nations and international aid agencies among them.

UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani said, “mammoth diplomatic efforts” are underway with Guterres and many member states “exercising what leverage they can.”

“We are looking at potentially thousands of deaths if this aid doesn't get through,” Shamdasani said.

Earlier, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has been visiting Israel and neighboring countries in recent days, meeting with various regional leaders.

On October 15, 2023, Blinken promised that the Rafah border crossing “will be open” and that the United States was working with the UN, Egypt, Israel, and others to coordinate aid efforts.

China's top diplomat Wang Yi accused Israel of going “beyond the scope of self-defense.” China's Middle East envoy Zhai Jun said he would visit the region this week.

Aid has been piling up on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing. Egypt says that airstrikes on the Gaza side have made roads inoperable, and Jordan has said it is seeking assurances that aid convoys will not be targeted by Israeli warplanes.

The UN's emergency relief chief, Martin Griffiths, reiterated the desperate need for aid to reach Gaza earlier. Griffiths will travel to Cairo for several days-long missions that will include a visit to Israel, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

France has said it will give \$10.55 million to UN agencies and NGOs to help humanitarian efforts in Gaza. French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna told reporters that the aid is ready. It is unclear how the aid will cross the border amid airstrikes on Gaza.

Earlier on October 16, 2023, Abu Obaida, a spokesperson for Hamas' Al-Qassam Brigades, said there were between 200-250 hostages held in Gaza. Abu Obaida said Al-Qassam Brigades held two hundred hostages, while the rest are with other "militant formations" in the territory, adding that they cannot determine the exact number due to constant Israeli bombardment.

Abu Obaida also said twenty-two of the hostages were killed in Israeli airstrikes. He added that the Al-Qassam Brigades will be releasing hostages holding foreign citizenship when "the opportunity arises on the ground," and said Al-Qassam is "committed" to protecting them. He also warned that any foreign national serving with the Israeli military would be considered a "direct enemy."

In its statement, the IDF said it is using "all intelligence and operational means to return the abductees," which it says number 199 Israeli and foreign nationals.

As Israel battles Hamas, it also faces the threat of a wider conflict on new fronts, with hostilities with Lebanon's powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah in the north, and Syria, being potential flashpoints. The IDF said it was striking Hezbollah targets in Lebanon.

The regional conflagration has Western powers concerned. Earlier, French President Emmanuel Macron "warned" his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi against an escalation of the Gaza crisis on October 15, 2023, and the US has been increasing its defense posture in the Middle East to deter any Iranian aggression or an expansion of the fighting beyond Israel's borders, according to a US official.

Additional US attack aircraft including A-10 Warthogs arrived in the Middle East Sunday, joining squadrons of fighter jets already deployed as well as two U.S. carrier strike groups deployed to the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Earlier, on October 15, 2023, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said that while there is no new intelligence, the threat level from Iran has changed, "there is a risk of an escalation of this conflict."

Iran has warned of the consequences of a possible larger escalation if Israel continues to attack Gaza. Diplomatic aid efforts ramp up for "strangled" Gaza as regional conflict fears grow.

Iran's foreign minister, Hossein Amirabdollahian, warned that a "pre-emptive action" against Israel could be expected "in the coming hours", signaling a potential escalation in the conflict. He said "The leaders of resistance groups will not allow the Zionist regime to act in any way it likes in Gaza" while referencing his meeting with the head of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, on Saturday.

He added: The possibility of pre-emptive action by the resistance front is expected in the coming hours.

"All options are open, and we cannot be indifferent to the war crimes committed against the people of Gaza," he said. He added:

If we do not defend Gaza today, tomorrow we must defend against these [phosphorus] bombs in the children's hospital of our own country.

Human Rights Watch last week accused Israel of using white phosphorus munitions in its military operations in Gaza and Lebanon last week. Israel has denied it used white phosphorus.

Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi said earlier on October 16, 2023, that time was running out to reach a political solution and warned against the expansion of the Israel-Hamas war on other fronts.

Earlier, the IDF maintained that it was launching strikes on Hezbollah targets in Lebanon. Since the start of the war, clashes on the Israel-Lebanon border have left around ten people dead on the Lebanese side, mostly combatants but also a Reuters journalist and two civilians.

On the Israeli side, at least two people have been killed.

The international community fears an escalation of the conflict between the pro-Iran Lebanese Hezbollah, an ally of Hamas, and the Israeli army.

Israel began evacuating thousands of residents from twenty-eight locations in the north of the country after these border clashes.

Earlier, Blinken was on a hectic stint of diplomacy in the region, shuttling back to Israel after visiting six Arab countries.

Meanwhile, Iran warned on October 16, 2023, of a possible "pre-emptive action" against Israel "in the coming hours", as Israel readies for a ground offensive on the Gaza Strip. Tehran has repeatedly warned that a ground invasion of the long-blockaded Gaza would be met with a response from other fronts – prompting fears of a wider conflict that could draw in other countries. "The possibility of pre-emptive action by the resistance axis is expected in the coming hours," Iran's foreign minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, said in a live broadcast to state TV, as he referred to his meeting with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on October 13, 2023.

An intense US-led diplomatic effort failed to ease the plight of two million Palestinians trapped under bombardment in Gaza, with supplies of water, food, and medicine all running out, raising the prospect of a humanitarian disaster.

The World Health Organization (WHO) warned Gaza faces an imminent public health crisis as the Palestinian enclave is "running out of water". The UN agency said the lives of more than 3,500 patients in thirty-five hospitals in Gaza are at immediate risk and called for unobstructed access to humanitarian aid into the enclave.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) said "There are not enough body bags for the dead in Gaza". It noted that Gaza had been without electricity for five days, there was limited access to clean drinking water, and more than one million people had been displaced.

Meanwhile, about 2,000 US troops have been told to prepare to be deployed for support to Israel, according to multiple reports. The troops are not intended to serve in a combat role, according to the reports, and come from across armed services who are tasked with missions like advising and medical support.

Human Rights Watch last week accused Israel of using white phosphorus munitions in its military operations in Gaza and Lebanon last week. Israel has denied it used white phosphorus.

Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi said earlier on October 16, 2023, that time was running out to reach a political solution and warned against the expansion of the Israel-Hamas war on other fronts.

Earlier, Hamas demanded the release of “6,000 male and female prisoners in Israeli prisons” in exchange for the hostages it took during its attacks on 7 October. A Hamas spokesperson said there were “about 200-250” Israeli captives in Gaza, contradicting an earlier statement from the Israeli military that said it had confirmed 199 hostages.

An intense US-led diplomatic effort failed to ease the plight of two million Palestinians trapped under bombardment in Gaza, with supplies of water, food, and medicine all running out, raising the prospect of a humanitarian disaster. US media reported that Joe Biden was considering a trip as an already dire situation drastically deteriorated.

The World Health Organization (WHO) warned that Gaza was facing an imminent public health crisis as the Palestinian territory is “running out of water.” The UN agency said the lives of more than 3,500 patients in thirty-five hospitals in Gaza were at immediate risk and called for unobstructed access to humanitarian aid into the enclave.

