



Gaza Conflict

Strategic Manoeuvring, Ceasefire Uncertainty, and Risk Implications

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OVERVIEW

Despite widespread expectations of a [renewed](#) large-scale confrontation between Israel and Hamas, both parties have so far refrained from escalating to full-scale hostilities. This suggests that strategic positioning is taking precedence over immediate military engagement. However, Israeli security operations remain active, as evidenced by the heightened level of military operations and hostilities currently being witnessed, which has resulted in many fatalities and injuries. Israel classifies these operations—conducted within the 500-1,100 km² buffer zone—as standard defensive measures rather than violations of the ceasefire.

Diplomatic efforts to extend the truce have stalled, as Hamas [rejected](#) an Israeli proposal involving the release of half of the remaining hostages in exchange for a temporary ceasefire during Ramadan and Passover. In response, U.S. and Israeli negotiators withdrew from talks in Cairo. Egypt proposed a two-week extension, but there is little indication that an immediate agreement will be reached.

Meanwhile, Israel has [suspended](#) all humanitarian aid entry into Gaza, citing Hamas's refusal to extend the ceasefire. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that the blockade would persist until all hostages are released, a stance Hamas has condemned as “blackmail” and a “war crime”. The closure of key border crossings—including Kerem Shalom, Erez, and Zikim—has further strained the availability of food, medical supplies, and humanitarian assistance. Restrictions on movement between northern and southern Gaza via the PSC checkpoint have compounded logistical challenges for aid organizations.

As humanitarian conditions worsen and diplomatic negotiations remain in deadlock, the coming days will be critical in determining whether hostilities resume or if the ceasefire is extended. Both sides are utilizing the current pause to bolster their bargaining positions, making the situation fragile and unpredictable.

ISRAEL LEVERAGING PRESSURE FOR TACTICAL GAINS

Israel appears to be manoeuvring to sustain the ceasefire without making formal commitments, using a combination of military, economic, and diplomatic pressure to increase strategic leverage over Hamas. By maintaining targeted security operations, restricting humanitarian aid, and delaying negotiations, Israel is forcing Hamas to either concede in hostage talks or face worsening conditions.

MILITARY OPERATIONS

Israel continues to apply low-intensity pressure while avoiding an outright breach of the ceasefire. Since March 2 there has been a spike in military operations and aggression across the Gaza Strip, specifically in the Northern Governorate, Khan Younis and Rafah Governorates, which has resulted in civilian injuries and death.

Israel has stated that the activity is part of ongoing security operations within the 500-1,100 km² buffer zone, reportedly with the aim to prevent Hamas from rebuilding its military capabilities without triggering a full-scale war.

HUMANITARIAN RESTRICTIONS

By blocking aid access to Gaza, Israel has tied humanitarian relief to hostage negotiations. Netanyahu has [reinforced](#) this stance, stating that aid entry will remain suspended until all hostages are freed. This decision has worsened Gaza's humanitarian crisis, with UN agencies and aid organizations warning of severe food and medical shortages. The closures of Kerem Shalom, Erez, and Zikim crossings have further hampered humanitarian operations.



DIPLOMATIC STALEMATE

Ceasefire negotiations in Cairo have [collapsed](#), with Hamas rejecting Israel's precondition for additional hostage releases before agreeing to extend the truce. The withdrawal of U.S. and Israeli negotiators signals that Israel is willing to wait Hamas out rather than make immediate concessions. Egypt's proposed two-week extension remains uncertain, as Israel appears reluctant to accept an extension without clear strategic benefits.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Israel's current stance serves several key strategic goals:

- Securing hostages through prolonged negotiations rather than rapid concessions.
- Maintaining operational control over Gaza without committing to a full withdrawal.
- Preserving Hamas's rule to prevent a power vacuum that could invite external intervention.
- Ensuring control over Gaza's border with Egypt to limit arms smuggling.
- Sustaining a physical division between northern and southern Gaza to manage security risks.
- Extending Netanyahu's political longevity by maintaining a controlled conflict state.

Israel is balancing pressure and restraint, aiming to weaken Hamas without triggering an outright war. The next phase of the crisis will depend on whether Hamas continues negotiations or escalates hostilities.

SCENARIO ANALYSIS

The ongoing situation between Israel and Hamas remains fluid, with diplomatic deadlocks, humanitarian crises, and strategic manoeuvring shaping the potential outcomes. The following three scenarios outline possible trajectories based on military, diplomatic, and humanitarian developments.

SCENARIO 1: LIMITED CEASEFIRE EXTENSION WITH CONCESSIONS

As international pressure mounts over the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Israel and Hamas may agree to a short-term ceasefire extension. This agreement would be conditional and incremental, requiring Hamas to release a limited number of hostages in exchange for Israel allowing some humanitarian aid into Gaza. Egypt, Qatar, and the U.S. would likely mediate this process, ensuring that neither side appears to be making major concessions publicly.

