

Rejoinder to James G. Lindsay, *Fixing UNRWA: Repairing the UN's Troubled System of Aid to Palestinian Refugees*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus#91, January 2009

By: Maya Rosenfeld¹

James Lindsay, currently a researcher with the Washington Institute and until recently a legal counselor for UNRWA, has written a policy paper on UNRWA that supports the dismantling of this UN agency. Directed to the US State Department, the paper calls upon the US, in its position as one of the major donors to UNRWA, to exercise pressure on the agency and impose upon it a series of structural modifications. These include: 1) an incremental denial of refugee status to the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian refugees who are currently registered with UNRWA, starting with the 1.9 million refugees currently living in Jordan. 2) The rolling back of UNRWA's primary welfare services: the replacement of the free education and health that UNRWA has been providing for six decades with a commoditized system (a restricted, means-tested entitlement to free services). 3) The subjection of all of UNRWA's beneficiaries to security "screening" as precondition for entitlement to employment, services and/or emergency relief assistance. 4) The enforcement of various restrictions on the public appearance (speeches, statements, lectures) of UNRWA's highest ranking officials, first and foremost the Commissioner General. If adopted, the implementation of these recommendations would all but nullify the capacities of UNRWA and bring about its demise.

In this rejoinder we argue that Lindsay's recommendations stem from the prejudiced political stand of the author with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Palestinian refugee problem rather than from a research-based evaluation of UNRWA's performance in the past and present. Specifically, we contend that Lindsay's call for a systematic weakening of UNRWA is part of a campaign of incitement and delegitimation against the agency, which has become more vociferous in recent years in the wake of military and political developments that affected the

¹Dr. Maya Rosenfeld is an Israeli sociologist and anthropologist. Her main field of research is the modern (post- 1948) social and political history of the Palestinians in Palestine and the Diaspora, with a major focus on refugee communities. Her book, *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp* was published in 2004 by Stanford University Press. Dr. Rosenfeld is a research fellow at the Harry S. Truman Research Institute at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She teaches at Sapir Academic College and at Beit Berl Academic College.

occupied Palestinian territories and the Middle East as a whole. The attack against UNRWA appears to be led and conducted by ultra-right wing oriented research centers and media agencies in Israel and by their counterpart pro-Israel foundations and lobby organizations in the US, and is addressed primarily to the US administration. Among other commonalities, those who take part in this campaign share the conviction that the Palestinian refugee problem should be **dissolved** through withdrawal of international recognition, support and protection to the refugees. It invariably follows that such campaigners do not want the refugee problem to be addressed and **solved** in the framework of a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in accordance with the international law and relevant UN resolutions. UNRWA is targeted because by virtue of its decades-long mandate as provider of services, assistance and protection to millions of Palestinian refugees in the Diaspora and in Palestine this UN agency embodies the persistence of the refugee cause and therefore constitutes a major hindrance to "dissolution".

The context and timing of the recent campaign against UNRWA, to which Lindsay has now added his own contribution, deserve special attention. It converged with the generally hostile and increasingly non-cooperative and disrespectful reaction of the government of Israel to the UN- sponsored emergency humanitarian operations in the occupied Palestinian territories, an intervention that came in response to the acute socio-economic crisis there. To recall: The breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in the Camp David Summit was followed by the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada in late September 2000 and the subsequent rekindling of the violent conflict between the parties. Israel reacted thereafter by escalating the military measures it employed in the occupied Palestinian territories to an unprecedented level. Repeated IDF invasions and incursions, the subjugation of the Gaza Strip to a protracted, near-hermetic siege, the reoccupation and fragmentation of the West Bank and the enforcement there of a closure regime resulted in the destruction of the Palestinian economy, the near collapse of the PNA institutional infrastructure and a subsequent unparalleled decline of Palestinian living conditions. Failure of the international community to halt the deterioration and to reverse the course of developments led to emergency intervention on behalf of the affected population by a number of UN organizations, with UNRWA's operations being the largest and most comprehensive by far.

Shamefully, however, UNRWA's emergency intervention was met with systematic obstructions on the part of the Israeli authorities. Israel imposed a host of restrictions on the movement of UNRWA area staff in the oPt, including the movement of rescue medical teams; hampered and impeded the transportation and distribution of food staples, medications and other emergency supplies, and hindered rehabilitation projects of the agency (the reconstruction of demolished homes and infrastructure).² Even graver in terms of consequences was the utter disrespect that Israel demonstrated towards the immunity of UN facilities and staff: UNRWA's schools, ambulances, offices, and additional installations were targeted by IDF fire on repeated occasions, resulting in the killing and injuring of school children, ambulance drivers, medical staff, local and international workers³; UNRWA schools were invaded and occupied by the army on numerous occasions, and at times school compounds were turned into detention centers⁴; other agency installations were attacked or raided, including an UNRWA-run hospital in the West Bank⁵.

