A Humanitarian Plan for Gaza

Key Recommendations

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Introduction

On February 29, at least 112 Palestinians were killed and 750 injured as they were trying to access food aid trucks in Gaza City. This incident, an inflection point in the war, combined with a report on extreme hunger, have highlighted the alarming humanitarian crisis that the Israel-Hamas war has inflicted on the Strip. And despite outsized international attention and resources directed at the issue from the U.S., Europe, Gulf countries, the U.N, and Israel, the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate.

The war has displaced over 1.8 million people, more than 80% of Gaza’s population, and Gazans’ humanitarian needs far exceed the aid that is reaching them. According to the U.N.’s Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), food security continues to deteriorate in Gaza, in particular in the northern region, with children and other vulnerable populations experiencing worsening symptoms of malnutrition and hunger. Access to healthcare is impaired by shortages of fuel, food, medicine, and medical supplies, amid continued hostilities and Hamas’ use of hospitals for terrorist activity. Meanwhile, only a third of water pipelines from Israel and 17% of groundwater wells are currently operational. The lack of safe water and sanitation services has exacerbated public health concerns, with over 330,000 cases of acute respiratory infections and 220,000 of diarrhea.

The United States recently stepped up its efforts to alleviate the crisis by airdropping aid into the territory and announcing the establishment of a temporary pier on the coast, which will allow more assistance in once construction is completed around late April. These measures are welcome but hardly sufficient. Sadly, it will not be possible to fully alleviate the dire conditions in Gaza as long as the war goes on and while Hamas continues stealing humanitarian aid and using civilian infrastructure for terror activities. Nonetheless, Israel, the United Nations, the United States, and the rest of the international community can and should do more today to lessen Palestinians’ suffering and plan for Gaza’s eventual recovery and reconstruction.

Humanitarian needs are often divided by sector, including food, water/sanitation/hygiene (WASH), health services, and shelter, with energy underpinning them all. Nevertheless, increasing access to any specific service is contingent upon addressing broader structural, procedural, and political challenges that encumber the entire humanitarian aid supply chain from donor to beneficiary. These challenges include, but are not limited to, access and movement issues, protecting aid and aid workers, intra- and inter-actor coordination, resource constraints, operational problems, and political tensions.

This brief summarizes the key problems hindering more effective aid distribution and suggests ways to ameliorate them by proposing targeted, tangible, and quick recommendations for the United States and the international community, the U.N. and its affiliates in Gaza, and Israel. These recommendations attempt to complement, not replace, existing humanitarian efforts and bridge the gap between international humanitarian standards and Israel’s security requirements, prioritizing the safe return of evacuees to their areas of origin and the utilization of existing infrastructure rather than temporary, non-cost-effective solutions.
Tensions and Challenges

The humanitarian response in Gaza presents serious tradeoffs and challenges for all actors involved including the following:

- Significant humanitarian relief is contingent on cessation of hostilities, which will likely come only as part of a hostage deal, the timing of which will be determined by Hamas and Israel.

- While the context today is different, the ad hoc nature of the current humanitarian response reflects longstanding systemic failures in Gaza, including Hamas’ exploitation of civilian suffering, lack of a coherent Israeli strategy, a tense relationship between Israel and the U.N., and preferential treatment for certain partners, in particular some Arab countries.

- Israel is balancing contradictory objectives of disengaging from Gaza and maintaining security control over it.

- Much of the aid that enters Gaza is either siphoned off or taxed by Hamas.

- Some donors opt to showcase their support by high-visibility in-kind donations rather than addressing the most urgent needs.

- Temporary arrangements often become permanent even when not intended to be.

- The Israeli government vetoes the PA’s return to Gaza, but its involvement could unlock important aid channels.

- Technical solutions are available but the barriers are political.

