



# IDF, Shin Bet using Gaza militias in exchange for pay and territory

Yaniv Kubovich

The Israel Defense Forces and the Shin Bet security service are using Gaza-based militias to carry out military operations in exchange for pay and control over territory in the Strip, according to testimonies from Israeli soldiers and commanders serving in Gaza.

Haaretz reported last year that Gaza civilians had been used by the IDF since the start of the war for targeted tasks, primarily scanning tunnels and inspecting suspicious buildings. In recent weeks, however, soldiers say recruitment has grown into organized groups that Israeli field forces must coordinate with—sometimes without having actual control over them.

Each militia consists of dozens of armed men, most from prominent Gaza clans, including the Abu Shabab family. In addition to receiving cash payments, the militias are allowed to carry weapons, which enables them to profit by controlling aid truck routes and charging for the right to set up tents in areas with high civilian presence.

According to the IDF, the Shin Bet oversees the militias' operations and recruits fighters alongside their leaders. Unlike earlier civilian recruits, once known as shawishim, these militias now participate in substantial combat activities. They operate primarily in the southern Gaza Strip, particularly Rafah and Khan Yunis.

Last week, Al Arabiya re-



Displaced Palestinians who fled Gaza City arriving at a tent camp in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, on Wednesday.

Jehad Alshrafi/AP

ported that the militias had also entered Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. On Abu Shabab's Facebook page, a recruitment ad for "security personnel" offered monthly salaries of 3,000 shekels (\$900) for a fighter and 5,000 for an officer.

Although the IDF and

Shin Bet manage militia activities, many commanders on the ground express concern over the consequences. "It reminds me of Sabra and Shatila [referring to the Palestinian refugee camps where Christian Phalangist militiamen carried out a massacre during Israel's

1982 Lebanon War]. It looks like something that will eventually blow up in our faces," one commander said. "They aren't truly under control, and they have no command obligation to the officers responsible for the battlefield. Tomorrow, if they massacre dozens of

people, who will be held accountable? Whose responsibility will it be? They'll pin it on the officer in charge of the sector and ruin his life."

Commanders say the militias are mainly deployed in "sensitive areas" for Israeli forces. "They're given more missions in densely popu-

lated zones. It's no longer just the menial work they were tasked with at the beginning [of the war]. Now they're conducting major operations."

Soldiers add that the IDF and Shin Bet no longer seem

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## EU proposal: Suspend some trade benefits, target some ministers

Liza Rozovsky and Reuters

The European Commission presented to the European Union on Wednesday a proposal for measures against Israel that includes suspending parts of the trade agreement and sanctioning far-right Israeli ministers, certain West Bank settlers and Hamas leaders.

EC President Ursula von der Leyen cited the "horrific events taking place in Gaza on a daily basis" as the basis for the measures presented to the European Council, which is comprised of the leaders of EU member states.

Kaja Kallas, the EU's chief diplomat, said, "We must leverage the tools at our disposal to pressure the Israeli government into changing course."

Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar described the proposal as "morally and politically distorted," adding that "actions against Israel will be met accordingly, and we hope that such measures will not be necessary."

The EC statement said that the body is also putting on hold all bilateral support to Israel, with the exception of support for civil society and Yad Vashem.

The commission said its review found that actions taken by the Israeli government represent "a breach of essential elements relating to respect for human rights and democratic principles," which entitles the EU to suspend the agreement unilaterally.

The commission added that the breach refers to the "rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza following the military inter-

vention of Israel, the blockade of humanitarian aid, the intensification of military operations, and the decision of the Israeli authorities to advance the settlement plan in the so-called E1 area of the West Bank, which further undermines the two-state solution."

Regarding Hamas, the commission proposes "a reinforced package of listings against 10 members of the Hamas politburo, based on a new listing criterion under the Hamas Sanctions Regime."

## Emigration rates are high

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The European Union is Israel's biggest trading partner, with trade in goods between the two amounting to 42.6 billion euros (\$49.9 billion) last year, according to the EU.

A qualified majority vote among EU governments would be required to pass the measures, with the support of at least 15 of the 27 EU members representing 65 percent of the EU population.

EU member states including Ireland, Spain, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands have called for the suspension of the EU trade agreement with Israel. Countries including Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic have opposed such steps. EU sanctions on individuals require unanimous backing from member states. Hungary has blocked an existing proposal to sanction violent settlers.

# \$1k for a tent, \$2k for a ride to Khan Yunis: The costs of fleeing Gaza City

Naghm Zbeedat

With Israeli strikes reducing neighborhoods to rubble, Palestinians face an impossible choice: remain in homes under bombardment or pay soaring prices to flee south.

Last week, the Israeli military issued evacuation orders for the entirety of Gaza City, urging its 1 million resi-

dents to flee south. But being displaced comes at a hefty price. A single truck ride from Gaza City to the southern cities of Deir al-Balah or Khan Yunis – a distance of 14 to 25 kilometers (approximately 8 to 15 miles) – can now cost up to 7,000 shekels (\$2,000) in cash. For those relying on money transfers from abroad, the sum rises to nearly \$3,900 after com-

mission fees. "What land, what faith, what homeland, what people, what cause is this for?" one resident told Haaretz. "Either you pay, or you die trapped in the north."

