

EUPOL COPPS: A Strategic Tool for Governance and Security Reform in Post-War Gaza

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November 2025

This document is part of a series of policy papers within a joint project of the Mitvim Institute and the Berl Katznelson Foundation, aimed at thinking about the day after the war.

Abstract

This paper critically examines the potential adaptation of the European Union Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support (EUPOL COPPS) as a strategic tool for stabilizing post-conflict Gaza. Established in 2006 under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy framework, EUPOL COPPS has been instrumental in strengthening Palestinian Civil Police (PCP) capacities and promoting judicial reforms in the West Bank, despite facing operational constraints, political fragmentation, and resource limitations. Recognizing these challenges, the paper explores how a recalibrated EUPOL COPPS mission could address the urgent governance and security needs in Gaza following the cessation of hostilities.

Drawing on comparative insights from international missions such as the US Security Coordinator (USSC) and Kosovo Police development efforts, the paper argues that a successful intervention must be context-specific, integrating security, governance, and economic revitalization strategies. Key recommendations include the establishment of a Transitional Security Authority under international oversight to manage disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of armed groups; the expansion of mission personnel with contributions from regional Arab partners; the adoption of advanced technologies to support judicial and policing reforms; and the engagement of civil society to foster local legitimacy and oversight.

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policing reforms; and the engagement of civil society to foster local legitimacy and oversight.

The paper also presents a comparative analysis of five strategic deployment options: maintaining the current EUPOL COPPS structure, expanding the mandate under the CSDP, establishing a new regional mission under Arab League auspices, creating a hybrid European-Arab mission, and focusing exclusively on technological support. The analysis concludes that a hybrid mission, combining European technical expertise with regional political legitimacy, offers the most promising path forward, provided clear command structures and shared objectives are established.

Ultimately, the study contends that with careful strategic design, robust international support, and genuine local engagement, an adapted EUPOL COPPS mission could serve as a cornerstone for post-conflict reconstruction, governance reform, and long-term stabilization in Gaza.

Introduction: Background and Strategic Context

EUPOL COPPS was created in 2006 under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework to strengthen Palestinian security institutions and promote the rule of law.¹ Its establishment aligned with the EU's broader strategy of supporting a two-state solution by empowering the Palestinian Authority to govern effectively and sustainably. However, political fragmentation, notably the split between the West Bank (PA-controlled) and Gaza (Hamas-controlled), has limited EUPOL COPPS' impact to the West Bank.²

The recent conflict in Gaza highlights the urgent need for renewed international efforts to rebuild governance and security institutions. Given the weaknesses demonstrated by the PA, even in the West Bank, any future intervention must address governance gaps, legitimacy deficits, and structural vulnerabilities. These challenges make it essential to revisit and adapt existing models like EUPOL COPPS for the specific realities of Gaza.

Article 2

Mission statement

1. The aim of EUPOL COPPS is to contribute to the establishment of sustainable and effective policing arrangements under Palestinian ownership in accordance with best international standards, in cooperation with the Community's institution building programmes as well as other international efforts in the wider context of Security Sector including Criminal Justice Reform.

To this end EUPOL COPPS shall:

- (a) assist the Palestinian Civil Police (PCP) in implementation of the Police Development Programme by advising and closely mentoring PCP, and specifically senior officials at District, Headquarters and Ministerial level;
- (b) coordinate and facilitate EU and Member State assistance, and where requested, international assistance to PCP;
- (c) advise on police-related Criminal Justice elements.

¹ Council of the European Union, "EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS)," Factsheet, 2023.

² International Crisis Group, "Reforming the Palestinian Authority: Ending Repression and Improving Governance," Report No. 234, March 2022.

Structure and Objectives of EUPOL COPPS

EUPOL COPPS operates as a civilian mission focused on two pillars: support to the Palestinian Civil Police (PCP) through training, strategic planning, technical assistance, and professional development, including specialized units such as the Family Protection Unit, and strengthening rule of law by enhancing judicial institutions' independence and capacity, fostering cooperation between police, prosecutors, and courts.³ The mission includes approximately 70–80 international and local staff, supported by a network of European experts. Activities range from daily advisory work to longer-term strategic reforms, under a mandate coordinated closely with the PA Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice.⁴ Despite limited authority and complex political surroundings, EUPOL COPPS has achieved incremental but notable progress in capacity building, professionalism, and human rights integration within PA security institutions.

