

Israel must stop helping Hamas to win

August 2, 2025



The Editorial Board

Published 9 hours ago Updated 3 hours ago

The formula for victory in war is straightforward: Do the thing that your enemy least wants you to do, and don't do the thing that your enemy would most want you to do. On that basis, Israel is failing, badly, in its 21-month war against Hamas in Gaza.

From the start, Hamas has used the civilian population of Gaza as both a shield and as a weapon.

The shield has been the intertwining of military and civilian infrastructure, with the direct effect of increasing civilian casualties as the Israeli military attacked Hamas. The weapon: images of dead and injured civilians deployed skillfully by Hamas to undermine Israel's legitimacy, and to paint the Jewish state as a brutal and brutalizing entity.

In recent months, heartbreaking images of hungry children have added to the power of Hamas' weapon.

Civilian casualties are exactly what Hamas needs if it is to win its existential fight with Israel. The question is: Why is Israel so intent on doing the thing its enemy most wants?

The Israeli government's intentional policy of restricting aid flowing into Gaza has created a humanitarian crisis and made clear that it is losing the war against Hamas despite overwhelming military power.

It is undoubtedly true that some food aid has been stolen (although doubt has been cast on Israeli allegations of systemic looting). It's true that data on civilian casualties from the Hamas-run health ministry are misleading in ways. And it is beyond a doubt that Hamas propaganda has sought to exaggerate certain instances of suffering.

None of that matters in the face of a looming catastrophe of famine. The restriction of aid needs to end now. Easing the suffering of civilians is, of course, the most important reason to ramp up the delivery of aid in Gaza. But doing so would also safeguard Israel's own interests.

The geopolitical danger to Israel is mounting. [France has said it will soon formally recognize](#) a Palestinian state. Britain has said it may do the same unless Israel agrees to a ceasefire, takes "substantive steps" to end the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and commits to long-term peace. [Britain also](#) put forward several conditions for Hamas, including that it release hostages and disarm.

And on Wednesday, [Prime Minister Mark Carney said Canada will follow suit](#) in September. He did lay down some conditions for the Palestinian Authority, including elections in 2026. But recognition will go ahead before those conditions are met, if they are met. (We'll have more to say next week on why Ottawa's move is a mistake.)



Palestinians climb onto a truck as they seek aid supplies that entered Gaza on Friday. Mahmoud Issa/Reuters

If Western countries do proceed with formal recognition of a Palestinian state, it would be more than just a symbolic loss for Israel. The message to the entire Middle East would be clear: radicalism and armed aggression, not diplomacy, will get results. The long-term peril for Israel is that it may end up diplomatically isolated, or even a pariah state shunned by Western democracies.

But that threat also offers Israel an opportunity to change its strategy. The start would be to end restrictions on food aid and instead focus on secure delivery. The surest way to break Hamas' control of scarce supplies is to flood the territory with food and medical stockpiles. What will Canada and others say in a month if Israel has taken such measures while Hamas refuses to take any steps toward a ceasefire?

After the brutal attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, Israel laid out three war goals: to free those taken hostage, to eliminate Hamas and to make certain that Gaza does not pose a security threat.

Those goals have not been achieved, even after 21 months of grinding Gaza into dust. It is time for Israel to rethink and recast its approach, starting with enabling the mass flow of humanitarian aid into the enclave. Images of reopened hospitals, daily food deliveries, stability: that is the very last thing that Hamas wants. Israel should ensure that it happens.

The broader changes in the Middle East hold the possibility of a more secure future for Israel. Hezbollah has been hobbled in Lebanon, and the civil government there is finding its feet. Iran's ability to project its influence in the region has been damaged, as has its nuclear program. The implacably hostile Assad regime in Syria is gone. And this week, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arab League were among those to call for Hamas to disarm as part of a [broader declaration](#).

It all amounts to an opportunity that Israel can seize if it is willing to end the humanitarian crisis in Gaza – to do the thing that its enemy least wants.