

# Undermining Humanitarian Space in Conflict Epicenters: The Gaza Strip from the 2006 Blockade to Post-October 2023 War

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the multiple challenges facing humanitarian operations and the erosion of humanitarian space in the Gaza Strip, which have been exacerbated by the escalation of hostilities since the outbreak of the October 2023 war. The study aims to highlight the underlying causes of humanitarian work stagnation in Gaza, the restrictions impacting aid delivery, and the key factors obstructing the outcomes of humanitarian interventions within a comprehensive analytical framework. The research integrates existing literature, reports from humanitarian organizations, and official statements concerning access restrictions, security risks, the politicization of aid, and relevant legal frameworks. The paper underscores that the effectiveness of humanitarian action in Gaza faces substantial challenges due to political complexities, security threats, the politicization of aid, and the overall collapse of infrastructure and essential services. Additionally, the blockade imposed on the Strip since 2006 has further constrained humanitarian space, limiting aid access while threatening both the neutrality and effectiveness of humanitarian efforts. The paper emphasizes the urgent need to remove barriers hindering humanitarian aid delivery, enhance security arrangements for field workers, clarify the concept of humanitarian space, and leverage international legal frameworks. It also advocates for sustained support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and the development of effective reconstruction mechanisms to promote stability and resilience in the region. The study concludes by stressing the necessity of a coordinated international response to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and ensure the continuity of humanitarian aid. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of aligning global efforts to alleviate humanitarian suffering and guarantee the sustainable provision of humanitarian operations in the region.

**Keywords:** Humanitarian Space, Humanitarian Operations, Gaza, Access Restrictions, Security Risks, Politicization of Aid, International Diplomacy.

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## Introduction

In the post-Cold War era, the international system has undergone fundamental transformations at both structural and normative levels within international relations. These shifts have led to new forms of conflict, resulting in multifaceted humanitarian crises. Consequently, violations of international agreements and laws designed to uphold human rights and promote humanitarian development within the framework of human security have become increasingly prevalent. At the same time, humanitarian capacities to address widespread suffering have significantly diminished, reaching catastrophic levels due to the proliferation and complexity of regulations and bureaucratic constraints (BouChabke & Haddad, 2021). These conditions are the inevitable outcome of escalating conflicts that continue to evolve, depleting financial resources allocated for humanitarian response efforts and exposing humanitarian workers to grave risks. Furthermore, humanitarian efforts are deeply affected by geopolitical agendas that hinder their effectiveness, compounded by additional challenges such as restrictive laws related to armed conflicts, counterterrorism legislation, and the increasing involvement of private sector actors including military forces, private security firms, and international humanitarian organizations (Ibrahim, E., Sharif, H., & Aboelazm, K. S., 2025). The concept of humanitarian space has been the subject of extensive academic and programmatic discussions and remains a topic of ongoing debate. Many of these discussions remain unresolved (Maher et al., 2019), as key stakeholders in the humanitarian field continue to seek the most effective methods of delivering assistance in

conflict zones. However, these approaches have often been ideologically instrumentalized within humanitarian space, turning it into a tool or principle that has fueled tensions among various actors involved in humanitarian interventions (Aboelazm, K. S., Tawakol, F., Ibrahim, E., & Ramadan, S. A., 2025).

The Gaza Strip, the focal point of this study, has endured severe Israeli occupation for over seven decades (Barakat et al., 2020), characterized by iron-fisted control. Additionally, since 2006, the territory has been subjected to a strict blockade, depriving more than 2.3 million residents of their fundamental rights, including freedom of movement, adequate housing, employment, education, humanitarian assistance, and essential resources such as electricity, drinking water, and food. For decades, Gaza has been at the center of violent political crises, making it a persistent source of international concern (Wolfsfeld, 2018). Over time, the region has continued to grapple with a deepening humanitarian catastrophe, which escalated into near-total warfare following the outbreak of hostilities on October 7, 2023, lasting for more than fifteen months. With each round of conflict, humanitarian response efforts, relief operations, and reconstruction attempts have persisted, despite widespread expectations of further escalations in armed confrontations.

Moreover, Gaza is now experiencing what has been described as "the worst man-made disaster in the world (Reuters, 2024)." Israeli military actions during this war have been deemed consistent with the characteristics of genocide, with starvation being used as a weapon of war. As a result of the ongoing hostilities, unprecedented challenges have emerged regarding humanitarian aid access, with severe restrictions significantly impeding the ability of relief agencies to provide indispensable services across Hamas-controlled areas (Aboelazm, K. S., 2024). Conflicts not only increase the demand for humanitarian assistance but also make the delivery of aid significantly more perilous (Hoelscher et al., 2017). In Gaza, extensive damage to roads, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure has severely disrupted aid logistics. Furthermore, the security risks for humanitarian workers have deteriorated significantly, with reports documenting direct attacks on aid workers and humanitarian sites (Khudhair, H. Y., Jusoh, A., Mardani, A., Nor, K. M., & Streimikiene, D., 2019). The humanitarian sites targeted in Gaza have suffered grave violations of international law, endangering the lives of humanitarian workers and impeding the delivery of essential aid to affected civilians. The widespread climate of insecurity has made humanitarian operations increasingly difficult, as fear and violence against aid personnel have escalated. The severity of these risks is underscored by the killing of over 250 UNRWA aid workers during this war, making Gaza one of the most dangerous environments for humanitarian work worldwide.

Beyond logistical and security challenges, numerous other obstacles hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Efforts aimed at raising awareness and aiding Gaza's population are frequently exploited by politically motivated organizations, individual governments, and factions that manipulate humanitarian aid for strategic gain. The politicization of humanitarian aid significantly undermines its neutrality, often resulting in the disruption or complete suspension of essential services (Salam, 2017). This reality complicates and obstructs humanitarian work, as aid has increasingly become a bargaining tool in political negotiations (Yas, H., Mardani, A., & Alfarttoosi, A., 2020). The obligation to comply with international humanitarian law (IHL) remains paramount, yet the persistent failure of warring parties to uphold these legal frameworks has led to systematic violations, exacerbating individual and institutional harm (Abraham, 2019). The erosion of respect for IHL has further deteriorated Gaza's humanitarian situation, actively undermining efforts to deliver essential aid and protection to those most affected by the conflict.

