
Starvation and Denial:

Israel's Use of Starvation as a Weapon of War in Gaza

Shmuel Lederman

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Shmuel Lederman

This report was originally written for the Hebrew-reading public in Israel. While numerous excellent analyses of the starvation in Gaza are available in English and are referenced herein, analyses in Hebrew remain limited, and for the most part amount to atrocity denial. Despite vital reporting in *Haaretz*, *The Forum for Regional Thinking*, *Local Call*, and other outlets, there are few comprehensive analyses of the long-term dynamics of starvation throughout the war, the most notable exception being the analysis by Lee Mordechai and Liat Kozma published on Bearing Witness. While this report has been adapted for the English-reading public, it remains a response to the dominant Israeli discourse surrounding Israel's policies in Gaza.

Introduction

In this report, I examine Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza, as well as the mechanisms behind its denial. The report demonstrates that the starvation in Gaza was rooted not in error, but in deliberate planning, calculated experimentation, and systematic maneuvering around humanitarian "red lines" and varying degrees of international pressure. Furthermore, I analyze how the Israeli discourse surrounding this starvation has served to obscure these deliberate policy choices.

Throughout Israel's war on Gaza, the existence of a severe humanitarian crisis and widespread hunger in the Strip has been undeniable. The crisis stemmed not only from the war itself, but from the systematic restrictions imposed on the entry of food, medical supplies, fuel, gas, and other essential goods. It has been further exacerbated by repeated attacks on civilian infrastructure, food sources and aid workers, alongside a persistent refusal to cooperate with the UN and its partner organizations in establishing safe passage routes, humanitarian zones, and deconfliction mechanisms. This reality has been repeatedly attested to by UN agencies, international aid and human rights organizations, independent experts, the relevant agencies within the Biden administration, and other allied governments.

By contrast, the official Israeli narrative – widely accepted and echoed by Israeli journalists and researchers – asserts that Israel never pursued a policy of starvation in Gaza, and that severe hunger was confined to the mid-2025 crisis. According to this narrative, food supplies were sufficient throughout the war, with restrictions on aid driven solely by security imperatives. This narrative gap is remarkable, given that Israel's weaponization of aid was not only explicitly signaled by key decision-makers, but also openly discussed in its mainstream media.

States and societies are often prone to denying their involvement in atrocities, whether as direct perpetrators or as complicit actors. Nevertheless, it remains critical to analyze the specific arguments and mechanisms that facilitate and sustain this denial in this case. The primary mechanism involves systematically dismissing empirical evidence and testimonies – from both Palestinians and international aid and medical workers – as fundamentally unreliable. While isolated data or specific testimonies may occasionally be erroneous in any conflict, the cumulative evidence emerging from Gaza is painfully clear. Ignoring or dismissing it as unreliable has therefore been part and parcel of atrocity denial in this case.

The second mechanism is overlooking a core insight in the study of mass starvation: that the fundamental challenge lies not in the mere *availability* of food and aid, but in their *accessibility* to the population, particularly its most vulnerable groups. Aid and food supply thresholds that might suffice under normal conditions become utterly inadequate under the constraints of intensive warfare, widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the systematic disruption of aid efforts.

Finally, those who deny Israel's starvation policy are nevertheless forced to acknowledge the acute hunger crisis that gripped Gaza in mid-2025. Because this particular peak is impossible to deny, it is framed as an isolated episode resulting from Israeli miscalculations and the alleged widespread looting of aid by Hamas during the early 2025 ceasefire. However, as shown below, the mid-2025 crisis cannot be understood as an isolated aberration: it was the culmination of a continuous process initiated at the outbreak of the war in October 2023.

This process reduced much of Gaza's population to a state of chronic hunger and extreme precarity, which, compounded by the destruction of hospitals and clinics, claimed many lives already during the Biden administration. Following the presidential transition in early 2025, the minimal constraints imposed by the United States were removed, allowing the Israeli government to pursue its policy to its absolute extreme, culminating in an unprecedented, yet predictable, humanitarian catastrophe.

The full extent of the harm inflicted on the civilian population in Gaza as a result of Israel's weaponization of aid remains unknown. Yet it can be stated with confidence that most of it was preventable. Throughout the war, the UN, alongside various aid and human rights organizations, has frequently emphasized that the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was man-made. Yet such statements are somewhat misleading: as scholars repeatedly [stress](#), mass starvation – especially in the modern era – is rarely a product of an absolute food shortage. Rather, it stems from the disruption of a population's access to food due to political decisions. In this sense, nearly all modern starvation crises are “man-made,” as witnessed in recent decades in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Yemen. What makes the starvation of Gaza unique, however, is the degree of control Israel exercises over the entry of goods into the Strip, and hence its degree of culpability. While Hamas bears heavy responsibility for the humanitarian disaster that has unfolded in Gaza since October 7, 2023, the use of starvation as a weapon of war was a deliberate policy choice by Israel. Ultimately, responsibility rests not only with the Israeli government and military, but with the broader Israeli political community, given the extensive public legitimacy accorded to the state's actions in Gaza.



Weaponizing Aid

Since [the ceasefire](#) in October 2025, Israel has continued to [restrict](#) the entry of aid into Gaza, from medical supplies and [infant formula](#) to [tents and caravans](#); [to block patients](#) from being evacuated to [hospitals](#) in East Jerusalem and the West Bank; and to obstruct the work of [dozens](#) of aid organizations. In doing so, it continues to weaken the aid infrastructure of the UN and its partner organizations. Israel's policy thus [perpetuates](#) the humanitarian crisis, resulting in deaths from [cold weather](#) and flooding, [shortages](#) of medical equipment and medicines, and [delayed](#) evacuation for treatment outside Gaza. Since the use of starvation as a [method of war](#) is [defined](#) in international law as depriving civilians of "objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions," a compelling argument can be made that Israel [continues to commit this crime](#) in the Gaza Strip.

There is an unsettling gap between Israel's repeated use of starvation as a method of war and the sweeping, systematic denial of this practice by its government, as well as by a host of Israeli researchers and journalists from across the political spectrum. As is well known, the peak of Israel's use of starvation occurred in mid-2025. It reportedly caused the direct deaths of [hundreds](#) from malnutrition-related causes, alongside an unknown number of [indirect](#) deaths - since most fatalities in events of mass starvation stem from the [interaction](#) between malnutrition

and infectious disease, as well as the body's compromised ability to recover from injuries. Moreover, many children in Gaza are projected to suffer enduring developmental harm, while Gazan society as a whole will continue to suffer from multigenerational trauma for the foreseeable future.

The mass starvation of mid-2025 triggered widespread international condemnation and led [leading legal experts](#) to conclude that the case against Israel for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide had grown [substantially stronger](#). Yet, it



is impossible to understand Israel's conduct during these months without recognizing it as the direct continuation of a policy that dates back to the very beginning of the war.

Thanks to reporting on the mid-2025 starvation crisis and Israel's response to it, we have deeper insight into the Israeli decision-making process. A [report](#) from early August 2025 by prominent Israeli journalist Nadav Eyal is particularly significant, as it represents a rare attempt to offer a critical account based on interviews with well-informed officials from the political and security establishments. The story Eyal tells is one of a chain of errors, intertwined with what can charitably be described as questionable considerations by the Israeli government. The root of the matter, Eyal explains, was this:

No one among the decision makers knew, and dealt in the cabinet meetings with a dramatic question: how much food does Gaza actually need? There is a fierce debate about this. At COGAT[Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories], they say that Gaza needs to receive approximately 80 truckloads of food a day. Each truck carries about 20 tons, which comes to some 50,000 tons of aid per month. International organizations reject "Israel's truck calculations", because they say some of the trucks do not carry 20 or 22 tons. The World Food Programme, which the IDF designated as a "clean" body (as opposed to UNRWA), claims that the figure is 62,000 tons per month.

