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CONSIDERATIONS ON THE HUMANITARIAN SECURITY CONSEQUENCES OF THE GAZA STRIP CONFLICT

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the humanitarian consequences of the Gaza Strip conflict that began on October 7, 2023, and extended into 2025. Its primary objective is to assess the direct impact on the civilian population and the capacity of international actors to respond effectively to a protracted and highly complex crisis. The research hypotheses are based on the premise that the restrictive security measures adopted by Israel, the military strategies employed by Hamas that instrumentalize the civilian population, and the insufficient response of the international community - shaped predominantly by a security-oriented logic - have cumulatively contributed to the exacerbation of humanitarian vulnerability and the undermining of the application of international humanitarian law in the Gaza Strip.

The analysis is based on recent official sources, including reports from the WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR, and UNRWA, highlighting the accelerated degradation of the healthcare system, the alarming rise in infant mortality, and the forced displacement of approximately two million people. It also highlights recent trends in the politicization of humanitarian norms.

The research findings confirm the initial hypotheses and underscore a profound disconnect between humanitarian imperatives and geopolitical constraints, reflecting the structural tensions of the current international order. In the final part of the paper, several directions are proposed for strengthening protection and intervention mechanisms, as well as recommendations for reforming the humanitarian cooperation framework. Thus, the study contributes to the understanding and contextualization of a paradigmatic crisis that illustrates both the failure and the potential of international norms in the face of contemporary armed conflicts.

Gaza Strip; Humanitarian Crisis; International Cooperation

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I. INTRODUCTORY, METHODOLOGICAL, AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 Contextual Background and the Humanitarian Premises of the Current Conflict

The conflict that erupted on October 7, 2023, in the Gaza Strip between Israel and the Islamist militant organization Hamas marked the beginning of one of the most violent and destabilizing episodes in the recent history of the region. The surprise attack launched by Hamas on Israeli territory, followed by Israel's large-scale military counteroffensive, triggered a security crisis with devastating effects on the civilian population. The intensity and duration of the military operations, combined with the widespread destruction of critical infrastructure, led to a rapid and dramatic deterioration of living conditions in the Gaza Strip, giving rise to a humanitarian catastrophe.

This conflict is characterized not only by significant human and material losses but also by severe humanitarian consequences. The national security rationale invoked by the Israeli state - namely, legitimate self-defense against terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas - has been weighed against the principles of international humanitarian law, which require the protection of civilians and civilian objects. At the same time, the military tactics employed by Hamas, including the strategic use of civilian infrastructure, have contributed to the creation of a highly complex environment, where the distinction between military targets and non-combatants has often been blurred. Against this backdrop, the overlap between security imperatives and the need for humanitarian protection represents one of the most strained and challenging aspects of the current conflict.

1.2. Research Methodology and Sources Used

This research adopts an analytical-descriptive approach, aiming to examine how the actions and security-related justifications or motivations arising from the conflict in the Gaza Strip generate or exacerbate critical humanitarian effects. The study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework situated at the intersection of security studies, international humanitarian law, and the analysis of contemporary armed conflicts.

The methodology involves the documentary analysis of primary sources (international legal texts, reports from United Nations - UN - agencies and humanitarian organizations) as well as the examination of secondary sources (specialized literature, academic analyses, and foreign policy studies). In addition, the research integrates statistical data and assessments issued by international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as well as relevant non-governmental organizations - Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, International Crisis Group (ICG), etc.

The study adopts a normative perspective on the interaction between security and civilian protection in conflict zones, seeking to identify discrepancies between state defense imperatives and compliance with fundamental humanitarian norms. Through this approach, the research aims to provide both a critical evaluation of the international response and possible directions for reconciling security action with the requirements of humanitarian protection in war theaters.

1.3. Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses underlying this research are based on the premise that there is a direct relationship between security-driven actions and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. In this context, the research is guided by the following hypotheses:



H.1: The security measures adopted by Israel - particularly those of a military and restrictive nature (blockades, attacks on infrastructure, exclusion zones) - have significantly contributed to the worsening of the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

H.2: The strategies employed by the Hamas organization - especially the use of the civilian population as a means of protection or propaganda - have increased humanitarian vulnerability and created challenges in the application of international humanitarian law.

H.3: The response of the international community, although rhetorically extensive, has been insufficient in ensuring the effective protection of civilians and the enforcement of humanitarian norms, due to the dominance of security logic in political and diplomatic discourse.

1.4. Research Objectives and Scope

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

O1: To analyze the impact of security strategies and actions on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

O2: To highlight how security rationales, invoked by both state and non-state actors, affect the protection of the civilian population, access to humanitarian assistance, and the functioning of essential institutions necessary for civilian survival.

O3: To identify dysfunctions within the international legal and institutional framework regarding the management of humanitarian consequences in asymmetric conflicts.

O4: To critically assess the effectiveness of international humanitarian protection mechanisms in the context of an intensified security-oriented approach, by examining the actions of the involved actors and the responses of the international community.

O5: To delimit the scope of the analysis exclusively to the interaction between security measures and their effects on the fundamental rights of the civilian population, without addressing in detail the broader geopolitical or strategic aspects of the conflict.

