**Israel slams UN chief for advocating armed UN force to protect Palestinians**

By: AP

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Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a new report that options for protecting Palestinian civilians range from establishing an armed military or police force to deploying civilian observers or beefing up the U.N. presence on the ground.

The U.N. chief stressed in the report circulated Friday evening that every option would require the cooperation of Israelis and Palestinians, “a sustained cessation of hostilities and additional resources.”

But the prospect of getting Israel’s consent, especially for a U.N. or non-U.N. armed force, remains highly unlikely.

Israeli Ambassador Danny Danon responded to the report by saying that “the only protection the Palestinian people need is from their own leadership.”

The Palestinian Authority “incites its people to demonize and attack Jews, and Hamas, a terrorist organization, exploits those under its control by intentionally putting them in harms way,” Danon said.

Guterres’ report was issued in response to a request in a Palestinian-backed resolution adopted by the General Assembly in June that blamed Israel for violence in Gaza.

Guterres stressed that the solution to protecting Palestinian civilians is a political settlement to the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Until that is achieved, he called on the 193 nations in the General Assembly to explore “all practical and feasible measures that will significantly improve the protection of the Palestinian population,” adding that the measures “would also improve the security of Israeli civilians.”

Among the options Guterres advanced in the report are armed military or police forces, if given a mandate by the Security Council, to “ensure the safety of the civilian population.”

The Trump administration has been a strong defender of its close ally Israel in the council, and vehemently opposed the resolution approved by the General Assembly in June that called for Guterres’ proposals. So the chances of a U.S. veto in the council on any armed force for the Palestinians’ benefit or a civilian observer mission are high.

In addition to sharp criticism of Israel in the report, Guterres also criticized “the indiscriminate launching of rockets, mortars and incendiary devices from Gaza by Hamas and other Palestinian militants towards Israel” and the building of tunnels into Israel, saying these acts threaten the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

He added that “incitement, provocative rhetoric and the glorification of terror attacks by Palestinian factions perpetuate the conflict, breed mistrust and diminish hope for constructive dialogue.”