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The Israeli-Hamas War Continues with No End in Sight



Missile explodes in Gaza City during an Israeli air strike on October 8, 2023.
Photo Credit: Mahmud Hams, Agence France-Presse

Silia Dimasi
The America-Eurasia Center
The International Security Program
Middle East Program
www.eurasiacenter.org

After Four Months of Devastation the Future of Palestine Still Remains in Question



Missile explodes in Gaza City during an Israeli air strike on October 8, 2023.

Photo Credit: Mahmud Hams, Agence France-Presse

On October 7, 2023, Hamas, the Sunni Islamist military movement governing parts of the Gaza Strip since 2007, launched a missile assault and murderous genocidal assault on Israeli settlements which included the capture of hostages. It was the third-deadliest terrorist attack on Israel in contemporary history. Israeli officials compared the attack to previous Islamic State campaigns in Syria and Iraq in public statements and cited such circumstances as grounds for a militarized self-defense response. The following day, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared Israel at war with Hamas and began launching campaigns in cities located miles outside of Gaza. By October 10th, Israel Defense Force (IDF) Minister Yoav Gallant ordered a “complete siege” of Gaza with the approval for an estimated 300,000 reserves to enter the Gaza Strip while electricity, fuel, and food were blocked off in the region.¹

¹ Byman, Daniel, Riley McCabe, Alexander Palmer, Catrina Doxsee, Mackenzie Holtz, and Delaney Duff. 2023. “Hamas’s October 7 Attack: Visualizing the Data.” Csis.org. 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/hamass-october-7-attack-visualizing-data>.



Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza is destroyed by Israeli air strikes on October 11, 2023.
Photo Credit: Mohammed Al-Masri/Reuters

At the end of October, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that the war on Hamas had entered a "new phase," including increased aerial attacks and broader, sustained ground operations. As of the most recent update from Al Jazeera's Live Causality Tracker, the Palestinian Ministry of Health cites at least 29,170 people have been killed as a result of ongoing conflict.² Though the vast majority of these deaths are linked to the ongoing destruction in Gaza, 395 of these casualties are reportedly from the West Bank. In Israel, officials revised the death toll down from 1,405 to 1,139.³ At the time of this report, the conflict has begun to extend beyond northern territories as the IDF launches aerial attacks on the city of Rafah, which has housed over 1.4 million displaced Palestinians since the start of the war and is the site of the Rafah Border Crossing to Egypt.⁴

The IDF's use of aerial assaults has demolished neighborhoods, schools, and mosques

² AJLabs. 2023. "Israel-Gaza War in Maps and Charts: Live Tracker." Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera. October 9, 2023.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>.

³ Ibid., <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>.

⁴ Hutchinson, Bill. 2023. "Israel-Hamas War: Timeline and Key Developments." ABC News. ABC News. November 22, 2023.

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/timeline-surprise-rocket-attack-hamas-israel/story?id=103816006>.

across Gaza; satellite imagery analyzed by the United Nations shows that approximately 30% of the city's structures have been destroyed or damaged. Satellite imagery conducted by the BBC places the percentage of damage to the city as between 50 and 70%.⁵ The Israeli government argues that its decision to attack residential and highly-populated areas of Gaza is due to Hamas having placed “portions of its command network and military tunnel system below civilian infrastructure.”⁶ Many believe the Israeli government's decision on where to target has little to do with the location of Hamas intelligence, and more to do with the sheer devastation attacks to populated areas will have on civilians trapped in Gaza. Amnesty International's Secretary General, Agnès Callamard, believed that “in their stated intent to use all means to destroy Hamas, Israeli forces have shown a shocking disregard for civilian lives.” As news agencies and social media cover the testimonies of eyewitnesses to the violence, politicians and civilians alike call for the negotiation of a ceasefire sharing the opinion of Callamard that “the international community must act now to prevent it becoming a giant graveyard.”⁷



Judges and parties sit during a hearing at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, January 12, 2024. Photo Credit: AP Photo/Patrick Post

In November 2023, the United Nations launched an updated \$481 million flash appeal to address the needs of people in Gaza and the West Bank; as of December, nearly half of the total

⁵ “The Israel-Hamas War: The Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza.” 2024. Council on Foreign Relations. 2024.

⁶ Ibid., <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/israel-hamas-war-humanitarian-crisis-gaza>.