Achievements and Challenges

Among its key achievements, EUPOL COPPS has contributed to the creation of specialized policing units, the development of standardized training curricula, initiatives promoting community policing and gender-sensitive law enforcement, and support for improved judicial professionalism and case management.⁵ However, persistent challenges, including political fragmentation, limited jurisdiction, resource constraints, and geopolitical pressures, have significantly

BACKGROUND



AREA COVERED

EUPOL COPPS operates in areas of the West Bank under the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. The Mission HQ is located in Ramallah.



HEAD OF MISSION

Karin Lindal
(Sweden) since April 2024.



BUDGET

EUR 13.24 million
For the period from
1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.



MISSION ESTABLISHMENT

The Mission was established by the European Union on 14 November 2005 (COUNCIL JOINT ACTION 2005 / 797 / CFSP) and became operational on 1 January 2006.



MISSION STAFF

106 Mission Members
The Head of Mission, 70 international and 35 local staff.



DURATION OF MANDATE

The EUPOL COPPS mandate is renewed annually and currently runs from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.

Timeline of EUPOL COPPS Activities in the Palestinian Territories

- **2005:** EU Member States agreed with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel to launch EUPOL COPPS as a police mission to assist in strengthening the institutional capacity of the PCP.
- **2006:** Establishment of EUPOL COPPS under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework; initial focus on supporting Palestinian Civil Police (PCP) and developing the rule of law.
- **2007-2009:** The Mission mandate was amended to also include support to Palestinian criminal justice authorities, as part of the PA's comprehensive approach towards security sector and criminal justice reforms.
- **2010-2012:** Development of specialized police units, including the Family Protection Unit focusing on gender-based violence; support for community policing initiatives.
- **2013-2015:** Launch of strategic planning frameworks for justice and policing sectors; introduction of human rights training across security institutions.

³ United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), "Support to Palestinian Civil Police Development," Project Report, 2021.

⁴ EUPOL COPPS Website: <https://eupolcopps.eu/en>.

⁵ EUPOL COPPS, Annual Review Document.

constrained its full operational effectiveness.⁶ These experiences demonstrate that without broader political resolutions and multilateral coordination, institutional reforms alone are insufficient to ensure sustainable governance and security sector development.

Applying the Model to Post-Conflict Gaza

An adapted EUPOL COPPS mission could contribute significantly to Gaza's stabilization, but only under conditions that recognize Gaza's unique political, security, and economic landscape. Reintegration of fragmented security forces under neutral authority, rapid judicial and legal reform prioritizing independence and integrity (in accordance with International Standards), establishment of anti-corruption mechanisms, and humanitarian recovery linked to governance development are core needs.⁷ Key adjustments must include mandate flexibility to allow expanded operational scope without requiring full reauthorization, significant augmentation of mission personnel through regional contributions (e.g., UAE, Jordan, Morocco), a tiered deployment starting with humanitarian security, and ensuring symbols and uniforms are locally acceptable, possibly under a "Gaza Recovery Force" umbrella. Lessons drawn from the US Security Coordinator (USSC) and Kosovo experiences emphasize the importance of distinguishing between "hard" security tasks (counter-terrorism, disarmament) and "soft" security tasks (community policing, judicial support), ensuring complementary roles across different international actors⁸.

- **2016-2018:** Enhanced coordination with international partners (e.g., United Nations, United States Security Coordinator); efforts to link security reform with broader governance development programs.
- **2019-2021:** Strengthened focus on judicial sector reform, including case management systems and prosecutorial support; introduction of digital tools to improve operational efficiency.
- **2022-Present:** Strategic reassessment of EUPOL COPPS's role in light of political stagnation.

Policy Recommendations

To effectively implement a governance reform mission in Gaza, the following strategies are recommended. First, establishing a Transitional Security Authority under international oversight would manage DDR processes and stabilize the security environment.⁹ Second, leveraging advanced technologies for policing and judicial processes would enhance efficiency, transparency, and public trust. Third, engaging civil society organizations would ensure community-driven reforms, monitoring police behaviour, advocating for marginalized groups, and enhancing oversight mechanisms. Fourth, proactive regional and international diplomatic engagement must secure political buy-in from regional players (especially Gulf countries), while maintaining

⁶ United States Institute of Peace, "Security Sector Reform in Fragile States: The Case of Palestine," 2020.