According to Eyal, then, when Israel decided to completely halt the entry of food and aid to Gaza in early March 2025 – even though it had by then been fighting in Gaza for 18 months, throughout which the hunger issue was

critical – the government had little idea of how much food was needed in Gaza. At the same time, Eyal notes that COGAT estimated Gaza needed about 50,000 tons per month, a figure lower than the 62,000-ton estimate of the World Food Programme (WFP).

A similar estimate appears in the September 2025 [response](#) by COGAT and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the report issued in August by the UN's Famine Review Committee (an independent panel of experts convened under the IPC framework), which concluded that a famine was unfolding in Gaza. COGAT and the ministry cite a UN source that supposedly concurs with COGAT's estimate: a March 2025 document by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which allegedly states that 50,000 tons of food can cover the population's nutritional needs. The response document does mention the WFP's higher figure, but claims it includes a buffer to account for the diversion and looting of aid.

In reality, however, OCHA's March [document](#) stated that over 50,000 tons of food were required monthly, in addition to more than 9,700 tons of



flour needed to keep subsidized bakeries operational and further supplies required for hot meals. The document therefore aligns with the WFP's estimate, without assuming substantial loss or waste of food. Furthermore, it explains that despite some improvement during the January-February 2025 ceasefire, incoming supplies remained far short of meeting nutritional needs, failing to provide necessary dietary diversity, particularly for infants and pregnant or breastfeeding women. OCHA thus concluded that the continued entry of food, humanitarian aid, and other essential goods was necessary in significantly greater quantities.

Despite these and subsequent warnings, Israel continued to block all aid until May 19, 2025, and thereafter allowed it in only in limited quantities, repeatedly declaring that there was "no hunger" in Gaza. Eventually, however, it was forced to acknowledge the escalating scale of starvation and gradually increased the volume of aid. As COGAT itself [acknowledged](#), even in July Israel allowed less than 50,000 tons of food into Gaza. Indeed, as Eyal notes, even when Israel did allow supplies to resume, it clung to the bare minimum in a deeply striking manner, given its full awareness of the scope of the crisis:

On May 19, Israel renews the transfer of food and aid to the Strip and makes a slow, hesitant U-turn of the policy it had begun about 80 days earlier [...]. At no stage, despite the warnings, was the defense establishment ordered to flood the strip with food and aid; the government still tries to control the amount of food given to millions of human beings.

According to Eyal, then, something went seriously wrong in the calculations made by COGAT and the Israeli government. What was it?

Miscalculations and the Access Factor

The estimate of 80 trucks daily, or 50,000 tons monthly, also appears in a report by [Orbach et al.](#), published by the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University. This report represents the most extensive attempt to date to refute the various accusations against Israel. Tellingly, the aforementioned response by COGAT and the Foreign Ministry appears to rely in part on its arguments and calculations without citing them, replicating many of the same mistakes and oversights.

Orbach and his colleagues argue that Israel allowed sufficient food into the Gaza Strip throughout the war, with the sole exception of the starvation crisis in mid-2025. Basing their calculations on the average number of food trucks entering Gaza daily in 2022 (73), combined with what they characterize as "compensation" for the collapse of Gaza's domestic food production, they conclude that roughly 82 trucks per day were required to maintain food consumption at its prewar level. They contrast this baseline with their finding that Israel permitted an average of 102 food trucks daily from October 7, 2023 to mid-January 2025.

The figure on which Orbach and his colleagues rely – prewar domestic food production capacity meeting 10-12%

of Gazans' caloric needs – is derived from [Checchi et al.](#), who in turn cite [a 2013 Oxfam study](#). In fact, however, that figure does not appear in the Oxfam report and is quite clearly erroneous. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), by contrast, [estimated](#) that prewar local production supplied 20-30% of the Gazan population's caloric intake, and that more than [half a million](#) residents were fully or partially dependent on it for their livelihoods.

Even if we were to adjust Orbach et al.'s estimates solely according to FAO's figures, the minimum required for Gaza would be 91-104 food trucks daily, or 55,000-62,000 tons of food per month. However, the problem with such calculations runs much deeper. We can compare them with the WFP's March 2024 [assessment](#) that “simply addressing the basic food needs will require at least 300 trucks to enter Gaza every day and distribute food, especially in the north.” Alternatively, we can look at Oxfam's early April 2024 [estimate](#) that “an absolute minimum of 221 trucks of food alone are needed [for Gaza] every day, not accounting for wastage or unequal distribution.” Finally, we can compare these figures with the Biden administration's [assessment](#), made in December 2023, that if fewer than 250 supply trucks entered Gaza each day, the aid system

would collapse under the pressure of desperate civilians, and that 350-400 aid trucks per day were required to prevent a humanitarian crisis. While the precise proportion of food in the Biden administration's total truck counts was not explicitly broken down, food represented 70-80% of all aid throughout the war. Consequently, we can safely deduce that the administration's baseline was far higher than the thresholds calculated by COGAT, Orbach et al., or other Israeli [researchers](#).

The discrepancy between these (admittedly rough) estimates stems primarily from a fundamental reality: in wartime, aggregate food volume is neither the sole nor the most critical metric. Rather, the central question is whether the civilian population can actually access that food. From the early stages of the conflict, the vast majority of Gaza's residents were internally displaced, living in tents or overcrowded shelters under severe conditions while domestic production sites, warehouses, and distribution centers were repeatedly destroyed or rendered inaccessible by IDF operations. As infrastructure collapsed and roads became impassable, market prices soared, drastically eroding the population's purchasing power. Furthermore, the conflict triggered a severe liquidity crisis, transforming cash into a [scarce](#), commodified asset.





Gazan nutritional and broader aid needs increased continuously over the course of the war. Responding to and compounding the access crisis, starving civilians, as well as armed gangs and Hamas militants, frequently seized control of aid provisions. At the same time, Israel [refused requests](#) by the UN and aid organizations to establish safe routes for aid convoys and killed aid workers in large numbers (over 500 aid workers are [estimated](#) to have been killed in Gaza by the October 2025 ceasefire). As [one humanitarian worker noted](#) early in the war, “It is easier to ensure deconfliction with a militia in rural South Sudan that has one single satellite phone than it is with the [Israeli army] at this point.” Other aid workers with experience in various war zones similarly testified that they [had never encountered such obstacles](#).

Alex de Waal, one of the world’s leading experts on mass starvation, [criticized](#) the calculations of Orbach and his colleagues in a similar vein: “Every student of famine should know by heart the famous opening lines of Amartya Sen’s 1981 book *Poverty and Famines*: ‘Starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat’” (emphases in the original). De Waal essentially argued that these calculations did not begin to grasp the problem of access, which arises in any situation of intense fighting, all the more so in a war of

the kind Israel waged in Gaza. This critique is equally applicable to COGAT’s estimate: *If* Israel truly sought to avoid a hunger crisis in Gaza, its strategy rested on fundamentally flawed calculations.

Furthermore, food aid cannot be isolated from other forms of humanitarian assistance. Crucially, Israel imposed severe restrictions on fuel, cooking gas, and water. Fuel and cooking gas are essential to refrigerate, preserve, and prepare food, as well as to power local bakeries. Similarly, safe drinking water is indispensable not only for cooking and hydration but also for preventing outbreaks of waterborne diseases, which can quickly turn lethal when combined with malnutrition. Since these and other essential goods – including hygiene products and wood as an alternative to cooking gas – entered only in small quantities, [their prices](#) skyrocketed. Necessary services, such as [transport following the evacuation](#) orders issued by the IDF, also became unaffordable. Gaza’s residents were left with even fewer resources to purchase the food sold by private traders, whose prices had likewise soared.



