

The Endgame of the Gaza War and Regional Politics: An Analysis of Recent Developments

On September 20, 2025, at least 36 people were killed, including 31 in Gaza City, as Israeli forces continued to bombard Gaza. The Palestinian Civil Defence says half of Gaza City's population, or about 450,000 people, have fled the area since Israel launched its major operation there in August. UN chief Antonio Guterres says Gaza is experiencing the "worst level of death and destruction" he has seen in his lifetime and calls on the international community not to be "intimidated" by Israel.

Earlier, on September 16, 2025, Israeli forces pressed on with a new ground offensive in Gaza City. The latest Israeli operation further escalates a conflict that has roiled the Middle East and pushes any ceasefire further out of reach. The Israeli military, which says it wants to destroy Hamas' military infrastructure, has not given a timeline for the offensive, but there were indications it could take months. As of September 19, 2025, the Israeli army is mobilizing near the heart of besieged Gaza City, the Strip's main urban center, forcing tens of thousands of Palestinians onto coastal roads in a bid to drive them out of the city. It is conducting nonstop attacks, including strikes by drones and fighter jets and blasts from remote-controlled robots, with the Israeli military blowing up entire neighborhoods as it advances. Israel's war on Gaza has killed at least 65,141 people and wounded 165,925 since October 2023. Thousands more are believed to be buried under the rubble. A total of 1,139 people were killed in Israel during the October 7 attacks, and about 200 were taken captive.[1] .

On September 18, 2025, the Israeli army pushed towards the center of Gaza City from two directions, "sandwiching" residents and forcing them towards the coast in a bid to drive them out of the enclave's biggest urban Centre. Infantry, tanks, and artillery were advancing on the inner city, backed by the air force, to apply pressure on the armed group Hamas. Ahead of the long-anticipated ground incursion, Israel's military accelerated its airstrikes and its bombardment of high-rise towers in Gaza City, the enclave's most populous. Approximately one million people – half of the territory's population – live in and around Gaza City. Israel has tried to force the local population to evacuate, but there are increasingly few safe places in Gaza to go. Palestinians continue to flee the north on foot, by car, and by bike – carrying what they can to the increasingly crowded south. On September 18, the IDF estimated that less than half of the city's residents, some 450,000 people, were left. [2]

On September 18, Hamas issued its strongest messaging about the Israeli hostages in Gaza, saying Netanyahu's Gaza City ground incursion means that Israel has lost any chance of getting its hostages out of the territory – dead or alive. Hamas' statement comes as public anger against Netanyahu and his government continues to mount inside Israel, with the weekly demonstrations in Tel Aviv demanding an end to the war and a ceasefire reaching a fever pitch. However, many hostage families have also said Israel's plans to take the city will be a death sentence for their loved ones. 48 hostages are staying in Gaza, 20 of whom are believed alive.[3]

More than a quarter of a million people have been displaced from Gaza City in the last month, according to figures from the UN, with tens of thousands more forced to flee makeshift homes and shelters daily in the face of a new Israeli offensive. Strikes by Israeli artillery, tanks, and warplanes hit Gaza City again on September 18 as a UN official said "new waves of mass

displacement” were underway, after about 60,000 fled the new assault in 72 hours earlier this week. The Israeli military claims that the total number following Israeli orders to evacuate Gaza City is much higher. Israeli military officials said Gaza City was a “ Hamas stronghold” and that as many as 450,000 civilians had left.

Swathes of Gaza City, once a busy commercial and cultural hub, have been reduced to uninhabitable ruins. Until weeks ago, more than a million people were living there, many already been displaced many times.[4]

Much of northern Gaza is gripped by famine, according to internationally respected experts. Hamas’s armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, warned the Israeli military to expect fierce fighting.

Netanyahu has rejected the advice of Israel’s most senior generals and intelligence officials not to launch the new offensive. Many Israeli observers and commentators accuse Netanyahu, who is facing corruption charges and is wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court, of seeking to fend off early elections, which could force his hard-right coalition from power, by prolonging the war.

Earlier this week, a UN commission of inquiry accused Israel of committing genocide in the Gaza Strip, saying Netanyahu and other senior officials had incited the crime. Israel rejected the findings as “distorted and false.”

On September 18, at least 79 Palestinians were killed by Israeli strikes or gunfire across Gaza. Dozens of Palestinians have been killed throughout the Gaza Strip since dawn as Israel continues its full-fledged ground invasion of its biggest city despite condemnation. At least 40 people were killed in Gaza City on September 18.[5]

The UN humanitarian office (OCHA) warned on September 18 that Gaza City’s last lifelines were collapsing. OCHA accused Israel of “systematically blocking” efforts to bring aid to people, citing the closure of the Zikim crossing to Gaza’s famine-stricken north and bans on certain food items.[6]

Outside Gaza City, at least 10 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire in other parts of the enclave. The Israeli military reported that four of its soldiers were killed in the early hours of the morning in the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Palestine denounced on social media Israel’s “blatant disregard” for international legal requirements to distinguish between combatants and civilians in its air attacks on Gaza.[7]

Pakistan again pressed the United Nations Security Council to demand an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire in Gaza on September 19, 2025. Addressing the Council, Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Ahmed, reaffirmed Islamabad’s “unwavering support” for the Palestinian right to self-determination and urged an end to Israeli military operations. He said Pakistan “stands with humanity, justice and international law,” noting that

Gaza's civilians are still under relentless bombardment and blockade, with children starving, hospitals destroyed, and families lacking food, medicine, and shelter.

Ahmed stressed that Pakistan stands with most Council members and the broader UN membership in reflecting the expectations of the international community for an urgent halt to the fighting. Last November, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its war on the enclave. The proposed deal includes a pause in hostilities, increased humanitarian aid, and negotiations on the release of captives.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan entered a defense pact on September 17 in Riyadh. Observers say it is a landmark moment in the decades-old alliance between the two nations whose ties stretch back eight decades. Pakistan is the Muslim world's only nuclear power. The deal comes at a critical moment. Regional politics have been upended by two years of Israeli aggression – including its war on Gaza and strikes on neighboring states – capped by last week's Israeli attack on Doha, Qatar's capital, which borders Saudi Arabia.

But it also comes amid heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, after a short but intense conflict in May in which they struck each other's military bases over four days, taking South Asia to the brink of a full-fledged war between nuclear-armed neighbors. Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the agreement with Saudi Arabia reflects the "shared commitment" of both nations to strengthen security and promote regional peace, while also pledging to "strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression." "The agreement states that any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both," the ministry said.[8]

Saudi Arabia was one of the first countries to recognize Pakistan after its independence in August 1947. In 1951, the two nations signed a "Treaty of Friendship," laying the foundation for decades of strategic, political, military, and economic cooperation. Over the years, Pakistani armed forces have deployed to the kingdom several times and trained Saudi personnel both in the Gulf and in Pakistan. According to official records, Pakistan has trained more than 8,000 Saudis since 1967. An agreement signed in 1982 further cemented this cooperation by ensuring the "deputation of Pakistan Armed Forces personnel and military training" in Saudi Arabia. But the latest pact arrives as the Middle East's geopolitical chessboard is in flux. The fallout from Israel's war on Gaza and its strikes on regional neighbors has made Gulf states uneasy, many of which still rely heavily on United States security guarantees, even as Washington stays Israel's closest ally.

As of mid-2025, some 40,000–50,000 US troops are stationed across the Middle East, deployed in large bases and smaller forward sites – at least 19 of them – including Prince Sultan Air Base outside Riyadh.

While Saudi officials say the deal with Pakistan has been in the works for at least a year, Sahar Khan, an independent security analyst in Washington, DC, said its language will raise eyebrows in the US.

During its tenure from 2021 to 2025, President Joe Biden's administration imposed sanctions on seven occasions targeting Pakistani individuals and firms over alleged ballistic missile development. Biden administration officials also publicly raised concerns over the range of missiles Pakistan was building, and whether they could carry nuclear weapons as far as the US. Earlier this year, in June, Israel waged a 12-day war with Iran, targeting nuclear facilities as well as senior civilian and military leaders. American bomber jets supported the assault, dropping massive bunker-buster bombs on Fordow, one of Iran's key nuclear sites.

Three months later, Israel struck a building in a leafy Doha neighborhood that is home to embassies, supermarkets, and schools, killing at least five Hamas members and one Qatari security official.

Saudi Arabia has long expressed interest in getting nuclear technology for civilian use, to diversify from fossil fuels. In January, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud reiterated Riyadh's readiness to enrich and sell uranium, a key part of nuclear programmers. Saudi Arabia has also repeatedly made clear that it does not look to pursue nuclear weapons.[9]

Earlier, Qatar was attacked by Israel on September 9 for hosting Hamas leaders, serving as the forward headquarters for the US Central Command (CENTCOM). The Doha attack triggered an emergency meeting of Arab and Islamic nations. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, on September 15, 2025, in Doha. It was decided to activate a joint Defence mechanism.

An editorial in Dawn entitled "Not enough" published September 17, 2025, had voiced the common Muslim sentiment about the summit: [10]:

While the tone of the participants of the Arab-Islamic Summit in Doha on September 15, 2025, was certainly hard towards Israel, unless there are tangible actions to back up the meeting's proposals, the Arab and Muslim world's reaction will remain limited to rhetoric... While Israel has been hitting Muslim states relentlessly since Oct 7, 2023 — mainly Iran and its regional allies — this time the target was different: a pro-US monarchy that also maintains ties with Hamas. The newest choice of target explains why the Islamic world's monarchs and rulers rushed to Doha to deliberate. Yet few actionable goals appeared from the summit. For instance, states were urged to review their economic and diplomatic relations with the Zionist state. One would have thought a definite line of action would have appeared in this regard, not insipid suggestions. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif proposed the formation of a "task force" to deter Israeli aggression ... And yet, as the Muslim world deliberates, Israel continues the bloodbath in Gaza... The Palestinian people have suffered long enough, while there is a very real threat of Israel attacking even more Muslim states as part of its strategy to dominate the region through the sword. Therefore, much more was expected from the Arab League/OIC moot. For one, the complete diplomatic and economic boycott of Israel — and those states that help fund

and support its genocide — until it ceases the violence should have been a unified decision, not an option. Words devoid of actions reflect division and weakness within the Muslim world. Additionally, the GCC's expectation that the US will use its "influence on Israel for it to stop this behavior" is divorced from reality. The Trump administration is openly pro-Zionist, featuring members who consider it a religious and ideological duty to defend Israel and all its crimes. Therefore, if the Arab/Muslim bloc is serious about ending the holocaust in Gaza and preventing more members of its fraternity from becoming Israeli targets, they will need to depend on themselves and produce a solid plan to end Israeli impunity.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has said that Pakistan is a nuclear power and will defend its sovereignty at all costs if attacked, regardless of which country is responsible. In an interview with Al Jazeera in Doha on the sidelines of the Arab-Islamic emergency summit, Dar described the recent Israeli strike on Qatar as a grave action against international law, the UN Charter, and the sovereignty of Muslim countries. He warned that if the Muslim world limits itself to statements alone, countries representing 2 billion Muslims will appear to have failed in the eyes of their people. Dar said Israel has become an uncontrollable state that is challenging the sovereignty of one Muslim country after another. "You have seen Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and now Qatar attacked. This approach is unacceptable," he said, adding that Qatar was engaged in US and Egyptian-mediated peace talks at the time of the strike and that the attack was intended to sabotage that process.[11]

Referring to a meeting of the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation, he said this is not the time for resolutions and statements only; a clear action plan is needed outlining what measures will be taken if Israel does not stop its aggression. He said Pakistan, together with Somalia and Algeria, at once sought a special session of the UN Security Council and mobilized the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Ishaq Dar said military action is a last resort, and Pakistan's priority has always been peace, dialogue, and diplomacy. However, if dialogue fails and the aggression does not stop, effective practical measures will be necessary, "which could include economic sanctions, legal action, or formation of a regional security force." [12]

Israel also conducted airstrikes on five towns in southern Lebanon on September 18, shortly after telling people to flee. Israel has kept up its strikes on southern Lebanon despite a truce signed in November that ended more than a year of hostilities and two months of open war with Hezbollah. It has also kept troops in five locations in the south of Lebanon it considers strategic.[13]

The latest Israeli strikes came a day after Hezbollah commemorated a year since Israel blew up hundreds of pagers and walkie-talkies used by its members, killing dozens and wounding thousands. Israel and Hezbollah had already been engaged in cross-border fighting for a year before the pager attack, which was one of a series of blows that drastically weakened the Iran-backed group, formerly Lebanon's most powerful political force. Under US pressure, Beirut has ordered the Lebanese army to draw up a plan to disarm Hezbollah in areas near the Israeli border by the end of the year. Hezbollah, which has rejected Beirut's plan, is currently preparing to

commemorate the death of its leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli strike on Beirut's southern suburbs in late September 2024.[14]

Meanwhile, the US on September 18 again wielded its veto and thwarted a UN Security Council call for a ceasefire in Gaza, shielding its ally Israel from meaningful diplomatic pressure. The 14 other members of the Council backed the resolution, which started in August in response to the UN's official declaration of famine after two years of Israel's war on Hamas in the Palestinian territory.

