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Piotr Kosiorek  
ORCID: 0000- 0003- 1618- 6607  
(Wroclaw University)

## **Humanitarian Aid as an Instrument of Warfare: The Role of the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* in Strategies of Control and Depopulation of the Palestinian People in the Gaza Strip**

**Annotation:** This article aims to examine the operations of the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* (GHF) in the Gaza Strip in the context of humanitarian aid management and to assess the extent to which its activities align with mechanisms described in the literature as the weaponization of aid. The study employs a desk research methodology, involving a systematic review and synthesis of available sources and media reports, including statements from representatives of selected humanitarian and human rights organizations, as well as information on GHF's activities within the Palestinian enclave. The analysis focuses on identifying instances in which humanitarian aid was employed as a tool of control or political leverage, in line with the concept of weaponization of aid, thereby allowing an assessment of the military and political implications of GHF's actions in the region. The primary research methods applied are critical analysis and reasoning, including both reductive and analogical inference. Additionally, elements of behavioral methodology were used to examine the political conduct of Israeli authorities with regard to the Gaza Strip. The article is structured in three parts. The first section addresses theoretical and definitional issues, explaining the phenomenon of weaponization of aid and providing examples of its application by various actors in selected countries (Ukraine, Syria, Yemen). The second section examines the profile of the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation*. The third section discusses controversies surrounding the organization, primarily related to its aid distribution practices, analyzing GHF's role in relation to the political and strategic objectives of the State of Israel.

**Keywords:** Israel, Gaza Strip, Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, weaponization of aid, humanitarian aid, militarization of aid, demographic policy

## Pomoc humanitarna jako narzędzie wojny? Rola *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* w strategii kontroli i depopulacji ludności palestyńskiej

**Streszczenie:** Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie funkcjonowania *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* (GHF) w Strefie Gazy w kontekście zarządzania pomocą humanitarną oraz udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jakim stopniu jej działalność wpisuje się w mechanizmy określone w literaturze przedmiotu jako *weaponization of aid*. Analiza została przeprowadzona z wykorzystaniem metody *desk research*, obejmującej systematyczny przegląd i opracowanie dostępnych źródeł oraz materiałów medialnych. Zawierają one stanowiska przedstawicieli wybranych organizacji humanitarnych i praw człowieka oraz informacji dotyczących działalności GHF w palestyńskiej enklawie. Analiza skupia się na identyfikacji przypadków, w których pomoc humanitarna była wykorzystywana jako narzędzie kontroli lub nacisku politycznego, zgodnie z praktyką *weaponization of aid*, umożliwiając ocenę skali militarnego i politycznego wpływu działań GHF w regionie. Główne metody badawcze wykorzystane w tekście to analiza krytyczna oraz wnioskowanie (redukcja oraz wnioskowanie analogiczne). W kontekście badania zachowań politycznych władz Izraela w odniesieniu do Strefy Gazy posłużono się także elementami metody behawioralnej. Tekst składa się z trzech części. Pierwsza porusza aspekty teoretyczne i definicyjne. W tym fragmencie skupiono się na wyjaśnieniu zjawiska *weaponization of aid* oraz na przykładach stosowania tego typu praktyk przez różnych aktorów w wybranych państwach (Ukraina, Syria, Jemen). Druga ma na celu zbadanie profilu *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation*. Z kolei trzecia część jest poświęcona kontrowersjom narosłym wokół organizacji, związanym głównie ze sposobami dystrybucji pomocy humanitarnej. W tej części przeanalizowano rolę *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* w odniesieniu do celów politycznych i strategicznych Państwa Izrael.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Izrael, Strefa Gazy, *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation*, *weaponization of aid*, pomoc humanitarna, militaryzacja pomocy, polityka demograficzna

### Introduction

For decades, the Gaza Strip has been experiencing chronic socio-economic degradation, political instability, and a persistent lack of security. Cyclical Israeli attacks, limited access to food, water, and electricity, dependence on external humanitarian aid, and weak public institutions have created conditions of a permanent crisis within the Palestinian enclave. The *Hamas* attack (*Islamic Resistance Movement*) on Israel on the 7th of October 2023, followed by a large-scale response from the Israeli state, marked a new, bloody phase, characterized not only by civilian casualties on the Palestinian side but also by mass population displacements, extreme strain on the humanitarian system, and profound ethical dilemmas for the actors involved in aid operations. On the 2nd of March 2025, Israel completely cut off humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip. Facing armed hostilities and lack of access to essential goods, the Palestinian enclave was deprived on that day of all emergency supplies, including water, food, medicine, fuel, and cooking gas<sup>1</sup>. The reason for this decision was the alleged appropriation of aid by *Hamas*. According to the *Israel Defense Forces* (IDF), the organization was reportedly confiscating and systematically diverting the incoming humanitarian assistance to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Resumed Hostilities, Blocked Aid Destroying Ceasefire Gains in Gaza, Security Council Hears, United Nations*, 18.03.2025, <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16023.doc.htm> [20.07.2025].