While this scenario does not resolve the core issues—such as the future of Gaza's governance, border control, or long-term security—it buys time for further negotiations while preventing an immediate resumption of large-scale hostilities. Israel would maintain its buffer zone operations, and Hamas would continue to resist full disarmament, keeping tensions high despite the extended truce.

TRIGGERS AND INDICATORS

- Intensified international diplomatic pressure, particularly from the U.S. and Egypt.
- A limited hostage-for-aid agreement emerges, allowing humanitarian relief into Gaza.
- Reduced but ongoing Israeli security operations in buffer zones.
- Hamas publicly rejects major concessions but agrees to minor hostage releases.
- Israeli political rhetoric remains firm, signalling no fundamental policy shifts.



SCENARIO 2: CONTROLLED ESCALATION LEADING TO RENEWED HOSTILITIES

If ceasefire negotiations remain at a stalemate, Israel may escalate military operations to increase pressure on Hamas while stopping short of a full-scale invasion. This could involve increased airstrikes on Hamas targets, targeted assassinations of key leaders, and expanded military buffer zones within Gaza. Hamas, in response, may retaliate with sporadic rocket fire or cross-border incursions, seeking to demonstrate resilience while avoiding an all-out war.

This scenario reflects Israel's strategy of controlled escalation—applying enough pressure to weaken Hamas without triggering a massive international backlash. However, miscalculations or unintended casualties could quickly spiral into a broader conflict, leading to a full-scale Israeli ground offensive.

TRIGGERS AND INDICATORS

- Continued diplomatic deadlock, with Hamas refusing further hostage releases.
- Israeli airstrikes intensify, targeting Hamas leadership and military sites.
- Hamas responds with limited rocket fire, testing Israel's response threshold.
- Regional actors (Egypt, Qatar) express concern but fail to broker a deal.
- Israeli public support for a stronger military response grows, especially if hostages remain captive.

SCENARIO 3: INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION FORCES A BREAKTHROUGH AGREEMENT

Under mounting international and regional pressure, Israel and Hamas could be compelled into a broader agreement that includes a longer-term ceasefire, increased humanitarian access, and a monitored de-escalation process. This would likely involve Egypt, Qatar, and the U.S. acting as guarantors, with Israel allowing greater aid deliveries and Hamas agreeing to halt military activities for an extended period.

This scenario would necessitate third-party monitoring, possibly involving UN or regional peacekeeping forces, to ensure compliance. While this agreement would not resolve core political disputes, it could create the conditions for a longer-term diplomatic settlement. However, both sides would remain sceptical, fearing that their opponents could use the lull to regroup militarily.

TRIGGERS AND INDICATORS

- Intensified U.S. and Egyptian diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions.
- Economic and political pressure on Israel, including potential diplomatic consequences.
- Hamas faces growing internal pressure, as prolonged hardship fuels dissent.
- International guarantees for humanitarian access and security mechanisms emerge.
- Signs of cooperation on border control or reconstruction efforts in Gaza.



SCENARIO ASSESSMENT AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

Given the current geopolitical landscape and tactical positioning of both parties, Scenario 1 (Limited Ceasefire Extension with Concessions) is assessed as the most likely outcome in the short term. It is further assessed that neither Israel nor Hamas wants an immediate return to full-scale war, however, neither side is willing to make significant concessions. A limited, incremental agreement would allow both sides to claim strategic victories while postponing a decisive resolution.

RISK IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN AND SECURITY OPERATIONS

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS RISKS

- Border crossings may open selectively under international pressure but remain tightly controlled.
- Organisations may face inconsistent access of staff and commodities due to shifting conditions.

SECURITY RISKS

- Continued Israeli military operations in and near buffer zones, creating sporadic security risks.
- Hamas may escalate in retaliation, leading to limited but impactful violence.
- International organisations and civilians remain at risk due to sudden spikes in armed conflict.

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

- Unpredictable diplomatic progress makes long-term planning difficult and unpredictable.
- Funding fluctuations may further impact organisations and aid availability, as donors will likely continue to wait for political stability.
- Bureaucratic hurdles will continue to persist, particularly around permits and logistics.

POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC UNCERTAINTY

- Pressure on Netanyahu's government may lead to sudden shifts in Israeli policy.
- Hamas faces internal fractures, affecting its negotiating stance.
- U.S. and Egyptian involvement could shape the next phase of the ceasefire.

FINAL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SARI Global advises our partners to:

- Closely monitor diplomatic efforts, as backchannel negotiations could lead to sudden ceasefire adjustments which may have impact on operations.
- Develop contingency plans for localized escalations, ensuring organisational resilience, staff safety and duty of care obligations are met.
- Maintain flexible operational strategies, adapting to changing border access and security conditions.

CONCLUSION

With diplomatic negotiations ongoing but fragile, the most probable outcome is a temporary ceasefire extension with limited concessions. However, the risk of escalation remains, and humanitarian organizations must remain adaptable to sudden shifts in security conditions and access permissions. The next few weeks will be critical, as international diplomatic pressure and internal political calculations shape the future trajectory of the crisis.



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