Despite the considerable uncertainty surrounding wartime estimates, it is clear which were closer to reality. Already since 24 November 2023, against the backdrop of the first hostage deal and mounting international pressure, Israel allowed more aid trucks to enter Gaza. Between December 2023 and late February 2024, a daily average of [close](#) to 80 food trucks entered the Strip (or 85, according to COGAT's [data](#)). The result, as demonstrated below, was severe hunger that spread throughout Gaza, particularly in the north. Even between March and September 2024, when Israel permitted a significantly larger volume of food to enter the Strip, food distress and malnutrition rates remained alarmingly high.

It is in this spirit that we must understand the WFP's [statement](#) that 62,000 tons of food per month would be sufficient

to feed the population of Gaza. First, it has been [repeatedly clarified](#) that this estimate refers solely to the [humanitarian aid](#) required to meet [minimum needs](#), and that addressing the hunger crisis requires the resumption of commercial food imports to ensure dietary diversity. Second and more importantly, this assessment assumes that food reaches the entire population [equally](#) and that no significant quantities are looted, hoarded, spoiled, or otherwise lost. This is, of course, an unrealistic assumption even in peacetime. It is particularly untenable when a chronically hungry population struggles to survive in a destroyed territory, amid ongoing [Israeli attacks](#) on warehouses, community kitchens, and aid distribution centers, as well as the seizure of aid by Hamas, armed gangs (some of which [collaborated with Israel](#)), and starving Gazans.

Possessing extensive experience in managing Gaza's humanitarian affairs, COGAT clearly knew better. Back in 2007, when [calculating](#) subsistence requirements for a population of roughly 1.5 million, it was aware of the Israeli Ministry of Health's estimation that approximately 91 food trucks per day (calculated on a seven-day weekly basis) were required to sustain the population in the absence of local food production. Adjusted to Gaza's current population of roughly 2.1 million, this calculation yields a baseline requirement of some 127 truckloads per day, or approximately 76,000 tons of food per month. Even

COGAT's own, more restrictive baseline from that period, when adjusted for the current population, would amount to approximately 100 truckloads per day, or roughly 60,000 tons of food per month. Crucially, COGAT's estimate did not account for a near-total collapse of local food production, nor did either calculation assume a protracted and intense war.

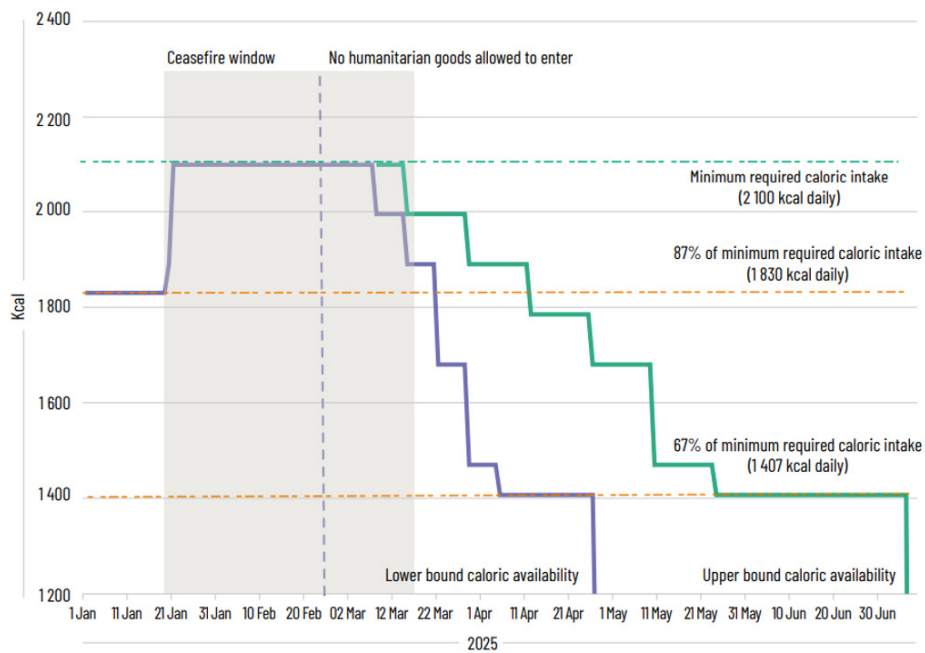
According to recent reports, COGAT now [assesses](#) that some 250 truckloads of aid per day are required to meet Gaza's basic humanitarian needs. This estimate is part of an effort to restrict the volume of incoming trucks, under the claim that current levels are excessive and enable Hamas to consolidate control. Ironically, this updated estimate serves as an implicit admission of the previous starvation policy: throughout the war, Israel routinely permitted significantly fewer trucks to enter the Strip. Indeed, COGAT's own data indicate a daily average of only around 150 trucks by October 2025, to say nothing of the periods when Israeli restrictions of aid were at their most severe: namely, the opening months of the war, late 2024, and mid-2025.

A detailed attempt to calculate the amount of food required for Gaza on a caloric basis [was carried out by FAO](#). Published in May 2025, the paper concluded that the minimum required volume was approximately 2,300 tons of food per day, or about 69,000 tons per month. Any amount below this estimate was projected to trigger a hunger crisis at varying severity (from "crisis" to "catastrophic"). It is worth emphasizing that this calculation, much like the WFP's

estimate, was based on the idealized assumption that food was distributed equally across the population, and that every resident was able to access and consume it. The analysis concluded that the amount of food Israel allowed in from the beginning of the war until December 2024, together with local food production, provided on average about 1,510 calories per person, or 72% of the minimum requirement.

One may [dispute](#) this estimate, and the authors themselves suggest in a [revised analysis](#) that 60,000 tons of food per month might suffice, assuming this quantity is distributed equally and is accessible to all. Even so, it is notable that in May 2025, on the basis of their analysis, they projected that Gaza would enter a severe hunger crisis between April 26 and July 5, depending on varying assessments of the quantity of food supplies during the ceasefire (see Figure 1) - which is precisely what [occurred](#). This analysis did not assume massive aid diversion by Hamas - an explanation on which COGAT, as well as Orbach et al., relied as the primary reason for the rapid depletion of the food that entered during the ceasefire. While Hamas [did seize aid](#) - likely primarily food shipments that were brought in by organizations and traders [outside the UN](#) and its [affiliates](#) - it is implausible that this occurred on a scale [sufficient](#) to explain the rapid plunge into mass starvation, nor has Israel provided [evidence](#) demonstrating diversion of that magnitude.

Figure 1. Caloric availability over time (lower and upper bounds).



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Source; FAO, *Food pipeline disruption and declining food availability in the Gaza Strip: Implications under international humanitarian and human rights law*.

Calibrating Hunger

Nadav Eyal argued that the grave error in the calculations by COGAT and the Israeli government led to the mass starvation in mid 2025. He explained that, according to COGAT's assessments, Gaza was supposed to reach the "red line" toward late June or early July. This "line" was never specified, but it seems that it marked a threshold of severe starvation that could lead to large scale mortality and a backlash of international condemnation. The Israeli government, Eyal reported, did not wish to cross this red line, but was willing to risk approaching it.

It is also evident that the calculations made by the Israeli government and COGAT were remarkably meticulous, tracking how much food entered during the ceasefire, how long those supplies were projected to last, at what point reserves would drop to a level that would strip Hamas of its reliance on those supplies, and when the introduction of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) would provide an alternative that served Israel's broader strategic aims. As [observed](#) by de Waal, there has likely been no case of such carefully designed starvation in recent decades.

Eyal's reporting suggests that the Israeli government ignored not only the

warnings of the UN, aid organizations, and experts, but also those of its own security establishment, which in April 2025 already saw indications of starvation. In May, the security establishment warned that Gaza was approaching the “red line”:

From the beginning of April, the indicators of the security establishment itself began to suggest growing deprivation in Gaza, and this was added to the warnings by the aid organizations. The calculation regarding the “surplus food” in the Strip as a result of the quantity that had entered during the ceasefire did not take into account basic aspects of supply, demand, and food insecurity [...].