Gaza Strip to finance terrorist activities<sup>2</sup>. This narrative, representing the official Israeli explanation for the measures taken against the Gaza Strip, was unequivocally rejected by the largest humanitarian organizations<sup>3</sup>. The complete blockade of the Palestinian enclave continued until the 19th of May 2025, when, following international pressure, Israel permitted the resumption of limited humanitarian aid deliveries on a minimal scale<sup>4</sup>. On the 26th of May 2025, the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* (GHF) commenced its operations in the Gaza Strip<sup>5</sup>. Currently, the organization plays a central role in delivering humanitarian aid and organizing its distribution points. The operations of GHF in the region have generated considerable controversy. According to media reports, at distribution centers, which are surrounded by the Israeli military and armed contractors (including for instance *Safe Reach Solutions*, SRS<sup>6</sup>), incidents of unrest and the use of force (firearms and stun grenades) have occurred against Palestinians seeking assistance. For this reason, numerous humanitarian and human rights organizations (including *Human Rights Watch*, *B'Tselem*, and *ActionAid*) have characterized the activities of GHF as the militarization of aid and the “politicization” of humanitarian actions<sup>7</sup>. There have been reports accusing Israel of taking measures aimed at the depopulation of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip. In this context, increasing attention has been given to a demographic control strategy, in which the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* is considered to play a significant role<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Berman, T. Staff, *IDF says documents show Hamas has been confiscating aid as a matter of policy*, 13.06.2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-documents-show-hamas-has-been-confiscating-aid-as-a-matter-of-policy/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>3</sup> J. Landay, *Exclusive: USAID analysis found no evidence of massive Hamas theft of Gaza aid*, Reuters, 25.07.2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/usa-id-analysis-found-no-evidence-massive-hamas-theft-gaza-aid-2025-07-25/> [25.07.2025].

<sup>4</sup> *Gaza: Israel 'approaches UN' to resume limited aid deliveries, says aid agency*, United Nation, 19.05.2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1163401> [20.07.2025].

<sup>5</sup> J. Magid, *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation says it began aid distribution today*, 26.05.2025, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/gaza-humanitarian-foundation-says-it-began-aid-distribution-today/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/gaza-humanitarian-foundation-says-it-began-aid-distribution-today/) [20.07.2025].

<sup>6</sup> Safe Reach Solutions (SRS) is a U.S.-based private military company specializing in planning, logistics, and security services for organizations operating in high-risk environments, such as humanitarian, governmental, and commercial missions. Source: *About Us*, Safe Reach Solutions (SRS), <https://www.team-srs.com/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>7</sup> *Human Rights and Legal Organizations Warn Gaza Humanitarian Foundation and Partners of Legal Liability for Complicity with Serious International Law Violations*, European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), 23.06.2025, <https://www.ecchr.eu/en/press-release/human-rights-and-legal-organizations-warn-gaza-humanitarian-foundation-and-partners-of-legal-liability-for-complicity-with-serious-international-law-violations/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>8</sup> P. Beaumont, A. Speri, *Leaked 'Gaza Riviera' plan dismissed as 'insane' attempt to cover ethnic cleansing*, 01.09.2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/01/leaked-gaza-riviera-plan-dismissed-as-insane-attempt-to-cover-ethnic-cleansing> [01.09.2025].

This article aims to examine the operations of the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* in the Gaza Strip in the context of humanitarian aid management and to assess the extent to which its activities align with mechanisms described in the literature as the weaponization of aid. The study employs a desk research methodology, involving a systematic review and synthesis of available sources and media reports, including statements from representatives of selected humanitarian and human rights organizations, as well as information on GHF's activities within the Palestinian enclave. The analysis focuses on identifying instances in which humanitarian aid was employed as a tool of control or political leverage, in line with the concept of weaponization of aid, thereby allowing an assessment of the military and political implications of GHF's actions in the region. The primary research methods applied are critical analysis and reasoning, including both reductive and analogical inference. Additionally, elements of behavioral methodology were used to examine the political conduct of Israeli authorities with regard to the Gaza Strip.

The article is structured in three parts. The first section addresses theoretical and definitional issues, explaining the phenomenon of weaponization of aid and providing examples of its application by various actors in selected countries (Ukraine, Syria, Yemen). The second section examines the profile of the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation*. The third section discusses controversies surrounding the organization, primarily related to its aid distribution practices, analyzing GHF's role in relation to the political and strategic objectives of the State of Israel.

### **Weaponization of aid**

The weaponization of aid is a broad concept that can be examined on multiple levels. It functions both as a conceptual description of the instrumental use of humanitarian aid and as a strategy employed by involved actors undertaking various actions, such as conditionality of transfers, selective flows or cutoffs of aid, military escorts and the "militarization" of distribution, or the use of humanitarian institutions for informational or political purposes. When analyzing this phenomenon within the framework of security studies, it is useful to refer to the procedural dimension of security, one of the three main analytical levels alongside the objective and subjective aspects<sup>9</sup>. This dimension allows for capturing the significant context in which a given participant in political, international, or social life operates. It serves as a fundamental indicator, enabling the observation of the dynamics of both subjective and objective security factors, their variability over time, and the evolution of security conditions<sup>10</sup>. Incorporating the procedural dimension allowed for relating the weaponization of aid to specific cases and for taking into account the conditions under which this phenomenon occurs in selected countries.

For the purposes of this study, it is useful to present two definitions that emphasize slightly different aspects. Aswin Ariyato Azis and Hemalia Kusumadewi,

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<sup>9</sup> R. Zięba, *O tożsamości nauk o bezpieczeństwie*, „Zeszyty Naukowe AON” 2012, no. 1, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, *Pozimnowojenny paradigmat bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego*, [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe po zimnej wojnie*, ed. R. Zięba, Warszawa 2008, p. 16.

