

## Chapter Three: Where to? Alternatives to UNRWA's Current Set-up

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In considering theoretical alternatives to the lacunae elaborated upon in the previous chapters, we have formulated four alternatives (three basic and one modular) based on experience and ideas that have accumulated over the years and are presented here for the first time. Evidently, while each of the first three alternatives has its advantages and disadvantages, no course of action is fully sufficient. Nevertheless, we chose to present these alternatives and to highlight the complexities involved in adopting a course of action that is based on a single logic. Thus, a fourth modular alternative that combines relative advantages from each course of action is also presented, based on the rationale that it could be tailored to the different contexts that characterize UNRWA's five operational zones. Furthermore, the entire conceptual model can be developed according to considerations and priorities defined by decision makers and can be adapted further as progress is made on the ground.

The proposed alternatives are as follows:

- A. Comprehensive reforms—including reviewing UNRWA's mandate, organizational structure, and methods of operation, while redefining beneficiaries in a manner that will substantially reduce the number of those eligible for the agency's support
- B. Transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones, including the Palestinian Authority
- C. Merging UNRWA with UNHCR
- D. A modular approach based on successful elements in the first three alternatives.

## Criteria for Assessing the Alternatives

Criteria for assessing the alternatives naturally are based on the interests of each side affected by UNRWA's long-term existence; that is, the Palestinian side, the Israeli side, and the international community (including the Arab world).

On the Israeli side, the defense establishment has good relations with UNRWA's leadership (which is an asset particularly in the Gaza Strip). This is also the rationale behind Israel's lobbying the United States, Canada, and other donor states to continue aiding UNRWA.<sup>159</sup> In fact, Israel has been perceived as a significant force in blocking efforts led by the US Congress to substantially reform UNRWA.<sup>160</sup> As for the Palestinian side, its leadership's interest is to maintain the status quo on refugee-related issues, which is likely to serve as an asset in future negotiations with Israel. The international community (except for the United States and including most Arab states) appears to be aligned with maintaining the status quo.

The first three alternatives will be assessed based on the five criteria below, whereas the fourth alternative will not be assessed but only generally outlined, owing to its modular nature. The criteria for assessing alternatives are as follows:

1. Feasibility of implementing the alternative (considering all relevant stakeholders: Palestinians, Israel, Arab states, donor states, the international community, and UNRWA)
2. Contribution to rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their daily lives
3. Contribution to strengthening the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale
4. Contribution to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict
5. Financial costs.

The proposed alternatives will be evaluated according to the abovementioned five criteria, with each criterion being ranked on a scale of 1–3, where 1 indicates low compatibility with the criterion and 3 denotes high compatibility. Additional criteria for assessment can be added, according to the preferences of the assessors. Furthermore, it is possible to assign weights to the criteria, e.g., the weighted value of the criterion of rehabilitating the refugees can be determined based on aggregating the values of a series of relevant metrics, such

as the number of refugees who receive professional training; the proportion of trainees that are integrated into the labor market; the improvement of existing infrastructure in the refugee camps; and the number of refugees who receive adequate housing outside of the refugee camps. In the analysis below, the five criteria were assigned with equal weight to simplify the analysis, present guiding principles for the conceptual model, and demonstrate its applicability to all stakeholders. As such, we propose viewing the conceptual model as a basis for a future more nuanced and comprehensive assessment.

## Analysis of the Alternatives

**Alternative A:** Comprehensive reforms—including reviewing UNRWA's mandate, organizational structure, and methods of operation, and redefining beneficiaries in a manner that will substantially reduce the number of those eligible for the agency's support.

This alternative constitutes reforms to address the lacunae in UNRWA's operational paradigm and procedural functioning elaborated on in chapter 2 (see figure 5). These reforms touch upon multiple aspects and necessitate a transition from passively managing the refugee problem to proactively working to resolve it, through the resettlement of refugees in host states. It also requires the redefining of the criteria for refugeehood eligibility, adapting employee recruitment policies, deterring administrative and educational politicization, and substantially increasing the monitoring of abuse of UNRWA facilities to stockpile weapons, as well as punishment and enforcement vis-à-vis involvement in terror.

