

Israel-Hamas conflict rages amid bickering in the UN

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Since the war between Israel and Hamas began on October 7, the UN has played an active role in working with countries to find means to subside the conflict but not stop it. The UN Security Council (UNSC) failed to address the issue more than five times.

On October 13, Russia proposed a resolution at the UNSC to a fifteen-member council, calling for a humanitarian ceasefire and condemning the violence against civilians and acts of terrorism. The resolution also spoke about the release of hostages, access to humanitarian aid and evacuation of the civilians.

For a resolution to be adopted in the UNSC, it requires approximately nine votes and no vetoes from the US, Britain, France, China, or Russia. On October 16, this resolution failed to get the minimum of nine votes in the fifteen-member panel. There were five votes in favour, four against, and six abstentions.

On October 18, the UNSC voted on a resolution drafted by Brazil that called for a humanitarian pause and allowed aid to pass through Gaza. While 12 voted in its favour, Russia and Britain abstained.

On October 21, the US proposed a draft at the UNSC that Israel has a right to defend itself; that members ought to respond to "terrorist attacks" as per international law and called for "continuous, sufficient and unhindered" transport of aid to the Gaza Strip. It also demanded that Iran stop selling arms to "militias and terrorist groups threatening peace and security across the region".

It received international criticism for not calling for a truce or ceasefire. This led to the US softening the language by removing references to Israel and Iran.

On October 25, the US draft aimed at addressing the humanitarian crises and a pause in violence to let aid pass through to Gaza. Russia and China vetoed it. The draft outlined a pause for the movement of aid. The United Arab Emirates voted against it, 10 were in favour and two abstained.

On November 15, the UNSC called for an extension of pauses in fighting between Israel and Hamas for a "sufficient number of days". The resolution was drafted by Malta and was vetoed by the US, Russia and Britain. Russia said it abstained from it because it failed to call for an immediate ceasefire. While the US and Britain claimed that the draft did not condemn Hamas attacks.

On March 25, the UNSC adopted a resolution which demanded an immediate ceasefire between the warring parties and the release of hostages. While 14 of the council's members voted in favour of the resolution, the US abstained.

The General Assembly, however, seemed to have productive engagement on the matter. On October 27, the United Nations General Assembly voted on a humanitarian truce between Israel and Palestine and access to aid.

The resolution drafted by Arab countries, 120 voted in favour, 44 abstained and 14 voted against, including the US and Israel. Hence, a two-thirds majority was achieved, without taking account

of the abstentions.

On December 12, the General Assembly finally passed a resolution for a ceasefire as 153 countries voted in favour and 23 abstained. Eight other countries, including the US and Britain, voted against the measure. On October 26, the UNRWA reported that "due to fuel shortage", they may have to stop operations. This is occurring amidst increasing needs for food, water, shelter, and medical facilities.

Humanitarian crises are dependent on the votes of the permanent members. The problem lies in the fact that while all the members have been calling for a ceasefire, their positions vary while voting. The politics between the countries affect the voting taking place.

For example, the US and Russia are unable to agree on a matter, as the former is traditionally allied to Israel. The very first draft submitted by Russia to the UNSC addressed all the issues that have arisen from the war.

Unfortunately, if this was accepted and not vetoed then and there, the world

wouldn't have to witness more than 30,000 deaths in the past six months and the issue wouldn't have dragged on for so long. There wouldn't be a chance for regional spills to occur, such as the Houthi attacks at the Red Sea, which has delayed trade by 10 days at one of the major choke points in the world, Bab el-Mandab Strait.

Another such example would be the assassination of the commander of Iranian forces, Qasem Suleimani; the Islamic State also attacked Iran on the anniversary of Suleimani, along with fights with Hezbollah and Iranian Guards.

The war also brings to light the need for reform in the UNSC, as countries veto draft resolutions while downplaying their interests.

Another point of consideration is the lack of the term 'permanent' being paired with ceasefire in the resolution. However, that does not deter Israel from continuing its attacks no matter what resolution is passed.

For instance, the General Assembly passed a resolution for a humanitarian

ceasefire, but Israel has continued its on-slaught and has shown no signs of stopping.

The General Assembly, however, tends to have a more democratic and valid stance on the crisis. Unfortunately, the level of power held by the UNSC and the General Assembly is not the same.

The UN has yet again failed at preventing a genocide, similar to what happened in Bosnia and Rwanda.

It has been said that UNRWA members participated in the October 7 attacks, which the UN has actively denied. The UNRWA is significant for providing healthcare, education and other essential services to Palestinians and is the last ray of hope in the progressing humanitarian crises.

Hence, amid a growing famine and a sharp rise in death tolls, the UN's motto of maintaining "international peace and security" remains questionable.

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