

Does the UN Exhibit an Anti-Israel Bias? A Critical Analysis of UNRWA's Responses to Israeli Allegations After October 7

André Lajst^{a1}, Igor H. Sabino^b

^aPhD Student, Juridic and Social Sciences Center, Córdoba University, Executive Director, StandWithUs Brasil. ^bPhd, Content Manager, StandWithUs Brasil

Abstract

Following the October 7 massacre, Israel found itself entangled in a series of diplomatic confrontations with the United Nations. Central to this tension are allegations that employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have connections to Hamas and may have participated in the attacks. The perception of anti-Israel bias—particularly within the voting patterns of UN General Assembly member states—has been widely studied, often through the framework of what has been termed the “new antisemitism.” Building on this body of scholarship, this article investigates whether the UN’s alleged anti-Israel posture extends beyond member-state voting behavior and reflects a deeper institutional pattern. Adopting Sharansky’s (2004) 3D framework as an explicit analytical lens and testing it against competing hypotheses rooted in operational constraints, legal due-process norms, and General Assembly dynamics, the article offers a structured qualitative content analysis of UNRWA’s official responses to Israeli accusations, supplemented by a computational linguistic analysis of the agency’s rhetorical patterns. The findings suggest that while the alternative hypotheses account for significant aspects of UNRWA’s response behavior, a cumulative pattern of differential treatment toward Israel persists—including a measurable asymmetry in the use of assertive versus hedging language—that is most consistently explained by the double standards dimension of the “new antisemitism” framework.

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Introduction

The prevention of violent extremism requires not only disrupting terrorist organizations but also understanding the institutional and discursive environments in which extremist narratives gain legitimacy. Within this broader context, debates surrounding antisemitism and the role of international organizations have acquired increasing relevance following Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack against Israel.

¹ Corresponding Author Contact: André Lajst, andrel@standwithus.com; Obispo Trejo 242 X5000HUA Córdoba Argentina

A few days after the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, Israel strongly criticized the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres due to his remarks about the attack. While condemning the murder of 1,200 people and the abduction of another 250, Guterres stated that the events “did not happen in a vacuum” (Hülsemann, 2023). For Israeli authorities, his statement seemed to justify Hamas’s actions, which later forced Guterres to clarify his position.

This diplomatic clash between Israel and the United Nations, however, was only one of many that followed Israel’s counter-offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, accompanied by mutual accusations between the country and the international organization. The main controversies revolve around UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, whose staff, according to Israel, maintained ties with Hamas with some employees being directly involved in the October 7 attack. Although the UN has denied Israel’s accusations on multiple occasions—particularly amid mounting pressure to suspend international donations to UNRWA—nine employees were dismissed after internal UN investigations (Frankel, 2024).

In January 2024, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article stating that, according to intelligence reports obtained by its journalists, approximately 10% of UNRWA employees in the Gaza Strip had some form of connection to terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, including participation in the murder of 1,200 people in the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust (Keller-Lynn & Luhnnow, 2024). The Israeli government corroborated these allegations, and, as a result, several countries—including the United States, Germany, and Japan—suspended their financial contributions to the UN agency. One year later, in January 2025, Israel ended up severing ties with the UN agency after video footage from security cameras showed a UNRWA employee kidnapping the body of Jonathan Samerano, an Israeli civilian murdered by Hamas terrorists on October 7 (The Times of Israel, 2025).

Despite these dynamics, the UN has not been uniformly hostile to Israel. The Secretary-General repeatedly condemned Hamas’s actions, called for the release of hostages, and the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict found reasonable grounds

to believe that sexual violence occurred during the October 7 attacks (United Nations, March 2024; Guterres, 2024).

Despite all these demonstrations, the UN's neutrality regarding Israel continues to be questioned by the country and its supporters, especially after the former UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, stated that she was dismissed in October 2024 for refusing to classify Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip as genocide (The Wall Street Journal, 2024). All these developments have reignited longstanding debates about the UN's stance on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the existence of a bias against Israel within the institution.

Beyond questions of international law and institutional neutrality, these debates also carry important implications for the field of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE). Contemporary P/CVE scholarship increasingly recognizes that extremist mobilization is influenced not only by individual or organizational factors, but also by broader informational and institutional environments that shape perceptions of legitimacy, injustice, and collective grievance. Because antisemitism functions as a central ideological component across multiple forms of violent extremism—including jihadist, far-right, and, in certain contexts, other ideologically motivated extremist movements—the ways in which international institutions address, frame, or fail to address allegations involving antisemitism may influence broader discursive environments relevant to radicalization and prevention efforts. Examining the consistency, credibility, and perceived impartiality of institutional responses is therefore relevant not only to international governance but also to understanding conditions that may facilitate or mitigate extremist narratives.

In December 2016, during his final speech as UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon addressed the Israeli–Palestinian issue, lamenting the fact that a Palestinian state had yet to be established. While offering criticism of Israel and attributing partial responsibility to the country for the situation, he also openly acknowledged the anti-Israel bias present within the UN. Moon stated that, over the years, various political maneuvers had turned the Jewish state into the target of a disproportionate number of resolutions, reports, and committees. He also emphasized that this excessive focus undermined the organization's ability to effectively resolve the conflict (Ban Ki-moon, 2016).

This statement strengthens the accusations made by some pro-Israel supporters that the UN has an anti-Israel bias, but this is primarily observed within multilateral forums, such as the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Therefore, Ban Ki-Moon's critique appears to be directed more toward the member states than the UN as an institution itself. According to data compiled by the pro-Israel NGO UN Watch, between 2015 and 2025, the UNGA adopted 170 condemnatory resolutions against Israel, compared to just 76 against all other UN member states combined (UN Watch, 2025).

These findings are corroborated by several academic studies that aim to analyze and explain the pattern of anti-Israel voting observed in the UNGA, since these resolutions are non-binding and result from the political decisions of the UN's 193 member states (Becker et al., 2014; Haykin et al., 2021; Gruenberg, 2009; Zaghi, 2021). Some scholars even debate whether this pattern could be considered a manifestation of the so-called "new antisemitism" (Judaken, 2008; Klug, 2003; Sharansky, 2004).

The events following October 7, however, seem to suggest that the UN's alleged anti-Israel bias permeates multiple dimensions of the institution. A report by the Henry Jackson Society (2025) found that among 367 UN reports on the Gaza Strip published after the Hamas massacre, the phenomenon of "human shields" was mentioned only four times, each in a single sentence, while the UN published approximately ten reports criticizing Israel's conduct in Gaza (Fox & Aizenberg, 2025).

In light of this, and considering the complexities of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its social and political ramifications, this article seeks to investigate the alleged existence of an anti-Israel bias within the United Nations as an institution, particularly in the post–October 7 context. Beyond contributing to debates on international organizations and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the article also contributes to the P/CVE literature by examining whether institutional responses to allegations involving antisemitism display patterns that may affect perceptions of legitimacy, institutional credibility, and the broader informational environment in which extremist narratives emerge, circulate, and are reinforced.

The Present Study

The central question guiding this study is: does the anti-Israel bias observed in the voting patterns of UNGA member states also extend to the United Nations as an institution? Considering that the UN is composed of a range of bodies with distinct roles and competencies, this article will focus specifically on the relationship between Israel and UNRWA. The UN agency for Palestinian refugees is not only at the center of several recent controversies but is also deeply embedded in the very history of the conflict. Established in 1949 through a UNGA resolution, UNRWA was created to assist those displaced by the war that followed Israel's declaration of independence in 1948.