Benjamin Netanyahu told the Knesset that the nation of Israel was united in its goal of victory while conceding that there would be an investigation into the intelligence and security failures that had allowed Hamas to mount such a devastating attack.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate has said that Israel has killed 11 Palestinian journalists in its airstrikes on Gaza.

The UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) has said there are not enough body bags for the dead in Gaza. Its latest situational report noted that Gaza had been without electricity for five days, there was limited access to clean drinking water, and more than one million people had been displaced.

Much earlier, leaders of all twenty-seven countries in the EU called for the “immediate and unconditional” release of all the hostages. Leaders will meet via video link for an emergency summit as fears rise across the EU over volatility in the Middle East.

The EU has announced that it will launch a “humanitarian air bridge” consisting of “several flights” to Egypt to bring supplies to humanitarian organizations on the ground in Gaza. The first two flights will take place this week, carrying humanitarian cargo from UNICEF, including shelter items, medicines, and hygiene kits, it said in a statement.

About 2,000 US troops have been prepared for deployment to provide support to Israel, according to multiple reports. The troops are not intended to serve in a combat role.

China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, has called for a ceasefire, saying: “The UN security council must act, and the major powers should play an active role. A ceasefire must be put in place, that the two sides be brought back to the negotiating table, and that an emergency humanitarian channel be established to prevent a further humanitarian disaster.”

Rishi Sunak has said six British nationals have been killed in Israel and a further ten are missing, some of whom are believed to be dead. He described the Hamas attack as a pogrom.⁹¹

Conditions in Gaza have deteriorated dangerously, experts say, with serious shortages of clean water and food as tens of thousands of Palestinians attempt to flee crippling airstrikes and an Israeli ground offensive. The World Health Organization pleaded with Israel on Sunday to immediately reverse evacuation orders for hospitals in northern Gaza, saying the deadlines are impossible to meet and risk additional loss of life. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that attacks on healthcare facilities are already causing additional deaths and injuries.

"The health situation in northern Gaza is dire," Tedros wrote on social media. "Evacuation orders by Israel to hospitals are practically impossible to implement and are a death sentence for the sick and injured."⁹²

Israel's military said on October 14, 2023, that its forces are readying for the next stages of the war, including "combined and coordinated strikes from the air, sea and land" in response to the unprecedented October 7 attacks by the Islamist militant group Hamas, which controls the enclave.

Further escalation of the long-running conflict increasingly risks spilling over regionally, prompting the Pentagon to order a second carrier strike group and squadrons of fighter jets to the region as a deterrence to Iran and Iranian proxies, such as Lebanon.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned in a statement on October 15, 2023.

"We are on the verge of the abyss in the Middle East," He issued urgent appeals to Israel and Hamas: "To Hamas, the hostages must be released immediately without conditions. To Israel, rapid and unimpeded aid must be granted for humanitarian supplies and workers for the sake of the civilians in Gaza." "Each one of these two objectives is valid in themselves. They should not become bargaining chips and they must be implemented because it is the right thing to do," he said.⁹³

For days, Israel has cut off the Gaza population's access to electricity, food, and water, prompting warnings of a dire humanitarian crisis.

Pope Francis on October 15, 2023, also called for the establishment of humanitarian corridors in Gaza and the release of hostages taken by Hamas.

Casualties in the besieged Gaza Strip over the past eight days have now surpassed the number of those killed during the 51-day Gaza-Israel conflict in 2014.

A growing number of nations, global rights groups, and organizations are calling on Israel to respect international rules of war, urging the protection of civilians' lives, and not to target hospitals, schools, and clinics in densely inhabited Gaza. Many families, some of whom were already internally displaced, are now crammed into an even smaller portion of the 140-square-mile territory.⁹⁴

Hamas' rocket attacks on Israel have meanwhile continued into the weekend. A barrage in the city of Sderot saw residents being evacuated to other areas of the country on Sunday.

Calls for Israel to respect the rules of war.

Gaza is suffering shortages of every kind, including body bags, say aid groups. Internet access, through which residents communicate their plight to the world, is shrinking. Food stocks are dwindling, the World Food Program has warned.

Hospitals have run out of painkillers and many Gazans are beginning to suffer from severe dehydration due to a lack of drinking water, according to medical NGO Médecins sans Frontières.⁹⁵

“The situation is very difficult...today for two hours we searched for drinkable water—even drinkable water is not available anymore,” said Dr. Mohammed Abu Mughaiseb, the organization’s deputy medical coordinator in Gaza. “There is food. No electricity, no pumping of normal water as well, the hospitals are barely working... They are bombing all day. We do not know what is going to [happen] tomorrow and where we are going.”

Earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office stated on October 15, 2023, that Israel has restored water to southern Gaza, where many Gazans have been told to flee. However, the director of the Water Authority there said he did not know if water was available because the electricity necessary to pump water for use had not been restored.

Israel is also in the process of creating a humanitarian zone where food, water, and other provisions could be accessed in Gaza, Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Herzog told CNN’s Jake Tapper on October 15, 2023.⁹⁶

The UN could not confirm the plan. “What we can tell you is that we have nothing to confirm at this time, but we have been working round the clock with various interlocutors to ensure humanitarian access in Gaza,” the spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, Stéphane Dujarric told CNN.⁹⁷

Earlier, President El-Sisi said on October 16, 2023, during his meeting with Blinken that Israel’s response to the deadly Hamas attack had gone beyond its right to self-defense.

It “amounts to the collective punishment of the Gaza Strip, home to 2.3 million Palestinians,” he said.

His criticism echoed that of several rights groups, with Amnesty International and the Norwegian Refugee Council describing the forced relocation of civilians as a violation of international law earlier in the week.

Mass evacuation ahead of Israel’s expected escalation

The clock is ticking for residents fleeing south through the battered streets of Gaza after the Israeli military told civilians to leave northern areas of the densely populated strip. More than half of Gaza’s 2 million residents live in the northern section that Israel said should evacuate, or risk danger in its next phase of retaliation.

“We will commence significant military operations only once we see that civilians have left the area,” IDF spokesperson Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus said on October 15, 2023.⁹⁸

Several UN agencies have warned that mass evacuations under siege conditions will lead to disaster and that the most vulnerable Gazans, including the sick, elderly, pregnant, and disabled, will not be able to relocate at all.

Palestinian Red Crescent Society spokesperson Nebal Farsakh said that although they had been notified by Israel to evacuate Al-Quds Hospital in Gaza City, they did not have the means to do so.

Gaza is made up of about 2.3 million Palestinians, half of whom are children. The Israeli military has been launching airstrikes on Gaza ever since Hamas' attack, razing entire neighborhoods and killing thousands of Palestinians — including more than half a million children. The attacks last week are in addition to the Israeli government's decades-long apartheid against Palestinians, of which multiple human rights groups have sounded the alarm.