The vote came as Israeli tanks and jets pounded Gaza City, the target of a major new ground offensive, forcing Palestinians to flee south.

The resolution text demanded "an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza respected by all parties" as well as the immediate and unconditional release of hostages. The US has repeatedly rejected that approach multiple times, most recently in June, when it used its veto to back Israel.

The earlier US veto sparked an unusual show of anger from the 14 other members of the council, who are increasingly vocal in their frustration over their clear inability to pressure Israel to stop the suffering of Gaza's inhabitants. For the first time September 16, an UN-mandated international investigative commission gave its independent analysis, accusing Israel of committing "genocide" in Gaza since October 2023 with the intent to "destroy" the Palestinians.[15]

The outcome further highlights U.S. and Israeli isolation on the world stage over the nearly two-year war in Gaza. The vote came just days before the annual gathering of world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly, where Gaza will be a major topic and major U.S. allies are expected to recognize an independent Palestinian state. It is a largely symbolic move vehemently opposed by Israel and the U.S., dividing the Trump administration from allies including the U.K. and France.[16]

Algeria, one of the leaders of the resolution, also expressed dismay at another failed council action for Gaza, apologizing to Palestinians for not doing enough to save civilians' lives. Despite the effort not passing, Algeria's U.N. ambassador, Amar Bendjama, said: "14 courageous members of this Security Council raised their voice. They have acted with conscience and in the cause of the international public opinion." Pakistan's ambassador called the vote, which took place during the 10,000th meeting of the Security Council, "a dark moment."

The effort reiterated demands from previous versions, including the release of all hostages held by Hamas and other militant groups following their Oct. 7, 2023, surprise attack in southern Israel that launched the war in Gaza.

In opposing similar resolutions since November, the U.S. had complained that the demands, including a ceasefire, were not linked to the unconditional release of hostages and would only embolden Hamas militants.

The new resolution expressed “deep alarm” after a report released last month by the world’s leading authority on food crises said Gaza City has become gripped by famine, and that it’s likely to spread across the territory without a ceasefire and an end to restrictions on humanitarian aid. [17]

Drawn to the U.N. General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to support a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and urged Israel to commit to a Palestinian state.

The U.S. veto of the resolution comes as about half of Americans say the Israeli military response in the Gaza Strip has “gone too far,” according to the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That is up from November 2023, when 40% said Israel’s military action had gone too far.

But at the same time, Americans overall, particularly Republicans, are less likely to say that negotiating a ceasefire should be a high priority for the U.S. government than they were just a few months ago when the U.S. was holding ceasefire talks with Hamas. [18]

US President Donald Trump said on September 18 that he disagreed with Prime Minister Keir Starmer over Britain's plan to recognize a Palestinian state, after the leaders discussed the war in Gaza.

Earlier, Starmer announced in July that Britain would take steps to recognize a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly in September unless Israel met certain conditions, including reaching a ceasefire in Gaza.

The issue proved to be one of the few sticking points in an otherwise united front put forward by Starmer and Trump during the press conference.

The United States has adamantly rejected the notion of countries recognizing a Palestinian state, even as France, Canada, and other Western allies are set to take the step at the United Nations next week. Starmer had called the situation in Gaza “intolerable” and stressed the “need to get aid into Gaza at speed”.

He added that recognizing Palestinian statehood would be part of a larger “plan for peace,” including ensuring Hamas played no part in its governance, without providing added details about when formal recognition would come. Starmer could complete plans to recognize a Palestinian state as early as this weekend, ahead of the UN summit.[19]

Meanwhile, the tide of American public opinion was turning against Israel. A growing number of Americans now believe Israel's military actions in Gaza have gone too far, highlighting shifting U.S. attitudes as the conflict intensifies. Half of U.S. adults say Israel's response has been excessive, compared to 40% in late 2023. This shift comes as Israel expands its ground offensive in Gaza City amid widespread destruction, displacement of around 90% of Gaza's population, and warnings of famine. International scrutiny has increased significantly, with United Nations experts recently accusing Israel of committing genocide during the ongoing conflict.

Transitioning to broader perspectives, many Americans express doubts about President Donald Trump's handling of the conflict, with approval slipping from 44% in March to 37%. Some, like Miami Republican Miguel Martinez, support defeating Hamas but worry the war is dragging on unnecessarily. Others argue the U.S. should focus less on foreign aid while facing domestic budget pressures, pointing to the administration's push for spending cuts in healthcare and social programs as justification for reducing support abroad. At the same time, calls for long-term solutions persist, particularly among Democrats. About half now believe negotiating an independent Palestinian state is incredibly important, compared with smaller shares of Republicans and independents. [20]

The U.N. General Assembly recently urged Israel to commit to a two-state solution, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is still adamantly opposed. As the humanitarian crisis deepens and political divides widen, Americans remain uncertain about whether U.S. mediation can secure lasting peace in the region or if the conflict will continue unchecked.[21]

A group of US Senate Democrats called on the US government to recognize a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside a secure state of Israel. It signaled a shift in Washington sentiment toward Israel two years into its war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The Democratic-led measure is unlikely to pass the chamber where President Donald Trump's Republicans have a 53-47 majority. Trump said on September 18, 2025, he disagreed with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer over whether to recognize a Palestinian state, and no Republicans have joined efforts to do so. [22]

The resolution urged US recognition of a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel and would offer both sides hope while boosting prospects for peace, Merkley said.

In the House of Representatives, Ro Khanna of California is circulating a letter hoping to rally support for recognition of Palestinian statehood. The actions reflect a shift among lawmakers toward pressuring Israel to end the war and ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza as the conflict approaches the two-year mark. A handful of US allies are preparing to recognize a Palestinian state as world leaders meet at the UN General Assembly in New York next week.[23]

A Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll last month showed that most Americans - 58 percent - believe that every country in the United Nations should recognize Palestine as a nation.[24]

Earlier, on September 17, 2025, Israel launched a full-fledged ground invasion of Gaza City weeks after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered his military to capture it. Despite condemnation and backlash from the families of hostages held by Hamas. The Israeli military estimates its offensive to take “several months” to complete. An independent United Nations inquiry has concluded that Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, in what it described as the “most authoritative UN finding to date.”[25] Over 10% of Palestinians in Gaza have been killed or injured since the war began, the Israeli military's former chief said — a figure very close to that reported by the Palestinian health ministry.[26] Israel announced on September 17, 2025, a “temporary” new route for residents to flee Gaza City. Israel is committing aggression in defiance of international criticism and the findings of a UN commission that it was committing genocide in the Palestinian territory. Israel's foreign ministry rejected the commission's report as “distorted and false.”[27]

Israel's military said that it expects its Gaza City offensive to take "several months" to complete, marking the first timeline it has given for its plan to take control of the territory's largest population center.

Netanyahu said the goals of the offensive were "defeating the enemy and evacuating the population," omitting any mention of the freeing of the remaining Israeli hostages, which had been a constant war aim until now. Hostage families and their supporters protested near Netanyahu's Jerusalem residence on Tuesday, accusing him of abandoning their loved ones.[28] The UN secretary general, António Guterres, said it was clear that Israel had no interest in a peaceful outcome.

"Israel is determined to go up to the end and [is] not open to a serious negotiation for a ceasefire, with dramatic consequences from Israel's point of view," Guterres said.[29] Meanwhile, international condemnation of Israel's actions continues to mount, with the European Union – Israel's biggest trading partner – proposing sanctions and a United Nations Commission report that concluded that Israel is committing genocide. Israel has denied the accusation.

The new assault comes as the United Nations and others have warned that it will only deepen an already catastrophic humanitarian crisis, with parts of Gaza officially in famine. The Palestinian Ministry of Health on September 18, 2025, said that four people, including a child, had died from malnutrition over the last 24 hours, bringing the number of famine-related deaths to 435 since the beginning of the war. [30]

Meanwhile, on September 17, 2025, Israeli President Isaac Herzog urged Europe not to drift from Israel on Tuesday, arguing that the continent will harm itself if it "turns its back on" the Jewish state.

"Want to be clear: Isolating, ostracizing, and penalizing Israel is falling prey to the manipulations of agents of chaos," Herzog said at a German embassy event in the Israeli city of Herzliya. "Europe must understand: Turning its back on Israel at this time is turning its back on Europe's own interests," Herzog continued. "And we will all pay the price. Yes, in science and innovation, in research and culture. But especially in a weakened alliance of moderates in favor of an empowered axis of extremism. We must not allow this to happen."

Herzog's comments come as Israel grows increasingly isolated internationally, both for its actions in Gaza and its recent strike on Qatar. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned last week that the commission will put its "bilateral support to Israel on hold," even proposing sanctions on certain far-right members of the Israeli government.[31] The European Commission is due to present a plan to member states to impose "measures to pressure the Israeli government to change course over the war in Gaza," said the EU foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas. Israel's ground offensive in Gaza will make an already desperate situation even worse," Kallas said, adding: "It will mean more death, more destruction [and] more displacement." [32]

Gaza City and its surrounding region are currently experiencing a famine, the UN says, after Israel severely restricted aid flows. Israel orders Gaza evacuation as it prepares for a major attack.

On September 18, a United Nations Commission of Inquiry concluded that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza. It called on the international community to end it and take steps to punish those responsible for it. Israel said the findings were biased and based on unverified evidence. The new 72-page legal analysis from the United Nations' commission of inquiry on the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel is the strongest finding by part of the UN on Gaza to date. It accuses Israel of committing genocide in Gaza, saying that its offensive there has been waged "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group". Created four years ago by the UN's human rights council and staffed by three independent experts, the commission does not officially speak for the UN, which has not yet used the term "genocide" itself but is under increasing pressure to do so. Israel has rejected the charge of genocide, citing its right to self-defense after the Hamas attack in October 2023 [33] To count as genocide under the 1948 UN genocide convention, adopted after the murder of 6 million Jewish people in the Holocaust, at least one of the five acts must have occurred. The UN commission accuses Israel of committing four. It cited as evidence interviews with victims, witnesses, and doctors, verified open-source documents, reporting by media and NGOs, and satellite imagery analysis compiled since the war began.

In the first category of killing, the commission quotes UN reporting that as of 15 July 2025, at least 46% of Palestinians killed in Gaza were women and children. The commission also cited reporting by the Guardian based on Israeli intelligence that 83% of those killed in Gaza were civilians.

Israel has used heavy unguided munitions with a wide margin of error in densely populated residential areas ... The number of bombs used by Israel since 7 October 2023 is extraordinary, even in comparison to other world conflicts.

Palestinians in Gaza were attacked in their homes, at hospitals, in shelters (including schools and religious sites), during the evacuations, and in designated safe zones. At times, civilians, journalists, healthcare professionals, humanitarian workers, and other protected persons were directly targeted and killed.

The commission highlighted the killing of five children when their family car was targeted near a petrol station in the Tel al-Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City on 29 January 2024, noting that Israeli security forces fired on an ambulance, "preventing access to the victims".[34] It also pointed to casualties that resulted from tight restrictions on humanitarian aid – especially medicine and medical equipment – from entering Gaza, quoting an obstetrician who spoke about deaths of pregnant women he had treated, whom he referred to as "indirect victims of war". The commission describes at length the killing of 15 paramedics by Israeli forces in southern Gaza in March and "notes the consistent pattern of conduct demonstrated by the Israeli security forces in the aftermath of attacks, in that they have often denied and shifted responsibilities until evidence that contradicts their narrative surfaced", also pointing to an acute lack of accountability. The report said Israeli authorities knew of the high numbers of casualties in Gaza

since 7 October 2023, but “did not intervene to change the means and methods of warfare employed, but persisted over time and caused even more Palestinian deaths”.[35]

Turning to the second category of acts that qualify as genocidal, causing serious bodily or mental harm, the commission highlighted the mistreatment of Palestinian detainees by Israeli security forces and mass displacement, which, it said, “has caused serious and irreparable physical and mental harm to Palestinians in Gaza who have lost their homes and have been forced to live in inhumane conditions”.