As a result, UNRWA has long been the target of sustained criticism by Israel and its supporters. In 2018, for instance, during his first term as U.S. President, Donald Trump suspended American funding to the agency, claiming that it was “irredeemably flawed” (Gaouette & Crawford, 2018). In this regard, one of the main allegations directed at UNRWA over the years—which has led to the suspension of donations by several countries—concerns the organization's alleged involvement not only with terrorism but also with the radicalization of Palestinians through textbooks and other educational materials used in its schools, which are claimed to contain extremist content.

Allegations of UNRWA's involvement with radicalization are longstanding. In 2005, an estimated 46 UNRWA school graduates became suicide bombers (Gold, 2005). In 2017, UN Watch documented 41 UNRWA employees promoting violence against Jews (UN Watch, 2017, pp. 6–12). In 2021, IMPACT-se reported that UNRWA textbooks contained incitement to violence, prompting an apology from Commissioner-General Lazzarini (Times of Israel, 2021). These patterns intensified after October 7, when Israel launched a campaign against UNRWA and called for its dismantling (UNRWA, 2025).

Answering this question is crucial for contemporary debates surrounding the so-called “new antisemitism,” understood as a form of hatred toward Jews that targets Israel as the symbolic representative of the Jewish collective. One of the main features attributed to this form of antisemitism is the application of standards to Israel that are not applied to any other country. Palestinian refugees are the only national group to be granted both a distinct definition of refugee status and a dedicated UN agency, unlike all other nationalities—a

circumstance that makes the examination of UNRWA's conduct analytically relevant. However, as the literature review will demonstrate, this circumstance alone does not establish the presence of antisemitism; it may also be explained by the historical timing of UNRWA's creation (1949, before UNHCR and the 1951 Refugee Convention), by the political dynamics of the General Assembly, or by the operational realities of working in a territory governed by an armed group. The task of this article is to evaluate which of these explanations—or what combination thereof—best accounts for UNRWA's institutional behavior in the aftermath of October 7.

This paper tests the hypothesis that the way UNRWA responded to the accusations made by Israel following October 7 exhibits a pattern of differential treatment consistent with the “new antisemitism” thesis—specifically, with the double standards dimension theorized by Sharansky (2004). To do so, it evaluates UNRWA's responses against three competing explanatory frameworks: operational constraints arising from Hamas's *de facto* control of Gaza, legal due-process requirements governing international organizations, and the institutional dynamics of the General Assembly. The analysis proceeds through a structured three-step protocol applied to six specific cases, designed to ensure that the antisemitism hypothesis is assessed comparatively rather than assumed. By situating this inquiry within the broader debate on the “new antisemitism,” the study underscores the importance of critically distinguishing between legitimate political criticism and discriminatory narratives that target Israel as a proxy for antisemitic sentiment—a distinction that is essential for the formulation of effective policies to counter radicalization and antisemitism, particularly in the post–October 7, 2023 context.

In addition to this introduction, the paper includes a literature review covering the historical relationship between Israel and the UN and the concept of the “new antisemitism.” The methodology section declares the adoption of Sharansky's (2004) 3D framework, identifies three competing hypotheses, and defines the three-step analytical protocol. The results section applies this protocol to six cases drawn from UNRWA's Claims versus Facts document (UNRWA, 2025), followed by a cross-case synthesis. The discussion and conclusion examine the findings in light of the “new antisemitism” debate.

Literature Review

The United Nations and the accusations of anti-Israel bias

The relationship between Israel and the United Nations started before the country declared its independence, when, in 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 181, which called for the partition of Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish state. The latter became a reality in 1948, following the end of the British Mandate, whereas the former still does not exist today due to the initial refusal of Arab states to recognize Israel's existence back in 1948—a conflict that persists to this day.

According to Geronik (2024), Israel's relationship with the UN has moved through phases: mutual trust (1947–1955), growing hostility culminating in Resolution 3379 equating Zionism with racism (1956–1975), and a period of normalization. In light of recent developments, a fourth phase may have begun after October 7, once again characterized by deepening mistrust.

In 1979, Israel's ambassador Chaim Herzog described the UN as the “world headquarters of antisemitism” (Herzog, 1979, pp. 143). A similar sentiment was expressed by Ambassador Gilad Erdan in October 2023, when he wore a yellow Star of David pin before the Security Council to protest its failure to condemn Hamas—a gesture that drew criticism even from some Israeli institutions (Magid, 2023).

On October 27, 2023, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 10/21, calling for civilian protection and hostage release but failing to mention Hamas by name—despite criticizing Israel for ordering evacuations in Gaza. The resolution passed with 121 votes in favor, 14 against, and 44 abstentions (United Nations General Assembly, 2023).

The fact that the UN Security Council has not recognized Hamas as a terrorist organization—even after the October 7 massacre—and that the UNGA approved a resolution which failed to explicitly condemn the group, highlights some of the structural limitations of the United Nations. These limitations are often cited by Israel and its supporters as supposed evidence of a disproportionate and hostile bias against the country.

The structural dynamics of the UN enable this disproportionate focus. As Gruenberg (2009) demonstrates, the Security Council's veto power and the General Assembly's bloc-

voting patterns allow specific states to become targets of condemnation regardless of the severity of their conduct. Becker et al. (2014) found that between 1990 and 2013, Israel was the target of 65% of all country-specific critical resolutions in the General Assembly, while no other country appeared in more than 10%. The authors attribute this primarily to the UN's institutional structure rather than to antisemitism per se (Becker et al., 2014, pp. 1–6).

Zaghi (2021) identifies political orientation as a key driver: right-leaning governments are more likely to oppose anti-Israel resolutions, while left-leaning governments tend to support them. His regression analysis confirms that partisan alignment, rather than principled assessment, shapes voting behavior toward Israel.

Haykin et al. (2021) add a religious dimension, finding that states with histories of repressing religious minorities disproportionately vote against Israel, likely to divert attention from their own records. Between 1990 and 2014, Israel faced opposing votes 87.63% of the time.

These conclusions reinforce the view that the anti-Israel voting pattern is driven by structural and political factors rather than antisemitism alone (Becker et al., 2014; Haykin et al., 2021). Critically, however, none of these studies examines whether the UN as an institution—as distinct from its member states—harbors bias against Israel. This is precisely the gap this paper seeks to address.

Israel and the “new antisemitism”

On February 27, 2024, Time magazine featured an article by Professor Noah Feldman titled “The New Antisemitism,” highlighting that while antisemitic incidents had surged after October 7, the trend predated it (Feldman, 2024). A central element of this debate is the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, which holds that criticism of Israel becomes antisemitic when a standard is applied to Israel that is not applied to any other country. However, seven of its eleven illustrative examples concern Israel, prompting critics to argue that it serves to silence legitimate criticism.

In response, the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, endorsed by approximately 370 academics, proposed an alternative definition. It argues that boycotts and the application of double standards against Israel are not inherently antisemitic, given the right to free

expression—a position that stands in direct contrast to the IHRA guidance and exposes the core dilemma in the “new antisemitism” debate (Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, 2021).

As Bergmann (2013) notes, discussions around this issue first emerged in the early 2000s during the Second Intifada and growing criticism of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. In the concept of the “new antisemitism,” Israel becomes the “collective Jew,” targeted by old forms of classic antisemitism that have evolved and now find support even among sectors of the global left and anti-colonial movements (Bergmann, 2013, pp. 5).

