

Lebanon and the Palestinian Refugee Camps

**From Militarization to State Sovereignty
and Human Security**

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Background

Putting the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon under scrutiny from a pure security and military technical angle could turn to be a thorny task, for the overlapping national, regional and international factors that determine its scope, expansion and the underlying goals behind it, in tandem with its impact on the societal camps management.

Nonetheless, the aim of this analytic paper is not to present a simple descriptive diagnosis for the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon; it rather seeks to present several scenarios to solve this ordeal in a way that guarantees the Lebanese state's right to expand its sovereignty over all its territory, and the Palestinian refugees' right to safety and security under the state umbrella, until their return in accordance with the UN resolutions (194) and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Participants in the National Dialogue held in 2006 were unanimous in their agreement to containing the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon; however, this posture remained a toothless one that did not translate on the ground and nothing has been done to enforce any implementation mechanisms in this regard. Stressing the need to disarm Palestinian factions outside the camps while simultaneously seeking to enforce Lebanon's sovereignty and ensure safety for refugees is noteworthy. In addition, we should not forget the UN resolutions 1559, 1701, 2650 tackling the necessity to put an end to all illegal arms.

This paper will approach the debated matter and confine its scope to exploring a path that guarantees the best relations between the Lebanese and the Palestinian Refugees, relations that enshrine at once Lebanon's sovereignty and the refugees' human rights, as well the Return Diplomacy.

Although the Lebanese parliament has repealed the Cairo Agreement in 1987, the Palestinian refugee camps remain militarized and coexist with a compromised Lebanese sovereignty. Indeed, despite the establishment of an internal paralegal system that enforces security, the refugee camps escape the Lebanese State's control and remain lawless and insecure enclaves where factional disputes and infiltration by non-Palestinian groups often affect the civilian population.

This ambiguous situation was on the one hand caused by the Lebanese State's reluctance to extend its sovereignty, as well as on the other hand by a complex situation in the Palestinian factional structure, despite Palestinian President Mahmoud

Abbas deciding on the option of surrendering under the full state sovereignty while other Palestinian Factions (Hamas, Jihad, Popular Front / General Commander, Fath El Intifada, El Saiikka) are still convinced that these weapons are part of a regional ideological axis led by Iran.

The multiple rounds of clashes in the Ain el-Helweh camp (Southern Lebanon) since **August 2023**, as well as the launching of missiles towards Israel months earlier by unknown Palestinian factions, all brought to light the necessity of placing Palestinian weapons outside and inside the camps again on the national agenda. This is especially needed since militarization has once again proven to be a threat to the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, to the national security of Lebanon, and to the human security of the Lebanese people. It is urgent to understand that what Lebanon is facing in terms of the infringement on its sovereignty is the equation of an illegal weapon that protects corruption, and corruption that legitimizes the illegal weapon. Moreover, "Hezbollah" has begun to embrace armed groups that are classified as "Palestinian," following what is called the philosophy of the "Unity of the Axis of Resistance" with all its contradictions and commonalities from Iran to Lebanon. This is a dangerous path for the Lebanese State, especially as its struggle to restore sovereignty completely must continue. In addition, there is a necessity to continuing to restore the Lebanese-Palestinian memory adhering to the equation of "Dignity for refugees under State Sovereignty until the Return."

It is necessary to understand the dilemmas this ambiguous situation creates in order to develop a road map for better governance of the Palestinian refugee camps, taking into account not only considerations related to Lebanese sovereignty, but also the need for a well-enforced social management, which is currently undertaken by the popular committees, as well as the relief and development intervention in the camps that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) as well as various local, regional and international civil society bodies conduct. All of these deliberations should be done in a scientific and quiet manner without demagogic and populism.



General Introduction

Only five years after its independence (**1943**), Lebanon had to deal with the Palestinian *Nakbah* (1948) and the establishment of the state of Israel. **100.000** Palestinians fled to Lebanon where they were hosted in slum-like camps in the country-back-then five governorates: the South, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, the North and the Beqaa Valley. Other Palestinians took refuge in Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, before spreading into host countries in the Middle East, the Arab World and the international community. The newly-established Lebanese Republic was still engulfed in the process of post-colonial state building and institutional engineering, therefore unfit to cope with the challenge and impact of the Palestinian displacement; the living conditions in refugee camps were deplorable. However, the UNRWA played a tremendous role in ensuring basic needs for the first wave of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. At the time, the Lebanese population welcomed the refugees with open arms displaying an exemplary generosity and solidarity and championing their just cause. The first post-independence President Bechara al-Khoury welcomed them in Tyr saying: "Enter your country, Lebanon." In addition, the minutes of the Lebanese Parliament session held in **12 May, 1948**, cited Hamid Frangieh, who was at the time Minister of foreign affairs saying: "Lebanon will receive the Palestinian refugees however many and for as long as they stay, while responding to all their needs and preserving their dignity; we will not tolerate any violation to their dignity as it will be considered as a violation to our dignity." What affects us affects them, and we will be sharing with each other until the last piece of bread". No one expected that their stay would extend until today, despite the adoption of **Resolution 194 of December 11th, 1948** by the United Nations General Assembly, confirming their right of return and right for compensation.