1.5. Conceptual Clarifications: „Humanitarian Security Consequences”

The phrase „humanitarian security consequences” implies an integrative approach situated at the intersection of security studies and international humanitarian law. At the core of this concept lies the understanding that security actions undertaken in the context of armed conflict are not neutral from a humanitarian perspective; rather, they generate both direct and indirect effects on civilians’ living conditions, access to aid, and essential survival infrastructure.

In the Gaza Strip conflict, the security dimension has been dominant in justifying the actions of both warring parties, often at the expense of humanitarian considerations. Israel has framed its military interventions in terms of the right to self-defense, while Hamas has employed the rhetoric of armed resistance (Alam, 2024). Nevertheless, the consequences of these actions - regardless of the rationale invoked - have largely materialized in the severe deterioration of the civilian population’s situation: destruction of homes, hospitals, and schools, and the lack of access to water, food, medical services, and physical security. Therefore, within this context, the phrase „humanitarian security consequences” refers to the full range of effects inflicted upon the civilian environment by actions intended to achieve military or security objectives (Kels, 2024). These include both immediate effects (casualties, injuries, destruction) and systemic medium- and long-term consequences (infrastructure degradation, food insecurity, healthcare collapse, forced displacement, psychosocial trauma, etc.).

Conceptually, this phrase calls for a redefinition of how security is understood - not solely as the military protection of the state or the elimination of terrorist threats, but also as human security, focused on the protection of life, dignity, and fundamental human rights in conflict situations (Kaldor,

2010). This perspective is increasingly supported by contemporary literature in international relations and human rights, which advocates for the integration of civilian protection into both national and international security strategies. In this study, „humanitarian security consequences” will be analyzed both in terms of the impact on the population of the Gaza Strip and from a normative perspective, assessing the legitimacy, proportionality, and compliance with applicable international law.

II. THE CONTEXT OF THE CONFLICT IN THE GAZA STRIP

2.1. Triggering Events and Military Escalation

The conflict that erupted on October 7, 2023, between Israel and the Islamist militant group Hamas represents the culmination of a long-standing set of historical, political, and social tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian context, dating back to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This episode of extreme violence must be interpreted in the broader framework of a protracted conflict marked by unresolved territorial disputes, chronic diplomatic deadlock, and a profound asymmetry in terms of power and sovereignty.

Among the key causal factors that created the conditions for the outbreak of violence are the following:

The blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2007, following Hamas’s takeover of the territory, has led to a progressive deterioration in the living conditions of the civilian population. This has resulted in near-total economic and social isolation, turning the territory into a space marked by systemic deprivation, instability, and marginalization (UNCTAD, 2024).

The absence of a credible peace process, particularly after the failure of bilateral negotiations and the marginalization of the two-state solution framework, has fueled deep frustration among the Palestinian population. This vacuum has enabled the rise of radical narratives and armed actions (Iqtait, 2025; Brown & Hamzawy, 2023).

Recurring tensions in East Jerusalem, especially in the area of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount complex, as well as the forced evictions of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, have become symbols of what is widely perceived as an Israeli policy of expansion and domination over the occupied territories (Nasasra, 2022).

The escalation of violence in the West Bank and Israel’s armed interventions in refugee camps and Palestinian cities - combined with the expansion of Israeli settlements - have reinforced the perception of an ongoing territorial occupation, fueling collective resentment and the radicalization of the population (Yiftachel, 2023).

The internal political dynamics in both Israel and Palestine have further contributed to this volatile environment. On one side, successive Israeli governments have been marked by political instability and the rise of ultranationalist parties. On the other side, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has been significantly weakened, while Hamas has consolidated its position as a resistance actor among segments of the Palestinian population (al-Omari, 2021; Abu Ras, 2025).

These factors have created a structural backdrop of latent tension, culminating in the triggering event of the conflict on October 7, 2023 - a massive offensive launched by Hamas against Israel - which the group’s leaders justified as a response to the „ongoing aggression” against the population of Gaza (Anadolu Agency [AA], 2024). The scale of the attack - which resulted in hundreds of Israeli civilian deaths, kidnappings, and extensive destruction - marked a dramatic paradigm shift and led to a devastating Israeli military response, with severe humanitarian consequences.



2.2. Involved Actors: Hamas, Israel, and Other Regional Players

The conflict that erupted in the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023, involved two main actors: the militant group Hamas, which launched the initial offensive, and the State of Israel, the direct target of the attack. As the conflict escalated, its scope expanded to include additional regional actors who became involved either militarily or diplomatically.

Hamas, designated a terrorist organization by Israel, the European Union (EU), and the United States (US), launched the offensive under the name „Al-Aqsa Flood.” The group’s leaders framed the attack as a response to Israel’s „ongoing aggression,” the blockade of the Gaza Strip, and repeated incidents perceived as desecrations of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (CFR, 2024).

Israel responded with a large-scale military campaign aimed at the complete dismantling of Hamas’s capabilities and the restoration of national security. This response was carried out with strong diplomatic backing from the United States and other Western allies (Dostri, 2023).

On the regional front, the militant group Hezbollah engaged in the conflict by launching repeated attacks on northern Israel, particularly along the border with Lebanon. This opened a parallel front that diverted additional Israeli military resources and significantly increased the risk of regional escalation. Hezbollah’s actions were accompanied by aggressive rhetoric from its leadership, who framed the intervention as an act of solidarity with the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip (Stroul, 2024).