analyzing the situation in the Gaza Strip, describe the weaponization of aid broadly, as the use of humanitarian assistance for wartime purposes<sup>11</sup>. In this understanding, weaponization of aid can be defined as a phenomenon in which, during armed conflict, humanitarian resources are deliberately used in a manner that transforms aid into an instrument for achieving various objectives, including political, military, strategic, or economic goals. This study adopts precisely this interpretation of weaponization of aid as its point of departure. It allows for capturing the phenomenon in the context of ongoing armed operations currently taking place in the Gaza Strip. It also enables the analysis of the application of weaponization of aid in other cases where humanitarian assistance is utilized under conflict conditions. In a second, narrower definition, the focus is on the use of humanitarian aid within the framework of a *sharp power* strategy<sup>12</sup>. According to this approach, weaponization of aid refers to the strategic use of foreign assistance to exert influence, manipulate governmental structures, or punish actors for non-compliance with international norms<sup>13</sup>. This perspective emphasizes a slightly different dimension of weaponization of aid, in which humanitarian or development assistance is utilized by states, international organizations, or other actors as a tool for achieving political, military, or geostrategic objectives. Compared to the first definition, the emphasis here is shifted, highlighting also development aid and the involvement of actors beyond states, such as militarized non-state actors or international cooperation platforms. In this framework, the instrumental use of humanitarian aid gains a new perspective. It allows the phenomenon to be defined as manifesting in the conditioning of access to aid on the fulfillment of specific political or strategic requirements, as well as in its selective distribution, directing support exclusively to certain groups or regions while neglecting other areas in need of intervention. This instrumentalization also encompasses the use of aid as a propaganda tool to shape public opinion and legitimize political actions, as well as the implementation of mechanisms of military control over its distribution, which in practice often results in the restriction or complete denial of assistance to civilian populations. These practices are in direct conflict with the fundamental principles of humanitarian law, which mandate the provision of aid to all those in need, regardless of their political or military affiliation. It is worth noting that the two definitions presented do not exclude each other, and cases of weaponization of aid can be analyzed using either the first or the second definition. Instances can be identified where aid is instrumentalized through *sharp power* strategies in the context of narrative shaping, simultaneously employing military resources. An example of

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<sup>11</sup> A. A. Azis, H. Kusumadewi, *Aidization of Weapon, Weaponization of Aid: The US-Israel Interventionist Aid in Israeli-Palestinian War*, "European Journal of Law and Political Science" 2024, no. 2, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> *Sharp power* can be defined as aggressive state actions conducted through methods resembling elements of *soft power*, aimed at manipulating the image of a given country (or another actor in international relations), destabilizing its socio-political system, or coercing its authorities into specific behavior. Source: Ł. Skoneczny, B. Cacko, *Sharp power – wprowadzenie do problematyki*, „Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego” 2021, no. 25, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> F. Maushe, T. Zulu, L. Moyo, N. Matenda, R. Muregi, Ch. C. Takaona, *The Weaponization of Aid: Analyzing the Socioeconomic Impact of USAID's Withdrawal on Social Services in Zimbabwe*, "Journal of Change Management" 2025, no. 1, p. 138.

this can be seen in the actions of the Russian Federation during the war in Ukraine<sup>14</sup>.

In recent decades, growing geopolitical tensions and the emphasis on the instrumentalization of foreign policy have led to the increasingly frequent use of international aid not as a neutral tool for crisis mitigation, but as an instrument of pressure and a means of shaping the behavior of states and non-state actors. According to Joanna Spear, one of the actors employing foreign aid to support its strategic objectives is the United States<sup>15</sup>. The author points out that the United States, through the militarization of development aid, pursues objectives within the theater of operations, serving the country's time-limited and specific military priorities. Examples of this include, among others, the broadly understood fight against terrorism and insurgency<sup>16</sup>. Such practices are closer to the second of the presented definitions of weaponization of aid. In the context of countering terrorist threats, *sharp power* plays an important role. Of particular significance is the information space, which is now accessible to almost all influential actors, including state and non-state entities, local groups, rebels, and extremist organizations. The latter conduct recruitment via the Internet, which allows for a considerable increase in both the efficiency and effectiveness of their efforts<sup>17</sup>. Another issue is the dissemination of propaganda, disinformation, and incitement to violence, which contributes to growing divisions within societies and deepens political instability. One way to counter such threats is the strategic use of cyberspace to shape the image of a given actor and influence its perception among a broad public audience. In such cases, the "politicization" of development aid may appear justified. It is worth noting, however, that the war on terror can also be instrumentally employed to serve the particular interests of individual states<sup>18</sup>, which does not always align with a positive understanding of weaponization of aid, understood as practices serving genuine security objectives. In contrast, the negative interpretation of this phenomenon refers to situations in which humanitarian aid is used as a tool of political or strategic pressure, which in practice works to the detriment of those in need.

Analyzing current realities and challenges to international security, a number of cases of the instrumentalization of humanitarian aid can be identified. In various regions of the world, instances of weaponization of aid have repeatedly been recorded as a tool of pressure or control for strictly wartime purposes. These cases include, among others: 1) Russia and its actions during the war in Ukraine; 2) Syria, where the Bashar al-Assad regime used starvation as a means of coercion against the civilian population; and 3) Yemen, where both the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis employed control over ports and roads to selectively allow aid, influencing the balance of power in the conflict. It should be noted that these examples represent only a small

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<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see the further sections of the article.

<sup>15</sup> J. Spear, *The Militarization of United States Foreign Aid*, [in:] *Securitization of Foreign Aid*, eds. S. Brown, J. Grävningholt, London 2016, pp. 18-19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *A New Era of Conflict and Violence*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence> [27.09.2025].