⁷ International Peace Institute, "Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Institution Building in Fragile States," 2022.

⁸ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), "Kosovo Police Service Development and Challenges," OSCE Report, 2020.

⁹ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in Peacekeeping Operations," Policy Document, 2020.

strict security assurances acceptable to Israel. Fifth, economic revitalization initiatives, including the establishment of industrial zones and promotion of cross-border trade, must accompany governance reforms to create sustainable economic opportunities.¹⁰ Finally, a robust monitoring and evaluation framework must ensure transparency, adaptability, and long-term success, complemented by formal invitations from the PA and tacit approval from Israel to guarantee operational legitimacy.

Analysis of Deployment Options

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages	Strategic Assessment	Recommended Actions
Maintaining the current EUPOL COPPS structure without modification	Rapid deployment leveraging existing institutional frameworks; minimal bureaucratic hurdles.	Inadequate mandate scope for Gaza's realities; limited flexibility and credibility in the new operational environment.	Not recommended as a standalone approach.	Requires substantial redesign to meet Gaza-specific challenges.
Expanding the mandate under the existing CSDP framework	Enables operational and geographical flexibility; facilitates multinational contributions under EU leadership; preserves accumulated expertise.	Requires political consensus among EU member states, which may delay deployment and introduce conditions.	Recommended in conjunction with broader partnerships.	Initiate diplomatic efforts within the EU to prepare for rapid mandate adjustment discussions.
Establishing a new mission under regional (Arab League) auspices	Enhances local legitimacy; mitigates perceptions of Western imposition; leverages regional	Potential deficiencies in technical expertise, operational standards, and sustainable financing; possible inter-	Feasible as a complementary pillar, not as a sole framework.	Engage Arab League members early to explore interest and establish political groundwork for cooperation.

¹⁰ Office of the Quartet, "Economic Framework for Gaza Reconstruction," 2021.

	political dynamics.	Arab political tensions.		
Creating a hybrid European-Arab mission	Combines European technical proficiency with Arab regional acceptance; broadens political coalition and financial base.	Operational coordination complexities; risks of divergent strategic objectives among contributors.	Highly recommended as the preferred model.	Launch formal negotiations between the EU and selected Arab states (e.g., Gulf, Jordan, Morocco) to design a joint mission structure; establish joint command and funding mechanisms.
Focusing exclusively on technological support without physical deployment	Reduces political sensitivity and security risks; offers cost-efficient support for governance and judiciary reform.	Insufficient for addressing the physical security needs of post-conflict environments; risk of limited on-the-ground impact.	Useful as a supplementary strategy, but insufficient as a primary intervention mechanism.	Develop remote governance support systems in parallel with physical mission deployment.

Strategic Recommendation: The preferred option is the establishment of a hybrid European-Arab mission, leveraging the technical expertise, institutional memory, and resource base of the European Union, combined with the political legitimacy, cultural proximity, and regional influence of key Arab states. This model offers the highest potential for operational success, local acceptance, and sustainable stabilization. Early diplomatic engagement, clearly defined governance frameworks, and joint operational planning between the EU and Arab partners are critical first steps.

Stakeholder Reactions and Management

Stakeholder reactions are anticipated to vary widely: the PA would likely support the mission conditionally, emphasizing its leadership role; Hamas, if not fully dismantled, may resist external intervention unless included in transitional governance frameworks; Israel would prioritize security assurances and operational transparency; Egypt would likely support the initiative if it protects its border security; Gulf countries, as key financial and political backers, would seek a role in the political reconstruction of Gaza; and the broader international community would likely back the initiative,

contingent on clear operational frameworks and funding guarantees. Civil society and local communities' reactions would hinge upon the mission's ability to deliver tangible improvements in security, justice, and economic opportunities, making trust-building measures and community engagement critical from the outset.¹¹

The Current Situation in Gaza and Its Implications for the Feasibility of EUPOL COPPS

