

EVA STALIN IAS ACADEMY

12/24, Muthuranga Mudali St, next to Deepam Hospital,
West Tambaram-600045

The Gaza war needs a smart exit strategy

On March 25, 2024, there was finally some good news in the ongoing conflict in Gaza when the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted a resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza during Ramadan, while also calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. This was the UNSC's first successfully passed resolution calling for a ceasefire since the war in the Gaza Strip following the brutal terror attack by Hamas last October in southern Israel. The previous four resolutions in the UNSC had failed due to veto, thrice exercised by the United States. The U.S., however, abstained this time and 'let the resolution pass'.

The resolution this time drew mixed reactions. Israel was the first to react, with its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alleging that the U.S. had "abandoned its policy in the UN" and was, therefore, harming the war effort and the measures for the release of Israeli hostages in Hamas's custody. Israel also cancelled the visit of its ministerial delegation to Washington which was scheduled to discuss the offensive in Rafah and other options. In an almost immediate U-turn, under Israeli pressure, the U.S. came out with a statement that the UN Resolution is 'non-binding' and that Israel can continue what it is doing in Gaza, making a mockery of the whole process in the UNSC. Hamas, on the other hand, initially welcomed the ceasefire resolution, but on March 26, reiterated its position on a permanent ceasefire accompanied by a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. As a result, the initial euphoria and hopes for an early ceasefire have very quickly turned into a 'back to square one' position.

The war grinds on

With no assurance that the ceasefire will actually take shape, the focus is now back to the joint efforts of Egypt and Qatar – these countries have been separately negotiating for an early ceasefire. Meanwhile, Israel has upped the ante. It launched an attack on the Al Shifa hospital in Gaza for the second time, again resulting in heavy civilian casualties. The airstrikes and bombing in Rafah too have intensified in the past few days. Reports also indicate Israel targeting Southern Lebanon, killing civilians. Meanwhile, Hezbollah has intensified its missile strikes into Northern Israel, inflicting damage to key military assets and loss of lives. Houthis in the south continue to disrupt and block Israeli, U.S. and British ships in the Red Sea, causing heavy economic losses for Israel and



Rajeev Agarwal

a retired colonel, is the Assistant Director of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi. He has served as Director in the Ministry of External Affairs and as Director, Military Intelligence

its allies. As in the latest estimates, the war in Gaza has resulted in the loss of over 32,000 lives in Gaza. Meanwhile, in a clear act of provocation, an Israeli strike in Syria targeted the Iranian Consulate in Damascus, killing a senior Al Quds leader on April 1, adding to the dangers of an enlarged conflict.

War objectives, their status

When Israel launched its counter-offensive into Gaza on October 7, it stated three clear aims: to flatten Gaza; eliminate Hamas, and get back all its hostages. With the war well into its sixth month, it is important to review each of these aims. Yes, Israel has flattened Gaza, in fact so badly that many who have been on the ground seem to suggest that Gaza will be virtually uninhabitable for years. Israel has also, in the past few weeks, flattened a kilometre-wide stretch along the border with Gaza, with the intention of converting it into a buffer zone later.

Second, the destruction of Hamas. The best estimates suggest that Israel has succeeded in eliminating only 30% of an estimated 30,000 Hamas fighters. Hamas's fighting potential remains intact while the supply of rockets and ammunition has not dried up. Also, the mastermind of Hamas's military operations, Yahya Sinwar, continues to evade Israeli forces.

Third, except for the exchange of a few hostages during a brief 'humanitarian pause' last November, Israel has not been able to rescue its hostages. In fact, around 32 hostages are reported to have been killed in cross fire in the war, leading to an uproar and protests against Mr. Netanyahu in Israel.

For Hamas, it was a question of two clear objectives. The first is to remind the world that while talks of normalisation and reconciliation between Israel and the Arab world could go on, the cause for a Palestinian state could not be lost sight of. The second is to expose to the world, and especially its support base, the false sense of the invincibility of the Israeli military and its intelligence services. Hamas has succeeded on both counts. When it unleashed terror on Israel on October 7, Hamas would have calculated the costs of an Israeli counter-offensive into Gaza. For Hamas, it was not about winning the war militarily but making its voice heard.

It is always easy to start a war but very difficult to decide when and how to call it off. Ceasefires often occur more due to stalemated situations or international pressure and less on account of military and political objectives. The U.S. war in

Afghanistan is a classic example. Launched in October 2001 with the aim of 'finishing off Al-Qaeda', it became a war that dragged on till the U.S. finally made a messy exit in August 2021. The U.S. war in Iraq in 2003 is another example of a military offensive without a clearly defined exit strategy. The result? Although the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, was defeated within weeks, the war of attrition continued for years. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war too has dragged on for over two years with no ceasefire or exit.

Impact on Israel

Israel, therefore, has to be mindful of the possibilities and the consequences of a prolonged conflict which has military, economic and political costs. The Israeli Army has suffered losses and injuries to its personnel. Its economy is shrinking rapidly, with some estimates showing a decline of almost 20%. Politically, it is becoming difficult for Mr. Netanyahu to hold on to his position, domestically and internationally. The U.S., Israel's staunchest ally, has, in the past few weeks, made it clear that Israel has to restrain itself and cannot bank upon blanket support for any Israeli action in Gaza.

