



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES
मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

Strategic Digest

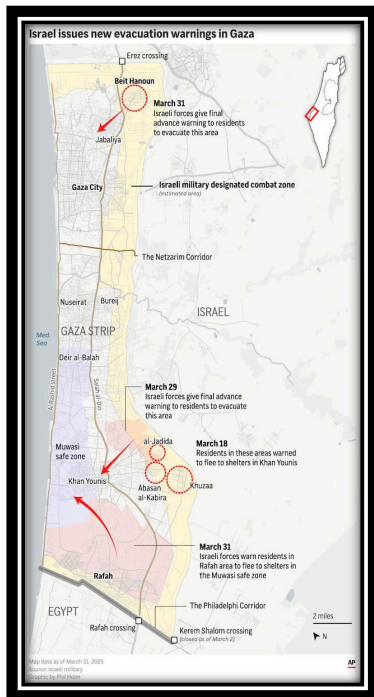
Vol. 7 | No. 07 | 01 April 2025

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Gaza War Resumes



Following Hamas' 7 October 2023 attack and 15 months of Israel's war in Gaza, a ceasefire agreement between both sides was finalised on 15 January 2025 and operationalised on 19 January. The first phase facilitated a 42-day truce, the release of nearly 1,800 Palestinian prisoners, the entry of 600 daily aid trucks into Gaza and the transit of Palestinians requiring medical treatment through Rafah crossing. In exchange, 33 hostages (including eight deceased individuals) and five Thai nationals were released through nine rounds of exchanges between 19 January and 27 February 2025. While Israel Defense Forces (IDF) retained control over the Philadelphi corridor, they withdrew from the Netzarim corridor connecting North and South Gaza. The terms of the second phase, involving further prisoner exchanges and a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, as well as the third phase, which includes a 3–5-year reconstruction plan, remain undecided.

Meanwhile, 59 captives—24 alive and 35 deceased—are still being held in Gaza.

Israel, following the conclusion of the 42-day truce on 1 March, adopted a dual approach – engaging with mediators from Egypt, Qatar and the US to negotiate the terms of Phase Two while simultaneously maintaining pressure through aid restrictions, continued troop deployment, control over the Philadelphi corridor, and new offensive plans under new IDF Chief Eyal Zamir. The deadlock over the next stage stems from Israel's efforts to extend Phase One, allowing for further hostage and prisoner exchanges. Hamas, however, insists that the original ceasefire terms should continue with talks on the second phase. Hamas has refused to release the hostages, its key leverage, without assurances of a permanent ceasefire and complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, due to domestic compulsions, is unwilling to commit to full withdrawal from the Philadelphi corridor and permanently end the war.

US President Donald Trump demanded the immediate release of the remaining 59 hostages or face destruction, effectively endorsing Israel's position. To break the impasse, US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff on 12 March proposed a "bridge deal", i.e. a month-long ceasefire extension through Ramadan and Passover until 19 April, providing time for negotiations on a permanent cessation of hostilities. The US also initiated direct talks with Hamas about hostage release. While Hamas agreed to release American-Israeli Edan Alexander and the remains of four other American-Israeli hostages, Israel demanded the freeing of 11 living hostages. The US dismissed Hamas' proposal as a non-starter and aligned with the Israeli stance, i.e. supporting the use of military pressure to recover the hostages and ultimately dismantle Hamas' military and governing capabilities.

Israel, after placing pressure through an aid blockade on 2 March and electricity cuts on 9 March, resumed airstrikes on 18 March, launched a ground operation and

re-took the Netzarim corridor. In response, Hamas fired rockets at multiple locations inside Israeli territory, though they caused no significant damage. The Houthi movement has resumed missile strikes targeting Israeli territory and US fleets in the Red Sea. Since 18 March, several prominent Hamas leaders have been killed, including Mahmoud Abu Watfa, director of Ministry of Interior; Bahajjat Abu Sultan, head of internal security forces; Mohammad Al-Jamasi, head of Emergency Committee; Ahmad Al-Hattha, head of Ministry of Justice; Issam Al-Da'alis, head of government administrative committee and members of political bureau, Salah al-Bardawil, Ismail Barhoum and Yasser Harb.

These fatalities were linked to Hamas' internal governance in Gaza. While their deaths could weaken the group's grip on the population, the absence of an alternative governing authority makes the collapse of its rule unlikely. Instead, the more probable outcome is increased chaos among civilians. In the last week of March, spontaneous protests erupted across Gaza, with demonstrators calling for an end to the war, an end to Israeli aggression, and expressing concerns over possible displacement. Some protesters reportedly chanted slogans such as "Hamas out," "Hamas are terrorists," and "Hamas does not represent us." According to Israeli reports, Hamas has responded by executing protesters in recent days.