The post-October 2023 landscape in Gaza serves as a critical test case, reflecting the ongoing difficulties in effectively and safely conducting humanitarian operations. Increased security risks, political interference, and legal violations continue to obstruct aid delivery, raising fundamental concerns about the future of humanitarian access and protection in the region (Darıcı & Hakyemez, 2019). In response to these challenges, humanitarian efforts in Gaza must navigate these interconnected issues to better serve civilians and safeguard human well-being. This study highlights the implications of the Israeli blockade and recurrent military confrontations in the Gaza Strip, which have led to widespread destruction of its infrastructure and economic fragility, reflected in rising unemployment rates and widespread poverty (Louwerse, 2020). This situation has directly contributed to the deterioration of essential services, including food, water, healthcare, and housing. With the outbreak of the October 2023 war, these challenges have worsened, as international humanitarian agencies face increasing pressures amid the near-total physical destruction of infrastructure.

The paper adopts a methodology that reviews existing literature, reports from humanitarian organizations (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, UNRWA, OCHA), and official statements to examine the

humanitarian situation in Gaza before and after the events of October 2023. The analysis revolves around several critical areas: access restrictions, security risks, politicization of aid, and the impact of international diplomacy and legal frameworks. By integrating insights from these diverse sources, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing humanitarian organizations in Gaza and to present an analysis aimed at enhancing humanitarian efforts in the region (Saeed, M. D., & Khudhair, H. Y., 2024). This paper addresses several key themes, starting with the concept of humanitarian space, then discussing its erosion in the Gaza Strip, followed by an examination of the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). It then highlights international diplomatic efforts and, finally, reviews the damage inflicted on infrastructure and the prospects for Gaza's reconstruction.

## **First: The Concept of Humanitarian Space**

### **1. Neutrality:**

The concept of humanitarian space refers to the environment that enables humanitarian actors to provide aid and essential services in a neutral, safe, and independent manner, ensuring access to the most vulnerable populations without obstacles or politicization. Maintaining this space requires legal and ethical commitments from all parties involved in conflicts to uphold fundamental humanitarian principles. Perley analyzes humanitarian space through four key dimensions: the institutional dimension of humanitarian organizations, the affected community space, international humanitarian law (IHL), and the complex political, military, and legal environment. However, no universally agreed-upon definition exists, as each humanitarian agency adopts its interpretation aligned with its institutional identity and operational objectives (Beerli, 2018). Barnett, in his theoretical framework, proposes that humanitarian space can be understood through four primary approaches: as an agency-centered space shaped by humanitarian actors, as a community-centered space reflecting the needs and agency of affected populations, as a legal construct defined by international humanitarian law, and as a politically and militarily contested arena influenced by geopolitical strategies. Historically, the term "humanitarian space" first emerged during conflicts in Central America in the Cold War era, though it only gained widespread recognition in the 1990s. Rony Brauman, then president of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), popularized the term to describe the operational environment in which humanitarian organizations could function independently of political conflicts. By the late 1990s, the concept had become widely adopted across international humanitarian agencies (Barnett, 2018).

Although the term is not limited to armed conflicts, it is most frequently invoked in discussions related to conflict zones, where it serves as a framework for humanitarian action rooted in fundamental humanitarian values. However, different organizations define the concept in varying ways. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) prioritizes responding to human suffering, often placing neutrality as a secondary concern. In contrast, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) defines humanitarian space as the operational environment where all dimensions of a crisis are considered, with member states responsible for ensuring aid reaches affected populations, thereby emphasizing neutrality as a core principle. Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) views humanitarian space as an entity deeply rooted in international humanitarian law (IHL), making it a legal obligation of states and inseparable from fundamental humanitarian principles. While IHL explicitly refers only to "neutral humanitarian space," the ICRC upholds this definition as a universally recognized standard among nearly 200 member states. Accordingly, the ICRC defines humanitarian space as "a neutral and impartial zone where no coercive authority can exercise power under any circumstances or conditions (Haugaard, 2018)". Defending humanitarian space is critical for populations trapped in armed conflicts. However, its legal definition represents only one aspect of a broader issue linking refugee protection to humanitarian action. This connection is reflected in comprehensive privacy protection guidelines (CPC) and Cross-Jurisdictional Model (CJM) frameworks for sharing personal data with third parties. However, these frameworks do not fully capture how humanitarian space is established or maintained in practice, nor do they adequately explain the frequent failures to uphold humanitarian space in real-world operations.

### **2. Politicization:**

The humanitarian space consists of multiple actors, including humanitarian workers and the populations affected by disasters and conflicts. However, there is a growing consensus among both practitioners and scholars that humanitarian space has lost its neutrality and centrality. Critics of politicizing humanitarian programs, particularly those addressing internally displaced persons (IDPs), argue that humanitarian spaces should remain free from

political interference (Macarthy et al., 2017). Saez & Bryant identify six key components of humanitarian politicization, highlighting how the global geopolitical landscape, fifty years after the Cold War, has kept humanitarian organizations and charities dependent on Western influence. During the Cold War, humanitarian organizations maintained neutrality by positioning themselves between two superpowers (Saez & Bryant, 2023). However, in the post-Cold War era, as Williams and Gordon-Gibson note, the nature of conflict has changed, leading to the emergence of transnational actors and shifts in military ambitions, which have made humanitarian interventions more susceptible to political agendas (Williams & Gordon-Gibson, 2024).

