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The United Nations and the
Arab-Palestinian Refugee Industry

Dr. Asaf Romirowsky

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During the presidential campaign trail and now since taking the oath of office Donald Trump has prided himself on being the author and implementer of the “art of deal.” In diplomatic terms in the global arena there is no greater deal than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The ongoing conflict has impacted every US president since Harry Truman as such, every president has tried to tackle and resolve yet none have able to do so successfully.

Of all the many ingredients involved in such a deal perhaps the most insurmountable and explosive issue within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the so-called “right of return”—the demand that millions of Palestinians must be allowed to “return” to the State of Israel under any peace agreement. While Israel has made clear that it cannot agree to this, since it would effectively destroy Israel as a Jewish state, the Palestinians have steadfastly refused to compromise on the issue. This has made the “right of return” the primary obstacle to any peace agreement. The question remains, will Trump and his advisors prioritize this matter over issues such a settlements and Jerusalem.

In terms of US-Israel relations thus far, we have seen some attitude change in contrast to the Obama administration. While in office, Obama demanded that Israel halt settlement activity from the outset because the president, along with much of the international community, is motivated in his approach to the Middle East by two false assumptions: The key to solving the Middle East’s problems resides within the Israeli-Palestinian problem, and the key to solving the Palestinian problem resides within the West Bank settlements and the status of Jerusalem.

All of this is part of the faulty “linkage theory” thinking. Settlements are hardly a major concern to either party when it comes to the big picture that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; it is just an excuse used by the Palestinians to make the Israelis look like the oppressor and the Palestinians the victim. In reality, both parties are aware that the settlement issue will only be solved when final borders of Israel and a future Palestine are created, which is why both Abbas and Arafat previously entered into negotiations without a freeze on settlement construction. Additionally, if a freeze in settlements was so important to starting negotiations with Israel, the PA could have initiated a direct discussion during 2010’s ten-month settlement moratorium

rather than waiting to start talks during the month that the freeze was due to expire.

Now under Trump, we are seeing some overtures in an effort to repair the scared relations left over from Obama as such the administration did not express much ire to Netanyahu's latest announcement to building a new settlement and has expressed interest in moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem. That said, as expected when Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas made his first official visit to Washington to meet with Trump on May 3rd he was consistent with the Palestinian political narrative stating "the importance of providing solutions that would address the situation Palestinian refugees and those imprisoned in Israeli prisons, referring to 'the suffering of my people.' Continuing with "Mr. President, it's about time for Israel to end its occupation of our people and of our land," Abbas said, referring to the Palestinian territories in the West Bank under Israeli control."¹

It is key to note that the phraseology above of "suffering" refers to the collective Palestinian memory embodied in the notion that all Palestinians are refugees and stateless because of Israel.

Regrettably, what tends to escape many Western observers and policy makers is that Arab-Palestinian identity is synonymous with three things, the 'right of return,' the permanent, sanctified struggle with Israel, and permanent recognition of their status as refugees, dispossessed at the hand of Israel with the connivance of the international community. A corollary demand is that the international community must sustain them as 'refugees' through United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) until the Palestinians themselves, somehow, declare the 'refugee crisis' resolved.

Palestinian national identity is predicated on winning a zero-sum struggle with Zionism, not a vision of a state of their own. There are sentimental images of restoring the status quo ante, an imaginary Arab Palestine of plenty; indeed, the 'right of return' is founded on the one hand precisely in such vague sentimentality, as well as inventive interpretations of ever-motile 'international law.' But clear proposals for a Palestinian state and its institutions, and how that state will be grounded in a society and with social, legal, and cultural principles, remains vague.

AFSC

Above all, the caretaker and custodian of this problem and this so called right is UNRWA. Since 1950 UNRWA has played a unique role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The agency provides health, welfare and education services to Palestinians that it defines as ‘refugees’ and actively promotes narratives of Palestinian nationalism and identity, not least of all the ‘right of return.’ But how did UNRWA come into being? The international community provided relief to Palestinian refugees from 1948 to 1950 through very different means.

