



# Humanitarian Aid as a Weapon: The Militarisation of Relief in Gaza

*Hanan Samoud*



*RSIS Commentary is a platform to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy-relevant commentary and analysis of topical and contemporary issues. The authors' views are their own and do not represent the official position of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced with prior permission from RSIS and due credit to the author(s) and RSIS. Please email to Editor RSIS Commentary at [RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg).*

## Humanitarian Aid as a Weapon: The Militarisation of Relief in Gaza

*By Hanan Samoud*

### SYNOPSIS

*Israel has turned humanitarian aid in Gaza into a weapon of war – using food, medicine, and so-called “safe corridors” not to save lives, but to control, punish, and displace. Since October 7, 2023, relief has come with strings attached: biometric surveillance, forced movement, and loyalty tests. Aid is no longer delivered by neutral actors but by private firms like the US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, run by ex-military and security figures. What was once a symbol of compassion now enforces submission, exposing the harsh truth: in Gaza, humanitarianism has been militarised, and neutrality is a myth.*

### COMMENTARY

The provision of humanitarian aid in Gaza is often framed as a neutral, life-saving intervention – an ethical obligation amid devastation. Yet in reality, it has become a central instrument of Israel's military strategy, serving not just as a disaster relief operation but as a mechanism of control, domination, and social engineering. Far from being an impartial lifeline, aid in Gaza operates within a framework of coercion, surveillance, and political manipulation, exposing the darker dimensions of an Israeli war campaign which former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert recently described as “war crimes”.

Israel's use of humanitarian aid as a strategic tool is not new. Between 2016 and 2018, it employed such aid in Syria to cultivate alliances and exert soft influence. However, in Gaza, particularly since October 7, 2023, the approach has shifted dramatically.

The Israeli military has turned humanitarian aid distribution into a security operation, designed to sever the bonds between civilians and Hamas, enforce behavioural compliance, and ultimately reshape Gaza's social fabric. Food and medicine are not

distributed freely but are tightly regulated, contingent upon biometric checks and security screenings. This transforms humanitarian assistance from a basic right into a conditional privilege – one that can be granted or withheld to manipulate civilian movement, loyalty, and survival.

The goal of all humanitarian actions is to help people in need during armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. The fundamental principles include humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. The so-called “humanitarian corridors” serve a dual purpose: framed as safe routes for civilians, they in reality enable forced displacement, pushing Palestinians further south or out of Gaza. After Israel broke the ceasefire in March 2025, it replaced traditional UN-led aid with a militarised system run by private security firms and profit-driven intermediaries. The result is a humanitarian apparatus driven not by neutrality, but by the logic of occupation and control.

### **New Kind of Aid and Aid Workers**

One of the most alarming developments in the assault on Gaza is the emergence of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), a US-backed entity reportedly owned by former IDF members, Israeli businesspeople, and American security agents, registered in both Switzerland and Delaware, USA. Though newly formed, GHF is now in charge of aid distribution through armed contractors of Israeli and US origins. GHF epitomises the merger of humanitarian aid and military strategy, with unofficial backing from well-connected members of the Donald Trump administration.

Under this system, Palestinians receive a single meal costing US\$1.30 once or twice a month, but only after submitting to intrusive biometric surveillance. The GHF's distribution centres, concentrated in southern Gaza, are not run by impartial aid workers but by Israeli and American security personnel, retired soldiers and former intelligence operatives.

Unsurprisingly, the UN has denounced this model as a “fig leaf for forced displacement”, with UN aid coordinator Tom Fletcher accusing Israel of weaponising famine for political leverage. GHF director Jake Wood openly acknowledged that the current framework is the only one “acceptable to Israel” – a stark admission that the goal is not to save lives, but to enforce submission. Wood's recent resignation came amid mounting criticism from the UN and international aid organisations, which argued that the GHF had become incapable of upholding even the most basic humanitarian principles.

### **Theoretical Frameworks: Understanding Aid as a Weapon**

To fully grasp Israel's strategy, we can turn to Game Theory, which examines how actors in conflict adjust their behaviour based on incentives. In Gaza, aid is not a passive resource but an active lever – denied to punish, granted to coerce, and manipulated to fracture civilian solidarity. By controlling who eats and who starves, Israel seeks to dismantle resistance networks and cultivate dependence.

From a sociological perspective, modern warfare is no longer just about brute force; it also involves soft domination – using aid, healthcare, and infrastructure to reshape

power dynamics. When an occupying army distributes food, it reframes itself not as an oppressor but as a provider, while reducing civilians from political agents to dependent recipients. This is not humanitarianism; it is pacification through rationing.

### **Conclusion: The Moral Crisis of Militarised Aid**

Humanitarian aid in Gaza has been stripped of its ethical pretences. It is no longer about alleviating suffering but about managing populations, dividing communities into “compliant” versus “criminalised” categories, and restructuring society under the guise of charity. Just as financial debt is weaponised to discipline nations, humanitarian aid in Gaza is deployed to discipline a people – rewarding obedience and punishing defiance.

This demands a fundamental reassessment of humanitarian principles in conflict zones. When aid becomes a tool of domination, the international community must confront an uncomfortable truth: neutrality is a myth in the face of systemic oppression. The militarisation of relief in Gaza is not an anomaly – it is a blueprint for how power disguises control as compassion. And unless challenged, it will redefine humanitarianism as just another frontier of war.

The question now is not whether aid will reach Gaza, but who gets to control it – and to what end?

---

*Hanan Sahmoud is a Palestinian legal researcher and human rights advocate based in Australia, with expertise in Middle Eastern affairs, colonialism, and international law. She is a graduate of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.*

---

**S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore**  
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

*Please share this publication with your friends. They can subscribe to RSIS publications by scanning the QR Code below.*

