While the tug-of-war over the continued implementation of the U.S. 20-point peace plan in Gaza continues, the terrorist organization Hamas not only refuses to surrender its weapons but is also recruiting new child soldiers with promises of money and weapons training.

Jan Kapusnak

In April 2013, students at a high school in Gaza City organized an unusual demonstration. Wearing uniforms and armed with weapons, they simulated an attack on an Israeli military base and the kidnapping of a soldier. Footage showed teenagers dragging a man—who was playing the role of an Israeli soldier—into a waiting vehicle.

These children and teenagers participated in Al-Futuwwa, a paramilitary school program that Hamas had launched in September 2012. A decade later, some of the tactics they practiced resembled those used during the attacks of October 7.

Inspired by the Hitler Youth

Hamas named its program after Al-Futuwwa, a youth organization founded in 1936 in British Mandate Palestine under the leadership of Jamal al-Husseini, a relative of the Jerusalem Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini. According to historian Benny Morris, its organizers were inspired by the Hitler Youth, and its members were initially referred to as “Nazi Scouts.”

As part of the Al-Futuwwa program, military training became part of the regular curriculum for boys aged 15 to 17. The students learned how to handle Kalashnikov rifles, practiced military maneuvers, and participated in intensive training camps. In April 2013, *The Guardian* reported that approximately 37,000 boys were participating in the program, of whom about 5,000 also attended specialized camps. Some students even accompanied armed Hamas members on nighttime security patrols.

100,000 children and adolescents receive military training

In 2015, Hamas’s military wing began organizing its own intensive training camps,

which continued in the following years. In the summer of 2023, just a few months before the October 7 attacks on Israel, Hamas claimed that approximately 100,000 children and teenagers had participated in its summer camps.

An internal Hamas document from July 2023, which was presented in January 2024 by Israeli President Isaac Herzog, listed the promotion of jihad, self-sacrifice, armed resistance, and the militarization of Palestinian society among the camps' objectives.

Money and Crash Courses in Weapons Training: Hamas Is Recruiting Again

Three years after October 7, Hamas has lost a large portion of its leadership, thousands of fighters, and extensive military infrastructure. Nevertheless, it retains influence over populated areas of Gaza and is attempting to rebuild its forces.

In January 2026, a Palestinian father described how Hamas had offered his 16-year-old son money and weapons training to join the organization. His account was not an isolated allegation but documented a broader pattern of recruiting minors. In October 2026 , Israeli security reports indicated that Hamas was recruiting boys aged 15 to 17 for accelerated military training lasting about a week, focusing primarily on small arms.

UNICEF's Alarming Response

The militarization of Palestinian children was by no means a secret. Hamas publicly promoted its training camps, published photos of armed children, and organized ceremonies to showcase their military skills. Yet UNICEF never made the issue the focus of a major international campaign.

In its own " " report for 2020, UNICEF documented two independently verified cases of 17-year-olds who were recruited into the military wing of Hamas. And a subsequently published bulletin acknowledged that Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other armed groups operated military camps that were even attended by children under the age of 14.

UNICEF stated that it had contacted the organizers and urged them to protect the

children. However, despite this intervention, Hamas continued the training.

UNICEF has therefore been criticized for devoting significantly less attention to the recruitment of Palestinian children than to comparable practices by armed groups in other conflicts. While the organization has repeatedly drawn international attention to the suffering of Palestinian children during Israeli military operations, Hamas's role in the militarization of these children has received significantly less public attention.

This raises a fundamental question: Why has an organization with UNICEF's international authority, resources, and media reach failed to launch a similarly high-profile campaign against the systematic recruitment and military training of children by Hamas?

"Glory and Eternity to Our Martyrs"

A November 2026 investigation by NGO Monitor, titled "," also revealed that *The Sameer Project*, a Gaza-based organization that presents itself as a UNICEF partner, had published material glorifying armed violence and supporting Hamas. Footage showed children in a school bearing UNICEF logos chanting "Glory and eternity to our righteous martyrs."

However, UNICEF told the Washington Examiner that it has no partnership with the Sameer Project and has not funded its activities. The project pointed out its membership in a water and sanitation group coordinated by UNICEF. Membership does not constitute an official partnership or funding. Yet the case raises questions about how organizations use the UNICEF name in humanitarian coordination networks.

When Children Become Combatants

The recruitment of minors also complicates the interpretation of casualty figures in Gaza. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, anyone under the age of 18 is legally considered a child. This includes a 16-year-old Hamas fighter who was killed in combat.

The Hamas-controlled Ministry of Health in Gaza does not systematically distinguish

between civilians and members of armed groups in its casualty figures. Consequently, statistics based solely on age cannot establish how many of the children killed were civilians and how many participated in the hostilities.

, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child prohibits non-state armed groups from recruiting or using persons under the age of 18 in hostilities.

Deradicalization in Gaza will take 20 to 40 years

Simply destroying tunnels and weapons caches will not prevent Hamas from rebuilding its forces and continuing to recruit child soldiers. Gaza's future will therefore depend not only on who controls its borders or finances its reconstruction, but above all on who educates its children. Counterterrorism expert Assaf Moghadam estimates that the deradicalization of Gaza's population could take 20 to 40 years.

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