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Foreword

This issue examines four critical challenges to the core of international and humanitarian law in the Mediterranean.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza reveals more than a breakdown of legal norms, but an additional lack of moral restraint as the Palestinian population is forced to endure starvation while under siege by Israeli forces. Such a humanitarian crisis could provoke a significant reaction from countries that support Israel as they burn through their remaining soft power and diplomatic cover.

The Israeli blockade has also contributed to the catastrophic levels of hunger, displacement and disease, with humanitarian efforts obstructed in international waters as in the case of the *Madleen* and its crew. The *Madleen*, carrying humanitarian aid, was stopped in international waters by the Israeli forces and its unarmed crew were detained and deported.

Israel also struck Iran pre-emptively, attacking their nuclear facilities and air defense systems while claiming anticipatory self-defense. We examine the legal precedent for and against Israel's claim to highlight the discrepancy between what is, and what isn't considered valid self-defense in an international legal framework.

Elsewhere, Tunisia continues its backslide into authoritarianism, prosecuting political dissidents such as lawyers, politicians, human rights defenders, researchers and journalists under terrorism charges in what's become known as the "Conspiracy Case". The EU, however, remains tight-lipped, perhaps in order to retain Tunisian state cooperation on issues like migration control.

The Weaponisation of Water & Humanitarian Aid in Gaza

Konstantinos Spanos

Key Takeaways

- Israel has been accused of intentionally blocking humanitarian missions and destroying essential water infrastructure in Gaza, severely worsening living conditions and exposing civilians –especially children– to malnutrition, disease, and dehydration.
- On 21 November, 2024 the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Netanyahu, citing war crimes such as starvation as a method of warfare, and deliberate deprivation of essentials like food, water, and medical supplies.
- Israel's actions likely contravene both International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law, particularly regarding civilians' rights to water, health, and protection in conflict. Legal experts argue that such actions may amount to war crimes and demand urgent accountability.

Background

On 1 March 2025, Israel and Hamas announced the conclusion of a two-month truce, a development that provoked the obstruction of the external humanitarian missions and import of essential to subsistence supplies to the Gaza strip.¹ According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), this situation exacerbated the adverse living conditions like malnutrition and disease for Palestinians, primarily for children.²

The essence of this reality has been concentrated in two phenomena, the systematic blockage of humanitarian missions and the premeditated destruction of water infrastructure in the Gaza strip by Israel. A recent manifestation of the former case concerns the seizure of the *Madleen*, a ship carrying humanitarian aid bound for Gaza crewed by Greta Thunberg and other activists. The individuals aboard were detained after their arrival at Israel's port of Ashdod on 2 June.³ The second phenomenon has demonstrated that Israel's military forces have targeted water facilities supplying the Palestinian people, leading to a shortage of potable water and inadequate wastewater sanitation. Both phenomena contributed to the insufficient availability of hygiene kits, menstrual products and a shortage of water containers, which has rendered vulnerable groups –especially women and children –more susceptible to infections, exuding a loss of dignity in already dire conditions.⁴

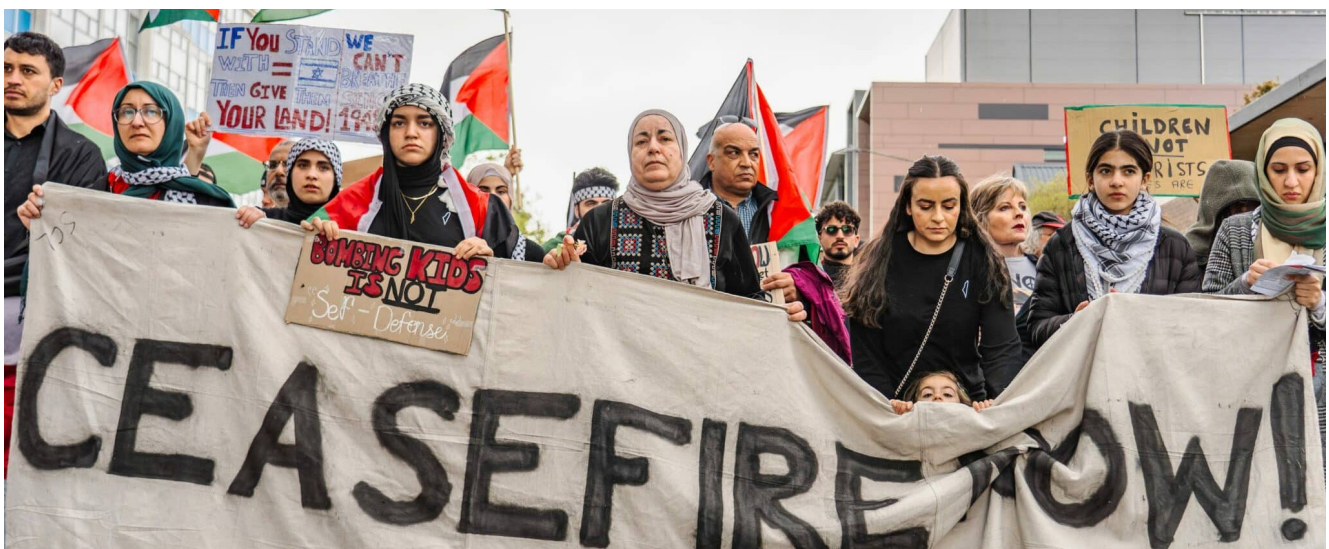
The afore-mentioned actions by Israel are not a one-off mistake, rather they appear to be part of a consistent policy of denial of access to water and basic needs. Beginning in October 2023, at the onset of the war, Israel imposed a full blockade on the Gaza Strip, cutting off access to essential resources. Despite the temporary ceasefires on 24 November, 2023 and 19 January 2025 that enabled a slight amelioration of the state of Palestinians, another hunger crisis took shape in the Gaza strip in March 2025.⁵ Throughout the 18-month conflict in Gaza, Israel has regularly "weaponised" water and international humanitarian aid in order to exert pressure against Palestinian people,

according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry.⁶

As a consequence, a minimum of 60.000 children in the Gaza Strip now face severe health risks from dehydration and malnutrition, with food shortages worsening amid Israel's continued restriction of aid.⁷ The unfolded succession of events sparked intense debate regarding the lawfulness of Israel's actions and their compliance with International Humanitarian Law.

The ICC & the Palestine Crisis

In this regard, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court initiated an investigation into the Situation in the State of Palestine for potential criminal actions that fall within the jurisdiction of Rome Statute.⁸ The Chamber advanced issuing warrants of arrest for two individuals, Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed from at least 8 October, 2023 until at least 20 May, 2024, the day the Prosecution filed the applications for arrest warrants.⁹



Protestors asking for a ceasefire deal between Israelis and Palestinians. Photographer: Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand (CC BY 3.0 NZ). Date: 9 November, 2023.

