UNRWA is not the solution

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<http://www.israelhayom.com/opinions/unrwa-is-not-the-solution/>

It seems quite a few officials at IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv are concerned by reports that the United States plans to cut funding to the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees and [revoke its mandate to operate in the West Bank](http://www.israelhayom.com/2018/08/26/report-us-to-take-palestinian-right-of-return-off-table/).

It is high time these officials realize that UNRWA – the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East – is not the solution, but the problem. It is hard to believe that in Israel, of all places, these officials claim to be in favor of finding a solution to the seven-decade-long refugee problem, but when push comes to shove, it seems the timing is never right.

Established for the exclusive benefit of Palestinian refugees, UNRWA has, instead of resolving the problem, done everything in its power to perpetuate it. Instead of peace and coexistence, it teaches hatred and incitement. Instead of fighting terrorist organizations, it collaborates with them. As someone who has worked toward UNRWA'S closure for years, I am glad Washington finally gets it and I hope the people at IDF headquarters will soon come to their senses.

According to media reports, the White House is determined to solve this persistent problem and plans to take the necessary steps, including ending the Palestinians' unique ability to inherit refugee status, and recognizing 500,000 Palestinian refugees instead of the 5 million UNRWA purports to serve.

While it is in Israel's long-term interest that UNRWA be closed, in practice the defense establishment acts as the agency's representative. Following the media reports, it took less than 24 hours for the fear-mongering to begin, with officials arguing that ending UNRWA's operations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would result in Israel being made to bear the burden of providing the education, health and welfare services for which the agency is currently responsible.

There may be difficulties in the short term, but in the long term this action must be taken. We cannot allow tactical concerns to dictate policy and perpetuate a strategic problem.

Responsibility for the Palestinians and the UNRWA budgets could be transferred to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, which looks after the rest of the world's refugees and, unlike UNRWA, works toward solving the refugee problem instead of perpetuating it.

Alternatively, U.N. agencies that already operate in the region, such as the United Nations Development Program, could be tasked with the job.

Another option is to transfer the budgets directly to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, where UNRWA's presence is particularly problematic. As things stand today, the budgets are allocated to UNRWA, which cooperates with Hamas which in turn acts against the PA. Transferring the authority and the funds to Ramallah would serve to strengthen the PA.

The U.S.'s reported plan for dealing with UNRWA is proof that in Washington they sometimes see things more clearly than they do in Tel Aviv. Israel must adopt the plan wholeheartedly. It is the only way for the refugee problem to be resolved and possibly for us to come closer to finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.