

GAZA – LAND OF HUMANITARIAN APOCALYPSE

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December 11, 2023

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is deeply rooted in the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, characterized by a denial of right to self-determination, territorial disputes, historical grievances, and geopolitical complexities. Gaza has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007 when Hamas took control of the territory. The blockade severely restricts the movement of goods and people, contributing to economic decline and human suffering. The ongoing crisis in Gaza is marked by a complex web of humanitarian crises on multiple levels with no solution in sight. The brutalities carried out by the Israeli forces and the response by the international community has left the world divided.

Resolution-2712

After the failure of multiple resolutions, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution-2712 (2023) proposed by Malta on November 15, 2023, urgently urging the implementation of prolonged humanitarian pauses and the establishment of corridors spanning the entirety of the Gaza Strip. The resolution will facilitate the unimpeded delivery of aid and the prompt evacuation of individuals requiring medical assistance. This action came in response to four previous unsuccessful attempts to address the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Ambassador Vanessa Frazier, the proponent of the resolution, emphasized the necessity of establishing corridors across the Gaza Strip for a significant duration.¹ The overarching goal of the plan was to provide a secure environment for the local populace, with a particular focus on the protection of children. The resolution underscores the critical importance of safeguarding civilian lives and ensuring access to essential resources and medical services during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Moreover, the resolution calls for the unconditional release of individuals held captive in the Gaza region. This measure garnered the support of 12 affirmative votes, with no opposition and three abstentions from Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

The adoption of this resolution carries the weight of binding international law, although historical instances reveal that Israel has not consistently adhered to various Security Council resolutions with similar legal mandates. Noteworthy is the fact that the United States, a major diplomatic player on this subject refrained from exercising its veto power, allowing the resolution to pass. This decision is anticipated to intensify the pressure on Israel, as it signifies a departure from the customary exercise of the U.S. veto privilege in such matters.

Earlier, a series of four resolutions faced unsuccessful outcomes in the Security Council over two weeks. On two occasions, Russia fell short of securing the requisite minimum votes, while a Brazilian-drafted resolution was vetoed by the United States. Additionally, a resolution presented by the United States was met with vetoes from both Russia and China. The veto power held by the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom, as permanent members of the Security Council, played a pivotal role in these deliberations. The resolution proposed by Brazil, which advocated for humanitarian pauses, faced a U.S. veto due to its perceived failure to acknowledge "Israel's right of self-defense." Subsequently, a resolution authored by the United States, emphasizing Israel's "right to self-defense" but omitting any mention of humanitarian pauses, encountered vetoes from both Russia and China. Two subsequent resolutions, drafted by Russia, managed to avoid vetoes but fell short of garnering the requisite nine votes necessary for approval by the council.

The resolution came during the presidency of China led by Ambassador Zhang Jun. China maintained that the Council should have adopted a more robust resolution earlier and that the 'key rests on the

¹ "UN Security Council Adopts Resolution for 'Humanitarian Pauses' in Gaza," Al Jazeera, November 15, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/15/unsc-adopts-resolution-calling-for-extended-humanitarian-pauses>

implementation of the resolution and its provisions to the letter.’² He further recalled the bleak situation in Gaza and urged Israel to end hostilities against civilian facilities, including hospitals, and to restore basic supplies, such as water and fuel, as soon as possible.

The resolution explicitly included fuel as one of the essential items that must be permitted to be delivered without obstruction. Furthermore, it mandated that the United Nations Secretary-General provide a comprehensive report on the implementation of the resolution during the subsequent meeting of the Security Council addressing matters pertaining to the Middle East. In response to the resolution, Gilad Erdan, Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations dismissed its significance, characterizing it as "disconnected from reality."³ Erdan reiterated Israel's stance, asserting that its actions in Gaza were per international law—a contention contested by several experts well-versed in the intricacies of the subject.