The Chamber seemingly found reasonable grounds to believe that, during the relevant time, IHL related to international armed conflict (IAC) between Israel and Palestine applied. This classification substantiated on Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967, and the fact that both Israel and Palestine are parties to the 1949 Geneva Conventions (GC) as the Common Article 2 provides.¹⁰ On the other hand, the conflict between Israel and Hamas was classified as a non-IAC, since Hamas is a non-state actor and its actions cannot be attributed to another state.^[11] Taking all these into consideration, the Court established that the GC and the Additional Protocol I (API) apply in the case of Palestinian occupation governing the conduct of hostilities and the protection of civilians, whereas the Israel-Hamas hostility is regulated by Common Article 3 of the GC and the APII.¹²

In light of these preliminary considerations, the Chamber considered that there are reasonable grounds to believe that both individuals intentionally and knowingly deprived the civilian population in Gaza of objects indispensable to their survival, including food, water, and medicine and medical supplies, as well as fuel and electricity.¹³ Evidence of this practice can be derived from the recent incident of the seizure of the Madleen, a civilian aid vessel part of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition directed to provide humanitarian aid in Gaza. The BBC reported that the crew was abducted and illegally detained by Israel's naval forces, on 9 June 2025, violating their IHL obligations.¹⁴ Due to the persistent blockade, there was a severe shortage of medical supplies and medication. According to verified reports, doctors had no choice but to perform surgeries and amputations - even on children -

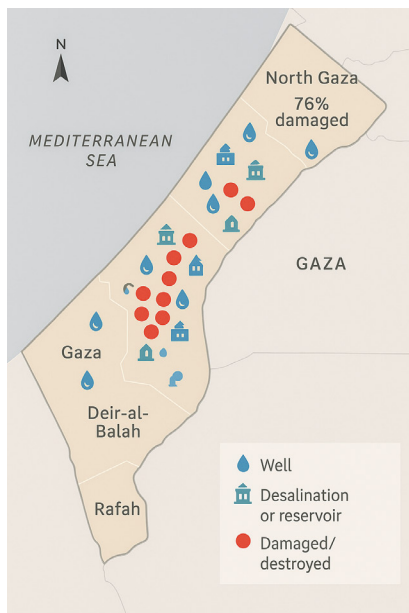
without the use of anesthetics, subjecting them to intense pain.¹⁵

Based on the evidence submitted by the Prosecution, the Chamber concluded that the two individuals bear criminal responsibility for the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare. Yet, it could not determine that all elements of the crime against humanity of extermination were met.^[16] Nonetheless, the Chamber did find that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the crime against humanity of murder was committed against these victims, under Article 7(1)(a) of Rome Statute.¹⁷

Deprivation of Essentials Under the Scope of IHL

In the context of the intentional and systematic deprivation of essentials, Israel's destruction of Gaza's water infrastructure and the denial of access to clean water for Palestinians amid its ongoing war are creating a mounting humanitarian catastrophe. It seems that this development constitutes part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population of Gaza, raising discourse around the compliance with IHL.¹⁸

Since October 2023, Israel's military operations have resulted in the destruction of approximately 70% of Gaza's water infrastructure, including desalination plants, pipelines and wells, crippling the region's capacity to provide clean water.¹⁹ Around 180 kilometers of water networks have been damaged or destroyed, raising serious concerns about deliberate targeting of essential civilian infrastructure.²⁰ Notably, on 29 July, 2024, the 401st Brigade bombed a drinking water reservoir in Rafah without authorisation from senior command, and on 25 January 2025, the Palestinian Water Authority reported that Israeli forces destroyed the only water desalination plant serving northern Gaza and Wadi Gaza.²¹ Under IHL, particularly Article 54 of API and Customary IHL Rules 53 and 54, objects indispensable to civilian survival, such as water installations, are afforded special protection.²² These provisions prohibit attacks on water infrastructure and the use of deprivation of water as a method of warfare. In this context, legal experts and humanitarian bodies have argued there was no clear military necessity justifying such actions, and that these measures may constitute unlawful targeting of civilian needs and obstruction of humanitarian relief.²³



Map of the damaged water facilities in the Gaza strip.
Creator: Konstantinos Spanos

Another alarming phenomenon made its occurrence one month ago, which unveils that the aid distribution mechanism was designed to contribute to the extermination of Palestinians. Without including the latest deaths, the UN has said that more than 410 Palestinians are reported to have been killed by Israeli gunfire or shelling since the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) began work in late May.²⁴ It is remarkable that children constitute the major victims of these attacks, as they attempt to collect food at distribution points.²⁵ This

phenomenon coupled with the general blockage of humanitarian missions reflects an alleged “weaponisation” of humanitarian aid, which has a nuanced correlation with IHL. Besides the principle of distinction between combatants and non-combatants solidified on Article 48 API, targeting humanitarian aid workers, convoys, or locations where aid is being distributed contravenes Article 70 API.²⁶ Therefore, Israel shall refrain from methods of warfare that either cannot distinguish between civilians and combatants or deny or misuse access to food, water, and humanitarian aid, following additionally the provisions of Articles 51(4)–(5) and 54 API.²⁷

In light of the scale, pattern and apparent intent behind the destruction of Gaza’s water infrastructure and the deliberate targeting of humanitarian aid missions, these actions have raised serious concerns of violations of IHL. The overall policy that has caused disproportionate harm to objects essential for civilian survival may amount to war crimes under international legal standards, hence it is essential to assign responsibility.²⁸

The Right to Water & Health

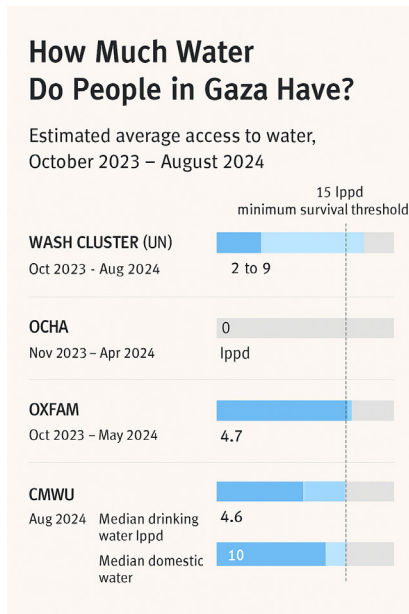
Apart from IHL, Israel’s actions fall within the scope of International human rights law and of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which apply to its conduct as an occupying power in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has repeatedly reiterated that states must comply with certain core obligations that represent the minimum essential levels of these rights, non-compliance with which cannot be justified even in times of conflict, as they are non-derogable.²⁹

A fundamental right is the right to water, which has been affirmed by reference to the right to an adequate standard of living in article 11(1) of the ICESCR, while the CESCR elaborated the particular qualities of this entitlement in its General Comment No. 15.³⁰ In this comment the Committee elaborated the particular qualities of this entitlement, setting 15 litres of water as a minimum level of subsistence according to international standards.³¹ The right contemplates a degree of adequacy in the sense that it is accessible to individual users, both physically and economically. Despite these international standards, various estimates of average water access indicate a shortage of water in Gaza’s territory. Oxfam and Human Rights Watch found that much of the water infrastructure it and its partners built or repaired between 2017 and 2023 has been damaged or destroyed by Israeli attacks since 7 October 2025, leaving it largely inoperable.³² Consequently, between October 2023 and August 2024, the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster and United Nations (UN) agencies reported average water access in Gaza ranging from 2 to 9 litres per person per day –well below the 15-liter survival standard– while UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU) in Gaza Strip reported no access to potable water in northern Gaza between November 2023 and April 2024.³³