Yet dissecting UNRWA and how it operates is not an easy task. It needs to be noted that access to internal UNRWA documents remains very limited, making analyses of decision-making, policy and personnel particularly difficult. Further, the literature on UNRWA is not easily distinguished from that of the Palestine Arab refugee issue, which is vast, political and polemical.

Moreover, UNRWA has broken all illusions of impartiality and neutrality by adapting the Arab-Palestinian narrative and its consistent support of a Palestinian ‘right of return’ and espousal of Zionism as the ‘original sin’ with regard to the refugees and the creation of the State of Israel.. The ‘right of return’ necessarily entails the dissolution of Israel as such and the establishment of a new state, either bi-national or Palestinian. In either scenario Jewish sovereignty, as envisioned by the Zionist movement and the 1947 partition plan, would be no longer exist.

Historically, at the beginning of the Palestinian refugee crisis, in December 1948, the UN asked three organizations, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the League of Red Cross Societies, to provide relief. The AFSC was assigned to the Gaza Strip. This account, is one of both successes and failures, and, important lessons regarding roads not taken in UNRWA’s later, seemingly permanent relief effort.

The AFSC was what we would call today a non-governmental organization with a religious orientation. Specifically, it was created by Quakers as a means of providing alternate ‘service’ during World War I. By the end of that war the AFSC was a global organization providing relief and education to refugees worldwide. They continued and expanded this mission after the war, using the Quaker tradition of political neutrality and willingness

to work with any party in order to help people in need. They did so during and after World War II and were important providers of relief to European Jews. Their reputation was so significant that in 1947 they were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

By the time of Israel's War of Independence in 1948, the AFSC was at the height of its international prominence. The AFSC's area of operation was the Gaza Strip, and during almost 18 months in the field it did an exemplary job. The organization provided food, set up schools and clinics, and faced down the Egyptian military. Unlike any other relief organization at the time or since, the AFSC conducted an accurate census and reduced its rolls of Palestinian refugees. It also rooted out fraud and corruption, and kept costs under control. And despite their pacifism, the AFSC learned to be what it described as "hard boiled" with the Egyptians, the refugees, and the international community in general.

At the same time, it was clear to the AFSC that even if the refugees did accept resettlement, no Arab state would accept them. The only possible solution would be political, not economic. And such a solution did not seem likely in the near future. To its credit, the AFSC could not countenance participating in an open-ended relief program, which it believed would intensify the "moral degeneration" of the refugees and the degradation of their skills, self-reliance, and self-respect. But by the end of 1949, it was clear to the AFSC leadership that the refugees would accept no solution to their predicament but repatriation to their former homes in what was now Israel. Barring that, they demanded to remain on permanent international relief. Even vocational education was considered suspect. In the minds of the refugees, improved job skills could result in them being resettled elsewhere.

As a result, the AFSC withdrew from Gaza in early 1950, turning its responsibilities over to the United Nations organization UNRWA. For more than 6 decades since, the AFSC's warnings about the detrimental effects of open-ended relief programs have gone unheeded, whether by UNRWA or by any of its international patrons, including the United States. From the Palestinian prism they view relief and eventual repatriation (the "right of return") as absolute rights. And the Arab states, with the exception of Jordan, remain steadfast in their refusal to do anything except warehouse Palestinians in permanent refugee camps. And above all highlight that these very same obstacles to peace which were identified by the AFSC are the lessons UNRWA refused to learn.

UNRWA

Fast forward, as with the Quakers to most what could be more noble and appealing as an agency to help refugees? The image that comes to mind is that of suffering people bereft of homeland, traumatized, insecure, and badly in need of help receive humanitarian assistance given altruistically to ease their plight. Who could object to such an enterprise, when presented in those terms?

But the problem is that UNRWA is much more than that. It has become an agency whose bottom line could be called anti-humanitarian, most of all for those who it purportedly serves. There are two basic problems here.

First, UNRWA has become a vehicle for perpetuating the conflict and thus in delaying the successful resettlement of Palestinian refugees. In this sense, it has worked to keep them in a permanent suspended animation, in which their plight becomes a weapon in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Second, UNRWA has become, at least indirectly, a revolutionary tool used by radical and terrorist forces for obtaining resources, providing bases, and ensuring recruits. This was true for all the groups in the PLO, though most importantly Fatah, and it now applies for Hamas and other radical Islamist groups as well.