In parallel, Iran provided strong rhetorical support to the Hamas movement, along with material assistance in the form of weapons deliveries, technical expertise, and logistical aid. These actions reinforced the perception of an emerging „axis of resistance” against Israel and its Western allies (Clarke, 2023; Mansour, Al-Shakeri & Haid, 2025).

Qatar and Egypt played a critical role in crisis diplomacy, acting as intermediaries in negotiations for the release of hostages and the facilitation of humanitarian aid access to the Gaza Strip. Their efforts included discreet communications with Hamas leadership, discussions with Israeli officials, and mediation among multiple international stakeholders seeking to de-escalate the conflict. Both countries emphasized their interest in maintaining regional stability and preventing the total collapse of Gaza’s humanitarian infrastructure (Altaweel, 2025; Adachi, 2024).

Saudi Arabia and Jordan, although not directly involved in military operations or negotiations, repeatedly expressed serious concerns - through diplomatic channels and official statements - regarding the risk of the conflict escalating into a broader regional confrontation. Both states underscored the threat posed to Middle Eastern stability, particularly in light of the religious and political sensitivities surrounding Jerusalem, as well as the potential domestic reactions among their own populations (ACR&PP, 2024). Jordan, in particular - whose population includes a significant Palestinian majority - was especially vocal in warning about the humanitarian and political consequences of a prolonged and uncontrolled intervention in the Gaza Strip (al Rantawi, 2024).

2.3. Strategic Infrastructure and Declared Security Objectives

The scale and intensity of the Gaza conflict have been reflected in both the typology of targeted sites and the declared security objectives of the opposing sides. These targets included military and logistical infrastructure, as well as dual-use facilities (civilian and military) - some classified as critical infrastructure - resulting in a profound impact on the civilian population.

For Israel, the main declared objectives were: the elimination of Hamas’s political and military leadership; the destruction of the tunnel network and rocket infrastructure used by the group; the reestablishment of control over the southern borders; and the prevention of similar attacks in the future. Accordingly, Israeli strikes focused on targets such as command centers, weapons depots, the



residences of Hamas leaders, and densely populated neighborhoods in the Gaza Strip suspected of concealing underground infrastructure used by Hamas operatives (Gat, 2024; Abuamer, 2024). This strategy has been heavily criticized at the international level due to its humanitarian consequences and the destruction of essential infrastructure.

On the other side, Hamas leaders stated that the objectives of their offensive were: to break the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip; to defend Islamic holy sites; to draw international attention to the Palestinian cause; and to negotiate from a position of strength for the release of Palestinian detainees (Margolin & Levitt, 2023). In this context, the strategic infrastructure targeted by Hamas included military facilities but also civilian sites, such as Israeli cities and border crossings.

The Gaza conflict has demonstrated that strategic infrastructure - both military and civilian - is used not only as a battlefield objective but also as a tool of psychological, symbolic, and diplomatic pressure in an asymmetric context where international humanitarian law is persistently challenged.

III. LEGAL AND NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

In the context of modern armed conflicts, adherence to international legal norms concerning the protection of civilians and essential infrastructure is a fundamental requirement. This normative framework is grounded in international humanitarian law, the concept of human security, and a set of conventions and treaties that regulate the conduct of parties during armed conflict.

In the case of the Gaza Strip conflict, these legal provisions are critical for assessing the legality and legitimacy of the actions carried out by the parties involved.

3.1. International Humanitarian Law and the Regulations on Civilian Protection

The primary legal framework governing conduct during war, aimed at limiting the effects of conflict on individuals not directly involved in hostilities, is international humanitarian law. Its foundations lie in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols. The core principles of international humanitarian law include: the distinction between combatants and civilians, proportionality between military objectives and anticipated collateral damage, and the obligation to take precautions in attacks to minimize harm to civilians.

Amid the dynamics of the Gaza Strip conflict, numerous reports by international organizations - such as Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2024a), Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2024), and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC, 2024) - have highlighted systematic violations of international humanitarian law by both parties involved in the conflict.

Among the most serious allegations are deliberate or disproportionate attacks on essential civilian infrastructure (hospitals, schools, water networks, and electrical facilities), which have severely impacted the minimum living conditions of the affected population. Israeli military forces have been accused of employing a doctrine of excessive force, particularly through the intensive use of airstrikes in densely populated areas, resulting in a high number of civilian casualties.

Simultaneously, Hamas has been criticized for employing human shields, placing military equipment in or near civilian structures, and launching rockets into Israeli residential areas without the ability to distinguish between military and civilian targets - actions that constitute a direct violation of the principle of distinction under international humanitarian law.

International organizations mentioned above have also documented the restriction of humanitarian aid access, particularly during periods of intensified hostilities, which has severely disrupted the distribution of food, drinking water, and medical assistance. On multiple occasions,



humanitarian convoys were denied entry into the Gaza Strip or blocked at border crossings, despite international appeals to uphold the right to humanitarian assistance. This situation has been characterized as a potential form of collective punishment, which is explicitly prohibited under international law.

As a result, the overall picture that emerges is one of an acute humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by repeated violations of the legal obligations of the parties to the conflict. From the standpoint of international law, these violations raise serious questions about international legal responsibility and highlight the need for the activation of independent mechanisms for investigation and accountability.