In addition to the airstrikes, Israel has cut off Gaza's access to food, water, medicine, and electricity, leaving Palestinian families to drink dirty water, ration their food, lose internet access to the outside world, and count the days until hospitals lose power. An increasing number of journalists have also died in Gaza, making it more difficult for the public to get updated on the territory.

Gaza is the responsibility of the Israeli government, which has control over the enclave and decides who gets to go in and out.

About half a million Palestinians whose homes have been obliterated are packed into U.N.-run schools and shelters. Since Israel declared war last weekend, it has launched airstrikes on some of those shelters.

In a first clear and stark denouncement, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Sunday condemned the Hamas attacks, saying the militant group's actions "do not represent the Palestinian people."

Abbas "affirmed his rejection of the killing of civilians on both sides and called for the release of civilians, prisoners and detainees on both sides," during a phone call with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Sunday, the official Palestinian press agency WAFA reported.

He also warned against forcing Palestinians out of Gaza, which he said would represent "a second catastrophe for the Palestinian people," according to WAFA.

Regional concerns grow.

As Israel battles Hamas, it also faces the threat of a wider conflict on new fronts.

Israel has said it is ready in case there are attacks from neighboring Lebanon or Syria.

Syria's military reported late October 14, 2023, that an "air aggression" by Israel, originating from the Mediterranean Sea, damaged Aleppo International Airport and rendered it nonoperational.

The humanitarian crisis is deepening with food, fuel, and water running short.

Over one million people fled their homes in Gaza in scenes of chaos and despair as Israel bombarded Hamas-ruled territory and continued massing troops on October 16, 2023, in preparation for a full-blown ground invasion. Hopes for a brief ceasefire in southern Gaza to allow foreign passport holders to leave the besieged Palestinian enclave and aid to be brought in were dashed on October 16, 2023, with Israeli bombardments intensifying ahead of an expected ground invasion.

Residents of Gaza said the overnight strikes were the heaviest yet in nine days of conflict. Many houses were flattened, and the death toll rose inexorably, they said.

Israeli aircraft bombed areas around Gaza City's Al-Quds hospital early on October 16, 2023, and ambulances at the facility were unable to move due to the strikes, Palestinian media reported.

Diplomatic efforts have been underway to get aid into the enclave, which has endured unrelenting Israeli bombing since October 7.

Egypt has said the crossing remained open from the Egyptian side in recent days but was rendered inoperable due to Israeli bombardment on the Palestinian side.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said on October 16, 2023, that the Israeli government had yet to take a stance that allowed the crossing to open. He called the situation faced by the Palestinian people in Gaza "dangerous."

The situation remained unclear at the Rafah crossing, the only one not controlled by Israel. Reuters journalists said a small crowd of people had gathered there waiting to enter Egypt.

The United States had told its citizens in Gaza to get close to the crossing so they could move out. The US government estimates the number of dual-citizen Palestinian-Americans in Gaza at 500 to 600.

Washington is also seeking to secure the release of 199 captives, including Americans.

US President Joe Biden has sent military aid to Israel but also stressed the need to get humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians and urged Israel to follow the rules of war in its response to the Hamas attacks.

The UN said on October 16, 2023, that forty-seven entire families, amounting to around five hundred people, had been killed in Israel's bombing campaign.

Foreign governments and aid agencies, including the UN and Red Cross, have repeatedly criticized Israel's evacuation order.

Lynn Hastings, the UN humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, decried that Israel was connecting humanitarian aid into Gaza with the release of scores of captives captured during the Hamas attack.

But power outages threaten to cripple life-support systems, from seawater desalination plants to food refrigeration and hospital incubators.

Even everyday functions -- from going to the toilet, showering, and washing clothes -- are almost impossible, locals said.

Gazans are effectively trapped, with Israeli-controlled crossings closed and Egypt also having shut the Rafah border in the south.

Much earlier, the UN Human Rights Office raised alarm over the humanitarian situation in the besieged Palestinian enclave, calling for an “urgent need” to halt hostilities to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. A significant amount of aid is waiting at the border to get in.

The United Nations Humanitarian Office (OCHA) said on October 16, 2023, that reserves of fuel at all hospitals across the Gaza Strip are expected to last only around 24 more hours, putting thousands of patients at risk.

More than one million people – almost half the total population of Gaza - have been displaced within the enclave, the United Nations said. The UNWRA agency said it was struggling to cope with their needs.

People across Gaza have severely limited access to clean drinking water. As a last resort, people are consuming brackish water from agricultural wells, raising concerns over the spread of waterborne diseases.

For the fifth consecutive day, Gaza has had no electricity, pushing vital services including health, water, and sanitation to the brink of collapse and worsening food insecurity.

Much earlier, the Arab League and African Union had warned that an invasion could lead to "genocide."

UN chief Antonio Guterres has warned that the entire region was "on the verge of the abyss."

Earlier, Israel had told 1.1 million Palestinians in the north of the Gaza Strip to head to the south of the enclave. Over one million people fled their homes in Gaza in scenes of chaos and despair as Israel bombarded the besieged territory.

People have fled their homes north of the enclave to seek shelter wherever they can, including on the streets and in UN-run schools.

The UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees said on October 15, 2023, that one million Palestinians had already been displaced in the first week of the conflict — but the number was likely to be higher.⁹⁹

Earlier, by October 14, 2023, more than 360,000 people in Gaza had been confirmed displaced amid a barrage of retaliatory Israeli strikes. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is now unprecedented in history.

Israel pressed on October 15, 2023, with preparations for a ground offensive in Gaza after giving Palestinians little time to flee northern areas it has vowed to target in response to the deadliest attack in its history. The invasion shall be very bloody and costly. The alarm has grown over the fate of Palestinian civilians in blockaded and besieged Gaza if it becomes the scene of intense urban combat and house-to-house fighting.

Israel has again pummeled northern Gaza with fresh air strikes on October 14, 2023.¹⁰⁰

Aid agencies have said forcing Gazans to move is impossible while the war rages.

But with food, water, fuel, and medical supplies running low because of an Israeli blockade, aid agencies are warning of a deepening humanitarian crisis. The WHO said on October 14, 2023, that forcing thousands of hospital patients to evacuate to already overflowing hospitals in the southern Gaza Strip could be "tantamount to a death sentence". International aid agencies, including the UN and Red Cross, plus several foreign diplomats are concerned about the feasibility of the evacuation plan. The Norwegian Refugee Council officials "fear an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe". More than 423,000 Palestinians have already left their homes, and 5,540 homes have been destroyed, according to the United Nations.

Israel, which has likened last week's attacks to those on September 11, 2001, in the United States, has fired thousands of missiles at northern Gaza. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh accused Israel of "genocide" in Gaza, while clashes in the occupied West Bank have killed 53 Palestinians in the past week. The Israeli military said on October 14, 2023, that the bodies of some of the dozens of hostages abducted by Hamas in its attacks had been found during operations inside Gaza. Hamas earlier reported twenty-two hostages had been killed in Israeli bombardments.

