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**Israel-Gaza Conflict: Biden's Ceasefire Plan in Focus**

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## Israel-Gaza Conflict: Biden's Ceasefire Plan in Focus

US President Joe Biden on 31 May 2024 put forth what he termed “a roadmap to an enduring ceasefire and the release of all hostages” spread over three phases. The first phase spread over six weeks involved a full and complete ceasefire, withdrawal of Israeli forces from all populated areas of Gaza, and release of a number of hostages — including women, the elderly, and the wounded — in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Phase two would involve the release of all remaining living hostages, including male soldiers, Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and ‘permanent’ cessation of hostilities. Phase three will involve a major reconstruction plan for Gaza. If Hamas fails to fulfil any of its commitments under the deal, Israel can resume military operations.

Biden's plan was welcomed by key global and regional players, including the United Nations Security Council which adopted a resolution on 10 June with 14 countries voting in favour (Russia abstained) urging both parties to fully implement the terms of the proposal ‘without delay and without condition’. Hamas on its part stated that it was willing to respond ‘positively and constructively’ to Biden's plan while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee on 3 June that Biden's plan had ‘gaps’. His office stated that the Israeli government had put forward a proposal to advance its goal of the release of all hostages, which allows Israel “to continue the war until all its objectives are achieved, including the destruction of Hamas's military and governing capabilities.”



Previously on 6 May, Hamas had agreed to a ceasefire proposal by Egypt and Qatar but that proposal was rejected by Israel. That proposal was also spread across three stages of around six weeks duration each with the second stage leading to a permanent cessation of military operations and the third stage beginning with a three to five-year Gaza reconstruction plan. Since hostilities began on 7 October 2023 following Hamas' terror strikes against Israel, there was only a short period of cessation of hostilities in November when around 100 hostages were released. Over 250 hostages were taken by Hamas.

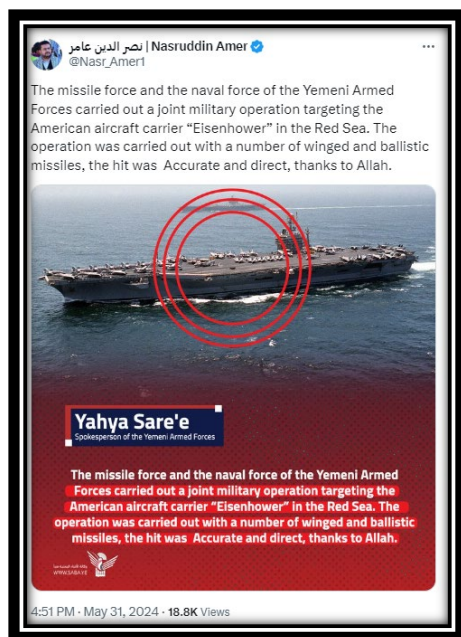
The Biden administration's ceasefire plan came amidst Israel's military push in Rafah that has led to a dire humanitarian situation. The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza in its Situation Report on 9 June stated that 37,084 people have been killed since 7 October 2023, including nearly 200 UNRWA staff while more than 500 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank. UNRWA stated that continued to be the ‘beating heart of humanitarian response’ in the Gaza Strip despite enormous challenges. Over one million Palestinians have been displaced from the Rafah area, ever since the Israel Defense Force (IDF) began military operations in Rafah on 6 May to secure the release of hostages.

An IDF air strike on a Palestinian refugee camp in Rafah on 26 May led to nearly 50 casualties, including at least 12 women and eight children. The IDF stated that its aircraft struck a compound in north Rafah in which significant Hamas terrorists were operating. It insisted that the strike was ‘carried out against legitimate targets under international law, through the use of precise munitions and based on precise intelligence that indicated Hamas’ use of the area’. The IDF charged that there was a Hamas ammunition warehouse near the civilian compound, over 100 metres away from the strike site. The IDF Spokesperson RAdm Daniel Hagari insisted that the fire that broke out was ‘unexpected and unintended’. PM Netanyahu termed it a ‘tragic incident’.