Likewise, Israel was committed to safeguarding the right to health as a party to ICESCR.³⁴ Article 12(1) of the ICESCR provides a “right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”.³⁵ While the Covenant does not articulate a right to be healthy, it rather recognises the right to enjoy high standards of health with positive obligations. General Comment No. 14 stressed the core obligation with a twofold nature. On the one hand, they require the provision of adequate health care services, while on the other they oblige the authorities to satisfy the underlying determinants of health, including basic shelter, food, water, sanitation, disease prevention and others.³⁶ Contrary to these obligations, news outlets reported Israel to damage 32 out of 36 hospitals in Gaza, rendering only 16 partially functioning, as of August 20, 2024.³⁷ The WHO reported that of the 16, 12 are partially accessible due to insecurity or physical barriers, such as damage to both patient and ambulance entrances, and surrounding roads.³⁸

These patterns suggest a failure to fulfill Israel’s legal responsibilities as an occupying power under IHRL and they may constitute violations of peremptory norms that are impermissible

even in times of conflict. The situation underscores the urgent need for accountability and the restoration of basic human rights protections for the Palestinian population in Gaza.³⁹



Graph of estimated average access to water in the Gaza strip from October 2023 to August 2024
 Creator: Konstantinos Spanos
 Data retrieved from Human Rights Watch

Conclusion

All things considered, the documented and escalating destruction of Gaza’s water infrastructure in conjunction with the systematic obstruction and “weaponisation” of humanitarian aid constitutes a grave humanitarian crisis with profound legal implications. The fundamental provisions of IHL and its customary rules along with the right to water, health, and dignity are being egregiously undermined, as evidenced by the drastic reduction of per capita water access, widespread attacks on hospitals, and fatal assaults on civilians, including children, at aid distribution points. In this context, the legal discourse about the protection of non-combatants needs to be upheld more than ever during these critical times amid the newly erupted war between Iran and Israel.⁴⁰ Urgent accountability and independent investigation are required to assess the legality of these attacks and to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian infrastructure in accordance with the principles of distinction, proportionality, and necessity.⁴¹

Policy Recommendations

- Israel’s government must promptly lift the unlawful blockage in Gaza and ensure that the supply of clean water is sufficient to meet the minimum daily standard of 15 liters per person, as the right to water and health suggest.
- Israeli state officials should also allow and facilitate repairs to water infrastructure and refrain from unlawful attacks on personnel and equipment needed for repairs which oppose Israel’s IHL obligations.
- Israel’s authorities should provide reparations to people in Gaza in conformity with the principles of restorative justice, including individual compensation and support for healthcare initiatives, both personal and public, aimed at recovery and the prevention of disease.
- The international community must act decisively to prevent the risk of genocide by Israeli authorities in Gaza. Recommended actions may include exerting diplomatic pressure to lift the blockade and comply with the orders of the ICC via imposing targeted sanctions, and reviewing bilateral deals and diplomatic relations.

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The “Conspiracy” Case & EU Silence on Human Rights Abuses in Tunisia

Alicia Blackham

Key Takeaways

- The protection of human rights and civil liberties in Tunisia has deteriorated since President Saïed’s self-coup in 2021, with arbitrary detention being commonly used to suppress opposition voices.
- This is represented by the “Conspiracy Case” in which harsh sentences were handed out to 37 defendants in April 2025 based on questionable charges relating to terrorism and conspiracy against the state. Throughout the case, there were multiple violations of the right to a fair trial which have been widely condemned by organisations promoting human rights.
- The European Union has largely remained silent on this case as well as wider violations by Tunisian authorities despite being a key partner to Tunisia, leading critics to argue that the EU is prioritising short-term migration control over long-term political and economic reform in Tunisia.

Background: Political Situation and Human Rights

The political situation in Tunisia has, in recent years, been increasingly turbulent and marked by a climate of repression. Once held up as an example of democratic transition in the region as the birthplace of the Arab Spring protests in 2011, since 2021 the country has been backsliding into authoritarianism following President Saïed’s self-coup whereby he began dismantling the fledgling democracy and suppressing dissent.¹

There are a number of major human rights concerns in Tunisia, notably in regards to repressing opposition, judicial independence, freedom of expression and attacking civil society. The most recent presidential election in October 2024 saw President Saïed win with 90.69% of the vote from a voter turnout of 28.8%. These elections took place in a climate of fear through a “wholesale political crackdown” as “Tunisian authorities intensified repression in the run-up to the election and targeted several potential presidential challengers to Saïed”, including detaining or convicting at least 10 prospective candidates.²

Human Rights Watch further notes that authorities have intensified repression by carrying out mass arrests, imprisoning journalists and targeting civil society groups, highlighting that:

“as of November, over 80 people were detained on political grounds or for exercising their fundamental rights, including political opponents, activists, lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders, and social media users.”³

There have also been “shocking reports” of human rights abuses against migrants and refugees by Tunisian security forces during crossings and search and rescue operations.⁴

It is therefore evident that Tunisia is no longer the beacon of democracy that it once was, however, the European Union continues to work with Tunisia on migration control deals despite ongoing human rights violations and escalating repression in the country.



Anti-coup protest in Tunis, 10 October 2021 (Dodds photography)

The 'Conspiracy Case': Violating the Right to a Fair Trial

On 19 April 2025, the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced 37 defendants to between 4 and 66 years in prison in the "Conspiracy Against the State Case", nicknamed the "Conspiracy Case". The defendants include lawyers, politicians, human rights defenders, researchers and journalists who were charged in May 2024 under the 2015 Counterterrorism law and articles of Tunisia's penal code. A Tunis prosecutor alleged that lawyers, political opponents, activists, researchers, and businessmen were plotting to overthrow President Saied, or even assassinate him, in order to destabilize the country.⁵ Judicial sources have further said that the charges include conspiracy against state security, forming a terrorist alliance, assault to change the state structure, inciting unrest and murder.⁶

The trial has been widely condemned as a politically motivated "sham", aimed at eliminating political opposition.⁷ As such, the charges were denounced as an "absurdity" on the first day of the trial by defence lawyer Abdelaziz Essid.⁸ Amnesty International echoed this, stating that the investigation "relied on questionable evidence".⁹ Throughout the case, Tunisian authorities have violated the right to a fair trial in a number of ways. Most defendants were tried in absentia as they were not in the country, but at least 12 were arrested in February 2023 and 8 remained in detention as of January 2025. Some had also been in pretrial detention for longer than 2 years, which is the maximum amount of time permitted under Tunisian law. Taking place across only 3 sessions, beginning in March 2025, the trial did not allow the defendants to adequately provide defences and they were ordered to only appear via videoconference rather than being allowed to attend their own trial in person. In addition, journalists and other observers were barred from the courtroom.¹⁰

On 21 April 2025, there was a further arrest of lawyer and former judge Ahmed Souab who was accused of "terrorist offences" following public statements made by him criticising the case and denouncing the executive's interference in judicial affairs.¹¹

Unsurprisingly, the reaction from human rights groups has been strong. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organisations jointly expressed their concern in a press release, accusing Tunisian authorities of "fabricating" the case and emphasising that political persecution in Tunisia will likely continue.¹² Yosra Frawes, Director of the Maghreb and Middle East Office at FIDH, described the sentences as "cruel and undignified", while Aissa Rahmoune, Secretary General of FIDH, stated that the trial has left them with:

"the bitter realisation that a dictatorship worse than the previous one has taken hold in Tunisia, one that stages mock trials and sentences political prisoners by the dozens."¹³

Bassam Khawaja, deputy Middle East and North Africa Director at Human Rights Watch, similarly highlighted how the case demonstrates a broader backslide into authoritarianism in Tunisia, stating that:

“the sham ‘Conspiracy Case’ trial reflects the depths to which President Kais Saied’s government will go to eliminate the last vestiges of political opposition and free speech in the country.”¹⁴

Erika Guavara Rosas, Senior Director for Research, Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns at Amnesty International, asserted that:

“the verdict is a travesty of justice and illustrates the authorities’ complete disregard for Tunisia’s international human rights obligations” and argues that the defendants were “convicted solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights” based on “unsubstantiated charges.”¹⁵

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, also made a statement condemning the trial. He affirmed that:

“the process was marred by violations of fair trial and due process rights, raising serious concerns about political motivations” and urged Tunisia “to refrain from using broad national security and counter terrorism legislation to silence dissent and curb civic space.”¹⁶

In response to this widespread condemnation, President Saied rejected the criticism, denouncing “blatant foreign interference” in Tunisia’s affairs and arguing that he is fighting against a “corrupt elite” and “traitors”.¹⁷ However, the actions of Tunisian authorities in this case undoubtedly violates laws and conventions agreed to by Tunisia, which is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights which guarantee the right to a fair trial and not to be subject to arbitrary detention.¹⁸



The Monument Place de la Kasbah and Tunis City Hall, Tunis (David Stanley)

Crushing Dissent: Arbitrary Detention in Tunisia

As already alluded to, the Conspiracy Case can be situated within a broader trend of crushing dissent and suppressing political freedom in Tunisia. Whilst it has been met with a greater international response and is somewhat unprecedented in its scope, this is largely due to the prominent nature of the defendants.¹⁹ In reality, it is not an isolated incident, rather, there have been repeated attacks on the judiciary and increased use of arbitrary detention in Tunisia since President Saied’s coup in 2021.

Judicial independence and consequently the right to a fair trial have been progressively dismantled by Saied. In February 2022, he unilaterally dissolved the High Judicial Council

(HJC), which was previously one of the few bodies still able to act independently, replacing it with a provisional council whose members would be at least in part appointed by Saied himself.²⁰ The day after, Tunisian police were deployed to lock the doors to the HJC headquarters to prevent staff from entering.²¹ This was described by Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, as "the death knell for judicial independence in the country."²²

In April 2025, Human Rights Watch released a report on how Tunisia used arbitrary detention to crush dissent, arguing that it is a "cornerstone of its repressive policy" which uses "politically motivated prosecutions, based on abusive or trumped-up charges, to target, intimidate, and ultimately silence critical voices."²³ It reports that, as of January 2025, over 50 people were being held on political grounds for exercising their rights, many of whom have been held for longer than the legal maximum of 14 months with additional charges often issued without bringing the detainee before a judge.²⁴ Crucially, one group of people who have been subject to arbitrary detention is human rights defenders, which further illustrates an abandonment of human rights protections in Tunisia.²⁵

In short, the "Conspiracy Case" is a high profile example of the wider practice of using arbitrary detention to suppress opposition voices in Tunisia. It illustrates the increasing authoritarianism under President Saied's regime since his self-coup and represents a major concern for political figures and critics within Tunisia and for the wider international community committed to civil liberties and human rights.

EU Silence: Migration Control Deals at the Expense of Human Rights

Another major part of the increasing human rights abuses in Tunisia is the role of the European Union. There appears to be little political will from the EU to promote human rights in Tunisia, allowing Saied to gain funding from them whilst continuing to consolidate his power. There could be multiple reasons for this, including Tunisia being politically removed from the EU, or it not being a key concern whilst they are involved in a range of matters on a global level. However, the EU is to some extent politically engaged with Tunisia, as it has been actively making migration deals with Saied's government. As such, some have accused the EU of remaining silent on the Tunisian authorities' violations in order to maintain their migration control deals.

In May 2025, Bassam Khawaja from Human Rights Watch stated in an article that "the EU has simply abandoned human rights in Tunisia" due to their silence on the "escalating repression", despite being one of Tunisia's main international partners.²⁶ The response of the EU to the "Conspiracy Case" is described as "feeble" with a Commission spokesperson merely stating that it "has taken note of the verdict" and affirmed that it regularly reiterates the importance of human rights in its dealings with Tunisia.²⁷ This rather vague statement could be read as a reluctance to strongly condemn Tunisian authorities for their violations.

It has been suggested that the EU's silence reflects their focus on migration deals with Tunisia at the expense of human rights commitments. Khawaja writes that:

"Tunisians are paying a steep price for the European Union's singular focus on migration and abandonment of human rights priorities."²⁸

In July 2023, the EU finalised a deal with Tunisia to tackle irregular migration, which included £90 million to stop smuggling, strengthen borders and return migrants entering Europe.²⁹ It also involved providing money to Tunisia in areas such as trade, investment and energy cooperation.³⁰

However, critics have highlighted that the deal failed to include any specific human rights guarantees for migrants and asylum seekers. Phillipe Dam from Human Rights Watch states that:

"demonstrates once again how the EU's obsession with sealing its borders over saving lives enables partners like Tunisia to not only go unchallenged for abuses they commit, but

to also pressure the EU for more financial aid.”³¹

The lack of protections is particularly concerning given Tunisia’s record on migrant rights. In 2023, the same year that the new deal was signed, reports revealed that Tunisian security forces were committing serious human rights violations against black African migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This included beatings, use of excessive force, some cases of torture, arbitrary arrests and detention, collective expulsions, forced evictions, and theft of belongings.³²



Left to right – Mark Rutte, Ursula von der Leyen, Kais Saïed and Giorgia Meloni at Presidential Palace in Tunis, 16 July 2023 (Dati Bendo, Audiovisual)

It is important to note that the EU purportedly backed the popular uprising in Tunisia in 2011, expressing solidarity with the Tunisian people after the dictatorship was toppled.³³ Yet now they appear willing to make deals and provide financial support to the new dictatorship that has formed in Tunisia. Tarek Megerisi, Senior Policy Fellow at European Council on Foreign Relations, suggests that European governments “have the tools to support Tunisian reform and resilience if they can look beyond short-term migration management.”³⁴ He argues that Europe should make future aid conditional on legal reforms and protection of civil liberties in order to incentivise reform and put pressure on Tunisian authorities to uphold Tunisian law.³⁵

Human Rights Watch echoes this, stating that:

“the EU leadership should end its silence, publicly condemn the deteriorating human rights situation in Tunisia, and make it clear that future partnerships will be linked to genuine human rights progress and key reforms.”³⁶

Similarly, the International Federation for Human Rights called on the EU to:

“reevaluate all ongoing cooperation agreements with the Tunisian government and to make them strictly conditional on the respect of human rights, as well as to provide increased support to Tunisian civil society, the last remaining guardian of democratic hopes in the country.”³⁷

Conclusion

It is clear that Tunisia has experienced a return to dictatorship, despite once being a beacon of hope for democratic reform in the region. In particular, the right to freedom of expression is being restricted through the use of arbitrary detention to suppress and silence opposition, including human rights defenders. This trend is epitomised by the high profile “Conspiracy Case”, which has been met with widespread criticism. Despite this, the European Union has remained relatively silent on both this case and wider violations in

Tunisia, despite being a key partner actively giving financial aid to a government restricting people's freedoms.

