

Dispatches **BALKANS+GAZA GUATEMALA MYANMAR PERU**



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dispatches

BALKANS+GAZA

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Unravelling the Complexity: Nuanced Perspective of the Gaza Conflict

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has once again thrust the complexities of international relations and media reporting into the spotlight. As I reflect on my own experiences as a refugee in the USA, far from the homeland I once knew, I am reminded of similar patterns during the Balkan War in the 1990s. During those years, I couldn't help but watch the CNN coverage of the Balkan War; aspects of that war, including 24-hour televising of the siege of Sarajevo, struck me to my core. The way it was portrayed left me feeling deeply dismayed. The conflict was painted as a military showdown between two equal sides with a vested interest in fighting, yet it failed to capture the innocent people caught in the crossfire. People who, in their hearts, never wished to take up arms. The story of innocent people's suffering, mostly women, children, and the elderly, emerged in detail only later. During the war, they were never presented as individuals they were presented through numbers of injured, deaths, and missing. They were at that point only mentioned as collateral damages of war, statistics. As I watched those reports in mid 1990s, it troubled me that the international response to the Bosnian Croats and Muslims was hesitant. Western powers often cited atrocities on both sides, and for years, this incomplete narrative persisted, deepening the confusion for those who, much like my friends around the world, struggled to discern who or what they should support and revealing the pitfalls of reducing conflicts to simplistic narratives.

Today, amid the Gaza conflict, the global narrative of 'both sides committing war crimes' is once again clouding the clarity of ordinary citizens worldwide. It is crucial to unravel this "complexity", to understand the historical roots, and to advocate for a more nuanced perspective. To truly comprehend the Gaza conflict, one must acknowledge its deep historical roots. It is not merely a series of recent attacks but the culmination of decades of pain, discrimination, and violence. The conflict did not emerge in isolation; rather, it is the result of 75 years of oppression and 50 years of occupation, evolving into a slow process of systematic removal of Palestinians from their lands. Describing the current conflict as a 'war on Hamas' oversimplifies the intricate dynamics at play. Not all Palestinians support Hamas, just as not all Israelis endorse their government's actions. Understanding this complexity is the first step towards fostering a more informed global perspective.

Moreover, in navigating the complexities of this conflict, it becomes evident that a 'justice for all' approach is essential. The 'eye for an eye' mentality, whilst it might provide an instantaneous sense of justice for those who lost their loved ones, does nothing but perpetuate a cycle of violence and injustice. Throughout my life, I have unwaveringly adhered to pacifism. My commitment remained steadfast, even in the face of the tragic loss of close relatives and friends in senseless wars that ultimately brought little security to my region. However, today, what sends shivers down my spine is the unmistakable sense of déjà vu as I bear witness to the suffering of innocent civilians in Gaza. As in the case of the Balkans war, this conflict seemed to be depicted as a military standoff between two seemingly equal adversaries. What the end goal is, is not clear to anyone now. It is undeniable that Hamas has carried out attacks on Israel, resulting in civilian casualties. However, it's crucial to recognise that the situation is far more intricate than it may seem at first glance. The loss of 13,000 lives in Gaza, a substantial number of children, in an act of retribution cannot be justifiably considered self-defence. The displays of power from both sides are conspicuously visible, but what the world often fails to comprehend is the long-term cost and impact on the people from both sides caught in the unrelenting crossfire. Perhaps the most distressing aspect is that those who perished were individuals who had no desire to be part of the horrors of war. Therefore, it is imperative to look beyond military and geopolitical considerations and recognise the human cost of the conflict. Innocent civilians, especially women, children, and the elderly, are reduced to mere statistics—victims in a war they didn't choose. It is crucial to humanise their stories and advocate for their rights, moving beyond the impersonal numbers that often dominate the narrative.