3.2. The Concept of Human Security and Its Intersection with Military Security

The concept of human security, advanced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the 1990s, represents an expansion of the traditional notion of security. It shifts the focus from the protection of borders and state sovereignty to the safety and well-being of individuals, emphasizing access to food, water, shelter, healthcare, and fundamental freedoms (Kaldor, 2010; Serescu, 2021).

In conflict situations, military measures, often justified by defense and national security concerns, can come into conflict with states' obligations to respect and guarantee the fundamental rights of civilians - obligations that stem from the human security framework. This intersection between military security and human security demands an ethical, balanced, and integrative approach, where military actions must be evaluated not only in terms of their immediate strategic effectiveness but also in relation to their direct and indirect impact on human life (Slim, 2016).

In the context of the Gaza Strip conflict, where civilian population density in combat zones is extremely high and critical infrastructure is fragile, Israeli military actions have been a major factor in triggering a humanitarian crisis. The resulting consequences have severely affected the core elements that define the concept of human security.

International humanitarian law and human rights law provide the necessary normative framework to temper the excesses of military-security logic and ensure that state actions respect the fundamental principles of proportionality, distinction, and precaution (ICRC, 2024). From this perspective, human security cannot be regarded as a secondary or optional objective but must be seen as an inseparable component of genuine national security, as lasting stability cannot be achieved by ignoring the suffering of the civilian population.

A responsible security policy should incorporate into decision-making not only the military effectiveness of an operation but also its impact on individuals' fundamental rights, access to vital resources, the capacity of local institutions to function, and the resilience of civil society. In this way, the human security dimension becomes not an obstacle to strategic action but a key criterion for its legitimacy, sustainability, and legality (Gilder & Linsdell, 2024).

Moreover, in situations of protracted conflict, such as the one analyzed here, neglecting the human security dimension can lead to cycles of radicalization, collective resentment, and social imbalances that perpetuate violence (Doucey, 2011). In this sense, security based solely on military superiority is illusory if it is not accompanied by coherent measures that ensure the protection of life, dignity, and the fundamental rights of civilians.

3.3. Relevant Conventions and the Obligations of Parties in Conflict

In addition to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols, the international normative framework relevant to the issues discussed includes the Hague Convention of 1907 on the laws and customs of war, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998),



and various UN Security Council Resolutions, including those concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflicts - such as Resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of medical infrastructure.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions, together with the 1977 Additional Protocols (ICRC, 1949), constitute the foundation of international humanitarian law, establishing essential rules for the protection of persons not participating in hostilities. These instruments affirm that warfare is subject to legal norms and impose limits through the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution. The Additional Protocols extend the applicability of international humanitarian law to internal and asymmetric conflicts, acknowledging the severe impact of such conflicts on civilian populations. In practice, however, the implementation of these norms faces significant challenges - particularly in complex conflicts, such as the one in the Gaza Strip. The frequent violations of the provisions contained in these conventions underscore the need for more effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

The 1907 Hague Convention, particularly Convention IV and its Annexed Regulations (Hague Convention [IV], 1907), represents one of the earliest international legal instruments regulating state conduct during armed conflict. It established fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, such as humanity, the distinction between combatants and civilians, the protection of prisoners of war and cultural property, and state responsibility for the actions of its armed forces. The document limits the permissible means of warfare and prohibits unnecessary suffering, pillage, and destruction without military justification. It also imposes on military commanders the obligation to prevent and punish abuses. The Convention sets clear rules for occupation authorities, emphasizing the need to maintain public order and protect the rights of the civilian population. While some provisions may be open to interpretation in the context of modern asymmetric conflicts, the core principles remain relevant and have been integrated and expanded within the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC, 1998) explicitly establishes individual criminal responsibility for war crimes, including deliberate attacks on civilian populations. According to Article 8, paragraph 2(b)(i), it is considered a war crime to „intentionally direct attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities”. This provision embodies the principle of distinction, which mandates the protection of civilians from the effects of hostilities. The Statute also criminalizes disproportionate attacks, which, although targeting military objectives, cause excessive harm to civilians. Furthermore, it prohibits attacks on humanitarian infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, and aid convoys. Military commanders are obligated to take precautionary measures to avoid or minimize civilian casualties. Violations of these norms entail international criminal liability, regardless of the perpetrator's rank or position. Overall, the Rome Statute strengthens the civilian protection regime in armed conflict and provides a judicial mechanism for holding perpetrators of war crimes accountable. At its core, this legal framework expresses a universal ethic of human dignity and protection in times of war and armed conflict.

UN Security Council Resolutions on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts (UNSC, 2016) emphasize the responsibility of warring parties to uphold international humanitarian law and to ensure the safety of individuals not participating directly in hostilities. A key document in this regard is Resolution 2286 (2016), which strongly condemns attacks on medical facilities, healthcare personnel, and humanitarian transport, and calls on states to conduct prompt and impartial investigations into such incidents. The resolution reaffirms the inviolability of medical infrastructure and highlights the increasing number of deliberate attacks on hospitals in war zones, including in contexts such as the Gaza Strip. It further urges all parties involved in conflicts to comply with their



obligations under the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law, while also calling for the establishment of more effective mechanisms for protection, monitoring, and accountability for violations committed against civilians. These resolutions thus contribute to the strengthening of the international normative framework for civilian protection, emphasizing both the legal and moral dimensions of state obligations in conflict zones.