## Criteria for assessing the alternative

### *Criterion no. 1—Feasibility*

James Lindsay, who completed his position as UNRWA's legal counsel in 2007, later wrote that UNRWA violates the Refugee Convention by abstaining from rehabilitating and resettling the refugees. He thus suggests that UNRWA reforms should be conditioned to include the rehabilitation of refugees outside of the camps. Simultaneously, however, given his familiarity with the agency, Lindsay asserts that the chances of its reform are minimal.<sup>161</sup> A central argument against the feasibility of implementing

far-reaching reforms in UNRWA is the absence of clear and open support for this alternative among all the stakeholders (the Palestinians, the Arab world, the donor states, UNRWA itself, most of the international community, and—to a certain extent—Israel).<sup>162</sup>

Consequently, the ranking of implementing UNRWA reforms with respect to feasibility on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a low score of 1.

***Criterion no. 2—Rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their daily lives***

Comprehensive UNRWA reforms could positively impact the lives of Palestinian refugees if they are well planned, fully implemented, and conducted in a manner that enables ongoing follow-up, feedback, drafting of best practices, and ongoing application of lessons learned. This will require meticulous work plans and adherence to strict timelines along with clear indices for evaluating success. In addition, the reforms will have to be monitored and supervised to ensure that the process remains unaffected by outside forces objecting to this course of action. The Achilles' heel of this alternative is that UNRWA beneficiaries will still be distinguished and differentiated from the general society, because the existence of a separate infrastructure and a differential budgetary framework that addresses the needs of Palestinians with a family history of refugeehood ultimately will undermine their full integration into modern Palestinian society.

Consequently, the ranking for implementing UNRWA reforms with respect to rehabilitating the refugees, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 2.

***Criterion no. 3—Strengthening the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale***

This alternative of implementing reforms at UNRWA will perpetuate the Palestinian Authority's dependence on external aid. The fact that an external aid organization operating in parallel to the Palestinian Authority continues to assume responsibility for the welfare of part of the Palestinian citizens living in areas of Palestinian jurisdiction will perpetuate an anomaly vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority's governability and authority. This situation will not only legitimize the Palestinian Authority's limited and conditioned

responsibility for its citizenry, but it will also sustain unhealthy competition for resources between the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA.

Consequently, the ranking for implementing UNRWA reforms with respect to contributing to the strengthening of the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 1.

***Criterion no. 4—Contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict***

One of the keys to the success of the political process is reducing asymmetries between the two negotiating parties. It appears that this alternative, which would contribute to perpetuating the weakness of the Palestinian Authority's state rationale, would not contribute to the political process. However, if as part of the reforms, UNRWA succeeds in resettling Palestinian refugees (whose initial number would be reduced as a result of the same reforms), this would contribute considerably to solving the refugee problem, which is one of the core issues of the conflict.

Consequently, the ranking for implementing UNRWA reforms with respect to contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 2.

***Criterion no. 5—Financial costs***

The estimated costs of reforming UNRWA are expected to be relatively high due to the extensive planning, monitoring, and supervision that will necessitate external involvement and the establishment of an efficient set-up to oversee the entire process. In parallel, the Palestinian Authority and the host governments will continue to be funded for rendering the same services that UNRWA will continue to provide to some of the citizens—sustaining double efforts and unnecessary overhead costs.

Consequently, the ranking for implementing UNRWA reforms with respect to financial costs, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 1.