Finally, within the growing right-wing and populist global political context, it is not surprising that toxic masculinities are evident both in the narrative and in the approach towards the resolution of the Israel-Gaza conflict. Recognising the importance of empathy and compassion is crucial in navigating the complexities of the conflict and seeking a more sustainable resolution. The current conflict narrative in Israel and globally seems to promote the idea that displaying compassion or a willingness to seek peaceful solutions is a sign of weakness. As I reflect on the devastating impact of war and its inherent toxic masculinity in my country(ies), I recognise that it not only degraded our humanity and harmed what we thought was a promising democracy but also left scars that will linger for generations.

As the Gaza conflict unfolds, it is essential for us to embrace a nuanced understanding. Fostering empathy and compassion is not a sign of weakness but a path towards lasting peace. Beyond the geopolitical intricacies, it is essential to acknowledge the individual stories, humanise the suffering, and strive for a world where conflicts are resolved through dialogue and understanding rather than perpetuating a cycle of violence.

GUATEMALA

El gigante se puso de pie para preservar la democracia

En mi anterior contribución a Múltiples, titulada *Guatemala: la necesaria pero elusiva alteración del rumbo*, escribí lo siguiente: "Sin muchas ventanas de oportunidad algunas expectativas se construyen ante la posibilidad de que un nuevo gobierno, a ser electo en junio de 2023, consiga durante su mandato de cuatro años alterar el rumbo actual de las cosas."

El 25 de junio de este año, los guatemaltecos votamos para elegir a Diputados, Alcaldes y al binomio presidencial. De manera sorprendente, el segundo lugar de los binomios más votados fue ocupado por los candidatos de un partido político ajeno a la clase política tradicional del país. Cuando ningún binomio obtiene la mayoría absoluta de los votos, la ley electoral guatemalteca prescribe un balotaje entre el primero y el segundo lugar.



Otto Valle

DICIEMBRE 2023

De esa cuenta, el 20 de julio pasado con una abrumadora mayoría fueron electos los integrantes del binomio alternativo. Los resultados contrariaron a grupos poderosos que se benefician del ejercicio político tradicional, quienes reaccionaron con acciones encabezadas por el Ministerio Público para impedir que el binomio electo tome posesión de sus cargos en enero de 2024.

Entre otras manifestaciones de rechazo a las acciones del Ministerio Público resultó notable el llamado de los pueblos originarios y sus autoridades ancestrales para realizar un paro y solicitar la renuncia de la Fiscal General y otros fiscales. El respaldo popular a la convocatoria paralizó la circulación por carreteras durante las primeras dos semanas del mes de octubre. Al mismo tiempo, nutridas marchas y concentraciones tuvieron lugar en la ciudad de Guatemala y otras ciudades del país.

A la fecha, aunque la circulación por carreteras volvió a la normalidad, las marchas y concentraciones continúan exigiendo el respeto a los resultados de la elección. Concluyo recalcando que en esta lucha por preservar las reglas democráticas en Guatemala estamos presenciando la potencia política de un gigante: los pueblos originarios y sus autoridades ancestrales.

MYANMAR

Tin Maung Htwe Myanmar is a prominent human rights advocate and a research fellow at Chiang Mai University. His past work and actual research focus on rights of the Rohingya and social cohesion and governance in Rakhine State, as well as countries hosting Rohingya refugees following the genocide. He is the national consultant for JGG's work related to Myanmar.

Establishing Bottom-Up Federalism in Post-Coup Myanmar

Resistance to the military junta

Since the military coup in February 2021, Myanmar has been under the tight grip of a military junta. This takeover triggered a nationwide resistance movement, now spearheaded by the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and various ethnic armed organizations. Their unified objective is to overthrow the junta's authoritarian rule and replace it with a federal democratic system.¹ To prepare for this federal system ethnic states are re-drafting state level constitutions that consider decentralized government at the local level.

In direct response to the oppressive regime, new local governance structures have surfaced, predominantly led by ethnic organizations in Kachin, Kayah, Chin, Rakhine and other states.² These local governments have become instrumental, especially in regions minimally influenced or overlooked by the junta. They undertake the crucial task of providing essential services including healthcare, education, and assistance to internally displaced people. These efforts do not only cater to the immediate needs of local populations but also represent a form of resistance to the central authoritarian rule. By offering a governance model that is more inclusive and representative of local community interests, these local administrations are laying the groundwork for a bottom-up approach to federalism in Myanmar.