This view was strongly championed by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. In a speech to the European Parliament in September 2016, Sacks defined antisemitism as the denial of the right of Jews to exist collectively as Jews, enjoying the same rights granted to others. According to Sacks, in the Middle Ages Jews were hated for their religion; in the 19th and 20th centuries, for their race; and today, for their nation-state, Israel. In his view, although the forms shift over time, the essence of Jew-hatred remains unchanged, with Israel now the principal target of antisemitism (Sacks, 2016).

Sharansky (2004), a former Soviet dissident and Israeli minister responsible for monitoring antisemitism, holds a similar view. He argues that the “new antisemitism” represents a novel challenge because it targets the Jewish state and can easily be conflated with legitimate criticism of Israel. To avoid this confusion while exposing new manifestations of Jew-hatred, he proposed what he calls the “3D Test”—three criteria for evaluating criticism of Israel.

The first “D” is Demonization, which occurs when Israel’s actions are exaggerated and compared to those of the Nazis, for example. The second “D” is Double Standards, which apply when Israel is subjected to criteria not applied to any other country—a phenomenon often seen in UN bodies, where Israel is the subject of more condemnatory resolutions than any other state, including known human rights violators. The third “D” is Delegitimization, which refers to denying Israel’s right to exist (Sharansky, 2004).

Some scholars, however, challenge the concept of a “new antisemitism,” arguing that it is overly simplistic and can be politically deployed to silence valid criticism of Israel. Klug (2003) points out that portraying Israel as the “collective Jew” serves both as thesis and

hypothesis for explaining rising hostility toward Jews globally—an approach he considers confusing and distorting. For Klug, while it is undeniable that antisemitism has risen since the Second Intifada, including within the UN, this trend will likely continue as long as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains unresolved. However, he does not see anything “new” in contemporary antisemitism.

Klug (2003) argues that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are independent variables. Analyzing Resolution 3379, he contends it passed not because member states were hostile to Jews but because newly independent states viewed Israel as a European colonial outpost. While this context does not justify the resolution, it explains it in political rather than prejudicial terms. He concludes that hostility toward Israel is the product of the conflict’s dynamics, not a new form of antisemitism (Klug, 2003, pp. 4, 13–15).

Judaken (2008) likewise critiques the concept, arguing that many elements framed as new have long been addressed by earlier theorists. Regarding Sharansky’s 3Ds, he sees them as a useful starting point but vague, noting that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict attracts disproportionate global attention for religious, political, and geostrategic reasons—not necessarily antisemitic ones (Judaken, 2008, pp. 554–555).

Marcus (2015), by contrast, argues that the “new antisemitism” is precisely why classic definitions of antisemitism apply to hostility toward Israel. Drawing on Adorno and Fein, he describes it as characterized by negative portrayals of Israel as threatening and unlike other nations—projecting onto the state the same fabricated images that classic antisemites projected onto Jews.

In the aftermath of the October 7, 2023 massacre, this debate has become ever more urgent. According to the ADL, 2024 saw 9,354 antisemitic incidents in the United States, the highest recorded since the organization began tracking such data in 1979. For the first time, moreover, most of these incidents (58%) contained elements related to Israel or Zionism (ADL, 2025). It is hoped that the analysis of Israel’s relationship with UNRWA in the post–October 7 context will contribute meaningfully to these ongoing discussions.

As this review demonstrates, the scholarly debate on the “new antisemitism” remains unresolved. Proponents such as Sharansky (2004), Sacks (2016), and Marcus (2015) argue that hostility toward Israel—particularly when expressed through demonization,

delegitimization, and the systematic application of double standards—constitutes a mutation of anti-Jewish prejudice that merits analytical treatment as a distinct phenomenon. Critics, including Klug (2003) and Judaken (2008), contend that this framework risks collapsing political conflict into ethnic prejudice, and that hostility toward Israel is more parsimoniously explained by the dynamics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict itself. The existing empirical literature on anti-Israel patterns within the UN system has focused almost exclusively on member-state voting behavior in the General Assembly, identifying structural, political, and religious factors that drive these patterns. What remains largely unexplored is whether such patterns extend beyond state preferences to the institutional behavior of UN agencies themselves. The present study addresses this gap by shifting the analytical focus from the General Assembly to UNRWA, and by testing—rather than assuming—whether the concept of “new antisemitism” provides the most convincing explanation for the agency’s conduct in the aftermath of October 7.

Methodology

This article employs a structured qualitative content analysis to evaluate whether the concept of “new antisemitism” provides a more convincing explanation for UNRWA’s institutional responses to Israeli allegations following the October 7, 2023 massacre than competing explanatory frameworks. Rather than assuming the presence of antisemitism *a priori*, the analysis treats it as a hypothesis to be tested against alternative interpretations. The central question is not whether UNRWA’s responses were politically convenient or institutionally defensive, but whether the pattern of those responses is better accounted for by the logic of double standards—as theorized in the “new antisemitism” literature—than by operational, legal, or security-related constraints.

As discussed in the literature review, the concept of a “new antisemitism” remains contested. Scholars such as Klug (2003) and Judaken (2008) have argued that hostility toward Israel is better understood as a product of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict’s political dynamics rather than as a mutation of anti-Jewish prejudice. Others, including Sharansky (2004), Sacks (2016), and Marcus (2015), contend that contemporary antisemitism has shifted its primary

target from Jewish individuals and communities to the State of Israel, manifesting through patterns of demonization, delegitimization, and the application of double standards.

This article adopts Sharansky's (2004) 3D framework—Demonization, Double Standards, and Delegitimization—as its primary analytical lens. This choice is made explicitly as a methodological decision, for two reasons. First, the 3D test was designed precisely to distinguish legitimate criticism of Israeli policy from conduct that crosses into antisemitic territory, making it directly applicable to the evaluation of institutional behavior. Second, and more importantly, the existing literature on anti-Israel patterns within the UN system has focused almost exclusively on the voting behavior of member states in the General Assembly (Becker et al., 2014; Haykin et al., 2021; Zaghi, 2021). The present study shifts the analytical focus from member-state voting to the institutional behavior of a UN agency itself, a context in which Sharansky's criteria—particularly the “double standards” dimension—offer a structured and falsifiable basis for assessment.

Table 1. Competing Analytical Frameworks on the “New Antisemitism” and Their Implications for the Analysis of UNRWA

Framework	Core Definition of Antisemitism	Double Standards as Evidence of Antisemitism?	Analytical Implication for UNRWA Case
Sharansky (2004); Sacks (2016)	Antisemitism mutates across eras; today it targets Israel as the “collective Jew.” The 3D Test identifies demonization, double standards, and delegitimization as markers.	Yes. Subjecting Israel to criteria not applied to any other state is a defining feature of the “new antisemitism.”	If UNRWA applies an evidentiary or communicative standard to Israel that it does not apply to its own conduct or to Hamas, this constitutes evidence consistent with the double standards dimension.
Klug (2003)	Anti-Zionism and antisemitism are independent variables. Hostility toward Israel reflects political conflict dynamics, not ethnic prejudice. Nothing “new” in contemporary antisemitism.	No. Even when Israel is treated unfairly, this does not necessarily constitute antisemitism. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict generates its own political hostilities.	UNRWA’s response patterns should be explained by the political and operational context of the conflict, not interpreted through the lens of anti-Jewish prejudice.
Judaken (2008)	The “new antisemitism” concept is limited; its elements are not new. Sharansky’s 3Ds are a useful starting point but vague and require more rigorous criteria.	Partially. Double standards exist but have multiple causes: geostrategic attention to the conflict, Zionist exceptionalism claims, opposition to nation-states generally.	Differential treatment of Israel may reflect structural features of international politics rather than antisemitism. Analysis must distinguish between bias and prejudice.