For others unable to pay, the only option is to walk. "The distance is 14 kilo-

meters – I walked it today without carrying anything, and I arrived exhausted," the resident added. "At the same time, there were people walking with their children, their belongings, their bags. I swear to God, what's happening is injustice."

Even when families

reach the south, survival is far from guaranteed. Rental prices for homes and apartments in Deir al-Balah and Khan Yunis have reached 2,500–3,000 shekels (\$660–790) per month, placing an additional burden on families seeking shelter. Some landlords justify the

increase by citing scarcity and rising living costs, but many residents see it as blatant exploitation of people desperate for safe housing.

For families already uprooted multiple times, the question of where to go is no longer just about safety – it's about whether they can afford to move at all. "The expenses for a single family moving from Gaza

City to the center or the south go beyond \$3,500," said 34-year-old Jamal Qadir. Qadir, his wife, four children and elderly mother joined the tens of thousands fleeing their homes.

"Transportation alone costs around \$1,000, a tent or makeshift shelter another \$1,000. Rent for a house, if you can find one, is at least \$1,000. Even if you

settle in a tent, you need to pay for the land beneath it – about \$500. And everything has to be in cash," he explains. These prices have inflated over the course of the war; for example, tents were previously sold for between \$500 and \$800.

If money is sent via bank transfer, Qadir added, a

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## Why the Israeli right wants to talk about 'Judeo-Christian values'

Analysis Ben Samuels

WASHINGTON – In the week since Charlie Kirk's killing turned American political culture upside-down, a fierce battle has emerged between dueling camps in the Republican Party over the late right-wing commen-



Trump and Kirk at the America Fest last year. Josh Edelson/AFP

tator's stance on Israel and whether it, in fact, justifies their respective worldviews.

Israeli government officials, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, now notoriously used the fatal shooting's immediate aftermath to stake claim to Kirk's legacy through social media posts and podcast appearances. These efforts

were further amplified in the ensuing days by Netanyahu's right-wing allies in Washington and pro-Israel hawks throughout the GOP landscape.

Kirk's allies in the so-called "realist" camp,

meanwhile, claimed Kirk's positions were more nuanced than illustrated and that he was undergoing his own personal evolution on whether the U.S. should provide blanket support for Israel. This is not even to mention the proliferating conspiracy theories from fringe social media personalities — some of whom

were close with Kirk, others strictly operating in the sphere of opportunism — that baselessly assert Israel was somehow involved in Kirk's assassination over his shifting worldview.

Regardless of where Kirk's positions actually remained on the day of his unjustifiable killing, the dueling camps of the GOP have now adopted Kirk as the latest and perhaps most powerful cudgel to date. The effective hagiography of Kirk has been instantaneously utilized as both a proof-of-concept for whatever worldview is being articulated while also dismissing the opposing thought. In reality, however, Kirk's worldviews were abundantly clear. He was an unabashed supporter of the State of Israel, grounded in his own Christianity.

This support, however, faced stress tests in recent months as Netanyahu increasingly alienated key elements of the GOP. As has been breathlessly discussed when considering Kirk's legacy, the Turning Point USA founder represented a significant swath of young voters while also being among the most effective influencers to steer voters toward that worldview. U.S. policy

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## Month before Nova massacre Police banned events near Gaza border



Eliyahu Hershkovitz

haaretz.com

# Gov't says it will cut film academy funding after 'The Sea' wins award

Ido David Cohen

Funding for Israel's top film awards will be suspended after the Culture and Sports Ministry claimed the winning film, about a Palestinian boy from the West Bank trying to see the sea for the first time, "defames" the Israel Defense Forces and Israel.

"The Sea" was awarded the Ophir for best feature film at the Israeli Academy of Film and Television's ceremony Tuesday night. It will go on to be considered at the Academy Awards in March 2026.

In a statement, the ministry said the movie "presents the Palestinian perspective and depicts the IDF and Israel in a negative light," calling the win "outrageous" and claiming, without citation, that it angered "many Israeli citizens and IDF soldiers who dedicate their lives to defending the homeland," prompting him to announce the withdrawal of government funding for the "embarrassing ceremony."

Culture Minister Miki Zohar, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, added in a personal statement: "There is no greater insult to the citizens of Israel than



Producer Baher Agbaria, center-left, and director Shay Carmeli Pollak, center-right, accepting an award on behalf of the film "The Sea" at this year's Ophir Awards.

Naama Grynbaum

the annual embarrassing and disconnected Ophir Awards. The fact that the winning film portrays our heroic soldiers in a defamatory and false manner while they risk their lives to protect us no longer surprises anyone."

In response, the academy, led by chair Assaf Amir, stated without directly addressing the funding threat: "The Sea" tells the story of a Palestinian boy from a

small village near Ramallah whose one wish is to travel to Tel Aviv and see the sea he has never seen. Film selections and awards are determined by academy members, all of whom are filmmakers and cultural professionals, who choose the best works of Israeli cinema based on artistic excellence, creative freedom, and freedom of expression."

The academy chair hinted at Zohar in his remarks,

calling the selection of the film "a decisive and resonant response" to calls to boycott the Israeli industry.

"I am proud that an Arabic-language film, created through collaboration between Jewish and Palestinian Israelis, will represent Israel at the Oscars," Amir said. "Israeli cinema once again proves that it is relevant and responsive to

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