In the third category of deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, the report noted that much of Gaza had been rendered virtually uninhabitable, that huge numbers of bakeries, schools, cultural sites and religious landmarks had been destroyed, and that attacks on hospitals had led to a collapse of the healthcare system. It also highlighted the recent declaration by respected UN-backed monitors of famine in parts of Gaza.

Considering the evidence in totality, the Commission has found that Israeli authorities were aware of the high probability that their military operations, the imposition of a total siege ... and the destruction of housing and of health systems and facilities would lead to the physical destruction of Palestinians, in whole or in part, in Gaza ... The Commission therefore finds that Israeli authorities knowingly and deliberately inflicted such conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of Palestinians in Gaza.[36]

The section on the fourth category of imposing measures intended to prevent births is more concise and focuses largely on the high proportion of casualties who were children, and the attack in December 2023 against the al-Basma IVF clinic, Gaza’s largest fertility clinic, which reportedly destroyed about 4,000 embryos and 1,000 sperm samples, and unfertilized eggs.

The report noted that much of Gaza had been made uninhabitable, as displaced people fled northern Gaza on September 16 as the expanded ground offensive took effect. [37]

International law experts say that it is often difficult to support genocide charges because of the requirement to prove intent, or even, in some circumstances, sole intent.

The commission concluded that statements by Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel’s prime minister, and other officials were “direct evidence of genocidal intent.”

The report cited his letter to Israeli soldiers in November 2023, comparing the Gaza operation to what the commission describes as a “holy war of total annihilation” in the Hebrew Bible.

The report also named the Israeli president, Isaac Herzog, and the former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.

Navi Pillay, the South African former judge who is the most senior of the report’s three authors, headed a UN tribunal for Rwanda where more than 1 million people were killed in 1994.

“The commission concludes that statements made by Israeli authorities are direct evidence of genocidal intent [and] also concludes that the pattern of conduct is circumstantial evidence for genocidal intent and that genocidal intent was the only reasonable inference that can be drawn from the totality of the evidence,” she said on September 16.[38]

On September 9, Israel ordered residents of Gaza City out, after it said it was about to obliterate the area in an assault to wipe out Hamas. Residents of the city, home to a million Palestinians before the war, have been expecting an onslaught for weeks, since the Israeli government devised a plan to deal Hamas a fatal blow in what it says are the militant group's last strongholds. Most Gazans have already been displaced several times since the war started in October 2023. The entire population has been internally displaced, much of the territory lies in ruins, and a hunger crisis has grown far worse in recent months.[39]

The Israeli military has instructed residents in Gaza City to move to a designated "humanitarian zone" in the already overcrowded Al-Mawasi area along the coast in the south, where thousands of Palestinians have already been sheltering in tents. Israel has also regularly bombed the south. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said on September 8, 2025, the military would unleash a "mighty hurricane" that would destroy Gaza if Hamas did not free the last hostages it holds and surrender.

Israel has called up tens of thousands of reservists for a ground operation. Netanyahu said Israeli forces were organizing and assembling in Gaza City. Israeli forces have been running on Gaza City's outskirts since last month, and the military said it was in control of 40% of the city already. Launching the new Israeli assault could complicate ceasefire efforts to end the two-year war. Hopes had been pinned on mediation efforts to reach a ceasefire that would avert Israel's plan. Netanyahu says Israel has no choice but to complete the job and defeat Hamas, given that the militant group has refused to lay down its arms. Hamas says it will not disarm unless an independent Palestinian state is set up and will not free all hostages without an agreement ending the war. The proposed deal includes a ceasefire, increased humanitarian aid, and negotiations on the release of captives.[40]

Launching the new Israeli assault could complicate ceasefire efforts to end the nearly two-year war. It was hoped that mediation efforts to reach a ceasefire would avert Israel's plan. The health ministry in Gaza appealed to the international community to protect Gaza City's hospitals, warning of "a humanitarian catastrophe that threatens the lives of thousands of patients and wounded individuals".[41]

About 87 people were killed and more than 400 suffered injuries in Israeli attacks on September 6. Another 21 people, mostly in Gaza City, have been killed since September 7. The intensified assault threatens to displace hundreds of thousands of Palestinians sheltering there from two years of fighting. Before the war, around a million people, half of Gaza's population, lived in the city.[42]

On September 9, the Israeli army says it has carried out an assassination attempt on top Hamas leaders in Qatar's capital, Doha, where multiple explosions have been heard. Senior Hamas member Suhail al-Hindi tells Al Jazeera that the group's leadership survived the attack, which another source said happened as a negotiating team was discussing a Gaza ceasefire proposal put forward by the United States. Qatar condemns the "cowardly" Israeli attack, calling it a flagrant violation of international law.

On September 9, 2025, at least 39 people, including several aid seekers, were killed by Israeli forces across the Gaza Strip, medical sources say. Israel's war on Gaza has killed at least 64,605 people and wounded 163,319 since October 2023. Thousands more are believed to be under the rubble. A total of 1,139 people were killed in Israel during the October 7 attacks, and about 200 were taken captive. Since March 2, Israeli authorities have completely closed all Gaza border crossings, pushing the territory's 2.4 million population into famine. The Israeli army resumed its attacks on the Gaza Strip on March 18 and has since killed 12,059 people and injured 51,278 others, shattering a ceasefire and prisoner exchange agreement that took hold in January.[43] There are growing calls within Israel, led by families of hostages and their supporters, to end the war in a diplomatic deal that would secure the release of the remaining 48 captives. Israeli officials believe 20 of the hostages are still alive. Meanwhile, Netanyahu is pushing for an all-or-nothing deal that would see all the hostages released at once and Hamas surrendering. U.S. President Donald Trump said on September 5 that Washington was in "very deep" negotiations with the Palestinian militants. Israeli foreign minister Gideon Saar on September 7 said that the offensive in Gaza could end at once if Hamas released the remaining hostages being held in Gaza and laid down its weapons. "We will be more than happy to reach this objective with political means," he said.[44]

Since March, when Israel unilaterally broke a ceasefire, at least 11,911 people have been killed and 50,735 wounded. Since famine was declared in Gaza, 109 deaths have been recorded, including those of 23 children. Earlier, Netanyahu announced Israel's intention to seize the Gaza Strip after indirect talks with Hamas on a ceasefire and hostage release deal broke down in July. The UN estimates that one million people are still in Gaza City, where it declared a famine last month. It has warned of an imminent "disaster" if the assault goes ahead. Some 367 people have so far died during the war because of malnutrition and starvation.[45]

On September 7, a UN aid chief warned of famine spreading to new areas. There is a "narrow window" to prevent famine from spreading further in Gaza, he said. He then called on Israel to allow unimpeded aid delivery in the territory. According to a global hunger monitor, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are already experiencing or at risk of famine in areas including Gaza City, the enclave's largest urban center, where Israel has launched a new offensive against Hamas.[46]

Meanwhile, President Trump issued a 'last warning' to Hamas to accept the Gaza ceasefire deal. He said, 'The Israelis have accepted my terms' and urged the release of hostages to secure a peace agreement. "The Israelis have accepted my Terms. It is time for Hamas to accept as well," Trump said. "Warned Hamas about the consequences of not accepting. This is my last warning; there will not be another one!" Hamas said in a later statement that it received some ideas from the US side through mediators to reach a ceasefire deal in Gaza. The group said it was discussing with mediators ways to develop those ideas, without giving specifics.

Hamas also reiterated its readiness for negotiations to release all hostages in exchange for a "clear announcement of an end to the war" and the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the enclave. Under the deal, Hamas would free all the remaining 48 hostages on the first day of the truce in exchange for thousands of Palestinian prisoners jailed in Israel and negotiate an end to the war during a ceasefire in the enclave.[47]

Meanwhile, there have been important developments on the international scene. Morbilli, several Western countries, including France, Belgium, the UK, Canada, and Australia, plan to recognize Palestinian statehood during the upcoming meetings of the UN General Assembly on Sept. 8-23, joining 147 nations that already do. The military campaign has devastated the enclave, which is facing famine.

Last November, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its war on the enclave. Israel and its main ally, the United States, reject the recognition moves. International critics say Israel's plan, which includes demilitarizing the whole strip as Israel takes security control, could worsen the humanitarian plight of the 2.2 million Palestinians who live there.

Israel has come under pressure from Arab and Western nations over its conduct in the war in Gaza. A global hunger monitor relied on by the United Nations has declared famine in areas including Gaza City.

Netanyahu says Israel has no choice but to complete the job and defeat Hamas, given that the militant group has refused to lay down its arms. Hamas says it will not disarm unless an independent Palestinian state is set up and will not free all hostages without an agreement ending the war. [12]

Massive pro-Palestinian protests in Western capitals have had an impact, as global public opinion is forcing Western leadership to support the Palestinian cause. However, the US is adamantly supporting Israel in its aggression in Gaza. Unless and until the US stops supporting Israel's chances of an independent and sovereign Palestine does not exist at all. The Trupp administration intends to stop the war but will not support the independence cause of the Palestinian people. Only a groundswell of American public opinion demanding a two-state solution can be effective. The chances of that happening anytime soon are slim, however. Therefore, the misery and cruelty against the Palestinian people by the Israeli military will continue unabated. Too bad for the cause of global justice and human rights.

Israel's aggression against Palestinians has continued for about 23 months now. Much earlier in April, end of 2024. More than 34,535 Palestinians have been killed and 77,704 have been wounded since then. Israel says that 263 of its troops have been killed and 1,592 wounded.[48] The later Israeli ground offensive destroyed vast swathes of Gaza, pushing more than 1.5 million displaced Palestinians into southern Gaza, where they are now sheltering from the war. There is now a crippling blockade of food, clean water, and medicine, according to the UN.[49] There were an estimated 10,000 Palestinians buried under the rubble of buildings flattened by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Civil Defence has said. [50]

It would take two to three years to recover all the bodies unless digging equipment, which has been destroyed by Israel, is urgently replaced, and allowed into the war-ravaged strip, it added. On April 30, 2024, the Civil Defence also warned of the spread of diseases from the decomposed

bodies. It said elevated temperatures in the summer will increase the threat of epidemics, as heat accelerates the decomposition of corpses. [51]

After most Israeli troops pulled out from Gaza's populated areas on April 7, rescuers have been able to reach areas previously considered inaccessible. They have recovered more than 700 bodies found in mass graves at al-Shifa Hospital and Nasser Hospital, the strip's two biggest health facilities. [52]

Palestinian officials previously estimated there were 7,000 people under rubble who had not been recovered and therefore not recorded. The new estimate by the Civil Defence means the death toll could reach at least 44,500 once all bodies are recovered. The majority of those killed and buried under debris are children and women. Rescuers say they have not been able to quickly recover dead bodies due to the Israeli targeting of crew members and their heavy equipment. The civil defense says at least 67 of its members have been killed in Israeli air strikes since October 7. [53]

Additionally, the widespread destruction of infrastructure and roads is complicating rescue efforts. The UN estimates there are 37 million tons of debris in Gaza left by the intense Israeli bombardment of residential buildings for seven months. It could take 14 years to safely clear the debris, according to Pehr Lodhammar, a senior officer from the United Nations Mine Action Service. [54]

Hamas seized sole control of Gaza in 2007, while Fatah keeps partial administrative control in the Israeli-occupied West Bank through the Palestinian Authority.