² On Israeli hindrances of UNRWA's emergency operations, the restrictions imposed on the movement of UNRWA staff, and the detrimental consequences of these measures see for example: Press Release No J/04/2002 of 25 September 2002, entitled: Donors Request Report on Humanitarian Aid Funds Diverted to Israeli Security Procedures; Press Release dated 23 April 2002 (Jerusalem/09/2002), entitled: Israeli Military Prevents 75 Tons of Humanitarian Aid Reaching Qalqilya; Press Release No HQG/06/2004, dated 1 April 2004, entitled: UNRWA Suspends Emergency Food Aid in Gaza; Press Release No. HQ/J/3/2004, dated 23 May 2004, entitled: UNRWA Protests Israeli Incursion into Jenin Camp Reconstruction Project Office and Detention of Senior Project Manager.

³ On IDF shooting on UNRWA schools and the resulting casualties, see for example: Press Release No. HQ/G/33/2004, dated 12 October 2004, entitled: Israeli Gunfire Hits 11 Year Old Girl Sitting at her Desk in an UNRWA School; Press Release No. HQ/G/34/2004, dated 13 October 2004, entitled: Child Shot in UNRWA School Dies; Press Release No. HQ/G/01/2005, dated 31 January 2005, entitled: 10 Year Old Child Killed in UNRWA School in Gaza. On IDF shooting on UNRWA ambulances and the resulting casualties, see for example: Press Release HQ/G/07/2001, dated 5 December 2001, entitled: The Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank; Press Statement dated March 8 2002, entitled: UNRWA commissioner General Expresses Deep Concern at the Worsening of the Humanitarian Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. On the IDF shooting and killing of the director of UNRWA's reconstruction project in Jenin refugee camp, Mr. Iain Hook, see press statement dated 22 November 2002, entitled: Death of a UN Worker. See also, UN Staff in the Occupied Territories, *press release*, 5 December 2002, entitled: Iain Hook: UN staff call for justice.

⁴ On IDF invasion and occupation of UNRWA schools, see for example: Press Release dated 8 March 2002, entitled: Director of UNRWA Operations in the West Bank Expresses Deep Concern at the Use of the United Nations School in Tulkarem to Detain Palestinians; Press Release No. Hq/J/2004, dated 25 August 2004, entitled: Israeli Military forcefully Occupied UNRWA School.

⁵ On IDF invasion of a West Bank Palestinian hospital and offense against UNRWA medical team, see Press Release HQ/G/17/2003, dated 24 September 2003, entitled: UNRWA Protests Israeli Action in Qalqilya Hospital.

At the same time, Israel repeatedly denied its responsibility for the creation of a humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories and frequently claimed that UNRWA overstates the gravity of the situation in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, inflates the number of Palestinian casualties and magnifies the scope of damage wrought by the Israeli military⁶. The Israeli authorities further raised the allegation that UNRWA sides with the Palestinians and endorses an anti-Israeli line and went as far as accusing the agency of fostering terrorism and lending its facilities to terrorists.⁷ On one notorious occasion such a fallacious contention was used by the Israeli Ambassador to the UN as grounds for demanding that UNRWA Commissioner General, Mr. Peter Hansen, be removed from his office⁸. And, while the charges that

⁶ Since the inception of the current conflict in October 2000, Israel continuously and repeatedly denied connection between its military actions and measures in the occupied Palestinian territories and the creation of a humanitarian crisis there. As a matter of fact, Israel frequently denied that such a crisis existed. See for example the response of the State (Ministry of Defense and Coordinator of IDF Activities in the Territories) to the July 2006 appeal by six Israeli human rights organizations to the Israeli Supreme Court against the IDF closure of the border crossings to Gaza. The appealing organizations claimed that the closure of the crossings, which was part and parcel of IDF "Operation Summer Rains" in the summer of 2006, inflicted collective punishment on the population of the Gaza Strip and bore disastrous impacts on the humanitarian situation there. These assessments were based on reports by UNRWA and other UN organizations, which came out with an urgent call. The State denied these allegations, claiming that recurring closure of crossings was necessitated by security considerations and that humanitarian supplies nonetheless reached their destination in the Strip. The Court accepted the stand of the State and dismissed the appeal. See, Supreme Court decision on case number 5841/06, given on 25 February 2007.