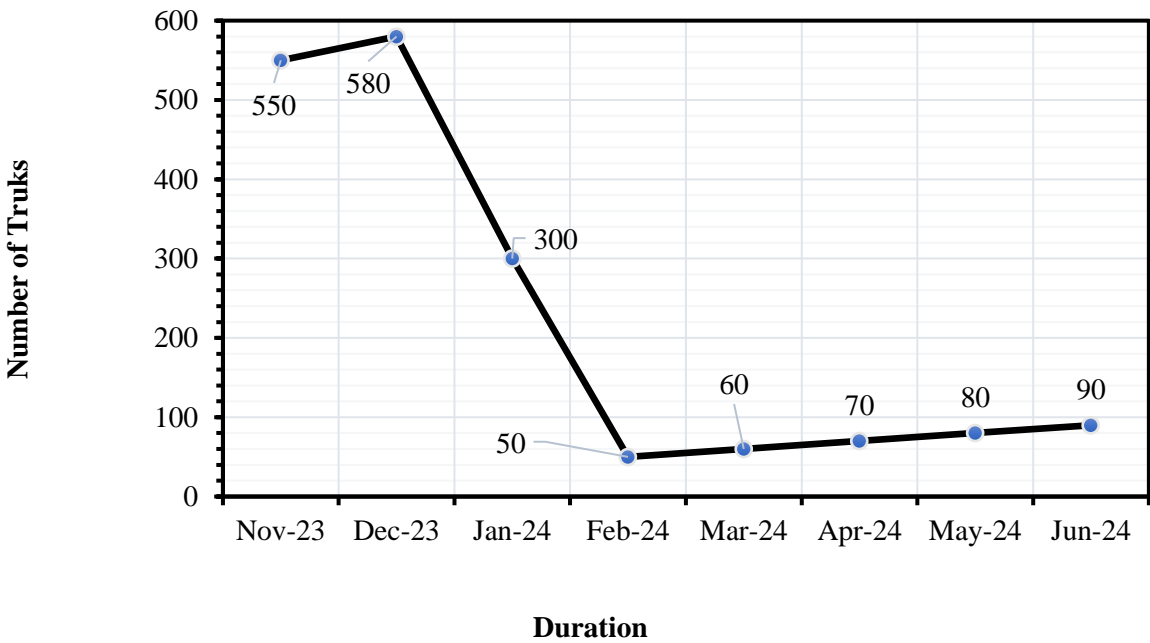
This shift has redefined security, with underdevelopment now perceived as a threat linked to terrorism, violence, and illicit trafficking. Consequently, Western states increasingly view humanitarian aid through a security-driven lens rather than focusing solely on the needs of affected populations. This perspective further reinforces the politicization of humanitarian interventions, leading to concerns that aid can sometimes incite or prolong conflicts. In response, Western powers have imposed conditions and restrictions on humanitarian interventions, aiming to enhance their effectiveness but often reducing their impartiality (Bartles-Smith et al., 2020). The blurring of boundaries between humanitarian actors has been exacerbated by overlapping policies imposed by donor governments and the assumption that liberal governance cannot function outside of its framework. From a Western perspective, this fusion of humanitarianism and politics has been instrumentalized to criminalize certain governments or promote democratic processes in regions where they previously did not exist.

The increasing reliance on public funding further complicates this dynamic. Many humanitarian organizations now depend on financial support from donor states, which are experiencing reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) due to global financial crises. This financial dependency subjects humanitarian organizations to the political agendas of donors. A potential solution to this funding gap lies in exploring alternative sources, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), volunteer-based initiatives, and even private sector involvement (O'Reilly & O'Reilly, 2019). However, Western governance practices in the global humanitarian system tend to prioritize financial and strategic attention toward specific crises, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq or the Haiti earthquake, often aligning aid distribution with donor interests rather than recipient-driven needs. Efforts to depoliticize humanitarian assistance have sometimes backfired, resulting in contradictory outcomes. In some cases, interventions have attempted to separate humanitarian, military, and political roles, yet this has ultimately harmed the very populations they aim to protect by excluding them from politically neutral humanitarian action (Legrand, 2022). Crises such as those in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad, as well as conflicts in Bosnia and Somalia, have demonstrated that humanitarian interventions are often transformed into sites of violent military operations rather than safe facilities for victims to receive aid. Despite the frequent entanglement of humanitarian work with politics, strong voices within humanitarian advocacy emphasize the need for a dedicated space for purely political action, separate from military-driven agendas. Humanitarian actors must operate within their own defined humanitarian space, where neutrality remains central to safeguarding humanitarian principles and ensuring access to affected populations. To achieve meaningful impact while maintaining their identity, humanitarian workers must protect their operational space and uphold fundamental humanitarian principles.

## **Second: The Undermining of Humanitarian Space in Gaza**

External restrictions can severely limit the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, directly impacting access to assistance for populations already at high risk. Many humanitarian organizations face serious access restrictions, primarily due to the Israeli blockade and the periodic border closures imposed by authorities. These measures significantly restrict the movement of goods and people, hindering the timely and effective delivery of humanitarian aid. With the outbreak of the 2023 war, the context of humanitarian response underwent a dramatic shift. Unlike previous wars in Gaza, where both local and international humanitarian organizations were able to operate despite ongoing hostilities, the 2023 humanitarian response has taken place in an exceptionally challenging and highly complex operational environment. This environment is characterized by widespread insecurity, the near-impossibility of aid access, and the collapse of local governance structures due to the extensive destruction caused by the war, all of which have negatively impacted the operations of humanitarian actors. Reed highlights that the complex permit system delays humanitarian operations, restricts access to life-saving healthcare, and worsens an already dire humanitarian situation (Roemer, 2021). These access restrictions have created major obstacles to effective humanitarian interventions in Gaza.