The armed wing of the Hamas-allied Islamic Jihad fired rockets into Israel on April 29, 2024, signaling the group was still able to launch rocket attacks. In addition, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that since October 7 some 469 Palestinians have been killed and 4,974 injured in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The figure includes people killed by Israeli security forces and Israeli settlers.[55]

In parallel with the war in Gaza, Israel and Hezbollah have been engaged in escalating daily cross-border strikes over the past six months - and their increasing range and sophistication have spurred fears of a wider regional conflict. Hezbollah has amassed a formidable arsenal since 2006. Like Hamas, the militant Palestinian group battling Israel in Gaza, Hezbollah has a network of tunnels to move fighters and weapons around. Its fighters have also been training for more than a decade with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces. Hezbollah has so far restricted its attacks to a strip of northern Israel, looking to draw Israeli forces away from Gaza. Israel has said it is ready to push Hezbollah back from the border, but it is unclear how. Some 60,000 residents have had to leave their homes, in the first mass evacuation of northern Israel, and cannot safely return, prompting increased calls within Israel for firmer military action against Hezbollah. Across the border in Lebanon, some 90,000 people have also been displaced by Israeli strikes.[56]

The Israeli military said in April 2024 that it had completed another step in preparing for war with Hezbollah that centered on planning, including preparations for a "broad mobilization" of reservists.

Since October, more than 300 people have died in fighting in the border area, including Hezbollah fighters. Meanwhile, Hezbollah has built an estimated arsenal of over 150,000 rockets to target Israeli cities.[57]

Saudi Arabia hosted a meeting on April 29, 2024, to discuss Gaza's future with foreign officials, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The talks in Riyadh included UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron and key officials from the European Union, Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, and the Palestinian Authority.

The discussions happened on the sidelines of a special edition of the World Economic Forum. Saudi Arabia and other Arab states have been extremely critical of Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza and called for an immediate cease-fire. The US, UK, and EU are pressuring Israel to allow more aid into the Palestinian territory to ease its humanitarian crisis and prevent a famine. They are urging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to launch an offensive on the city of Rafah, which the Israeli military says is the last bastion of Hamas.

Washington has also been frustrated by what it sees as a lack of Israeli planning for Gaza's post-war situation, and by Netanyahu's unwillingness to discuss steps toward a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar have signaled they are willing to help fund Gaza's reconstruction if Israel accepts negotiations on Palestinian statehood. US President Joe Biden broadly backs the plan.

Blinken has traveled to the Middle East several times since then, looking to have the conflict. In March, he met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the kingdom to discuss Gaza. In addition, they spoke about a possible US-brokered deal that may ultimately see Riyadh normalize ties with Israel in exchange for a security pact with Washington. The Saudi government has said Israel must show its willingness to accept a Palestinian state for the deal to happen.[58]

In September, before Hamas's 7 October attack on Israel sparked the war, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) said that "every day we get closer" to a deal that could also bolster the Washington-Riyadh security partnership.

However, MBS said the Palestinian issue was "significant" for Riyadh, adding: "We need to ease the life of the Palestinians."

Saudi Arabia has never recognized Israel and did not join the 2020 US-brokered Abraham Accords that saw its Gulf neighbors Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Morocco, set up formal ties with Israel.

During a debate in 2019, Biden vowed to treat Prince Mohammed as a "pariah" over human rights concerns. But after Biden visited the Saudi city of Jeddah and fist-bumped the crown prince in 2022, his administration actively pursued a Saudi Israeli deal that would build on the Abraham Accords, a foreign policy win for his predecessor, Donald Trump. The Saudis showed they would want more than their Gulf peers got, bargaining hard for benefits like US security guarantees and aid with a civilian nuclear program with uranium enrichment capacity. In the months that followed, Israeli and American officials issued bullish statements, while the Saudis said characteristically little.

Saudi Arabia holds the most leverage over the Palestinians. It has consistently denounced Israeli forces' conduct in Gaza, accusing them of "unchecked heinous war crimes. Even without the Gaza war, sealing the Saudi-Israeli-US deal would be a tall order. In any case, Netanyahu has repeatedly made clear his opposition to a Palestinian state, saying last month that Israelis rejected any attempt to force a peace deal.[59]

The US stance on the Gaza war is ambivalent and hypocritical, to say the least. President Biden is sending billions of dollars to back Israel's war against Hamas, even as the destruction of Gaza and deaths of Palestinians fuel growing protests on college campuses. Very recently, \$26 billion in new aid to Israel was passed overwhelmingly in Congress and signed into law by Biden. Meanwhile, there is a deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and a looming Israeli invasion of the southern city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinian civilians are sheltering. [60]

While Democrats have expressed growing concerns about how Israel is conducting its war in Gaza, they mostly supported sending more weapons to Israel.

American weapons to Israel remain inviolable in Washington, and the latest package was helped by rallying around Israel after Iran's April 13, 2024, unprecedented attack on the country. However, the aid package highlights a disconnect between Democrats in Congress and rank-and-file voters. There is now support for the Palestinian cause among the left and the Democrats. There is a clear trend that the Democratic Party is moving gradually and increasingly toward aid conditionality.[61]

The Gaza war has unleashed the biggest outpouring of U.S. student activism since the anti-racism protests of 2020. College campuses across the U.S. are roiled by pro-Palestinian students rallying against the war in Gaza and calling for universities to divest from Israeli companies or defense companies supplying weapons to Israel. Protests in Israel have now gripped several U.S. universities, including City College of New York, the University of California in Los Angeles, and Columbia University. The protests have also included Jews opposed to Israeli actions in Gaza, saying they are being unfairly branded as antisemitic for criticizing Israel's government and expressing support for human rights.[62]

On April 29, the New York City police arrested dozens of pro-Palestinian demonstrators holed up in an academic building on the Columbia University campus. They removed a protest encampment that the Ivy League school had sought to dismantle for two weeks. Officers from the New York Police Department have seized protesters who laid siege to Hamilton Hall in the

Columbia University premises on April 29 amid protests against Israel that have gripped several U.S. universities. Police stormed the campus after being requested by Columbia University president to end the pro-Palestine protests. The university faculty, however, released a statement before the police action, blaming the President and staff for the imminent arrests. [63]

Protesters were seeking three demands from Columbia: divestment from companies supporting Israel's government, greater transparency in university finances, and amnesty for students and faculty disciplined over the protests.

President Shafik this week said Columbia would not divest from finances in Israel. [64]

The Gaza war issue has also taken on political overtones in the run-up to the US presidential election in November. White House spokesperson John Kirby on April 29 called the occupation of campus buildings "the wrong approach." [65]

Critics of prevailing U.S. policy toward Israel have urged Biden to use Israel's desire for U.S. weapons as leverage to lessen the suffering in Gaza,

While Biden has pushed for a hostage release and a temporary cease-fire deal and has expressed frustration with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, he has continued to unconditionally send more weapons to Israel, which is committed to fighting until Hamas is destroyed. That aim has placed a target on Rafah, a final Hamas holdout. The US has said it will not back an invasion of the city unless there is a safe civilian evacuation plan, but Israel has vowed to press ahead regardless of outside pressure.

Overall, support for Israel was still tremendously strong in Washington. The \$26 billion package is entirely earmarked for defensive and offensive weapons for Israel, with some funds for U.S. forces in the Middle East.

Biden's commitment to Israel stays extraordinarily strong, for he believes that the security of Israel is critical. Biden claimed that he will always make sure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself against its enemies, such as Iran.

Biden also underscored how the bill contains \$1 billion in humanitarian aid for Gaza, where the U.S. military is airdropping in food and water and also constructing a port off the coast of the territory to get more assistance. That effort comes as Israel faces accusations that it was still restricting aid trucks through land crossings.

On April 30, Netanyahu vowed to launch a ground offensive on the Gaza Strip's far-southern city of Rafah "with or without" a truce deal being agreed with Hamas. The hawkish premier issued the warning despite strong concerns raised by top ally Washington, and hours before US Secretary of State Blinken was set to arrive in Israel on his latest Middle East crisis tour.

Netanyahu, who had vowed to destroy Hamas over its Oct 7 attack, promised "total victory", and said stopping the war "before achieving all of its goals is out of the question". [66]

Meanwhile, Hamas was weighing the latest plan for a truce proposed in Cairo talks with US, Egyptian, and Qatari mediators that had raised cautious hopes for an end to the fighting after seven months. Hamas said it was considering a plan for a 40-day ceasefire and the exchange of scores of hostages for larger numbers of Palestinian prisoners. Israel will also decide soon. [67]

Meanwhile, the US had heightened pressure on all sides to reach a ceasefire - a message pushed by Blinken, who was on his seventh regional tour since the war broke out. Blinken, who arrived in Jordan from Saudi Arabia and was later heading to Israel for talks with Netanyahu and other officials on May 1, 2024, described Israel's offer as "extraordinarily generous". In Amman on April 30, Blinken called for the redoubling of aid efforts at a "critical moment in making sure that everything that needs to be done is being done". He met with King Abdullah II, who stressed the "importance of immediate action to stop the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip and the need to protect innocent civilians", according to a royal statement.

Washington has strongly backed its ally Israel but also pressured it to refrain from a ground invasion of Rafah, which is packed with displaced civilians.

President Biden, facing rising fury on US university campuses, urged the Egyptian and Qatari leaders on April 9 to exert all efforts to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas.[68] Biden called this "the only obstacle" to securing relief for Gaza's civilians, who the United Nations has warned are on the brink of famine.

As the Gaza war has roiled the region and its human toll has sparked international outrage, political momentum has built in the search for a post-war solution to the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

European and Arab foreign ministers met in the Saudi capital on April 29, 2024, to discuss how to join forces on advancing a two-state solution.

To provide Israel with an incentive, Washington has pushed the prospect of normalized relations with Gulf kingpin Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has demanded "irreversible" steps towards Palestinian statehood, which Netanyahu and many members of his hard-right government oppose.[69] EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he expected several European governments to announce their recognition of a Palestinian state within the next month, including Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Slovenia, and Spain.

The UN's International Court of Justice on April 30 threw out Nicaragua's request for emergency measures to stop Germany from sending military supplies to Israel over alleged violations of the Genocide Convention.

In a pending ICJ procedure, South Africa accused Israel of perpetuating genocide in Gaza. China, meanwhile, said that rival Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah had met in Beijing recently for "talks on promoting intra-Palestinian reconciliation".[70] Netanyahu says Israeli forces will enter Gaza's southern city of Rafah regardless of whether a ceasefire deal is reached with Hamas.[71]

On May 1, 2024, UN chief Antonio Guterres warned that an Israeli assault on Rafah would be an "unbearable escalation" that would be "devastating" for Palestinians in Gaza and the wider region. Martin Griffiths, the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, said that "The simplest truth is that a ground operation in Rafah will be nothing short of a tragedy beyond words. No humanitarian plan can counter that." [72]

The most significant of Antony Blinken's meetings in Israel was with Netanyahu. That came less than a day after Netanyahu said he was determined to go into Rafah to launch an operation, whether or not there's any sort of ceasefire agreement.

Earlier, Blinken urged Hamas to take advantage of what they called an extraordinarily generous proposal that would return 33 captives in exchange for 40 days of a first ceasefire, followed by the potential of an extended period of calm. But Netanyahu's comments cloud that, and now Hamas is having to consider a deal on the understanding that whatever happens, there is still going to be an operation in Rafah.[73]

Biden was playing politics as he was saying something and doing something else. He is showing concern about Israel's actions in Gaza but was still giving it new weapons.

The increasing rhetorical criticism of Israel is just playing politics for domestic consumption, and Biden's practical policy calls for continuing support to Israel regardless of its actions in Gaza. In Congress, Democrats willing to oppose aid for Israel remain a small minority, even as concern about the humanitarian crisis mounts. In the House, which voted on separate aid packages for each nation, the final tally was 366-58, with only 37 Democrats against.

A growing number of Democrats have called for to condition of weapons to Israel after an Israeli strike killed seven aid workers with the charity World Central Kitchen, which Israel attributed to a mistake but still led to severe backlash in Washington. In the Senate, only a small group of Democrats are actively calling to condition aid to Israel, including Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who tried and failed to pass an amendment to the bill that would restrict offensive military aid. However, college students are forcing the issue, with growing protest encampments and pressure on university leadership. Some universities have cracked down on the protesters and arrested dozens of them.