Exiled Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh accused Israel on October 14, 2023, of committing "war crimes" in Gaza, but he ruled out any "displacement" of Gazans, including to Egypt. Hamas is regularly accused by Israel of using civilians as human shields.

Much earlier, Israel faced the threat of a separate confrontation on its northern border with Lebanon and artillery exchanges have taken place with the Iran-backed Hezbollah group in recent days. On October 14, 2023, a Reuters video journalist was killed and six other reporters from AFP, Reuters, and Al-Jazeera, were wounded in shelling that Lebanon blamed on Israeli forces. Two Lebanese civilians were killed in Israeli shelling of a southern village on October 14, 2023. Hezbollah said one of its fighters was killed by Israeli fire. Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari on Oct night warned that the army "has very large forces in the north." "Whoever reaches the fence to infiltrate Israel, will die," he said in televised remarks.

US officials have warned that the war between Israel and Hamas could escalate after cross-border clashes between Israel and fighters from Lebanon's Hezbollah.

A potential Israeli ground invasion has also increased fears for the safety of the 150 hostages, including foreigners, that Israel said Hamas seized during its deadly rampage. Hamas has threatened to kill the hostages one by one for every unannounced Israeli air strike.¹⁰¹

Earlier, the United Nations said the Israeli military has told that some 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza should relocate to the enclave's south within the next 24 hours, a request it considers impossible "without devastating humanitarian consequences." The bloody siege is illegal under international humanitarian law. Ahead of its planned ground invasion, Israel gave Palestinians in northern Gaza mere hours to evacuate this weekend, something the U.N. has warned is "impossible" and will lead to more deaths. Palestinians in Gaza also said there is nowhere to run, as they have been trapped in what they've called an "open-air prison" for years.

The October 7 Hamas attack, unprecedented in scale and scope, is the deadliest offensive that Israel has experienced in 50 years. The Hamas group has been in power in the Gaza Strip since 2007. Its attack came half a century after the outbreak of the 1973 conflict called the Yom Kippur War in Israel, sparking bitter recriminations for an enormous intelligence failure. Western capitals have condemned the attack by Hamas, which Washington and Brussels consider a terrorist group.

Gaza, a small strip of land that is home to over 2.3 million Palestinians within 140 square miles, is one of the most densely populated territories on Earth. It has been kept under an Israeli land, air, and sea blockade since 2007. The United Nations classifies Israel as an occupier state over the Palestinian territories, whose occupations and annexations following the 1967 Six-Day War violate international law.

Meanwhile, the mood in Israel has swung between collective grief, fury, and an ardent desire to punish Hamas, which Netanyahu has likened to the Islamic State group. It is proscribed as a terrorist group by several Western governments, including the United States.

Much earlier, Israel had drafted a record 300,000 reservists in its response to the multi-front Hamas attack from Gaza, a military spokesperson had said as an estimated 100,000 soldiers are amassing near the fence with Gaza amid fears of a possible ground operation.

Earlier, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Israel on October 8 to prepare for a "long and difficult" conflict a day after Hamas launched a surprise assault in Gaza, firing a barrage of rockets and sending a wave of fighters who gunned down civilians and took at least one hundred hostages.

On October 9, 2023, Israel announced implementation in the Gaza Strip. Defence Minister Yoav Gallant stated that all supplies of electricity, water, food, fuel, and other goods would be stopped as Israeli troops battled to clear out Hamas fighters from southern settlements.

The Israeli military said it had retaken control of Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip. Hamas militants claimed October 8, 2023, to be holding more than 100 hostages in Gaza, including high-ranking Israeli army officers. Netanyahu has vowed to turn Hamas hideouts "to rubble" and urged Palestinians there to flee.

"We are embarking on a long and difficult war that was forced upon us by a murderous Hamas attack," Netanyahu wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

Meanwhile, Hamas has called on resistance fighters in the West Bank, and Arab and Islamic nations to join the battle.

There are 199 Israeli captives that it claims were taken by Hamas back into Gaza. On October 16, 2023, as regards the hostage situation, Israeli military spokesperson Daniel Hagari said:

This is a top national priority effort on the issue of the abductees, and we are focused on this effort as a national top priority. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) is working around the clock to return the abductees.

The IDF said it had notified the families of all the 199 hostages now known to have been taken to Gaza by Hamas. The hostage crisis resolvent is going to be one of the single biggest challenges for Israel in the coming weeks.

Earlier diplomacy was in action. Western governments, including Germany, whose chancellor heads to Israel on October 17, 2023, have urged Tehran not to fan the flames of the conflict.

"Lebanese officials have a responsibility to do everything possible to prevent Lebanon from being dragged into" a war with Israel, France's Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said on October 16, 2023.

But Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said: "time is running out for political solutions."

That has prompted Western governments, including Germany, whose chancellor heads to Israel on October 17, 2023, to urge Tehran not to fan the flames of the conflict. But, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said "Time is running out for political solutions." Writing on X, formerly known as Twitter, after talks with his counterparts in Malaysia, Pakistan, and Tunisia, he warned that the "probable spread of war on other fronts is approaching an inevitable stage."

Lebanese authorities should take all necessary measures to avert a war with Israel, France's foreign minister said in Beirut, following repeated exchanges of fire along the shared frontier. Moreover, Russian President Vladimir Putin called Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu and briefed him on several talks with leaders from the region and the Palestinian Authority. "The Israeli side was in particular informed of the essential points of telephone correspondence that took place today with the leaders of Palestine, Egypt, Iran, and Syria," the Kremlin said in a statement. The Kremlin statement said Putin had voiced concern in his calls about "a catastrophic increase in the number of civilian victims and the aggravation of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza."

United States (US)

National security adviser Jake Sullivan met with Saudi Arabian Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman Al Saud at the White House on October 30, 2023, as the Biden administration continued efforts to keep the war from expanding. A readout released by the White House said the duo affirmed the urgent need to increase humanitarian assistance in Gaza. They also emphasized the importance of working toward a sustainable peace between Israelis and Palestinians "building on the work that was already underway between Saudi Arabia and the United States over recent months."¹⁰²

As expected, the US is providing military aid to Israel. On Biden urged the United States to take the lead in supporting Israel and Ukraine, saying he would make an "urgent" request to Congress for aid on October 20, 2023. "American leadership is what holds the world together," Biden said. While solidly backing Israel, he also pointed to the plight of those trapped in Gaza, saying they "urgently need food, water, and medicine".

Biden is hoping to staunch the possibility of a wider Middle East war.

The United States has already moved two aircraft carriers into the eastern Mediterranean to deter Iran or Hezbollah, both allies of Hamas, from getting involved.¹⁰³

President Joe Biden made a landmark trip to Israel in an "ironclad" show of US support as efforts to ease a spiraling humanitarian disaster in Gaza intensified.

Biden's Israel visits also sought to avert a regional conflagration.

Biden's visit also came amid frantic diplomatic efforts to ease the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza after waves of brutal Israeli retaliatory air strikes on the enclave. However, the visit was a failure in many respects.