This has been interpreted by critics as a prioritisation of migration control due to the EU-Tunisia migration deal signed in 2023, rather than encouraging a return to democracy in the country. This is particularly relevant given that migrants and refugees have themselves been victims of human rights violations in Tunisia, meaning that migration control deals with the country potentially putting more migrants and refugees at risk. However, such financial aid and deals in fact put the EU in a strong position to incentivise reform by making further aid conditional on human rights protections.

Policy Recommendations

- The Tunisian government must remember its commitments as a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which guarantee the right over everyone to freedom of expression and assembly, to a fair trial, and to not be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention. This includes reestablishing independent institutions such as the judiciary.
- Civil society and political opposition in Tunisia should avoid fragmentation and mobilise to jointly oppose democratic backsliding and keep sight of Tunisia's legacy as a beacon of democracy. However, given the dangers of arbitrary detention and other violations, opposition from Tunisian people may not always be possible.
- The burden of opposing President Saied's regime may fall to international actors such as independent organisations, domestic governments and international bodies such as the United Nations. In particular, the European Union should not continue to remain quiet on the situation in Tunisia. As a partner, they could be in a position to incentivise President Saied to uphold rights by making aid conditional on reform and protections.

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Beyond Anticipation: Jus ad Bellum & Israel's Strikes on Iran

Kamilla Sorskar Engen

Key Takeaways

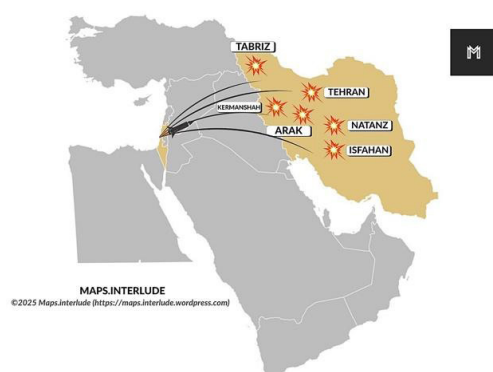
- Israel's strike on Iran likely constitutes preventive, not anticipatory, self-defence. Despite Israel's claim of acting in anticipatory self-defence, the lack of verifiable evidence that Iran posed an imminent threat, especially based on available intelligence and IAEA findings, means the attack likely falls under preventive self-defence, which is unlawful under international law.
- Jus ad Bellum, the legal regime governing the valid reasons for a state to resort to war, requires ongoing compliance with necessity and proportionality. Even if an armed conflict already exists, each new use of force must independently meet the tests of necessity and proportionality. Israel's strikes raise serious doubts about whether those thresholds were met.
- Public intelligence, including IAEA reports, undermines Israel's claim of imminence. While Israel has cited "high-quality intelligence," assessments do not confirm that Iran had decided to build or imminently use a nuclear weapon. This gap between capability and intent weakens Israel's argument under jus ad bellum.
- Legal acceptance would undermine the UN Charter system. If Israel's operation were accepted as lawful, it would expand the scope of self-defence to include speculative future threats, effectively legalising preventive war. This could erode the prohibition on the use of force under Article 2(4) and destabilise the international legal order the UN Charter was designed to protect.

Introduction

Security dynamics across the Middle East have long been shaped by tensions between Israel and Iran, however the recent escalation of tensions could have profound consequences for peace, stability and international law across the Mediterranean and Middle East. On Friday, 13 June 2025, Israel launched several missiles targeting nuclear facilities, military targets and individual scientists in Iran, after which Iran retaliated by launching missiles at Israel. At the time of writing, Iran has reported over 220 fatalities, including children, while Israel has reported 24 fatalities.¹ Israel's attacks signify a significant escalation, with Israel declaring it an act of "preemptive, precise, combined offensive based on high-quality intelligence to strike Iran's nuclear program, and in response to the Iranian regime's ongoing aggression against Israel."² In other words, Israel has framed it as an act of pre-emptive self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations (UN) Charter, to protect against a future nuclear attack.³ However, Article 51 permits force only in response to an armed attack, and any response must meet the tests of necessity and proportionality.

Israel struck several nuclear sites in Iran

13/06/2025



Map of sites targeted in Iran.
Author: Maps.interlude
13 June 2025

Israel's offensive thus gives rise to controversy regarding its legality. It argues that Iran's nuclear and proxy capabilities pose an "existential", imminent threat. Yet experts argue that these attacks comprise a preventive, rather than reactive or anticipatory doctrine, which is incompatible with international law. This then begs the question of whether a state may use force against another to prevent a non-imminent threat from materialising in the future. Israel's attack against Iran likely does not meet the legal threshold for lawful self-defence. Such a legal manoeuvre risks undermining regional peace and stability, as well as the prohibition on the use of force.

Reactions

Members of the UN Security Council have been divided. China and Russia condemned the attacks as "violations of Iranian sovereignty" and a "flagrant violation" of both international law and the UN Charter.⁴ Western allies offered muted support whilst calling for restraint and de-escalation.⁵ UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated that there are "moments when the directions taken will shape not just the fate of nations, but potentially our collective future... This is such a moment," and that the conflict could not be allowed to expand.⁶ These reactions are significant in emphasising the lack of international consensus supporting Israel's legal rationale. Israel's operation risks legitimising preventive use of force, undermining international norms.

The Legal Framework of Self-Defence

UN Charter and Customary Law

The international legal regime governing the use of force derives from the UN Charter, Article 2(4), which sets out an almost absolute prohibition against the threat or use of force. The one, limited, exception to this is Article 51, which permits the use of force in self-defence only "if an armed attack occurs."

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has interpreted Article 51 narrowly, affirming in *Nicaragua v. United States* and other cases that the right to self-defence applies only in response to an actual armed attack.⁷

Customary international law further develops these principles, particularly through the *Caroline* affair (1837), a diplomatic dispute between the United States and Britain following a British militia raid on the American steamboat *Caroline*, which had been supplying Canadian rebels across the Niagara River. The incident led to an exchange of diplomatic notes which established a long-standing test for lawful anticipatory self-defence: the threat must be "instant, overwhelming, and leaving no choice of means, and no moment

for deliberation.”⁸ A key element in assessing imminence is the difference between nuclear capacity and the intent to use it.

Categories of Self-Defence

The following are the general categories of self-defence in international law:

- Reactive: responding to an armed attack already underway or occurred.
- Pre-emptive: used to stop a likely and identifiable threat believed to evolve into an armed attack – but is not yet imminent.
- Anticipatory: aimed at stopping a future obvious, imminent attack.
- Preventive: directed against non-imminent, speculative threats, usually based on strategic assessments.⁹

Whilst anticipatory self-defence remains somewhat legally contentious and debated, there is consensus that preventive self-defence is unlawful. As legal scholar Marko Milanović emphasises:

“There is unanimous agreement in the literature and in state practice that preventive self-defence is not permitted under international law.”¹⁰

Additionally, pre-emptive self-defence is more controversial than anticipatory self-defence, and lacks legal consensus supporting its legality. To sum, any lawful invocation of Article 51 requires a demonstrable threat of imminent attack, not a possible future or hypothetical attack. The onus is on Israel to prove that both immediacy and necessity are fulfilled, which appears unlikely in this case based on the facts available to us.



Natanz nuclear facility. Author: Parsa 2au. 18 August 2022. Wikipedia

Israel’s Operation Rising Lion Against Iran

The Facts

In the early hours of 13 June 2025, Israel launched missile strikes deep inside Iran, targeting facilities and individuals associated with Iran’s uranium enrichment programme, as well as military and intelligence personnel. This was justified as an act of anticipatory self-defence, with the goal of thwarting Iran’s nuclear ambitions and invoking the right of self-preservation.

