

UNRWA: An Obstacle to Peace that Must Be Replaced

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinians has long been criticized for perpetuating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and inciting violence against Israel.

New Israeli intelligence, which Secretary of State Antony Blinken called “highly, highly credible,” exposes just how deep UNRWA’s ties to terrorism are and confirms that the problems with UNRWA are grave and systemic, not just a matter of a few bad actors.

The United States must institute a plan that ends American funding for UNRWA and urges our allies to do the same. Humanitarian aid to the Palestinians must be delivered through an alternative mechanism that promotes peaceful coexistence with Israel and is not indifferent to terror.

Recent reports highlight UNRWA’s deep ties to terror.

Some of the most recent revelations include:

- At least 12 UNRWA employees, including seven schoolteachers, participated in the October 7 massacre, took Israelis hostage and even used U.N. resources to assist in the attack.
- According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the intel that Israel shared with the U.S. revealed that around 10% of all UNRWA employees in Gaza — 1,200 out of 12,000 — have ties to terror organizations, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Meanwhile, 23% of UNRWA’s male employees have ties to Hamas.
- Around 50% of UNRWA employees in Gaza have close relatives who are members of the terror groups.
- U.N. Watch, a watchdog organization, uncovered a Telegram group of 3,000 UNRWA staffers that celebrated Hamas’ October 7 massacre.
- A released Israeli hostage reported that an UNRWA teacher held him captive in Gaza in inhumane conditions.
- In February, the IDF discovered a Hamas communications center and intelligence hub with rows of computer servers under UNRWA’s headquarters in Gaza, run on electricity drawn from the U.N.’s power supply. As *The Wall Street Journal* reports, “In 2014, part of the parking lot at the UNRWA headquarters in Gaza began sinking, likely from a Hamas tunnel dug beneath. ‘No one talked about what was causing the collapse,’ a former UNRWA official said, ‘but everyone knew.’”



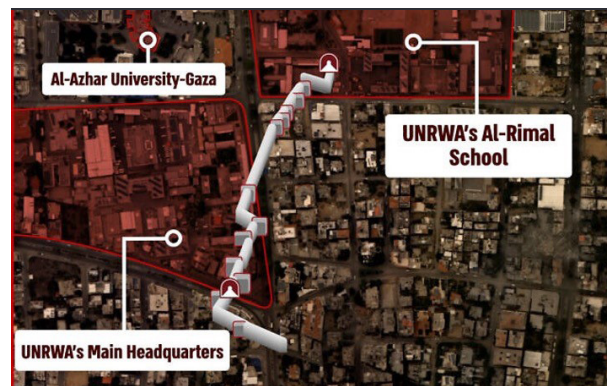
Hamas’ complex located underneath UNRWA’s headquarters in Gaza (Source: Emanuel Fabian/*Times of Israel*, Gaza City, February 8, 2024).

- In mid-February, Israeli security forces confiscated six military drones hidden in UNRWA shipments that entered the West Bank from Jordan through the Allenby Bridge.
- A video from October 7 revealed an UNRWA employee driving into Kibbutz Be'eri and abducting a slain Israeli civilian, carrying him into the back of an SUV. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant identified the UNRWA staffer as a social worker named Faisal Ali Mussalem al-Naami. Gallant also said that 30 other UNRWA workers directly participated in the October 7 massacre.
- On February 21, the IDF arrested eight UNRWA employees with direct ties to Hamas. Israel revealed that 440 UNRWA workers in Gaza are active in the military wing of Hamas. 2,000 are registered Hamas operatives, and thus are actively fighting against the IDF.
- In late February, the IDF uncovered large quantities of Hamas weapons, including RPGs, warheads, grenades, K-47s and ammunition, in an UNRWA school compound in Khan Younis. The school was being used as a shelter for Gazan civilians. Hamas terrorists created a hole in the school wall to access their weaponry and conduct ambushes against IDF soldiers. The IDF also detained around 60 terrorists who were hiding among civilians in this UNRWA facility. Israeli forces also evacuated the civilian population in the UNRWA school to safety.

International action against UNRWA provides key opportunity to reassess strategy.

AIPAC supports the Biden administration's suspension of funding to UNRWA. The U.S. has been the single largest donor to UNRWA for many years, providing around 25% of the agency's overall funding.

The U.S., along with the EU and more than a dozen other countries — including Germany, Sweden, Japan, France, Switzerland, Canada and the U.K. — have now suspended aid to UNRWA pending further investigation.



Hamas' terror tunnels underneath UNRWA facilities in Gaza (Source: IDF).

UNRWA is a major obstacle to achieving a lasting peace.

These new allegations against UNRWA employees are indicative of the deep-seated animosity to Israel and indifference to terror that have always existed within the agency. UNRWA plays a central role in promoting hatred of and conflict with Israel. Below are some of the key ways UNRWA has undermined coexistence with Israel:

- **Glorifying Terror:** UNRWA schools foster anti-Israel and antisemitic hatred through their curriculum and incite violence by glorifying notorious Palestinian terrorists.
- **UNHCR vs. UNRWA** : While the roughly 30 million non-Palestinian refugees around the world are assisted by the U.N. agency for dealing with refugees — the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) — the Palestinians have their own U.N. body dedicated specifically to them. In contrast to UNHCR's goal of helping refugees get on their feet and repatriated into third countries if they cannot return home, UNRWA maintains the Palestinian population's isolation and dependency indefinitely.

- **Unique Standard for “Refugee” Status:** Unlike the standard of any other international organization or any other displaced people, UNRW’s definition of refugees includes all descendants of the original Palestinian refugee population indefinitely — irrespective of whether they have resettled and gained citizenship elsewhere. This ensures that its refugees rolls expand exponentially every year. While the actual number of refugees from 1948 is less than 200,000, UNRW’s count lists over 5.6 million people — including the fourth and fifth generation of the original refugees, two million Jordanian citizens, and millions of Palestinians living in Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank and Gaza. As the number of refugees grows, it becomes more difficult to reach an agreement over their future.
- **Promoting the Myth of a “Return”:** UNRW’s educational curriculums and teachers also perpetuate the myth that all Palestinians enjoy a right to “return” to their original homes in Israel. Realization of such a “right” for generations that have lived elsewhere would pose a threat to Israel’s character as a Jewish democratic state. By instilling this ideal within generations of Palestinians, UNRW undermines peaceful coexistence with Israelis and discourages Palestinian leadership from compromising on a solution with Israel.
- **Dependence vs. Training:** UNRW prioritizes providing direct benefits like food and education while neglecting job training. Most Palestinians in Gaza remain dependent on external funding. Unlike the UNHRC, UNRW’s mandate does not encourage or help Palestinians to become self-sufficient. The primary place that UNRW creates jobs is within the agency itself. Astonishingly, UNRW has around 30,000 employees (including 12,000 in Gaza) to serve Palestinians, while UNHCR has 18,000 employees for the rest of the world. Rather than promoting peace, UNRW’s model inherently stymies the Palestinian independence and institution building necessary for any potential two-state agreement.

The Way Forward: UNRWA Must Be Replaced

These latest intelligence revelations have only confirmed that the problems with UNRW, both in Gaza and beyond, are grave, systemic and beyond repair.

While UNRW provides important humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians — especially during the ongoing war with Hamas in Gaza — it is a morally bankrupt and corrupt organization. All efforts over several decades to reform UNRW have failed.

The United States must institute a plan that ends American funding for UNRW and urges our allies to do the same. Humanitarian aid to the Palestinians must be delivered through an alternative mechanism that promotes peaceful coexistence with Israel and is not indifferent to terror.