<sup>18</sup> E. Stepanova, *Anti-terrorism and Peace-building During and After Conflict*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI, Stockholm 2003, p. 37.

segment of the instrumental use of humanitarian aid. Similar practices have also been observed in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. The three aforementioned cases are briefly discussed below:

1. Russia employs humanitarian aid to achieve its strategic objectives in the war against Ukraine, simultaneously combining a strategy of promoting and shaping its own narrative of the conflict with the selective distribution of humanitarian assistance, including food, medicine, and other essential supplies<sup>19</sup>. Aid is restricted in areas of civilian resistance or where communities remain loyal to the Ukrainian authorities. It is instead directed toward groups willing to cooperate with the Russians. Access to support often requires formal recognition of the authority of the Russian Federation, making aid an instrument of social control, coercion of compliance, and legitimization of the occupation<sup>20</sup>. In practice, this means that aid distribution does not correspond to actual humanitarian needs but serves political and military objectives as a tool of coercion. In September 2023, a Russian airstrike hit a Caritas Spes warehouse in Lviv, destroying approximately 300 tons of humanitarian aid. The attack was condemned by UN officials, who regarded it as a violation of international humanitarian law<sup>21</sup>. In a further instance, in March 2025, a Russian missile struck a hotel in Kryvyi Rih, the hometown of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The attack killed four people and injured more than 30, including children<sup>22</sup>. Among the injured were aid workers from Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States who were present in the hotel at the time of the attack. President Zelensky condemned the actions as a deliberate strike against civilians and humanitarian personnel<sup>23</sup>.
2. During the civil war in Syria, the Bashar al-Assad regime employed mechanisms of humanitarian aid instrumentalization to a degree comparable to that of the Russian Federation. This involved the *siege and starve* strategy, which consisted of the complete or partial denial of access to food, water, medical care, and other basic services, combined with bombardments and blockades aimed at forcing civilians or opponents to surrender<sup>24</sup>. In December 2015, the *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (OCHA) reported that

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<sup>19</sup> L. Davies, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and Weaponization of the "Humanitarian Space"*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo no. 831, 2023, pp. 1–6, [https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Peppm831\\_Davies\\_Feb2023.pdf](https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Peppm831_Davies_Feb2023.pdf) [20.07.2025].

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> *Caritas Warehouse burns to the ground following overnight Russian attack*, Caritas, <https://www.caritas.org/2023/09/caritas-warehouse-burns-to-the-ground-following-overnight-russian-attack/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>22</sup> V. Kholodova, *4 Killed As Missile Hits Hotel In Zelenskyy's Hometown*, Radio Free Europe, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-missile-strike-hotel-kryviy-rih/33338348.html> [20.07.2025].

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> N. Hågerdal, *Starvation as Siege Tactics: Urban Warfare in Syria*, „Studies in Conflict & Terrorism” 2023, no. 7, pp. 1241–1262.

between September and November 2015, nearly 400,000 people in Syria were located in besieged areas, of whom only 1% received food assistance and less than 1% received medical aid<sup>25</sup>. In the city of Madaya (near Damascus) residents lived under conditions of near-total deprivation of regular supplies of food, medicine, and fuel from July 2015 onward. The blockades prohibited or severely restricted the entry of aid convoys. Medical evacuations were also frequently denied<sup>26</sup>. Access for humanitarian convoys was selectively restricted, and aid was often conditioned on the signing of so-called *reconciliation deals* – local agreements with the authorities that required the surrender and evacuation of residents in exchange for the lifting of the siege<sup>27</sup>. These actions were deemed by the United Nations as potential crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law<sup>28</sup>.

3. In Yemen, both the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi forces have, since 2015, instrumentalized humanitarian aid, using it as a tool of political and military pressure. The Saudi coalition imposed maritime and aerial blockades, restricting access to key ports such as Hodeidah, which drastically hindered the delivery of food and medical supplies<sup>29</sup>. Simultaneously, the Houthis implemented bureaucratic control and selective distribution of aid, directing it primarily to loyal regions, while other areas were often deprived of support<sup>30</sup>. These actions not only exacerbated the humanitarian crisis but also served the military and political objectives of the parties to the conflict, reinforcing their control over the population and affecting the local balance of power. Human rights organizations have recognized these practices as violations of humanitarian law, contributing to the escalation of the famine crisis in the country<sup>31</sup>.

The examples discussed demonstrate that the phenomenon of weaponization of aid, the use of humanitarian assistance as a tool of coercion in armed conflicts, represents a current challenge to international security. Both state and non-state actors

<sup>25</sup> Syria: Give Besieged Areas Urgent Aid Access. *Madaya a Wake - Up Call for International Community*, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/08/syria-give-besieged-areas-urgent-aid-access> [20.07.2025].

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Syria: 'Surrender or starve' strategy displacing thousands amounts to crimes against humanity, Amnesty International, 13.11.2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/11/syria-surrender-or-starve-strategy-displacing-thousands-amounts-to-crimes-against-humanity/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>28</sup> Starvation by Siege Now 'Systematic' in Syria, Assistant Secretary-General Tells Security Council, amid Warnings that Tactic Could Be War Crime, United Nations, 15.01.2016, <https://press.un.org/en/2016/sc12203.doc.htm> [20.07.2025].

<sup>29</sup> Yemen: coalition's 'stranglehold' on aid deliveries is endangering millions - new report, Amnesty International, 22.01.2018, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/yemen-coalitions-stranglehold-aid-deliveries-endangering-millions-new-report> [20.07.2025].

<sup>30</sup> Yemen: Coalition's Blocking Aid, Fuel Endangers Civilians. Houthi-Saleh Obstruction Heightens Crisis, Human Rights Watch, 27.09.2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/27/yemen-coalitions-blocking-aid-fuel-endangers-civilians> [20.07.2025].

<sup>31</sup> Vital that all Yemeni ports kept open for aid and commercial vessels, stresses UN humanitarian chief, United Nations, 24.12.2017, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/12/640411-vital-all-yemeni-ports-kept-open-aid-and-commercial-vessels-stresses-un> [20.07.2025].

instrumentalize aid, selectively granting or denying access in order to strengthen control over populations, weaken opponents, and influence the balance of power within conflicts.

### Gaza Humanitarian Foundation

The *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* was established in February 2025 with the support of the governments of Israel and the United States<sup>32</sup>. The organization is characterized by a high degree of anonymity. At present, there is insufficient publicly available data to allow for a detailed analysis of its origins and operations<sup>33</sup>. In late May 2025, Israeli opposition leader, Yair Lapid, revealed that the activities of GHF were controlled and financed by the Israeli government<sup>34</sup>. This information was partially confirmed by Benjamin Netanyahu, who stated that GHF was an Israeli initiative created with the participation of American companies in order to divert *Hamas* from controlling the distribution of aid<sup>35</sup>. However, the broader context of the organization's establishment and its sources of funding remain unclear<sup>36</sup>. However, it is known that the creation of GHF is linked to a strategy for distributing humanitarian aid designed to bypass the United Nations as the primary provider of such assistance in the Gaza Strip<sup>37</sup>. This conclusion emerges from Israel's involvement in the establishment of the GHF, as well as from the broader context of the country's changing stance towards the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East* (UNRWA). A statement published on the official website of the European Union expressed concern over the ongoing debates within the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) regarding UNRWA<sup>38</sup>. On the 28th of October 2024, the Knesset passed a law banning the agency's operations in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, along with another law designating it as a terrorist organization. The measure aimed to sever all formal relations between Israel and UNRWA, a decision that drew widespread criticism from humanitarian organizations and the international community. The legislation

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<sup>32</sup> UN experts call for immediate dismantling of Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, United Nations, 05.08.2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/un-experts-call-immediate-dismantling-gaza-humanitarian-foundation> [20.09.2025].

<sup>33</sup> As of September 2025.

<sup>34</sup> S. Sokol, *Lapid suggests Israel is funding foreign 'shell companies' distributing Gaza aid*, 26.05.2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/lapid-suggests-israel-funding-foreign-shell-companies-distributing-gaza-aid/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>35</sup> L. Berman, S. Levaton, E. Fabian, *Netanyahu admits Gaza Humanitarian Foundation was Israeli initiative*, 16.06.2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-admits-gaza-humanitarian-foundation-was-israeli-initiative/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>36</sup> P. Kingsley, R. Bergmon, N. Odenheimer, *A New Gaza Aid Plan, Bypassing U.N. and Billed as Neutral, Originated in Israel*, 24.05.2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/24/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-aid-plan.html> [20.07.2025].

<sup>37</sup> Y. Knell, I. Fouldes, *US confirms plan for private firms to deliver Gaza aid despite UN alarm*, 09.05.2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250613135733/https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp92rlm300mo> [20.09.2025].

<sup>38</sup> *Israel: Statement by the High Representative on attempts to label a UN agency a 'terrorist organisation'*, European Union, 31.05.2025, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israel-statement-high-representative-attempts-label-un-agency-terrorist-organisation\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israel-statement-high-representative-attempts-label-un-agency-terrorist-organisation_en) [20.07.2025].

was justified by allegations of UNRWA's alleged ties with *Hamas*<sup>39</sup>. However, the agency itself has firmly rejected these claims, and no evidence has been presented to substantiate such affiliations<sup>40</sup>. The legality of these laws under international law has been widely questioned. The United Nations and human rights organizations have argued that they may violate Israel's obligations toward the population in the occupied territories, as stipulated by international law<sup>41</sup>. It should be noted that UNRWA has historically played a crucial role in providing humanitarian aid to millions of Palestinian refugees, and Israel's decision was met with strong condemnation from the international community.

The *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation*, operating with the support of Israel and the United States, began its activities in the Gaza Strip on 26 May 2025, replacing previously active humanitarian organizations<sup>42</sup>. On 1 July 2025, UNRWA Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini posted on his account on the X platform (formerly Twitter) that since the establishment of the GHF, the number of aid distribution points in the Palestinian enclave had fallen from approximately 400 to just four militarily protected sites<sup>43</sup>. All four centers are operated and managed by the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation*<sup>44</sup>. It is important to note certain limitations stemming from the complexity and timeliness of the issue, the scarcity of available data, and the high degree of controversy surrounding it. Available information indicates that the GHF has, to some extent, assumed the role previously held by humanitarian organizations in Gaza, though not entirely and not across all areas. Despite the ban, UNRWA continues its humanitarian operations in the Gaza Strip, still providing food aid, water, and medical assistance to hundreds of thousands of people<sup>45</sup>. However, given the Israeli government's involvement in the establishment of the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* and the adoption of laws restricting UNRWA's activities, it can be assumed that Israel's objective is to establish a GHF monopoly over the distribution of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip.

<sup>39</sup> A. Roth, *Israeli parliament votes to ban Unrwa from Israel within 90 days*, 28.10.2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/28/israeli-lawmakers-pass-bill-that-could-halt-unwra-relief-work-in-gaza> [20.07.2025].

<sup>40</sup> *Remarks by Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA Commissioner-General at the Third Meeting of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution*, UNRWA, 15.01.2025, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/remarks-philippe-lazzarini-unrwa-commissioner-general-third-meeting> [20.07.2025].

<sup>41</sup> *UNRWA banned by Israel: the UN calls for international justice*, United Nations, 15.06.2025, <https://unric.org/en/unrwa-banned-by-israel-the-un-calls-for-international-justice/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>42</sup> J. Magid, *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation says it began aid distribution today...*

<sup>43</sup> P. Lazzarini, 01.07.2025, [https://x.com/UNLazzarini/status/1940001096740565137?utm\\_](https://x.com/UNLazzarini/status/1940001096740565137?utm_) [20.07.2025].

<sup>44</sup> C. Balmer, N. Al-Mughrabi, *Overcrowding forces halt to Gaza aid distribution, Eid holiday marked by violence*, 06.06.2025, [https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-backed-gaza-humanitarian-foundation-says-all-aid-distribution-sites-are-2025-06-06/?utm\\_](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-backed-gaza-humanitarian-foundation-says-all-aid-distribution-sites-are-2025-06-06/?utm_) [20.07.2025].

<sup>45</sup> *UNRWA Continues Operations On the Ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Despite Unlawful Israel Knesset Ban and Escalating Challenges*, UNRWA, 04.02.2025, <https://www.unrwausa.org/unrwa-usa-press-releases/unrwa-continues-operations-on-the-ground-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory-despite-unlawful-israel-knesset-ban-and-escalating-challenges> [20.07.2025].



Figure 1. Map of the Gaza Strip

The four aforementioned GHF humanitarian aid distribution points are located in so-called “evacuated areas,” that is, zones from which the Palestinian population was ordered to leave by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). These areas are designated by the Israeli military as “high-risk zones,” as they are sites of intense ongoing combat operations. The establishment of aid points in such locations poses a severe threat to civilians. In practice, this has resulted in their transformation into “death zones,” where numerous casualties have been reported among those seeking assistance<sup>46</sup>. One of the distribution points is situated near the central part of the Gaza Strip (Wadi Gaza),

<sup>46</sup> *Inside the aid-seeker ‘kill zone’ Israel created in Gaza*, Al Jazeera, 21.07.2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/21/what-is-the-kill-zone-people-in-gaza-need-to-cross-to-receive-aid> [01.09.2025].

close to the Netzarim Corridor. The remaining three are located in the southern part of the enclave (Saudi Neighborhood, Tal As-Sultan, Khan Younis)<sup>47</sup>. It is important here to highlight the function of the Netzarim Corridor in exerting control over the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian population. For the State of Israel, this passage holds crucial strategic importance, as it cuts through the central section of the enclave. The IDF uses it both for conducting military operations and as an access route to different parts of the region. The presence of a GHF distribution point near the corridor forces civilians to move through active combat zones. Many civilians – including children and the elderly – are unable to traverse such distances, resulting in their effective isolation from humanitarian aid<sup>48</sup>. The map below presents the Gaza Strip with the GHF distribution points, the Netzarim Corridor, and the designated evacuation areas.

The establishment of four aid distribution points in high-risk zones from which residents have been evacuated results in the forced displacement of Palestinians toward the south. At the same time, the concentration of three out of four GHF centers in the southern part of the enclave raises questions regarding the demographic policy of the State of Israel toward the Gaza Strip. The current situation suggests that Israel is using humanitarian aid as an instrument of depopulation in the northern areas of the territory<sup>49</sup>.

### Controversies Surrounding the Activities of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation in the Gaza Strip

According to information published on the official website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* is described as the only reliable organization engaged in the large-scale distribution of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip<sup>50</sup>. The statement emphasizes that GHF actively tests and adapts its distribution model in order to deliver assistance to as many people as possible<sup>51</sup>. It also mentions the organization's flexibility and its capacity to adjust operations to conditions on the ground, including crowd pressure and security concerns<sup>52</sup>. However, a serious irregularity emerges regarding the activities of the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation*. Numerous reports circulating in the public information space indicate that massacres of Palestinian civilians have taken place at the organization's humanitarian aid distribution points<sup>53</sup>. *Human Rights Watch* reports that the Israeli military regularly

<sup>47</sup> N. Slawson, *First Thing: Gaza food points called a 'death trap' as hundreds of civilians killed seeking aid*, 22.07.2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jul/22/first-thing-gaza-food-points-called-a-death-trap-as-hundreds-of-civilians-killed-seeking-aid> [01.09.2025].

<sup>48</sup> A. Baba, *Knives, bullets and thieves: the quest for food in Gaza*, 06.07.2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/06/g-s1-75874/gaza-food-hunger-ghf> [20.07.2025].

<sup>49</sup> A. R. Arnaout, B. Yilmaz, *Israel's aid distribution plan aims to turn northern Gaza into 'depopulated area': Israeli media*, 21.05.2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-s-aid-distribution-plan-aims-to-turn-northern-gaza-into-depopulated-area-israeli-media/3573940> [20.07.2025].

<sup>50</sup> *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation - Operational Update*, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11.06.2025, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/gaza-humanitarian-foundation-operational-update> [20.07.2025].

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> *US-backed aid distribution points in Gaza are sites of orchestrated killing*, Doctors Without Borders,

opens fire on civilians at these sites, with mass casualties occurring almost daily<sup>54</sup>. Between the 27th of May 2025 and the 31st of July 2025 alone, at least 859 Palestinians lost their lives while attempting to access humanitarian aid at GHF distribution points<sup>55</sup>. This issue is raised not only by human rights organizations; corroborating accounts also come from soldiers who shared their experiences with domestic media. Their testimonies indicate that they were ordered to deliberately shoot unarmed residents of Gaza waiting for humanitarian assistance<sup>56</sup>. They describe GHF distribution points as “death zones,” where civilians were intentionally killed or wounded while awaiting food and medical supplies<sup>57</sup>. These reports suggest that what the Israeli side frames as “security concerns” and “flexibility” in adapting aid distribution to on-the-ground conditions, including “crowd pressure,” constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law principles prohibiting the use of aid distribution points for military purposes. Crowd management by the Israeli forces is carried out through the use of live fire against unarmed civilians. According to one soldier, such shootings serve as a means of communicating with Palestinians seeking aid, signaling, for example, that they have remained too long in the evacuation zone or that they have deviated from the access routes to distribution centers designated and approved by the Israeli army<sup>58</sup>. It should be recalled that all four GHF aid points are located precisely within these “evacuated areas,” meaning that Palestinians must enter zones in which they cannot move freely in order to collect aid packages<sup>59</sup>. Considering the above, and Israel’s potential objective of depopulating the northern part of the Gaza Strip, it can be inferred that these actions are focused on the deliberate and systematic displacement of Palestinians from the enclave.

Another controversial issue concerns the involvement of U.S. private military companies, which are officially tasked with protecting GHF aid points. The presence of these entities in the Gaza Strip reflects the lack of trust by the United States and Israel in traditional humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations. In this context, concerns are again raised that aid could fall into the hands of *Hamas*<sup>60</sup>. The participation of U.S. private military and security companies in the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* project has raised concerns from the outset. Particular attention has been paid to the activities of *Safe Reach Solutions* (SRS) and *UG Solutions*, which were

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07.08.2025, <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/us-backed-aid-distribution-points-gaza-are-sites-orchestrated-killing> [21.09.2025].

<sup>54</sup> *Gaza: Israeli Killings of Palestinians Seeking Food Are War Crimes...*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> N. Hasson, Y. Kubovich, B. Peleg, ‘It’s a Killing Field’: IDF Soldiers Ordered to Shoot Deliberately at Unarmed Gazans Waiting for Humanitarian Aid, 27.07.2025, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-06-27/ty-article-magazine/.premium/idf-soldiers-ordered-to-shoot-deliberately-at-unarmed-gazans-waiting-for-humanitarian-aid/00000197-ad8e-de01-a39f-ffbe33780000> [20.09.2025].

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>60</sup> K. DeYoung, C. Brown, *U.S. Consulting Firm Quits Gaza Humanitarian Aid Effort, amid Criticism*, 03.06.2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/06/03/gaza-humanitarian-fund-bcg/> [20.07.2025].

responsible, among other tasks, for convoy and distribution point security. Human rights organizations, such as *Trial International*, have warned that the militarization of humanitarian aid risks violating the fundamental principles of neutrality and impartiality and may entail legal liability for complicity in breaches of international law<sup>61</sup>. Doubts have also been raised regarding financial transparency. *Reuters* has highlighted the absence of oversight mechanisms and ambiguities in the funding of GHF operations<sup>62</sup>. Additional controversy has arisen from contractors' accounts, who, similarly to Israeli soldiers, claimed that during aid distribution, stun grenades, tear gas, and live ammunition were used against civilians<sup>63</sup>. Anthony Aguilar, a retired U.S. Special Forces lieutenant colonel and former GHF contractor on behalf of *UG Solutions*, gave an interview in which he reported witnessing the killing of unarmed civilians in Gaza by other contractors and Israeli soldiers. He stated that civilians were shot at with firearms, tank shells, and mortars<sup>64</sup>. According to Aguilar's accounts, the IDF also instructed on-site contractors to shoot at children<sup>65</sup>. These testimonies indicate that crowd management was conducted through the commission of war crimes. The operation of GHF in contradiction with humanitarian principles was also highlighted by Jake Wood, former Chief Executive Officer of GHF, who resigned from his position. He argued that the mechanism for distributing humanitarian aid through the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* was being instrumentally used to achieve geopolitical objectives<sup>66</sup>. The organization has denied these allegations<sup>67</sup>.

Another highly serious allegation raised by human rights organizations, media outlets, and former contract workers against GHF concerns the use of hunger as a tool of political and military pressure. Restricted access to food and humanitarian aid is reportedly employed as an instrument of control over the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. In this context, it is emphasized that the rationing of aid and the conditioning of its distribution on security considerations and the presence of

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<sup>61</sup> *Legal Organizations Warn Privatized "Humanitarian" Operators in Gaza of the Risk of Legal Liability for Complicity in Serious Violations of International Law*, Trial International, 23.06.2025, <https://trialinternational.org/latest-post/human-rights-legal-organizations-warn-privatized-humanitarian-operators-in-gaza-of-the-risk-of-legal-liability-for-complicity-in-serious-violations-of-international-law/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>62</sup> A. Roston, *Chicago private equity firm has stake in Gaza aid company*, 06.06.2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/gaza-aid-logistics-company-funded-by-chicago-private-equity-firm-2025-06-05/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>63</sup> E. A. M. Dom, *US contractors claim colleagues fired live rounds at Palestinians seeking aid in Gaza*, 03.07.2025, <https://www.euronews.com/2025/07/03/us-contractors-claim-colleagues-fired-live-rounds-at-palestinians-seeking-aid-in-gaza> [20.07.2025].

<sup>64</sup> S. Pabst, *Former Green Beret: The IDF is the GHF's 'client'*, 30.07.2025, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/idf-gaza-humanitarian-foundation/> [25.09.2025].

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>66</sup> G. Pence, *How humanitarian aid became a tool to empty Gaza*, 01.06.2025, <https://www.middleeast-monitor.com/20250601-how-humanitarian-aid-became-a-tool-to-empty-gaza/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>67</sup> T. Staff, *Ex-US contractor says he saw IDF commit war crimes at aid sites; GHF rejects 'false claims'*, 26.07.2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ex-us-contractor-says-he-saw-idf-commit-war-crimes-at-aid-sites-ghf-rejects-false-claims/> [25.09.2025].

private security firms may result in a situation where the basic needs of residents are treated as an element of a war strategy<sup>68</sup>.