The IDF charged that Hamas was holding the remaining hostages in Rafah and asserted that it would ‘not stop fighting for their freedom’. On 8 June, four hostages were rescued during a raid on the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza. Authorities in Gaza however charged that at least 274 Palestinians were killed as a result of the Israeli raid that freed the four hostages. The IDF stated that 116 hostages still remained in Gaza, including at least 40 who are presumed to be dead.

Hamas Spokesperson Osama Hamdan told CNN on 14 June that ‘no one has an idea’ how many hostages are still alive and that any deal to release them must include guarantees of a permanent ceasefire and the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. At the G7 Summit in Italy meanwhile, President Biden replied in the negative when asked by reporters on 14 June whether a Gaza truce deal could be reached soon but added he has not ‘lost hope’.

### Alleged Attacks on Uss Eisenhower in The Red Sea



On 31 May 2024, the spokesperson of the Houthi militant group in Yemen announced that they had successfully carried out a missile attack on the US Navy’s Aircraft Carrier USS Eisenhower in the Red Sea. On 1 June 2024, again the Houthis claimed that they had achieved a direct hit on two US Navy warships including USS Eisenhower. The Houthis described these attacks as retaliation for the US and British airstrikes inside Yemen on 30 May 2024. These airstrikes were carried out by the Carrier Strike Group (CSG) led by USS Eisenhower as a response to the surge in Houthi attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The key objective of these airstrikes was to degrade the ability of the Houthis to carry out their attacks targeting commercial shipping in the region. US sources claimed that several underground facilities, missile launchers, command sites and vessels of Houthis

were destroyed. However, the Houthis and Iranian state media claimed that these attacks killed 16 civilians and injured more than 40 people. This latest exchange is indicative of a steep escalation of hostilities since the US launched Operation Prosperity Guardian last December to safeguard commercial shipping in the region.

Soon after the announcement of the attacks on Eisenhower by the Houthi spokesperson, photos and videos purportedly showing damages sustained by the American Carrier began circulating on the internet and social media platforms. Even the Iranian state media seconded these claims made by the Houthis that USS Eisenhower had sustained serious damage. This included a video of burning US warships and infrared footage showing the exact movement when the carrier was struck by Houthi missiles. This was followed by another aerial footage purportedly showing the Eisenhower moored in a port in Saudi Arabia with visible damage sustained on its forward flight deck. An aerial image purportedly showed the upper section of the entire flight deck of USS Eisenhower removed indicating the carrier being functionally damaged. These videos and images were also widely circulated across Chinese and Russian social media platforms.

But the US Central Command refuted all these claims and confirmed that none of its ships in the region had sustained any damage and were operating at full capacity. The US military stated that USS Eisenhower led CSG shot down multiple Houthi projectiles including two ballistic missiles between 31st May and 2nd June. Soon all the videos and photos of the damaged Eisenhower were proven to be fake by reputed media outlets, military observers and fact-checking websites. The video of the burning warship turned out to be of the US Navy's amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard which caught on fire while undergoing repairs in San Diego Harbor back in July 2020. The infrared footage of the missile strikes on the carrier has been taken from a popular military simulator game ARMA 3. The aerial image showing the damaged flight deck is of the Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov which has been docked in a naval shipyard in Murmansk since 2018 for refit.

Since the start of Operation Prosperity Guardian, the USS Eisenhower has been the most conspicuous symbol of the American Naval Presence in the region. By claiming to have successfully attacked USS Eisenhower, the Houthis are attempting to seek political legitimacy in the Yemeni Civil War that they have been fighting since 2014. The Houthis control nearly one-third of Yemen's territory including its capital Sanaa and 70 to 80 percent of its population. Despite this, the Houthis' control of Yemen is not recognised by the international community. Hence, the Houthis recent claims along with their wider campaign in the Red Sea in solidarity with the Palestinian cause can be described as their attempts to assert their image as a legitimate state actor in the region.