The general attitude toward [Head of COGAT] Major General Rassan Alian [...] was that “he’s just waving red flags, but at the same time saying there is no starvation,” as one minister told me. Another minister remarked that the military’s assessments had been treated with disdain [...] In early May, countries around the world and aid organizations were already reporting a very severe crisis. Discussions began about the option of renewing aid. The military was already warning that “we are approaching the red line.” In retrospect, this was a mistake; we were far beyond it.

Publicly, COGAT had claimed in early April that there would be enough food in Gaza for a long time, “if Hamas allows the population to consume it”. The UN’s response was that this claim was “ridiculous [...] we are at the very

end of our supplies.” COGAT persisted in publicly denying starvation for some time, despite the evidence. It is worth noting, at this point, that Eyal seems to echo the security establishment’s apologetics. The story he tells is that “gross miscalculations” were made, but that COGAT issued at least belated warnings that were ignored by the government. However, at least in the earlier stages of the war, it was often senior military officials who were enraged by the entry of aid in response to international pressure. To reconstruct this dynamic, let us step back in time.

October 2023–March 2024: Gaza Collapses into Starvation

After October 7, Israel’s control over Gaza’s borders enabled it to impose a tight blockade. According to [the World Bank](#), it pushed Gaza into one of the worst economic collapses in recent history, with hunger and malnutrition [unfolding at a similarly unprecedented pace](#). By November 23, 2023, [only a few dozen trucks](#) entered Gaza daily, mainly thanks to American pressure. Already in October, the Biden administration reportedly [conditioned](#) the presidential visit on allowing more aid into Gaza. Netanyahu yielded to pressure, after claiming some of his ministers would not agree to let [“even an aspirin”](#) into Gaza.

Even after the Rafah crossing was opened for the transfer of goods and aid from Egypt several weeks into the war, Israel limited aid to just [75 trucks a day](#). This restricted flow was further hampered by an [arbitrary and non](#)



[transparent inspection](#) process based on a constantly changing list of allegedly “dual-use items,” which excluded many vital goods. This bureaucratic blockage of most aid trucks, officially denied, would serve Israel for most of the war and may have also facilitated the rationalization of starving Gaza’s civilian population, as suggested by [Sari Bashi](#).

At the same time, Israel destroyed Gaza’s local sources of food. In mid November, it bombed [Gaza’s main flour mill](#). Out of some 130 bakeries that had operated in Gaza before the war, [only 15 remained](#) by January 2024, whether because of the widespread displacement of the population or because of direct targeting by the IDF. Similarly, Israel destroyed farms and other food sources, including livestock and the [fishing](#) industry. According to [analysis](#) by Forensic Architecture, by October 2024, the IDF carried out more than 320 attacks on aid, including aid convoys, aid workers, and civilians seeking aid.

Note that all this happened against the backdrop of reports that the strategic goal of Netanyahu, Finance Minister Smotrich, National Security Minister Ben Gvir, and several other ministers was “to [thin out](#) the population of Gaza to the bare minimum.” Netanyahu’s envoy Ron Dermer reportedly formulated a [plan](#)

to that end, even though the security establishment deemed it unrealistic, as indeed proved to be the case due to Egypt’s opposition. Gaps of this kind between Netanyahu’s government and at least some political and security officials would persist, as discussed below, but both the vision of ethnic cleansing and the displacement from the northern Strip shared a common denominator. Brigadier General Erez Wiener, Head of the Operational Planning Department in the IDF Southern Command, encapsulated this logic in August 2025. He [explained](#) that residents of Gaza City should be “persuaded” to evacuate by ensuring “that humanitarian aid will not enter Gaza City, but only the evacuation zones.” As we shall see, a similar logic of starvation for the purpose of displacement also applied in other stages and contexts of the war. It is worth noting that in another interview from the same month, Winner [lamented](#) that Israel had not invested enough in promoting emigration from Gaza, and [clarified](#) that his “professional position” was that Trump’s plan for “voluntary emigration” should be implemented. He also claimed in the same interview that there was no starvation in Gaza and that no Gazan had died of hunger.



Already in November 2023, aid organizations [warned](#) that Gaza was collapsing into widespread hunger. According to [Oxfam](#), the number of premature births had risen by 25–30%, and at least one infant in each of the shelters run by the organization aid Zazoor had died as a result of the deteriorating living conditions. On November 24, the first ceasefire began, and for about a week, aid entered on a larger scale. Once the ceasefire ended, however, [the volume declined](#) again and the situation continued to deteriorate rapidly. In December, the WFP reported that the percentage of households among the displaced in the southern Strip suffering from severe hunger had risen from 38 to 56. Almost half of the displaced reported others who had been forced to consume food that was uncooked or unfit for consumption. Interviewed by Human Rights Watch, one displaced person from the northern Strip [testified](#): “We had no food, no electricity, no internet, nothing [...] we do not know how we survived.” Others described similar conditions, including in Gaza City. Before long, starving Gazans resorted to [looting](#) aid trucks.

In December 2023, the Biden administration began to apply stronger pressure on Israel. On December 22, a Security Council [resolution](#) required it to supply the aid needed to meet the population’s needs. By late December, a report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) [determined](#) that the entire population of Gaza was experiencing food insecurity ranging from “crisis” to “catastrophic,” and that in no other place monitored by the

organization since its establishment in 2004 had such a high percentage of the population experienced such levels of food insecurity. Toward the end of January 2024, the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel must allow the entry of the food and aid required for the Gaza Strip. In response to these developments, Israel did allow in food and other aid [on a larger scale](#), but at the same time began attacking police forces in the Strip, which facilitated looting. During this period, Israel also began undermining UNRWA – the organization that Gazans, the UN, and affiliated humanitarian agencies [trust most](#) when it comes to aid distribution, thanks to its unique capacity to distribute food directly to the household level.

In February 2024, Israel again reduced the aid entering Gaza. This was possibly due in part to senior IDF officers who [were enraged](#) by this minimal level of aid. They argued that bringing in aid while Israeli hostages were held in horrifying conditions was “immoral”; that aid should serve as a bargaining chip for a better hostage deal; and that Hamas’s takeover of aid contributed to its survival. The security establishment reportedly maintained that there were “no hunger conditions” in Gaza, but in the same breath [assessed](#) that “Should the humanitarian crisis in the Strip



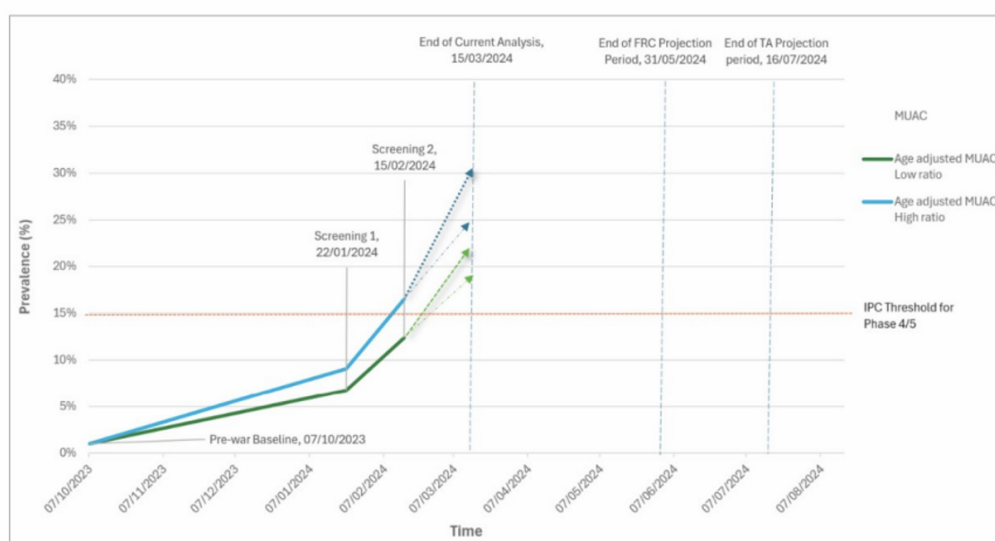
deepen, internal protest will develop within the shelters and built-up areas where civilians are concentrated. Such protests would exert mounting pressure on the Hamas leadership, which remains concealed in the subterranean networks constructed in Khan Younis.”

Meanwhile, [an analysis](#) by the UN’s Nutrition Cluster found that the vast majority of children under age two, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women, faced severe food poverty. In northern Gaza, the rate of acute malnutrition among infants was more than 15%, and about 3% were suffering from the most severe form of malnutrition. In Rafah, to the south, the rate of malnutrition among children of the same age was relatively

low – around 5%. Yet it still reflected a marked deterioration compared to the rate among children under five before October 7, which was less than 1%. Extensive destruction of infrastructure continued, and diseases kept spreading.

Data from February-March 2024 indicated further, rapid deterioration. [An analysis](#) by the IPC/FRC reflected this in figures on child malnutrition in the northern Strip, food consumption levels in Gaza, and hunger among families (see Figure 2). “The speed at which the catastrophic crisis of child malnutrition has developed is shocking”, [UNICEF noted](#), “especially when the necessary aid is just a few miles away.”

Figure 2. Trends in global acute nutrition (GAM) by mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) prevalence in North Gaza (children aged 6-59 months).



Source: Famine Review Committee: Gaza Strip, [March 2024](#).

[Gazans](#) repeatedly testified to the [hunger](#) they experienced. “The biggest indignity,” wrote Mahmoud Mushtaha, “is the daily struggle to feed ourselves. It is impossible to describe our efforts to put food on the table in northern. I’ve lost 17 kilograms since the war started due to the scarcity of food.” Johnathan Whittall, former head of OCHA, was part of a UN team that visited the northern Strip at the end of January 2024; he [testified](#) that “[m]ass starvation had already set in. Everyone we spoke to asked us for food. People gestured to us in the street for something to eat. Israeli authorities continued to deny the entry of any supplies despite our warnings of the deadly conditions.”

UNICEF spokesperson James Elder visited Gaza in March 2024 and [described](#) what he had seen: “As soon as you drive through the north, you get that universal gesture of hunger of people putting their hands to their mouths. A lot of children, women with very gaunt faces.” At Kamal Adwan Hospital, he saw a dozen children who looked like skeletons: “We are seeing severe malnutrition cases [...]. Children who are on the brink of death, just skin and bones [...] and these are the ones who have managed to get to hospital. There is a real fear for those that can’t.” The *Guardian*, which [reported](#) Elder’s testimony, noted that his description was supported by multiple interviews with other aid workers and locals: “Most describe appalling conditions, with no or limited sanitation for huge numbers of people, inadequate food supplies even in the more accessible areas and a wide-scale breakdown of civil order.” Many in

Gaza [resorted](#) to [eating animal fodder and grass](#).

According to a [UNICEF report](#), at least 23 children in northern Gaza had died by that point as a result of malnutrition and dehydration. [Iman’s](#) (pseudonym) [baby](#) was perhaps one of them: as her mother testified to *At* magazine, he died in January 2024 due to lack of infant formula. Sharif al-Kafarna from Beit Hanoun [testified](#) to B’Tselem in early March that his son had died of malnutrition. Human Rights Watch [interviewed](#) fathers from North Gaza whose children had died after being born to mothers suffering from extreme malnutrition, and others whose children were suffering from severe hunger. The organization also confirmed testimonies about children dying from causes related to malnutrition at Kamal Adwan Hospital.

Yet these data and testimonies capture only part of the humanitarian crisis caused by Israel in the Gaza Strip. Many of those who suffered from hunger in Gaza did not appear in the figures on malnutrition: a large portion of children under the age of five (for the most part, the early estimates excluded children above the age of two), most pregnant



and breastfeeding women and children under six months, as well as older children and adults. Adults in Gaza skipped meals so that their children could eat, and women in Gaza were often the last to eat. In a survey by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Gaza, conducted in March 2024, 55% of respondents reported that they did not have enough food for a day or two. Most said they knew where they could obtain food or water, but reaching those places involved great difficulty and risk. Typically, none of these empirical data or eyewitness testimonies are mentioned by Israeli journalists and researchers who have referred to the crisis as a fabricated “starvation campaign” or dismissed the claims of starvation in Gaza.

Gradually, pressure on Israel mounted. In early February 2024, the Biden administration decided to examine whether Israel was violating the conditions US law sets for the provision of military aid. The combination of international criticism with the data and testimonies about the dire situation led the Israeli government to allow in more aid. When Smotrich leaked this, he drew the ire of senior IDF officers, who as mentioned, regarded humanitarian aid as a bargaining chip, and assessed that Hamas was “very concerned” with the humanitarian situation in northern Gaza, as the fighting there had led it to lose its “governance capacity” over the 250,000 Palestinians remaining in that area.

By late February 2024, Israel was harshly condemned for the “flour massacre,” in which over 100 Palestinians who had gathered to collect flour were killed. In

early March, the Biden administration used yet stronger language in demanding that Israel allow in more aid, essentially acknowledging Israel was weaponizing starvation: “[T]he Israeli government must do more to significantly increase the flow of aid”, declared Vice President Kamala Harris. “No excuses. They must open new border crossings. They must not impose any unnecessary restrictions on the delivery of aid. They must ensure that humanitarian personnel, sites, and convoys are not targeted. And they must work to restore basic services and promote order in Gaza so more food, water, and fuel can reach those in need.”

On March 18, a second IPC report was published, warning that the situation could rapidly develop into a famine. By the end of that month, the International Court of Justice issued another, more explicit order to Israel to allow unrestricted aid. After Israel killed aid workers from the World Central Kitchen at the beginning of April – an incident that sent shockwaves around the world – the Biden administration threatened to condition the continuation of US military assistance on a significant increase in aid. In response to these developments, Israel began to allow in food and other aid on a significantly larger scale.

Throughout this period, the Israeli security establishment kept maintaining that there was no hunger in Gaza, nor was one expected. According



to reports in the Israeli media, Israel was forced to allow in more aid because of international pressure, but the security establishment was frustrated, since the entry of aid had been granted to Hamas “for free”, rather than in return for a better deal, and because Hamas seized aid or profited from it in other ways.

Gaza is a small territory, and the aid organizations, first and foremost UNRWA, had the experience, knowledge, and personnel to distribute food efficiently. The rapid improvement that followed the increase in aid in March-April 2024 made the direct link between Israel's policy and the severity of the situation in Gaza even more undeniable. It also demonstrated that the restriction of aid was never primarily a technical bottleneck caused by wartime circumstances, but rather the result of a deliberate political decision.

Throughout the war, Israel asserted that the recurring forecasts of severe, widespread starvation were unfounded. Ironically, these catastrophic projections failed to materialize largely because Israel yielded to international pressure and increased aid. There is, in fact, a double irony here: had Israel heeded these warnings rather than dismissed them, it could have avoided the “diplomatic avalanche,” as Eyal termed it, triggered by its engineered starvation in mid-2025.

A further irony lies in the fact that even when the relevant agencies in the Biden administration reported that northern Gaza had turned into an “apocalyptic wasteland,” or when they concluded that Israel was deliberately blocking or delaying aid, senior US officials

suppressed these findings. This was driven by the political commitment to support Israel, coupled with the constraints of US law, which mandates a halt to arms shipments to any country found to be restricting or blocking American humanitarian aid. As in other aspects of the war (and indeed long before it), a tougher approach by the administration might have saved Israel from itself.