The protests are heartening and could lead to more pressure on Democrats to act on Gaza.[74] U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken embarked on three days of uphill Middle East diplomacy on April 29, 2024, hoping to pause the bitter conflict in the Gaza Strip that is taking a heavy toll on civilians and inflaming anti-Israel sentiment in the U.S., complicating President Biden's path to re-election.[75]

The White House's immediate goal is to secure a cease-fire that would delay an Israeli invasion of Rafah, the city in southern Gaza where more than one million displaced Palestinians are sheltering. The Israeli military says Rafah is the last bastion for Hamas battalions in the besieged territory. Washington hopes to delay an Israeli invasion of Rafah as protests rile U.S. campuses and Israel's isolation deepens[76]

Pro-Palestinian demonstrations and sit-ins are spreading at universities across the United States and on several campuses around the world. Columbia University in New York, one of the most prestigious universities in the US, has emerged as the center for student activism since Israel's war on Gaza began. On April 19, more than 100 protesters were arrested on the campus as police cleared an encampment set up by students.

On April 22, Columbia administrators announced that classes would be held in hybrid mode until the end of the spring semester. Students kept a protest encampment in support of Palestinians on April 26, 2024, at Columbia University in New York. The students and faculty members at Columbia were calling for their university to divest from corporations that profit from Israel's war on Gaza, which had now killed more than 34,400 people and injured at least 77,500. At least 491 Palestinians have been killed in the Occupied West Bank. [77]

Meanwhile, large-scale protests on university grounds have spilled over to at least 50 other campuses around the world, including Yale University, Virginia Tech, University of Texas at Austin, University of California at Berkeley, American University, Arizona State University, Indiana University Bloomington, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Michigan State University East Lansing Campus, Morehouse College, New York University, Ohio State University, Rice University, Roosevelt University, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Stanford University, Swarthmore College, Temple University, The City College of New York, The New School, Tufts University, University of California Berkeley, University of California Los Angeles, University of Chicago, University of Colorado, University of Connecticut, University of Maryland Baltimore County, University of Michigan Ann Arbor University of Southern California in Los Angeles, University of Texas Arlington, University of Texas Austin, University of Texas Dallas, Washington University, and George Washington University. At least 900 students and faculty members had been arrested in the US as protesters continue to demand a ceasefire in Gaza and divestment from companies enabling Israel's seven-month war in Gaza. The protests had grown violent as law enforcement agencies tried to remove students and faculty from encampments and protest sites.

Several students had been suspended, put on probation, and, in rare cases, expelled from their colleges. Some universities have had to cancel graduation ceremonies, while others have seen their buildings, quadrangles, and courtyards occupied by the protesters and, in some cases, by encampments.[78]

The Israeli attacks come amid renewed international efforts to broker a ceasefire in the nearly seven-month-old conflict: a Hamas delegation including the Palestinian militant group's deputy Gaza chief, Khalil al-Hayya, was expected in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, on April 29, 2024, to respond to Israel's latest truce and hostage release proposal via Egyptian and Qatari mediators. The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, on his seventh visit to the region since the war broke out, is currently in Saudi Arabia and was expected to visit Israel to discuss the negotiations. A senior Hamas official said on April 28, 2024, that the group had no "major issues" with the most recent truce plan, which essentially remains the same as the deal outlined in several failed rounds of talks since a week-long ceasefire collapsed at the end of November.

Israel's mounting preparations for a ground operation in Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population has sought shelter from the fighting elsewhere, mean this week's talks may be the last opportunity to salvage a diplomatic solution to free hostages and pause or end the war.

Israel has said that Hamas's leadership, along with four battalions of fighters, was camped out in Rafah, using Israeli hostages as human shields, and that a ground operation is necessary to

achieve Netanyahu's promise of "total victory" over the Palestinian militants and bring the remaining 130 or so hostages home.[79]

But the long-threatened plan to attack Rafah has drawn intense opposition from Israel's allies, including the US, which says the overcrowded conditions could lead to thousands of civilian casualties as well as further disrupting aid deliveries entering from Egypt. Joe Biden "reiterated his clear" opposition to an invasion of Rafah in a conversation with Netanyahu on April 28, 2024.[80]

The latest ceasefire proposal includes compromises from Israel, which is under international and domestic pressure over the fate of the hostages and the humanitarian crisis its war has caused in Gaza.

Israel is reportedly willing to accept the release of fewer than 40 hostages in exchange for Palestinians held in Israeli jails, and a second phase of a truce that includes a "period of sustained calm" – a new response to Hamas's repeated demand for a permanent ceasefire. It is also reportedly open to discussing the return of Palestinians to their homes in the northern half of the strip, and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from a central corridor that now divides the territory.

Netanyahu's ministers have publicly sparred on whether to go forward with a truce, with far-right members of his coalition threatening to quit the government if Israel is seen to "surrender" to Hamas's demands.[81]

Secretary of State Antony Blinken is pushing Hamas to promptly accept an 'extraordinarily generous' ceasefire proposal, saying they must describe 'quickly'. The nation's top diplomat was in Saudi Arabia for talks after the White House continued to press Israel not to undertake what it says would be a destructive incursion into Rafah. Israel has 'assured us that they won't go into Rafah until we've had a chance to share our perspectives and our concerns with them,' national security spokesman John Kirby said on April 28, 2024, on a day when President Biden spoke with Netanyahu. 82]

Hamas negotiators were expected to meet Qatari and Egyptian mediators in Cairo on April 29, 2024, to deliver a response to the phased truce proposal that Israel presented over the weekend. A source briefed on the talks said Israel's proposal entailed a deal for the release of fewer than 40 of the 130 hostages believed to be still held in Gaza in exchange for freeing Palestinians jailed in Israel. A second phase of a truce would consist of a 'period of sustained calm' - Israel's compromise response to a Hamas demand for a permanent ceasefire. A total of 253 hostages were seized in a Hamas attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which about 1,200 Israelis were also killed, according to Israeli counts.[83]

Blinken reiterated that the United States - Israel's main diplomatic supporter and weapons supplier - could not back an Israeli ground assault on Rafah if there was no plan to ensure that civilians would not be harmed. Israel retaliated by imposing a total siege on Gaza and its authorities. Palestinians are suffering from severe shortages of food, fuel, and medicine in a humanitarian crisis. Blinken's comments come after Biden phoned Israeli PM Benjamin

Netanyahu to reiterate the 'clear position' on a Rafah invasion. 'The President and the Prime Minister also discussed increases in the delivery of humanitarian assistance into Gaza, including through preparations to open new northern crossings starting this week,' according to the White House readout, in just the latest public mention of the need for measures to assist civilians in Gaza. 'The President stressed the need for this progress to be sustained and enhanced in full coordination with humanitarian organizations. The leaders discussed Rafah, and the President reiterated his clear position,' according to the readout. Britain's Foreign Secretary David Cameron, who was also in Riyadh for the WEF meeting, also described the Israeli proposal as 'generous.' It included a 40-day pause in fighting and the release of potentially thousands of Palestinian prisoners as well as Israeli hostages, he told a WEF audience. 'Hope Hamas does take this deal and frankly, all the pressure in the world and all the eyes in the world should be on them today saying 'take that deal',' Cameron said.[84]

Cameron is among several foreign ministers in Riyadh, including those from the U.S., France, Jordan, and Egypt, as part of a diplomatic push to bring an end to the Gaza war. Blinken reiterated that the United States - Israel's main diplomatic supporter and weapons supplier - could not back an Israeli ground assault on Rafah if there was no plan to ensure that civilians would not be harmed.[85]

More than a million displaced Gaza residents are crammed into Rafah, the enclave's southernmost city, having sought refuge there from Israeli bombardments. Israel says the last Hamas fighters are holed up there, and it will open an offensive to root them out soon. Blinken also said the United States and Saudi Arabia had done 'intense work together' over the past few months towards a normalization deal between the kingdom and Israel - a goal that has been disrupted by the Gaza war. 'To move forward with normalization, two things will be required: calm in Gaza and a credible pathway to a Palestinian state,' he said.

In return for normalization, Arab states are pushing for Israel to accept a pathway to Palestinian statehood on land it captured in the 1967 Middle East war - something Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected. Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, also said on April 29, 2024, that an accord between Washington and Riyadh over normalization was 'very, very close'.[86]

Blinken continued his tour of the Middle East on Tuesday, heading to Jordan and Israel with a focus on getting more humanitarian aid to civilians in the embattled Gaza Strip. The visit, his seventh to the region since Hamas's Oct. 7 attack on Israel, comes amid fresh optimism that negotiations could lead to a cease-fire.[87]

Meanwhile, on April 29, 2024, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said that there is a potential deal for a "sustained" 40-day Gaza cease-fire. Blinken called the proposal "extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel." A former Egyptian official with knowledge of the talks said the first truce would involve the release of 33 hostages. Israel had originally demanded the release of 40.

Members of Congress warned of a backlash if the International Criminal Court issues arrest warrants for senior Israeli political figures, as foreshadowed by Israeli media but not confirmed

by the global court. House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) wrote on social media that the ICC “should stand down on this immediately.”

At least 34,488 people have been killed and 77,643 injured in Gaza since the war began, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but says the majority of the dead are women and children. Israel estimates that about 1,200 people were killed in Hamas’s Oct. 7 attack, including more than 300 soldiers, and says 263 soldiers have been killed since the launch of its military operation in Gaza. [88] On April 29, 2024, Blinken was in Saudi Arabia for a meeting with Gulf region counterparts to discuss a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Blinken’s visit was his seventh to the region since Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel. Saudi Arabia was the first leg of a regional tour that will also take him to Israel and Jordan. He was making a final attempt to secure a cease-fire agreement ahead of a possible Israeli ground operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where some 1.4 million Palestinians have sought shelter in desperate conditions.

On April 29, 2024, Blinken said, “The only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire” is Hamas. Hamas has before it a proposal that is extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel. “They must decide, and they must decide quickly ... Hopeful that they will make the right decision, and we can have a fundamental change in the dynamic.” [89] He said that the most effective way to “alleviate the suffering ... is to get a cease-fire and the hostages home.” He added that the United States was pushing Israel to take steps to protect civilians, improve humanitarian conditions, and keep aid workers safe.

Blinken described the latest cease-fire proposal as “extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel.” Meanwhile, on April 29, 2024, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that “the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire” is Hamas, the invasion in Rafah. “Hamas has before it a proposal that is extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel. “They must decide, and they must decide quickly ... Hopeful that they will make the right decision, and we can have a fundamental change in the dynamic.” [90]

There were some signs of progress on a peace deal between Israel and Hamas to halt fighting in Gaza and release dozens of Israeli hostages. This was widely seen as the last, best chance to prevent a return to full-scale war. It was reported that the first truce would involve the release of 33 hostages. Israel had originally demanded the release of 40. [91]

On April 30, 2024, mediators expressed hope, once again, that there could be a peace deal when Israel softened its position. [92] On April 30, 2024, President Biden urged the leaders of Egypt and Qatar to “exert all efforts” towards securing the release of hostages held by Hamas as part of negotiations for a Gaza ceasefire. Hamas was considering Israel’s offer of a 40-day truce in the war in exchange for the release of scores of hostages. The Biden administration, Qatar, and Egypt have been mediating for months to achieve a truce in Gaza.

Representatives from Egypt, Qatar, and Hamas met on April 29, 2024, in Cairo, with the Palestinian group expected to respond to a proposal for a second truce in Gaza, coupled. British Foreign Secretary David Cameron has urged Hamas to agree to a deal for a sustained 40-day ceasefire in Gaza and the release of potentially thousands of hostages and prisoners. The

foreign secretary also challenged Arab states to accept that the Hamas military leadership responsible for the attack on 7 October must leave Gaza.[93]

Meanwhile, Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry said on April 29, 2024, that his country was hopeful about a proposal for a truce and hostage release in the Gaza Strip. France's foreign minister Stéphane Séjourné, visiting the region, said, "Things are moving forward, but you always must be careful in these discussions and negotiations. The situation in Gaza is catastrophic, and we need a ceasefire.

Meanwhile, Hamas officials have left Cairo after talks with Egyptian officials on a new ceasefire proposal in Gaza. The Hamas delegation would return to Cairo with a written response to the ceasefire proposal, without saying when. While details of the proposed deal have not been made public in full, it is thought the outline involves Hamas returning between 30 and 40 vulnerable hostages, including women, children, and those aged over 50, and Israel releasing scores of Palestinian detainees, accompanied by a pause in fighting for forty days.[94]

Netanyahu's cabinet includes people who are against a deal and in favor of Israel's military launching an assault on Rafah instead.