**Table 4.** Concluding assessment of alternative A, comprehensive reforms

Criterion	Explanation	Score
<b>Feasibility</b>	The feasibility is low due to lack of desire on the part of stakeholders.	1
<b>Rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their daily lives</b>	Reforms could certainly contribute to rehabilitating the refugees, but they would still be differentiated from the rest of Palestinian society due to the separate infrastructure for addressing their needs.	2
<b>Strengthening the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale</b>	Competition would occur with the Palestinian Authority over resources and would undermine its governance.	1
<b>Contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict</b>	This alternative would weaken the Palestinian Authority and contribute to the asymmetry in negotiations with Israel, while it would have the potential to reduce the number of refugees, thus contributing to solving a central issue in the conflict.	2
<b>Financial costs</b>	The costs would be high to establish an efficient set-up to oversee the entire process and to continue to fund an organization that operates in parallel to existing host-state infrastructures.	1
<b>Weighted assessment</b>	<b>=7/5</b>	<b>1.4</b>

**Alternative B:** Transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones, including the Palestinian Authority.

This alternative includes dissolving UNRWA and transferring its responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones. Due to the complexities in the Gaza Strip, governed by Hamas (a designated terror organization, see Chapter 2), two courses of action should be considered under this alternative: transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to the Hamas government, or introducing a unique adjustment for the Gaza Strip as long as Hamas continues to rule this host region (e.g., a new international aid organization tailored for the needs of Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip).

In Jordan, this alternative could include elements previously proposed by former senior official at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Dave Harden, to divert large sums from UNRWA's annual budget to the Jordanian government for a ten-year period. Half of the sum would be designated for social services for Palestinians living in Jordan, and the other half for funding the private sector and encouraging competitiveness, to help the Jordanian economy.<sup>163</sup>

UNRWA beneficiaries in Syria and Lebanon, given the complexities in Syria and discrimination and non-integration of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, could potentially be absorbed into third states and into the territories governed by the Palestinian Authority. The absorption of refugees would be accompanied by supporting mechanisms put in place in the new host states and in the Palestinian Authority. The guiding principle should ensure that advancing a permanent solution for the Palestinian refugees is fulfilled outside of Israel's sovereign territory.

This alternative requires a gradual, supervised process that would extend for several years. It could be implemented in one UNRWA operational zone at a time, assessed, and improved before embarking on a similar procedure in the next host state, or it could be implemented simultaneously in limited and well-planned steps in a number of zones.

Similar to alternative A detailed above, this course of action also warrants revisiting what defines Palestinian refugees (including the revoking of

refugee status when considering parameters such as citizenship in host states, socioeconomic conditions, and involvement in terror) and mechanisms and best practices to resettle refugees. As such, this alternative is similar to the first one in that it embodies a component of reforms, but it also includes an additional component of dismantling UNRWA and transferring its responsibilities and budget to existing state structures.

## **Criteria for assessing the alternative**

### ***Criterion no. 1—Feasibility***

This alternative will require the consent and early coordination with the host governments and cannot be implemented without the backing of both a unified international front and influential Arab states.

A significant barrier is the civil war in Syria, although the Syrian regime has invested considerable efforts and resources in restoring control over territories controlled by the rebels. Additionally, the Syrian regime is not sovereign in its decisions but is subject to the influence of Iran and Russia, which could, subject to their own interests, impede such an initiative. Hardships may also emerge in the Palestinian territories, both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where the Palestinian leadership (the Palestinian Authority and Hamas respectively) relates strategic and symbolic importance to leveraging prolonged Palestinian refugeehood as a tool to advancing the Palestinian cause both regionally and internationally. The Palestinian leadership could also have concerns about the economic difficulties in handling the expenses and shouldering the burden of assuming responsibility for supporting the refugee population.

Media reports suggest that the Trump administration may support the alternative of transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in UNRWA's operational zones (most prominently Jordan), in line with this alternative.<sup>164</sup> Owing to the perceived openness of the United States for this course of action, but in addition to the abovementioned difficulties in various operational zones, the ranking for transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones with respect to feasibility, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 2.