The number of Palestinian refugees registered at the Directorate of Political Affairs and Refugees (DPAR) of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities in Lebanon, has increased from the initial **100,000** to reach a staggering **430,000**. However, as per a study carried out in **2018** by the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee, the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Palestinian Statistics Authority, the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon amounted to

175.000 persons, with many living in the country's 12 refugee camps. There were 15 camps initially; three were destroyed during the Lebanese civil war or due to Israeli bombardment: al-Nabatieh, Tel al-Zaatar and Jisr al-Basha. The remaining 12 camps are geographically distributed as follow: four in and near Beirut (Burj al-Barajneh, Shatila, Dbayeh, and Mar Elias), two in North Lebanon (Beddawi and Nahr al-Bared), five in South Lebanon (Burj Shemali, al-Bass, Rashidiyah, Ein el-Helweh and Mieh Mieh) and one in the Beqaa Valley (al-Jalil). There are six more informal Palestinian camps: al-Maashouq, Shabreha, al-Qasmieh, Abu al-Aswad (near Tyr city in South Lebanon) and Adloun (south of Sidon city in South Lebanon) and Shheem (Chouf district). The south of Lebanon also hosts several Palestinian communities: Jel al-Bahr, al-Burghalieh, al-Wasta, al Aitanieh and Kfarbda (near Tyr city in the South of Lebanon), al-Fawwar project Dakour, al-Fawwar project Abu Tablah, Taameer, al-Hara area, Old Sidon, al-Hamshari hospital area, behind the officers club, Villas road, the suburb of Haret Sidon (North side), Dalaa street, Mieh Mieh area (near Sidon city and its surroundings in the South of Lebanon).

The UNRWA provides the camps' dwellers humanitarian, educational and health care services. As per the Lebanese State, in addition to the DPAR whose mandate is currently restricted to registering refugees and issuing a refugee card, an inter-ministerial government body was formed in **November 2005** by the Lebanese Council of Ministers, "The Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee" (LPDC). Its mission is (Supposed to) ensure coordination among all concerned ministries and develop the policies of the Lebanese government designed to deal with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon at all levels: Political, Legal, security, and diplomatically, in coordination with the UNRWA and the State of Palestine embassy in Beirut, along with all stakeholders among the Palestinian various factions.



Lebanon and the Palestinian Armed Militant Action: Historical View

It all began in **1967** with Israel's capturing of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights. The Arab defeat or *el-Naksa* has bolstered the Palestinian guerrilla groups embracing the ideology of armed struggle and they established permanent bases for the Palestinian *Fedayeen* (militants) in South Lebanon bordering occupied Palestine, in order to mount cross-border and inside attacks against Israel. The Lebanese state tried to quell the Fedayeen's violation to the country's sovereignty, but this effort collided with the formation of a Lebanese leftist alliance in support for the Palestinian resistance.

This status quo fostered a volatile arrangement brokered by then Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser following a meeting held in Cairo on **November 3rd, 1969**, gathering a Lebanese delegation headed by Commander of the Lebanese Army, General Emile Bustani, and a delegation representing the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) headed by Yasser Arafat, with the attendance of Egyptians Minister of Foreign Affairs, Riad Mahmoud and Minister of War, General Mohamed Fawzi.

The Cairo Agreement was born granting legitimacy to the Fedayeen's militarism in Lebanon and ceding jurisdiction over Palestinian refugee camps in the country to the PLO, further eroding Lebanese sovereignty, independence and security. The foothold that was granted to the Palestinians in Lebanon deepened the rift between Lebanese, dividing them into two opponent camps: the first saw normalcy in the coexistence between the "State" and the "Revolution", and the second was aware that such coexistence would be detrimental to both Lebanon's power-sharing system and the Palestinian cause. Ambiguity, tensions and compromises continued to rein the Palestinian-Lebanese relations until **1975** when things burst forth with the outbreak of hostilities between the Palestinians and some Lebanese parties. Discordance between Lebanese emerged with the birth of a pro-Palestinian resistance, "the National Movement", and an anti-Palestinian resistance right-wing "the Lebanese Front", which viewed the Palestinian resistance as a violation to Lebanon's sovereignty.

The Cairo Agreement has allowed the Palestinian armed factions to practically take over the management of the camps, granting the Palestinian refugees a relative-freedom of movement, work and travel. With the support of Lebanese leftist parties, intensive arming and training operations begun, coupled with the establishment of intelligence networks to support the guerrilla militarism and a series of welfare institutions intended to provide refugees with social, healthcare, cultural and financial services. Lebanon witnessed bloody confrontations and both Lebanese and Palestinian sides were at fault; the Syrian-Israeli common goal to liquidate both PLO and Lebanese leftist parties' leaders exasperated the already tensed situation.

In **1982**, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon succeeded in driving thousands of the PLO fighters out of southern Lebanon and West Beirut to northern Lebanon and they resettled in the city of Tripoli namely, until they were once again forced to leave the country following a one-month fighting with the pro-Syria Palestinian factions, specially Fatah al-Intifada. The so-called war of camps that started in Tripoli spilled over to Beirut's camps and those in the South, as the Syrian-backed Amal Movement and Palestinian pro-Arafat factions vied for control. This war lasted for three years and saw the outbreak of several inter-factional and Palestinian-Lebanese conflicts that have swept the camps and the country alike.

The year **1988** has witnessed inter-Palestinian clashes in the Beirut's camps between pro-Arafat Fatah and those who have defected its ranks. These clashes reflected security chaos and a steady militias' call up, and have engendered lamentable socio-economic consequences and left a bitter impression among the Lebanese, driving them to consider Palestinian refugee camps as outlawed terrorist outposts and a fertile ground for the spread of extremism. In **1987**, the Lebanese Parliament repealed the Cairo Agreement.

In **1989**, the Taëf Agreement was signed and clearly stated the refusal to settle Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and declared the need to put an end for all the illegal arms. In **1991**, the peace process began in Madrid and resulted in the signing of the Oslo Agreement between Israel and the PLO in **1993**. During this phase, the Lebanese state attempted to extend its sovereignty over all its territory, but the continuation of the Israeli occupation and the Syrian tutelage over Lebanon as well as the Iranian new influence intervening in Lebanon and in the Region, kept the issue of the Palestinian arms as a bargaining chip and a means for intimidation.



Lebanon and the Palestinian Arms: Founding Milestones

1. Abrogation of the Cairo Agreement

On **June 15, 1987**, the Lebanese Parliament passed the law No. 25 signed by the President of the Republic Amin Gemayel and acting Prime Minister Selim el-Hoss, revoking a law passed on **June 14, 1983**, authorizing the Lebanese government to sign an agreement reached with Israel on **May 17, 1983**; the Cairo Agreement and its security arrangement annexes were abrogated during the same parliamentary session. Nonetheless, the law was not fully implemented with the failure of removing the Palestinian arms from the camps and beyond and handing it to the Lebanese authorities, as evidenced by the subsequent use of these arms in several confrontations. The **May 17** process was eliminated too.

2. The Taëf Agreement during the Syrian occupation era

In 1989, following the signing of the Taëf Agreement, attempts were made to redress the Lebanese-Palestinian relations and address the issue of Palestinian weapons, but they were foiled by three obstacles: the emerging Palestinian rift between the PLO and Hamas, the Syrian tutelage over Lebanon and the rise of Hezbollah controlled by Iran, as well Hamas in Palestine. Nevertheless, two agreements were reached, the first stipulated that the Palestinian factions would hand over their medium and heavy arms to the Lebanese Army, with the right of bearing light arms on condition to remain inside the camps; the second entrusted the Palestinian factions to control the security in the camps in coordination with the Lebanese state.

While the process of disarming the Palestinian factions took its way to implementation, though not in a complete way inside the camps, it has excluded the Palestinian factions outside the camps associated with the Syrian regime in close collaboration with Iran through Hezbollah, in terms of removing their arms be it light, medium or heavy. In this regard, due consideration should be given to Syria's input concerning the Palestinian military presence in Lebanon. In fact, Syria has shown biases in

dealing with this ordeal distinguishing between "opponents" and "allies" among the Palestinian factions, and its stance over the disarming issue was not driven by Lebanon's quest to extend the state sovereignty over its entire territory. This has given a structural blow to the Taëf agreement as it stands in contradiction with its provision stipulating the disarming of all local and foreign warring parties. These pro-Syria Palestinian factions embraced the "rejection" and "resistance" war cry, notwithstanding that from a military standpoint their bases' geographical location in Lebanon did not grant them any effectiveness in the military struggle against Israel.

3. Mission of the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (since 2005)

More than 22 years after the resolution **425** was passed, Israel withdrew its troops from southern Lebanon in **2000**; meanwhile, Hezbollah single-handedly took over the resistance against Israel, a mission previously assumed by the leftist National Movement. In **2005**, the Syrian army followed suit and withdrew from Lebanon. In **November 2005**, an inter-ministerial government body called "The Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee" (LPDC) was formed by the Lebanese Council of Ministers' decision **89/2005**; the LPDC's initial mandate was four-fold:

- "To address socio-economic, legal and security issues related to the Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, in collaboration with UNRWA;
- To develop a mechanism that puts an end to the Palestinian armed presence outside the camps;
- To put a mechanism that controls and regulates arms inside the Palestinian camps;
- To examine the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Palestine".

The LPDC hardly realized any meaningful achievement in what pertains to its second and third task, especially with the wave of systematic political assassinations that has struck the country in **2005** along with the occurrence of several security

breaches. In **July 2006**, a devastating war broke out between Israel and Hezbollah triggering rift among Lebanese, to be followed in **May 2007** by the Nahr al-Bared battle when fighting erupted between the Islamist terrorist organization Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). This battle, which ended with Lebanon declaring political and military victory with the complete blessing of the Palestinian legitimate authority, raised once again the issue of the Palestinian arms, though the targeted Islamist organization had no ties with the camp's residents.

4. The National Dialogue Committee Decisions

After nine sessions which took place between **March 2nd** and **November 24th, 2006** and in an attempt to break the internal stalemate that followed the assassination of former PM Rafic Hariri, the decisions of the dialogue roundtable included a section addressing the Palestinian issue, praising the establishment of the LPDC. It said:

- "In keeping with the section of the Charter of National Accord (the Taef Agreement) entitled "Reinstating the sovereignty of the Lebanese State over the entire Lebanese Territories" and in compliance with the contents thereof, affirming the need for Palestinians to respect the authority of the State and to comply with its laws, and rejecting resettlement and supporting the right of return for Palestinians, the conferees agreed on the following:
- "To urge the Lebanese government to follow up on its efforts to deal with quality-of-life, social and humanitarian issues with regard to Palestinians living both inside and outside refugee camps in Lebanon, with all the legal facilitation and concrete follow-up on the part of the international community that this entails, and to shoulder its responsibility to ensure a decent and honorable life for Palestinians until such time as they return to their homes.
- Based on the decision of the council of ministers with respect to the issue of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and in compliance therewith, to disarm Palestinians outside the camps within a six-month period and to deal with the problem of arms inside the camps, while stressing the responsibility and commitment of the Lebanese state to protect the Palestinian camps from any aggression, the conferees committed to concrete action to implement the above and support the government's efforts to do so through means of dialogue.
- The statement in the Preamble to the Constitution stating that there shall be "no fragmentation, no partition and no resettlement" will be regarded as part of the pact of communal existence, about which paragraph (j) of the Preamble to the Constitution states that "any authority that contradicts it has no constitutional legitimacy".

The conferees seemed to agree on addressing the Palestinian arms ordeal inside and outside the camps. In response to this accord, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Ahmed Jibril, voiced his readiness to put

arms as part of a broader *quid pro quo* whereby the refugee community will be accorded full human rights, to retract afterwards linking the disarmament to the return. However, in his statements, the Ambassador of the State of Palestine in Lebanon, Abbas Zaki, reiterated the Palestinian authority president Mahmoud Abbas' stance stressing that Palestinians are in no need of weapons whether inside or outside the camps, stressing that the upper hand should be for the Lebanese state. This standpoint was recapped in the Declaration of Palestine in Lebanon **(2008)**.

5. Nahr el-Bared refugee camp under the Sovereignty of the Lebanese State

The Lebanese government's official decision to place the Nahr el-Bared camp under the sovereignty of the Lebanese state after the end of the four-month fighting between the Lebanese army and a group of terrorists (**May-September 2007**) was a decisive indication that ensuring self-security inside the camp is no longer acceptable, which was proven to be volatile and subject to exploitation. This decision was very bold and signaled Lebanon's confidence in its vision of state-building as it went beyond the decisions of the National Dialogue Committee **(2006)**, stipulating the urgency to "end the presence of Palestinian arms outside the camps" and to "control and organize these arms inside the camps". This decision and the follow-up mechanisms for the establishment of a sovereign security system for Palestinian refugees in the camp, and in cooperation with them, may serve as a model to be implemented in the rest of the camps. This model requires further elaboration, and the LPDC has made a substantial contribution in this regard. The tables below reflect examples of the positions of the Lebanese State, political parties and Palestinian factions regarding Palestinian Arms.



6. Examples of the Lebanese State, parties, and Palestinian factions' stances on Palestinian arms in Lebanon

The Palestinian Arms in Lebanon	
Lebanese State Stance	
The Lebanese State	<p>"The State cannot tolerate any act whose purpose is to destabilize peace and order. It will not accept under any circumstances, that men are exploited as cannon fodder of terrorism or that we advance the sacredness of the Palestinian cause as an excuse to instigate unrest, as some have done a year ago, when they attacked the Lebanese army. Let us join our efforts to remedy the effects of what happened, to heal the wounds and continue the reconstruction. The pain has broken us. We can only rely on hope. The gun will be pointed out only against the enemy and we will never allow it to be headed in another direction. Lebanon clings to the Arab initiative, launched in Beirut at the Arab summit of 2002". (President Michel Sleiman swearing-in speech, May 2008)</p>
	<p>"Based on the decision of the council of ministers with respect to the issue of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and in compliance therewith, to disarm Palestinians outside the camps within a six-month period and to deal with the problem of arms inside the camps, while stressing the responsibility and commitment of the Lebanese state to protect the Palestinian camps from any aggression, the conferees committed to concrete action to implement the above and support the government's efforts to do so through means of dialogue."</p>
	<p>"Proceed with the implementation of the National Dialogue Conference decisions especially in what pertains to addressing the Palestinian arms outside the camps while providing appropriate conditions to do so."</p> <p>(From the statement issued following the National Dialogue Committee session held in January 2009)</p>
	<p>"Based on the National Accord Document that was announced in Taef, especially its clause stipulating the necessity to reinstate the sovereignty of the Lebanese state over the entire Lebanese territories and affirming the need for Palestinians to respect the authority of the State and to comply with its laws, and in accordance with the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference, the government will work towards ending the presence of arms outside the camps and addressing the issue of security and weapons inside the camps, emphasizing its responsibility and engagement to protect the Palestinian refugee camps from any aggression. The Lebanese government shall join forces with the representatives of different Palestinian factions and Arab stakeholders to reach the required solutions, while ensuring the security of both Palestinians and Lebanese".</p> <p>(Cabinet Policy Statement, August 2008)</p>
	<p>"Weapons inside the camps: "From the beginning, we stressed the need to supervise and regulate the proliferation of arms inside the camps in keeping with the Lebanese sovereignty; delay in doing so does not mean acknowledging the arms' legitimacy. When the situation in the country subsides, the Lebanese accord is achieved and the institutions return to work, we will resume the debate over the Palestinian arms in a way that leverages the Lebanese sovereignty. I don't believe there is a country in the world that accepts the current status quo, especially with the lack of any rational behind bearing arms; it is useless. As for the arms outside the camps, they must be removed; we are adamant about this issue". (Ambassador Khalil Makkawi, head of LPDC, September, 2007)</p>

The Palestinian Arms in Lebanon

Examples of the Lebanese Political Parties' Stances	
Al-Mustaqlal Movement	"The Palestinian arms should be subject to the sovereignty and laws of the Lebanese state in accordance with the national security requirements as defined by the Lebanese legitimate authorities".
The Progressive Socialist Party	"There is a need to address the Palestinian arms outside the camps in accordance with the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference".
The Lebanese Forces Party	"There is a need to address the ordeal of the Palestinian arms inside the camps and beyond, in accordance with the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference, 2006".
The Kataeb Party	<p>"The Palestinian bases outside the camps are lawless enclaves that should be under the state authority".</p> <p>"Declaring the Palestinian refugee camps as populated areas only subjected to the authority and protection of the Lebanese military forces; the Lebanese Army should have checkpoints inside all the Palestinian camps, so that these areas stop being no-law zones and spaces of exception. The presence of the army inside the camps also negates the argument that the Palestinians must retain their weapons for self-protection. The army is the sole guarantor and protector of all those who are present on the Lebanese territory".</p> <p>"Emphasize the principle of the Lebanese State's full reached sovereignty over all its territory and the need to disarm Palestinians inside and outside the camps".</p>
Amal Movement	"There is no need for Palestinian arms outside the camps; however, it is through dialogue that it should be removed. As for the arms inside the camps, it should be regulated".
Hezbollah	Dealing with the Palestinian arms from a sole security angle is refused. For Hezbollah, "it is through dialogue with the different Palestinian factions" that the ordeal of the arms outside the camps should be addressed, as for the arms inside the camps it is linked to "the refugees' right of return to their homeland".
The National Free Movement	<p>"Handling the issue of removing arms outside the camps and restoring security within them should be carried out within the framework of a serious, responsible and most-needed dialogue between the Lebanese government and the Palestinians, leading to the extension of the state's authority and laws over all Lebanese territories".</p> <p>"Remove the Palestinian arms inside and outside the camps and ensure the right of return for Palestinian refugees living in misery"; it called on the West "to facilitate their resettlement in some Arab countries as a preliminary step for their return to their usurped land".</p>

(Statements and electoral programs of the Lebanese parties / (2009)

The Palestinian Arms in Lebanon

The PLO, Hamas, and other Palestinian factions' stances

PLO	<p>"What the Lebanese have agreed upon during the National Dialogue Conference i.e. the removal of arms outside the camps and their regulation within them, should serve as a cornerstone for the Palestinian-Lebanese dialogue".</p> <p>"We declare that the Palestinian arms in Lebanon should be subjected to the sovereignty and laws of the Lebanese State in keeping with the requirements of the Lebanese national security, as outlined by the legitimate authorities. In this regard, we declare our full and immediate readiness to reach an understanding with the Lebanese government on the basis that the security of the Palestinian people in Lebanon is part of the security of the Lebanese citizens. In this context, the Palestinian position over the outcome of the Lebanese Dialogue Conference is a clear indication of the veracity of our words and our good intentions".</p> <p>(“Declaration of Palestine in Lebanon”, 2008)</p>
Hamas	<p>"Discussing the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon in all its aspects could be done through a Lebanese-Palestinian understanding within the context of a broader political framework. I believe that any dialogue with our brothers the Lebanese should start with acknowledging that we are both keen to preserve the same interests; therefor these accords will not come at our expenses but would instead favor our common interests".</p> <p>(Interview with Ousama Hamdan, The Palestinian Information Center, 10/11/2005)</p>
Other Palestinian factions	<p>"We recognize that arms without a political goal could be used as means to further political agendas unrelated to our cause, as we recognize that arms in a hostile environment and negative atmosphere could not lead but to an undesirable detrimental end".</p> <p>(The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, 2007)</p> <p>"Some Lebanese do not raise the issue of the Palestinian arms unless the issue of human rights is raised, in attempt to falsely portray the refugee camps, any exception could be seen in all Lebanese regions. That means, the individual Palestinian arm is no longer as in the past in terms of function and performance, and the real description that portrays the conditions inside the camps is that of islands of misery and deprivation".</p> <p>(Democratic Front, 2008)</p> <p>"We deeply support a strong and resistant Lebanon where security and stability prevail; we are not a state within a state".</p> <p>(Fatah al-Intifada)</p>



Deductive Analysis of Various Stances over the Palestinian Military Presence in Lebanon

The comparative table shows that the Lebanese side has emphasized two concepts, the "Sovereignty" and "Under the rule of law"; however, it should be noted that the different Lebanese parties do not share the same understanding of both concepts and they have failed to outline the proper procedure to follow in order to enforce them on the ground. What is common between the stance of Hezbollah and that of the various Palestinian factions is the correlation they have established between the disarmament inside the camps and the right of return. What is also evident is the link that some Palestinian factions and the Palestinian refugees in general, have unconsciously established between acquiring social and economic rights and laying down arms. They consider their arms as a bargaining chip in a broader *quid pro quo*: "Give us our rights we surrender our arms".

Obviously, a dialogue among stakeholders to assess whether these correlations are accurate or erroneous is imperative, along with outlining the proper channels of communication and practical mechanisms to address them, upholding in the one hand Lebanon's sovereignty and the rule of law and on the other the need to ensure decent life conditions for refugees. The main obstacle that prevents establishing such mechanisms lies in the ideological disagreement between two main Lebanese and Palestinian trends, the first embraces the military struggle to solve the Arab Israeli conflict, while the other rather binds to the Arab and International legitimacies.

Recalling both official and partisan Lebanese and Palestinian positions over the removal of Palestinian arms, including that of the Lebanese state and that of the Palestinian state

represented by its president Mahmoud Abbas and its embassy in Beirut, fundamentally aims to showcase the existence of a Lebanese-Palestinian accord over this issue, except for a structural disparity illustrated by Hezbollah's stance. This accord emphasizes the need to put an end to the Palestinian military presence inside and outside the camps as it violates Lebanon's sovereignty. Nonetheless, this recognition sprouted since 2006, failed to yield any practical mechanisms ought to harvest tangible results on the ground. What are the main obstacles that have thwarted such endeavor and what are the features of the proper road map that may allow the transition from the status of security and militarization inside the Palestinian refugee camps to that of sovereignty and safety?

It is imperative firstly to understand that such a transition presents two fundamental challenges, the first of which is closely related to the political choice of the Lebanese state, and the other, is closely related to the communal management model of the Palestinian refugee community. The document entitled "A Unified Lebanese Vision for the Palestinian Refugees Affairs in Lebanon" developed after two years of hard work by the Lebanese Working Group on Palestinian Refugees Affairs established within the framework of the LPDC attached to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, stressed the mighty need for addressing these two challenges i.e. "security" and "camps management".

1. Camps Security

The document said: "The Working Group believes that the articles of the National Accord document and the decisions of the National Dialogue Committee of **2006**, constitute the main framework for dealing with the sovereignty and security aspects in issues related to the camps and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, starting with Lebanon's indisputable right of extending its sovereignty over all its territory, without any exception, and its exclusive right to use weapons. The Working Group reiterates the decisions taken at the National Dialogue Conference held in **2006** in this regard, which provide for "disarming Palestinians outside the camps within a six-month period and addressing the issue of weapons inside

the camps, while stressing the responsibility and commitment of the Lebanese state to protect the Palestinian camps from any aggression. The conferees committed to work hard to implement the above and support the government's efforts in doing so through means of dialogue. The Working Group believes that over two and a half decades after the end of the Lebanese war, the abrogation by the Parliament of the Cairo Agreement, the signing of the Taëf Agreement, in addition to the overall national and regional developments and the progress made in the relationship between the Lebanese state and the state of Palestine, the government ought to re-evoke the decisions of the National Dialogue Conference in order to provide the necessary grounds for their implementation and to find a favorable political context while giving priority to the Lebanese national interests".

"The Working Groups stresses the need to consolidate and humanize security procedures around the camps and at their entrances according to objective and specific criteria, and to unify the Lebanese reference authority in this domain".

2. Camps Governance

"The Working Group believes that the current chaotic situation in the camps, starting from the overlapping of formal defined territory and informal territory which expanded with demographic growth, to the internal management of the camps and the relationship between the camps and their surroundings, is the product of a cumulative path and a de facto way of running things in the absence of a consistent and stable strategy.

Following the reconstruction of Nahr El-Bared camp, and despite the heavy price paid by both the camp and Lebanon, relatively favorable conditions were available to introduce a new model of camp management, reinforced by a positive and healthy approach adopted by all the concerned parties. The Lebanese state took the entire responsibility of rebuilding the camp, based on a systematic plan and with the participation of the camp residents. The Lebanese vision expressed in the Vienna donor conference **(2008)** included new ideas for expropriation, urban planning, the extension of the state sovereignty, and bringing back camp residents to their homes in a systematic and gradual manner. This experience ought to be pursued until its end, and to serve as an example for developing alternative ways to manage the camps.

The Working Group believes that the state's role in camp management should not be limited to the security aspect, which is the case currently, but must also include political matters, access to services and human rights issues, and thus take care of all those residing on its territory according to the principle of state sovereignty on its territory and citizens.

The existence of representative committees in the camps would help improve their management, especially in what pertains to the living issues, and facilitate interaction between the refugees, public service administrations and surrounding municipalities.

The state must manage the camps in cooperation with the UNRWA, the international agency responsible for the provision of services, and with the committees representing camps residents and authorities.

The assessment of camp management and the collaboration between popular committees and various public administrations, service institutions and municipalities, show the need to work in this direction, in addition to taking the following procedural steps:

- a. Identifying the drawbacks resulting from the multiplicity of authorities and channels of communication regarding the camp situation;
- b. Unifying the Lebanese and Palestinian administrative authorities and organizing their collaboration based on sound principles".

The above recounted literature over the camps' security and management remained mere ink on paper for several hidden agendas. This underlines the need for in-depth look into the required operational and executive mechanisms, especially in what relates to extending the state sovereignty over all the Lebanese territory as the societal management of the camps entails communication dynamics among the factions, the civil society organizations and the UNRWA, within the framework of respecting the Palestinian identity on the one hand and leveraging the rule of law on the other hand.



Palestinian Weapons and State Sovereignty; Which practical steps?

The clashes that broke out in Ain El Helweh Camp (**September 2023**) and in Mieh Mieh Camp (**October 2018**), highlighted once again the need to eradicate all lawless zones that transgress the country's sovereignty, with the aim of reintegrating them under the state umbrella, solely responsible for ensuring security and safety for all those who reside in Lebanon including the Palestinian refugees.

While acknowledging the essential difference between arms held by the Palestinian factions that fall under the PLO's prerogatives, and arms held by the Palestinian military organizations associated with regional agendas, it remains primordial for Lebanon to regain its sovereignty over all areas in the country where both arms are present. This should also entail the need for Lebanese stakeholders to reach consensus over a defense strategy that restores the country's sovereignty violated by Hezbollah's arms and its status as a rogue entity outside the State. However, in this pivotal stage of Lebanon's contemporary history, it seems that the Lebanese officials are focusing on resolving the country's socio-economic ordeals while neglecting all other issues that violate its sovereignty. Truth be said, a solid economy is a crucial factor in reinstating Lebanon's sovereignty, nonetheless it will not be fully restored without bold political decisions that eradicate all lawless manifestations and strongholds. Security and safety cannot be re-established but through a clear and unified vision which includes the development of a comprehensive national security strategy.

Based on the aforementioned, what could pave the way to a serious dialogue over the long-overdue defense strategy is the extension of the state's sovereignty over the Palestinian camps and put an end to the Palestinian armed presence inside and outside these camps. The experience of Nahr al-Bared offered

a conceptual and practical framework to achieve this goal as it currently stands as a living witness to the restoration of the state's compromised sovereignty. Referring to Nahr al-Bared experience is not a call to adopt the military confrontation in other camps; it is rather a wake-up call to protect both refugees and Lebanese from similar catastrophic experiences, by implementing these principles and practical mechanisms in the other camps without resorting to force.

Hereafter, the paper proposes a set of practical steps to remove the Palestinian arms inside and outside the camps.

1. The Palestinian arms outside the camps

A. Dismantling the structure that is trying to legitimize these arms

- i. There is no correlation between the Palestinian arms and the rejection of settlement; the Lebanese government ought to develop a comprehensive diplomatic strategy based on the Arabic and international stances supporting the country's rejection for settlement.
- ii. There is no correlation between the Palestinian arms and the refugees gaining their socio-economic rights; the Lebanese government should work towards increasing the funding of the UNRWA to enhance its ability to provide services. In fact, since **2006**, the Lebanese government has supported the project launched by the international agency to improve the precarious conditions of the camps. Any legislative development in this regard should ensure a scientific and transparent law making process, as well as guarantee that laws are in keeping with the Lebanese Constitution. A trade-off between rights and sovereignty is unacceptable.

- iii. The militarized Palestinian presence in Lebanon is not anymore related to the armed struggle against Israel nor should it be considered as a crucial component of the long-awaited defense strategy or related to the controversial formula of "the army, the people and the resistance; by mere virtue of the fact that the geographic expansion of the Palestinian arms in Lebanon makes it inefficient in the struggle against Israel and therefore illegitimate.
- iv. There is no correlation between the Palestinian arms and defending the Palestinian refugees or their demands, bearing in mind that the legitimate Palestinian authority is not anymore shielding the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon.

