

Setting Conditions for the New Policing Force in Gaza

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Key Points

- The reported screening of 5,000 candidates appears focused primarily on Hamas affiliation and direct security risks. This is necessary, but insufficient.
- Moving Palestinians within Gaza, placing them in new uniforms and giving them weapons does not create a fundamentally new force if their understanding of the conflict remains unchanged.
- No candidate should be armed unless he formally accepts Gaza as his permanent home, renounces any claimed 'right of return' to Israel, and commits himself to peaceful coexistence and the permanent end of the conflict.
- For UNRWA-registered candidates, screening must produce a documented administrative transition: relinquishing refugee documentation, requesting removal from UNRWA's lists, and receiving a Gaza-resident identity document.
- If qualified candidates reject these conditions, the standard must not be relaxed. Their refusal would reveal whether a reliable, nonbelligerent force can presently be established.

Introduction

The US-backed Board of Peace (BoP) has reportedly completed the vetting of approximately 5,000 Gazans for the first class of a new Palestinian police force. More than 200,000 people applied.[1] The candidates are expected to undergo training, much of it outside Gaza, although no deployment timetable has yet been announced. Israeli security bodies apparently supplied information during the screening.

Preventing Hamas members from entering the force is indispensable. But

determining that a candidate has no documented organizational connection to Hamas does not establish that he accepts Israel's existence, rejects continued war, or would refuse an order to use his weapon against Israel.

The problem is therefore broader than organizational affiliation. Gaza's armed institutions have repeatedly been shaped by the political culture of the conflict: the belief that the war of 1948 remains unfinished, that Palestinians in Gaza are temporary 'refugees,' and that they or their descendants are entitled to 'return' to sovereign Israel. A police force recruited without addressing these ideas may have a different name and chain of command, but it will not represent a different political future.

Security vetting asks whether a candidate previously belonged to a hostile organization. Strategic vetting must also ask what political purpose he believes his weapon should ultimately serve.

A genuine transition requires candidates to choose between incompatible statuses: perpetual refugees committed to reversing Israel's creation, or permanent residents of Gaza committed to building their future there. A person cannot credibly exercise armed authority in postwar Gaza while continuing to claim that Gaza is merely a temporary station on the road to Israel.

Policy Recommendations

1. Establish an explicit political threshold for armed service

Every candidate should sign – and record on video – a binding declaration stating that:

- Gaza is his only permanent national and political home;
- he possesses and asserts no personal or inherited 'right of return' to Israel;
- he rejects 'from the river to the sea' and any comparable program seeking Israel's elimination;
- he accepts peaceful coexistence with Israel and the permanent conclusion of the conflict; and

- he will neither join nor support any organization advocating or conducting armed action against Israel.

The declaration must remain a condition of recruitment, training, salary, promotion and continued possession of a weapon – not a ceremonial statement.

2. Identify all candidates registered as UNRWA ‘Palestine refugees’

Israel and the BoP should compare the candidate list with available UNRWA-registration data. The review should identify each registered candidate and his immediate family members with refugee status.

3. Require a documented transition from ‘refugee’ to permanent Gaza resident

Before entering armed service, every UNRWA-registered candidate should:

- surrender his UNRWA refugee card to the BoP for cancellation or verified destruction;
- sign a declaration that he no longer considers himself a ‘Palestine refugee’ and will not seek to renew or restore that status;
- submit a written request to UNRWA headquarters asking that he and the members of his family be removed from its refugee-registration system;
- provide proof that UNRWA received the request, even if it has not yet processed it; and
- receive a new BoP Resident document identifying Gaza – not Israel – as his permanent home.

Adult family members should make equivalent declarations.

4. Apply the standard without exceptions

No numerical recruitment target should take precedence over reliability. If only a fraction of the 5,000 candidates accepts these conditions, the force should initially consist only of that fraction. If none accepts them, no Gazan police force should be armed at this stage.

That outcome would reveal that the necessary political transition has not yet occurred. Lowering the standard would merely feed the next confrontation and supply its future participants with weapons, salaries and training.

Conclusion

A new uniform does not create a new political identity. Arming Gazans without first establishing that they accept a future in Gaza - rather than a future achieved through 'return' to Israel - means transferring weapons from one hostile Palestinian formation to another. A verified transition away from perpetual refugeehood and continued conflict must therefore precede the transfer of arms.

The test is not simply whether a candidate belonged to Hamas yesterday. It is whether he has demonstrably chosen a peaceful and permanent future alongside Israel today. Therefore, a verified political transition away from perpetual refugeehood and continued conflict must precede the provision of weapons.

[1]

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/vetting-of-first-5000-cadets-for-gaza-police-force-complete-says-official/>.

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