Earlier, the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, went on a short tour of countries in the region, including high-level meetings in Israel, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. On October 16, 2023, he was in Egypt trying to open the Rafah border with little success. Blinken is trying to achieve a cease-fire so that Americans stuck in Gaza can leave, desperately needed humanitarian aid flow into besieged Gaza, somehow contain the spread of the conflict in the region, and get the American hostages released. There was little success in his mission, which was expected.¹⁰⁴

Joe Biden left Israel after a day of talks on October 18, saying that US and Israeli officials had discussed “alternatives” to a mass ground offensive into Gaza, which will almost certainly cause large-scale civilian casualties. More than 3,000 Palestinians have already died in the enclave from the past 12 days of aerial bombardment.

On October 19, 2023, Biden explicitly backed Israel, calling for billions more in aid while seeking to link Hamas with Russian president Vladimir Putin, whose forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022.¹⁰⁵

“Hamas and Putin represent different threats, but they share this in common: They both want to annihilate a neighboring democracy,” he said.

Biden also stressed that the US could not “ignore the humanity of innocent Palestinians who only want to live in peace and have opportunity.”¹⁰⁶

US President Joe Biden has warned Israel against the occupation of the Palestinian territory, saying the ground assault would be “a big mistake.”

In a video clip posted by CBS News’s 60 Minutes on October 16, 2023, Biden backed a humanitarian corridor to let people flee the war-hit area as well as allow the delivery of humanitarian aid, including food and water, into Gaza.

“I am confident that Israel is going to act under the rules of war,” Biden said.

The US president said that he did not believe Hamas represented “all the Palestinian people” and that he wanted to see the group eliminated.

Biden said he did not think American troops would be necessary on the ground as Israel has one of the “finest fighting forces,” even as American warships head to the area amid growing clashes on Israel's northern border with Lebanon.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on October 12, 2023, the United States had seen no indication that Hezbollah militants were amassing the border to potentially attack Israel.

The United States, which has given unequivocal backing to Israel, has sent two aircraft carriers to the eastern Mediterranean as a deterrent.

The White House has voiced fears at the prospect of Iran becoming “directly engaged” after Tehran praised the Hamas attack but insisted it was not involved.

Biden was asked in the 60 Minutes interview whether U.S. troops might join the war and said, "I don't think that's necessary."

"Israel has one of the finest fighting forces ... I guarantee we are going to provide them with everything they need," he said.

The United States has also appealed to China to use its influence in the region to ease tensions.

To avert the risk of the war escalating into a regional conflict, the United States deployed a second aircraft carrier that would "deter hostile actions against Israel," Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said. In a call on October 14, 2023, US President Joe Biden told Netanyahu the United States was working with the United Nations, Egypt, Jordan, and others in the region "to ensure innocent civilians have access to water, food, and medical care".¹⁰⁷

Biden also spoke with Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas and pledged "full support" to the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to bring humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, "particularly in Gaza," according to the White House.¹⁰⁸

Earlier, US President Joe Biden on October 8, expressed "my full support for the people of Israel in the face of an unprecedented and appalling assault by Hamas terrorists."

The US-led Western denunciations of Hamas' attack, with Biden issuing a warning to Iran and others that this was "not a moment for any party hostile to Israel to exploit these attacks."¹⁰⁹

It will also send multiple military ships and the world's largest aircraft, the USS Gerald Ford, closer to Israel as a "deliberate show of force." US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the US will provide security assistance to Israel imminently.¹¹⁰

On October 16, 2023, Progressive legislators in the United States introduced a congressional resolution urging "an immediate de-escalation and ceasefire in Israel and occupied Palestine". They stressed that the US has the power to push for an end to the fighting.

The measure is backed by more than a dozen Democratic members of the House of Representatives, including Cori Bush, Rashida Tlaib, Summer Lee, Ayanna Pressley, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Ilhan Omar — highlighted growing calls in Washington for a ceasefire in Gaza.¹¹¹

"All human life is precious, and the targeting of civilians, no matter their faith or ethnicity, is a violation of international humanitarian law," the proposed resolution reads.

Despite overwhelming support for Israel in Congress, Bush told reporters during an online briefing that the resolution was an urgent push Americans could rally around. With a land invasion of Gaza imminent, Bush said that "hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of lives, hang in the balance."

"And it is not only happening right before our eyes. It is happening with the support and the power of the United States government, and it is shameful," she said.¹¹²

"Leaders led from the front, and we moved with the call of the people," Bush said. "Our constituents around the country are going to begin calling our colleagues to join us."

“The only way to move legislation is to first of all introduce them,” Bush added. ¹¹³

Moreover, Progressive US lawmakers have introduced a resolution calling for “an immediate de-escalation and ceasefire in Israel and occupied Palestine.” The measure – backed by more than a dozen Democratic House members, including Cori Bush, Rashida Tlaib, Summer Lee, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Ilhan Omar – is unlikely to pass, but it highlights growing calls in Washington for a ceasefire in Gaza. “We must do everything in our power to end this ongoing violence,”¹¹⁴ Congressman Jamaal Bowman, another co-sponsor of the resolution, said in a statement. “Our actions should proceed based on recognizing our shared humanity, including rejecting violence in all forms and pursuing an urgent ceasefire and de-escalation so we can save civilian lives.” ¹¹⁵

On October 16, 2023’s online briefing, however, Tlaib — the only Palestinian-American member of Congress — described the horrific humanitarian situation in Gaza, home to 2.2 million people.

“Entire families are being wiped out, all while President Biden and Secretary Blinken and most of Congress have failed to even hint at the need to de-escalate or facilitate a ceasefire. And that to me is a failure,” the congressperson said.

Tlaib stressed that the collective punishment of Palestinians is a war crime. “See what is happening. Do not turn away. All they need to do is see Palestinians as human to see again that these are war crimes,” she said.¹¹⁶

October 16, 2023’s resolution marks a small but significant break in the near-unanimous support for Israel’s war effort in Washington.

“We must do everything in our power to end this ongoing violence,” Congressman Jamaal Bowman, another co-sponsor of the resolution, said in a statement.

“Our actions should proceed based on recognizing our shared humanity, including rejecting violence in all forms and pursuing an urgent ceasefire and de-escalation so we can save civilian lives.”

"Now we have this."

Maya Berry, executive director of the Arab American Institute think tank, said the resolution is important because of the role the US plays in the conflict.

The US provides Israel with at least \$3.8bn in military assistance annually, despite human rights groups like Amnesty International accusing the country of imposing apartheid on Palestinians.

That sum is likely to increase this year, with US officials pledging to back Israel with more weapons and ammunition for the ongoing war.

Washington also regularly uses its veto power at the UN Security Council to shield Israel from criticism over violations of international law.

“We are not a benign observer in this conflict,” Berry told Al Jazeera, referring to the US. “We have enabled the occupation for years and are currently enabling the attacks to take place now. So, Congress needs to take their job seriously.”

Beth Miller, the political director of Jewish Voice for Peace Action, also underscored the significance of Monday's proposed resolution, saying that it gives rights advocates a solid demand they can take to their lawmakers.