One central issue involves whether the threat posed by Iran was ‘imminent’ according to the customary international law standard. Whilst Israel has cited “high-quality intelligence” against the Iranian nuclear programme, no clear evidence has been provided indicating that Iran had decided to use such a capability aggressively or imminently.¹¹

Assessing this claim requires scrutiny of publicly available intelligence and independent verification, by drawing on recent US intelligence briefings and findings from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to evaluate whether Iran’s nuclear activity amounted to an imminent armed threat.



IAEA Director General Grossi with Dr. Araghchi, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of Iran. Author: IAEA Imagebank. 6 May 2021.

Intelligence and Verification on Iran’s Nuclear Programme

A legal assessment must be supported by verifiable facts. Israel has claimed that Iran’s nuclear programme posed an imminent existential threat, thereby justifying anticipatory self-defence. Yet assessments of available intelligence suggest this threshold was not met.

In early 2025, US intelligence agencies indicated that Iran had neither decided nor begun building a nuclear weapon. In March, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard testified in a Senate hearing that “Iran is not building a nuclear weapon.”¹² However, she later walked back this statement, suggesting in media appearances that Iran could develop a nuclear weapon within weeks – blaming the initial statement on media misrepresentation.¹³ Gabbard’s reversal, viewed by some as politically motivated, raised concerns about the credibility of intelligence briefings and highlighted tensions within the administration’s messaging.

In June, US President Trump claimed Iran was “very close” to building nuclear weapons.¹⁴ A May 2025 IAEA report documented that Iran had 408.6kg of uranium enriched up to 60% and found that Iran had violated non-proliferation obligations by conducting secret nuclear activities with material undeclared to the IAEA at three locations, labelling it a “serious concern”.¹⁵ However, it did not find evidence of an active nuclear weapons programme.

The difference between capacity and intent is important for *jus ad bellum*. Without evidence of a decision by Iran to imminently use force, Israel’s justification lacks the causal, or factual, basis for anticipatory self-defence. Consequently, the attack is more likely to be preventive in nature, and therefore unlawful under international law.

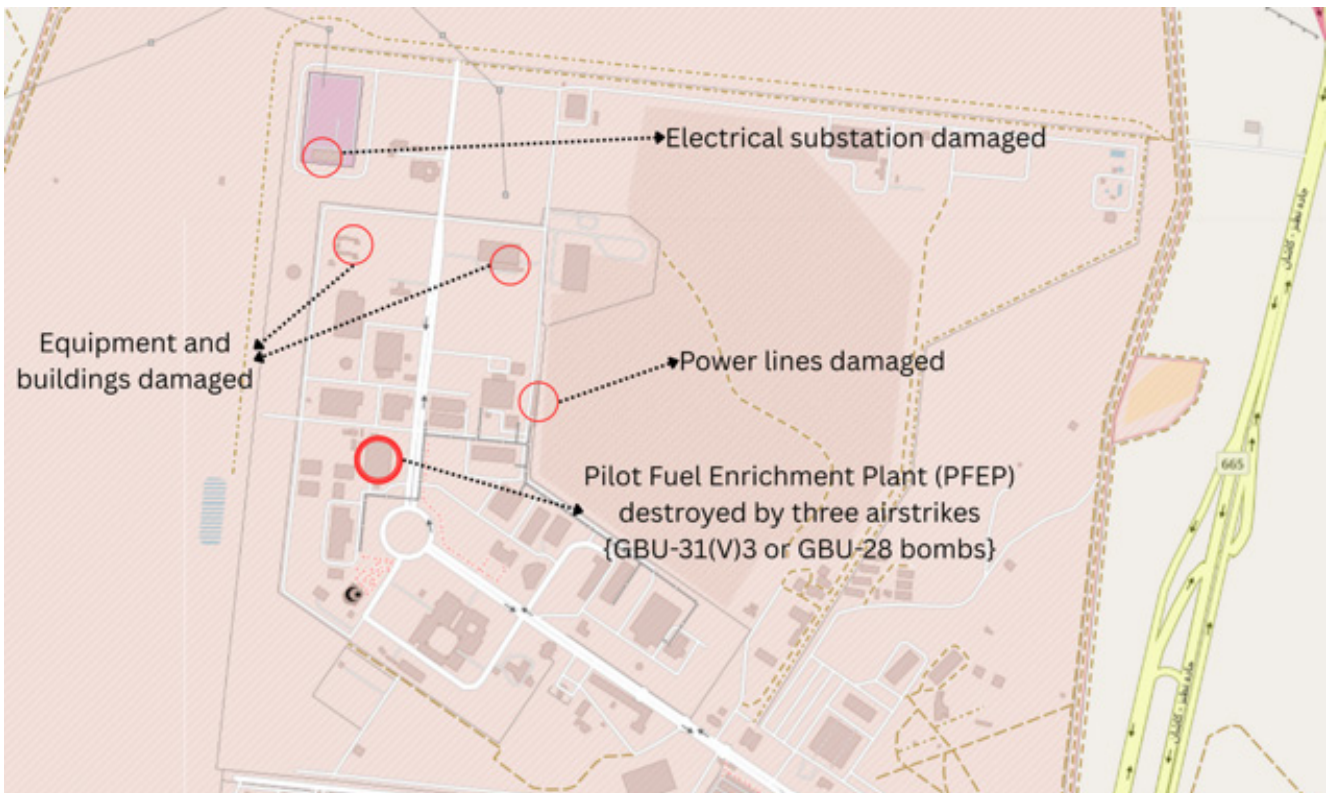
Necessity, Imminence, and Proportionality

As noted, there are three positions on self-defence (use of force) to respond to future attacks.¹⁶ Israel’s strikes likely fall within the preventive category, which does not enjoy support amongst international legal scholars or professionals.

The principle of proportionality requires that, even when a state faces an imminent threat, its response must be proportionate. Arguably, attacks deep within the territory of another sovereign state to destroy infrastructure and kill scientific and military personnel, without

a preceding armed attack, would not meet this criterion. The scale and timing of Israel's attack appears disproportionate to any immediate threat. Legal experts argue that the right to self-defence cannot be separated from the requirement that the attack be temporally proximate and causally linked to an actual or imminent use of force.¹⁷ In this case, there is no evidence that Iran had launched, or was about to launch, a nuclear strike – raising doubts about both the causal trigger and temporal urgency required to justify anticipatory action.

There is some debate around how to apply jus ad bellum necessity and proportionality to an ongoing armed conflict, as certain critics argue exist between Israel-Iran. Some argue, (and state practice seemingly reflects) that necessity and proportionality only regulate the first decision to use force to respond to an armed attack, and that it is unnecessary to assess the necessity and proportionality of each ensuing attack during the hostilities.¹⁸ However, the leading view in current discourse maintains that necessity and proportionality must be evaluated throughout the hostilities.¹⁹ Attacks that comply with international humanitarian law (jus in bello) can still be considered unlawful under jus ad bellum where they are separate from or excessive relative to the lawful goals of the acts of self-defence. Even if an operation complies with jus in bello, it can still violate the broader prohibition on the use of force (jus ad bellum) if it lacks a lawful basis under Article 51. Thus, this would constitute a severe escalation of an existing armed conflict between the two states.