The following pages present a non-comprehensive list of steps required to address the urgent humanitarian crisis and pave the way toward recovery and reconstruction. The recommendations are divided into three tiers: strategic-level (e.g., structural, political), actor-specific (U.S., U.N., and Israel), and sector-specific (e.g., food, WASH).
Strategic-Level Recommendations

Funding

Key problems: Threat of donor fatigue. OCHA appeal for humanitarian assistance to Gaza has several issues: tracks self-declared pledges rather than disbursed funds, inadequately monitors donations outside of the appeal’s scope, and conflates Gaza’s situation with the West Bank. Donor preference for temporary, in-kind measures over sustainable options.

- Streamline OCHA appeal to make it more accessible
- Prioritize sustainable funding, especially from Arab states
- Shift from in-kind donations to cash-equivalent transfers or vouchers to stimulate market-driven model that involves the private sector
- Implement a universal basic emergency income to stimulate the private sector
- Plan a day-after conference facilitated by the U.N. in collaboration with the U.S., the PA, Egypt, and other Arab partners focused on addressing humanitarian issues

Inter- and Intra-Actor Coordination

U.N.-Israel-NGOs

Key problems: Several high-level U.N. officials tasked with overseeing humanitarian affairs in Gaza. Inefficient institutionalized communication and lack of trust between Israel and U.N. teams on the ground. Tensions between Israeli and U.N. leadership. The investigation into UNRWA’s ties with Hamas and Israel’s cutting ties with UNRWA adds complication.

- Within the U.N., clearly define responsibilities and terms of reference for more effective division of labor and cooperation between the Gaza humanitarian coordinators
- Improve coordination between U.N. and NGOs operating in Gaza
- Temper Israeli rhetoric against the U.N.
- Ensure the U.N. acknowledges Israel’s humanitarian efforts and sharpens condemnation of Hamas
• Improve technical expertise of COGAT staff and establish regular structural sector-specific channels with the U.N.

• Assign a Hebrew-speaking OCHA official to liaise with COGAT, Southern Command

• Launch Israeli dialogue with prominent NGOs

• Advance a process to reform UNRWA, with a focus on depoliticizing the agency and ensuring that aid is linked to need rather than political status

Israel-Egypt-U.N.-U.S.

Key problems: El-Arish port limited in capacity. Rafah crossing not designed for goods. Opaque prioritization process on Egyptian side in which aid trucks receive precedence. Egyptian reluctance to systemize procedures. Multilateral coordination is tactical.

• The departure of Amb. David Satterfield and personnel changes at the U.N. and elsewhere provide an opportunity to elevate the quad coordination mechanism between Israel, Egypt, the U.N, and the U.S. into a strategic forum tasked with planning the humanitarian response going forward

• Use the new mechanism to reshape U.N. OCHA Flash Appeal and 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)

• Involve IDF’s Southern Command in the multi-lateral coordination forum

• Create a multilateral forum for special humanitarian envoys to jointly set priorities and speak with one voice

• Appoint an Israeli senior humanitarian coordinator reporting directly to the Prime Minister’s Office
Access, Routes, and Aid Protection

Crossings Into Gaza

Key problems: Insufficient aid entering Gaza, due to a limited number of crossings, some of which are limited in capacity (el-Arish, Rafah). No clear procedures for coordination on upcoming aid, lack of transparency and no clear prioritization at el-Arish port. Israeli inspection hinders faster pre-positioning of aid and creates additional bottlenecks (e.g., goods travel 25 miles each way from Rafah to Nitzana and back for inspection). Israeli protests often disrupt access at the Kerem Shalom crossing. Ashdod port, the main landing site for imported goods for Gaza prior to the war, at large unused for domestic political reasons in Israel.