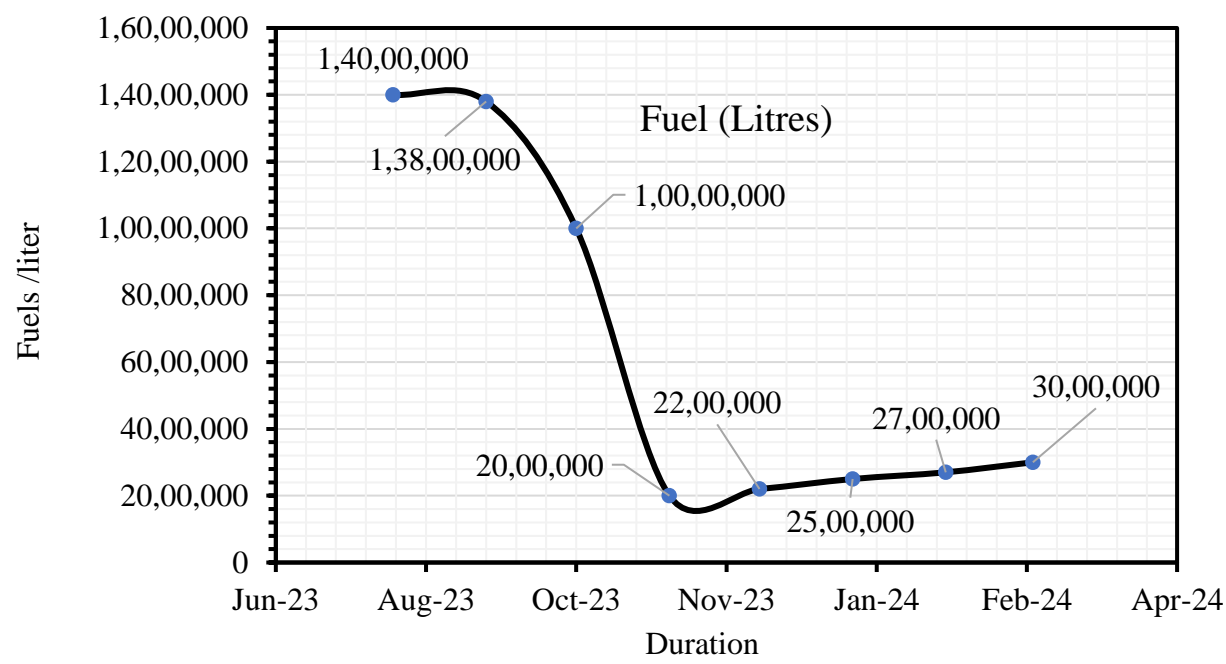
Following the escalation of the conflict in October 2023, several significant changes occurred in both the volume and geographical distribution of humanitarian aid reaching Gaza. Before the escalation of violence, Gaza received approximately 500 to 600 aid trucks per day. However, after the conflict began, this number plummeted to approximately 50 trucks per day, representing only 5% of the pre-war supply. Essential aid includes food, water, infant formula, flour, and canned goods. However, with about 90% of Gaza’s population (approximately 2.3 million people) in desperate need of humanitarian aid, bureaucratic and security restrictions frequently delay deliveries and prevent sufficient quantities from entering the territory, further exacerbating humanitarian suffering (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** The number of aid trucks entering Gaza before and after the escalation of the conflict in October 2023

**Source:** Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024

The ongoing blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip has led to a severe deterioration of the healthcare system, resulting in an unprecedented collapse of medical infrastructure. Reports indicate that more than half of the hospitals in the Gaza Strip have either become non-operational or are functioning only partially. One of the most critical factors exacerbating this health crisis is the shortage of fuel. Due to fuel shortages, hospitals have struggled to operate essential medical equipment, including radiology machines and ventilators. Furthermore, healthcare facilities have faced significant difficulties in sustaining electricity supplies, which are crucial for powering operating rooms and intensive care units (ICUs). Additionally, the fuel crisis has severely affected the operation of power plants that supply electricity to medical facilities. This has forced many hospitals to reduce their operating hours or limit their services to emergency care only, which has severely impacted the sector’s ability to treat patients, particularly amidst ongoing military escalations and a rising number of casualties. Beyond the healthcare sector, the fuel crisis has also affected other essential services, including water and sanitation systems, further exacerbating the overall humanitarian crisis (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The amount of fuel delivered to Gaza before and after the escalation of the conflict in October 2023.

**Source:** Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024.

The implementation of humanitarian programs in Gaza faces a multitude of challenges and obstacles that hinder their success. The complex operational environment in the Gaza Strip is highly hostile, posing severe risks to humanitarian workers, including direct targeting of personnel and infrastructure, as well as contamination from unexploded ordnance (UXOs) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These hazards move within the Strip extremely dangerous unless conducted with extreme caution. Moreover, the politicization of aid is one of the key reasons why various actors in this environment exploit humanitarian assistance to serve their agendas. This practice undermines the core humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. As a result, this polarization ultimately leads to disproportionate aid distribution, causing tensions and disruptions among the population (Yas, H., Alkaabi, A., ALBaloushi, N. A., Al Adeedi, A., & Streimikiene, D., 2023).

Additionally, Israel’s blockade on Gaza since 2007 has severely restricted the movement of people and goods in and out of the Strip, leading to severe shortages of essential supplies and further complicating humanitarian access and operations. Visas and special permits are required for entry into Gaza, and Israeli authorities regularly obstruct the permit system, making aid delivery slow or impossible<sup>1</sup>. These bureaucratic controls significantly hinder the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), restricting their ability to reach affected areas and provide essential goods and services. Frequent military escalations further devastate Gaza’s infrastructure, exacerbating logistical challenges. To ensure effective and sustainable assistance, international aid efforts must be coordinated to enhance access, humanitarian space, and legal frameworks that facilitate the delivery of critical aid.