⁷ A well known incident in which such allegations were raised took place in May 2004, in the course of a large scale armored Israeli incursion in the Gaza Strip ("Operation Rainbow"). The Israeli Defense Minister at the time, Shaul Mofaz, alleged that a UN ambulance had transported body parts of Israeli soldiers who were killed during the operation. Major General Yossef Mishlev, then Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), further claimed that a video tape showed Palestinian use on 11 May "...of ambulances belonging to UNRWA, apparently for the purpose of transporting body parts ...". However, Israel had no evidence whatsoever to support its allegation. In a particularly furious response, UNRWA Commissioner General demanded an apology. See, Press Release No. Hq/G/15/2004, of 25 May 2004, entitled UNRWA Demands Apology and Retraction for "Baseless Charges" against UNRWA Ambulance Drivers".

⁸ On October 1 2004, in the course of another large scale incursion into the south of the Gaza Strip, Israel again lodged accusations against UNRWA. The IDF released UAV footage and video documenting what they initially claimed was a group of Palestinian militants loading a rocket into UN-marked vehicle. Israel announced its intention to file a harsh complaint against UNRWA and demand that Danish diplomat Peter Hansen, UNRWA's head, be removed from office. In a special press release (Hq/G/30/2004, 2 October 2000) entitled: Response by Commissioner-General Peter Hansen to Allegations Regarding Misuse of a UN Vehicle, Hansen stated that: "While the quality of the video clip is poor, its analysis shows beyond the shadow of a doubt that the object carried and thrown into the vehicle is not / cannot be a Qassam rocket... In my mind and in that of those whom I have consulted, it is clearly a folded stretcher, a logical and indispensable accessory in any ambulance." Hansen further commented that "such false allegations can lead to increased aggressive behavior by Israelis towards the United Nations in general and UN humanitarian staff in particular, and therefore seriously increase the risks which UN personnel face in this zone of violent conflict." Israeli UN ambassador, Dan Gillerman dismissed UNRWA's reaction and blamed Hansen has "for years has expressed anti-Israeli, biased, unrestrained positions and statements". However, On October

Israel raised against UNRWA were all proved wrong, in the end, the Israeli campaign against the Agency and its head probably did cost Hansen his position⁹.

A full analysis of the Israeli position with respect to UNRWA remains beyond the scope of this rejoinder. However, it is hard not to see that the above manifestations of animosity and contempt towards the Agency and its workers concur with Israel's interests as an occupying power and with the overall Israeli political agenda of the past eight and a half years: During the latter time period, the application of excessive military force against the Palestinian population in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip comprised the predominant, at times the only component in Israel's policy vis a vis the Palestinians. Yet, Israel refused to be held accountable for the consequences of its actions and for the gross violations of International Law and human rights that the latter entailed. In this respect, UNRWA's emergency intervention - which continuously brought the worsening situation of the besieged, impoverished and otherwise adversely affected Palestinian population to the attention of the international community - stood in Israel's way.

Against this backdrop we suggest that the attack on UNRWA by Lindsay and his predecessors is geared to provide a supposedly scholarly backing to the Israeli efforts to undermine the work of UNRWA and to discredit this UN agency. A yet broader connection is worth looking into here. We are referring to the exceptional proliferation, in the wake of the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan and war on Iraq, of "policy-research" centers, "think tanks", "forums" and the like that proclaimed expertise in "counter terrorism" and vied for recognition and acknowledgement from Near East policy makers in the Bush Administration. The affiliation with this institutional milieu whether through formal membership or by looser association stimulated and inspired those who lead the campaign against

6, 2004, Israel retracted the accusations, but did not offer an apology. (See article in NationMaster.com, under Encyclopedia/UNRWA/UNRWA and Israel/October 1 incident).

⁹ See for example: The Guardian, January 20, 2005, article by Chris McGreal entitled: "Bush forces UN refugee chief to go: Israeli pressure backed by conservative and Jewish groups in US stops reappointment of controversial head of relief agency".

UNRWA. In fact, to a great extent it defined and shaped the essence of their task: the scheme was to influence the US administration that the disintegration of UNRWA is in its interest; the ready made formula for carrying out this plan was to link the crusade against UNRWA to the US "counter-terror" agenda.

Let us now turn to Lindsay's text. Lindsay attempts to disguise the motivation and the connections that stand behind his recommendations with the supposedly scientific clothing of a sizeable paper that boasts an academic format. Nonetheless, closer inspection reveals that despite the scholarly appearance, the author's core arguments remain unsubstantiated by researched findings. Only a minor, eight-page long section, in this paper pertains to UNRWA's defining role as services provider, and there too, hardly any attempt was made to review the agency's work, let alone to assess the cumulative impact of its various programs. Lindsay deliberately refrains, then, from relating to the nuts and bolts of UNRWA's operations on the ground, namely, the day to day toil of approximately 30,000 area staff – teachers, nurses, doctors, social workers, maintenance and sanitation workers and others - on behalf of 4.6 million refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