- Ensure Kerem Shalom operates at full capacity
- Open a crossing in the north and augment it with inspection capabilities to expedite aid transfers much more significantly than does the recently opened ad hoc Gate #96 by Karni
- Import aid to Gaza from the port of Ashdod
- Expand capacity and improve efficiency of Jordanian Route, eliminating the frequent back-to-back truck transfers
- Create a parallel route allowing for aid imports from the West Bank
A Humanitarian Plan for Gaza: Key Recommendations

- Develop security protocols for upcoming maritime aid corridor from Cyprus
- Begin planning a three-way crossing at the point where Gaza, Egypt, and Israel meet (Gate #38) to facilitate Israeli-Egyptian joint monitoring of aid entering Gaza
- Improve and expedite vetting procedures for truck drivers
- Improve and expedite Israel’s pre-clearance process for items entering Gaza

Securing Aid and Aid Workers Inside Gaza


- Flood Gaza, and especially the northern part of the Strip, with essential food and other supplies to lower risk of looting
- Tag aid trucks in Gaza for real-time monitoring against theft; use facial recognition, geolocation technology, and kill switches to protect sensitive equipment from Hamas
- Develop protocols for IDF protection of aid convoys that ensure restrained use of force
- Facilitate deconfliction between humanitarian actors and IDF’s Southern Command, with COGAT’s participation
• Ensure Israel speaks publicly about its efforts to protect civilians, including detailed, remedial measures taken in response to deconfliction failures

• Rely on vetted non-Hamas Palestinian security personnel to oversee aid

• Return the Palestinian Authority Security Forces to Gaza’s international crossings beginning with the north and the new humanitarian pier the U.S. intends to establish adjacent to Gaza’s coast

• Remove rubble and debris to facilitate better access to the north

Palestinian Authority Involvement in the Humanitarian Effort

Key problems: The PA remains the internationally legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza and has maintained a presence there since the Hamas takeover in 2007, being the second-largest employer in the Strip after Hamas. It has continued to pay employees in Gaza, be integrated in local ministries, and coordinate internationally backed projects in the Strip. Taking on a greater role in delivering and overseeing humanitarian aid and reconstruction in Gaza will be an important step toward expanding its presence and capacity in the territory. It will also serve as the bridge to the day-after vision the Biden administration has put forward as a pathway to an eventual two-state outcome. Investing in the PA would also help improve the West Bank’s economy.

• Develop an aid route from the West Bank: Establish aid facilities in the West Bank (food production facilities, factories to produce tents and other temporary shelter options) and transport goods into Gaza, leveraging simpler inspection options

• Pilot the use of border and customs police in managing crossings in areas clear of Hamas, e.g. the north crossings once operational and the upcoming U.S. pier.

• Develop a UNMAS (United Nations Mine Action Service)-PA civil defense campaign to clear areas of rubble and unexploded explosive ordnance (UXOs)

• Bring West Bank-based medical teams into Gaza to support international field hospitals

• Integrate the PA into water testing campaigns, vaccination efforts, and blood drives

• Build on the existing trilateral Israel-PA-U.N. Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) agreement to develop a system for efficient monitoring of complex goods at scale in preparation for recovery and reconstruction
Actor-Specific Recommendations

United States and International Community

The U.S. is the only party that has leverage over all key players. It plays an essential role in the humanitarian effort by pressuring Israel to reduce restrictions, urging Egypt to tackle inefficiencies, seeking positive diplomatic engagement at the U.N., mobilizing support from European partners, and pushing to bring a revitalized PA back to Gaza.

Immediate term:

• Enhance coordination between aid agencies, Israel, the PA, and Egypt, possibly through the creation of a forum of humanitarian special envoys

• Use leverage with Israel to ensure Gazan civilians can return to the north by reopening the water pipeline, resuming operations at the Ashdod port, and opening another crossing for aid to northern Gaza

• Seek rapprochement between Israel and the U.N.

• Encourage Arab states to shift from in-kind donations to assistance within OCHA appeal

• Involve the PA in the humanitarian effort to bridge current status with its “Day After” vision

Short to medium term:

• Work with U.N. and international community to substantially reform UNRWA, condition funding on reforms using clear benchmarks, and rely on alternatives whenever possible

• Involve the PA Security Forces in clearing rubble and debris in Gaza and manning border crossings

• Ramp up support to the United States Security Coordinator to build and train an interim security force for Gaza

• Create a roadmap for PA reform that includes specific benchmarks, synchronized with steps by Israel to strengthen the PA
United Nations

The U.N. and NGOs spearhead the humanitarian effort, from raising funds and defining needs to coordinating actors and delivering aid on the ground. The effectiveness of the U.N.’s operations is largely tied to funding and the cooperation of actors on the ground.

