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## ***Despite its shortcomings, UNSC vote will tie Israel's hands***

The Security Council's watered-down Gaza vote is still important for two reasons: it highlights the US and Israel's increasing isolation at the UN, and it begins the process of narrowing Tel Aviv's options.



Photo Credit: The Cradle

The adoption of a resolution by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Friday with focus on a pause in the fighting in Gaza to allow for the delivery of more humanitarian aid can be seen as a turning point in the tortuous journey toward imposing a sustainable ceasefire.

But a caveat must be added that the ultimate litmus test lies in the implementation of the UNSC resolution, as the past history of such resolutions on Palestine does not give cause for optimism.

In fact, Israel's defiance was in full view already. As the Security Council passed the resolution, Israeli forces pushed ahead with their offensive into Gaza on Friday and ordered residents in Al Bureij — an area in central Gaza where Israel had not previously focused its offensive — to evacuate. Israeli military's chief spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said on Thursday: "Our forces continue to intensify ground operations in northern and southern Gaza."

UN Secretary General António Guterres was spot on when he told reporters after the resolution was passed that "a humanitarian ceasefire is the only way to begin to meet the desperate needs of people in Gaza and end their ongoing nightmare."

The resolution itself is the outcome of week-long intense negotiations between the United States and the Arab countries that sponsored it — the UAE and Egypt, in particular — to settle for the lowest denominator, which meant accepting a Washington-friendly text that enabled the Biden administration to evade responsibility for another veto, for the third time since 7 October.

Unsurprisingly, the US negotiators brazenly resorted to pressure tactics by drawing on their usual diplomatic tool box — blackmail, arm-twisting and ultimatums — to water down the text to the extent that important provisions relating to a ceasefire and a UN mechanism to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza and ensure its monitoring were abandoned.

And, yet, the US abstained in the vote at the end of the day, registering its reservations — principally, that the resolution was silent on the attack by Hamas on 7 October.

The unkindest cut of all is that the resolution accommodated the US diktat to replace the language describing an immediate cessation of violence with an ambiguous phrase calling on the parties to "create conditions for a cessation of hostilities." The wording meets the Israeli requirement to have a free hand to continue with its barbaric military operations.

This anomaly, coupled with the absence of any reference to the condemnation of indiscriminate attacks by the Israeli military against civilians almost delivers the wrong signal that the Security Council is effectively becoming an accomplice to the destruction of Gaza — a misnomer that agitated Russia so much that it proposed a last-minute amendment to replace the phraseology in the resolution: "to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of

hostilities” with the unambiguous call “for urgent steps toward a sustainable cessation of hostilities.”

Russia’s demand for an immediate ceasefire was in line with a resolution overwhelmingly passed by the UN General Assembly recently, but the Americans would have nothing of that sort. The unfortunate part is that the Arab sponsors of the resolution caved in to US blackmail to veto the resolution. What transpired between the protagonists behind the scenes is not known.

The paradox is that, in reality, the Americans themselves were desperately keen to avoid casting a veto — the third in as many months — that would have made a mockery of President Joe Biden’s bombastic remark in his September speech at the UN last year that the permanent members of the Security Council should cast vetoes only under “rare, extraordinary situations to ensure the council remains credible and effective.”

All indications are that the US is acutely conscious of finding itself “diplomatically isolated and in a defensive crouch,” as the *New York Times* put it in an acerbic [commentary](#) on the Biden administration’s plight as “an increasingly lonely protector of Israel ... (that) puts it at odds with even staunch allies such as France, Canada, Australia, and Japan.”

The commentary says that what rankles most is that first, when the US seems to have green-lit a massive Israeli military response to 7 October “without guardrails,” it:

**“painfully confirmed to many in the (global) south this sense that there was a double standard” — and second, even more, “the Russian strategy works, because beyond the United Nations what everyone sees is Russia standing up for international law — and the US standing against it.”**

The crux of the matter is that Israel’s Gaza operation is running into a Cornelian dilemma (*dilemme cornélien*) where sooner rather than later, it is obliged to choose one option from a range of options, all of which reveals a detrimental effect on itself.

Hamas’ top leaders have evaded capture so far, and Gaza’s armed resistance groups have continued to fire rockets into Israel, including two barrages that reached Tel Aviv and its environs last week.

According to another *New York Times* [report](#), “political commentators and some military experts have been lowering expectations for a quick and decisive Israeli victory.”

“Nobody should imagine that there will be a situation where we put a flag on top of a hill and say: OK, we won, and now Gaza will be peaceful and safe. It will not happen,” said Gabi Siboni, a colonel in the reserves and a fellow at the conservative-leaning Jerusalem Institute

for Strategy and Security. "The reality is that we are going to be fighting in Gaza for years to come."

But is that sustainable — even if Israel controls the US Congress? Conceivably, Israel's main goal in Gaza was to ethnically cleanse the Strip and drive the Palestinian population to Egypt and Jordan by killing and starving them and making Gaza unlivable.

The real significance of the UNSC resolution, therefore, lies in that such an Israeli game plan will not fly. By not vetoing the resolution, the US may also have signaled that it will not allow the ethnic cleansing. There seems to be an understanding on this score between the US and the Arab protagonists at the political level — Egypt, in particular.

On the other hand, can Israel really destroy Hamas while the Palestinian population remains in Gaza? No, it will not be possible. Now, there is reason to believe that Hamas is inflicting significant damage to the Israeli military. The retreat of the [Golani Brigade](#) from the Gaza operation also points in that direction.

The bottom line is that the Israeli operation in Gaza will have to take a different form during the next several weeks — one that is anchored on surgical strikes rather than continuing with the extended ground operation and open-ended Israeli occupation. With warts and all, the Security Council resolution that was passed on Friday paves the way for such a transition.

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