Note. This article adopts the Sharansky/Sacks framework as its primary analytical lens, while testing its explanatory power against the alternatives represented by Klug and Judaken. See Methodology section for justification.

Crucially, the adoption of this framework does not entail treating antisemitism as the only plausible explanation. The analysis explicitly considers three alternative hypotheses that could account for UNRWA’s response patterns without recourse to the concept of institutional bias or antisemitism:

Operational constraints hypothesis. UNRWA-Gaza operates under the *de facto* control of Hamas, which exercises authority over the territory in which the agency delivers services. Humanitarian organizations working in environments controlled by armed groups routinely adopt cautious communication strategies to safeguard staff, maintain access, and ensure the continuity of operations (Terry, 2002). Under this hypothesis, UNRWA's reluctance to publicly validate Israeli allegations or adopt language perceived as siding with one party reflects pragmatic survival considerations rather than ideological alignment or institutional hostility.

Legal due-process hypothesis. International organizations are bound by procedural norms that require formal evidence before acting on allegations against staff. UNRWA's insistence that "allegations are not evidence" may reflect adherence to institutional due-process standards rather than an attempt to shield employees or deflect criticism.

General Assembly dynamics hypothesis. UNRWA's mandate, its definition of Palestinian refugees, and its continued existence are products of General Assembly resolutions. Institutional inertia and the political composition of the UNGA—rather than antisemitic intent—may account for patterns that critics interpret as evidence of bias.

For the antisemitism hypothesis to be sustained, the analysis must demonstrate that UNRWA's response patterns cannot be adequately explained by any combination of these alternatives—or, more precisely, that even when operational, legal, and political factors are accounted for, a residual pattern remains that is most consistent with the application of a double standard toward Israel.

The primary source for analysis is the document *UNRWA: Claims versus Facts*, published on UNRWA's official website in February 2025 and updated in July of the same year. This document represents the agency's most comprehensive public effort to respond to the allegations directed against it by Israel and its supporters following the October 7 attacks. The initial version addressed 21 claims; the updated version responded to 17. For the purposes of this study, only the responses specifically related to allegations of UNRWA staff involvement with Hamas in the context of the October 7 massacre are analyzed, yielding six cases for examination. Allegations concerning UNRWA's broader mandate, refugee definitions, or calls for the agency's dissolution fall outside the scope of this analysis, as these

matters are determined by General Assembly resolutions and are better understood through the lens of member-state politics rather than institutional agency behavior.

Supplementary sources include official statements by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israel Defense Forces, which present the evidentiary basis for Israeli claims; the report of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which examined specific allegations; and independent reporting by international media outlets, particularly *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, both of which played a significant role in the Israel–UNRWA diplomatic crisis by publishing evidence and facilitating responses from both sides.

Each of the six cases is analyzed through a structured three-step protocol designed to ensure that the antisemitism hypothesis is evaluated comparatively rather than assumed. The first step presents the Israeli allegation and UNRWA’s official response as stated in the *Claims versus Facts* document. The second step assesses the extent to which UNRWA’s response can be plausibly explained by the alternative hypotheses outlined above—namely, operational constraints, legal due-process requirements, or General Assembly dynamics. The third step evaluates whether, after these alternatives have been considered, the response pattern remains more consistent with the application of a double standard toward Israel, as theorized by Sharansky (2004). This last step draws on the triangulation of UNRWA’s statements with Israeli official sources, OIOS findings, and independent media reporting.

A note on the weighting of evidence is warranted. Israeli government statements and media reports corroborating its claims are not treated as self-evidently authoritative, just as UNRWA’s denials are not treated as self-evidently evasive. Rather, the analysis applies a consistent evidentiary standard: claims from any party are assessed based on whether they are corroborated by independent sources, whether the responding party addresses the substance of the allegation or deflects through procedural language, and whether the pattern of response is consistent across cases. Where UNRWA provides substantive and verifiable rebuttals, these are acknowledged. Where the agency’s responses are demonstrably incomplete or contradicted by publicly available evidence—including evidence the agency itself indirectly references—this is noted.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study examines a single UN agency’s responses to a specific set of allegations during a defined period (October 2023–July

2025). The findings are not generalizable to the UN system as a whole without further comparative research. Second, the analysis relies on publicly available documents and reporting; internal communications, classified intelligence, and confidential OIOS materials are not accessible. Third, the qualitative nature of the analysis means that the identification of patterns involves interpretive judgment, even when guided by structured criteria. To mitigate this, the three-step protocol is applied consistently across all six cases, and the evidentiary basis for each interpretive claim is made explicit.

Finally, the adoption of Sharansky's framework as an analytical lens does not constitute an endorsement of the political positions associated with its author. The 3D test is employed as a heuristic for identifying patterns of differential treatment, not as a normative judgment on Israeli or Palestinian claims.

Results

Analysis of UNRWA's Responses to Israeli Allegations

As outlined in the methodology, each case is examined through a three-step protocol. Step 1 presents the allegation and UNRWA's response. Step 2 assesses whether the response can be explained by the alternative hypotheses (operational constraints, legal due process, General Assembly dynamics). Step 3 evaluates whether a residual pattern consistent with Sharansky's (2004) double standards criterion persists after the alternatives have been considered.

Case 1: The "10 Percent" Claim — Alleged Staff Links to Hamas and Islamic Jihad

"The Claim: Citing alleged intelligence estimates, several media have relayed claims that around 10 per cent of all UNRWA staff in Gaza, or about 1,200 people, have links to Hamas or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad" (UNRWA, February 2025).

Step 1: Allegation and Response

On January 29, 2024, *The Wall Street Journal* published a report claiming it had seen Israeli intelligence indicating that at least 12 UNRWA staff members participated in Hamas's

attack and that roughly 10% of UNRWA's Gaza staff—approximately 1,200 people—had ties to radical Islamic groups. At the time, the United States stated that while it could not verify the allegations, they appeared credible (Keller-Lynn & Luhnnow, 2024). In response to formal complaints from Israel, UNRWA stated that it had preemptively dismissed the 12 staff members on January 26, 2024, to safeguard the agency's neutrality.

In April that year, the UN Secretary-General announced that 19 UNRWA staff members, including the 12 dismissed, would be subject to an internal investigation. The findings, released in August, indicated that no evidence was found against one accused staffer, that information was insufficient for nine others, and that for the remaining nine, the evidence “if authenticated and corroborated—might indicate that the staff members may have been involved” (UNRWA, July 2025).

UNRWA also stated it had not received any information or evidence from Israel or any other UN member state regarding *The Wall Street Journal's* claims about 1,200 staff being linked to Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The agency claimed it only learned of these allegations through international media and a subsequent document from the Israeli government. UNRWA asserts that it shares the names of all its Gaza and West Bank employees with Israel, including those Israel accused in January, March, and April 2024 of having terrorist ties. Before 2024, according to UNRWA, Israel had never raised objections about these staff members. Moreover, the agency says all its staff lists undergo biennial vetting against the UN Security Council's list of terrorist organizations.