Blinken has left Saudi Arabia and is next headed to Jordan, where he will meet King Abdullah II, Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, and the UN humanitarian aid and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag. Blinken will head to Israel later in the day.

Washington, Doha, and Cairo have been mediating for months to achieve a truce in Gaza, which has endured relentless bombing by Israel in response to the deadly attack by Hamas against Israel on 7 October. Earlier, the representatives from Egypt, Qatar, and Hamas met on April 29, 2024, in Cairo, with the Palestinian group expected to respond to a proposal for a second truce in Gaza, coupled with a fresh release of hostages.[95]

On April 29, 2024, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was under rising pressure from all sides over his country's ongoing war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Far-right members of Netanyahu's cabinet have threatened to drop their support for his coalition government if he accepts a cease-fire deal with Hamas, but the U.S. and many Israelis are pushing him to strike an agreement to bring the remaining hostages home from Gaza and wind down the devastating war in the Palestinian territory.[96]

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia hosted an Arab European meeting on April 29, 2024, to discuss the recognition of a Palestinian state. The meeting, held in the capital Riyadh, was attended by representatives of 20 countries. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told the meeting that the kingdom is renewing its "commitment to finding a final solution to the conflict, recognizing the State of Palestine and drawing support for a two-state solution." He warned that a planned Israeli ground attack on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip would lead to a disaster.[97] Blinken said on April 29, 2024, that a cease-fire would be the most effective way to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. But he stressed that civilians caught in the middle of the war cannot afford to wait for that to happen, and he urged Israel "to take the necessary steps to meet the needs of civilians." [98]

Blinken acknowledged "measurable progress in the last few weeks, including the opening of new [border] crossings and increased volume of aid delivery to Gaza and within Gaza, and the building of the U.S. maritime corridor, which will open in the coming weeks. But it is not enough," he said.[99] He said President Biden was adamant that Israel should take more specific, concrete, measurable steps to better address humanitarian suffering, civilian harm, and the safety of aid workers in Gaza — including in his most recent call with Netanyahu on April 28, 2024.[100]

In a statement provided after Blinken's Monday meetings with Qatari leaders, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller made it clear that the onus, as far as the Biden administration is concerned, was on Hamas to accept the latest deal. Blinken and Qatar's prime minister "emphasized the need for Hamas to accept the significant proposal that is on the table," Miller said, adding that the top American diplomat had "also underscored our shared commitment to continuing to increase and sustain the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance into Gaza."

United Nations humanitarian agencies have also acknowledged an increase in aid flowing into Gaza, but they continue to warn that tens of thousands of people face famine conditions in the territory, and the uptick in aid has not been enough to avert that.

The challenge for Netanyahu has been weighing the fate of about 130 remaining hostages — including five U.S. nationals still believed to be alive — and the rising pressure over the war's impact on Palestinian civilians, against his stated mission to destroy Hamas. He has said a Rafah incursion is the only way to meet that goal, as Hamas still has combat units hiding out in the city. Calls from the families of the remaining captives to strike a deal have grown louder and angrier, however. They have led regular, massive rallies on the streets of Israel, accusing Netanyahu of failing the hostages. More than once, the protests ended in scuffles with police.

There's pressure for a cease-fire, too, from college campuses across the U.S. — Israel's most important ally and benefactor — and parallel protests taking shape on European university campuses. The anti-war demonstrations have not gone unnoticed by displaced Palestinian students in Rafah, whose education came to an abrupt halt on Oct. 7.

Israel has made a concerted effort in recent days to show it is stepping up aid distribution in Gaza. There's hope that a cease-fire deal could scuttle the plans for Netanyahu's promised invasion of Rafah. Meanwhile, there were three new Israeli strikes in the city on April 29, 2024, amid the renewed talk of a cease-fire. At least five more children were among the dead.[101] Israel now stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). An interim ruling in January 2024 ordered Israel to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian help is provided to civilians in Gaza.

Today, Israelis are not just worried about the open-ended war and its impact on the country's economy. They are also worried about the international image of Israel, given the legal moves against it before the ICJ and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Very recently, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz wrote that “Israel scrambles” as Netanyahu, Defence Minister Yaov Gallant, and Army Chief Herzl Halevi “face ICC warrants for war crimes” in the coming days.[102]

Both the Israeli and the US press have quoted sources in both countries who have said that Netanyahu is reaching out to US President Joe Biden for help. Relations between Biden and Netanyahu have been at an all-time low over the reluctance of Israeli prime minister to accommodate Biden’s request to have the humanitarian violations committed during the war in Gaza.[103]

On April 29, 2024, the US said that it does not support an ICC investigation into the complicity of Netanyahu, Gallant, and Israeli army chiefs in committing war crimes in Gaza. “We have been clear about the ICC investigation that we do not support it. We do not believe that they have the authority,” White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told a briefing.[104]

Earlier this year, the ICJ called on Israel to make sure that genocide is not being committed in Gaza, upon the request of South Africa for provisional measures to be ordered by the top UN legal body.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz, who shrugged off the ICJ ruling, has also said that Israel will not bow to the ICC. Netanyahu has said that it will not influence his decisions.[105]

This tragic situation of a prolonged conflict between Israel and Palestine can only be resolved by the implementation of the universally recognized UNSC Resolution 242 of 1967. The world cannot keep on ignoring the human rights violations in occupied Palestine. Only the United States has the power to bring peace to the region. However, this will not happen unless the world community takes a stand for the independence of Palestine. We, the enlightened people of the world, must unite to implement a two-state solution and bring peace to the volatile region. A fresh wave of student demonstrations and encampments are underway at UK universities in protest over the war in Gaza.

Protests were due to take place in at least six universities on Wednesday, including Sheffield, Bristol, Leeds, and Newcastle, with others expected to follow suit, in a show of solidarity with Palestinians. Protesting students are also calling for their universities to divest from arms firms that supply to Israel and, in some cases, sever links with universities in Israel.[106]

French foreign minister Stéphane Séjourné has spoken briefly to the media after meeting his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in an unscheduled extension to Séjourné’s trip to the region. “We came to coordinate our efforts for a truce. The message given by France and its Arab partners in the region is that Israel pulls back on this offensive in Rafah,” said Séjourné, adding, “It is a question of life and death for many people on the ground.”

Reuters reports he declined to say how optimistic he was of a deal being concluded or give details of where the negotiation stood.

France has three dual nationals still held hostage by Hamas after the group assaulted Israel on 7 October. “We would like them to be on this list if a truce were to happen,” he said.

He also stressed that a French proposal to defuse conflict between Israel and Lebanon’s Iran-backed Hezbollah needed to be high on the agenda, should a Gaza ceasefire be agreed.[107]

As well as the protests at BAE Systems factories in the UK, there is also a pro-Palestinian camp set up outside Scotland's parliament in Edinburgh.

Among the campaign's demands are that the Scottish government apply pressure on the UK government to enact an embargo on all Israeli arms sales, and that local pension funds and local Universities in Scotland divest from links to Israel.

Blinken has posted to social media about his earlier visit today with Israel's president, Isaac Herzog. The US secretary of state said the meeting was to "discuss our support for Israel's security and efforts to reach a ceasefire that secures the release of hostages," adding, "We also discussed the urgent need to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza."

Three arrests have been made in London at a demonstration against UK arms sales to Israel. PA Media reports a Metropolitan police statement said: "We are policing a protest in Admiralty Place and Horse Guards Parade. Officers have made three arrests after protesters blocked access to a building. Protesters must stay within the law."

Organizers have said more than 1,000 workers and trade unionists protested outside BAE Systems sites in three locations, as well as the London offices of the Business and Trade department, to show solidarity with Palestinian workers. Speaking in Glasgow, demonstrator Jamie – who did not wish to give a surname- said: "Our fundamental aim is for the UK Government to introduce an arms embargo, it is the morally right thing to do. It has been almost seven months of death and destruction in Palestine, and the idea that this is being committed by weapons that are being produced in our neighborhoods is horrifying."

On May 1, 2024, France's foreign minister said that there was still work to be done to secure a truce between Israel and Gaza after he was updated by Egyptian officials in Cairo on the status of negotiations. "We came to coordinate our efforts for a truce. The message given by France and its Arab partners in the region is that Israel pulls back on this offensive in Rafah," Stéphane Séjourné said after meeting his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shukri. He declined to say how optimistic he was of a deal being concluded but added that if there were a truce, he hoped that three French-Israeli dual nationals being held by Hamas would be on the list for release.[108] On May 1, 2024, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Israeli leaders in his push for a cease-fire deal between Israel and Hamas to impress on them that "the time is now" for an agreement that would free hostages and bring a pause in the nearly seven months of war. He said that Hamas would bear the blame for any failure to achieve a deal.

A truce could avert an Israeli incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are sheltering. Blinken on Wednesday also told families of hostages held in Gaza that Hamas needs to say yes to the deal.[109]

On May 1, 2024, Blinken said that "The working visits come within the framework of Jordan's efforts to reach an immediate and lasting ceasefire in Gaza and stop the humanitarian catastrophe in the Strip." [110]

James J Zogby, in his insightful article “The impact of the student protests on Biden’s re-election,” published in the Washington Watch published April 30, 2024, wrote that:[111] University student protests US support for Israel’s war in Gaza have spread like wildfire. Last count, there have been sustained demonstrations on over 200 campuses. More recently, students have taken to setting up protest encampments in the center of some campuses. This began last week at Columbia University in New York. Ten days later, there were encampments at almost four dozen universities.

What has been most striking is not only the way this effort has spread, but also the amazing diversity of the students involved in the demonstrations. There are Arab American students, to be sure, who have been joined by fellow students of every race and creed.

The leadership of the protesting students has been disciplined and eloquent in their demands for a ceasefire and an end to the genocide in Gaza. Many have also called on their universities to divest funds from entities contributing to the Israeli war effort. The protesters were peaceful, though purposefully disruptive. At times, they have occupied central locations on campus. They have also chanted, as demonstrators are wont to do. Yet, as noted by respected observers who have visited the protest sites, the protests have been peaceful and orderly.

Goaded by Republican congressional leadership and a few pro-Israel Jewish organizations, there has been an effort to paint these demonstrations as antisemitic and a threat to the safety of Jewish students. The members of Congress have latched onto this, exploiting it as a wedge issue and portraying the protesting students as liberal elites, captive to anti-Israel groups.

Both the Republican leadership and the small but influential group of Jewish leaders have used their respective platforms to repeatedly argue that chants used by some of the students are inherently antisemitic. For example, they have said that “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” is a call to commit genocide against Jews in Israel. They recently passed a Congressional resolution making that very point. Using such deliberately distorted interpretations of the slogans used by the students in support of Palestinians, they have pressured some university presidents to resign and have made life uncomfortable for others.

What has been ignored is that in most of the encampments, a disproportionately substantial number of the protesters are Jewish students. Ironically, while one Jewish leader was advising Jewish students at Columbia University to stay home and not come to campus because it was unsafe for them and was urging New York’s governor to call in National Guard units to restore order on campus, the Jewish students in the encampment were holding an interfaith Passover Seder.

Later, New York City police were ordered onto campus to disband the encampment. This was followed by similar police actions in Texas, California, and Georgia, where disturbing levels of violence (tear gas, rubber bullets, tasers, and baton beatings) were used against the peaceful protestors. Instead of dampening the students’ commitment to continuing these protests, the actions by the police, elected officials, and university administrators have hardened the protesters’ resolve. And so, the day after the encampments were forcibly disbanded, the students returned, reestablishing their protest sites.

With the ire of the students directed not only at Israel's genocidal behaviors in Gaza but also at how the Biden administration has enabled this war to continue, the way these campus protests are playing out does not bode well for the President during this election year.

Comparisons are being made to the 1968 anti-Vietnam War protests and the role they played in costing Democrats the presidency. Having been a participant in protest politics both in that period and the current one, I can attest to the similarities, as well as some significant differences. Vietnam was the first war that was televised, bringing it into American homes. We saw the impact of napalm on civilians and learned of the use of torture against prisoners. In addition to opposition to the war for moral or political reasons was the more personal and unsettling concern with the national draft that required young people to register for military service. The Vietnam era was also a time of broad national ferment that saw the emergence of several other protest movements: civil rights, environmental concerns, women's rights, and such. There was limited overlap in the participation in these diverse movements.

