**Cutting UNRWA**

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The Trump administration’s decision to cut funding to UNRWA, the UN agency serving Palestinian refugees, was justifiably applauded by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the weekend.

As Netanyahu said, UNRWA’s treatment of Palestinians is “one of the main problems perpetuating the conflict.”

In recent years, for example, there have been a number of cases of its employees and facilities harboring terrorists, spreading incitement in textbooks and other materials, and even housing rocket launchers used to shoot at Israel.

But beyond the UNRWA system being abused by terrorists, its written mandate plays a central role in perpetuating the Palestinian refugee myth and the demand for the “right of return.”

The Palestinians have their own special UN refugee agency, as opposed to all other refugees who are served by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The definition of refugee that UNRWA follows is different from that of the UNHCR, and is so broad that to use the term “refugee” for most of the people it serves is absurd.

According to UNRWA, Palestinian refugees are not just people who fled this land during the 1948 War of Independence and have yet to be resettled. They include descendants of male refugees – meaning someone born this week can be a refugee of a war 70 years ago.

It also includes people that are citizens of other countries, as well as people living in the West Bank and Gaza – the very land from which they supposedly fled – who in other situations would legally be considered victims of “internal displacement.” By considering all of these people refugees, it bolsters their claim that they should be granted the “right of return” to sovereign Israel.

Former MK Einat Wilf, who wrote a book published in Hebrew this summer called War of the Right of Return, estimated that at most 1% of the 5.3 million Palestinians registered by UNRWA fit the general UN definition of a refugee.

She tweeted: “2.1 [million] live in [the West Bank] and Gaza, so IN Palestine, 2.2 [million] are CITIZENS of Jordan; in Syria and Lebanon, 1 million [ population] figure is 4x inflated and of them only 10-30,000 have fled war.”

In other words, UNRWA has been fleecing the world since it was established in 1949 – and has failed in its 69 years of operations to do what the UNHCR did within a decade for the millions of refugees of World War II.

The endless flow of Palestinian grievances – and the support of them by an international community that funds UNRWA – are keys to why the conflict continues.

It is unrealistic to expect the Palestinians to give up their national aspirations. But as long as they feign perpetual victimhood – and, of course, inflate Israeli “crimes” beyond proportion – they view themselves as not having agency, and not being responsible for trying to improve their own lives, and the world agrees. Sweden, for example, pledged on Friday to transfer $206 million in un-earmarked funds over four years to UNRWA.

How can the Palestinians be expected to engage in state building if they refuse to take responsibility for themselves and are constantly holding their hand out to the world?

There is one legitimate concern about the US pulling out of funding UNRWA: that it will destabilize the West Bank. A senior IDF officer expressed concern to The Jerusalem Post’s Anna Ahronheim that if UNRWA schools shut down, those who would otherwise be in a classroom will start attacking Israelis. He also pointed out that children are more likely to participate in rock-throwing, which can be deadly.

While the concern is real, it is also tactical, as opposed to looking strategically at UNRWA’s role in the ongoing conflict.

And even if the agency is kept alive by donor countries such as Sweden and Jordan – which is pushing UN member states to increase their pledges – the fact that the US, once UNRWA’s biggest donor, is pulling out, sends a strong message.

And as the IDF officer told the Post: “Maybe something good will come out of [the cutting of funds] – and the Palestinians will learn to support themselves and not rely on others for everything.”