**Third: The Role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)**

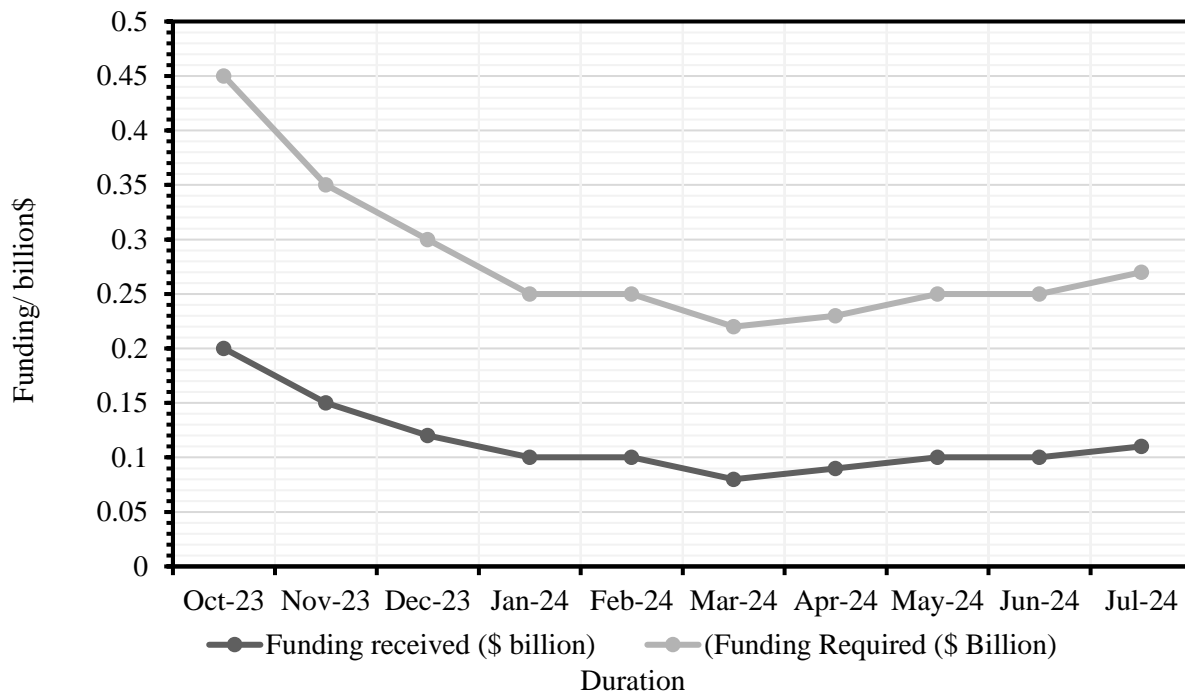
The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has played a crucial role in delivering aid to those affected by the escalation of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023. With the destruction of vital infrastructure and documented cases of violence, UNRWA remained one of the primary sources of immediate and emergency humanitarian assistance for the civilian population (Seven, 2024). During the first month of the conflict, UNRWA successfully distributed over half a million food parcels, which were essential in preventing widespread starvation amid the severe food access restrictions caused by the blockade (Hassoun et al., 2024). UNRWA operated under near-impossible conditions, facing infrastructure destruction and severe financial difficulties in funding its humanitarian operations. Countless civilians lost their lives or were severely injured when UNRWA schools where they sought shelter were bombed and destroyed by airstrikes. Additionally, the agency faced

political pressure from various actors following accusations of bias and alleged collaboration with certain parties in the conflict (Irfan, 2023) which negatively affected its international standing and led to reductions in funding from several donors.

Despite these immense challenges, UNRWA persisted in its mission, demonstrating determination and resilience in delivering critical humanitarian assistance while reaffirming its neutrality and independence. In the first three months of hostilities, UNRWA continued to support over 1.4 million Gaza residents by providing education assistance to more than 700,000 children through its Emergency Education Programs (Shiddat, 2023), delivering healthcare services to over 500,000 people, including primary and mental health support in emergency medical situations, ensuring access to clean water for approximately 900,000 people to help curb the spread of waterborne diseases and contamination, and distributing 400,000 hygiene kits to prevent deteriorating sanitary conditions in temporary shelters. These efforts underscore the significant humanitarian contribution of UNRWA in assisting Gaza's civilian population throughout the ongoing conflict (Shafi & Malik, 2024). Beyond direct aid, UNRWA also played a pivotal role in mobilizing international support and advocacy, bringing global attention to Gaza's deteriorating humanitarian situation. These efforts highlight the critical need for sustained international solidarity with UNRWA to ensure the continuation of humanitarian aid during times of conflict (Leenders & Mansour, 2018). This also emphasizes the necessity for strong and resilient humanitarian organizations that can operate in high-risk environments to deliver urgently needed assistance.

### ***Challenges and Accusations Against UNRWA***

UNRWA faces structural challenges that undermine its ability to provide essential humanitarian services to Palestinian refugees. The agency's primary burden stems from a persistent financial crisis. Since UNRWA relies predominantly on voluntary contributions from states, efforts to diversify funding sources have repeatedly failed to secure sufficient financial resources, bringing the agency close to financial collapse. Traditional donor countries are struggling to maintain financial contributions, forcing UNRWA to implement austerity measures that directly impact the quality of services provided in refugee camps (Canton, 2021). UNRWA has faced a series of accusations, primarily from the Israeli government, alleging ties to armed groups such as Hamas in addition to its financial struggles. Israel has held several UNRWA employees responsible for the events of October 7, 2023, while the United States expressed concerns about allegations of UNRWA staff involvement in Hamas attacks, leading Washington to suspend its funding pending investigations. Other countries, including Canada, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Finland, and the Netherlands, also announced temporary suspensions of their financial support for UNRWA, citing ongoing investigations into these allegations. UNRWA has firmly denied these claims, reiterating its commitment to neutrality and independence in humanitarian work (Aboelazm, K. S., & Afandy, A., 2019). However, international funding for the agency has significantly declined due to these allegations (UNRWA, 2025). Political pressures exacerbate these challenges, further complicating the operational environment for UNRWA's international staff. Allegations have surfaced claiming that UNRWA has distributed educational materials in its schools that contain politically sensitive content related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These allegations add another layer of difficulty to the agency's mission of providing essential services such as education, healthcare, and social relief. In response to the financial crisis, UNRWA has been forced to scale back or restructure several of its programs to adapt to a shrinking funding environment.



**Figure 3.** UNRWA Funding Table (October 2023 - July 2024).

**Source:** Ghanem et al., 2024.

UNRWA received approximately \$1.47 billion against an identified need of \$1.63 billion to support its operational and emergency activities, leaving a significant funding gap (Brljavac, 2012). This shortfall has resulted in either reductions or expansions in the scope of essential services, making it increasingly difficult to maintain the level of support and care that Palestinian refugees deserve. Additionally, the UNRWA report indicated that an additional \$80 million is required to sustain its operations until the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025 without accumulating debt. UNRWA continues to utilize its infrastructure and deploy its workforce of over 5,000 personnel in Gaza, ensuring that the agency can swiftly conduct emergency response operations and effectively manage its 154 shelters, which provide immediate relief to those affected by the crisis (Husseini, 2024).

#### **Fourth: International Diplomatic Efforts**

##### ***Mediation Efforts for a Ceasefire in Gaza After October 2023***

While international diplomacy is a fundamental component in supporting humanitarian operations, mediation and negotiations play a crucial role in facilitating aid delivery. However, these processes are often dictated by state interests, which can negatively impact the effectiveness of humanitarian aid programs, rendering them infeasible or impractical in many cases (Nguyen et al., 2019). Following the October 2023 war, the conflict in Gaza intensified to an unprecedented level, prompting several nations to mediate in an attempt to address the humanitarian crisis and mitigate the destruction of infrastructure caused by escalating military operations. Qatar played a pivotal role in mediating between the key stakeholders, focusing its efforts on streamlining humanitarian procedures and providing financial assistance. Qatari mediation efforts were accompanied by significant funding for vital humanitarian programs in Gaza, including infrastructure development and social services. However, Qatar faced considerable pressure either to secure the release of hostages or to risk its position as a neutral mediator due to the political sensitivities surrounding the negotiations (Elkahlout & Hedaya, 2024).