Immediate term:

- Purchase 100 trucks for use in Gaza to increase distribution capacity within the Strip
- Examine the merit of using private security companies to assist in protecting aid and aid workers inside Gaza
- Assess status of public facilities (mosques, schools, universities, etc.) to plan for an efficient distribution network
- Improve ties with Israel by acknowledging its efforts when deserving, facilitate better coordination and deconfliction
- Work with Egypt to improve procedures at el-Arish and Rafah
- Improve internal communication and collaboration between the humanitarian coordinator teams

Short to medium term:

- Plan to phase out in-kind assistance and shift to market-based approach
- Begin dialogue with Israel to establish community-based humanitarian zones
- Strengthen disease surveillance systems and other public-health initiatives
- Evaluate damage in northern Gaza and assess viability of IDPs returning
Israel

Israel has two conflicting impulses: disengaging from Gaza and maintaining security control. Since 2005, its humanitarian role in Gaza has primarily been to facilitate relief by third-party actors. Israel's cooperation is a prerequisite for much of the humanitarian effort and under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), its control of Gaza renders it responsible for providing for the needs of the civilian population.

Immediate term:

• Appoint a high-level humanitarian coordinator trusted by the prime minister and the security cabinet, similar to the hostage envoy, to demonstrate Israel's commitment to humanitarian relief and improved inter-agency coordination

• Address protests at Kerem Shalom

• Allow imports through Ashdod port at least until the U.S. pier becomes operational

• Improve communication with and rhetoric toward the U.N.

• Increase fuel entering Gaza and allow reopening of Gaza power plant

• Encourage investment in existing health infrastructure rather than ad hoc solutions

• Establish clear approval process for communications equipment for U.N., NGOs

• Improve ties with NGOs and ease access to help lower dependence on UNRWA

• Accept PA involvement in the humanitarian efforts in Gaza even absent day-after commitments

Short to medium term:

• Enable IDPs to return north by allowing rubble removal and repair of lightly damaged homes

• Explore reopening power lines to parts of Gaza cleared of Hamas

• Work with U.S. and others to establish requirements and a timeline for UNRWA reform
Sector-Specific Recommendations

Electricity and Fuel

**Key problems: Electricity supply currently cut off by Israel. Fuel importation is far short of needs.**

- Ensure sufficient fuel for Gaza’s critical infrastructure, including the central power plant
- Allow fuel to enter northern Gaza
- Involve the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) in planning for electricity and fuel supply for WASH plants
- Provide more generators and identify other power solutions (e.g. solar panels)
- Examine how to restore power from Egypt through non-operational lines
- Reconnect power lines from Israel

Telecommunications

**Key problems: Intermittent internet connectivity. Few operational telecommunications towers. Service providers report shutdowns due to damaged infrastructure.**

- Increase volume and expedite importation of telecommunications equipment for vetted international NGOs, including high-frequency (HF) and very-high-frequency (VHF) radio equipment and satellite phones, while ensuring sensitive items do not fall into Hamas’ hands
- Establish independent and reliable shared services for telecommunications to ensure coordinated humanitarian service delivery to the population of Gaza
- Expand access of U.N. agencies and NGOs to Israeli SIM cards
- Devise a mechanism to protect communications sites from the theft of fuel, generators, solar panels, and other essential goods
- Increase number of essential spare parts, especially cables, that are entering Gaza to enable critical repairs and restore services

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1 These data are current as of late February 2024.
Food Security

Key problems: Food entering Gaza not meeting needs and prices increasing substantially. Entire population is facing acute food insecurity and malnutrition and dehydration rising, especially in the north. Growing risk of famine.