In relation to the Gaza conflict, it must be noted that both Israel and Hamas are subject to these obligations, although the legal applicability and accountability of non-state armed groups remains a contested issue within international law.

IV. SECURITY CONSEQUENCES WITH HUMANITARIAN IMPACT IN THE GAZA STRIP CONFLICT

4.1. Military Tactics and Their Impact on the Civilian Population

The conflict in the Gaza Strip has rapidly escalated into a high-intensity military confrontation, characterized by a variety of offensive and defensive tactics employed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). These have included sustained aerial bombardments, large-scale ground incursions into densely populated areas, and the designation of so-called „safe zones” or „buffer zones,” which in practice have often become hazardous spaces for Palestinian civilians (UNHRC, 2025). The IDF has conducted targeted operations aimed at eliminating Hamas leadership through high-precision airstrikes, relying on military intelligence and advanced technologies. These actions have focused on hideouts, tunnel networks, and urban infrastructure, frequently located in heavily populated areas (Peptan, 2024).

Although officially justified by the need to neutralize Hamas and dismantle its infrastructure, such operational methods have resulted in significant civilian casualties and the systematic destruction of essential infrastructure necessary for daily life.

The implementation of these tactics has led to a severe deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip. Reports by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have pointed to repeated violations of international humanitarian law committed by the IDF in the context of armed conflict.

A notable aspect is the critical response expressed within the Israeli academic and civic spheres, where influential voices - including historians, philosophers, and legal scholars - have condemned the intensity and scale of the repression. Terms such as „*criminal killing of civilians*” and „*starving out Gaza*” have been used not only in the international press but also in manifestos and public statements by groups of Israeli intellectuals, who have warned against the danger of transforming an asymmetric conflict into a process of institutionalized dehumanization (Al Jazeera, 2025a). This internal opposition highlights the ethical fractures within Israeli society regarding the conduct of the war and the moral responsibility toward civilian victims.

4.2. Blockades and Their Impact on Access to Humanitarian Aid

The blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip by Israel, beginning in 2007 and dramatically intensified between 2023 and 2025, has had devastating effects on the civilian population, directly impacting all elements essential for survival. Restrictions on access to food, fuel, medicine, and other vital supplies have led to the collapse of the internal market and a prolonged humanitarian crisis. Although Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits collective punishment under any circumstances, the restrictive measures collectively imposed on the more than two million residents

of the Gaza Strip have been described by numerous international organizations as a serious violation of this legal norm (UNHRC, 2025; UNHR, 2025).

In 2025, the escalation of military operations was accompanied by logistical and administrative restrictions that severely impeded the flow of international humanitarian aid, with dramatic humanitarian consequences. International humanitarian organizations such as UNRWA and the WHO reported that access to the Gaza Strip was systematically obstructed through excessive inspections, administrative delays, and denial of authorizations. In this context, the restrictive measures cannot be viewed merely as a tool of military pressure, but rather as a form of deliberate suffering imposed on a vulnerable civilian population (UNRWA, 2025a; WHO, 2025a).

The cumulative effect of this policy may be interpreted as equivalent to a strategy of punishing the population, raising serious questions about its legality and morality.

4.3. Destruction of Critical Infrastructure: Hospitals, Schools, Water and Food Systems

The developments of the armed conflict in the Gaza Strip have led to the systematic destruction of essential civilian infrastructure, with particularly severe consequences for the local population.

The medical infrastructure has been among the most affected sectors, with hundreds of documented attacks on healthcare facilities. According to the WHO (WHO, 2025a; WHO, 2025b), over 40% of hospitals and the majority of primary care centers in Gaza have been shut down, with the healthcare system operating under critical resource constraints. Estimated damages exceed USD 6.3 billion. The destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure has increased the risk of disease outbreaks, while the threat of famine is severe, especially among children. WHO has also documented multiple attacks targeting medical personnel in Gaza. The mental health crisis affects more than two million people, with children being particularly vulnerable. Essential services for women and newborns are profoundly disrupted. Although WHO has mobilized mobile clinics and medical supplies, financial support remains far below the required level.

In parallel, the conflict has triggered a deep educational crisis with devastating effects on Palestinian children and youth. According to the UNRWA (UNRWA, 2025b), the education system has suffered massive damage: over 200 schools and universities have been hit, with at least 53 completely destroyed by March 2024. Approximately 75–90% of educational infrastructure requires reconstruction. The suspension of the 2023–2024 school year, the use of schools as shelters, and the lack of basic supplies have interrupted education for approximately 625,000 students. Since March 2, 2025, the ban on aid transport has entirely halted UNRWA's programming, including psychosocial and educational support. International organizations warn of the risk of a „lost generation”, irreparably affected by trauma, violence, food insecurity, and systemic instability.

