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Distinctions Without Difference: The Security Council on Gaza Passes

By Dr. Binoy Kampmark
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The UN Security Council presents one of the great contradictions of power in the international system. On the one hand vested with enormous latitude in order to preserve international peace and security, it remains checked, limited and, it can be argued, crippled by an all too regular use of the veto by members of the permanent five powers (US, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France).

When it comes to the bleeding and crushing of human life in Gaza by the Israeli Defence Forces (32,300 dead Palestinians and rising), resolutions demanding a cease fire of a conflict that began with the attack on Israeli soil by Hamas militants have tended to pass into voting oblivion. The United States, Israel's great power patron and defender, has been consistent in using its veto power to ensure it, exercising it on no less than three occasions since October 7.

On March 25, a change of heart was registered. Washington, reputationally battered for its unconditional support for Israel, haughtily defied by its own ally in being reduced to airdrops of aid for the expiring residents of Gaza, and resoundingly ignored by the Netanyahu government in moderating the savagery of its operations in the strip, abstained. In terms of resolution protocol, it meant that 14 out of 15 Council members favoured the vote.

Resolution 2728 calls for an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan "leading to a lasting sustainable" halt to hostilities, the "immediate and unconditional release of all hostages", "ensuring humanitarian access to address their medical and other humanitarian needs" and "demands that the parties comply with their obligations under international law in relation to all persons they detain". The resolution further emphasises "the urgent need to expand the flow of humanitarian assistance to and reinforce the protection of civilians in the entire Gaza Strip". All barriers regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance, in

accordance with international humanitarian law" are also to be lifted.

The wording of the resolution has a degree of lexical ambiguity only tolerable to oily diplomats and paper mad bureaucrats. Neither Hamas nor Israeli hostages are mentioned, ghosts unacknowledged at the chattering feast. Does the latter, for instance, cover Palestinian prisoners?

The justification from the US delegation was uneven and skewed. The abstention, **Secretary of State Anthony Blinken** [explained](), "reaffirms the US position that a ceasefire of any duration come as part of an agreement to release hostages in Gaza." While some provisions of the text had caused disagreement in Washington, the sponsors of the resolution had made sufficient changes "consistent with our principled position that any ceasefire text must be paired with the release of the hostages."

Mild mannered approval for this sloppy, weak position (the apologetics of abstentions are rarely principled, suggesting a lack of moral timbre) followed. Hadar Susskind, President and CEO of Americans for Peace Now, even [praised the stance]() in *Newsweek*. "By allowing the resolution to pass the US has staked out a position in favor of ending this horrible war, and in opposition to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's prioritization of his political well-being over the current and future good of Israelis and Palestinians alike."

For his part, Netanyahu cancelled a planned Washington visit of two of his ministers, **Ron Dermer** and **Tzachi Hanegbi**, to specifically discuss the impending attack on Rafah, though much of this is bound to be studiously ceremonial, given the language of inevitability associated with the planned operation. Besides, neither are versed in anything related to military matters. But just as one pays attention to a wealthy, doddering relative who keeps funding your bad habits in the hope that you might, one day, see sense, it pays to feign courtesy and interest from time to time to your benefactor.

As if to prove this point, **John F. Kirby**, spokesman for the National Security Council, [reminded]() journalists that various other meetings would still be taking place between the US and Israel, notably those between President Joe Biden's national security advisor, **Jake Sullivan**, and with **Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III.**

In a gruff statement, the Israeli PM rebuked the abstention as "a retreat from the consistent American position since the beginning of the war". In taking that stance, Washington had given "Hamas hope that international pressure will enable them to achieve a cease-fire without freeing the hostages."

Netanyahu's approach to Hamas, Gaza and the Palestinians has become one with his obsession with political survival and rekindling the fires of the Israeli electorate. As far back as December, a Likud official was already [making the observation]() that the PM had adopted the posture of a vote getting electioneer even as the war was being prosecuted. "Netanyahu is in full campaign mode. While the external political threats are gradually increasing, Netanyahu knows that over time the attacks and the calls to remove him will also increase. He has been acting first to win back his base."

For the UN Secretary General, **António Guterres**, the resolution had to be implemented. "Failure would be unforgivable." But failure to do so, certainly in the context of the planned assault on Rafah so solemnly denounced by the international community, is most likely.

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Dr. Binoy Kampmark *was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He currently lectures at RMIT University. He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG). Email:* bkampmark@gmail.com

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