Israel launched the offensive in a state of rage and revenge. However, after the initial onslaught, and instead of reviewing its war strategy and politico-military objectives, it continues to unleash punitive strikes into Gaza. Israel, therefore, needs to work out a clear and achievable end state. Militarily, Gaza has been defeated, but Hamas, as an organisation, is unlikely to be eliminated.

What is the most viable option then for Israel? An early ceasefire, withdrawal of forces from the Gaza Strip and using the recently flattened one kilometre strip along the Gaza border as surveillance cum buffer zone, under 24X7 surveillance, to prevent a recurrence of 'another 07th October', could be a possibility. On hostages, Hamas would most likely agree to an exchange of hostages once Israel agrees to the above.

When it relates to the future and a two-state solution, all parties will have to go back to the drawing board and search for a time-bound and acceptable solution. Israel and Palestine are bound by geography and destiny and the solution for a peaceful future will have to include major compromises and climb-downs from previously stated positions. If all this is agreed upon, both sides can then ensure a face-saving and smart exit from what is an unwinnable war in Gaza.

Gaza is an unwinnable conflict and Israel and Palestine, bound by geography and destiny, will need to search for major climb-downs

EVA STALIN IAS ACADEMY

12/24, Muthuranga Mudali St, next to Deepam Hospital,
West Tambaram-600045

Poll campaigns in India must reflect climate issues

The *State of the Global Climate* report that was released recently is cause for concern. The report, by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) of the United Nations, states that 2023 was the hottest year in the recorded history of the planet. Moreover, the average temperature rise from pre-industrial levels has been 1.45 °C, with a margin of uncertainty of ±0.12 °C. The temperature rise is tantalisingly close to breaking the agreed limit of 1.5 °C by different nations. Such a rise in global temperatures, also popularly known as global warming, is definitely alarming.

The WMO report states that 2023 was not only the warmest year by a clear margin but also one where many records were breached. For instance, records for a rise in ocean temperatures, glacier retreat and diminishing Antarctic ice cover were also broken. Moreover, evident sea level rise around the planet has also been observed. Consequently, the frequency of extreme weather events such as heat waves, torrential rains and tropical cyclones has increased. It is said that public memory is short. However, every reader of this daily and also article is sure to recall extreme weather events. Such events have disrupted many activities including agriculture, and are having a significant impact on socio-economic developments around the world. The WMO report is, therefore, extremely worrisome, making it imperative to trigger collective public action – something similar to what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Progress and mitigatory steps

As is well known, industrial progress since the mid-18th century has improved the quality of life significantly.

The principal drivers of this progress have been mechanisation and technology-led



Shekhar Mande

is former Director General, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and Secretary, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Government of India

Political parties should recognise that elections in India have the potential to generate the momentum for climate justice

innovations in all sectors. Among other things, exploitation of natural resources to drive progress has grown considerably in the post-Industrial Revolution period. Unfortunately, the apparent progress driven by the use of natural resources has also had an adverse impact on the environment. Dependence on natural resources for energy requirements has had enormous bearing on the climate. The use of fossil fuels, for example, has led to large emissions of greenhouse gases, leading directly to the rise in global temperatures.

Recognising the gravity of the climate situation and the urgency to address it comprehensively, has led to all nations agreeing, in what is famously known as the Paris agreement, to holding the temperature rise to well below 2 °C from that in pre-industrial times, and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5 °C. Entered into force on November 4, 2016, it became a legally binding international treaty. Since then, many nations have taken steps to limit carbon emissions, with some notable examples in the renewable power sector.

In the power sector in India, for example, the government announced the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). The National Solar Mission was one of the missions that came under the NAPCC. India has also announced the National Green Hydrogen Mission, making a strong commitment to the energy transition plan. Thus, although the Paris agreement has seen a positive intent of action from different nations, the latest WMO report raises fundamental questions. Have we acted too late? Or, are we doing too little? Or, have public commitments fallen short of expectations on such action plans?

Election season as opportunity

It is election season in many democracies around the world. In India, the election season has

expectedly brought in festivities, enthusiastic audiences to televisions, passionate debates in every corner of the country and hope that the outcome of the elections will change lives.

Indeed, the hope that every political party plants in the minds of voters and the promises that are made in every election, make people anxiously anticipate the outcome of the elections. The *State of the Global Climate* report, therefore, has arrived at the right time to initiate discussion across the political spectrum.

In this election season, the WMO report should result in an awakening not only for all of humanity, but also, specifically, for all political parties. The anxiety over climate change expressed by the WMO, the UN and scientific fraternity should motivate parties across the political spectrum to make their action plans clear. People will wholeheartedly welcome stands taken by political parties on such an important issue.

Political parties, for example, must commit themselves to enhancing public awareness on climate change and clearly defining steps to reduce global warming. Political differences in approaching both these questions may persist, but the larger public interest would be served by addressing these issues, thereby giving voters a chance to assess these views. Political parties may also wish to spell out the steps that they would undertake to reduce the impact of global warming in India. If India were looking to find its rightful place in the global order, and be counted as a true world power in the *"Amrit Kaal"*, the demands on its leadership on climate change actions will be watched. All political parties are pitching the agenda of shaping India's economic prosperity and the well-being of its people. This is an agenda which would be incomplete without addressing the core issue of a climate change action plan.