In this process, UNRWA has broken all the rules that are supposed to govern humanitarian enterprises. Often, this has been due to intimidation though at times also to the politically committed positions of its officials, and especially employees, who agree with the two principles outlined above.

Consequently, UNRWA is the exact opposite of other refugee relief operations. They seek to resettle refugees; UNRWA is dedicated to blocking resettlement. They help refugees to live normal lives so that they can move on with their existence; UNRWA's role is to ensure their lives remain abnormal so they are filled with anger and a thirst for revenge that inspires violence and can only be quenched by a victorious return. They try to create stable conditions for refugees; UNRWA's mission is to enable radical political activity and indoctrination by armed groups which ensures a continual state of near chaos. It is in effect nothing more than an internationally subsidized recruitment base for terrorist groups or, to put it in the most generous way is a hostage of the terrorists.

In the past, there has been little to no sign that the Palestinians are willing to change their stance regarding the demand for the so called right of return. Indeed, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has unequivocally stated, “Let me put it simply: the right of return is a personal decision. What does this mean? That neither the PA, nor the state, nor the PLO, nor Abu Mazen [Abbas’ *nom de guerre*], nor any Palestinian or Arab leader has the right to deprive someone from his right to return.” Abbas is by no means alone in this. In fact, whenever it appears that Abbas might waver, the reaction tends to be rapid and violent.

Case in point, Ali Huwaidi, director of the Palestinian Organization for the Right of Return (“*Thabit*”) in Beirut, lashed out at Abbas stating,

Regardless of Abbas’ statements, the right of return is guaranteed, individually and collectively, through UN resolutions. The refugees will not give up their right no matter where they are living today. Abbas is worried about flooding Israel with five million refugees while Israel has brought one million people from the former Soviet Union and no one complained about this. Our refugees will not accept any alternative to their right to return to their homeland and we do not care what Abbas’ position is.²

But how many actual refugees are there? Surely over the years, many of those displaced have passed away, and such status does not normally transfer from generation to generation.

The issue is so emotive because, in many ways, Palestinian identity itself is embodied in the collective belief in a “right of return” to “Palestine.” Along with the belief that resistance to Israel is permanent and holy, Palestinian identity is largely based on the idea that the Palestinians are, individually and communally, refugees; that they have been made so by Israel; and that the United Nations should support these refugees until they can return to what is now Israel.

Almost since its inception, UNRWA, the international institution charged with aiding the refugees, has worked against their resettlement in Arab countries where Palestinians are located. One way UNRWA has done this has been by shifting its mission from refugee relief to education, devising its own expanded definitions of who is a refugee, and expanding its legal mandates to “protect” and represent refugees. Consequently, the Palestinian clients of UNRWA have gradually taken over the organization and have

The United Nations and the Arab-Palestinian Refugee Industry

undermined an international relief effort, created in naïve good faith, but with the complicity of the UN General Assembly.

Over the years, UNRWA, by its own admission, has proudly evolved from a temporary relief and works program into a broad social welfare organization for Palestinian society. It has also succeeded to such an extent that “there is little or no significant difference between the standard of living of refugees and non-refugees in the WBGS [West Bank and Gaza Strip], Jordan, or Syria.”³ Maintaining those standards of living in dynamic economic conditions, much in the manner of a government, is a primary concern of the organization. Conversely, the international community, led by the United States and now, the European Union, has adopted a strategy of increasing support for UNRWA and other Palestinian institutions, such as the Palestinian Authority, in the traditional effort to avoid instability and, since the 1990s, in the attempt to shape Palestinian state-building. Another irony, however, is that UNRWA competes directly with the Palestinian Authority for international support.