***Criterion no. 2—Rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their daily lives***

The course of action outlined in this alternative will demand a gradual transfer of UNRWA's responsibilities accompanied by proportional budget transfers over several years. The important advantage of this alternative is effectively in serving the population that is truly in need, diverting resources for refugees living in difficult conditions, and creating a long-term political horizon to end their refugeehood in a manner that will substantially improve their economic and social standing as well as the economies of their host states. Naturally, this course of action will neutralize the politicization of the Palestinian refugee cause and annul the UN General Assembly's rubber stamp on prolonging UNRWA's mandate irrespective of the agency's lack of success in resettling Palestinian refugees.

Once governments in the host state assume responsibility for the Palestinian refugees within their areas of jurisdiction, accompanied by sufficient funds to oversee this population's full integration into local society and economy, it is reasonable to assume that host states—particularly Jordan and the Palestinian Authority—will be incentivized to work toward this end and hence will actively strive to alleviate refugees' hardships.

Consequently, the ranking for transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones with respect to rehabilitating the refugees and improving their daily lives, from 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 3.

***Criterion no. 3—Strengthening the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale***

This alternative substantially boosts the state rationale of the Palestinian Authority, enabling it to improve its governance, particularly within the Palestinian territories. Responsibility for all Palestinians will fall squarely on the Palestinian Authority, which will be strengthened by appropriate budgets transferred from UNRWA. In the process, monitoring mechanisms put in place by the donor states and international community at least in the initial transfer period will guide and assist the Palestinian Authority, enabling stricter and more effective supervision on the expenditure of aid money. By enabling the Palestinian Authority to assume responsibility for

its entire citizenry, this alternative would become an important component in the Palestinian state-building process, ultimately stabilizing the system and positively contributing to a political process.

Consequently, the ranking for transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones with respect to strengthening the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 3.

***Criterion no. 4—Contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict***

Thanks to the contribution that this alternative could provide to the governability of the Palestinian Authority, the process of state building, and adopting state rationales of operation, this alternative also facilitates replacing built-in asymmetries in the political process between Israel as a state entity and the Palestinian Authority as an aspiring state entity. This also enables the sides to focus on the advantages of economic and regional cooperation as leverages for boosting the Palestinian state-building process. Finally, the Palestinian Authority's assuming of responsibility for Palestinian refugees, with the appropriate help and guidance of international and regional players, will contribute to diminishing the victimized narrative of refugeehood and reduce its negative impact on the ability to move forward with a political process.

Consequently, the ranking for transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones with respect to contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 3.

***Criterion no. 5—Financial costs***

The costs of this alternative are expected to be high. However, in conducting a cost-benefit analysis, it is estimated that the financial price attached to this course of action will have the valuable benefit of substantially alleviating refugees' suffering, finally mainstreaming refugees from the margins of society to become fully integrated and productive members of society, and simultaneously boosting Palestinian governability and state building. In effect, this is an investment that serves two large and important objectives,

and assuming that the process of Palestinian state building in itself will require substantial resources, this alternative has a heavy financial price tag that appears to be well worth the investment.

Consequently, the ranking for transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones with respect to financial costs, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 2.

**Table 5.** Concluding assessment of alternative B, transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones

Criterion	Explanation	Score
<b>Feasibility</b>	There is greater feasibility of implementing this course of action primarily in the territories under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and in Jordan, due to the support of the United States and its determination to change UNRWA's modes of operation to the point of suspending the agency's financial support.	2
<b>Rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their daily lives</b>	This course of action advances the rehabilitation of the refugees by the different governments and removes barriers to their full integration into society.	3
<b>Strengthening the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale</b>	The assuming of responsibility by the Palestinian Authority (with the necessary international support) for Palestinians with a family history of refugeehood is an important milestone in building the Palestinian state and governance.	3
<b>Contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict</b>	This alternative contributes to reducing the built-in asymmetry in the political process between the Israeli state and the Palestinian Authority as an aspiring state.	3
<b>Financial costs</b>	The costs of this alternative are high; however, cost-benefit considerations highlight significant long-term benefits.	2
<b>Weighted assessment</b>	<b>=13/5</b>	<b>2.6</b>

### **Alternative C: Merging UNRWA with UNHCR**

The figures relating to UNHCR's operation demonstrate considerably greater effectiveness in comparison to UNRWA. This is expressed not only in the organization's budgeting but also in the number of employees (figure 4 in chapter 2 illustrates a lower employee-to-refugee ratio than UNRWA, and a lower budget for rehabilitating UNHCR refugees). In the merger alternative, responsibilities and resources for rehabilitating the Palestinian refugees would be transferred from UNRWA to UNHCR, which would adopt similar working methods in the Palestinian arena as those it follows in rehabilitating refugees from all other conflicts.

