

# KENTUSAM Policy Paper of Geopolitical Fires: Türkiye and the Crisis in Palestine, March 12, 2025.

The hybrid workshop titled "Geopolitical Fires: Türkiye and the Crises in Ukraine, Syria, and Palestine" took place on March 12, 2025, in Kent University's Kağıthane campus under the auspices of Istanbul Kent University International Strategic Research and Application Center (KENTUSAM). Academics and diplomats worldwide gathered and shared insights on threats surrounding Türkiye: Ukraine, Syria, and Palestine under the moderation of Ozan Ormeci of Kent University. The event has been concluded in four sessions, each focusing on a different crisis and the last one as a final assessment. It was kicked off with the Palestine crisis by Hakan Keskin's presentation and continued with Syria as Saffet Akkaya's fruitful contributions. Yasar Onay led the final session regarding the Ukraine crisis. The event concluded with a final assessment and Q&A Session.

## Palestine Crisis, M.Hakan Keskin

The Israel-Palestinian Conflict (IPC) surged back to global attention after October 2023, resulting in a humanitarian catastrophe. Over 40,000 civilians—mostly Palestinians, including women and children—have lost their lives, representing nearly 2% of Gaza's population. On the Israeli side, Hamas attacks have claimed approximately 1,200 lives. Various challenges have hindered the international community's finding a viable solution.

As of March 2025, Hamas is holding around 251 Israeli civilians and soldiers hostage. A ceasefire agreement in January 2025 facilitated the release of some captives, while Israel continues to detain about 10,000 Palestinians, including those arrested in the West Bank and Gaza. This ceasefire, brokered by Qatar, followed 15 months of hostilities and included provisions for prisoner exchanges and Gaza's reconstruction.

The economic impact of the IPC has been severe, causing significant concern. Israel's direct daily war expenses amounted to approximately \$246 million. Projections indicated that if the conflict persisted for 8 to 12 months, the financial toll could exceed \$50 billion, equivalent to about 10% of Israel's GDP. Economic activity plummeted, with consumer spending down by 27%, imports reduced by 42%, and exports dropped by 18%. The Palestinian economy suffered even more, with an additional 300,000 people falling into poverty by November 2023. Employment in Gaza fell by 61%, while the West Bank experienced a 24% decline. By March 2024, unemployment across Palestinian territories soared to 57%, leading to 500,000 job losses.

Since the 1970s, the European Union (EU) has played a significant role in the geopolitical crises involving Türkiye, particularly in the Israel-Palestinian Conflict (IPC). The EU's approach to the IPC is built on three main pillars: advocating for a two-state solution, supporting Palestinian socio-economic development, and assisting in state-building efforts. The EU also emphasizes adherence to international law, engaging in diplomatic efforts, providing humanitarian aid, advocating for human rights, and fostering bilateral economic

relations. However, internal disagreements within the EU—exacerbated by global factors such as the fall of the Assad regime in Syria and policy shifts following Trump's second presidential term—have weakened its ability to shape foreign policy effectively.

The EU's capacity to implement a cohesive policy on the IPC has also been complicated by the United States' unwavering support for Israel, which often bypasses UN resolutions and international legal frameworks. Additionally, military trade and cooperation between certain EU member states and Israel have created further obstacles. Discrepancies in policies among EU institutions have also contributed to the bloc's struggles in addressing the conflict effectively.

Despite ongoing criticism regarding its effectiveness as a global actor, the EU has a historical role in crisis management, a fact that should reassure the audience. Since the 1970s, it has been involved in peace negotiations, beginning with the Venice Declaration of 1980, which marked its first formal endorsement of Palestinian self-determination. Since 2002, the EU has worked alongside the UN, the US, and Russia as part of the Middle East Quartet to mediate peace efforts. It remains the most prominent financial donor to the Palestinians while simultaneously maintaining significant trade relations with Israel.

Key aspects of the EU's IPC policy include:

- Commitment to a two-state solution
- Support for pre-1967 borders with mutually agreed land swaps
- Ensuring security for both sides
- Opposition to Israeli settlement expansion, which the EU considers illegal under international law
- Significant financial contributions to the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA
- Support for Gaza's reconstruction and ceasefire negotiations, including backing a \$53 billion Arab-funded initiative
- Diplomatic engagement with both Israeli and Palestinian representatives to promote long-term stability
- Advocacy for legal and human rights compliance

Although the two-state solution remains a cornerstone of EU policy, it has become increasingly difficult since October 2023. The EU has faced criticism for failing to adapt its policies to changing realities. Nevertheless, influenced by evolving global and regional dynamics, EU and G7 leaders played a key role in brokering the ceasefire, even if they did not act independently.

In conclusion, despite internal divisions among member states and institutions, the EU is expected to continue its mediation role in the IPC, maintaining long-standing policies. While its impact remains limited, the EU will likely persist in managing and mitigating the conflict.

EU member states have varying approaches toward Israel. Some countries openly condemn its military operations in Gaza and its human rights violations, leading to restrictions on arms sales. Spain halted arms exports to Israel on October 7, 2023, and in May 2024, banned weapons shipments from passing through its ports. Italy ceased approving new arms sales

after October 2023, although previously signed contracts continued. Some regional governments in Belgium imposed restrictions, while the federal government pushed for an EU-wide ban. In February 2024, a Dutch court ruled that the Netherlands must halt the F-35 fighter jet parts supply to Israel.

Conversely, several EU countries maintain robust support for Israel based on historical and political factors. Germany, for example, continues to be a significant supplier of arms, referencing its historical responsibility related to the Holocaust. Similarly, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has explicitly affirmed Israel's right to self-defense and has strongly condemned any attacks against it.