In early April 2024, analysts at the International Crisis Group concluded:

Israel's approach to aid distribution, especially in the northern Strip has been a fiasco. It has not coordinated military with humanitarian action, endangering aid workers and recipients, and frequently halting convoys. It has attacked civilian police, citing links to Hamas, and compelled their retreat, which leaves supplies vulnerable to plunder, whether by profiteers or the desperately hungry. It has tried to work around the international aid system [...], doling out assistance on an ad hoc basis in hopes of building a network to administer Gaza on its behalf after the war. It directs aid to big families who agree to embrace its agenda, while targeting those who refuse, risking damage to Gaza's social fabric in a way that a U.S. official noted is reminiscent of Mogadishu in the early 1990s.

It is no coincidence that this observation prefigures the radicalization of Israel's policy a year later, which plunged Gaza into mass starvation. The crisis was engineered by the same political and security establishment, albeit with two important differences. First, the transition from the Biden to the Trump administration effectively removed the few constraints previously placed on Israel. Second, Netanyahu orchestrated

the departure of Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi, replacing him with his former military secretary, Eyal Zamir. The latter failed – or perhaps never tried – to resist the woefully misnamed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), as discussed further below.

The Rafah Invasion and Northern Gaza as a Laboratory

The increased entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip in April 2024 raised hopes that this marked a turning point in Israel's policy. It lasted for about a month, until the invasion of Rafah. In light of the multiple warnings about the invasion's humanitarian implications, Israel more than doubled the number of commercial trucks in May and the following months. At the same time, however, the humanitarian aid it allowed in [fell by almost half](#) in May and declined even further in the following months. There was a reason why aid organizations warned against prioritizing commercial trucks over humanitarian aid: food brought in by private traders is vital for dietary diversity and nutritional value, but its composition is subject to market considerations and includes items unsuitable for a malnourished population.

Indeed, an [analysis](#) by Naomi Fliss-Isakov and colleagues of food supplies entering Gaza in January-July 2024 based on COGAT's data, which generally supports the Israeli narrative, noted that the supply of food donated by UN agencies gradually dropped from 51% of all delivered food in April to just 22% in July. They identified this as a cause for

concern due to the reasons mentioned above. They further noted that the fourth most prevalent food group supplied in the period under study was “sweets,” which contribute little to the supply of essential micronutrients. While Fliss-Isakov and her colleagues state that the reasons for this shift toward commercial goods at the expense of humanitarian aid “have not yet been studied,” the underlying rationale seems fairly clear: Israel grew increasingly hostile toward UN-provided aid, perceiving it as a resource leveraged by Hamas to sustain itself and its control over the population. Prioritizing commercial goods funneled through a select group of approved traders was harmful to the Gazan population, and predictably [led](#) to higher prices and widespread corruption, yet it undermined the UN distribution system in favor of a commercial alternative that Israel believed would better serve its political and military objectives.

The marked increase in commercial trucks prevented the catastrophe many had feared prior to the invasion of Rafah. However, the sharp decline in the volume of humanitarian aid and, more broadly, the impact of the fighting in Rafah and the displacement of more than one million people from the area, reversed the positive trend that had begun in April. The invasion also resulted in the [closure](#) of centers for the treatment of malnutrition and denied essential care to thousands of children.



By late May 2024, the UN [reported](#) that 85% of children surveyed had gone an entire day without eating at least once during the preceding three days. By July, the number of Gazans receiving humanitarian aid had [decreased](#) by approximately 700,000 compared to those reached by aid agencies prior to the invasion of Rafah. A large portion of the aid intended to enter through the Rafah crossing was held up for weeks, and the amount of food reaching the south [declined significantly](#). In surveys conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in [June](#) and [September](#), more than 30% of respondents reported that they did not have enough food for a day or two. [Reports](#) of [child deaths](#) due to [factors related](#) to malnutrition and lack of medical care [continued](#).

In October, [testimonies](#) by international medical personnel described what they had witnessed during their volunteer work in Gaza over the preceding year. “These people were starving,” testified nurse Merrill Tydings. “I quickly learned not to drink my water or eat the food I had brought with me in front of the health workers, because they had gone so many days with nothing.” Another nurse, Abeerah Muhammad, recounted that “everyone we met showed us pictures of themselves from before October. Everyone had lost between about 10 and 30 kilograms of their body weight. Most of the patients and staff appeared emaciated and dehydrated.”

Dr. Nahreen Ahmed testified: “Every patient I treated showed signs of malnutrition – for example, poor wound healing and rapidly developing

infections.” Others reported seeing infants who had been born healthy return to hospitals and die from dehydration, starvation, or infections caused by their mothers’ inability to breastfeed, as well as by lack of infant formulas and clean water. Dr. Arham Ali stated that “starving mothers would arrive at intensive care units and plead for infant formula to feed their newborns. Infants only hours or days old were brought to the hospital suffering from severe dehydration, infections, and hypothermia. Many infants died from conditions that, without exception, were preventable.”

Dr. Aman Odeh, who worked in a neonatal intensive care unit, said that “several infants died each day due to a lack of medical equipment and appropriate nutrition. We were forced to make difficult decisions about which critically ill infant would be connected to a ventilator because of equipment shortages.” Other doctors testified that many of the children they treated suffered from malnutrition, and that combined with infections and shortages of equipment, the result was that children died of preventable causes. [Testimonies](#) by [Gazans](#) told a similar story.

Even the increased entry of commercial trucks lasted only a few months. In October 2024, as part of the “clearing” of northern Gaza, their number [dropped sharply](#). That same month, COGAT issued a [directive](#) requiring UN aid workers arriving from Jordan to complete a special form in which they identified themselves and confirmed the cargo declaration destined for

Gaza. Due to legal concerns, many organizations refused to do so, leading to a significant reduction in the volume of aid from Jordan, which had been a major conduit to Gaza. The restrictions imposed by Israel on aid organizations also greatly reduced the entry of medical personnel.

At the same time, [Israel allowed gangs](#) in Gaza [to loot aid trucks](#) entering from the south on a large scale. The IDF justified this by citing concerns about harming aid workers if it intervened. However, it later emerged that this was at least partly due to Israel's [support](#) of Gazan militias it sought to foster, most famously that led by Yasser Abu Shabab, whom the UN identified as a [principal actor](#) in the looting.

The weakness of the Biden administration ahead of the approaching US elections likely played a role in the Israeli government's decision to return to a more intensive policy of deliberate deprivation. Despite the administration's [demand](#), in October 2024, to allow in at least 350 aid trucks and 50-100 commercial trucks daily, in line with Israel's promises from March, [Israel waited](#) until northern Gaza had been cleared of most of its residents before allowing larger quantities of aid to enter in December. The ceasefire that began in January 2025, which permitted a substantially larger volume of aid to enter Gaza, led to a significant

improvement across the Strip. Yet northern Gaza, in particular, remained a "laboratory" for the strategies that Israel subsequently attempted to implement on a broader scale, starting in March 2025.

According to the UN Nutrition Cluster, by the end of 2024, [approximately 40,000 children](#) aged 6 months to 5 years had been treated in Gaza for acute malnutrition. About 8,000 suffered from severe acute malnutrition. These figures did not include all children estimated to be suffering from malnutrition in this age group. Children over the age of 5 were largely excluded, as were adults, and diagnosis and treatment for pregnant and breastfeeding women were limited as well.

To date, [studies](#) have pointed to significant excess indirect mortality by the end of 2024. The most rigorous of them, utilizing primary data, [suggests](#) a toll of over 8,000 individuals beyond the baseline mortality expected in the Strip during this period – a staggering figure, even if lower than many had expected. The struggling healthcare system in Gaza, the relatively high level of child vaccinations, the [absence](#) of major, deadly epidemic outbreaks, the fact that Israel allowed increased aid at critical moments, as well as [community](#) and family support systems and aid frameworks that cared for and fed children and pregnant and breastfeeding



women - all apparently combined to prevent a larger-scale disaster.