The technical and civil infrastructure has suffered severe damage. According to the OCHA (OCHA, 2025a), the destruction of essential infrastructure in the Gaza Strip - water supply, sanitation, and electricity - has triggered an unprecedented public health crisis. More than 85% of water and sewage systems are completely non-functional, and the lack of electricity has halted desalination and pumping stations. Each day, over 130,000 cubic meters of untreated wastewater are discharged into the sea, contaminating water reserves and causing outbreaks of disease. International organizations have reported an alarming increase in cases of acute diarrhea, hepatitis, jaundice, and skin infections. The lack of access to clean drinking water and hygiene services has significantly amplified epidemiological risks, particularly among children. The crisis is further exacerbated by the continued blockade on humanitarian aid and the inability to repair the damaged infrastructure. OCHA has emphasized the urgent need for coordinated international intervention to prevent the total collapse of public health in Gaza.



Regarding agricultural infrastructure, according to the UN and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), approximately 80% of agricultural land has been either destroyed or rendered inaccessible, while groundwater sources have been contaminated or severely damaged due to bombings and the degradation of irrigation systems. Crop yields have plummeted, and food insecurity has reached catastrophic levels, with approximately 500,000 people on the brink of famine (UNHRC, 2025; Srivastava, 2025; FAO, 2025).

4.4. Border Security and the Impact on Refugees and Human Mobility

The security measures adopted in the context of the Gaza Strip conflict have significantly altered the dynamics of civilian mobility, transforming borders from areas of passage into zones of intensified control and systematic exclusion. These measures include heightened security screenings, the establishment of fortified buffer zones, and the forced displacement of the population toward the southern part of Gaza, where so-called „transit camps” have been set up. Although initially presented as temporary humanitarian measures, these spaces have increasingly taken on the characteristics of *de facto* detention zones, where freedom of movement is severely restricted.

At the same time, controversial plans for mass population relocation have been put forward, including proposals for the creation of „Humanitarian Transit Areas” to host hundreds of thousands of people, or even the forced transfer of civilians to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. Such proposals have drawn sharp criticism from international organizations and legal experts, as they are perceived as forms of involuntary displacement - prohibited under the Geneva Conventions and international refugee protection norms (Landy & Roston, 2025). The consequences of these measures go beyond logistical and operational considerations, striking at the core of humanitarian law and the right to freedom of movement in situations of armed conflict.

The transformation of borders into instruments of absolute securitization has led to a heightened politicization of the humanitarian dimension, in which access, protection, and assistance criteria are increasingly influenced by military-oriented approaches. Rather than focusing on the protection of civilians, international interventions are often conditioned by the imperative of population control, under the pretext of „managing” the crisis (HRW, 2024b). Within this framework, the humanitarian axis - meant to be neutral, impartial, and centered on the needs of victims - is being diverted in favor of national security objectives.

This development raises concerns not only about the effectiveness of international protection mechanisms but also about the legitimacy of interventions that fail to respect the principles of non-refoulement, non-discrimination, and proportionality. Overall, the security measures implemented at the borders of the Gaza Strip risk setting dangerous precedents for the future management of humanitarian crises by normalizing disproportionate restrictions and spatial segregation under the guise of maintaining order.

V. THE SECURITY - HUMANITARIANISM DYNAMIC: TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

5.1. Prioritizing Military Security versus the Needs of the Civilian Population

In the conflict zones of the Gaza Strip, the antagonistic relationship between military security imperatives and the obligation to protect civilians becomes starkly apparent. The IDF offensive launched in October 2023 was presented by Israeli authorities as a legitimate act of self-defense in response to attacks by Hamas. However, the scale of the military response and the use of



disproportionate force in densely populated areas have led to massive civilian casualties, with a recent study estimating that over 80,000 civilians have been killed to date (Fieldhouse, 2025).

This situation has drawn criticism from international law experts, who have pointed to violations of the principles of proportionality and precaution as outlined in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Forced evacuations from northern to southern Gaza - carried out without meaningful security guarantees - and bombardments of so-called „safe zones” raise serious questions about the actual commitment to civilian protection (HRW, 2024c).

In concrete terms, the prioritization of military objectives has also manifested in the deliberate targeting of humanitarian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and food warehouses, an issue documented by multiple international organizations (HRW, 2025). What emerges is a conflict paradigm in which the needs of the civilian population are subordinated to military logic, despite the existence of international legal frameworks that impose clear obligations for civilian protection.

5.2. Ethical and Operational Dilemmas in the Delivery of Humanitarian Aid

The provision of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip has been marked by major obstacles since the beginning of the conflict, against the backdrop of the strict blockade imposed by Israel. These conditions have created significant dilemmas for humanitarian actors, who are forced to operate in an environment where military logic dominates the civilian space. Following the prolonged closure of the Kerem Shalom crossing and the destruction of logistical infrastructure in southern Gaza, the Rafah border crossing became, for a time, the only point of access for humanitarian assistance. However, operations in the area were frequently interrupted by airstrikes and a lack of military coordination, which led to dozens of UN and international non-governmental organization (NGO) convoys being stranded at the border for extended periods. In this context OCHA has reported a consistent deterioration in security conditions affecting humanitarian access, as well as the absence of coordinated political will to enable the entry and equitable distribution of aid to affected populations (OCHA, 2025b).

At the same time, in an effort to prevent the inadvertent support of Hamas’s armed structures through international aid efforts, Israel has imposed strict controls and conditions on the content and destination of humanitarian shipments. These restrictions run counter to the principle of impartiality as enshrined in UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182, prompting Médecins Sans Frontières to accuse Israel of politicizing humanitarian aid deliveries in a manner incompatible with international humanitarian law (MSF, 2025).