The operation of GHF in the Gaza Strip, in addition to the controversies discussed, exacerbates the political instability of the area and contributes to the escalation of violence. On 12 June 2025, *Hamas* attacked a bus transporting Palestinian GHF workers affiliated with the *Popular Forces*, an opposition group to the *Islamic Resistance Movement*<sup>69</sup>. Eight people were killed and many others were injured in the attack<sup>70</sup>. This incident highlights the increasing tensions and conflicts among Palestinian factions. It also raises the risk of misinformation regarding the motives of the attack and alleged links with local militias. The occurrence of such acts further raises questions about the escalation of violence, where attacks on humanitarian workers reinforce mutual suspicions, restrict access to aid, and hinder civilian protection, thereby deepening the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave.

### Conclusion

There is substantial evidence suggesting that the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* functions as an instrument in the hands of Israel, utilized to achieve the country's geopolitical and military objectives. Even before the establishment of this organization, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the population of the Gaza Strip would be relocated for its own security as part of an intensive military operation<sup>71</sup>. Furthermore, in August 2025, Netanyahu announced a plan to assume full control over the Gaza Strip, with the intention of placing it under the administration of "independent Arab forces"<sup>72</sup>. The position of the Israeli Prime Minister indicates a clearly defined political objective regarding the Palestinian enclave, linked to demographic policy. This objective concerns the intentional transformation of the region's population structure. The Israeli argumentation is highly inconsistent and encounters numerous irregularities. Despite declarations expressing the intention to relocate Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, Israel maintains that the establishment of GHF, as well as the restriction of other humanitarian organizations' operations in the area, is motivated by concerns over the potential seizure of aid supplies by *Hamas* and by security considerations. The latter consistently serves as a central point in justifying Israel's actions in all controversial matters. It is also worth noting the construction of threats by the Israeli side. In the perception of the Israeli state, the phenomenon

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<sup>68</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>69</sup> C. Balmer, N. Al-Mughrabi, *Humanitarian workers killed in Gaza ambush blamed on Hamas; internet cut in territory*, 12.06.2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/humanitarian-workers-killed-gaza-bus-ambush-that-israel-blames-hamas-2025-06-12/> [20.07.2025].

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>71</sup> *Netanyahu says Gaza population to be moved in intensive Israeli operation*, Al Jazeera, 05.05.2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/5/israel-plans-conquest-of-gaza-in-expanded-offensive> [20.07.2025].

<sup>72</sup> T. Staff, S. Levaton, *Netanyahu: Israel to take military control of all of Gaza, but 'we don't want to keep it'*, 07.08.2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-israel-intends-to-capture-all-of-gaza-hand-it-over-to-non-pa-arab-forces/> [20.09.2025].

of terrorism is defined very broadly, encompassing not only the conduct of strictly terrorist activities but also identification with a given organization or the promotion of its activities<sup>73</sup>. Such security concerns are perceived as evidence of the abuse of defensive rhetoric. In Israel's case, they also exhibit elements of manipulation. As the example of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation demonstrates, broadly construed security issues are used to justify war crimes. Israel's extremely inclusive perception of threats results in the attribution of collective responsibility. It appears that the Israeli state assumed that, since the entire Gaza Strip is controlled by *Hamas*, a large group of people could be treated as "members" or "supporters" of a terrorist organization, even if they individually did not participate in armed activities. The constant and pervasive references to security by the Israeli authorities should not be interpreted as a valid argument but rather as a deliberate and manipulative rhetorical device, primarily intended to legitimize actions that are difficult to justify under international humanitarian law. In this context, it must be concluded that claims alleging *Hamas's* appropriation of aid, which are rejected by major humanitarian organizations, have no basis in reality. Instead, they serve as a justification for limiting UNRWA's operations and establishing a monopoly of the *Gaza Humanitarian Foundation* in the distribution of humanitarian aid.

The current situation in the Gaza Strip exemplifies the "militarization" of humanitarian aid and its deliberate use for political and military purposes. The concentration of aid distribution mechanisms in the hands of a single organization, which is additionally controlled and funded by a party to the conflict, raises serious concerns regarding compliance with the principles of neutrality and impartiality. The exclusion of traditional humanitarian organizations, such as the UN, has resulted in aid distribution being subordinated to a structure directly supported by the United States and Israel. Consequently, mechanisms that are supposed to operate neutrally have been transformed into instruments serving political and military objectives. Distribution points have become spaces of control, and humanitarian aid has effectively been turned into a tool of coercion, implemented both through the use of gunfire against civilians and the imposition of hunger.

Considering the analyzed issues, it can be concluded that Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip align with a strategy of weaponization of aid. During the conduct of military operations in Gaza, humanitarian resources are deliberately employed in a manner that transforms aid into an instrument for achieving the state's own objectives<sup>74</sup>. At present, this can be interpreted as the implementation of Israel's demographic policy aimed at the depopulation of the Gaza Strip and the consolidation of control over the territory. This, in turn, indicates that the intention to resettle the Palestinian population is linked to broader Israeli geostrategic objectives, one of which may be the complete assumption of control over the Palestinian enclave.

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<sup>73</sup> P. Pokrzywiński, *Izraelskie ustawodawstwo antyterrorystyczne wobec zagrożeń XXI wieku*, „Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego” 2021, no. 24, p. 103.

<sup>74</sup> *Israel's weaponization of aid in Gaza*, 08.05.2025, Dutch Relief Alliance, <https://dutchrelief.org/israels-weaponization-of-aid-in-gaza/> [20.07.2025].

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