

might be the only place in Gaza where Israeli forces won't shoot an armed Palestinian. Additionally, Israeli forces frequently take it upon themselves to attack aid workers. In a previous article for Responsible Statecraft, I list 14 instances in which humanitarian organizations were attacked by Israeli

forces after sharing their coordinates with the IDF. Israel deploys more passive strategies to obstruct humanitarian assistance as well. Here is one example I discussed in a recent report for Security in Context: "Because Israeli forces have cut off northern Gaza from the south, any humanitarian

movements that must travel between those two areas must pass through an IDF checkpoint. The IDF has two checkpoints between the north and south, but it refuses to operate more than one at a time. This means that all humanitarian missions — responding to massive humanitarian demands in Gaza —

must use the same checkpoint, resulting in bottlenecks that prevent delivery of urgently needed assistance. When an IDF checkpoint gate broke in late September, Israeli forces did not open the other checkpoint. As a result, various humanitarian teams were stranded in the north for 13 nights before they

were able to cross back to the south. These delays disrupt essential missions, eat up scarce resources, and make personnel and transport unavailable for other aid missions." Not unlike the Biden administration, the Israeli cabinet believes it is entitled to violate international law, but desperately

wants to avoid being seen as the type of country that violates international law. Embracing this sort of hypocrisy is a recipe for self-incrimination, as Israel's cabinet-run social media accounts frequently demonstrate.

*The full article first appeared on Responsible Statecraft.*

## Cyprus-Gaza maritime aid corridor was harmful publicity stunt



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### OPINION

*Since Hamas's October 7, 2023, attacks on southern Israel and the beginning of the latest Israeli military offensive on Gaza, the calls for unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the besieged strip have remained tragically unanswered. Over the past 15 months, more than 45,000 Palestinians — two-thirds of whom were women and children — have been killed, many more have been gravely injured and most of Gaza's civilian infrastructure has been reduced to rubble. The situation on the ground today is nothing short of apocalyptic. As the violence continues with no end in sight, the need for humanitarian aid in Gaza has drastically increased. Not only bombs and bullets but also a chronic lack of food, clean water, and basic healthcare are threatening the lives of the population. "People in Gaza are facing catastrophic levels of hunger. Famine looms. This is intolerable. Crossing points must open immediately, and bureaucratic impediments must be removed," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated on October 17. This was neither the first nor the only request made of Israel to meet its obligations under international law and ensure Palestinians in Gaza have access to adequate aid amid relentless military aggression.*



A satellite image on May 29, 2024, shows a view of the remaining section of the dysfunctional pier that was damaged by high winds and heavy seas the week before on the Gaza shoreline.  
● MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES/REUTERS



Palestinians storm trucks loaded with humanitarian aid brought in through the US-built pier, in the central Gaza Strip on May 18, 2024.  
● ABDEL KAREEM HANA/AP

In January, the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to "take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip". So far, Israel has refused to heed these calls and maintained strict restrictions on the flow of aid into the besieged Strip. Unable to compel Israel to declare a cease-fire or open borders for aid and facing growing domestic pressure to ease the suffering of the Palestinian population, several governments in the region and across the West have embarked on often symbolic aid delivery operations that regrettably have failed to make much difference to the situation on the ground. Aid packages airdropped by Jordan and France, for example, provided temporary relief to a limited number of people, who were lucky enough to get their hands on them but did nothing to ease the suffering of the masses in the long term. In many cases, these initiatives served only to provide political capital for responsible governments, allowing them to appear engaged while avoiding the difficult decisions and actions necessary to make a real difference. The most high-profile, costly, and overall harmful example of such symbolic aid initiatives was the United States-led effort to establish a temporary maritime corridor between Cyprus and Gaza to deliver aid. Initially hailed as a vital humanitarian lifeline that would allow aid deliveries to bypass heavily contested land routes and swiftly reach target popu-