Schooling

Absent any real reintegration, resettlement or repatriation efforts UNRWA’s primary product is its educational infrastructure, most importantly textbooks, used in UNRWA schools—is a product of the Arab countries, none of which have positive sentiments feelings toward Israel or the peace process, while the teachers are Palestinians. During the 1960s and 1970s, one explicit goal of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was spreading Palestinian nationalism through the global Palestinian community, and in particular, through educational institutions to which it had access. In keeping with its nationalistic orientation and multilevel approach to Palestinian society at large, the PLO targeted schools, teachers’ unions, and youth organizations. The same can be said for the PLO’s rivals, the Muslim Brotherhood which had been active in the West Bank since at least the 1960s. Between the two, Palestinian education was completely politicized. UNRWA and national governments also funded scholarships for Palestinians to pursue higher education in Western and Soviet bloc institutions. Indeed, UNRWA’s advocates praise it as a Palestinian national institution and for providing many levels of Palestinian education.

Of late, there have been rumblings of changes in UNRWA curriculum in a statement by coming out of the Palestinian Authority Education Ministry calling for possible revisions to the curriculum an “affront to the Palestinian

people, its history and struggles,” and said the suspension would continue until the UN agency’s “positions are corrected.” But not surprising, there are already voices arguing that intended changes will “eradicate” Palestinian “national identity” and distort their “struggle” against Israel.

UNRWA has not formally published any plans to alter its curriculum, but leaks to the Arab press of possible changes have led to outrage over recent weeks in Gaza and the West Bank. The changes, according to Arab media reports, include revisions to maps of Palestine to exclude references to cities inside Israel as Palestinian cities, a practice that numerous studies of Palestinian textbooks have labeled as “incitement.” Other changes were reportedly planned to tone down praise for Palestinian prisoners and improve Israel’s image.

A Government within a Government

In 1974 the PLO adopted the “phased approach.” This was a plan for the gradual destruction of Israel through the “right of return,” meaning that Palestinians would be allowed to return to homes vacated during 1948 and thus create a demographic majority in Israel or a Palestinian “secular democratic state.” UNRWA’s turn to education during this period meshed well with the PLO’s approach, as it did with the creation of the many UN resolutions to support the newly declared “inalienable rights” of the Palestinian people. Since the 1960s, UNRWA’s actions, like those of the Palestinian Authority, have been criticized for their anti-Semitism and anti-peace content.

Further, providing education for Palestine Arab refugees was also a critical means to generate Palestinian identity and nationalism, but then to transfer responsibility for its maintenance back to UNRWA and the international community.

The influx of an increasing number of refugees from the West Bank into the UNRWA system following the 1967 Six-Day War appeared to offer an opportunity to conduct studies and establish a new baseline for the organization. Lack of host country cooperation and deteriorating political conditions in Lebanon, culminating in civil war, again made the process impossible. General rations from UNRWA were only eliminated in 1982, when the “Special Hardship Case” category was introduced. But financial crises continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s. From 1973 to the present, UNRWA has initiated a variety of emergency appeals, both in response to its own financial crises and political or military events, such as the 1982 Lebanon War,

the First Intifada of 1987, and the Gaza War of 2006. In fact, UNRWA has issued “emergency appeals” every year since 2000.

UNRWA’s ever expanding role in the Palestinian economy is measured through the number of its local employees. By the mid-1970s, UNRWA had 15,000 employees. During the 1980s and 1990s, refugee participation in UNRWA increased still further into “planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Agency programmes.”⁴ UNRWA now has more than 30,000 employees, the largest of any United Nations organization, and only a small number of international employees. It maintains two headquarters offices in Gaza and Amman, five field offices in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the West Bank, and four Representative offices, in New York, Geneva, Brussels, and Cairo. There are some 3,000 employees in Lebanon and 10,000 in Gaza. The “approved total budget” for 2011 was U.S. \$624.7 million, with most funds coming from the United States and the European Commission. The assumption of moral hazard by the United States alone through contributions to UNRWA has amounted to some U.S. \$4 billion since 1950.

This process of a complete and total Palestinian takeover of UNRWA is similar to regulatory capture, which occurs when a state regulatory authority is taken over by the interests or industries that it is designed to control. UNRWA is an international agency that is effectively managed by the interests that it is intended to serve. The full weight of the organization’s coercive “soft power” and halo effect have been brought to bear on local and international political and media processes in order to shield it and keep the rent-seeking cycle in operation. This has been done in large part by members of the “refugee” population itself working within UNRWA, with the help of the senior international managerial staff. By acting as a pressure group, the organization has thus been able to extend its mandate, and ward off oversight and reform. It might also be asked whether UNRWA’s prerogatives and operations also constitute a deliberate infringement on the sovereignty and legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority.