The absence of an effective regulatory mechanism in this domain has turned humanitarian operations into a highly dangerous and unpredictable undertaking.

5.3. The Instrumentalization of Humanitarian Discourse for Political and Military Purposes

Humanitarian discourse has been visibly instrumentalized by various actors involved in the Gaza conflict, reflecting a broader trend of politicizing international norms. Israel has frequently employed the rhetoric of civilian protection to justify tactical humanitarian pauses or directed evacuations toward southern Gaza, even though it later expanded military operations into areas previously designated as „safe zones.” These actions have been perceived internationally as a strategic manipulation of the humanitarian framework to serve national security objectives (UNHRC, 2025).

Conversely, Hamas and other armed groups have exploited the humanitarian impact of IDF bombings in both discourse and imagery to exert international pressure on Israel and mobilize

external diplomatic support. The symbolic use of civilian victims within a narrative of resistance blurs the line between genuine humanitarian concerns and political legitimization efforts.

The instrumentalization of humanitarian discourse also poses serious challenges for neutral organizations, which risk becoming pawns in a broader geopolitical struggle. When the distribution of aid is portrayed as a „favor” granted by one of the warring parties, it undermines the core principle of humanitarian neutrality. Examples such as Israel’s proposal to establish „Humanitarian Transit Areas” in the Sinai - firmly rejected by both the UN and Egypt - illustrate how humanitarian concepts can be repurposed as tools of control and forced displacement (Landy & Roston, 2025).

VI. THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE: BALANCING SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

6.1. The Positioning of the UN, UNRWA, WHO, and Other Key Actors

Between 2023 and 2025, the conflict in the Gaza Strip prompted a fundamental reassessment of the role and effectiveness of international institutions in the face of an acute and protracted humanitarian crisis.

The UN consistently issued urgent appeals for compliance with international humanitarian law, calling for unimpeded access to deliver essential aid and for the protection of civilian infrastructure. Nevertheless, humanitarian access was systematically restricted, particularly in northern Gaza, where Israeli authorities blocked the majority of convoys on security grounds. The situation was further exacerbated by the absence of effective coordination mechanisms between the parties and the repeated refusal to authorize critical shipments. These constraints led to a significant worsening of famine conditions and the collapse of medical services (OCHA, 2025b; OCHA, 2025c). Despite UN mediation efforts, its position was frequently undermined by political vetoes in the Security Council and by the lack of coordinated international pressure, resulting in limited impact for its humanitarian appeals.

The WHO condemned the attacks on medical infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and called for unrestricted humanitarian access, warning of a major health crisis caused by the lack of medicines, medical personnel, and safe conditions for treating the wounded and the sick. This stance drew international attention to the critical situation in Gaza, increasing diplomatic pressure for compliance with international humanitarian law. However, the concrete effects were limited, as humanitarian access remained restricted and attacks on healthcare facilities continued (WHO, 2025a; WHO, 2025b).

UNRWA, the main provider of services for Palestinian refugees, has faced both structural and contextual challenges during the conflict in the Gaza Strip. The agency has been at the center of a legitimacy crisis, intensified by accusations from the Israeli government regarding the alleged involvement of some staff members in the October 7, 2023 attacks. The suspension of funding by several donors - despite the absence of conclusive evidence - was deemed disproportionate and risky for the stability of humanitarian operations (UN, 2025). These developments highlight the need for strengthened internal oversight within the agency, alongside the imperative of maintaining its mandate as a central pillar of protection for Palestinian refugees.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2025) has issued repeated reports documenting the collapse of the healthcare infrastructure and the dramatic deterioration of public health indicators, especially among children and women. Reports published in the first half of 2025 indicate that approximately 70% of hospitals in the Gaza Strip have become completely non-operational, while the remaining facilities are functioning with minimal resources - lacking stable electricity, essential medicines, and adequate medical personnel due to IDF attacks. The situation is further exacerbated



by the systematic destruction of water and sanitation networks, leading to the rapid spread of communicable diseases, particularly among children.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2025) has included the Gaza Strip crisis in its global reports on forced displacement, highlighting an unprecedented increase in the number of internally displaced persons - estimated at over 1.9 million by December 2024, out of a total population of just over two million. The forced displacement of the population, particularly from the north to the south of the Gaza Strip, occurred under direct pressure from military campaigns and in the absence of meaningful safety guarantees. This situation prompted UNHCR to issue repeated calls for stronger international intervention to protect those in conditions of extreme vulnerability. Nevertheless, the effective protection of civilians has been hindered by the absence of an international monitoring and intervention mechanism capable of functioning efficiently.

Overall, the positioning of WHO, UNICEF, and UNHCR in the context of the Gaza crisis reflects a profound tension between humanitarian imperatives - unhindered access to affected populations, civilian protection, and equitable aid distribution - and geopolitical realities that undermine these principles in practice.

This situation reveals a crisis not only of institutional capacity but also of the foundational norms that guide global humanitarian action. Paradoxically, while the UN and its specialized agencies continue to promote a discourse grounded in the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality, the reality on the ground reveals a steady erosion of these foundations in favor of geopolitical calculations that transcend the boundaries of international legal frameworks. In this context, it is not only the effectiveness but also the legitimacy of the international humanitarian system that is called into question, exposing the imbalance between the moral imperatives of civilian protection and the institutional deadlocks of a faltering international order.