In response, Riyad H. Mansour, the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, expressed his conviction that the Security Council should have already declared a ceasefire and recognized the futility of a military resolution. Addressing the Security Council, Ambassador Mansour emphasized that the Council ought to have heeded the universal plea issued by the United Nations and every humanitarian organization for a humanitarian ceasefire. He underscored the profound and enduring consequences of the ongoing events, cautioning against underestimating their long-term effects. Characterizing the situation as a monumental failure of humanity, he stressed the immediate imperative of saving lives, putting an end to the bloodshed, preventing forced displacement, facilitating humanitarian aid, ensuring unhindered humanitarian access, and safeguarding civilians and essential infrastructure.

Drawing attention to Israel's disclosed plans through official statements, and leaked memos, Permanent Observer Mansour urged an acknowledgment of the government's intentions, emphasizing its purported agenda of perpetuating the dispossession, displacement, and denial of rights to the Palestinian people to fulfill what he referred to as the continuation of the Nakba.⁴ Recognizing and confronting these intentions, he argued, is the essential first step in thwarting such plans. Mr. Mansour concluded by vehemently advocating for an end to the ongoing turmoil, asserting that the time has come for peace.

² “Israel-Palestine Crisis: Security Council Calls For Urgent, Extended Humanitarian Pauses In Gaza,” Al Jazeera, November 15, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143632>

³ “Israel-Palestine Crisis: Security Council Calls For Urgent, Extended Humanitarian Pauses In Gaza,” Al Jazeera, November 15, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143632>

⁴ “Israel-Palestine Crisis: Security Council Calls For Urgent, Extended Humanitarian Pauses In Gaza,” Al Jazeera, November 15, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143632>

Reporting on the implementation of the resolution UN Secretary-General painted a bleak picture of the crisis in Gaza and warned the SC of the ‘epic humanitarian catastrophe’s that the people are facing. He further highlighted that, 104 incidents that have impacted 82 UNRWA installations — 24 of which happened since the adoption of the resolution. A total of 218 internally displaced people sheltering in UNRWA schools have reportedly been killed and at least 894 injured.⁶ Under the resolution, a working group composed of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the Office of Legal Affairs to urgently prepare proposals in this regard was also established along with a humanitarian notification system.

UN Security Council Session

Meanwhile, China, -- as the president of the United Nations Security Council for November -- called for the formulation of a "concrete" timetable and roadmap towards a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The proposal presented outlined China's position, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive, just, and lasting settlement. China urged the Security Council to enhance diplomatic efforts, revive the two-state solution, and promptly organize a more authoritative and effective international peace conference.⁷

The proposal stressed the international community's call for a comprehensive ceasefire and calls for heightened attention to prevent the conflict from spreading in the Middle East. During a Security Council meeting, China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, advocated for a lasting truce in Gaza, warning against the conflict expanding in the region. President Xi Jinping reiterated China's support for the Palestinians' quest for statehood, emphasizing the importance of upholding the concept of common security for sustainable security. Additionally, Xi urged the Security Council to fulfill its responsibilities in promoting an end to the fighting, protecting civilians, and preventing a humanitarian catastrophe. China also pledged to provide a new batch of emergency humanitarian supplies to Gaza.

⁵ “Reporting on Resolution 2712 (2023) Implementation, Secretary-General Warns Security Council People of Gaza in Midst of Epic Humanitarian Catastrophe,” United Nations, November 29, 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm22055.doc.htm?_gl=1*pr32x5*_ga*MTkwOTUxMTg3Ni4xNjg5ODQ0MzA4*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*MTcwMTY3NDU3Mi40MC4xLjE3MDE2NzQ2MTluMC4wLjA.

⁶ “Reporting on Resolution 2712 (2023) Implementation, Secretary-General Warns Security Council People of Gaza in Midst of Epic Humanitarian Catastrophe,” United Nations, November 29, 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm22055.doc.htm?_gl=1*pr32x5*_ga*MTkwOTUxMTg3Ni4xNjg5ODQ0MzA4*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*MTcwMTY3NDU3Mi40MC4xLjE3MDE2NzQ2MTluMC4wLjA.