This course of action translates into the dismantling of UNRWA as an independent, distinct organization. One method of carrying out this course of action is gradual, by subordinating UNRWA to UNHCR in terms of operational paradigms, functional procedures, resources and manpower, so that UNHCR would supervise UNRWA and manage its affairs for an interim period defined in advance. Another method, which bypasses the risk of "the interim" becoming permanent (similar to the course that has already prevailed with the evolution of UNRWA through the years), is to implement this change more intensively in a shorter time span.

It is likely that even after adopting a new approach to defining Palestinian refugees in accordance with UNHCR's definition, a considerable number of refugees will remain—the treatment of which will warrant extensive reorganization on the part of UNHCR. Under this alternative, this reorganization will remain focused on the economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees, prioritizing their integration into local labor markets and improving their residential conditions, whether inside refugee camps or by relocating refugees to appropriate housing properties outside of these designated areas.

### **Criteria for assessing the alternative**

#### ***Criterion no. 1—Feasibility***

The feasibility of implementing this alternative is low, due to the Palestinian opposition to cancelling the unique status and treatment of the Palestinian refugees. Similar to other courses of action described above, this alternative

also warrants the support of the Arab world, along with significant parts of the Western world and the donor states.

Consequently, the ranking for merging UNRWA and UNHCR with respect to feasibility, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 1.

***Criterion no. 2—Rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their daily lives***

The merger alternative will lead to aligning the status of Palestinian refugees with the status of other refugee populations in the world—a policy step that would ultimately lead to reducing the number of people recognized as refugees, thus freeing up resources to substantially help those refugees who are most in need.

As mentioned above, UNHCR has successful experience in rehabilitating refugees. Consequently, the merger with UNRWA has the potential to contribute positively to rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their lives. To illustrate, UNHCR defines the resettlement of refugees as transferring them from the state in which they sought shelter to a third state that agrees to take them in as refugees with the status of permanent residents. The receiving state provides the refugee and his/her family with identical civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights to citizens of the state. At a later stage, these refugees (with permanent residency status) can also become citizens of the host states. With UNHCR's assistance, 27 states took in 55,700 refugees in 2018.<sup>165</sup> Because UNHCR is committed to completing the rehabilitation process as quickly as possible and is subject to review, it is reasonable to assume that under the course of action adopted as part of this alternative, UNRWA beneficiaries will benefit from relatively focused, effective, and short rehabilitation processes (for example within a time span of five years, as is proposed in the Geneva Initiative).<sup>166</sup> Consequently, some argue that in comparison to UNRWA, UNHCR has the capacity and incentive to work more effectively to end the state of refugeehood of populations transferred to its authority.<sup>167</sup>

Consequently, the ranking for merging UNRWA and UNHCR with respect to rehabilitating Palestinian refugees, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 3.

***Criterion no. 3—Strengthening the Palestinian Authority’s governability and state rationale***

Merging UNRWA with UNHCR could produce varying results regarding the Palestinian Authority’s governability and state rationale. UNHCR’s care for the Palestinian refugee community, which would ultimately result in improved living conditions, could lead to harsh criticism of the Palestinian Authority regarding its decades-long inaction vis-à-vis Palestinian refugees—and could harm its perceived governability. At the same time, this challenge could potentially push the Palestinian Authority toward functional improvement, thus contributing to the process of building the Palestinian state and its institutions. Nevertheless, as for the importance and symbolism that the refugee issue constitutes within the Palestinian narrative, it is reasonable to assume that assigning responsibility over the issue to any entity other than the Palestinian Authority—whether UNRWA or UNHCR—is more likely to weaken the Palestinian Authority’s governability and state rationale than vice versa.

