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The enduring tragedy of Gaza

A new report suggests the territory will be unliveable within a few years. That warning must be heeded

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“Gazais an open prison”. This statement has become the stock phrase that best explains the misery of living under the oppressive and pervasive security architecture imposed by Israel on the territory.

Years into Israel’s crippling blockade and a decade after Hamas’s ascent to power, a United Nations official has declared the strip potentially unliveable within years. All indicators are going in the wrong direction, declared a top humanitarian official in the Palestinian territories. Two million Gazans have access to scarcely two hours of electricity a day and almost two-thirds of youth are unemployed. The new UN report, titled “Gaza – ten years later”, says almost all water in the territory is unfit for consumption.

Access to health care, energy and water has been hard to come by for years, but the fact that Gaza is on the verge of collapse indicates that the factors that have led to its disintegration must now be fought.

The blockade will never end as long as Israel keeps collectively punishing millions of people. Its pretext is security, but the reality is that Gaza is Israel’s biggest nightmare. It has no interest in occupying it again; but it also does not know what to do with Gaza and leaves it to fester as a geostrategic hotbed, but without any hope of autonomy or economic self-determination.

And then there is Hamas. Any change must come from within. Hamas had a few solid opportunities to change the dynamics of its domestic rule, but it did not. Instead, it has tried to impose an ideological imperative on its people, essentially holding them hostage to its narrative.

For a place this tiny to have so many people suffering is a travesty. Hamas fought Israel three times in six years. One of the most densely populated areas in the world, Gaza suffered mass destruction in each of the conflicts and never remotely began getting back on its feet before the subsequent blows.

There are no guarantees Israel will lift the blockade even if Hamas is ousted. What history has shown is that Israel has never run out of excuses for oppression. The Palestinian Authority is trying to put pressure on Hamas by reducing energy funding and travel permits for the sick wanting to leave the strip for treatment. The fact of the matter is that calamity is another word far too readily attached to Gaza. We shouldn't allow it to turn into catastrophe.