Following Israeli ground operations and troop reinforcements, Hamas has shown some flexibility in negotiating the release of a few hostages, including American-Israeli Edan Alexander. The group hopes to restore the Phase One ceasefire conditions, which include the entry of humanitarian aid and an agreement to negotiate the second phase of the ceasefire. During a security cabinet meeting on 30 March, Prime Minister Netanyahu argued that the military pressure is working by simultaneously destroying Hamas' military and governmental capabilities and creating the conditions for the release of hostages. Since the latest escalation began on 18 March, the death toll in Gaza has surpassed 50,000.

Domestically within Israel, the resumption of war strengthened the Likud-led bloc after Itamar Ben-Gvir re-joined the government. The Netanyahu government's US\$ 206 billion budget was passed with 66 votes in favour and 52 against. Meanwhile, on 20 March, the Israeli security cabinet removed Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar, and on 23 March, it passed a no-confidence motion against Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara, both of whom had been vocal critics of Netanyahu's war strategy and domestic policies. While the Supreme Court has temporarily stayed the removal of Ronen Bar, former Navy commander Eli Sharvit has been chosen as the new head of Shin Bet. The Knesset, on 27 March, passed the controversial judicial appointments law granting political authorities greater control over the appointment of judges.

Sudan's Army Reclaims Khartoum: Turning the Tide?

Nearly two years after Sudan plunged into a devastating civil war, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have recaptured central Khartoum from the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), marking a significant, albeit complex, turning point. The SAF's seizure of key infrastructure such as the presidential palace, central bank,

and international airport culminated in General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan's triumphant return to the capital on March 26, where he declared the city "liberated."

This breakthrough follows months of urban warfare that began in September 2024. A newly galvanized military-political coalition facilitated the SAF's resurgence. Armed with Iranian drones, Russian weaponry and diplomatic support from Egypt and Qatar the SAF broke the RSF's siege of military headquarters in January 2025. This momentum carried through to offensives in eastern and southern Khartoum, culminating in the RSF's retreat across the Jebel Aulia bridge into White Nile State. While RSF commanders framed the withdrawal as a "tactical repositioning," most observers saw it as a major strategic defeat. As a result, Sudan is now starkly divided: the SAF holds the east and centre, while the RSF maintains dominance in the west.



However, this apparent victory conceals deeper structural vulnerabilities. The SAF's gains have been enabled by a fragile patchwork of Islamist brigades, ethnic militias, and Darfuri rebel groups many of whom pursue conflicting goals. Though united in opposition to the RSF, their long-term cohesion remains in doubt. This raises pressing concerns over post-conflict governance, especially in recently "liberated" areas where competing factions may jostle for power or pursue retributive violence.

The human cost of the war in Sudan has been devastating. Over 30.4 million people, more than two-thirds of the population, now require humanitarian assistance, including healthcare, food, and other essential support. The conflict has triggered an economic collapse, driving up the prices of food, fuel, and basic goods, making them unaffordable for many families. Acute hunger is worsening rapidly, with more than half of the population experiencing severe food insecurity. Famine conditions have already been confirmed in five areas across North Darfur and the eastern Nuba Mountains, with projections indicating that five additional regions could fall into famine by May this year.

Moreover, the RSF now stands accused by the U.S. and numerous human rights organisations of committing war crimes, including systematic sexual violence, mass killings, and village burnings actions many describe as genocidal.

Compounding the humanitarian tragedy is the geopolitical entanglement of the conflict. Sudan's civil war has increasingly become a proxy battleground for competing regional and global powers. The SAF has drawn closer to Iran, Russia, and China, while the RSF is reportedly supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through arms, intelligence, and financing. In a dramatic escalation, Sudan filed a case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on March 6, accusing the UAE of aiding genocide in Darfur- allegations that the UAE categorically denies. Yet, analysts suggest that the UAE's support for the RSF is driven not only by ideological opposition to the SAF's ties with Islamists but also by commercial interests, particularly the RSF's control over gold-rich territories in Darfur.

The SAF's pivot to Iran and Russia, in turn, reflects a pragmatic response to diplomatic isolation. With the U.S. and European Union reluctant to extend direct support, Khartoum has turned to alternative patrons. Russia, eyeing both Sudanese gold and a Red Sea naval foothold, has deepened its military backing. Similarly, Iran having reestablished ties with Sudan in 2023 now supplies advanced drones, which have become a critical factor on the battlefield.