The non-availability of credible evidence to support Houthi's claim of successfully striking the USS Eisenhower is indicative of their attempts to engage in information warfare. Aircraft carriers generally operate along with a flotilla of



warships and auxiliary ships that provide them with multiple layers of protection against incoming aerial and seaborne threats. Considering this, it is highly unlikely that a non-state actor like Houthis can successfully strike an American aircraft carrier. However, the incident has demonstrated that even non-state actors can effectively engage in information warfare against a superior adversary. This is yet again an example of how the internet and social media have enabled non-state actors to effectively manipulate information and disseminate misinformation to influence local, regional and international perceptions.

### G-7 Summit – Key Takeaways

The heads of the Group of 7 nations — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States- met for the annual summit on 13-14 June in Puglia on the southern Italian coast. The leaders, along with representatives of the European Union and selected guests, meet to discuss economic issues and major international policies. This year the summit's host, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy, has also invited other figures including Pope Francis and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India.



The forum meets annually to discuss issues such as global economic governance, international security, and, most recently, artificial intelligence (AI) and climate change. Whatever the leaders' disagreements on the issues, one feature of the summits tends to be a shared overall outlook. Their countries are major trading partners, and even if their share of global trade has declined, they account for about half of the world economy. They also share broadly similar views on trade, security and human rights, giving them enormous influence when they act in concert.

In Puglia, President Biden and President Zelensky signed the U.S.-Ukraine Bilateral Security Agreement as a demonstration of enduring U.S. support for Ukraine, including through binding commitments to deepen our security and defence cooperation and to consult in the event of a future armed attack. In a bid to bolster Ukraine's fight with Russia, this 10-year security agreement will commit Washington to supply Kyiv with a wide range of military assistance. In his remarks, on the new security agreement, President Biden reiterated that the pact is designed to make Ukraine self-sufficient and put the country on the road to NATO membership.

Given the heightened anxiety among the G7 countries' leadership about deteriorating trends in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in China and their own political futures, this year's summit went extraordinarily smoothly by the standards of a gathering. There was a dispute over the use of the word "abortion" in the communiqué, prompted by the host, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy, but that was seen as a gesture to her domestic constituency. On important issues of geopolitics, there was little that divided the group.

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza and the threats posed by China's economic rise were high on the agenda this year. Group of 7 leaders also agreed on a plan to give Ukraine a \$50 billion loan to help it buy weapons and begin to rebuild damaged infrastructure. The loan is expected to be repaid using interest earned on \$300 billion in frozen Russian assets, which are mostly in European banks. Leaders reaffirmed their commitment that Russia's sovereign assets within G7 jurisdictions will remain immobilized until Russia ends its aggression and pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine.

Even on issues like Israel and Gaza, where Europeans are passionately divided and much less inclined than Mr. Biden to give Israel a pass on the conduct of the war, the discussion at the summit was quiet and the communiqué was bland and muted, simply restating the Biden administration's view.

Similarly, regarding China, where European and American interests do not always coincide, there was a new toughness in the language, led by Washington. In contrast to a few years ago, there were at least 25 references to China in this communiqué, nearly all of them critical of Beijing. The G7 accusations against China included several areas such as the Ukraine crisis, climate crisis, cyber security, the Taiwan question, the South China Sea, and human rights issues. The G7 vowed to counter "the wave of cheap high-tech products" from China and take action against Chinese financial institutions that "support Russia." The G7 also expressed concerns about China's "overcapacity," and threatened to retaliate against China through export restrictions.

The G7 reiterated its commitment to a "free and open Indo-Pacific" based on the rule of law and also committed to promoting concrete G7 PGII (Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment) initiatives, flagship projects, and complementary initiatives to develop transformative economic corridors for quality infrastructure and investment such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

On migration, G7 leaders said they would work with countries of origin and transit to deal with the root causes of irregular migration, enhance border management, and fight people smuggling rings through the launch of the G7 coalition while creating "safe and regular pathways for migration." Turning to climate change and the environment, the leaders said each G7 member would submit "ambitious" national plans aimed at keeping the target of limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius.