

7.7.3. Security situation in the camps

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a) General security situation

Palestine refugee camps have long witnessed violent clashes between Palestinian armed factions.[835] The UN described the security situation in the camps as ‘largely calm but highly fragile’ between April and September 2024,[836] while noting ‘heightened insecurity’ over the first half of 2025. Fighting erupted between residents of Beddawi camp (near Tripoli) and the neighbouring Wadi al-Nahlah area in March 2025, followed by clashes involving rival criminal groups in Shatila camp (southern Beirut) in May 2025.[837] The second quarter of 2025 in particular experienced a surge in violence, with UNRWA recording 21 incidents leading to at least nine deaths among Palestinian refugees.[838]

In Ein el-Hilweh camp, known for its volatile security situation due to the presence of a multitude of armed groups,[839] several UNRWA schools remained inaccessible as of June 2025 as armed actors continued to be present on their premises.[840] The level of proliferation of weapons varied among the camps. While heavy weaponry was found in Ein el-Hilweh and Rashidieh (in the Tyre area), the Nahr al-Bared camp was reported to be devoid of weapons.[841]

In autumn 2024, Palestine refugee camps were affected by Israeli airstrikes targeting Ein el-Hilweh[842] and Beddawi (early October 2024),[843] El Buss (early October[844] and late November 2024), and Rashidieh (late November 2024),[845] with reports of several casualties resulting from these attacks.[846] Intense airstrikes also struck the area of Burj al-Barajneh camp in early October 2024, prompting large-scale displacement of residents from the camp.[847] Israeli airstrikes on camps continued into 2025.[848]

b) Balance of power and role of militias in specific camps

Palestinian factions have long operated with relative autonomy in a number of the country’s 12 refugee camps, which exist largely outside state jurisdiction.[849] The traditionally Fatah-dominated[850] Popular Committees and the Palestinian factions were responsible for security and governance in camps.[851] Some of the factions involved in governance have not pledged loyalty to the Palestinian Authority.[852] Notably, Hamas has a strong presence in the camps alongside Fatah.[853] Under a tacit agreement, both the Fatah movement and its rival Hamas maintain security in the camps.[854] Ein el-Hilweh, the largest[855] and most overcrowded of all Palestine camps and home to diverse political and military factions[856] was run by Fatah but Hamas was gaining ground against the group.[857]

For more information on Palestinian factions, see sections 5.2 Palestinian factions and 6.3 Areas controlled by different actors.

c) Conflict resolution mechanisms

After Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had reached an agreement in May 2025 on disarming the Palestinian groups in Lebanon, the Lebanese authorities launched disarmaments in refugee camps on 21 August 2025.858 The handovers of weapons were overseen by the Palestinian Authority in coordination with Lebanese authorities. 859 In an initial phase of the plan's implementation,860 some weaponry in Burj al-Barajneh camp (Beirut) was transferred to the Lebanese Army.861 This was followed by the collection of weapons in Rashidieh, Al-Bass, and Burj al-Shamali camps in the Tyre area (28 August 2025). 862 A third phase again involved Burj al-Barajneh, as well as Mar Elias and Shatila camps (29 August 2025).863 On 13 September 2025, the Lebanese Army began implementing the fourth phase of the disarmament plan, focusing on Beddawi camp in the north864 and Ein el-Hilweh camp in the south.865

Meanwhile, journalist Rami George Khouri noted that the May 2025 agreement was hampered by both Aoun's and Abbas's insufficient control over actors on the ground. Thus, for instance, the weapons handed over from the Burj al-Barajneh camp in August did not stem from Fatah's official forces but from a renegade member who had been dismissed from Fatah. The journalist noted that as of early September 2025, it remained uncertain whether Fatah would fully turn over its arsenal of weaponry in the camps.866 Islamist groups like Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other non-PLO groups rejected outright to surrender weapons,867 including militant groups operating in Ein el-Hilweh.868 As of mid-September, Hamas did not cooperate in the disarmament process, although talks with the group regarding arms handovers were reportedly ongoing.869

d) Security forces in the camps

Security forces generally refrained from entering Palestine refugee camps870 (an exception being Nahr al-Bared camp in the country's north, which has been under Lebanese Army control since 2007),871 but Lebanese security forces monitored all movement of persons and items into and out of the camps.872 The Palestinian National Security Forces, restructured under a new command in 2025, were operating in the camps873 where they were tasked with enforcing order and discipline, including a ban on firing weapons.874

In July 2024, the Lebanese Army carried out raids inside the Nahr al-Bared camp in an attempt to arrest wanted 'gang' members. This operation reportedly led to exchanges of gunfire and heightened tensions, with instances of resistance to the raids prompting the deployment of further military reinforcements.875 In a more recent development, in 2025, it was reported that the new Lebanese government was seeking to extend state authority into the Palestinian camps 876 by implementing the above-mentioned plan to disarm the camps.877

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