At the same time, numerous testimonies [suggest](#) that the impact of malnutrition on mortality - through its interaction with disease, the difficulty of recovering from injuries, and lack of access to medical care - was likely more extensive than could be inferred from the abovementioned studies. In a [survey](#) conducted among 78 medical personnel who volunteered in Gaza between August 2024 and February 2025, they testified that malnutrition was the most common medical problem, and that it worsened the outcomes of injuries and illnesses and led to preventable deaths.

None of this altered the considerations of the Israeli government when it decided, in March 2025, to impose a total blockade on the Gaza Strip. Then, too, the [assessment](#) of the security establishment was that what would change Hamas' calculations was "internal pressure and the humanitarian issue."

The GHF and the Mass Starvation of mid-2025

"We always knew this was on the edge", Nadav Eyal [quotes](#) a senior official as saying. "And they laughed at [Head of COGAT] Rasan Alian. We knew the situation was severe." Eyal continues:

The government did not want mass starvation in Gaza, if only because it knew this would backfire on Israel. But it knew that Gaza was close to starvation, and it was willing to walk a tightrope that put an entire population at risk of a humanitarian disaster. This was not done out of strategic considerations, but mainly out of political fear of Ben Gvir, Smotrich, and public opinion.



Without belittling its fear of the right-wing base, it seems that the Netanyahu government did have significant strategic considerations. In addition to the attempt to undermine Hamas's ability to sustain itself and control the population of Gaza, and to weaken the UN and aid organizations' distribution system in favor of a mechanism that would better serve Israel's goals, the Israeli government [sought](#) to push the population to the south to advance the [implementation](#) of Trump's "voluntary migration" plan - namely the ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

After all, three of the four aid "distribution centers" of the GHF were in [the southern Strip](#), and two of the foundation's [initiators](#), Michael Eisenberg and Liran Tancman, were also behind Trump's plan to create a "riviera" in Gaza after relocating Gazans to other countries. Part of the original planning included creating areas in southern Gaza where Gazans would be housed and provided with aid, in the spirit of the ["humanitarian city"](#) announced by Defense Minister Israel Katz, which was to be built on the ruins of Rafah

with the explicit aim of promoting Trump's scheme.

The GHF was both a tragedy and a farce. As [many](#) pointed out, no humanitarian aid worker would design a scheme in which the population is forced to walk miles through a warzone to reach a very small number of aid distribution points, instead of having the aid brought to the population at hundreds of distribution sites, as done by UNRWA and all other agencies. Anyone could understand that under such a scenario, it would mainly be the strong who would reach the aid, while many others would be harmed on the way. The speed with which the aid distribution points turned into death traps for hundreds of Gazans, shot by the IDF in attempts to "manage" the starving crowds with live fire, may have been less predictable. Still, in light of the dehumanization of Gazans following October 7, and the scale of starvation, this too could have been foreseen.



The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation was never for Gaza and was [anything but humanitarian](#). It was intended to replace the UN's aid system, grant Israel the greatest possible control over the distribution of aid and, through it, over the Gazans themselves, and thus pave

the way for Israel's war objectives. The logic behind it was [neatly articulated](#) by Col. (res.) Prof. Gabi Siboni, CEO of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS), and the aforementioned Brig. Gen. (res.) Erez Winner in April 2025:

The key to fulfilling Israel's war objectives lies in the destruction of Hamas's military and governmental capabilities [...] This is a necessary condition for the organization's total defeat. Necessary, but not sufficient. Hamas is a symptom of a deeper and broader problem [...]: the psychological and ideological infrastructure of the Palestinian public is one of perpetual struggle aimed at the destruction of the State of Israel [...] [T]o secure sustained calm over the long term [...] Israel will need either an effective and swift de-radicalization program (which has slim chances of success) or to implement Trump's vision: the voluntary emigration of Gaza's population [...].

Accordingly, we propose the establishment a new humanitarian zone in the Rafah area and to transfer the civilian population there through controlled corridors that prevent the passage of hostile actors. This new humanitarian zone in Rafah would include a temporary, partial military administration, allowing for the distribution of aid under IDF oversight and through humanitarian organizations managed and monitored by foreign security companies, an approach that has already proven workable elsewhere in the Strip. Doing so would allow the IDF to focus offensive operations in areas of Gaza that have been cleared of civilians and relocated to the new enclave. This enclave would also serve as a transit camp to facilitate the emigration of Gaza residents to third countries willing to receive them.

As in other aspects of Israel's war, the commitment to destroy Hamas and to ensure that the horrors of October 7 would not be repeated served to justify unprecedented harm to the civilian population. Since the population was perceived as steeped in Hamas ideology, a more fundamental solution to the "Gaza problem" was deemed necessary. Presumably, this was one of the reasons why Israel did not heed the UN's May 2025 [proposal](#) to establish an even more rigorous monitoring mechanism for the aid entering Gaza in order to allay Israel's concerns about Hamas seizing aid -- even though the mechanism already in place was likely the most rigorous ever constructed.

The government left no doubt as to its intentions. Receiving aid at the distribution centers was conditioned, [according to Netanyahu](#), on Gazans not returning to their places of residence: "We are destroying more and more houses, they have nowhere to return. The only plausible outcome will be the desire of Gazans to emigrate out of Gaza. Our main problem is destination countries willing to take them."

Statements by the Defense Minister's office [explicitly defined](#) the war plan as including the transfer of Gaza's residents to the south as a step toward implementing Trump's plan. When Smotrich was asked what victory in the war would look like, [he replied](#): "When Gaza is completely ruined, its civilians are concentrated south of the Morag axis, and they begin to leave in large numbers for third countries." In his vision,

The IDF continues to clear, to turn over every stone and to destroy infrastructure. Gaza's civilians are concentrated in the south, completely despaired, understanding that it is futile and there is nothing to look for in Gaza. They look for relocation and to start new lives elsewhere. This puts Israel in a different position and radiates across the entire region, including this place where we sit, for the next fifty years.

It is likely that quite a few of the senior IDF officers did not share that vision. Like others consulted, they [were already concerned](#) that the GHF was intended to pave the way for a prolonged Israeli occupation of Gaza. There was also the [difficulty](#) of finding third countries prepared to absorb Palestinians. In any case, it is worth recalling a simple fact: without the severe hunger in the Strip, Gazans would hardly have made the long and arduous journey to the "distribution" centers. Even if Israel did not anticipate a collapse into mass starvation on the scale that occurred in the Strip, acute food distress that would force Gazans to rely on these centers was a feature of the plan, not a bug.

According to the UN Nutrition Cluster, throughout 2025, approximately [95,000](#)



[children](#) were treated for malnutrition in Gaza, around 19,000 of them for severe acute malnutrition. In October 2025, [more than 150 American medical workers](#) who had volunteered in Gaza published an open letter to President Trump. They testified to the impact of the combination of malnutrition and medical conditions in Gaza on patients dying during surgery, on miscarriages, on a “pandemic” of children being born undernourished, on mothers’ inability to breastfeed, and on deaths from diseases. In their assessment, the data on direct deaths from malnutrition represent only a small fraction of the overall mortality resulting from Israel’s starvation policy and its broader policies in Gaza.

The full consequences of Gaza’s starvation will become clearer only in the future,

but the close link between Israel’s policy on aid and the extent of hunger in the Strip is noteworthy. This correlation was clearly illustrated in a [study](#) published in *The Lancet* in October 2025, which examined trends in malnutrition among children under five in Gaza between January 2024 and August 2025 (Figure 3). Note that each percentage point in such data represents thousands of children suffering from malnutrition.