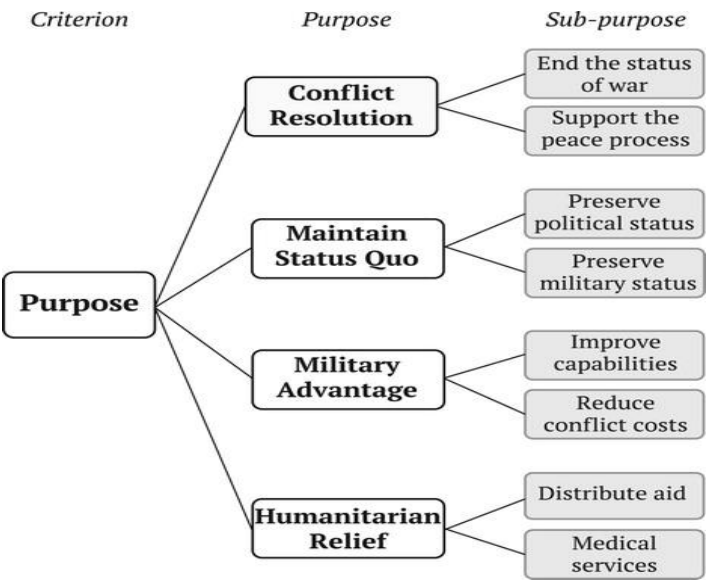
Egypt also played a critical role in brokering ceasefire agreements and facilitating the movement of civilian goods. Egypt's efforts received support from the United Nations and allied nations, but they encountered challenges due to political and security constraints in the region. In the West Bank and Gaza, the United States intensified humanitarian assistance efforts, working closely with Qatar and Egypt to enhance aid distribution, reduce logistical bottlenecks, and ensure the safety of humanitarian workers on the ground (Malik et al., 2023). France, along with other European powers, urged Israel to halt its military offensive immediately and prioritized humanitarian aid efforts in Gaza. France emphasized the necessity of coordinating aid delivery with the United Nations and



humanitarian agencies to ensure timely and effective distribution. Meanwhile, South Africa actively advocated for investigations into human rights violations and the humanitarian situation. It also participated in international forums supporting humanitarian activities, calling for an end to hostilities and the protection of civilians (Shafi & Malik, 2024).

**Reasons for the Initial Failure of the Ceasefire**

Efforts to broker a ceasefire through diplomacy were intensive and diverse, yet various geopolitical factors ultimately rendered them ineffective. Political, security, and global considerations all played a role in the failure of negotiations (Zartman, 2019). Following the October 7 attacks, both Hamas and Israel engaged in chaotic exchanges of fire, plunging them into a political deadlock that made negotiations nearly impossible. Internal political pressure within the Israeli government prevented it from making significant concessions, further complicating talks with Hamas. The inability to enforce even a temporary cessation of hostilities was exacerbated by broader global geopolitical shifts. The international community including Western governments shifted its focus to other crises, such as Ukraine (Götz, 2018), leading to a decline in diplomatic engagement with Gaza. Compounding these challenges was the overt support of some Western nations for Israel, alongside their strong condemnation of Hamas, which further reduced the likelihood of reaching an agreement. In this context, Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani stated that Qatar was reconsidering its role as a mediator, as one party in the conflict had used its mediation efforts to advance narrow political objectives.



**Figure 4.** Ceasefire Trend and Its Purpose.

**Source:** Clayton et al., 2021.

**Theoretical Frameworks Explaining the Ceasefire Failure**

Structural realist theories, such as those proposed by Kenneth Waltz, explain the failure of ceasefire attempts in international contexts. According to realist theory, the international system is anarchic, where states act based on self-interest in security and survival. This perspective offers a theoretical framework to understand the challenges facing international diplomacy among actors and stakeholders, where humanitarian objectives often become secondary to national interests. Additionally, this theory suggests that permanent members of the UN Security Council, particularly major Western powers, make decisions based on their national interests rather than global cooperation or public welfare (Wallenstein & Johansson, 2016). This tendency is evident in the use of the veto power within the UN Security Council, which demonstrates how international decisions are shaped by national interests a reality reflected in how the Gaza conflict was handled diplomatically. These geopolitical constraints made ceasefire negotiations exceedingly difficult, as competing interests and strategic calculations outweighed humanitarian considerations. Moreover, the manipulation of humanitarian aid for political purposes further illustrates the core challenges facing effective humanitarian intervention in an anarchic global system. These obstacles emphasize the difficulty of coordinating international relief efforts. In this context, the realist framework underscores the need for

stronger international cooperation through the UN Security Council to ensure the effective and lawful delivery of humanitarian assistance (Puder, 2016).

### ***Motivations for Accepting a Ceasefire***

The acceptance of a ceasefire by conflicting parties in Gaza reflects the application of contextual intelligence theory, as developed by Joseph Nye. This theory suggests that decision-makers assess political, humanitarian, and economic contexts before taking action. In this case, both parties analyzed the overlapping pressures and interests influencing the conflict and made decisions accordingly. For Gaza, the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation due to intense bombardment, near-total infrastructure collapse, and mounting pressure from the local population demanding an end to hostilities were key factors driving Palestinian leadership to agree to a ceasefire. The ceasefire also provided a critical opportunity to mobilize international efforts for humanitarian relief and reconstruction amid severe hardship and urgent need for basic assistance. On the Israeli side, the rising economic and political costs of continued hostilities became a heavy burden. The prolonged escalation resulted in significant economic losses, particularly in the trade and infrastructure sectors, while also triggering reverse migration, increasing domestic pressure on Israeli leadership.

