Humanitarian Priorities in Post-Ceasefire Gaza

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October 22, 2025

Executive Summary: Gaza remains in a humanitarian crisis despite the relief provided by the October ceasefire. Immediate, coordinated action through a joint US–UN–Israeli humanitarian operations center is needed to deliver aid, remove rubble, and rebuild critical infrastructure.

Background

The humanitarian situation in Gaza deteriorated dramatically during the two-year conflict between Israel and Hamas. The physical destruction of homes, hospitals, health clinics, sanitation facilities, and power plants; the multiple displacements of large segments of the population, and the limited access to basic food and medical supplies have contributed to catastrophic living conditions that affected all Gazans.

The complete closure imposed by Israel in March 2025, following the breakdown of the January 19, 2025 ceasefire, further deepened Gaza's humanitarian crisis. Under considerable international pressure, Israel reopened several crossings in May 2025 and authorized the newly established Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) to serve as the principal provider of humanitarian assistance. However, the number of trucks entering Gaza was insufficient to meet the demand, and the process was further compromised by difficulty accessing the GHF sites and the diversion and looting of aid by armed gangs. By August 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification's Famine Review Committee determined that famine was occurring in parts of the Gaza governorate and there were daily reports of children dying of malnutrition.

Humanitarian Commitments in the Ceasefire Agreement

On October 10, Israel and Hamas agreed to President Trump's 20-point ceasefire plan, which included several provisions designed to address the dire humanitarian situation:

- **Point 7:** Full aid will be immediately sent into Gaza, infrastructure will be rehabilitated, and specialized equipment will be brought in to remove rubble.
- **Point 8:** The UN and other agencies not associated with either party will handle the entry and distribution of aid in the Strip, and the Rafah crossing will be opened in both directions.
- **Point 17:** In the event Hamas delays or rejects the ceasefire, the scaled-up aid operation will proceed in the terror-free areas handed over by the IDF to the ISF.

Ongoing Humanitarian Challenges

Since the agreement went into effect, the number of trucks entering Gaza has steadily increased; however, the target of 600 trucks per day – the average during the January–March ceasefire period – has not yet been met. Commercial bakeries and more

than 175 humanitarian kitchens have reopened, and prices for basic commodities, including sugar and flour, have decreased significantly. Medical supplies are also again entering Gaza, although Israeli restrictions still prevent certain items that are designated as dual-use. Fuel to power desalination plants – which provide clean water for Palestinians – and other critical facilities is becoming more available, although the minimal daily levels to sustain the entire population have not yet been reached.

These improvements, however, should not mask the severe conditions that continue to prevail. An estimated 90 percent of homes are uninhabitable, and winter is fast approaching. The medical triage necessary to cope with shortages of supplies and a lack of hospital beds has exacerbated the health conditions of the already and newly vulnerable, particularly infants, elderly, and the disabled. Nearly 90 percent of schools have been damaged or destroyed and more than 625,000 school-age children have had only limited access to educational opportunities. Gaza's pre-war industries have been destroyed and huge investments are required to remove the rubble and unexploded ordnance from the streets of Gaza and restore the potential of previously productive agricultural lands.

Policy Recommendations

As acknowledged in Trump's 20-point plan, Gaza's humanitarian realities require immediate responses that must not be delayed by protracted negotiations regarding the composition of an International Stabilization Force (ISF) or the designation of a technocratic, apolitical Palestinian committee. Hence, the following steps should be taken immediately:

- The US military team deployed by CENTCOM to oversee the ceasefire should establish and coordinate a joint humanitarian operations center (JHOC), which includes the IDF, United Nations agencies, and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) operating in Gaza.
    - The JHOC should develop clear guidelines regarding the items that are allowed into Gaza, expeditiously review requests from companies and organizations seeking to deliver goods into Gaza, and monitor the distribution of goods once inside Gaza.
    - The JHOC should also develop protocols for the use of rubble-removal equipment and provide effective monitoring of its deployment to avoid diversion for nefarious purposes.
- The United Nations should continue to facilitate the existing cluster system with an emphasis on identifying priorities and effectively coordinating with participating organizations.
- The IDF should authorize additional crossing points for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza and operate the crossings on a 24/7 basis. As per Point 17 of the Trump plan, the Israeli government should not use cut-offs of humanitarian assistance as a mechanism for pressuring Hamas or punishing the Palestinian population.

- The ISF should be formed and deployed quickly, and its mandate should include providing security for humanitarian actors in Gaza and ensuring the safe delivery of goods to their designated locations.
- The United Nations or World Bank should retain an independent auditing firm to ensure that funds designated for humanitarian purposes are spent appropriately and, as necessary, to investigate allegations of fraud and price gouging.
- In moving rapidly to address Gaza's humanitarian crisis, special consideration must also be given to the following:
    - Identifying non-militants who worked for Hamas-controlled ministries and are not implicated in the October 7 attack – their technical expertise and local knowledge will be critical for addressing the profound medical, educational, and economic challenges facing Gaza.
    - Ensuring that UN agencies and INGOs can operate effectively by allowing their international staff to obtain visas to enter Israel and by respecting their duty of care for local staff, which may preclude them from handing over the names of those they employ in Gaza to Israeli authorities.
    - Recognizing that UNRWA has traditionally been the largest humanitarian actor in Gaza, with more than 10,000 staff whose experience and expertise are essential to effectively responding to the immediate needs of the population.
    - Closing down the controversial and costly Gaza Humanitarian Foundation operations, as reportedly is underway, should proceed and a full examination of its operations between May 19-October 14 should be undertaken by the Government Accountability Office.