B. Practical steps

- i. To send an official letter to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas informing him of the decision to put an end to the Palestinian military presence outside the camps, in keeping with the principle of state sovereignty, the abrogation of the Cairo Agreement (resolution 25-1987), the Taef Agreement and the decisions taken by the National Dialogue Committee (the letter is to be send through diplomatic channels in order to reiterate that Lebanese-Palestinian relation is confined to that between the two legitimate states).
- ii. The Lebanese Council of Ministers ought to take the decision of establishing a political-military committee under the umbrella of the Lebanese-Palestinian Committee, tasked with developing a disarmament road map with a specific timetable to achieve this endeavor.
- iii. Briefing the Supreme Council of Defense on this decision with instruction to request from the Lebanese Army Command to develop an implementation mechanism to be executed according to a specified timeframe. Palestinian stakeholders should also be acquainted with this decision.

C. Precautions

- i. The Lebanese State should be solely responsible for handling the disarmament issue; any attempt to diversify the decision makers should be thwarted.
- ii. While emphasizing the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Lebanon, it is primordial to coordinate with the legitimate Palestinian Authority on the disarmament decision and its implementation, with the goal of strengthening the legitimacy rational.
- iii. Stressing that the removal of the Palestinian arms outside the camps does not means transferring these arms to the camps.
- iv. Emphasizing that the decision to disarm the Palestinians in Lebanon is par excellence an irrevocable and non-negotiable political and sovereign one, with the Lebanese Army tasked to enforce it through a well-supported plan of action.

2. Palestinian arms inside the camps

A. Dismantling the structure that is trying to legitimize these arms

The above-mentioned arguments i.e. the rejection of settlement, the rejection of the correlation between disarmament and gaining socio-economic rights, ensuring the safety of the Palestinian refugees and the need to develop a defense strategy, apply to the Palestinian arms inside the camps, along with rejecting all hypotheses that try to portray these arms as:

- An asset to ensure a power balance against other armed presence;
- A reserve that can be used against other armed presence;
- An element in a unified armed axis.

No one gives credit to these hypotheses, and the experience of Nahr el-Bared has proven that the Lebanese legitimate authorities are unified, and that the Palestinian refugees had taken part in eradicating terrorism from the camp by acknowledging the Lebanese unified stance in countering terrorism.

B. The experience of Nahr el-Bared

Between the decisions of the National Dialogue Committee in **2006** pertaining to controlling and organizing the Palestinian arms, and what the Doha Agreement (**2008**) stipulated in this regard, the country went through the Nahr el-Bared battle. After ousting terrorists from the camp, the Lebanese state restored its sovereignty over the camp installing a model police station. In **2008**, the concept of "human security" emerged with the aim of expanding the Nahr el-Bared experience to other camps.

The Lebanese government has than claimed that Nahr el-Bared camp would be a model for expanding the sovereignty of the state and preserving the dignity of the refugees until their return. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas supported this approach when he repeatedly stressed that the Palestinian refugees are under the sovereignty of the state and that there is no need for Palestinian arms inside or outside the camps.

Based on the forgoing, disarming Palestinians inside the camps should be done gradually with the aims of handing over their full arsenal to the Lebanese state.

C. Practical steps

- i. To send an official letter to the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas through diplomatic channels.
- ii. Requesting from all Palestinian factions to assemble their

arms within a unified framework.

- iii. To develop a timetabled mechanism for the surrender of arms through a Lebanese political - military committee and in coordination with the Palestinian side.
- iv. Briefing the Supreme Council of Defense on the Cabinet of Ministers decision with instruction to request from the Lebanese Army Command to develop an implementation mechanism.
- v. Developing a plan for the deployment of the Internal Security Force inside the camps.
- vi. Developing a comprehensive strategy to expand the state sovereignty over all camps, in order to ensure the safety of both refugees and Lebanese.

The implementation of the above outlined practical steps is not impossible as they abide by the constitution, the law and the terms of reference of the Declaration of Intent between Lebanese and Palestinian refugees, as well as the respect of the UN Resolutions (**1559, 1701 and 2650**). However, we should be aware that some relevant players within both parties are hindering this implementation for personal agendas.

In conjunction with this practical process and in order to ensure its success, it is imperative to purify the anxious Lebanese memory and the desperate Palestinian memory; any attempt to deal with the disarmament of Palestinian refugees without taking into account this ordeal would be a short-sighted one. We will wrap our paper with a reflexion on this essential issue.



Lebanon and Palestine: Two Memories: Anxious and Desperate; Dignity, Sovereignty and Return!

The establishment of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee in 2005 dictated an in-depth examination of both Lebanese anxieties and Palestinian expectations as the years of fighting had devastating consequences on both sides. While right and justice often converge, their non-convergence presupposes a catastrophic confrontation in which everyone is a victim.

It was necessary from the start to set straight political, sovereignty-related, and diplomatic tracks, regardless of their humanitarian weight, to dispel all anxieties or concerns that have piled up in the Lebanese collective memory over the detrimental consequences that would eventually hit Lebanon and impose on it difficult existential choices should the international community fail to reach a sustainable solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, ergo the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was also necessary to wipe out the dream of making Lebanon an alternate homeland that some Palestinian refugees and leaders were fostering at one time.

It bears noting that all the tracks initiated to achieve Arab-Israeli peace have been a resounding failure; from the Madrid Conference through the Oslo Accords to the pragmatic Arab initiative, all have fallen short of reaching a solution for the Palestinian Cause. This reality has increased the anxieties of the Lebanese from the one hand and the despair of the Palestinian refugees from the other; the path towards healing the common Lebanese-Palestinian memory will remain obstructed should both sides choose to hold on some political, demagogic, populist, and improvisational slogans. Rather, the

closing of a searing chapter in Lebanese-Palestinian relations requires understanding the sources of anxiety and the swamps of despair. I believe that both sides are responsible for generating the anxiety and despair, notwithstanding the noticeable improvement in their relations since 2005.