Additionally, international criticism from human rights organizations and the International Criminal Court (ICC) posed a serious threat to Israel's global image. Furthermore, pressure from hostage families and continuous media campaigns played a role in compelling the Israeli government to consider a ceasefire as a means to reduce both domestic and international pressure. The acceptance of a ceasefire by both sides demonstrates a real-world application of contextual intelligence, where decisions were made based on a comprehensive understanding of the surrounding conditions, including urgent humanitarian needs, economic burdens, and intensifying global scrutiny. This suggests that the ceasefire was not merely a reaction to immediate events but rather a strategic response to complex, interwoven factors influencing all parties involved. This analysis highlights the importance of enhancing negotiation mechanisms rooted in contextual intelligence to achieve more efficient and sustainable conflict resolutions in the future.

### ***The Role of Humanitarian Aid in Facilitating a Ceasefire***

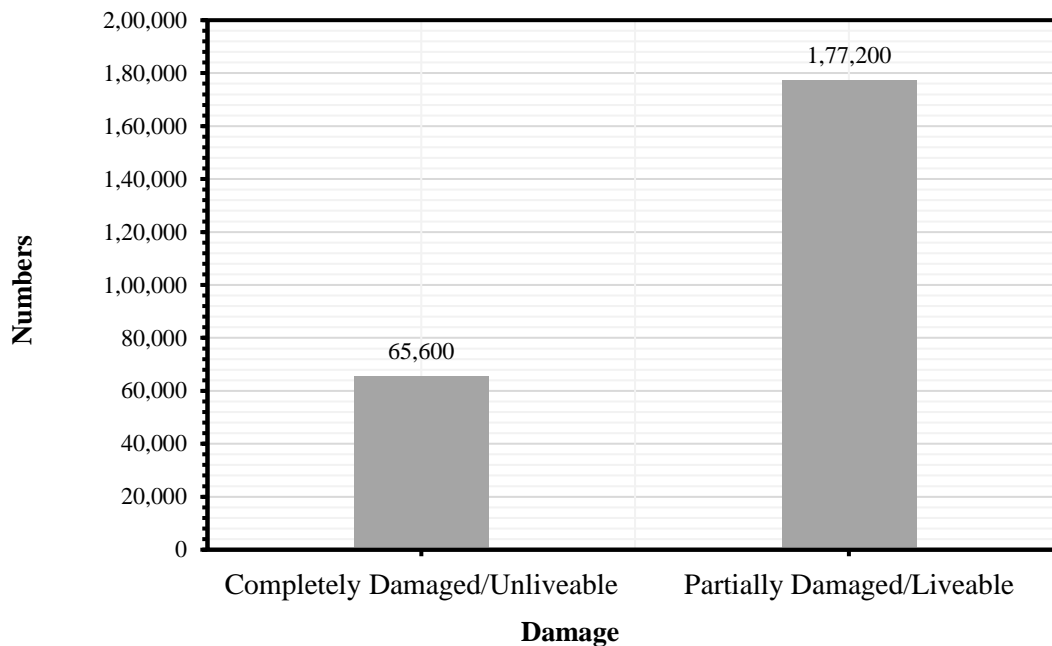
Between 1989 and 2018, approximately 15% of internationally documented ceasefire agreements included explicit references to humanitarian objectives, such as aid deliveries, vaccination campaigns, or medical supply provisions. For instance, in Angola, a temporary lull in hostilities during the 1999 ceasefire agreement allowed for the vaccination of three million children against polio (Marton & Ntaka, 2024). Similarly, the 1995 ceasefire in Bosnia and Herzegovina included prisoner exchanges as a measurable post-agreement action. While such agreements are intended to facilitate humanitarian aid deliveries, they may also create unintended consequences. Different groups may pursue separate and conflicting objectives, often using humanitarian cover for military or strategic gains. For example, during the 1995–1999 ceasefire in Sudan, humanitarian aid including polio vaccinations was successfully delivered. However, both Khartoum authorities and South Sudanese forces used the truce to rearm and restock supplies for future military operations. In Gaza, the intersection of politics, security, and geopolitics in the North Africa/Middle East region has weakened the prospects of an effective ceasefire. The United States, Qatar, and Egypt led mediation efforts in Gaza, each playing a different role: Qatar leveraged its extensive ties with Hamas to facilitate negotiations, Egypt enabled humanitarian aid deliveries through the Rafah border crossing, and the U.S. proposed "humanitarian pauses" to allow for aid shipments. However, these efforts were frequently stalled as Israel consistently refused to agree to a complete cessation of hostilities.

### ***Fifth: Infrastructure Damage and the Future of Gaza's Reconstruction***

The conflict has resulted in widespread destruction of infrastructure, particularly following wars with Israel in 2021 and 2022. The damage from the 2021 conflict alone is estimated at \$290 million to \$380 million (Mohiuddin, 2023). The housing sector experienced the greatest impact, accounting for approximately 93% of damages in the social sectors, with losses estimated between \$140 million and \$180 million. Productivity losses were assessed between \$75 million and \$80 million, while structural infrastructure damage was estimated at \$60 million to \$85 million (Milton et al., 2024). Years of prolonged violence have taken a severe toll on both public and private infrastructure, with thousands of buildings, homes, factories, schools, and hospitals destroyed. Between 2007 and September of this year, more than 60,000 buildings have been partially or destroyed due to ongoing conflicts in Gaza,

severely disrupting the local economy and diminishing the quality of life for its residents. Despite ongoing reconstruction efforts, progress has been painfully slow (Jaber, 2024).

At the beginning of 2022, only 1% of all fully destroyed housing units from previous wars had been rebuilt and made available for use, while 9% were still under reconstruction. By September 2022, only 20 out of 1,689 homes destroyed in a single year had been fully rebuilt, revealing the staggering delay in reconstruction efforts. Further analysis indicates that approximately 159 housing units are currently under construction, and around 236 units have been funded. However, a total of 708 units have secured committed funds but have not yet received payments, while an alarming 565 units remain without any financial commitments for reconstruction (Wibowo, 2024).