Consequently, the ranking for merging UNRWA and UNHCR with respect to strengthening the Palestinian Authority’s governability, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 1.

***Criterion no. 4—Contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict***

Adjusting the definition of who is eligible for Palestinian refugee status, and thereby significantly reducing the number of people recognized as Palestinian refugees—which is an inevitable part of the merger between UNRWA and UNHCR—will positively contribute to resolving one of the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the refugee issue always will be an inherent part of the Palestinian ethos, its impact will be diminished as the living conditions of the resettling of at least part of this group and the overall decrease in its size. In considering this alternative’s contribution to the resolution of the conflict, another advantage is that the politicization of the Palestinian refugee issue in the Gaza Strip—which is a by-product of Hamas’s control in this UNRWA operational zone—would be diminished. As such, the merger alternative could be conducive to a pragmatic Israeli-

Palestinian political process with a defined political horizon accepted by both sides and with external support by the United States and the Arab world.

Consequently, the ranking for merging UNRWA and UNHCR with respect to contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 3.

***Criterion no. 5—Financial costs***

As detailed in chapter 2 (figure 5), data on the UNHCR's activity indicates considerably less resources in overseeing the resettlement of the world's refugees than those allocated to UNRWA in providing for Palestinian refugees only. Nevertheless, fully integrating Palestinian refugees into their host states' societies, incorporating them into local labor markets, and substantially upgrading their living conditions will require extensive investment in housing, education, and employment infrastructure, which need to be part of a macro plan that accompanies the merger. And yet, unlike the high economic costs involved in operating UNRWA, it is reasonable to assume that the costs associated with this alternative will be more effective in terms of results for each dollar invested in assistance.

Consequently, the ranking for merging UNRWA and UNHCR with respect to financial costs, on a scale of 1 (low compatibility with the criterion) to 3 (high compatibility with the criterion), receives a score of 2.

**Table 6.** Concluding assessment of alternative C, merging UNRWA with UNHCR

Criterion	Explanation	Score
Feasibility	The feasibility is low due to lack of desire on the part of stakeholders.	1
Rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their daily lives	This alternative would likely improve the rehabilitation of Palestinian refugees who will benefit from experience, expertise, and best practices of UNHCR in resettling refugees from conflicts around the world.	3
Strengthening the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale	Given the importance and symbolism that the refugee issue carries in the Palestinian narrative, assigning responsibility vis-à-vis refugees to an entity other than the Palestinian Authority is likely to weaken the Palestinian Authority's governability.	1
Contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict	Assigning responsibility for a core issue in the conflict to a professional (and not political) entity, which has proven experience in the field and will align the definition of Palestinian refugees and their resettlement mechanism with those of other refugees worldwide will positively contribute to resolving the conflict.	3
Financial costs	The costs are high; yet it is reasonable to assume that the costs associated with this alternative are effective for each dollar invested in assistance.	2
Weighted assessment	=10/5	2



### **Alternative D: An integrated modular approach based on successful elements in the first three alternatives**

Seeing as each of the abovementioned alternatives has built-in weaknesses and varying implementation difficulties, the fourth alternative comprises a plethora of actions that results from combining different elements of the first three alternatives. For example, it is possible to consider a course of action whereby alternative C (transferring UNRWA's responsibilities to UNHCR) will be implemented in Syria and Lebanon only, whereas responsibility for Palestinian refugees in Jordan and in the Palestinian territories will be assumed by the government of the host entities (alternative B). Another possible scenario is to have a different set-up in the Gaza Strip where a new international organization will be established to avoid transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and resources to Hamas. Alternatively, it is possible to consider transferring the responsibility for Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip to Hamas under certain conditions, such as the complete inability to restore the Palestinian Authority's governance in the Gaza Strip and should a working arrangement between Israel and Hamas with regional cooperation and support (especially that of Egypt) be reached.