"We haven't had anything yet to push for because the only things that have been coming out of Congress so far have been horrible one-sided resolutions that only value or speak about Israeli life and completely disregard Palestinian life," Miller told reporters. "And now we have this."

Iran

Iran is an ally of Hamas, and it backs the Hamas attack.

Reuters reports that Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said on October 16, 2023, in a televised press conference that "Iran considers that the US is already militarily involved in the conflict between Israel and Palestinians".¹¹⁷

Iran said the United States should be held to account for its role in the conflict. Meanwhile, Iran's Mission to the UN warned on October 14, 2023, that if Israel does not stop its attacks on Gaza, "the situation could spiral out of control and ricochet far-reaching consequences."

Hostilities in neighboring Lebanon are being closely monitored internationally, as an escalation could draw the powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah paramilitary group into the conflict.

For days, Lebanon-based Palestinian militants have launched rockets into Israel, leading to Israeli attacks on Lebanese territory, including Hezbollah positions. Hezbollah has fired back at Israeli border positions with precision-guided missiles.

On October 14, 2023, Israel returned fire after Hezbollah launched an attack on the disputed territory of the Shebaa farm near the Israel-Lebanon border, with CNN teams on the ground reporting prolonged shelling. Reuters video journalist Issam Abdallah was killed on the Lebanese side of the border on October 13, 2023.¹¹⁸

On October 8, 2023, President Ebrahim Raisi voiced support when he spoke with the leaders of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad group.

Notwithstanding some claims, Iran has rejected allegations that it had a role in the assault on Israel by Hamas.¹¹⁹ "We have not yet seen evidence that Iran directed or was behind this particular attack, but there is certainly a long relationship," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on October 8, 2023.

Israel regards Iran as its biggest threat and has repeatedly attacked Iranian targets in the region. Earlier, in February 2023, Iran blamed Israel for a drone attack on a military factory near Isfahan. Much earlier, in 2021, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif vowed revenge against Israel for an attack on Iran's main nuclear facilities at Natanz. Iran calls for emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

Iran called for an emergency meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation over recent hostilities between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. It emphasized that the Palestinian issue is still the first issue of the Islamic world.

United Nations

The UN is expected to play a key role in easing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. However, it will not be able to play any meaningful role in the political aspects of the war. The US, and some other Western powers like France, the UK, Germany, and Italy will support Israel and be able to balance the popular support of Hamas among the Global South, China, and Russia. As expected, the UN is desperately trying to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Earlier, the UN appealed for the creation of humanitarian corridors to bring food into Gaza and said at least 70,000 Palestinians in Gaza are seeking shelter in schools it runs. The UN aid chief Martin Griffiths said on October 16, 2023, he would be traveling to the Middle East on October 17, 2023, to support negotiations on getting aid into the blockaded Gaza Strip. Griffiths said his office was in “deep discussions” with Israel, Egypt, and other parties.

The Security Council (UNSC) meeting on October 8, 2023, failed to unanimously take a position against Hamas, a setback for the US and Israel. Russia and China urge the members to take a broader view of the situation to resolve the decades-long crisis. Several members of the UNSC maintained their stance in favor of Israel as it suffered a massive assault, but the US regretted that there was no general agreement on the issue, which indicates the delicacy of the situation. The Security Council of the United Nations voted on October 16, 2023, to reject Russia’s attempts to pass a resolution that would have condemned the killing of civilians whilst failing to blame Hamas for the atrocities committed in Israel.

The draft resolution would have called for “an immediate, durable and fully respected humanitarian cease-fire” and denounced “all violence and hostilities directed against civilians and all acts of terrorism.”

Voting against the proposal, British Ambassador Barbara Woodward said it would be “unconscionable for this council to ignore the largest terror attack in Israel’s history.”

Only four countries joined Russia in voting for the resolution — China, United Arab Emirates, Mozambique, and Gabon.

The US, France, and Japan joined the UK in rejecting it while the other six countries abstained.

Later, another resolution was vetoed by the US on a flimsy pretext. Given the staunch support of America for Israel, the UNSC cannot pass any resolution against it. Thus, the UNSC is paralyzed by politics, as seen many times before. That was to be expected, though.

Russia

Russia is supportive of Hamas. Having been seriously distracted by the Ukraine war, it will play a lesser role in the war now. Vladimir Putin and Syria’s president, Bashar al-Assad have called for an end to the forced displacement of Gaza residents and the shelling.

Earlier, Vassily Nebenzia, the Russian ambassador to the UN, said, “My message was to stop the fighting immediately and to go to a ceasefire and to meaningful negotiations, which I was told for decades. “This is partly the result of unresolved issues,” he said. Russia says there is a “high risk” of a third party entering the ongoing fighting after an announcement from the Pentagon that it was moving warships and aircraft carriers closer to Israel. Russian government spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Moscow is worried about the situation in Israel and Gaza,

calling it a "great danger for the region." The Kremlin said on October 9, 2023, it feared a foreign player could enter the conflict after the US moved warships closer to its ally Israel.

"The risk of third forces becoming involved in this conflict is high," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov was quoted as saying by the TASS news agency.

"It is very important to find ways as soon as possible to move towards some kind of negotiation process to reduce this escalation and move away from a military solution," he said. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on October 9, 2023, that creating a Palestinian state was the most dependable solution for peace in Israel and that fighting terrorism alone would not ensure security. "The Palestinian problem should not be delayed further." Lavrov earlier said that Russia and the Arab League would work to "stop the bloodshed" in Israel and Gaza. Russia said it had asked the UN Security Council to vote on October 16, 2023, on its ceasefire resolution.

China

China has supported the Palestinians for long. Given its distractions, it is not expected to play a prominent role in the war. China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, has called for a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza.

Speaking in Beijing at a joint appearance with Russia's Sergei Lavrov, Reuters reports that Yi said:

The UN Security Council must act, and the major powers should play an active role. A ceasefire must be put in place, the two sides be brought back to the negotiating table, and an emergency humanitarian channel be established to prevent a further humanitarian disaster.

On October 15, 2023, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Israel's response had "gone beyond the scope of self-defense" and demanded that it "cease its collective punishment of the people of Gaza." On Sunday Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Israel's response had "gone beyond the scope of self-defense" and demanded that it "cease its collective punishment of the people of Gaza."

On the diplomatic front, Chinese envoy Zhai Jun will visit the Middle East next week to push for a ceasefire and promote peace talks.

Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom is a prominent leader of the Muslim world. Therefore, it cannot ignore Muslim aspirations that are now favoring Hamas very strongly. Saudi Arabia has simply bowed to public pressure, as expected.

It has also pressed for an "immediate ceasefire." The Israel-Saudi normalization of relations has now been complicated by conflict. The move will be relegated to the back burner for now.

Egypt

Egypt is a close ally of the US and has warm relations with Israel. Egypt had normalized relations with Israel decades back after fighting and losing several wars.

