



Mounting International Criticism Against Israel and Condemnation of Its Use of Starvation as a Weapon of War

Israel has been facing growing international rebuke and isolation over its actions in Gaza, with an array of countries recently voicing strong levels of public criticism. Earlier this week, German officials threatened of potential measures against Israel, joining others such as the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Spain who had previously done so as well. All of this comes as the European Union (EU) also announces that it will review its political and economic ties with Israel in light of the appalling human rights violations and war crimes taking place in Gaza. The expansion of Israel's military assault, the widely denounced aid distribution takeover, and Israel's continued weaponization and politicization of humanitarian relief have all elicited deserved condemnation from a host of entities – and even prompted the resignation of the head of the controversial group created to spearhead the aid distribution takeover plan, who himself acknowledged that the operation failed to adhere to humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence. United Nations (UN) agencies and the world's other major aid organizations have refused to participate in the aforementioned takeover plan due to it being a violation of international law with blatant underlying Israeli political motivations.

Throughout the course of the Gaza War, humanitarian groups have sought to draw attention to Israel's reprehensible use of starvation as a weapon of war. The obstruction of humanitarian aid and its weaponization is a war crime, and now on top of these longstanding violations, the Israeli government is clearly seeking to use the aid takeover plan as a means of manipulating its distribution for political and military purposes – hence why so many have been quick to denounce it. The Mossad is behind the controversial organization – Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) – that was set up to front the aid takeover operation, with Israel financing the agency through shell companies abroad in order to hide the clear ties to the Israeli government. While much of the world has spoken out against this and urged that impartial humanitarian organizations instead be allowed to resume their relief services in Gaza, the current U.S. government on the other hand warrants its share of culpability for its role in enabling Israel's war crimes and violations, as well as the implementation of the highly condemned aid takeover plan. The U.S.-backed Israeli aid takeover operation has been criticized for a number of reasons. Firstly, by limiting distribution points to a few locations, it forces further displacement of Gazan civilians – a crime against humanity – while providing no mechanism for those most vulnerable like the elderly and disabled to access humanitarian aid. Even for those who are able-bodied, the aid takeover operation requires them to individually collect and haul boxes weighing up to nearly 45 lbs. for miles from isolated sites. The amount of aid itself is also far from sufficient, and as many have outlined, a “drop in the ocean” to the surge that is actually desperately needed. On top of all of these shortcomings, the aid takeover is overtly politicized and militarized, rather than free from these destructive influences as should be the case with these types of relief operations. In fact, this week, witnesses at an aid distribution site in southern Gaza described scenes of chaos which left several people dead and dozens injured as Israeli troops stationed nearby opened fire. Aid group officials have expressed how, regrettably, this is the inevitable consequence of such a reckless and inhumane plan being carried out as opposed to simply opening up crossings into Gaza and allowing independent humanitarian groups to function and do their work.

Many countries, particularly in Europe, have recently ramped up their public criticism towards Israel for its ongoing actions in Gaza. On Sunday, Spain hosted a meeting in Madrid in which the country's foreign minister remarked that the international community should look to impose sanctions on Israel as a means of putting an end to its

military assault on Gaza. This follows last week's joint statement from the United Kingdom, France, and Canada whereby the leaders of the respective nations conveyed horror at Israel's military escalations in Gaza and threatened to take concrete actions. One of the elements that is becoming more and more undeniable to government officials around the world is that Israel's accelerated military operations in Gaza serve no objective other than to mask naked aggression and attempt to expand illegal occupation. There has also been increased acknowledgement from some senior European officials regarding Israel's use of aid and starvation as weapons of war. Several countries have taken steps to reassess their diplomatic and trade relations with the Israeli government, with the United Kingdom suspending free trade negotiations and imposing sanctions on illegal Israeli settlers.

Denunciation of Israel's conduct in Gaza has reached a point where it has grown internally as well. Israeli officials themselves have voiced that the country is becoming an "outcast among nations" as a result of the government's approach to the war. As one put it, "A sane country doesn't engage in fighting against civilians, doesn't kill babies as a hobby, and doesn't set for itself the goals of expelling a population." Perhaps most notably, Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert relayed his heavy criticisms earlier this week when he declared that Israel is committing war crimes and that "the government of Israel is currently waging a war without purpose, without goals or clear planning, and with no chances of success." Olmert openly admitted that Israel's actions in Gaza were indiscriminate and cruel – condemnation which spoke volumes and revealed a lot coming from a former head of the Israeli government.

In recent days, Israel has also garnered condemnation for its announced plan to expand illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank – a move which is in open defiance of international law. Officials went as far as brazenly disclosing that the expansion is aimed at further obstructing any possibility of a viable Palestinian state. Rights groups have underlined how this is the largest single illegal settlement expansion in decades, and serves as the latest example of Israeli officials carrying out increased violations in the West Bank such as home demolitions, settler violence, unlawful land seizures, and mass displacements, while much of the world's attention is fixated on its war crimes and abuses in Gaza. They also point out that it demonstrates illegal settlement expansion is an evident central goal of the current Israeli government. Spain, Finland, the United Kingdom, and others have strongly criticized the decision and labeled it a grave violation of international law and United Nations resolutions, which undermines the prospects for peace. On this note, activists have alluded to the fact that the Israeli government is making it clear with actions like this that it prefers deepening the illegal occupation over pursuing peace.