In any case, veterans who have experienced the shuttered era of the Lebanese-Palestinian confrontation are now in two opposing camps. Some of them have engaged in a critical revision of the past. Others insist on their ideological or pragmatic position embracing the logic of the "executioner" and the "victim". In both camps it has never occurred to some to opt for truth-seeking, which is indeed nothing but a perception of the truth, and perception is relative. The truth for some of them is absolute. They are keen to invoke the necessary arguments, whether in defense or in attack. But the defense or attack strategies won't heal two memories enfeebled with wounds. This supposed healing does not mean embellishing history, or ignoring its events or justifying them; but in the end it means a sincere call for understanding the Lebanese, Palestinian, regional, and international geopolitical situations that dictated that confrontation. It also means a call for working on restoring the balance between Palestinian human rights and Lebanese national sovereignty, and achieving a solution to enforce the Palestinian right of return in line with the requirements of international justice. It is in this enforcement that the foundations for tackling despair and anxiety are to be found.

1. Lebanon and the Refugees: Human Rights

Since **2005**, a unified national incubator has sought to improve the socio-economic conditions of Palestinian refugees, out of the conviction that denying them basic social and economic rights is not the proper strategy to prevent their permanent settlement. Indeed, such denial challenges Lebanon's cultural heritage in respecting human rights, on the one hand, and paves the way for malicious infiltrations into the refugee community, on the other, with frightening consequences for the camp dwellers, the Lebanese population and perhaps the whole region. However, improving socio-economic conditions also remains dependent on continued UNRWA intervention for greater effectiveness in terms of relief and development.

In this context, the Lebanese people's belief that improving the living conditions of the refugees is prohibited has shifted, as has the refugees' conviction that their impoverishment is inevitable. What we are witnessing today is merely a first step toward strengthening human resilience for both sides until the refugees return to their homeland. However, the distance between humanitarian improvement and permanent settlement remains controversial.

2. Lebanon and the Refugees: National Sovereignty

Since **2005**, a national incubator has also emerged, even if ambiguous, to end the effects of the Cairo Agreement, which was repealed by the Lebanese Parliament in **1987**. This national incubator has been joined by the Palestinian legitimacy choice to respect the sovereignty of Lebanon. Other dissidents among Palestinian factions rejected the new status quo, hailed by some of the Lebanese who understand their views. But the failure to implement the decision to put an end to the presence of Palestinian arms outside and inside the camps has continued to be an infringement of Lebanon's sovereignty, and put the refugees' safety at risk due to repeated turbulence. The battle of Nahr el-Bared camp is an example, as is Ain El Helweh camp.

Unless the question of sovereignty is resolved—both sides have interest in resolving it—it is illogical to swap roles in this or exchange accusations. Unless this issue is resolved, explosive detonators could be revived in collective memory, probably for malicious uses.

3. Lebanon and the refugees: Enforcement of the Right of Return

Formally speaking, since **2005**, the rejection of the refugees' permanent settlement has run parallel to the assertion of their right of return. This rejection seemed to be intrinsic to the core endeavor of achieving justice. However, the process

of rectifying the concepts of human rights and national sovereignty has not been structurally complemented with a solid Lebanese-Palestinian diplomacy that goes beyond the consensus over principles to adopt practical and operational plans. Indeed, consenting on principles without any conceived framework for their implementation keeps reaching the desired goal a volatile process.

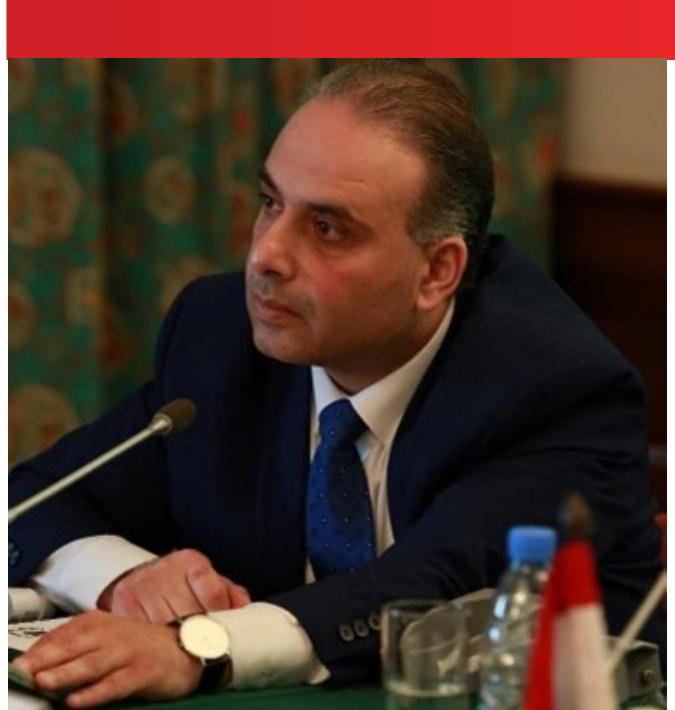
This paper does not allow us to expand on various diplomatic options, but it is noteworthy to say they could have enormous impact in what pertains to enforcement of the international law, emphasizing Palestinian rights, and leveraging Lebanese sovereignty. One remains astonished vis-à-vis Lebanon's reluctance to engage in a diplomatic path that could be promising in implementing the refugees' right of return.

The restoration of the Lebanese-Palestinian memory has begun. But its rise to the realm of public policy is still lacking behind...and both parties could be held responsible for this default.





Author's Short Bio



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