A Troubling Picture of UN Complicity in Palestinian War Crimes

May 4, 2015

By Anne Herzberg

YNet News

[http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4653096,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4653096%2C00.html)

Last week, the United Nations Office of the Secretary General issued a summary of its long-awaited [Board of Inquiry (BOI) report on the 2014 Gaza War](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4651245%2C00.html). The BOI was tasked with investigating incidents affecting UN premises during the two-month conflict.

 The BOI’s mandate was generally even-handed, did not declare Israel guilty in advance, and was comprised of individuals who appeared to be free of bias. As a result, the Israeli government fully cooperated with the mission.

The BOI’s formation and origins stand in marked contrast to the UN Human Rights Council inquiry currently underway. The HRC mission has been tarred by a biased mandate, pre-determined conclusions of Israeli violations, and highly prejudiced staffing. Moreover, it is conducted within the HRC framework, controlled by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and many of the other world’s worst human rights abusers.

While we are still awaiting the results of the HRC’s Gaza inquiry, based on past experience, it is highly likely that it will not address in any serious way how Palestinians exploit UN facilities as part of their human shielding combat strategy.

 The BOI summary, on the other hand, paints a picture of intense urban combat between Israel and Palestinian terror groups, use of UN facilities by Palestinians to launch attacks and to store weapons, and uncertainty as to whether buildings were hit by IDF or Hamas. It also reveals, at best, gross incompetence by UNRWA, which apparently had no policies in place aimed at preventing these illegal activities.

 According to the report, the organization essentially handed over rockets found hidden in UNRWA schools to unknown local authorities during the war, with no apparent concern for Hamas’ involvement.

There are other troubling details regarding the BOI primarily relating to the lack of transparency and methodology of work.

 The main report itself is secret, so it is generally unknown what material was used by the BOI in drawing its conclusions. The public summary, however, indicates that the BOI relied heavily on witness interviews with UNRWA and other UN personnel.

 These individuals have a clear interest in hiding the role of their organization in facilitating or even actively assisting Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups in their commission of war crimes. And, as is typical, in every case examined by the BOI, UN and Palestinian "witnesses" claimed to never have seen any Hamas activity anywhere near the UN facilities where Israeli operations took place - assertions that bear no credibility whatsoever.

 These incredulous claims beg the question as to how much more extensive Hamas operations in and around UN facilities were downplayed or hidden.

 In addition to non-credible claims made by self-interested individuals, the BOI also apparently used information obtained from unnamed NGOs. No information is provided as to how NGOs were selected, what reports were reviewed, and to what extent they were credited. Based on the current NGO publications issued on the Gaza War, almost all are based solely on speculation and conjecture, contain innumerable factual and legal errors, hide Palestinian combatant activity, and misrepresent dozens, if not hundreds, of Palestinian fighters as civilians in order to manufacture false claims of Israeli violations.

 While it is reasonable not to disclose classified information, there is no rationale to place NGO information in this category, particularly since it is almost certain that NGO documentation provided to the BOI did not relate to Palestinian violations in any systematic way.

 Nevertheless, the BOI report, even if unintentionally, clearly refutes the NGO narrative about the Gaza War. The NGOs falsely accuse Israel of deliberately targeting civilians and deny the extent to which Palestinians operated from within civilian areas to launch thousands of deliberate rocket attacks on Israeli civilians, thereby increasing the risk to the population of Gaza.

 The UN routinely stresses that its premises are inviolable. Yet, as is made clear in the BOI report, UN facilities were routinely exploited by Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups to store weapons and to carry out attacks. It also indicates that most if not all the damage is directly attributable to the actions of Hamas (and the Palestinian Authority as the "unity government").

There is no doubt that UN officials and employees turned a blind eye to these blatant violations as they were taking place, and possibly were involved in facilitating such attacks. It is apparent that several UN officials were more interested in disseminating propaganda during the war than acknowledging the reality of what was taking place on the ground.

If the UN wishes to secure its installations and avoid future death and injury, the onus is on the institution to enforce the law it preaches to others and end its highly damaging role in enabling Palestinian war crimes.