Being an important center of Islamic civilization and culture, the Egyptian government had to bow to the public pressure to support Hamas at the humanitarian level. It has not opened the

only international crossing available for humanitarian aid to flow in and for Gazans to exit the enclave. Egypt is insisting that an inflow of humanitarian assistance to the besieged Gaza, which is already lined up, must happen simultaneously with an exodus of foreigners, Americans, from the Rafah crossing. Israel has not agreed to it but most probably will very shortly. Egypt must protect its status as an important Islamic nation. More importantly, they are wary of an exodus of Gazan refugees into Sinai that will become permanent like that of Lebanon and Jordan earlier. It cannot afford to accommodate a large refugee influx from Gaza. Also, the forced exodus of a besieged population by force amounts to ethnic cleansing, which is a violation of international humanitarian law. So is the reluctance to open a border to the possible influx of Gazan refugees.

The Egyptian foreign minister, Sameh Shoukry, said on October 16, 2023, that the Israeli government had yet to take a stance that allowed the crossing to open. There has been some movement of UN-flagged fuel trucks on October 16, 2023, at the border, but despite speculation of a local ceasefire and a limited opening, the crossing between Egypt and Gaza has remained closed.

Egypt can play a facilitation role in the war.

Pakistan

Pakistan is a very staunch supporter of Palestinians. On October 18, 2023, it demanded that Israel must bring an immediate end to its terror campaign with an “instant ceasefire and lift the siege to Gaza” Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani, who led the Pakistan delegation to the urgent open-ended Ministerial Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in Jeddah, also condemned October 17, 2023’s massacre of innocent civilians in a vicious Israeli attack on a hospital in Gaza.

The meeting was co-convened by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to discuss the crisis in Gaza and the humanitarian situation of besieged civilians there.

In his statement, Foreign Minister Jilani “strongly denounced the Israeli aggression and inhumane blockade of Gaza that resulted in death, destruction, and displacement. He underscored that the Israeli occupation forces were committing a clear violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Their indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity,” he added.¹²⁰

The foreign minister called on the international community to hold Israel accountable for its crimes.

Jilani emphasized that Israel must rescind forced evacuations of Palestinians from their homes. He also underlined the urgency of humanitarian corridors for rapid, secure, and unrestricted humanitarian and relief supplies to Gaza.

The foreign minister underlined that the root cause of the recent conflagration lay in the non-implementation of the two-state solution. He reaffirmed Pakistan’s solidarity and support for the Palestinian people. He called for an “early establishment of a viable, secure, contiguous and sovereign state of Palestine based on the pre-June 1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital”. After the meeting, the Executive Committee adopted a Joint Communiqué outlining the collective stance of the Muslim Ummah on the situation in Gaza.¹²¹

In response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Pakistan has decided to swiftly send humanitarian relief aid to Gaza.

The government of Pakistan is actively coordinating with various organizations and nations, including the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, relevant UN agencies, the Egyptian government, and Pakistan's diplomatic missions worldwide. This coordination is essential for finalizing the logistical details of delivering humanitarian aid.

Pakistan's Caretaker Prime Minister, Anwaarul Haq Kakar, made a public call for an immediate ceasefire and the lifting of the blockade in Gaza. He expressed Pakistan's unwavering support and solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine.

Pakistan on October 13, 2023, called “unacceptable” the collective punishment of Gaza’s entire Palestinian population by Israeli occupation forces, saying it amounts to “war crimes and crimes against humanity”.

“Major crimes against humanity are being committed even as we speak, in Palestine, in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and other situations of oppression, occupation, and violence,” Pakistani delegate Rabia Ijaz told the General Assembly’s Sixth (Legal) Committee.

Ijaz, a second secretary at the Pakistan Mission to the UN, was speaking in a debate on crimes against humanity in which speakers spotlighted the need for a universal instrument for preventing and punishing those crimes during geopolitical confrontations, including the recent Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Pakistan, she said, was deeply concerned by the rapidly deteriorating and dire humanitarian situation in Gaza due to the indiscriminate aerial bombardment, including of civilians and even protected UN targets.”¹²²

In addition to those actions, the Pakistani delegate said that the “inhumane blockade of food, fuel, and medicines, as collective punishment of the entire Palestinian population of Gaza by Israeli Occupation forces, were unacceptable.”

“The current cycle of aggression and violence is a sad reminder and a direct consequence of over seven decades of illegal Israeli occupation, aggression, and disrespect for international law, including UNSC (Security Council) resolutions that recognize the inalienable right to self-determination of the Palestinian people.,” Ms. Ijaz said.

“The international community must work together for a just, comprehensive, and lasting two-state solution with a viable, sovereign, and contiguous State of Palestine based on pre-1967 borders, with Al Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

“Peace in the Middle East will remain elusive in the absence of such a solution,” the Pakistani delegate added. In her remarks, Ms. Ijaz also underscored the necessity for global cooperation to eradicate impunity for culprits and to ascertain justice for victims.

While the International Law Commission’s draft articles serve as “an instrumental kick-off point” on this issue, she emphasized that it is too soon to establish any solid conclusions regarding their essence and layout. Discussions on their content -- like those held during the April resumed session -- are valuable but show that a certain degree of disparity between viewpoints remains.¹²³

Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani on October 15, 2023, called out Israel for committing genocide against the people of Palestine as atrocities in Gaza continue to rage on.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, he described the current situation because of "seven decades of illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories."

Israel committed aggression and conducted aerial attacks over Gaza, resulting in the deaths of scores of women and children, said Jilani, adding that any attempt to equate Israel, an aggressor, with the Palestinians' struggle for self-determination is "unacceptable."

He categorically maintained that there was no change in Pakistan's policy regarding Israel. It would continue pursuing the same policies adopted in the past and will continue to do so until the Palestinians attain their right to self-determination under the United Nations Security Council and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) resolutions, he said.

The minister reiterated that Pakistan condemns the siege of Gaza as the Palestinian people continue to face unabated Israeli aggression while deprived of water, food, and power. The situation has led to a severe human crisis, he said.

Jilani asserted that Israel should respect and implement international laws, the UNSC, and the OIC resolutions over Palestinians' rights to self-determination for an independent state.

He stated that an emergency meeting of the executive committee of OIC will be held in Jeddah on October 18 to discuss the ongoing situation in Palestine.

Jilani further stressed the separate status of Palestine under the two-state policy accepted by the international community, with an independent state of Palestine having pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Regarding humanitarian aid for besieged Palestinians, Jilani said that his office was in touch with the international community and Muslim countries. "Unfortunately, there is a complete siege of Gaza."

He said this aspect would be highlighted during the upcoming OIC executive committee meeting, where they would consider the coordinated response of OIC member countries on how to end the violence perpetrated by Israel and provide immediate humanitarian assistance to Palestinians.

Pakistan is ready to provide humanitarian assistance and has been in touch with Egyptian authorities, he apprised, adding that the OIC committee meeting would make a forceful case for the early resolution of the issue.