Locations of Israel's strikes on Natanz Nuclear Facility. Author: WeatherWriter. 19 June 2025. Wikipedia

Attribution and Proxies

A key, relevant legal issue is whether Israel's strike can be attributed to self-defence against Iran or its proxies. While past engagements with actors like Hezbollah or the Houthis are important, the strikes targeted Iran directly and aimed to prevent a potential nuclear attack, not to respond to an armed attack already carried out.

Previous clashes between Iran and Israel are relevant to provide context, however the issue in question revolves solely around preventing a future Iranian nuclear attack. Determining the lawfulness of Israel's strike against Iran requires both a careful interpretation of what counts as self-defence in international law, and an honest assessment of whether the

facts actually meet that threshold.

Israel has long justified actions against Syria and Lebanon by attributing attacks by proxies to those states. However, the recent use of force targeted Iran itself, removing any ambiguity, without proxy involvement. Thus, the legal assessment concerns whether Iran's behaviour amounted to an imminent armed attack – and by most legal accounts (given the information available to us), it did not.

A competing perspective argues that Israel's strikes should be seen not as a preventive action, but as an escalation within an already ongoing, low-intensity conflict with Iran. Proponents of this view claim that a sharp shift in Israel's strategic risk assessment – driven by credible intelligence about Iran nearing nuclear weapons capability, combined with the IAEA's findings that Iran was in violation of its non-proliferation obligations, as well as the collapse of US-Iran nuclear diplomacy – created a uniquely urgent context.²⁰ In this light, Israel's timing was also reportedly shaped by short-term operational opportunities, including a temporary degradation of Iranian air defences and a weakened Hezbollah, potentially reducing the likelihood of immediate retaliation.

However, the notion that a pre-existing armed conflict with Iran justifies ongoing strikes is problematic. Under international law, self-defence under Article 51 must still meet the tests of necessity and proportionality for each use of force, and cannot be invoked perpetually once hostilities begin. The ICJ in *DRC v. Uganda* reaffirmed that self-defence does not create a legal blank cheque for future uses of force.²¹

Implications for Peace and Security

If Israel's use of force is accepted as a lawful act of anticipatory self-defence, this would indicate a dangerous shift within international law. International law traditionally prohibits preventive use of force, and any erosion of this principle could result in further use of force under the justification of preventing a future attack. The application of *jus ad bellum* necessity and proportionality may arguably give rise to some debate and differing interpretations.²² Without clear consensus or enforcement, due to frequent UN Security Council deadlock, states increasingly resort to unilateral action, citing national security concerns.

Legal acceptance of Israel's operation could potentially expand the scope of lawful self-defence to include uncertain future risks – which risks undoing the Charter system itself. This would effectively legalise preventive war, destabilising the very normative order the UN was built to protect.

Regionally, the attacks have deepened fault lines, with a rise in civilian casualties across both Iran and Israel, as well as comprising an additional strain on international humanitarian law, water, refugee, and energy concerns in areas such as Lebanon and Gaza.

Conclusion

It is strongly arguable that Israel's June attacks cross the line from anticipatory self-defence into preventive self-defence. This leap is not supported by Article 51, or ICJ jurisprudence, whilst academic consensus generally underscores that preventive self-defence lacks legal standing.

Reactions globally indicate (from UN condemnations to warnings of caution from various states) strong concerns over the legitimacy of the attack, as well as the potential precedent it may establish. If other states cite Israel to justify pre-emptive or preventive force, international norms prohibiting the use of force will erode and undermine peace and security.

Treating a long-term strategic threat as an imminent risk weakens the legal threshold for self-defence, and undermines the historical and textual meaning of Article 51. The UN

Charter was intended to prevent states from launching a unilateral use of force based on perceived security threats. This is why states invoking Article 51 must meet a high legal and evidentiary threshold, and public, verifiable facts matter. Without any concrete, verifiable evidence of an imminent Iranian armed attack, or nuclear attack in this case, as required under international law, any invocation on the part of Israel of self-defence remains unlawful and incompatible with both Article 51 and ICJ jurisprudence.

Policy Recommendations

- In order to safeguard legal frameworks, the international community must adhere to international self-defence norms, including meeting the tests of imminence, necessity, and proportionality.
- Mediation efforts should be undertaken by the UN, to ensure perceived threats are addressed without the use of force and calm any regional tensions to prevent further escalation.
- Reaffirmation, either through the UNSC or even ICJ clarification, can underscore that Article 51 does not permit preventive use of force, to avoid the normalisation of such use of force.

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Gaza Under Siege: the Madleen Case & the Humanitarian Aid Blockade

Rebecca Ceglie

Key Takeaways

- The blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza since 9 October 2023 has drastically created conditions of widespread hunger, malnutrition and disease, described by international organisations and UN experts as a humanitarian catastrophe – that has forced the displacement of 2.2 million Palestinian.
- On 9 June, 2025 a UK-flagged ship, The Madleen, carrying aid to Gaza, was intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters about 200 km off Israel's territorial jurisdiction.
- Although the freedom of navigation in international waters is guaranteed by the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), it was not fully respected by the Israeli forces, who deliberately intervened with force against an unarmed civilian crew and confiscated the humanitarian cargo.
- The humanitarian blockade violates international humanitarian law as well as the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention and Additional Protocols, as it restricts the free passage of aid supplies and undermines the lives of civilians and humanitarian personnel delivering aid during armed conflict.

Background

Conditions in Gaza have continued to deteriorate since the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023 followed by Israeli bombardment and reoccupation. ¹

The conflict has led to the forced displacement of 1.9 million out of 2.2 million Palestinian within the Gaza Strip. Civilian infrastructure has been severely damaged: hospitals, schools, water, electricity facilities have been hit and according to the World Food Programme (WFP) severe hunger levels rose from 38% to 56% within just 12 days of the conflict's onset. ²

Currently, UNICEF reports that more than 9,000 children have been admitted for treatment of acute malnutrition. While following the 2025 Integrated Food Insecurity (IPC) report, 470,000 people in Gaza are still facing catastrophic hunger, (IPC Phase 5) and the entire population is now experiencing acute food shortage. ³



Forced Displacement of Gaza Strip Residents During 23–25. Photo by Jaber Jihad Badwan (29 January 2025)

Despite ongoing appeals from the international community and the recent United Nations (UN) Gaza ceasefire resolution, humanitarian agencies report that a major problem has emerged concerning the blockade of humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Israel appears to have restricted the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza, limiting aid deliveries, border crossings and access points for months on end. ⁴ UNRWA, the Agency for Palestinian Refugees, has reported that:

"[nearly] 3,000 UNRWA trucks of lifesaving aid were ready to enter Gaza, but Israeli authorities continue to block the delivery of these supplies."

This highlights the ongoing struggle to deliver humanitarian aid to this part of land due to continued strict border control, as has been the case most recently. ⁵

The Interception of Madleen in International Waters

On 9 June 2025, a UK-flagged ship carrying aid to Gaza was intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters about 200 km off Israel's territorial jurisdiction. The Madleen ship had departed from Sicily on 1 June as part of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, with 12 unarmed international activists on board with the intention of delivering essential food and medical supplies, challenging Israel's blockade on Gaza. ⁶ Rima Hassan, a European Parliament member who joined the mission stated:

"I am aboard Madleen because silence is not neutrality—it is complicity [...] This ship is not just carrying aid, it is carrying a demand: End the blockade. End the genocide."