A similar illustration can be found in the data of another aid organization, [Médecins du Monde](#). In Figure 4 below, the green line marks malnutrition among children under five; the blue line, among pregnant and breastfeeding women. The organization only began taking measurements in July 2024, and its database is much smaller and based

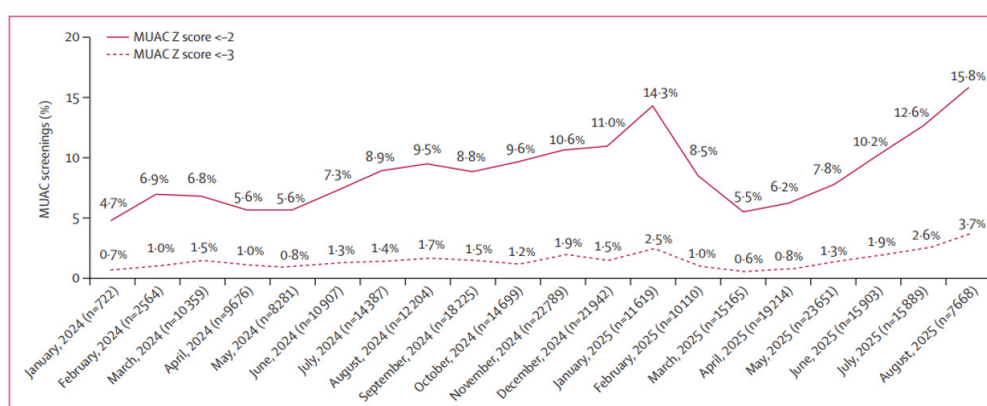


Figure 2: Monthly prevalence of moderate-to-severe and severe wasting malnutrition among children aged 6-59 months in Gaza (Jan 1, 2024-Aug 15, 2025)
265 974 screening measurements were recorded during this time period. Moderate-to-severe wasting was defined as MUAC Z scores of less than -2. Severe wasting was defined as MUAC Z scores of less than -3. MUAC=mid-upper arm circumference.

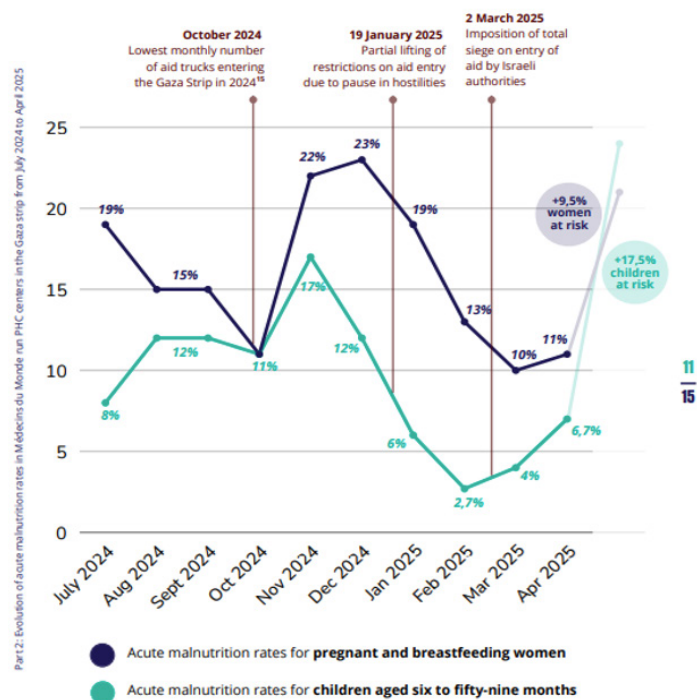
solely on Deir al Balah and Khan Yunis, so naturally the figures are different, but the trend remains similar. Also noteworthy is the organization's finding that in less than eighteen months, malnutrition rates in Gaza reached levels similar to those in countries experiencing long term malnutrition crises, such as Yemen and Nigeria.

In a pre-print [study](#) based on interviews with 76 children from Gaza, mostly from mid-2025, Marieke Hopman and her colleagues note that "one of the first things those children mentioned was

the lack of food: Food is unavailable, too expensive, insufficiently nutritious and/or unhealthy (e.g. spoiled, infested with worms or insects)". One of their interviewees testified:

We don't have food or drink, nothing. The Israelis have closed the crossings and won't allow food to enter. Whenever food is supposed to come in, it gets stolen. Children have died from hunger. [...] There's no lentils, no flour, nothing. That really upset me. Before, we used to drink and say, "thank God". Now there's nothing left to even thank God for. [...] Children in Gaza have become

Infographic 5: Evolution of acute malnutrition rates in MdM PHC centers from July 2024 to April 2025



A total of 5,322 children aged 6-59 months and 1,430 pregnant and breastfeeding women were screened across the four MdM PHC centers in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis governorates from July to December 2024 (6 months). From January to April 2025 (4 months), a total of 5,418 children and 2,534 pregnant and breastfeeding women were screened in Deir Al Balah and Khan Yunis centers, as well as in MdM PHC centers in Gaza City and Rafah in the month of March.

Médecins du Monde - Ten Months of Monitoring Children, Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women Acute Malnutrition in up to six healthcare facilities in the besieged Gaza Strip, May 2025

skeletons, just bones without flesh. If you find a child still alive, you just say thank God.

The children further described “dizziness, weakness, being upset and tired, stomach aches, fainting, and dying from hunger.” In some instances, they were driven toward other fatal hazards. As another interviewee stated: “Many children in Gaza went to steal from aid trucks. Because they didn’t find bread at home, they said: We’ll go to the trucks and steal to eat. Some were run over, some were killed.” Another testified that children “cry constantly from hunger. My younger brother cries all the time because there’s no milk.”

On the whole, the authors note, “although the children we spoke to do live with others, they feel alone. Some children also mention the international community, by whom they feel abandoned or forgotten.” While most children in Gaza are still alive, they conclude, “many describe themselves as mentally and emotionally destroyed.” They cite another interviewee:

Children don’t talk much, they sit alone. You feel a child has aged 20 years from hunger and suffering. Their spirits are destroyed; their smiles rarely appear. It’s as if they cannot express themselves, cannot speak. [...] [They] sit with their head in their hands, thinking about the future, psychologically destroyed.



Concluding Remarks: Gaza as a Laboratory

Over the past two and a half years, Gaza has served as a [laboratory](#) not only for extreme forms of warfare, mass destruction and dehumanization, but also for an architecture of starvation. For this reason, the questions raised above regarding the limits of international law, the moral and criminal responsibility of decision-makers, and the complicity of international actors, will occupy courts, commissions of inquiry, civil society organizations, and scholars for years to come.

The strict prohibition against using starvation as a weapon of war is relatively new, but over recent decades, this norm has taken hold. This is reflected in the UN Security Council's unanimous [resolution](#) in 2018 (Resolution 2417) that sharply condemned this practice. It has not prevented various states from [weaponizing starvation](#), often with the backing of powers that have themselves declared it a crime. Even though other cases of using starvation as a weapon of war in recent years have had even worse consequences, it is doubtful that any other case has undermined this norm as thoroughly as the starvation of Gaza by Israel, perpetrated as it was with the explicit support of Western powers that claim to represent the international liberal order, primarily the United States.

In this sense as well, Gaza is a laboratory, foreshadowing what may befall other populations if the use of starvation as a weapon of war becomes legitimized. A distinctive aspect of the starvation in Gaza might give some hope: unlike most other [cases of mass starvation](#) in recent years, it received considerable attention from around the world. Denial of Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war will likely remain confined to Israel and its most staunch supporters. The challenge, however, will be translating the shock from Israel's conduct in this war and the way it has been enabled by Western powers into a global struggle to restore basic moral and legal norms in wartime and beyond.

Content editing: Dr. Assaf David

Copy editing: Ayelet Herring

Images: Routers

Graphic design: Shahar Livne