Pakistan on October 16, 2023, announced immediately dispatching humanitarian assistance to Gaza as Israel continued to pound the densely populated territory with air strikes and was preparing for a ground offensive.

“In the wake of indiscriminate Israeli aggression and siege of the Gaza Strip, the already oppressed people of densely populated Gaza are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance,” read a statement issued by the Foreign Office here.

Given the human tragedy unfolding in Gaza, Pakistan decided to immediately dispatch humanitarian relief assistance to Gaza to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian brothers and sisters, according to the statement.

“The government is coordinating with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, relevant UN agencies, the Government of Egypt and Pakistan Missions abroad to finalize modalities of delivery,” it added.

Despite the announcement, it is not clear whether Pakistan will be able to send assistance as other regional countries have been barred by Israel from doing so.

Egypt, the next-door neighbor of Gaza, wants to send relief goods through Rafah Crossing in exchange for allowing Americans and other foreigners standard in the besieged territory. However, Israel has not yet agreed to the proposal.

Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani on Sunday termed Israel's ongoing actions against Palestinians as "genocide."

"Certainly, Palestine is a very, very, important issue for us. We will certainly discuss the ongoing situation. There is absolutely no doubt that Israel has committed aggression," Jilani told reporters at a news conference.¹²⁴

The foreign minister referred to the air strikes conducted by Israel targeting the civilian population which resulted in the death of several innocent men, women, and children.

He lamented that the besieged residents of Gaza did not have access to food, water, or health facilities.

“This is a situation that can be equated with genocide. Matter of fact, it is a genocide being conducted by Israel against the poor people of Palestine.”¹²⁵

He added that Pakistan’s position was that Israel must respect United Nations resolutions that recognize the right of self-determination. “We also feel that this is also the result of seven decades of illegal occupation of Palestinian territories.”

He also said that “any attempt to equate Israel, which is an aggressor, with the Palestinian struggle, is unacceptable for Pakistan.” He said that Pakistan demanded that the Palestinian right to self-determination be respected.

He called for recognizing Palestine as a separate state with pre-1967 borders and Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. “That remains Pakistan’s consistent position about this particular issue,” he said.

As the Israeli ground offensive in the densely populated Gaza Strip looms large, the Executive Committee of the OIC will meet in Saudi Arabia on October 18. Pakistan is part of the Executive Committee and Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani will be attending the extraordinary session.¹²⁶

Pakistan on Monday announced that it would immediately dispatch humanitarian assistance to Gaza as Israel continued to pound the densely populated territory with air strikes and was

preparing for a ground offensive.

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“The government is coordinating with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, relevant UN agencies, the government of Egypt and Pakistan missions abroad to finalize the modalities of delivery,” it added.

Around 2.3 million Palestinians are facing humanitarian catastrophe as the Israeli forces on hand continue with their brutal assault and at the same time cut off water, electricity, and other supplies.

Despite the announcement, it was not clear whether Pakistan would be able to send the assistance as other regional countries had been barred by Israel from doing so. Egypt, the next-door neighbor of Gaza, wants to send relief goods through Rafah Crossing in exchange for allowing Americans and other foreigners' standards in the besieged territory. However, Israel hasn't yet agreed to the proposal.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Jalil Abbas Jilani on Monday telephonically spoke to his counterparts from Iran and Egypt and discussed the crisis in Gaza, including the killing of civilians.

The foreign minister, in the conversation with their Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir Abdollahian, also discussed the large-scale displacement of the Palestinians from their homes.

Both sides agreed that urgent steps were needed to prevent conflict from escalating and the provision of humanitarian assistance.

As part of efforts for a coordinated response to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, Foreign Minister Jilani also spoke to the Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri.

In the conversation, they stressed preventing the conflict from escalating, besides protecting civilians from collective punishment, starvation, and displacement. The foreign minister also assured of Pakistan's humanitarian assistance.¹²⁷

Caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani on Sunday termed Israel's ongoing actions against Palestinians “genocide”.

The foreign minister referred to the airstrikes conducted by Israel targeting the civilian population which resulted in the death of "several innocent men, women and children". He lamented that the besieged residents of Gaza did not have access to food, water, or health facilities.

“This is a situation that can be equated with genocide. [As a] matter of fact it is a genocide being conducted by Israel against the poor people of Palestine.”¹²⁸

He added that Pakistan’s position was that Israel must respect United Nations resolutions which recognized the right of self-determination.

He also said that “any attempt to equate Israel, which is an aggressor, with the Palestinian struggle, is unacceptable for Pakistan”, adding that Pakistan demanded that the Palestinian right to self-determination be respected.

The foreign minister called for recognizing Palestine as a separate state with pre-1967 borders and Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. “That remains Pakistan’s consistent position about this particular issue,” he said.

As the Israeli ground offensive in the densely populated Gaza Strip looms large, the Executive Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation will meet in Saudi Arabia on Oct 18. Pakistan is part of the executive committee, and the caretaker foreign minister is scheduled to attend the extraordinary session.

Pakistan to send humanitarian aid to Gaza. ¹²⁹

The European Union

The EU has hastily cut aid to Hamas to show solidarity with Israel and the US. However, it will support the humanitarian assistance of the Gazans in the emergency of the siege and the deteriorating living conditions, and security of the population.

The leaders of all twenty-seven countries in the EU have called for the “immediate and unconditional” release of all the hostages. The leaders will tomorrow meet over video link at an emergency summit called over the weekend as fears across the EU rise over the volatility of the region. In a strongly worded statement European Council president, Charles Michel, said the EU defended Israel’s right to defend itself but said it must be “in full compliance with international law and international humanitarian law.”¹³⁰

Global Public Reaction

European Union leaders will hold an emergency summit as concern mounts that the war could fuel tensions in Europe and bring more refugees in search of sanctuary.

Since the start of the war clashes on the Israel-Lebanon border have left around ten people dead on the Lebanese side, mostly combatants but also a Reuters journalist and two civilians. On the Israeli side, at least two people have been killed.

In Gaza, US efforts to open the Rafah border into Egypt, allowing dual nationals to flee to safety, appeared to flounder.

Hamas demanded the release of 6,000 Palestinians in exchange for what they claimed were up to 250 hostages held in Gaza

The people trapped in Gaza face a growing humanitarian crisis, with supplies of water running low and healthcare facilities on the brink of collapse.

Meanwhile, Hamas says it has continued to fire a "barrage of rockets" at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv - with sirens sending diplomats into bomb shelters.

Pro-Palestinian protests have taken place in several countries across the globe. Protesters marched in several European capitals on October 22, 2023.

Thousands gathered in Paris to demand an end to Israel's operation in Gaza, the first pro-Palestinian rally in the French capital that was not banned on security grounds.¹³¹

Demonstrations took place in the UK, United States, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, India, and other countries, while Germany and France were among nations stepping up security around Jewish temples and schools. Angry protests condemning Israel and supporting the Palestinians in Gaza are taking place across the Arab world.¹³²

All these actions did not stop Israel from continuing its war in Gaza.

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