⁷ “China proposes U.N. Security Council action over Israel-Hamas war,” Nikkie Asia, November 30, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Israel-Hamas-war/China-proposes-U.N.-Security-Council-action-over-Israel-Hamas-war>

President Xi Jinping in his congratulatory message to a UN Special Commemorative Meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People highlighted the need for a legitimate national right of Palestinians to establish an independent State of Palestine. - a right long overdue.⁸

Ceasefire and Hostage Deal – A Temporary Relief

The Israeli government came under intense domestic amid a high-profile "bring them home" campaign by hostage families. Despite a military assault in northern Gaza, only one hostage was rescued. Simultaneously, Israel came under international pressure not just at the bilateral level but also at the UN for a ceasefire to address the building humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip as its military's bombing and ground invasion triggered a severe humanitarian crisis, resulting in shortages of food, water, fuel, and medicines. With 1.7 million people displaced out of 2.3 million, and only 10 out of 36 hospitals operational, urgent action is needed to address the escalating civilian crisis. The arrangement led to the release, over five days, of 60 hostages — 29 women, 31 children and outside the arrangement during the same period, another 21 hostages were released; and the release of 180 Palestinian prisoners and detainees from Israeli jails, mostly women and children.⁹

While initially, the ceasefire led to a temporary pause to a war, with the release of hostages on both sides; Israel recalled its negotiating team from Qatar on Saturday after it said talks had reached an impasse.¹⁰ With the end of the ceasefire and stalemate of the deal fighting in Gaza resumed on December 1st with hundreds of Palestinians killed by Israeli bombardments along with restrictions to humanitarian operations to support millions amid a scarcity of food, water, fuel, and other essentials.¹¹

Israel then forwarded evacuation orders in southern Gaza, resulting in the displacement of approximately 1.8 million people, equivalent to nearly 80% of the strip's population, as reported by the United Nations. Urging evacuation in additional parts of Khan Younis, a significant urban area in

⁸ "Xi Jinping Sends Congratulatory Message to U.N. Special Commemorative Meeting in Observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, November 29, 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202311/t20231130_11190305.html

⁹ "Reporting on Resolution 2712 (2023) Implementation, Secretary-General Warns Security Council People of Gaza in Midst of Epic Humanitarian Catastrophe," United Nations, November 29, 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm22055.doc.htm?_gl=1*pr32x5*_ga*MTkwOTUxMTg3Ni4xNjg5ODQ0MzA4*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*MTcwMTY3NDU3Mi40MC4xLjE3MDE2NzQ2MTluMC4wLjA.

¹⁰ Stephen Kalin,, Anat Peled, Summer Said, and Dov Lieber, "Israel-Hamas Deal Talks Stall as Fighting Ramps Up," Wall Street, December 3, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/gaza-truce-talks-focus-on-women-held-hostage-by-hamas-rivals-64633c49>

¹¹ Gaza: UN Rights Chief Appeals For End To Violence And A Return To Dialogue, United Nations, December 3, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144287>

the south, follows previous directives given a day earlier, anticipating military operations. With the end of the ceasefire, UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk emphasized the renewed threat of bombardment for hundreds of thousands of individuals still in northern Gaza. These people face ongoing deprivation of essential items, including food, heightening their vulnerability. UN has repeatedly dismissed Israel's claim of self-defense on the occupied Palestinian territories, stating that Israel cannot claim the right of 'self-defense' under international law because Gaza is a territory which it occupies.¹²

Since the crisis began Israel's military operations in Gaza, encompassing airstrikes and ground maneuvers, have resulted in the reported loss of more than 17,700 Palestinian lives, with over 7,729 of them being children. The imposition of Israel's blockade on this densely populated Palestinian territory has exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation, causing severe shortages in essential resources such as food, fuel, water, and electricity, affecting the lives of every Palestinian.

The ongoing conflict signifies the beginning of a chapter poised to exert a lasting impact on the lives of millions, not only within the confines of the Middle East but also extending its repercussions across a broader geographical spectrum for the foreseeable future. The multifaceted impact of these events has not only resulted in a significant loss of life but has also given rise to a complex humanitarian crisis in Gaza, characterized by restricted access to necessities, amplifying the challenges faced by the affected population.

¹² "UN Special Rapporteur: Israel Can't Claim 'Right Of Self-Defence'," United Nations, November 15, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/15/un-special-rapporteur-israel-cant-claim-right-of-self-defence?traffic_source=KeepReading