Today is different. There is a significant overlap in the movements for women's rights, Black empowerment, environmental justice, and now opposition to Israel's war in Gaza. And because of the impact of social media, today's young people, whom my brother John Zogby calls "the first global," are experiencing the war in Gaza non-stop, up close, and personally, and are deeply disturbed by what they see.

There were no Vietnamese students on campuses in the 1960s, but today, empowered and organized Arab American and progressive American Jewish students have taken the lead in mobilizing opposition to Israel's Gaza war, with the former saying, "Not to our people," and the latter saying, "Not in our name." Because they have found allies in the other movements in which they too were participants, the anti-war effort has grown.

Through it all, the Biden White House has proved only limited concern, convinced that they will weather this storm and still defeat Donald Trump in November. They dismiss polls showing the President losing support among young and "minority" voters. This is a dangerous miscalculation. As primary elections in several states have proved, there is a hemorrhaging of support for the President's reelection. And as repression against student demonstrators continues, that opposition is solidifying.

Should the war continue for several more months and the scene at this summer's Democratic Convention in Chicago be as ugly as it was in 1968, many young voters will be hard-pressed to vote for Mr. Biden. They will not vote for Mr. Trump. They will either vote for a third party or not vote at all.

War on Gaza: Estimated 10,000 Palestinians buried under rubble, civil Defence says, April 30, 2024 There are an estimated 10,000 Palestinians buried under the rubble of buildings flattened by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian civil Defence has said. It would take two to three years to recover all the bodies unless digging equipment, which has been destroyed by Israel, is urgently replaced and allowed into the war-ravaged strip, it added.

In a press release published on April 30, 2024, the Civil Defence also warned of the spread of diseases from decomposed bodies. It said elevated temperatures in the summer will increase the threat of epidemics, as heat accelerates decomposition of corpses.

“The General Directorate of Civil Defence renews its appeal to all relevant parties, led by the United Nations and the World Health Organization... to urgently intervene,” the statement read. It added that pressure was needed to “allow the entry of heavy equipment necessary to enable our crews to save the lives of those wounded by the ongoing Israeli bombing, as well as to extract the bodies of the martyrs that are decomposing under the rubble, and are causing a health disaster for the population.”

After most Israeli troops pulled out from Gaza's populated areas on 7 April, rescuers have been able to reach areas previously considered inaccessible. They have recovered more than 700 bodies found in mass graves in al-Shifa hospital and Nasser hospital, the strip's two biggest health facilities. They have also launched fresh attempts to remove rubble in some areas in the northern Gaza Strip. Using basic tools, they recovered some decomposed corpses from under the debris of buildings earlier this week.

However, they said their efforts are limited due to the lack of heavy digging machinery. “Civil Defence crews in the northern Gaza governorate embarked on these efforts, with the support of residents and volunteers using available simple hand tools,” they said. “In light of the lack of heavy equipment such as bulldozers and excavators, these efforts will remain insufficient and will not meet the minimum requirements necessary to recover the bodies of thousands of martyrs.”

Palestinian officials previously estimated there were 7,000 people under rubble who had not been recovered and therefore not recorded. The new estimate by the Civil Defence means the death toll could reach at least 44,500 once all bodies are recovered. The majority of those killed and buried under debris are children and women. Rescuers say they have not been able to quickly recover dead bodies due to the Israeli targeting of crew members and their heavy equipment. The Civil Defence says at least 67 of its members have been killed in Israeli air strikes since 7 October.

Additionally, widespread destruction of infrastructure and roads is complicating rescue efforts. The UN estimates there are 37 million tons of debris in Gaza left by the intense Israeli bombardment of residential buildings for seven months. It could take 14 years to safely clear the debris, according to Pehr Lodhammar, a senior officer from the United Nations Mine Action Service.

What are the major challenges facing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as his country enters the seventh month of its war on Gaza, asks Dina Ezzat?

As the Israeli war on Gaza gets close to hitting the seven-month mark, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seems to be facing more problems than ever. He does not seem to have plans to end the war, but according to the Israeli press, he is not in a good place and has been becoming increasingly erratic.

It may not be the war or Netanyahu's plan to start a ground offensive on Rafah in the Southern Gaza Strip that is alone responsible for the pressure. "There is pressure on Netanyahu from the US to reconsider his plans to enter Rafah, but this pressure is coupled with promises of other types, including new military packages and new Arab Israeli normalization deals," said one Arab diplomatic source.

He said the US was hoping to convince Netanyahu to execute the Rafah offensive in a way that would not cause the expected humanitarian tragedy. He added that several Arab and European capitals are on board in offering Netanyahu their support in sparing Rafah. However, the question is whether the details of the planned ground offensive against Rafah are really Netanyahu's biggest worry. Diplomats who spoke to Al-Ahram Weekly in Cairo and from several concerned capitals abroad argue that Israel's "master manipulator" has more pressing issues to deal with.

One critical issue on Netanyahu's agenda, the most important, is the outcry in Israel over draft legislation designed to end an exemption that has been traditionally granted to ultra-orthodox Jews attending religious schools to serve in the Israeli military. With Israel entrenched in its prolonged war on Gaza and with worries over a possible Israeli war on Hizballah in Southern Lebanon, there has been debate over the fairness of this exemption among other Israelis who must do mandatory military service.

In March, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled in favor of ending the exemption on the basis that it was discriminatory. Ultra-orthodox Haredi Jewish leaders decried the ruling and insisted that they would not accept it. By the last day of June, legislation on the matter should be in place. However, ultra-orthodox members of Netanyahu's own governing coalition have made it clear that they will not support any such legislation.

The Haredim community represents about 13 per cent of Israeli society. If ultra-orthodox members of the ruling coalition, including the United Torah Judaism and Shas Parties, were to walk out over the military service legislation, then Netanyahu would have to face one of the things he is most worried about these days: elections.

In the face of the large demonstrations that have been calling on him to step down over his failure to secure the return of all the Israeli hostages taken by Hamas during its operation against Israel on 7 October last year, Netanyahu has been determined that he will not go for early elections. The current extreme-right Israeli government was formed at the end of December 2022. It is not until the fall of 2026 that its term expires.

In the view of diplomats following Israeli politics, it is unlikely that the failure of Netanyahu to secure a deal with Hamas to allow for the return of hostages will bring him down. However, these same diplomats say that Netanyahu cannot shrug the Haredim's position off in the same way that he has been shrugging off the public outcry over his failure to live up to his promise to bring back all the hostages and his failure to agree a deal with Hamas.

Today, they say, Netanyahu is engaged in talks over a re-routing of the government if the ultra-orthodox Jews were to quit over the conscription legislation. Even when the law is passed, it will

be an uphill battle for Netanyahu to see that it is seen when the ultra-orthodox leaders have been making it clear that they will not see it.

One of Israel's two chief rabbis, Yitzhak Yosef, said that the Haredim will leave Israel if the exemption is dropped. Netanyahu does not have many choices. He could bow to the Supreme Court ruling that has wide public support against the ultra-orthodox. He could appeal against the ruling to the possible fury of public opinion. Or he could just drop the legislation to his own political embarrassment. "There is no easy choice, and this issue is just one of many on the bill that Netanyahu now has to pay for his prolonged war on Gaza," one of the diplomats said. There is also another equally consequential item, he said, namely the resignations of Israel's top military brass over the Hamas operation on 7 October. On 22 April, Aharon Haliva, the Israeli military intelligence chief, resigned because of failures in predicting and preventing the Hamas operation. "There is a lot of speculation about what this resignation actually means and about what [Haliva] will be saying about what happened prior to 7 October and during the subsequent months of the war and whether he will say anything that could blame Netanyahu," the same diplomat said. He added that, coming at a crucial point of the war, when Netanyahu has failed to eliminate Hamas as he said he would, the resignation makes the situation a lot more difficult for the Israeli Prime Minister, who has so far declined responsibility or failure.

Haliva's resignation came after several other resignations in the Israeli army spokesman's team in March. According to diplomatic sources, it is not necessarily the last of the resignations that Netanyahu might have to deal with over the Gaza war. "This is a big challenge for Netanyahu, who wants to strengthen the morale of his soldiers ahead of the Rafah ground offensive that is promising to be a tough battle given the strength that Hamas has been showing despite the brutal Israeli strikes," the diplomat said.

He added that even if those resigning did not blame Netanyahu for any wrongdoing, their action is demoralizing for soldiers on the ground, no matter the public and political support the army has for its war on Gaza. "This is the last thing that Netanyahu would want right now, ahead of his anticipated operation against Rafah – a demoralized army that has been in an open-ended war for [close to] seven months with no end at sight," the diplomat said. He added that foreign embassies in Israel have been checking an increase in the number of Jews leaving Israel. The Israeli press has been showing that reverse migration has been on the rise in the country, with close to a quarter of a million people having already left as the war was getting into its third month by the end of December. "We don't know the figures today, but we do know that they are increasing fast," the diplomat said.

Israelis, he said, are not just worried about the open-ended war and its impact on the country's economy. They are also worried about the international image of Israel in view of the legal moves against it before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

This week, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz wrote that "Israel scrambles" as Netanyahu, Defence Minister Yaov Gallant, and Army Chief Herzl Halevi "face ICC warrants for war crimes" in the coming days.

Both the Israeli and the US press have quoted sources in both countries who have said that Netanyahu is reaching out to US President Joe Biden for help. Relations between Biden and Netanyahu have been at an all-time low over the reluctance of Israeli Prime Minister to accommodate Biden's request to have the humanitarian violations committed during the war in Gaza.

On Monday, the US said that it does not support an ICC investigation into the complicity of Netanyahu, Gallant, and Israeli army chiefs in committing war crimes in Gaza. "We have been clear about the ICC investigation that we do not support it. We do not believe that they have the authority," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told a briefing.

Earlier this year, the ICJ called on Israel to make sure that genocide is not being committed in Gaza, upon the request of South Africa for provisional measures to be ordered by the top UN legal body. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz, who shrugged off the ICJ ruling, has also said that Israel will not bow to the ICC. Netanyahu has said that it will not influence his decisions. The Earlier phase of the war in 2023.

Much earlier, the threat of an all-out ground war loomed. Weeks of heavy bombardment of Gaza have claimed over 8,005 lives, including at least 3,595 children, and injured 20,242.[112]. Another 1,000 people were missing and believed to be under rubble. At least 1,400 Israelis have been killed, including foreign nationals. [113]

In the occupied West Bank, 96 Palestinians have been killed and more than 1,650 injured. At least 27 Americans have also been killed in Israel. Hamas militants held 222 people captive. Four of those have been released.[114] More than 5,000 have been injured on both sides of the conflict.

Israel has launched indiscriminate and relentless airstrikes, besides an invasion on the ground, while blacking out communications and internet services in the Palestinian territory. 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 since late October 27, 2023.[115]

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." [116] "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 12 hospitals and 32 health care centers were forced out of service due to Israeli bombing or lack of fuel and medical supplies.[117]

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:[118]

The situation in Gaza is growing more desperate by the hour. 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 seeing 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. 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... 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." [119] 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, found 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.

"Supplies on the market are running out while the humanitarian aid coming into the Gaza Strip on trucks from Egypt is insufficient," UNRWA said, adding that the current system to get humanitarian convoys into Gaza was "geared to fail". "The needs of the communities are immense, if only for basic survival, while the aid we receive is meagre and inconsistent."

UNRWA has said that its ability to help people in Gaza has been completely stretched by air strikes that have killed more than 50 of its staff and restricted the movement of supplies. [120]

Israel also warned Gaza City residents that the area was now a "battlefield," saying "shelters in northern Gaza and Gaza (City) are not safe" in leaflets dropped by fighter jets that urged them to "immediately" evacuate south.

Hamas's armed wing said it was ready to release the captives if Israel freed all the Palestinians held in its prisons. "The price to pay for the large number of enemy hostages in our hands is to empty the (Israeli) prisons of all Palestinian prisoners," it said.

"If the enemy wants to close this file of detainees in one go, we are ready for it. If it wants to do it step-by-step, we are ready for that too." [121]

The cross-border skirmishes have killed at least 58 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. [122]

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

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." [123]

On October 22, Iran's senior diplomat, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, issued a warning about the violence spreading. He said that if Israel and Washington did not "at once stop the crime against humanity and genocide in Gaza, "the region would go out of control." [124]

However, just hours after the Pentagon moved to step up military readiness in the region, Washington declared it would not hesitate to intervene if there was 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. [125]

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. [126] 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. [127]

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." [128] 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. [129]

This time Israel aims “to go in and clean it and to cut 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.”[130]

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.[131]

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.