Furthermore, with growing examples of hate, falsehoods and incitement such as UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness cries on camera while being interviewed constitutes “neutrality compliance” is unclear, as is the celebration of the murders of rabbis on the Facebook pages of UNRWA teachers. Perhaps it is unreasonable to expect UNRWA employees, the vast majority of whom are Palestinian, to express neutrality. But if that is the case, then the Framework’s endorsement of “UNRWA’s human rights, conflict resolu-

tion, and tolerance education program” may also be questioned, or at least its implementation.

US Foreign Policy has shown a puzzling commitment to UNRWA and suggests a vast disconnect with reality. As a 2015 State Department Framework for Cooperation Between UNRWA and the U.S states, “All U.S. foreign assistance programs are required to demonstrate performance and accountability, and clearly link programming and funding directly to U.S. policy goals.” How prolonging the Palestinian “refugee” issue through the permanent institutionalizing of UNRWA serves U.S. policy goals is mystifying.

Beyond that, UNRWA officials at the top continue to defend the Palestinian “right of return,” in speeches as well as on official web pages, not to mention its pervasive promotion in UNRWA schools. How does promoting the Palestinian ideology that they are entitled to return to places once occupied by parents, grandparents and great-grandparents which are now in Israel, and in the process transform Israel into a Jewish minority state, serve U.S. policy, much less the cause of peace?

Incitement

Historically, ever since the 1960s, American lawmakers have focused more closely on UNRWA and its relationship to terrorism. Section 301(c) of the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act (P.L. 87-195), as amended, states that

“No contributions by the United States shall be made to [UNRWA] except on the condition that [UNRWA] take[s] all possible measures to assure that no part of the United States contribution shall be used to furnish assistance to any refugee who is receiving military training as a member of the so-called Palestine Liberation Army or any other guerrilla type organization or who has engaged in any act of terrorism.”⁵

In the 1970s, a number of US Congressional resolutions have sought to limit or cut off funding to UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority. American legislators regularly introduce language into appropriations bills to require UNRWA to advance transparency, self-policing and accountability with regard to vetting employees for terrorist connections as well as eliminate the promotion of terrorism in educational materials. Similar provisions are regularly written into funding for United States Agency for International Development budgets, administered by the State Department, for grants intended for the Palestinian Authority. In 2002, a letter from the late US

Representative Tom Lantos, who served as a ranking Democratic member of the House International Relations Committee to then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, complained that “UNRWA officials have not only failed to prevent their camps from becoming centers of terrorist activity, but have also failed to report these developments to you.” Annan replied to Lantos that “the United Nations has no responsibility for security matters in refugee camps, or indeed anywhere else in the occupied territory.”⁶

Official U.S. Government analyses indicate that UNRWA has claimed to have responded by improving vetting of its employees against watch lists of Al Qaida and Taliban suspects but that it remains unwilling to screen names against lists of Hamas, Hezbollah or other Palestinian groups provided by Israel.

Finally, in the fall of 1949, when the Clapp Commission visited a refugee camp and was met by protest, an American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) staffer reported that “A large sign had been printed in English on which were the following, numbered as indicated: 1. Send us back home. 2. Compensate us. 3. Maintain us until we are refreshed. Just what they had in mind by ‘refreshed’ I leave to your imagination.”⁷ This embodies UNRWA’s mandate today.

Additionally, the sanctity and totality of the right of return embodied in statements made by the Palestinian leadership, Western scholar-advocates, NGOs and UNRWA itself regarding the ‘inviolable’ ‘right of return’ is the success of the evergreen Palestinian narrative. There are only two solutions, repatriation and resettlement, either or both of which would require political will and cultural willingness on the part of deeply alienated populations to be even considered. The centrality of the ‘right of return’ to Palestinian identity, along with the concept of ‘resistance’ as a means to restore both ‘justice’ and ‘honor’ have reliably thwarted any consideration of resettlement which is why it is a cause worth dying for.