In a document released on April 23, 2025, Israel rebutted UNRWA's statements by presenting further evidence of UNRWA staff's links to terrorism. Israel stated that the information had been sent to both UN Secretary-General bodies investigating the allegations (the Colonna Review Group and the UN's Office for Internal Oversight Services—OIOS). However, both declined to review the evidence regarding staff ties to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, arguing that it fell outside their mandates (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

Step 2: Assessment Against Alternative Hypotheses

The operational constraints hypothesis offers partial explanatory power here. UNRWA's initial decision to dismiss the 12 staff members before the formal complaint suggests institutional responsiveness, not obstruction. The agency's claim that it was unaware of the broader "10 percent" allegation until media reporting is plausible in a context where intelligence-sharing between Israel and UN agencies has historically been fraught with mistrust. Additionally, UNRWA's reliance on biennial vetting against the UN Security Council's sanctions list—rather than Israeli intelligence databases—reflects standard UN practice, not a procedure specific to UNRWA or to Israel.

The legal due-process hypothesis also has some traction: UNRWA's position that it cannot act on unverified intelligence provided through media channels is consistent with the procedural norms governing international organizations. The hedged language of the OIOS findings ("if authenticated and corroborated—might indicate") likewise reflects standard investigatory caution.

Step 3: Evaluation Under the Double Standards Framework

However, several elements of UNRWA's response are not adequately explained by operational or legal constraints alone. The refusal of both the Colonna Review Group and OIOS to examine broader evidence of staff ties to Hamas—on the grounds that it fell outside their mandates—raises a structural question: if the UN's own investigative mechanisms are not mandated to examine the most serious allegations, then UNRWA's repeated referral to these investigations as evidence of its good faith becomes circular. The agency invokes inquiries that, by their own admission, did not address the core issue.

Furthermore, UNRWA's claim that Israel never previously flagged concerns about its staff is contradicted by Israel's April 2025 documentation, which asserts that evidence was shared with UN bodies prior to the investigations. The question of who shared what, and when, cannot be definitively resolved with publicly available sources. But the pattern—in which UNRWA frames the evidentiary burden as entirely Israel's while simultaneously declining to engage with publicly available evidence corroborated by credible media outlets—suggests a response posture that goes beyond procedural caution. It is consistent with what

Sharansky (2004) identifies as a double standard: holding Israel's claims to an evidentiary threshold that the agency does not apply to its own internal processes.

Case 2: “Not Just a Few Bad Apples” — Systemic Infiltration Claims

“The Claim: Israeli officials have stated that ‘UNRWA’s problem is not just a few bad apples involved in the October 7 massacre,’ and that the ‘institution as a whole is a haven for Hamas’ radical ideology’” (UNRWA, February 2025).

Step 1: Allegation and Response

UNRWA claims it takes its responsibility to uphold humanitarian principles seriously, citing that between January 2022 and November 2024, only 0.66% of its 33,000 employees were found involved in breaches of neutrality (UNRWA, 2025). However, the OIOS report and the Colonna Review Group both explicitly disclaimed jurisdiction over broader infiltration claims (United Nations, 2024). On December 8, 2024, The New York Times reviewed documents recovered during Israeli military operations indicating that 24 UNRWA educators in 24 different schools were members of Hamas or other militant groups. The NYT found multiple instances where educators remained employed even after Israel issued written warnings. Commissioner-General Lazzarini admitted UNRWA lacked resources to investigate independently, while Gaza residents told the NYT it was an “open secret” that Hamas operated within UNRWA schools (Becker & Rasgon, 2024). On its website, UNRWA references this evidence but characterizes the allegations as part of a disinformation campaign.

Step 2: Assessment Against Alternative Hypotheses

The operational constraints hypothesis is relevant here, and its force should not be underestimated. As the UN official quoted by the NYT acknowledged, ensuring that no Hamas members are among UNRWA's 33,000 Gaza employees is exceptionally difficult when the organization's background checks rely on certificates issued by Gaza authorities—that is, by Hamas itself (Becker & Rasgon, 2024). The testimony of former UNRWA general counsel James Lindsay confirms this structural vulnerability. In this light, UNRWA's citation of its

0.66% breach rate and its reference to the Colonna and OIOS reports can be understood as an institution attempting to defend its record within the limits of what it can verify.

The legal due-process hypothesis also contributes: UNRWA's insistence that Israel failed to share evidence directly with the agency—rather than through media channels—reflects a procedural norm that international organizations are entitled to invoke.

Step 3: Evaluation Under the Double Standards Framework

Nevertheless, the alternative hypotheses do not fully account for the pattern observed. Three elements are particularly telling. First, UNRWA's reliance on the OIOS and Colonna reports as evidence of institutional integrity is misleading, given that both bodies explicitly disclaimed jurisdiction over the broader infiltration question. The agency presents these limited inquiries as if they addressed the systemic allegations, when they did not. Second, UNRWA's selective engagement with the *NYT* evidence—referencing the article while failing to address its most damaging findings about Hamas presence in schools—goes beyond legal caution. An organization genuinely constrained by due-process concerns would either fully engage with the evidence or explain why it cannot; UNRWA does neither, opting instead for partial acknowledgment and deflection.

Third, the characterization of Israeli allegations as a “disinformation campaign” is difficult to reconcile with the operational constraints hypothesis. An agency navigating security risks under Hamas's control might remain silent or issue carefully hedged responses; it would not typically adopt the language of victimhood and counter-accusation. This rhetorical choice is more consistent with an institutional posture that treats Israeli claims as presumptively illegitimate—a pattern that aligns with the double standards dimension of Sharansky's framework.

Case 3: Deepening Ties Between UNRWA and Hamas Since 2007

“The Claim: Media claimed that Israel has documented deepening ties between UNRWA and Hamas, the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip, since 2007” (UNRWA, July 2025).

Step 1: Allegation and Response

In response to allegations of deepening ties with Hamas, UNRWA emphasized that the UN operates in complex environments requiring engagement with all relevant parties. The agency initially referred to Hamas only as the “de facto authorities,” later explicitly naming the group and noting that Hamas had opposed UNRWA’s activities on several occasions. However, on October 16, 2023, UNRWA’s official X account reported that Hamas vehicles had removed fuel and medical equipment from its headquarters. The post was deleted shortly afterward without explanation (National Review, 2023). Additionally, in September 2024, UNRWA acknowledged that a Hamas leader in Lebanon, Fateh Sherif, had been a staff member at one of its schools (Davidovich, 2024).

Step 2: Assessment Against Alternative Hypotheses

Of the six cases examined in this study, this is the one where the operational constraints hypothesis carries the greatest weight. Humanitarian agencies operating in territories governed by armed groups routinely maintain working relationships with *de facto* authorities as a prerequisite for delivering services. The International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, and UNHCR all engage with non-state armed actors in comparable settings—from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan to areas held by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNRWA’s acknowledgment that it maintains relations with Hamas as the governing authority in Gaza is therefore not, in itself, evidence of ideological alignment or institutional bias.

Furthermore, the fact that Hamas has publicly accused UNRWA of collaborating with the “Israeli occupation” suggests a more adversarial relationship than critics allege. An agency that was genuinely a “haven for Hamas’s radical ideology” would be unlikely to face such accusations from the group itself.

Step 3: Evaluation Under the Double Standards Framework

However, the operational context does not explain two specific patterns. First, UNRWA’s initial reluctance to name Hamas directly—referring instead to “de facto authorities”—while understandable as a diplomatic convention, contrasts with the agency’s

willingness to identify Israel by name in critical contexts. If the circumlocution is driven by security concerns, one would expect it to be applied consistently; the asymmetry suggests a differential communicative posture.

