**The UN's Insanity on Gaza**

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The saying that “insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results” has been attributed to several people over the years, including Albert Einstein. Now, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres’ latest report on the spectrum of options to help protect Palestinians seems like a perfect illustration of that statement.

Guterres focused on four options: 1) A more robust UN presence on the ground with more UN human rights, political and coordination experts to strengthen UN prevention capabilities and increase the organization's visibility. 2) Additional resources to strengthen UN programs and humanitarian and development assistance to address Palestinian needs. 3) Civilian observers, based on a UN or non-UN observer mission, with a mandate to report on the protection of Palestinian civilians. 4) Physical protection with an armed UN military or police force.

Over the years the Palestinians have been one of the major recipients of international aid; indeed, it has been argued that the Palestinians receive one of the highest levels of aid in the world. The expectation that adding more money for the protection of Palestinians to the equation would change the situation seems unrealistic, if only due to different needs of Gaza and the West Bank. The former requires an immediate humanitarian plan of action, and they both need a long-term development program for infrastructure, job creation and enhancement of democratic institutions. From donor fatigue, to concerns regarding how the aid is distributed, more money will likely just mean more of the same.

With over 100 international organizations on the ground and a robust UN presence based mostly in Jerusalem, the UN has senior political players such as the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nikolay Mladenov (UNSCO), the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), professional organizations like the World Food Programme and the usual alphabet soup of UN and international non-governmental organizations. Needless to say, all the international organizations act as advocates for the Palestinians, and are extremely visible, despite what the UN chief may say.

The idea of civilian observers is also not new in our region. In Hebron, after the 1994 massacre of Palestinians by Baruch Goldstein, a Temporary International Presence in Hebron was established to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians. Its mandate was revised over the years and its current one was determined in the Hebron Agreement in 1997, under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The force was established to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians, the same logic and goals as the one the UN is now suggesting for Gaza. The problems of the one-sided mandate of such organizations can be clearly seen following the recent reports of a TIPH observer slashing tires of an Israeli vehicle, or a video that circulated of an observer slapping an Israeli settler child.

Finally, the idea of a UN military or police force to deter or protect civilians is useless in the Palestinian arena due to the already highly politicized reality. Israel has learned that it cannot depend on international forces like UNIFIL and UNDOF for its security concerns. When things get tough, these forces seem to only focus on Israeli violations, repeatedly failing to gain Israel’s faith or confidence in their contribution.

When the UN secretary general highlights another one-sided mandate focused only on Palestinian civilians, he once again makes the body he represents irrelevant for Israel. The Israeli civilians targeted by Hamas’ rockets and tunnels and the weekly Hamas-initiated and planned confrontations at the Gaza border fence, which result in unfortunate and unnecessary deaths, also need to be considered.

When the UN ignores Hamas as a strategic regional actor – one that runs Gaza, uses the Strip as a staging ground for terrible, indiscriminate attacks, and abuses its civilians by making them into human shields, I would ask: What is the UN doing to protect the Palestinians in Gaza from Hamas?