- Following an initial surge of truckloads, ensure consistent supply of 150 trucks of food daily, with a focus on ready-to-eat, high-energy food
- Ensure sufficient food is delivered to 300,000 people in the north of Gaza
- Expand fleet of delivery trucks
- Procure and deliver equipment to rebuild and repair additional bakeries
- Implement market-based approach to food supply
- Expand accessible kitchens close to shelters
- Revive agricultural production

Health


- Increase medical supplies, including medication (anesthesia, antibiotics, IV fluids, pain medications, insulin, and blood/blood products) and standardized health kits, including cholera kits
- Import equipment, such as monitors, ventilators, incubators, x-ray and CT machines, lab analyzers, and anesthesia machines
- Assess salvageability of hospital facilities and develop a sequential work plan based on feasibility to reopen, repair, and expand capacity of hospitals and healthcare facilities
- Plan for the reopening of primary health clinics, prioritizing addressing the needs of vulnerable populations (children, elderly, pregnant women)
- Ensure sufficient electrical supply for medical facilities
- Bolster medical services, including post-op rehabilitation and trauma support
- Improve external referral pathways and medical evacuations, and ensure U.N. teams have clear evacuation protocols and means for quick departure in the case of medical emergencies
• Facilitate medical evacuations and inter-hospital transfers inside Gaza by real-time coordination and safe routes for ambulance movements

• Strengthen disease surveillance systems and outbreak preparedness and build response capacity for communicable diseases

• Plan for vaccination campaigns jointly with the PA

• Sustain current field and ship hospitals while evaluating the establishment of new ones

• Facilitate blood donation drive from the West Bank, carried out jointly by the PA and U.N.

• Enhance road transportation infrastructure for ambulances and medical logistics

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

Key problems: Most Gazans have no access to clean water and are turning to unsafe sources. Ineffective waste management and presence of corpses and carcasses in streets, elevating risk of disease.

• Reopen water pipeline from Israel to northern Gaza

• Deliver water and purification tablets to collection points via trucks

• Repair water pipes, sewers, and other critical infrastructure

• Provide sufficient fuel for desalination and wastewater treatment facilities

• In a joint initiative by the U.N. and Palestinian Water Authority, transport water to the north via pumping stations and trucks

• Immediately remove and dispose of human waste in populated areas

• Expand capacity of hygiene facilities and supplies: Expand latrine, shower, and domestic water point facilities for IDPs and host families in densely populated areas; distribute personal hygiene kits

• Develop a quick mechanism for importing and deploying solar-powered mobile units for wastewater treatment and greywater utilization
Shelter and Non-Food Items

Key problems: Over 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Shelters south of Wadi Gaza operating at nine times capacity. Shelters often shelled, even if by mistake. Over 60% of housing stock damaged, destroyed, or uninhabitable. Humanitarian zones established by Israel not recognized by U.N. and humanitarian organizations due to exposure to hostilities, lack of services, and poor infrastructure.

- Provide emergency shelter materials, build prefabricated units on determined sites, repair and rehabilitate existing housing units on an emergency basis.
- Allow IDPs from north Gaza to return to their original areas after clearing debris and unexploded explosive ordnances (UXOs).
- For IDPs who can return home: Rapid damage assessment by U.N., clear debris, repair partially damaged homes, establish community-based assistance to provide essential services and preserve social fabric.
- For IDPs currently unable to return: Strengthen shelter capacity, ensure dignified living conditions, prevent overcrowding.
- Safe zones and temporary housing: Identify multiple areas near original community locations where displaced individuals from those areas can reside temporarily. Ensure at least 1.5 square kilometers for every 30,000 people. Build prefabricated houses in lieu of tents, provide health and education services, and accommodate economic activity.
• Provide transitional shelter cash assistance (including host families) and extend rental support subsidies to housing and alternative accommodation options

• Adapt non-residential buildings and build tents or makeshift shelters on individual plots

• Examine the merit of establishing a U.N. compound to act as a shelter for U.N. personnel and a logistics hub for facilitating aid

Education

Key problems: 90% of school buildings damaged or sheltering IDPs. Over 625,000 students affected.

• Provide psychosocial support and recreational activities to students and teachers

• Prioritize setting up temporary learning spaces when possible

• Prepare distance-learning programs once electricity and connectivity restored

• Repair and rehabilitate schools once possible