Second, the deletion of the October 2023 social media post documenting Hamas's seizure of UNRWA fuel and medical equipment—without explanation—is not adequately accounted for by any of the alternative hypotheses. An agency operating under security constraints might choose not to publish such information in the first place; but publishing and then silently deleting it suggests a retroactive decision to suppress evidence of Hamas's hostile actions against the agency. Combined with the belated acknowledgment that a Hamas leader in Lebanon had been a UNRWA employee, this pattern is consistent with an institutional reluctance to publicly document Hamas's encroachment—even when doing so would support, rather than undermine, UNRWA's own claim to neutrality. This selective suppression is difficult to explain without reference to a communicative double standard regarding how the agency treats Israeli and Palestinian actors.

Case 4: UN Watch Allegations — The Telegram Group and Staff Links

“The Claim: Israeli officials have stated that ‘UNRWA is infiltrated by Hamas’”
(UNRWA, July 2025).

Step 1: Allegation and Response

The July version of the document uses this title to respond to official Israeli accusations, but what follows is an answer to allegations made by the pro-Israel NGO UN Watch—known for its sustained campaign against UNRWA. In the February version, the title was different: “The Claim: Members of a Telegram group of 3,000 UNRWA teachers allegedly supported violence, including in the October 7 attacks against Israel, and there have been similar cases in the past involving UNRWA staff” (UNRWA, February 2025).

UN Watch compiled an extensive list of over 40 pieces of purported evidence of UNRWA and its staff's links to Hamas and the October 7 massacre. The UN agency, however, directly addressed only one claim: UN Watch's January 2024 allegation that

members of a 3,000-member UNRWA teachers' Telegram group spread hate speech and supported Hamas's attacks on Israel.

UNRWA said the group was unofficial and that the Telegram platform's nature made verifying all identities impossible. Of the 30 names provided, only 18 could be verified due to incomplete information on the others. Of these 18, three were not UNRWA employees, and six cases were inconclusive, requiring further investigation. The remaining nine were indeed UNRWA staff, and their names were referred to the agency's internal investigations unit (UNRWA, February 2025).

Step 2: Assessment Against Alternative Hypotheses

The operational constraints hypothesis has limited applicability here. The Telegram group in question existed in the digital sphere, not in the physical operating environment of Gaza; the challenges of vetting staff under Hamas's *de facto* authority do not extend to monitoring publicly accessible online activity by agency employees. The legal due-process hypothesis offers somewhat more traction: UNRWA's insistence on verification before acting on names provided by an advocacy organization is procedurally defensible. The fact that some names could not be verified, and that three turned out not to be UNRWA employees, lends partial credibility to the agency's cautious approach.

Step 3: Evaluation Under the Double Standards Framework

Two features of UNRWA's response, however, exceed what the alternative hypotheses can explain. First, the agency addressed only one of UN Watch's more than 40 documented allegations. Even granting that UN Watch is an advocacy organization with a particular agenda, the decision to respond to a single claim while ignoring dozens of others—without explaining the selection criteria—creates an impression of selective engagement designed to minimize rather than address the full scope of the accusations.

Second, and more significantly, the change in the section's title between the February and July versions of the document is revealing. The February version specifically referenced the Telegram group allegation; the July version replaced this with a broader Israeli government claim ("UNRWA is infiltrated by Hamas") while retaining the same narrow

response about the Telegram group. This creates a structural mismatch: the document's title implies a comprehensive rebuttal of systemic infiltration allegations, but the content addresses only a peripheral case. Whether intentional or not, this framing is consistent with a communicative strategy that minimizes the substance of Israeli claims—a pattern that, under Sharansky's framework, qualifies as a form of double standard in which the evidentiary threshold applied to Israel's allegations is set higher than the threshold applied to the agency's own rebuttals.

Case 5: The List of 100 Names — Alleged Military Wing Members

“The Claim: In July 2024, the Government of Israel provided UNRWA with a list of 100 names allegedly members of the military wing of Palestinian armed groups, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, claiming the U.N remains silent and UNRWA did nothing about it” (UNRWA, February 2025).

Step 1: Allegation and Response

The UNRWA document asserts that “allegations are not evidence” and claims the Commissioner-General requested further information from Israel but received no response. However, on May 12, 2025, Israel's Permanent Mission in Geneva presented specific evidence, including the case of Naji Abdalla Abu Aziz, principal of an UNRWA-run school and alleged Hamas operative, whose involvement had reportedly been flagged to UNRWA since 2011. As of April 2025, he remained employed by the agency (Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, Geneva, 2025). UNRWA has not responded to this specific case despite Israel publishing evidence on an official government website (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

Step 2: Assessment Against Alternative Hypotheses

The legal due-process hypothesis is directly invoked by UNRWA itself: “allegations are not evidence.” This is a defensible procedural position in the abstract. International organizations are not intelligence services; they cannot be expected to act on unilateral claims

from a party to a conflict without independent verification. The Commissioner-General's request for additional evidence is consistent with standard institutional practice.

The General Assembly dynamics hypothesis is less relevant here, as the allegation concerns operational staff decisions rather than mandate-level questions.

Step 3: Evaluation Under the Double Standards Framework

The due-process defense, however, is significantly weakened by the specificity of the case Israel presented. The allegation regarding Naji Abdalla Abu Aziz is not a general claim about percentages of staff with ties to militant groups; it is a named individual, in a named school, with a described role in Hamas's military apparatus, allegedly flagged to UNRWA since 2011. If UNRWA's evidentiary standard requires corroboration before acting, the question becomes: what level of corroboration is sufficient? Israel claims to have provided evidence through official channels and published it on a government website. UNRWA's failure to respond to this specific, documented case—while maintaining the general position that “allegations are not evidence”—creates a significant credibility gap.

The pattern here is particularly consistent with Sharansky's double standards criterion. The evidentiary threshold demanded of Israel—named individuals, institutional channels, public documentation—appears to have been met, yet UNRWA's response remains unchanged. This suggests that the agency's insistence on evidence functions less as a genuine procedural standard and more as a discursive strategy for avoiding substantive engagement with Israeli claims. The asymmetry becomes clearer when one considers that UNRWA accepted the findings of its own internal investigations—which, as the OIOS report acknowledged, lacked the capacity for comprehensive verification—while simultaneously demanding a higher standard from external evidence provided by Israel.

Case 6: The Abduction of Jonatan Samerano and Hostages in UNRWA Facilities

The final case consolidates two related allegations: the involvement of an UNRWA employee in the kidnapping of an Israeli civilian on October 7, and the subsequent holding of hostages in UNRWA facilities during the war.

“The Claim: UNRWA has blood on its hands. On October 7 2023, an UNRWA worker kidnapped a hostage from southern Israel to Gaza. To date, there has been no apology, no explanation, no condemnation by the U.N. as to why its employees participated in the horrific October 7 attacks, including by abducting hostages” (UNRWA, July 2025).

“The Claim: Hostages were held in UNRWA shelters during the war” (UNRWA, July 2025).

Step 1: Allegation and Response

UNRWA states that “there has never been evidence provided to substantiate allegations of such horrific actions by anyone from UNRWA” (UNRWA, July 2025). However, the agency has not disclosed details about the nine staff members its own investigation found might have participated in the October 7 massacre. According to The New York Times, one appears in video footage abducting the body of Israeli civilian Jonatan Samerano. On August 1, 2024, Samerano’s mother publicly confronted Commissioner-General Lazzarini in Geneva; he did not respond. In June 2025, Jonatan’s body was recovered by the IDF. UNRWA has not addressed the case. Regarding the hostage allegation, former hostage Emily Damari claimed she was held in a UNRWA school (BBC News, 2025). UNRWA called this a serious allegation but stated it could not verify it, calling for independent investigation (UNRWA, July 2025).