The renewed and protracted conflict in Gaza since October 2023 has dramatically reshaped the strategic and operational landscape in which European security missions might operate. For EUPOL COPPS any future expansion or replication of its model in Gaza appears highly constrained by current realities. The following are the major obstacles that the Gaza conflict presents to EUPOL COPPS' potential role in a post-conflict stabilization framework:

1. Lack of Security and Civil Governance Foundations

A central premise of EUPOL COPPS' engagement is the existence of a functioning, legitimate civil governance structure capable of coordinating with international partners. In the West Bank, this role has been fulfilled by the PA, albeit with significant challenges. In Gaza, however, Hamas' continued control and its militant posture render the territory incompatible with the core mandate of EUPOL COPPS. There is no institutional parity to the PA's Ministry of Interior or National Security Forces operating under a rule-of-law framework. Instead, Hamas maintains its own internal security apparatus, often accused of using force to suppress dissent, control civilian populations, and engage in acts that violate international humanitarian law.¹²

The operational implications for EUPOL COPPS are severe. Without a legitimate counterpart to work with in Gaza, the mission would lack both political traction and the capacity to implement reform-based programs in policing, criminal justice, and legal institutional development.

2. Hamas' Militarization of Civil Space

Recent reports have underscored Hamas' ongoing strategy of embedding military infrastructure within civilian neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals.¹³ This militarization of civil space not only exacerbates the humanitarian crisis but fundamentally erodes the distinction between civilian governance and combatant activity—an essential distinction for the viability of any European mission focused on civil security reform.

Furthermore, Hamas has resisted international initiatives that would reintroduce the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, thereby obstructing pathways toward political

¹¹ Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "[Public Opinion Polls in Gaza and the West Bank: Implications for Governance and Reconciliation](#)," 2023.

¹² The Guardian, "Hamas accused of torture, arbitrary detentions in Gaza amid ongoing conflict," May 2025.

¹³ Reuters, "Hamas embeds military assets in schools, hospitals, say IDF and U.S. officials," 1 June 2025.

reconciliation that could facilitate renewed international engagement, including by the EU. The absence of a credible and depoliticized law enforcement structure in Gaza precludes EUPOL COPPS from exercising any meaningful advisory or capacity-building role.

3. Humanitarian Emergency and Rule of Law Breakdown

The humanitarian collapse unfolding in Gaza since early 2024 - characterized by mass displacement, infrastructure destruction, and severe food insecurity - has also entailed a broader collapse of the rule of law.¹⁴ In such conditions, where informal power networks, armed groups, and opportunistic actors dominate public life, there is no effective institutional framework to uphold legal norms or human rights standards.

EUPOL COPPS, which operates on the premise of institution-building and legal reform, would find itself unable to initiate even foundational programming in this context. Moreover, its presence could be seen as either symbolic or instrumentalized, especially if deployed in a territory where governance remains dominated by an internationally designated terrorist organization.

4. Strategic Implications for the European Union

The EU has long envisioned EUPOL COPPS as part of a broader strategy for state-building and peacebuilding in the Palestinian territories. Yet the current situation in Gaza poses a strategic dilemma. While there is growing international support for EU involvement in “the day after” scenarios, especially in policing and border security, any mission modeled on EUPOL COPPS would require a significant transformation in local political conditions.

Critically, these conditions would include: (1) a cessation of hostilities; (2) the dismantling or marginalization of Hamas’ security apparatus; and (3) the re-establishment of Palestinian Authority jurisdiction in Gaza, supported by international consensus and robust security guarantees. Until such prerequisites are met, the deployment of EUPOL COPPS-style initiatives remains infeasible.

Conclusion

EUPOL COPPS provides a proven, adaptable model for rebuilding governance and security structures in post-conflict environments. However, the feasibility of EUPOL COPPS extending or replicating its mission in Gaza is presently constrained by multiple factors, foremost among them Hamas’ control of the territory and its rejection of internationally endorsed governance frameworks. The absence of institutional legitimacy, the intertwining of military and civilian domains, and the erosion of the rule of law all present insurmountable barriers to a civilian security mission premised on cooperation, reform, and legality. While the EU may ultimately play a central role in

¹⁴ UN OCHA, “Collapse of law enforcement and governance in Gaza leaves civilians exposed,” Situation Report, May 2025.

post-conflict governance stabilization, that role will depend on political shifts on the ground that have yet to materialize.

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