**Figure 5.** Direct Damage to Housing.

**Source: Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor Report on Damage to Gaza (October–November 2023).**

However, the greatest obstacles to reconstruction remain financial constraints and Israeli-imposed restrictions on the entry of essential construction materials (Shalev, 2017). Strict regulations have contributed to logistical difficulties in the delivery of materials and funding, further reducing efficiency in physical reconstruction efforts. International support for rebuilding Gaza has been limited, with humanitarian agencies struggling to sustain reconstruction projects. Egypt pledged \$500 million for reconstruction, but as of September 2022, only 18% of the work had been completed. Similarly (Milton et al., 2024), Qatar launched the construction of 239 housing units for \$10.6 million, although work did not begin until March 2022 (Monshipouri & Motameni, 2024). Initial cash payments issued by UNRWA, which planned to construct 700 housing units in Gaza, highlight the urgent need for greater international coordination and a more sustainable funding source (Onyigbuo, 2024).

To address these challenges, successful international cooperation is essential, along with securing long-term funding. Additionally, greater community involvement in planning and implementation is crucial to ensure that reconstruction efforts meet actual population needs and support sustainable development. Ensuring the timely entry of essential goods into Gaza is also critical for the continuation of reconstruction efforts and for improving the living conditions of affected civilians (Opoku et al., 2024). Gaza has suffered severe structural and residential damage due to repeated escalations of violence, most recently in October 2023. Recent reports from various sources, including the Shelter Cluster and UNRWA, indicate that thousands of housing units have been either destroyed or severely damaged in previous wars, leaving many people homeless (Alshawawreh, 2019). In May 2023 alone, reports documented 2,943 housing units damaged, including 103 units destroyed and 140 units sustaining major structural damage, rendering them uninhabitable.

According to the Shelter Cluster, nearly 90% of affected buildings were residential, impacting more than 6,600 structures and causing severe displacement challenges for affected families. By the end of December 2023, approximately 1.4 million people had sought refuge in UNRWA facilities, while an additional 400,000 people continued to rely on UNRWA services due to the destruction of their homes (Shafi & Malik, 2024). The direct damage to housing has left 21,500 housing units in Gaza below standard living conditions, requiring extensive rehabilitation to meet basic living requirements, such as weather protection, sanitation, and privacy. The extensive destruction of housing in Gaza poses a significant challenge to humanitarian efforts, as the scale of devastation hinders effective aid delivery and complicates reconstruction initiatives. Studies indicate that repeated escalations contribute to an unstable environment, delaying repair efforts and prolonging the suffering of affected populations. Data from the aftermath of the October 2023 conflict reveals that 1,689 housing units were destroyed, rendering them uninhabitable, while 60,599 units sustained partial damage but remained livable (Milton, Elkahlout, & Attallah, 2024). This widespread destruction underscores the urgent need for large-scale reconstruction efforts in the housing sector.

Current reconstruction efforts are severely hampered by a critical lack of funding. Compared to previous post-war periods (Susser & Schneider, 2020), such as after the 2014 conflict, financial commitments from donor states have been significantly lower following the recent 2021 and 2022 conflicts. Although Palestine has received over \$40 billion in aid since the Oslo Accords, this funding has not translated into significant developmental progress due to political and security dynamics affecting both the West Bank and Gaza. Ongoing restrictions on the import of essential materials and construction supplies, coupled with internal Palestinian factional divisions, severely obstruct reconstruction efforts. Additionally, Israel's use of humanitarian aid as a bargaining tool in negotiations further complicates the situation, leaving Gaza in a protracted state of crisis and uncertainty.

### Conclusion

This paper has explored the increasing humanitarian restrictions in the Gaza Strip, which are a direct consequence of the protracted military conflict and escalating political violence. The region faces numerous challenges that obstruct humanitarian operations and erode humanitarian space, particularly following the war that erupted on October 7, 2023 and persisted for over fifteen months. This war led to widespread destruction of infrastructure and the near-total collapse of essential services, particularly electricity and water supply, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, severe fuel shortages led to the shutdown of most hospitals, leaving thousands without critical medical care. Meanwhile, the conflict resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians and left thousands more injured. The humanitarian crisis was further exacerbated by the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2006, which has severely restricted the movement of aid and essential supplies.

Humanitarian aid faces severe restrictions due to the blockade and border closures, leading to a significant decline in the volume of aid entering the Strip, particularly during the latest conflict. Bureaucratic obstacles and prolonged inspection procedures further delay aid deliveries, exacerbating the suffering of Gazans. The Gaza Strip has become one of the most hazardous environments for humanitarian work, particularly following the direct targeting of humanitarian personnel a violation of international humanitarian law during the recent war, where more than 250 UNRWA employees were killed, and hundreds more were injured. Moreover, humanitarian aid has been increasingly exploited as a political tool by conflicting parties, with access to aid being conditioned by geopolitical negotiations, thereby delaying critical assistance and exacerbating the suffering of civilians. In this context, there is an urgent need for international calls to lift the blockade and establish a streamlined system for permits, which is essential to ensuring that humanitarian interventions are implemented effectively and promptly. These dynamics underscore the importance of prioritizing diplomatic efforts to remove barriers to the delivery of essential supplies and services while recognizing the diplomatic initiatives of Qatar, Egypt, and the United States in mediating a ceasefire and facilitating aid delivery. It is crucial to strengthen initiatives that ensure the safety of humanitarian workers and the protection of critical infrastructure, both of which are fundamental to the reconstruction of Gaza. The war has caused extensive destruction, demolishing thousands of homes and buildings and displacing over one million Palestinians.

This paper also presents a set of policy recommendations, emphasizing the need for enhanced cooperation between international agencies and local stakeholders, the establishment of clear risk mitigation strategies, and the implementation of specialized training programs for emergency response. The international community must assume its responsibility to hold accountable those responsible for grave violations of international humanitarian

law, ensuring that political manipulation does not weaken the protection of humanitarian workers. Additionally, humanitarian organizations must remain committed to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence, ensuring that aid is distributed equitably and without political interference that could obstruct its delivery to those in need.

Furthermore, the situation in Gaza necessitates increased international support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Displaced Persons (UNRWA) to guarantee the continuity of essential services such as education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid for Palestinian displaced persons. Sustained financial support from the international community is critical to counteracting political pressures that hinder UNRWA's ability to operate effectively. The reconstruction of Gaza is a long-term process requiring substantial financial investment and coordinated international efforts to address the region's political and security challenges. Sustainable progress will only be possible through addressing the root causes of the conflict via a unified political solution. The international community must ensure that humanitarian agencies play a pivotal role not only in crisis response but also in fostering long-term stability and development, contributing to a safer and more stable future for the region.

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