However, the journey is fraught with challenges. These local governing bodies, despite their critical role, are constrained by limited resources and threats from the military, which perceives them as a challenge to its authority. The resilience of these local administrations, amid such adversities, underscores the urgent need for international support and recognition. Such backing would not only empower them to confront the junta's regime more effectively but also sustain their vital services.



Tin Maung Htwe

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Operation 1027: A Catalyst for Change

Operation 1027, launched by the Three Brotherhood Alliance (including the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and the Arakan Army), on October 27, marks a significant turn in the junta's control over Myanmar. To date this operation has resulted in the capture of numerous military bases and key transportation routes and signifies a substantial strategic defeat for the junta. It exemplifies the increasing strength and coordination among ethnic armed groups opposing the military regime, and importantly, it alters the dynamics of the conflict, particularly challenging the junta's control in certain areas, including over a number of cities.³

The junta's weakened control over local administration presents a challenge to its electoral ambitions, as it loses territory and already having lost legitimacy. The disruption in governance and community services due to the conflict, while concerning, also opens avenues for more equitable and stable local governance, potentially leading to greater benefits and stability in the community. Establishing local governance in Myanmar, especially in the post-coup context and Operation 1027, requires a multi-faceted approach. Improving local government service delivery will bolster the legitimacy of both the state and local government institutions but will also encourage local democratic engagement. Meeting the needs of the population and engaging them in participatory planning and accountability mechanisms can also foster legitimacy and trust in a fragile context. Furthermore, the intertwined nature of protection and governance in conflict zones like Myanmar means that improvements in one area can positively influence the other, creating a more stable and secure environment.⁴

The Road Ahead

The emergence of new local governance structures in Myanmar presents a significant opportunity for advancing federal democracy, as envisioned by resistance forces and civil society organizations. These structures, with effective civilian control, offer a robust counterbalance to the post-coup militarization at the local level and embody the principles and aspirations of a federal democratic system. For the international organizations aiming to support populations affected by military conflict, recognizing and supporting resistance governance mechanisms in liberated areas would be a strategic approach to democracy support programming. Furthermore, these local governance bodies, deeply interconnected with civil society, humanitarian organizations, and nonviolent resistance groups, provide a viable and effective channel for delivering humanitarian aid.

In conclusion, Myanmar's post-coup environment is a complex interplay of authoritarian rule by both military and armed groups, widespread resistance, the emergence of local governance, and the strategic shifts brought about by ethnic alliances like Operation 1027. The development of local governance structures is vital for establishing bottom-up federalism, a crucial political system for a democratic and diverse Myanmar.

- 1 "Myanmar Military Junta Vows to Hit Back at Armed Groups' Offensive," France 24, November 3, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20231103-myanmar-military-junta-vows-to-hit-back-at-armed-groups-offensive>.
- 2 Ye Myo Hein, "One Year On: The Momentum of Myanmar's Armed Rebellion," Wilson Center, May 2022, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/ASIA_220519_1YearOn-BRIEF_V1r2.pdf.
- 3 Lucas Myers, "The Myanmar Military Is Facing Death by a Thousand Cuts," War on the Rocks, November 17, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/11/the-myanmar-military-is-facing-death-by-a-thousand-cuts/>.
- 4 Roz Price, "Local Governance in Conflict-Affected Contexts," Institute of Development Studies, November 15, 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c18eba440f0b60bb6e035f0/234_Local_Governance_in_Conflict_Affected_Contexts.pdf.

PERU

¿Qué Pasa Ahora en el Perú?

La grave crisis de gobernabilidad en el Perú se mantiene y agudiza. A un año del fallido autogolpe del ex presidente Pedro Castillo y de la asunción a la jefatura del gobierno de Dina Boluarte, quien fuera elegida primera vicepresidenta en los comicios del año 2022. El país vive un repliegue del movimiento social luego de los estallidos, mayormente del sur, que duraron tres meses y devinieron en brutal respuesta del gobierno con un saldo de casi sesenta asesinatos, centenas de personas heridas y detenidas y un clima de control y persecución persistente y sin garantía de mínimos mecanismos de protección para la población.

