The problem is UNRWA

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A doctor trying to find a medicine to treat an illness must, first of all, determine its etiology. One of the main obstacles on the path to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the U.N. agency founded with the purpose of assisting only Palestinian refugees, and that perpetuates the fantasy of their return.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC), the U.N.'s worldwide refugee agency, has dealt with some 66 million true refugees from civil wars, blood-soaked conflicts and natural disasters in recent years. Meanwhile, UNRWA, which was founded in 1949 specifically for Palestinian refugees when there were only some 700,000, ostensibly assists 5.3 million people it defines as refugees today, but any connection they have to true refugee status is completely incidental.

For starters, some of these refugees do not exist at all. The most recent population census in Lebanon found that two-thirds of the refugees listed in UNRWA reports were simply made up. Some 300,000 people exist only in UNRWA reports. It is clear that UNRWA has an interest in inflating the numbers – they do good business from this. Their budget per refugee in 2016, for example, was four times as much as the UNHCR had: $246 compared to $58.

UNRWA was born of sin, and in sin it remains. The organization perpetuates the Palestinian refugee issue, prevents a political settlement from being reached, contributes to anti-Israel incitement and robs aid to real refugees.

As long as UNRWA continues to exist, we only sentence ourselves to have no settlement in the present. At the same time, we ensure that in another decade or two, when students currently enrolled in UNRWA schools take their high school matriculation examinations, nothing will have changed for the better after the years of incitement they have undergone. We must look at Israel's long-term interests and to those who strive to strike a future peace agreement.

The world knows this, just as Israel knows this, but it has been comfortable for everyone to sit on the sidelines and do nothing to fix UNRWA's distortion of history. Until, that is, the Trump administration came and said loud and clear that UNRWA is part of the problem and cannot be part of the solution.

When the U.S. announced it was considering halting American funding for UNRWA, Israel should have held on to this suggestion with both hands. The Israeli response, however, which reflected the defense establishment's thinking, was to stutter and hesitate. Israel was shortsighted, preferring a short-term quiet for which we will all pay for heavily in the mid- to long term.

The defense establishment fears the instability caused if the funding for UNRWA stops. In my view, there are U.N. organizations that are already active, like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and others, that can supply humanitarian services to answer the needs of these Palestinians relatively quickly. Many Palestinians who receive money and services from UNRWA would shed no tears if they would receive this aid from another organization, one that has not indoctrinated them. Will this be easy? No. Are some of the defense establishment's arguments rational? Yes. But this view looks at the long term. We have a ticking time bomb here, and if we do not defuse it now, in the long term it will blow up in our faces.

We are standing now at a historical crossroads. The American administration has expressed a new line of thinking regarding the U.N. and the Middle East, and is now unwilling to fund organizations that act against the national security of the U.S. UNRWA is an organization that acts against the national security interests of the State of Israel and all those in favor of a regional peace agreement. Closing UNRWA would be the first step in treating the sickness before it becomes truly becomes malignant.