⁷ “Israeli Attacks Wipe out Entire Families in Gaza.” 2023. Amnesty International. October 20, 2023.

funding requirements had been pledged. Additionally, in Gaza, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are helping to provide essential goods and services to the nearly two million Palestinians who have fled the fighting.⁸ However, Israel launched allegations that twelve of its roughly 13,000 employees of UNRWA in the Gaza Strip had participated in the 7 October 2023 attack on Israeli towns led by the Palestinian militant group Hamas, thus placing relief work in jeopardy as donors pull out. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has also condemned Israel’s attack following South African President Cyril Ramaphosa’s call to the courts to declare the Israeli government’s actions as genocide. "We, as South Africans, will not be passive bystanders and watch the crimes that were visited upon us being perpetrated elsewhere," Ramaphosa said in an address to the nation, referring to abuses committed against Black South Africans under the apartheid system. Acharya, Bhargav, and Nellie Peyton. 2024. “South African President Hails Ruling against Israel as Step toward Justice.”⁹ The ICJ ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent its troops from committing genocide, punish acts of incitement, and take steps to improve the humanitarian situation as it wages war against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has existed long before the events of October 7. Since the first Arab-Israeli War, sparked as the result of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, tensions over the division of Israeli-owned land, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank have been continuously rising.¹⁰ What is occurring today in the region results from years of unsettled political contention. While the international community has long evaded conversations surrounding rights to Palestinian sovereignty, and Israeli control in Middle Eastern relations, it is undeniable that a solution is needed. Yet, after over four months of destruction and displacement, the possibilities of a peaceful solution seem impossible.

For several years dialogue around the potential of one-state and two-state solutions has been circulated throughout the international community. Under the proposed binational one-state solution, a democratic, secular state would govern both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Under

⁸ “Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | Global Conflict Tracker.” 2015. Global Conflict Tracker. 2015.

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict#:~:text=On%20May%2014%2C%201948%2C%20the>

⁹ Acharya, Bhargav, and Nellie Peyton. 2024. “South African President Hails Ruling against Israel as Step toward Justice.” Reuters. January 26, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/south-africa-court-ruling-against-israel-victory-rule-law-2024-01-26/>

¹⁰ Ibid., <https://abcnews.go.com/International/timeline-surprise-rocket-attack-hamas-israel/story?id=103816006>.

a two-state solution, border negotiation would occur to establish a sovereign Jewish-majority Israeli state and a sovereign Muslim-majority Palestinian state. Such a solution echoes the conclusions drawn from the 1993 Oslo Accords in which Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Negotiator Mahmoud Abbas signed a declaration stating that Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, and the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist in peace.¹¹ Both sides agreed that a Palestinian Authority would be established and assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over five years, and mediated negotiation of borders would then follow. In current calls for a two-state negotiation, many view Egypt or Qatar as needing to mediate just as the United States did in 1993.



Palestinians line up for a free meal in Rafah last December, now there is mass food shortages and starvation. Gaza is suffering from extreme shortages of food, medicine and other basic supplies as a result of war between Israel and Hamas. Photo Credit: AP, Fatima Shbair

According to a 2019 Haaretz Poll, a third of Israelis supported a two-state solution. 19% of Israelis supported a one-state solution and 9% supported a confederation. Under the solution of an established confederation, Israelis and Palestinians would function under their own

¹¹ Ibid., <https://www.csis.org/analysis/hamass-october-7-attack-visualizing-data>

government, but share in resources, security, and economic structures.¹² Mobility between both states would exist for all Arab and Israeli citizens, although citizens would be limited to voting in elections solely related to that state of their origin. Before the October 7 attack, a vast majority of world powers, including the U.S., supported the proposed two-state or confederation solution. Currently, Prime Minister Netanyahu has vowed to continue war until “total victory” over Hamas is attained.¹³

Finding a plausible solution all parties involved could agree upon will be a multi-stage process involving actors at all levels. Many experts and state spokespeople view implementing conflict response as a three-stage process, which sequences immediate humanitarian aid, midterm conflict resolution, and eventual long-term redevelopment negotiation. With war now expanding further south, the international focus must remain on the immediate humanitarian response to the roughly two and a half million Palestinian refugees as well as those still trapped in war-torn regions. While the UN Security Council has placed pressure on the Israeli government to pause fighting for humanitarian relief, there is little likelihood for a temporary ceasefire to occur in the coming weeks. As a result, thousands of civilians remain trapped in IDF-targeted areas with limited access to basic resources for survival. As the situation remains, innocent civilians will remain the victims of a conflict. With no end to fighting in sight, the question remains: what is the future for the Palestinian people?

¹² Kraft, Dina. 2019. “Haaretz Poll: 42% of Israelis Back West Bank Annexation, Including Two-State Supporters - One State, Two Stat.” Haaretz.com. Haaretz. March 25, 2019.

¹³ Ibid., <https://www.csis.org/analysis/hamass-october-7-attack-visualizing-data>

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