This geopolitical realignment also poses a dilemma for Washington. The Trump administration's 2020 delisting of Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list tied to its normalisation with Israel under the Abraham Accords had raised hopes for Sudan's reintegration into the international order. But the UAE's support for RSF atrocities now casts a shadow over that strategy. In recent weeks, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and several members of Congress have begun to question the implications of continued U.S. reticence on Emirati actions in Sudan.

In this context, the SAF's recapture of Khartoum, while symbolically important, does little to resolve the underlying instability. The RSF still controls vast swathes of territory, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan. Both factions remain dependent on foreign support, entangled in war crimes, and internally fragmented. Without immediate international mediation and the establishment of a credible political framework, Sudan is on the brink of collapse threatening to fragment along ethnic, ideological, and geopolitical lines, with devastating consequences for the region and beyond.

Turmoil in Turkey

Turkey is in turmoil after Istanbul's mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, a leading opposition figure and potential challenger to Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was arrested on March 19 on charges of corruption and terrorism. The arrest has triggered widespread protests across Turkey, particularly in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Riot police have responded with water cannons, tear gas, and plastic bullets, while demonstrators have fought back with stones. Despite the government's vow to crack down on what it calls "street terror," the protests continue to gain momentum. The opposition sees Imamoğlu's detention as an attack on democracy.

A day earlier, Istanbul University had annulled his diploma, citing irregularities with Council of Higher Education regulations. Under the Turkish constitution, presidential candidates must have a higher education degree. On 23, a Turkish court formally placed him under arrest pending trial on corruption charges, while terrorism charges were dropped.



Imamoğlu, who had been re-elected as mayor of Istanbul— the country's largest city and commercial hub -- in the country-wide municipalities election in March 2024, was widely seen as a frontrunner in the imminent primary of Turkey's main opposition and secular-nationalist party, the Republican People's Party (CHP) to choose a candidate for the next presidential election. After the CHP-led broad opposition

alliance had lost in General elections in May 2023, the party's victory in the largest cities, including Istanbul, the capital Ankara, and Izmir and inroads into numerous AKP strongholds made them rally around Imamoglu as the prospective candidate in the next presidential election scheduled for 2028 but could be held sooner.

Following Imamoglu's formal arrest, the CHP called for nationwide protests. Hundreds of thousands of protesters congregated in Istanbul despite assembly bans, police crackdowns, and legal prosecution by authorities, including the arrest of 1,900 people since protests began on 20 March. On 24 March, the CHP announced that 13 million non-party members joined an estimated 1.7 million members in eighty-one cities in supporting Imamoglu as its official candidate for the next presidential election. As the street protests have sustained, Erdogan has labelled them as "evil" and criticised the CHP for starting a "violent movement."

Imamoglu's rise as a popular challenger to long-serving President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has come in the wake of earlier threats of political ban, legal fights and contestation of his election victories by his political rivals. In March 2019, Imamoglu was elected as Mayor of Istanbul in an upset win by 13,000 votes against the ruling AK Party-backed candidate Binali Yildirim.

After weeks of AKP appeals against the mayoral election, Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council upheld one complaint regarding ballot counting and annulled Imamoglu's victory. The annulment of the election drew much international attention to Imamoglu. In the election re-run, Imamoglu increased his lead to more than 800,000 votes, ending 25 years of AKP's rule in Istanbul. Erdogan – who rose to national prominence after being elected as Istanbul mayor in the 1994 elections, famously said: "Whoever loses Istanbul loses Turkey."

Imamoglu faced a political ban after the AKP party seized on his remark in November 2019 and sued him for "insulting" public officials. Speaking to reporters, Imamoglu said that "those who cancelled the March 31 election are idiots." Imamoglu appealed against the December 2022 court verdict sentencing him to jail for more than two years in addition to a political ban. The ban does not apply as long as he is pending trial.

The latest court rulings aimed to derail his presidential ambitions and oust him from the mayoral position. The Turkish interior ministry issued a directive to officially remove Imamoglu and two Istanbul district mayors from office, appointing a trustee to replace one of the ousted. Since the court refused to pursue "terror" charges against Imamoglu, a government trustee cannot be appointed; instead, a mayor would be elected from within the municipal council.

Over the last year, the Erdogan government has used 'terror' charges to unseat democratically elected mayors from opposition parties and replace them with government trustees after dissolving municipal councils. These include the mayor of Esenyurt, the district of Istanbul with the largest population and mayors of three southeastern cities of Mardin, Batman and Halfeti, who belonged to the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), the main pro-Kurdish party. Selahattin Demirtas, the former leader of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party, or HDP and a two-time election rival of President Erdogan, has already been imprisoned since 2016 on terrorism-related charges.