Lamentablemente los levantamientos sociales del sur no recibieron eco suficiente en la mayor parte del país, aun cuando es evidente la ilegitimidad tanto del gobierno como del congreso, expresada en las encuestas (90% del país quiere que se vayan todos). El rechazo social, sin embargo, no se expresa en movilizaciones y ha permitido que se cree y fortalezca un pacto político civil y militar dictatorial que controla el parlamento, el gobierno, el ministerio público, parte del poder judicial, el Tribunal Constitucional y hasta la Defensoría del Pueblo, el único espacio mas confiable que le quedaba a la ciudadanía. Con esto el país queda sin mecanismos institucionales formales que garanticen un mínimo de Estado de Derecho. El objetivo mayor de la alianza civil militar es el control de organismos tutelares (electorales, por ejemplo) para perpetuarse en el poder.

A ello hay que añadir la débil presión internacional de los gobiernos aun cuando todos los organismos de derechos humanos han declarado que en el Perú se violan sistemáticamente esos derechos, probando la existencia de ejecuciones extrajudiciales. Los sectores empresariales avalan la situación, porque les facilita condiciones para grandes inversiones. Por otro lado, la fragilidad de las instituciones y organizaciones sociales, así como de sus tradicionales liderazgos es factor clave para explicar la limitada capacidad de respuesta y de movilización social.

Ese panorama fue alterado recientemente por el destape público de corrupción, favoritismo político y negociado de votos por retrainimiento de acusaciones judiciales, que salpican a autoridades de alto nivel.

El nuevo pico de crisis puede ser una oportunidad para intentar que el movimiento social y político proponga medidas que generen algunas condiciones para mirar el futuro con mayor optimismo, como convocar a nuevas elecciones en plazos inmediatos y con garantía de transparencia; que estos procesos tengan mecanismos de negociación con actores nacionales e internacionales más confiables; restringir el poder de las organizaciones políticas convertidas mafiosas; designación de nuevo/a Defensor del Pueblo; restitución de las autoridades del ministerio público encargadas de los juicios de corrupción, y que se garantice la protección de las personas defensoras ambientales, decenas de ellas asesinadas.

Ojalá que con esta nueva espiral de crisis se puedan generar condiciones para construir otro pacto para que el país retome la senda de una propuesta democrática, inclusiva, justa, con renovados liderazgos para las instituciones políticas y sociales.



Carlos Herz Saenz

DICIEMBRE 2023

Consultancies

Gender and Governance in Iraq

A multinational and interdisciplinary JGG team, led by Jim Newkirk, conducted a summative evaluation between October 2022 and June 2023 of four projects related to gender, inclusive governance and women's rights in Iraq. Data was collected with support from the four implementing agencies and their local partners, peer researchers, and Global Affairs Canada. The JGG evaluation team was supported in its field work in various governorates by researchers and staff from Canadian Leaders in International Consulting (CLIC).

Gender Audit Ethiopia

Gender specialist Anamaria Golemac Powell, with support from Kimberly Inksater, provided technical assistance to the Forum of Federations program Strengthening Federal Governance and Pluralism in Ethiopia for a gender audit of the second chamber of Parliament. JGG provided a policy brief to facilitate discussion of the gender audit results.

Desarrollo y gobernanza local en Guatemala

Un equipo de consultores de JGG, liderado por Otto Valle, está realizando la evaluación cualitativa de un programa de desarrollo y gobernanza local implementado en el transcurso de nueve años en 22 municipios del altiplano occidental de Guatemala. Las personas del equipo visitaron dos municipios para observar los impactos en las comunidades. La evaluación analizó el grado de integración y resultados con enfoque en tres grupos priorizados: mujeres, jóvenes y pueblos indígenas.



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