Next Steps for the UN in Addressing the Problem

All of the above represents the same historical read that has convinced Palestinians that it is Israel and the West that created the Arab-Palestinian refugees, rather their own Arab leaders who did indeed put them in this state intentionally. Today, the perfidy of Palestinian society lies in its division, dysfunctionality, and complete denial of the reality it lives in.

As President Trump and US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley look to the tackle the bias towards Israel within Turtle Bay UNRWA should be at the top of list. Ultimately, the goal should be to wean Palestinians off UNRWA and decrease the hold UNRWA has on Palestinian society, in order to encourage a peaceful solution of the conflict and a material improvement of the refugees' lives.

Three basic steps are required to make this happen:

First, UNRWA should be dissolved.

Second, all the services UNRWA currently provides should be transferred to other agencies within the UN, notably the UNHCR, which have a long experience in such programs. In addition, these activities must be subject to normal transparency and accountability.

Third, to the greatest possible extent, responsibility for normal social services should be turned over to the Palestinian Authority. A large portion of the UNRWA staff should be transferred to that governmental authority. Donors should use the maximum amount of oversight to ensure this be done effectively.

In 2002, it was Tom Lantos then the ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee who wrote to then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, complaining that "UNRWA officials have not only failed to prevent their camps from becoming centers of terrorist activity, but have also failed to report these developments to you." Annan simply replied, "The United Nations has no responsibility for security matters in refugee camps, or indeed anywhere else in the occupied territory."

While the US government has not ignored the issue it has also not taken serious steps to reform it. Since the 1970s, a number of Congressional resolutions have sought to limit or cut off funding to UNRWA; and Congress regularly introduces language into appropriations bills requiring UNRWA to promote transparency, self-policing, and accountability with regard to vetting employees for terrorist connections, as well as eliminating the promotion of terrorism in educational materials.

UNRWA's ability to act independently has been compromised by its having been co-opted, however one possible remedy is the reassignment of services UNRWA currently provides to parallel agencies within the UN.

Former Senator Mark Kirk from Illinois proposed a more precise series of definitions for American aid to UNRWA, to be specified in the Memorandum of Understanding with the organization. The draft amendment states that “a Palestinian refugee is defined as a person whose place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who was personally displaced as a result of the 1948 or 1967 Arab-Israeli conflicts, who currently does not reside in the West Bank or Gaza and who is not a citizen of any other state.”

Refugee status would therefore no longer be heritable, at least if UNRWA were to continue to receive American funding. The amendment would also require the Secretary of State to report to Congress about the notoriously slippery numbers of refugees and what measures the US Government is taking to ensure these limits are abided by.

That said, even more specific provisions could be introduced with the existing architecture of UNRWA something that was reinforced and agreed upon by James G. Lindsay who served with UNRWA as a lawyer and general counsel from 2000 to 2007, overseeing all UNRWA legal activities.

Historical evidence has shown that UNRWA continually expanded its refugee rolls in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan with unknown numbers of non-Palestinians, to avoid confrontation and as a means of regional development. UNRWA could be therefore required to demand evidence that demonstrated an individual was resident in Palestine from 1946 to 1948 and that they were personally displaced as a result of the hostilities. UNRWA could also be required to independently verify that recipients of aid are not currently citizens of other states. UNRWA could also be directed to begin planning the handover of its operations to the Palestinian Authority as well as to other Arab governments. And a truly daring innovation would be to leave the Executive branch no wiggle room to evade Congressional man-dates with a Presidential waiver.

Here are additional actions that should be considered:

Removing National Citizens from UNRWA’s responsibility is the greatest change for UNRWA that is for the agency to accept that its mission—saving the Palestinian refugees from starvation and providing for their well-being has been achieved in most of its fields of operation, and that it can finally turn its responsibilities over to the relevant local or national authorities. In truth, the vast majority of UNRWA’s registered refugees have already been “resettled.”