Step 2: Assessment Against Alternative Hypotheses

The operational constraints hypothesis has some relevance to the hostage allegation: UNRWA cannot control the use of its facilities by an armed group that exercises sovereign-like authority over the territory. Humanitarian agencies in comparable settings—from the ICRC in Syria to UNHCR in refugee camps in eastern Congo—have faced analogous situations in which armed groups appropriated neutral spaces. UNRWA’s call for an independent investigation is a reasonable institutional response when it lacks the capacity to verify claims about events in facilities over which it has lost effective control.

The legal due-process hypothesis also applies in a limited sense: UNRWA's refusal to comment on the identities of dismissed staff may reflect legal constraints related to employment law and ongoing investigations.

Step 3: Evaluation Under the Double Standards Framework

These alternative explanations, however, cannot account for the totality of UNRWA's response pattern in this case. Three elements stand out. First, UNRWA's blanket denial that "there has never been evidence provided" is directly contradicted by the video footage cited by both the Israeli government and *The New York Times*—footage that shows a person identified as a UNRWA employee participating in the abduction. The agency's own OIOS investigation found that nine staff members "may have been involved." For UNRWA to claim that no evidence has been provided, when its own investigation identified potential involvement, represents either a failure of internal communication or a deliberate misrepresentation of the evidentiary record.

Second, the complete institutional silence regarding the Samerano case is striking. This is not a statistical claim about percentages of staff with ties to militant groups; it is a specific, named individual, with video evidence, whose mother publicly confronted the Commissioner-General. No operational constraint, legal procedure, or General Assembly dynamic requires an international organization to refuse any acknowledgment whatsoever of such a case. The silence is most parsimoniously explained as an institutional unwillingness to engage with evidence that would validate Israeli allegations—a posture consistent with the double standards framework.

Third, the contrast between UNRWA's treatment of the two sub-allegations within this case is itself revealing. When confronted with the hostage claim—which concerns the *use* of its facilities by Hamas—UNRWA acknowledges the gravity of the allegation and calls for independent investigation. When confronted with the abduction claim—which concerns the *actions* of its own employee—UNRWA issues a blanket denial. The asymmetry suggests that the agency is more willing to engage with allegations that can be attributed to external actors (Hamas) than with those that implicate its own personnel. This differential treatment is consistent with a pattern that privileges institutional self-protection over transparent

accountability—a pattern that, cumulatively across the six cases examined, aligns more closely with the double standards hypothesis than with any single alternative explanation.

Cross-Case Assessment

The structured analysis of the six cases reveals a consistent pattern that no single alternative hypothesis can fully account for. In each case, the operational constraints, legal due-process, and General Assembly dynamics hypotheses explain part of UNRWA's response—and this article has taken care to acknowledge their explanatory contribution. Humanitarian agencies in conflict zones face genuine dilemmas, and UNRWA's operating environment in Gaza is exceptionally difficult.

However, across all six cases, a residual pattern emerges that the alternative hypotheses leave unexplained. This pattern has four recurring features: (1) the invocation of UN investigative mechanisms that, by their own admission, did not address the core allegations; (2) selective engagement with evidence, in which the most damaging findings are acknowledged indirectly or not at all; (3) an asymmetric evidentiary standard in which Israeli claims are held to a threshold of corroboration that the agency does not apply to its own internal processes; and (4) communicative choices—such as the deletion of the October 2023 social media post, the refusal to address the Samerano case, and the characterization of Israeli allegations as a “disinformation campaign”—that go beyond what operational or legal constraints require.

This qualitative pattern is corroborated by a computational analysis of co-occurrence linguistics applied to the full text of UNRWA's Claims versus Facts document. After structural cleaning and tokenization of 237 sentences, a heuristic codebook was applied to map assertive language (e.g., evidence, neutrality, mandate, confirmed) and hedging language (e.g., allegations, claims, unsubstantiated, alleged) against their discursive targets. The results reveal a striking rhetorical asymmetry: when addressing its own institutional processes, UNRWA employed assertive language in 77 sentences versus hedging in 26 (a 3:1 ratio favoring certainty). When addressing external accusations from Israel and its supporters, the pattern inverted: hedging appeared in 51 sentences versus assertive language in only 16 (a 1:3 ratio favoring distancing). This near-symmetrical inversion confirms quantitatively what the

case analysis identified qualitatively: UNRWA mobilizes the language of institutional authority to legitimize its own conduct while systematically deploying the language of doubt to delegitimize Israeli claims.

Taken individually, each of these elements admits of alternative interpretations. Taken cumulatively, they constitute a pattern that is most consistently explained by the double standards dimension of Sharansky's (2004) framework: UNRWA applies a standard of scrutiny and a communicative posture toward Israel that it does not apply to its own institutional conduct or to the actions of Hamas within its operational space. This finding does not establish that UNRWA is institutionally antisemitic in any comprehensive sense. It does, however, suggest that the agency's response patterns exhibit a differential treatment of Israel that is consistent with the "new antisemitism" thesis—and that this differential treatment cannot be fully explained by the operational, legal, or political constraints in which the agency operates.

Table 2. Cross-Case Synthesis: Alternative Hypotheses and Residual Patterns Across Six Cases

Case	Operational Constraints	Legal Due Process	GA Dynamics	Residual Pattern Consistent with Double Standards
1. The "10%" claim	Moderate. Dismissal of 12 staff shows responsiveness; biennial vetting is standard UN practice.	Moderate. Hedged OIOS language reflects investigatory caution.	Low. Not a mandate-level question.	OIOS and Colonna declined to examine core allegations yet are cited as evidence of good faith. Asymmetric evidentiary threshold: Israel's documented claims are dismissed while limited internal findings are accepted.
2. "Few bad apples"	High. Background checks rely on Hamas-issued certificates; structural vulnerability is real.	Moderate. Demand for direct evidence sharing is procedurally defensible.	Low.	Selective engagement with NYT evidence. Labeling Israeli allegations a "disinformation campaign" exceeds defensive caution—consistent with presumptive delegitimization of Israeli claims.
3. UNRWA–Hamas ties	High. Engagement with <i>de facto</i> authorities is	Low. Not a procedural question.	Low.	Asymmetric naming: Hamas referred to as "de facto authorities" while Israel is named directly. Silent deletion

	standard humanitarian practice (ICRC, MSF, UNHCR precedents).			of Oct. 2023 post documenting Hamas seizure of UNRWA resources.
4. UN Watch / Telegram	Low. Digital activity is not constrained by Gaza's operational environment.	Moderate. Verification before acting on advocacy-sourced names is defensible.	Low.	Only 1 of 40+ allegations addressed. Title changed between versions to imply comprehensive rebuttal while content remained narrow. Structural mismatch between framing and substance.
5. List of 100 names	Low. Named individual with specific role and school identified.	Moderate in abstract; weakened by specificity of the Abu Aziz case (flagged since 2011).	Low.	Evidentiary threshold demanded of Israel (named individual, official channels, public documentation) appears to have been met, yet response unchanged. Internal investigations accepted at lower standard.
6. Samerano / Hostages	Moderate for hostage sub-case (loss of facility control). Low for abduction sub-case (employee's actions).	Low. No procedural norm requires total silence on a documented, named case.	Low.	Blanket denial contradicted by UNRWA's own OIOS findings. Complete institutional silence on Samerano despite video evidence and public confrontation. Asymmetry: facility-use allegation acknowledged; employee-action allegation denied.