Because this modular alternative may comprise a set of different paths of action—determined by multiple considerations, diverging interests of the sides, and other unique variables of the assessing body—we did not apply the theoretical model to this alternative but merely present it theoretically as a possible product of analyzing the three basic alternatives (A–C).

### **Concluding Assessment of the Alternatives and Policy Recommendations**

Utilizing the model to conduct a theoretical analysis suggests that transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and resources to governments in operational zones (alternative B) has the highest weighted score; thus, it might be a positive first step in considering different alternatives to emerge from the current status quo. This course of action embodies three clear advantages: it will contribute to improving living conditions for the Palestinian refugees; it will strengthen the governability of the Palestinian Authority; and it will positively contribute to a future Israeli-Palestinian process toward resolving the conflict.

**Table 7.** Comparative assessment of the three central alternatives

Criterion	Implementing comprehensive reforms	Transferring UNRWA's responsibilities and budget to governments in the different operation zones, including the Palestinian Authority	Merging UNRWA with UNHCR
Feasibility	1	2	1
Rehabilitating Palestinian refugees and improving their daily lives	2	3	3
Strengthening the Palestinian Authority's governability and state rationale	1	3	1
Contributing to an Israeli-Palestinian political process toward resolving the conflict	2	3	3
Financial costs	1	2	2
Weighted assessment	1.4	2.6	2

We nevertheless remain somber and very much attuned to the many obstacles that pave the road to change—primarily the reluctance of all stakeholders to change the status of Palestinian refugees and limit their number, which is inherent in all alternatives presented, as well as the lack of will of any of the host entities to assume responsibility for this thorny issue, which has become symbolic to the Palestinian ethos over the decades. Indeed, even in Jordan, where circumstances for change appear to be ripest, the demographic weight and influence of UNRWA beneficiaries are likely to create substantial difficulties in promoting any form of change.

Consequently, overcoming the many impediments requires an expression of Palestinian will and broad international backing—primarily from the Arab world, and particularly from the leadership of the pragmatic Sunni camp

including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. Adopting a modular alternative that caters for optimal adjustments in UNRWA's different operation zones and contingency measures to deal with opposition during the implementation stages are also essential. Previous thinking about UNRWA's future suggested a gradual process of over a decade of UNRWA's dismantling and even Israeli aid in supporting the Palestinian health and education systems during the transition period, in order to ensure that no humanitarian and economic blunders are suffered by the Palestinian population under UNRWA's responsibility.<sup>168</sup> Another necessary condition is Israel's support, or at least lack of opposition to introducing changes to the current status quo, primarily in the Gaza Strip where UNRWA's continued operation in the current format serves as a convenient default to dealing with the complex reality posed by Hamas's rule.

Nevertheless, in acknowledging that at least part of the deadlock stems from the fact that no alternative to the current situation is presented, this chapter sought to fill the vacuum by offering a number of alternatives and an empirical methodology for assessing them. To conclude this chapter, we recommend basing any future course of action on the following six principles:

1. **Differential implementation** in tailoring the most appropriate course of action to the circumstances that characterize each of UNRWA's five operational zones.
2. **Gradual implementation** in a responsible, measured, and controlled manner over a predetermined period, all the while maintaining the ability to fully cater for the population in need.
3. **Modifying the eligibility criteria of refugees** so that the process is transparent, vastly agreed upon, and apolitical.
4. **Fundamental change in the mandate** of any organization that will oversee the issue of Palestinian refugees, with a clear emphasis on rehabilitating them, integrating them as empowered citizens with equal rights in the different operation zones, and defining a time limit for their resettlement.
5. **Supervision and monitoring** that will ensure organizational efficiency, transparency, and functional and structural adjustments subject to developing needs.
6. **Backing and support** (mainly) of the United States; the pragmatic Sunni Arab world led by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan; the Palestinians; and stakeholders in the international community.