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.

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 that 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, 100 trucks enter Gaza every day. So, 20 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.[132]

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 aid,” Philippe Lazzarini, the UNRWA Commissioner-General, said in a statement Sunday.

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 at once while ensuring that it is only used for humanitarian purposes.[133]

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 needed.”

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.[134] “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.”[135]

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." [136]

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, 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 100 trucks would be needed daily to meet essential needs in Gaza.[137]

The United Nations (UN) said on October 20, 2023, that the first aid 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".[138] "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.[139]

The Egyptian foreign ministry has accused “Western media” of targeting the country over the Gaza humanitarian crisis. On the social media site X, formerly 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.”[140] It added: “Rafah crossing is open, and Egypt is not responsible for obstructing third-country nationals’ exit.” A later 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. The UN said 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 number of casualties amongst children is rising." [141] 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.[142]

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.[143]

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”. 500 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.[144] 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.[145]

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 59 attacks on the Gaza Strip, which resulted in the death of at least 16 health workers since October 7.

Israeli bombardment on Gaza has also killed 15 staff of the United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA) and four Palestinian 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 are prohibited under international criminal law. “We sound 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 killings in the West Bank, there is also a risk of genocide against the Palestinian 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 at once 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.[146]

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.”[147] 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 refugees (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”. [148]

Israel says it is attacking Hamas militants wherever they hide in Gaza and have accused the militants of taking shelter among the civilian population. The death toll of Israelis and Palestinians neared 5,000, making the conflict the deadliest of five wars involving the narrow, densely populated strip of land bordering Israel, Egypt, and the Mediterranean Sea. International aid agencies have called for aid to be urgently allowed into the territory, and for Gaza's border with Egypt to be opened to allow 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.

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 at once 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 the 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 is still 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 help 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 or ventilators. In northern Gaza, unknown numbers stayed, 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.

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.[149]

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.”[150] 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 the hostages held by Hamas 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 that 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 stays 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 stays 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?

On October 29, 2023, Türkiye'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 Türkiye.[151] 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.[152]

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.[153]

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.[154]

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".[155] 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.[156]

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 help, 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 earlier 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 help 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”[157]

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.

Though the Biden administration has said repeatedly that 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 that the United States has appointed a terrorist organization, would be more likely to take a provocative strike at a traveling president, according to one of the officials." [158] 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".[159] 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, keeps that:[160] America's intense wartime 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 those 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 ending Hamas. The captives are believed to include nationals of countries including Thailand and Germany. Other countries have reported their citizens 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 hostage 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 that the siege will result in an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe inside the Palestinian enclave.

Enter your email to sign up for CNN's "Meanwhile in the Middle East" Newsletter. "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 running, 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 number 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 visited 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 decide 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 planes, including A-10 Warthogs, arrived in the Middle East, 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.

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 that 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 did not 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 the 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) have 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.

Meanwhile, leaders of all twenty-seven countries in the EU have 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 to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table, and an emergency humanitarian channel must be set up 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.[161] 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 at once reverse evacuation orders for hospitals in northern Gaza, saying the deadlines are impossible to meet and risk added loss of life. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that attacks on healthcare facilities are already causing added 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." [162]

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 at once 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 aims is valid. They should not become bargaining chips, and they must be implemented because it is the right thing to do," he said.[163]

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 part of the 140-square-mile territory.[164]

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. Gaza was 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.[165] “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 said 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 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.[166]

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 around the clock with various interlocutors to ensure humanitarian access in Gaza,” the spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, Stéphane Dujarric, told CNN.[167]

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 be evacuated, 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.[168]

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 move at all.

Palestinian Red Crescent Society spokesperson Nebal Farsakh said that although Israel had let them know 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 be "a second catastrophe for the Palestinian people," according to Wafa.

Regional concerns are growing.

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 made 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 planes 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 made 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.

Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Office has 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 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 its 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. Meanwhile, the Arab League and African Union have 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 invasion.

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.[169]

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 had 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 had again pummeled northern Gaza with fresh air strikes on October 14, 2023.[170]

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 that 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.

Meanwhile, Israel faces 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.[171]

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.

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, 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 the 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 on 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 who 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 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 resolution is going to be one of the single biggest challenges for Israel in the coming weeks.

Diplomacy 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

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.[172]

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 looked 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, the 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 can flow into besieged Gaza, and somehow stop the spread of the conflict in the region, and get the American hostages released. There was little success in his mission, which was expected. [173]

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 over the past 12 days of aerial bombardment.

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

February 2022.[174] “‘‘ 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.’’[175]

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. “‘ 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 sign that Hezbollah militants were amassing on 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 ... 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’’. [176]

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. [177]

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.’’ [178] It will also send multiple military ships and the world’s largest planes, the USS Gerald Ford, closer to Israel as a “‘ deliberate show of force.’’ US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the US will provide security aid to Israel imminently. [179]

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.[180] “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.[181] “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 it,” Bush added. [182] 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,”[183] 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.” [184]

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 ease 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.[185]

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 aid 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. So, Congress needs to take its 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”. [186]

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 checked 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.[187]

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.[188] “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 an 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 Security Council (UNSC) meeting on October 8, 2023, did not 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 shows 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 not blaming 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, the 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 a long time. 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 must be brought back to the negotiating table, and an emergency humanitarian channel must be set up 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". He 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 ago after fighting and losing several wars. Being an important center of Islamic civilization and culture, the Egyptian government had to bow to 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 aid 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 Gaza 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 Gaza 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 still been closed. Egypt can play a facilitation role in the war.

Pakistan

Pakistan is a very staunch supporter of the 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.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia co-convened the meeting 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.[189]

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. [190]

In response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Pakistan has decided to swiftly send humanitarian relief aid to Gaza. The government of Pakistan was 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 completing 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.”[191]

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, was unacceptable. The international community must work together for a just, comprehensive, and lasting two-state solution with a practical, 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 find 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 set up any solid conclusions on their essence and layout. Discussions on their content -- like those held during the April resumed session -- are valuable but show that there is a certain degree of disparity between viewpoints. [192]

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 denied that there was any change in Pakistan's policy on Israel. It would continue pursuing the same policies adopted in the past and will continue to do so until the Palestinians reach 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.

Jillani asserted that Israel should respect and implement international laws, the UNSC, and the OIC resolutions about 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. About 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 aid to Palestinians. Pakistan is ready to provide humanitarian aid 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, dispatched humanitarian aid 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 at once dispatch humanitarian relief 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 the Rafah Crossing in exchange for allowing Americans and other foreigners to enter 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.[193] 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." [194] 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 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. [195]

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 a 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 the 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 a 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 Pakistan's humanitarian assistance.[196]

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." [197] 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 October 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. [198]

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 the security of the population.

The leaders of all twenty-seven countries in the EU had called for the “immediate and unconditional” release of all the hostages. T. 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.”[199]

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.[200] Demonstrations took place in the UK, United States, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, India, and other countries, while Germany and France were among the 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.[201]

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 Naba, 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 are still 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.

What comes next?

Today, there are increasing concerns that the conflict could spill out into the region. 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 ragtag militia at 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 with 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 aid 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, months at the best. The US has a convergence of national interest with local powers like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and even Pakistan to have the war in 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 cutting 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 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 further weaken 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, 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 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 sentiment 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 is possible provided there is a quick cease-fire and an end to hostilities. However, the US itself cannot even easily stop the Israeli momentum of war. Therefore, weeks of bloodshed can be seen in the Gaza and the northern Israel border with Lebanon. It all depends on Israel and its staunch American backer.

The war will have an impact on the entire region. 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 recent 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.

The Last Chapter: Likely Outcomes

Appeals for restraint came from around the world, though the US stood by Israel. Nonetheless, as the situation in the Gaza Strip deteriorates significantly, a new push for the establishment of the Palestinian state may well occur in the UN General Assembly. From 1948 onwards, Israelis have been forcibly expelling Palestinians from their homes. The only solution to the conflict is the implementation of the universally agreed UNSC resolutions 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 reach its freedom. Despite the growing crisis, the administration of US President Trump has failed to restrain Israeli aggression. 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 reached 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 people of the Middle East region deserve better. Peace and justice must be prioritized over war.

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 2 billion or so. It miserably did not come to the aid 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 Trump administration to get much-needed humanitarian aid flowing into Gaza. But that is hoping too much as the Islamic world faces an acute crisis of leadership. The very recent OIC emergency summit of heads of government did display a united front on a one-point agenda: getting desperately needed humanitarian aid flowing into Gaza once again. No one mentioned military assistance, just humanitarian aid. But that was asking too much from a timid and feckless Islamic leadership. It is both possible and doable. We are running out of time, though.

Meanwhile, it is certainly heartening to note that the world's public opinion has turned against Israel's aggression in Palestine. The world's leadership, except Netanyahu, now wants a ceasefire and an end to the war. Netanyahu still wants a total victory of sorts over Hamas and the release of the Israeli hostages. However, he cannot achieve the desired annihilation of Hamas simply because of its deep roots in Gaza. Hamas is more than just a militia, as it symbolizes the very idea of resistance to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land. Today, Gazans are effectively trapped, with neighboring Arab nations fearful that if Palestinians leave the Strip, they could be permanently exiled. There are demands from extreme right-wing politicians in Israel that the Palestinians be evacuated permanently to Sudan, or somewhere else, from Gaza. That would be a monumental tragedy if it were to happen. Somehow.

Many world leaders and political analysts agree with this argument. The Trump Administration is still trying to get a ceasefire deal done between Hamas and Israel. It is not likely to happen as the distrust between the Palestinians and the Israelis is just too much. America has no credibility as an honest broker that could ease a peace deal to end the conflict. As a result, the US has lost its credibility, and the Palestinians do not trust it. The Trump administration is bristling supporting Israel's aggression and is not viewed as an honest broker who wants the war to end. Many now see it simply as a cover to give Israel more time to get the job done, as seen by Netanyahu. No one trusts the Trump administration anymore because of its recent actions, and more importantly, inaction. The only country in the world that can stop Israel from killing the Palestinian people is the US, but it will not act when it is most required. The domestic politics of the US, where pro-Israel political forces are still extraordinarily strong, will eventually triumph over any tangible action toward ending the tragic war. It needs to be reiterated that only a two-state solution can bring peace to the region. Nothing else can. But it will not happen as Israel will not stop unless and until it is forced to do so. Meanwhile, shame on the Arab and Muslim world for not raising their voices forcefully in support of a ceasefire and the eventual independence of Palestine. The Pakistan-Saudi defense pact is an important development and a signal to Israel to mend its ways. Given the tragic circumstances in Gaza, which is not enough, though. That is tragic, indeed. Thus, the Israeli aggression against Gazans and Palestinians in the West Bank shall continue with impunity. It is a tragedy that can still be avoided, provided the Trump administration acts forcefully to thwart Israeli aggression in Gaza and the West Bank. However,

it is not likely to happen anytime soon. The cost to America is going to be the further loss of overall influence in the greater Middle East, the Islamic region, and the even greater global South. We wish it were otherwise.

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. The UN must also support negotiations on getting aid into the blockaded Gaza Strip. The Palestinians continue to suffer from Israeli brutal offensives. Israel is adamant to destroy the Hamas. Meanwhile, the US is not doing enough to stop Israel from destroying what stays of Gaza. Today, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is beyond terrible. It must end now. There must be an immediate ceasefire. We must move on to a two-state solution to the decades-old conflict. Only the US can force Israel to move in that direction. No one else has the leverage on Israel. But it will not happen as the Trump administration is playing politics with the whole Palestinian Israeli conflict issue. Given the domestic politics of the US, the Trump administration will not take any strong action to deter Israel from committing further aggression in Gaza and the West Bank.

The total siege of Gaza was becoming unbearable. The Gazans were on their own and could not depend on anyone else to come to their rescue. The world community of nations, especially the Arabs and Muslims, had betrayed them. So, they had to act with their backs against the wall. So, to speak. That is most tragic and unfortunate, but it is still a hard reality, nonetheless.

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