Note. Explanatory power of alternative hypotheses is assessed as High, Moderate, or Low based on the analysis in each case's Step 2. The residual pattern column summarizes findings from Step 3. See individual case analyses for full discussion.

Discussion

The three-step analysis yields a finding that is neither straightforward nor unqualified. The alternative hypotheses each possess genuine explanatory power, and any assessment of UNRWA's conduct that ignores these realities would be analytically incomplete.

Nevertheless, the cross-case analysis reveals a cumulative pattern that these alternatives do not fully explain: the invocation of limited-mandate investigations as comprehensive rebuttals, selective engagement with evidence, asymmetric evidentiary standards, and communicative choices exceeding what operational or legal constraints require.

This finding carries implications for the broader debate on the “new antisemitism” examined in the literature review. The existing scholarship has focused overwhelmingly on anti-Israel voting patterns among UN member states (Becker et al., 2014; Haykin et al., 2021; Zaghi, 2021), identifying structural, political, and religious factors that shape state behavior in the General Assembly. The present study shifts the analytical focus from member-state voting to institutional agency behavior—and finds that patterns consistent with the “new antisemitism” thesis are observable not only in the political arena of the UNGA but also in the operational and communicative conduct of a UN body itself. This suggests that the anti-Israel dynamics documented in the voting literature may extend beyond state preferences to the institutional culture of at least some UN agencies.

It is important, however, to specify the limits of this claim. The analysis does not establish that UNRWA is institutionally antisemitic in a comprehensive or intentional sense. It demonstrates that the agency’s response patterns to Israeli allegations exhibit a differential treatment that is consistent with the double standards criterion theorized by Sharansky (2004) and Sacks (2016). Whether this differential treatment reflects conscious institutional hostility, bureaucratic path-dependence, political capture by the dynamics of the UNGA, or some combination of these factors cannot be determined on the basis of the present analysis alone. What can be stated is that the pattern exists, that it is not adequately explained by the operational, legal, or political alternatives examined, and that its implications for the debate on “new antisemitism” warrant serious scholarly attention.

The consequences of this perceived double standard are significant and operate in two directions. On one hand, UNRWA’s failure to engage transparently with allegations of Hamas infiltration has contributed to the erosion of international confidence in the agency, resulting in the suspension of funding by several donor states and the deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip. The October 2024 Knesset legislation suspending Israel’s

relations with UNRWA, and the broader funding crisis that followed, are directly linked to the perception that the agency cannot be trusted to maintain neutrality. On the other hand, the pattern of differential treatment documented in this study may contribute to the rise of antisemitic narratives that use institutional criticism of Israel as a vehicle for broader hostility toward Jewish communities. When an international institution applies a demonstrably different standard to Israeli claims than to comparable situations involving other actors, it risks legitimizing the very “new antisemitism” that scholars like Klug (2003) and Judaken (2008) have cautioned against conflating with political criticism.

These findings suggest that the international community should consider structural reforms to UNRWA’s oversight mechanisms. The current arrangement, in which the agency’s mandate is renewed by the General Assembly and its investigations are conducted by UN bodies with explicitly limited mandates, creates an accountability gap that neither Israel’s supporters nor the agency’s defenders can credibly resolve through public argumentation alone. Independent external monitoring—demanded by donor states as a condition for continued funding—would provide a more reliable basis for assessing UNRWA’s neutrality than the existing framework of internal investigations whose scope is defined by the very institution under scrutiny. However, given the longstanding voting patterns against Israel within the UNGA, such reforms through the General Assembly route may prove difficult to achieve. An alternative pathway would involve bilateral conditionality by major donor states. Simultaneously, the UN should expand efforts to combat antisemitism. In January 2025, the UN announced an action plan led by the UNAOC and the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (United Nations, 2025). However, no concrete measures have been made public, and the issue was last formally discussed in May 2022—well before October 7. Operational anti-antisemitism guidelines applicable across all UN agencies, including UNRWA, remain essential.

Conclusion

This article set out to investigate whether the anti-Israel bias documented in the voting patterns of UN General Assembly member states extends to the institutional behavior of a UN

agency, using UNRWA's responses to Israeli allegations following the October 7, 2023 massacre as a case study. Adopting Sharansky's (2004) 3D framework as an explicit analytical lens—and testing it against three competing hypotheses rooted in operational constraints, legal due-process norms, and General Assembly dynamics—the analysis examined six specific cases drawn from UNRWA's *Claims versus Facts* document.

The findings indicate that while the alternative hypotheses account for significant aspects of UNRWA's response behavior, they do not fully explain the cumulative pattern observed across the six cases. Four recurring features—the invocation of investigative mechanisms that did not address the core allegations, selective engagement with the most substantiated evidence, an asymmetric evidentiary standard applied to Israeli claims, and communicative choices that exceed what operational or legal constraints require—are more consistently explained by the double standards dimension of the “new antisemitism” framework than by any single or combined alternative interpretation.

This finding contributes to the scholarly literature in two ways. First, it extends the analytical focus of the anti-Israel bias debate from member-state voting behavior—where the existing research is concentrated—to the institutional conduct of a UN body itself. The shift from state preferences to agency behavior reveals that patterns consistent with the “new antisemitism” thesis are not confined to the political arena of the General Assembly but may be embedded in the operational and communicative practices of UN agencies. Second, the structured analytical protocol employed in this study—which treats antisemitism as a hypothesis to be tested against explicit alternatives rather than as a foregone conclusion—offers a methodological template for future research on institutional bias in international organizations.

Several important qualifications are warranted. This study examines a single UN agency during a specific and highly charged period; the findings are not generalizable to the UN system as a whole without further comparative research. The analysis relies on publicly available sources; classified intelligence and internal communications remain inaccessible. And the identification of a pattern consistent with double standards does not, in itself, establish the presence of antisemitic intent—a distinction that matters both analytically and politically. Future research could productively extend this inquiry through systematic

comparison of UNRWA's communicative behavior with that of UNHCR in analogous conflict settings, temporal analysis of UNRWA's response patterns before and after October 7, or computational text analysis of UN communications and resolutions concerning Israel relative to other conflict situations.

The case of UNRWA ultimately illustrates the difficulty—and the necessity—of distinguishing between legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and institutional patterns that cross the threshold into the territory of the “new antisemitism.” The operational realities facing humanitarian agencies in conflict zones are genuine and must be taken seriously; but so too must the evidence of differential treatment when it persists after those realities have been accounted for. As antisemitic incidents reach record levels worldwide, and as the debate over the boundaries between political criticism and prejudice intensifies in the aftermath of October 7, the scholarly community has both the opportunity and the responsibility to bring analytical rigor—rather than ideological presumption—to bear on these questions. This article has attempted to contribute to that effort.

The findings also have broader implications for P/CVE. Contemporary P/CVE research increasingly recognizes that institutional credibility, perceptions of fairness, and the consistent application of international norms influence the broader informational environments in which extremist narratives develop and circulate. Although this study does not seek to establish a direct causal relationship between institutional conduct and radicalization, it suggests that perceived inconsistencies in the way allegations involving antisemitism are addressed by international organizations may contribute to grievance narratives that extremist actors seek to exploit. Strengthening transparency, consistency, and institutional accountability is therefore relevant not only to international governance but also to broader efforts aimed at preventing radicalization and countering antisemitism.

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