Specifically, most of the nearly 2 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan are citizens of that country, and the rest have residency and travel documents. Similarly, the refugees in the West Bank and Gaza have exactly the same rights as the no refugee population, including suffrage. The refugees in Syria have a somewhat different status especially, now as the country is chaos. That said, they still hold most of the trappings of Syrian citizenship. The roughly 414,000 UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have a significantly different status from their no refugee neighbors, but even there, some of UNRWA's registered beneficiaries are likely citizens. The only thing preventing citizens from ceasing to be "refugees" is UNRWA's singular definition of what constitutes a refugee.

Further, moving to *a Need-Based Provision of Services*, UNRWA started out as a need based provider; upon inheriting registration rolls from the UN Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR), it did not hesitate to remove large numbers of people who were not actually in need of relief. In general, Western countries view education and health care as a public entitlement, the idea of limiting UNRWA's program reach to those who could not afford to pay might have seemed too harsh. In any case, "need" was formally dropped from the eligibility requirements for these and other non welfare services in 1993.

Palestinian refugees who can pay for at least part of their children's education and their family's health care should be required to do so. In other words, all UNRWA services, not just welfare, should be provided based on need rather than registration status. Above all, eliminating services based on status would actually save money and ensure that real needs are met instead of being wasted on political ones.

Given that UNRWA is a UN body, and that its schools are not connected to the PA, Israel, or host-country educational systems, the agency should provide its students with a UN curriculum using UN textbooks. This effort does not require a massive redesign of the existing curricula and textbooks, both of which could be modified to give students a balanced education while preparing them to join national educational systems when they leave UNRWA schools.

In particular, the agency could demand electronic versions of the national textbooks and curricula, modified by UNESCO in order to provide a more balanced education, and then publish the results as UNRWA textbooks. Modifications should include removing racist, anti-Semitic materials, as well as neutralizing the sort of “highly nationalistic” material highlighted by past critics. For example, problematic passages could be reconstructed and supplemented with new material.

In this way, students would be protected from objectionable material and given a balanced education, even while being exposed to the nationalistic views that are supposedly necessary for their smooth transition to national secondary schools. Minimally, the United States should urge UNRWA to seek UNESCO review of all textbooks it is presently using, followed by withdrawal, modification, or continued use of each book depending on UNESCO’s findings. And new textbooks should only be introduced after a UNESCO review. Regarding teachers, a portion of the U.S. contribution to UNRWA should be set aside to establish an independent group of Arabic-speaking classroom monitors (from countries other than UNRWA’s hosts). Such a group might be costly, but it would better enable the agency and its donors to counter accusations that UNRWA teachers are influenced by Islamist groups like Hamas.

Moreover, a careful look at the Ambulance Services UNRWA operates a number of ambulances, though many fewer than the Red Crescent Society and other providers. In the West Bank and Gaza, agency ambulances have been implicated in terrorist activities.

Many often wonder why it is that violence and instability persists after so many years regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and especially the Palestinian element therein. Why is this issue so seemingly impossible to resolve?

A part of the answer is that UNRWA does not work towards a resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem. In fact, the opposite is true. UNRWA perpetuates the problem.

All those seeking real progress toward peace between Israelis and Palestinians need to take a close look at this unacceptable situation. All those with responsibility for the management of these issues need to work for a change of course.

Finally, if there indeed an actual desire within the West to see a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a growth of Palestinian society then a serious effort needs to be put into ending the so-called Palestinian right of return by removing UNRWA thereby allowing for actual state building to take place. Removing UNRWA from the scene is something that is way overdue in order to give the Palestinians the freedom — and the responsibility — to build their own society. Western taxes would be better spent promoting independent Palestinian organizations and private-sector growth.

Asaf Romirowsky, PhD is the Executive Director of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME) and co-author of Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief.

Notes

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- 4 Terry Rempel, "UNRWA and the Palestine Refugees: A Genealogy of 'Participatory' Development," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28:2-3, p. 425 (2009).
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- 7 Don Stevenson to Bronson P. Clark, "Interview with Ambassador Eliahu Elath of Israel at the Israeli Embassy, Washington on August 9, 1949," American Friends Service Committee Archives, August 12, 1949.

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