6.2. The Role of Humanitarian NGOs in Insecure Environments

Humanitarian NGOs played a crucial role in the Gaza Strip between 2023 and 2025, conducting operations under conditions of extreme insecurity, in a context where civilian infrastructure was systematically degraded or destroyed. Organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Rescue Committee, and the International Committee of the Red Cross provided medical, food, and protection services despite heightened risks to their personnel (MSF, 2025). Numerous attacks on convoys and distribution centers resulted in significant human losses among aid workers, undermining the notion that NGO neutrality offers effective protection in conflict zones.

At the same time, the emergence of private or semi-official actors - such as the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation - has led to fragmentation within the humanitarian space and growing disputes over the legitimacy of those involved in aid distribution (Al Jazeera, 2025b).

This situation has raised serious concerns about the standards of neutrality, transparency, and impartiality - standards that are essential for the effective conduct of humanitarian operations in conflict settings. As a result, NGOs have found themselves in a tense equation where the effort to support victims has been continuously undermined by political manipulation, the militarization of humanitarian space, and the erosion of unconditional access to civilians in need.

6.3. The Challenges of International Cooperation in Complex Crises

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Gaza Strip has exposed the structural limitations of international cooperation in responding to complex and prolonged crises (Shari Kia & Ghadir, 2023; Imam, 2024).



Although calls for humanitarian intervention and compliance with international legal norms have been persistent, the effectiveness of multilateral mechanisms has been severely undermined by geopolitical polarization and decision-making gridlock within the UN. The temporary suspension of funding for UNRWA by key actors such as the US and the EU, following politically motivated accusations, has weakened the agency's institutional capacity to meet the basic needs of the population. At the same time, controversial initiatives - such as the creation of „Humanitarian Transit Areas” in the Sinai - have been criticized for their tendency to transform humanitarian concepts into tools of relocation and demographic control.

The fragmentation of humanitarian actors, the emergence of private structures, and the absence of coherent coordination have led to inefficiencies, overlaps, and a breakdown in trust among stakeholders. Logistical challenges - including restricted access, infrastructure destruction, and communication blackouts - have further compounded the difficulties of humanitarian response.

Overall, the Gaza crisis has revealed a dysfunctional model of international cooperation, in which humanitarian norms are frequently subordinated to strategic interests, and the protection of civilians becomes a secondary objective.

VII. PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has highlighted how the conflict in the Gaza Strip - beginning in October 2023 and continuing into 2025 - has generated a systemic humanitarian crisis, with profound implications for the civilian population, the international legal framework, and the institutional architecture of humanitarian response. In light of these findings, a strategic rethinking of international intervention and protection mechanisms is required, particularly in the face of conflicts marked by deep asymmetries and the political instrumentalization of humanitarian principles.

First, there is a need to strengthen civilian monitoring and protection frameworks by reinforcing the mandates of international agencies, particularly UNRWA, WHO, and UNICEF, which have faced significant operational and political pressures. The suspension of UNRWA's funding has demonstrated the vulnerability of humanitarian mechanisms to unilateral political decisions, underscoring the need to establish multilateral guarantees for functional continuity in situations of protracted crisis.

Second, enhanced cooperation is recommended between the UN, regional states, and non-governmental actors, through coordination based on shared standards, transparency, and a clear division of responsibilities. The Gaza crisis has illustrated the risks of fragmented humanitarian action and the negative consequences of unauthorized or politicized initiatives, such as the proposal to establish „Humanitarian Transit Areas”.

In the long term, academic research should deepen its analysis of the relationship between humanitarian discourse and geopolitical interests, particularly in the context of asymmetric conflicts. The Gaza conflict offers a relevant case study for examining how the concepts of protection, neutrality, and human security are negotiated, contested, and reconfigured on the ground. Future studies can thus contribute to shaping a more robust normative and operational framework in which the protection of civilians is no longer conditional on strategic calculations but becomes a collectively upheld priority.



VIII. CONCLUSIONS

This study has comprehensively analyzed the humanitarian consequences of the conflict in the Gaza Strip, with a focus on the period from October 2023 to July 2025, highlighting the severe deterioration of living conditions, the collapse of the healthcare system, mass forced displacement, and the challenges of international cooperation.

The research hypotheses -regarding the worsening of the humanitarian crisis, the institutional inability of international actors to respond effectively to a complex emergency, and the tendency to instrumentalize humanitarian norms - have been confirmed through the documentary analysis of relevant sources.

The research objectives have been fully achieved: the limitations of the international humanitarian response have been identified, the positions of institutional and non-governmental actors have been analyzed, and the geopolitical impact on civilian protection has been emphasized. The findings indicate that, although international humanitarian law is frequently invoked, it is often subordinated to strategic and security considerations, which directly affect vulnerable populations' access to aid.

In conclusion, the crisis in the Gaza Strip reveals a disconnection between normative principles and operational realities, necessitating a critical reassessment of the functionality of the international humanitarian system. This study thus offers a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of contemporary crises and proposes concrete directions for strengthening the effectiveness and coherence of future humanitarian interventions.

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