Similarly, Greta Thunberg said explained her decision to take part in the humanitarian effort:

"Every single one of us has a moral obligation to do everything we can to fight for a free Palestine." ⁷

The Israeli military operation conducted in the middle of night, however, appears to have halted this peaceful mission, interrupting the Madleen's journey.

After drones repeatedly hovered over the Madleen, the mission was stopped when Israeli forces boarded the ship, taking all 12 passengers hostage. All lines of communication were cut. The crew was forced to put on orange life jackets and gather in a small area of the ship. They were ordered to raise their hands and throw their phones into the water, while someone was heard telling them to keep calm.⁸

Due to this blockade, the aid supplies on board were seized and the team of activists was detained and obligated by Israeli forces to sail to the port of Ashdod - Israel, from which they were later repatriated.

One day after their detention, four of them were deported after signing an order that claimed they had illegally entered Israel. The remaining eight were held for between four and five days, as they had refused to sign the deportation order, according to Adalah - the first Palestinian Arab-run legal center in Israel.

Following the example of the 2010 Mavi Marmara flotilla, a similar raid that sparked international backlash and during which some people were shot, the mission was ultimately declared over without achieving its humanitarian goal. ⁹

According to the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, the boarding of the ship could be considered illegal, as it was carried out with force against an unarmed civilian crew and ended with the confiscation of humanitarian cargo. The vessel was, in effect, seized, the crew was detained and repatriated to their countries of origin in a manner that, according to many observers, resembled a military action against a terrorist threat rather than an attempt to stop a peaceful humanitarian mission. ¹⁰

In response, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz stated that he "had ordered the Israel Defence Force (IDF) to prevent the Madleen from reaching Gaza." Addressing Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg and the 11 other volunteers from Brazil, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey - including the franco-palestinian MEP Rima

Hassan, the Minister affirmed that “Israel will not allow anyone to break the blockade of Gaza, which is intended to impede weapons from reaching Hamas.”¹¹

Regarding the confiscated supplies, Katz further claimed that the “tiny amount of aid would be transferred to Gaza through real humanitarian channels”. However, while the mission was purely symbolic and aimed at drawing international attention to ongoing violations in Gaza, the problem remains with the overall flow of humanitarian aid, which continues to be severely restricted.¹²



Rima Hassan Marseille (cropped). Photo by AN2303 (21 April 2024) Rima Hassan Marseille 21 avril 2024 02 (cropped) | Openverse

The Violation of International Humanitarian Law

The illegality of this pushback operation carried out by Israeli military forces must be examined within the framework of international law, the Geneva Conventions, as well as the international humanitarian law. The principles established by the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which guarantees the freedom of navigation particularly in international waters beyond the territorial limits of any state.¹³ In this context, there are a few specific expectations under which a state may lawfully stop a foreign vessel in international waters: these includes piracy, slave trading, unauthorised broadcasting, cases involving stateless vessels, or situations where the state is enforcing a lawful blockade or acting in self-defence during an armed attack under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Moreover, although a naval blockade in international waters is not necessarily illegal during armed conflict or war – as emphasised by the San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea (1994) – it must meet several legal conditions.¹⁴ Specifically it must allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in a blockaded territory.

The obligation to ensure humanitarian access is reinforced by Rule 55 of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) codification of the International Humanitarian Law, which provides that:

“the parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need.”

While Article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention requires states to allow:

“the free passage of all consignments of essential foodstuffs, clothing and tonics intended for children under fifteen, expectant mothers and maternity cases.”¹⁵

More broadly, the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in times of conflict, along with the 1977 and 2005 Additional Protocols, underscores the obligation to protect civilians, as well as humanitarian personnel delivering aid during armed conflict. As

such, individuals aboard the Madleen, whose intentions were peaceful and humanitarian, remain protected civilians under international law and must not be treated as combatants or detained arbitrarily.¹⁶ In support of this, videos and images released by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition clearly depict the crew sitting peacefully with their hands raised as the Israeli military boarded the vessel.¹⁷



Sending humanitarian cargo to Gaza. Photo by Naser Jafar (20 October 2023) Wikimedia Commons

Humanitarian Impact on Gaza

The unprecedented escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine is devastating countless lives. Israel's relentless bombardment of Gaza has led to the death of over 54,000 Palestinian and injured more than 125,000 between 2023 and June 2025. In addition, many more have been forced to survive without essential goods such as food, clean water, medicine and other supplies.

Israel's intensified blockade of Gaza has evolved into the militarisation of aid distribution, and has severely restricted the entry of humanitarian aid and assistance, leaving the population along the Gaza Strip struggling for survival.¹⁸

By blocking the entry of supplies, Israel continues to undermine the lives of Palestinians, reducing them to a slow physical destruction —reported Human Rights Watch.¹⁹ While Amnesty International, in December 2024 statement, kept accusing Israel that all this "amounts to acts of genocide against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip."²⁰

According to Erika Guevara Rosas of Amnesty International:

"Israel has completely cut off the supply of humanitarian aid and other items indispensable to the survival of the population... to collectively punish over two million civilians."

Her remarks highlight once again the severe lack of access to basic necessities for Palestinian in Gaza —a reality reflected in the words of a displaced person who said:

*"I don't want my child to die hungry. We just want to fill our children's stomachs."*²¹



Gaza-Israel conflict. Photo by Ecrusized, influenced by user Rr016 (8 October 2023) Wikipedia

Conclusion

The interception of the Madleen vassel, named “the selfie yacht of the celebrities” by Israel’s Foreign Ministry, serves as yet another example of collective punishment for the Palestinian population. Through its ongoing illegal blockade, Israel has systematically and deliberately restricted the entry of food, medicine, and other humanitarian aid into the occupied Gaza Strip. Furthermore, humanitarian organisations continue to face serious difficulties in delivering aid supplies and providing assistance to the population in need.

According to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres “Gaza is a killing field, and civilians are trapped in an endless cycle of death”.²² Similarly, Antoine Renard, a senior WFP official, stated that “Humanitarian assistance must continue to flow into Gaza”, in order to guarantee the dignity of people’s lives.²³

Policy Recommendations

- Although a naval blockade in international waters is not necessarily illegal during armed conflict or war, it must meet several legal conditions and must not prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians as happened with the peaceful Madleen mission.
- International humanitarian law requires authorities to ensure that the population under their control is treated humanely. As the occupying power, Israel has a clear obligation to ensure the basic needs of Gaza’s population are met, ensuring civilians have food, medicines, sufficient hygiene, public health standards and any other essential supplies they need.
- All obstacles and blockades preventing the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid into Gaza should be immediately eliminated in compliance with international humanitarian law and repeated order from the International Court of Justice.²⁴ Similarly, humanitarian workers must be protected at all times as any attack constitutes a grave breach of international law.
- Given Israel’s ongoing violations of international law, human rights, persistent injustice towards Palestinians or third-party states must immediately cease all forms of aid or collaboration that sustain these actions. States, including Israel’s allies must ensure that Israel complies with international resolution and does not commit a genocide in Gaza.
- A lasting and monitored ceasefire is urgently needed to safeguard people’s lives in the Gaza Strip and to guarantee the continuous flow of humanitarian assistance as well. In the face of such suffering, humanity must prevail.

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