lations, the project has proven fraught with inefficiencies and complications. Known as the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore modular system, the initiative aimed to transport aid from Cyprus to Gaza via a series of vessels, a floating platform, and a temporary pier affixed to the beach. Reportedly, the idea of a maritime aid corridor was first proposed to US President Joe Biden and Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu within the first few weeks of Israel's all-out assault on Gaza. According to the Reuters news agency, Israel believed this would be an "important step" towards disengaging economically from the enclave. After months of political wrangling, the corridor became operational in May, nearly seven months after the beginning of the conflict. The launch of the aid operation received much fanfare across the world and was applauded by the US and its European allies alike as an important step to prevent famine in the besieged Strip. The cost of the project was also considerable. The US government allocated about \$230m to the operation, deploying 1,000 US soldiers and sailors along with 16 ships. The United Kingdom government is also known to have contributed to the mission. Despite its high-profile launch and considerable price tag, the humanitarian impact of the maritime corridor has been extremely limited. Due to various issues, the corridor operated effectively for only 20 days before it was officially abandoned. According to a report by the US Agency for International Development's Office of the Inspec-

tor General, the US expected to deliver enough aid to feed 500,000 people for 90 days. However, in the end, only about 8,100 metric tonnes of aid — equivalent to just one day's worth of pre-war aid deliveries by truck — was delivered through the corridor during its brief operational window. Additionally, most of the aid that managed to reach Gaza through this route did not make its way to its intended recipients. One key objective of the initiative was to provide aid to northern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of civilians were trying to survive under a near-complete siege and relentless bombardment with little access to food. To this end, humanitarian organisations active on the ground had suggested that the temporary pier for the aid deliveries be built in the north. However, the Israeli military demanded that it instead be located on a beach in central Gaza. The US agreed, demonstrating clearly that in this operation, its priority was not delivering humanitarian aid efficiently but rather responding to Israel's military concerns and strategic demands. Arriving in central Gaza, aid had to travel a long way to reach the masses in need up north. This caused major logistical and operational issues with hungry crowds diverting trucks carrying supplies and looting the goods whenever they were able. Meanwhile, bad weather repeatedly damaged the pier, eventually leaving it permanently unusable. All these issues suggest that the real purpose of this initiative was not to feed hungry Palestinians but to ease the in-

creasing diplomatic pressure on Israel to follow international law and open land routes for aid deliveries. The entire project was more of a publicity stunt than a serious effort to ensure the survival of a besieged population. In the end, the cost of the maritime corridor was not only financial. This stunt, which, at every step, put Israel's interests above the needs of Palestinians, also had a heavy humanitarian cost because it politicised aid and helped Israel undermine with impunity international humanitarian law (IHL), which clearly forbids the blocking of aid to a civilian population. Not only was the Israeli military, which is the very reason why Palestinians are in need in the first place, given a say in how and where this aid was delivered, but it was also allowed to inspect aid packages in Cyprus before they began their journey to Gaza. All this raised serious questions about the impartiality of the mission. Furthermore, it created the impression that certain actors can

disregard IHL, or worse, try to use it to reach their political and military objectives. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to escalate with 95 percent of the population displaced and nearly 80 percent of civilian infrastructure destroyed. As the death toll rises and suffering deepens, the international community must focus on more effective and politically neutral aid delivery that complies with IHL. To prevent the complete erosion of trust in humanitarian aid, it is crucial that the international community — and the humanitarian organisations themselves — reaffirm that they abide by the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence when delivering much-needed aid to Gaza. Humanitarian agencies must take a firm stand against any form of aid manipulation and make it clear that they will not be co-opted into political or military strategies. The global community, which has a responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law to ensure all civilians in need

have unimpeded access to aid, also has a responsibility to protect humanitarian workers. There were 161 humanitarian aid workers killed by Israel in Gaza in the last three months of 2023 alone, and many more have since fallen victim to this conflict. The global community must hold all parties — whether Israeli or Palestinian — that harm aid workers accountable. The failure of the Cyprus-Gaza maritime corridor and other similarly symbolic initiatives in Gaza do not harm only the Palestinians left without aid. They also harm everyone, everywhere affected by conflict because they undermine the very foundations of humanitarianism and humanitarian law. The people of Gaza, like everyone affected by conflict everywhere in the world, deserve more than symbolic gestures. They deserve a truly impartial, efficient, and unhindered flow of assistance to alleviate their suffering.

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Soldiers and sailors assemble a sprawling at-sea discharge platform in the Mediterranean Sea off the Gaza Strip in April 2024.  
● AP