This avoidance of facts on the ground is coupled with a complete disregard of the contexts within and against which UNRWA functions. The basic realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which shaped the history of both the refugees and UNRWA - the wars, the mass uprooting of Palestinians from their homeland and their dispersal in exile, the politics of the "host" Arab regimes, the impact of the Palestinian national movement, and above all, the now forty-one year old Israeli military occupation over the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the hitherto failed attempts to bring an end to it - are all but missing from Lindsay's account. Perhaps the most disturbing omission in this regard is that of the background to UNRWA's current emergency operations in the occupied Palestinian territories, during which time period Lindsay served as counselor for the agency. Not a single paragraph in the text is devoted to the critical conditions that prevail in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, let alone to the factors that gave rise to the steep deterioration. A reader of Lindsay's paper who is not acquainted with current affairs in occupied Palestine would not only remain in her/his ignorance but is liable also to question the need of an emergency intervention there altogether.

Likewise conspicuous in their absence from Lindsay's paper are UNRWA's beneficiaries, the Palestinian refugees. They are non-existent as members of dispossessed communities in exile or under military occupation, or otherwise, as individuals and members of families, students, laborers, employees, UNRWA staff, political beings, etc., or, god forbid, as a people with internationally-recognized rights. Neither are they present as an injured party in need of relief assistance and protection. Indeed, the most salient attributes of the current refugee condition in the besieged Gaza Strip, including the pervasive deep poverty, the widespread lack of food security, soaring unemployment, deteriorating health indicators, and falling educational attainments, never found their way into his account. Deplorably, if the refugees surface in Lindsay's paper, it is only as terrorists, security threats and potential security threats.

What makes Lindsay's avoidance of the subject matter and context of UNRWA's activities all the more troubling, however, is not only his personal background as a high official with the agency, a position that undoubtedly acquainted him with the factual material, but mainly the abundance of documentation and research that stood at the author's disposal, and which he chose to ignore. As far as the routine functioning of UNRWA as provider of key social services to millions of Palestinian refugees is concerned, one is struck in particular by the lack of reference to two indispensable sources. The first consists of the numerous publications by UNRWA, including the Annual Reports of the Commissioner General, statistical records of the various departments, and special thematic reviews and assessments. The second source comprises the exhaustive comparative study on UNRWA services and living conditions of Palestinian refugee populations in the Arab host countries and in the occupied Palestinian territories, which was carried out by the Norwegian Fafo Research Institute for Applied Research and published in 2003 under the title: "Finding Means: UNRWA's Financial Crisis and Refugee Living Conditions"¹⁰

¹⁰ See, Fafo report 427. 2003. UNRWA's Financial Crisis and Refugee Living Conditions, Volume I: Socio-economic Conditions among Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank and Gaza; Volume II: The Persistence of Poverty in the Palestinian Nation; Volume III: UNRWA Service Delivery, Budget and Donor Environment; Summary Report: Blome-Jacobsen, Laurie (ed.): UNRWA's Financial Crisis and Refugee Living Conditions . In the years that followed the publication of this comprehensive study, Fafo conducted a series of researches on the situation of Palestinian refugees in all countries of their dispersal, none of which was consulted by Lindsay.

As far as the role of UNRWA as provider of emergency relief assistance in the occupied Palestinian territories is concerned, the wealth of available studies and appraisals renders Lindsay's disregard of the material even more striking. We are referring first and foremost to the twelve "Emergency Appeals" and the thirty three follow-up "Progress Reports" that UNRWA addressed to the donor states since the inception of the current crisis in October 2000, which provide an all embracing review of the condition of the targeted refugee populations and detail the allocation of resources to the various emergency programs in light of debilitating funding constraints. Detailed evaluations of the impact of UNRWA's intervention on the refugee aid recipients are found in recurrent publications by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), in reports and assessments of the World Bank, in the surveys conducted by the Graduate Institute for Development Studies (IUED) in Geneva, and elsewhere.

Given the improbability that Lindsay was unaware of the large body of knowledge that pertains to UNRWA's work, why then has he chosen to disregard it? An examination of the aforementioned sources leads to the inescapable conclusion that the findings offered by the literature simply did not match with the author's objectives, namely, to discredit the agency and damage its reputation. Thus, for example, among other things, the Fafo study, which provides a most extensive evaluation of the impact of UNRWA's services, demonstrates the indispensability of UNRWA's education and health services to refugee populations – predominantly camp refugees, women, and the poor – in all five fields of the agency's operation. The authors of the study explicitly conclude that "... UNRWA has a democratizing effect by serving as a safety net for vulnerable groups. Over the long term, this has meant that vulnerable refugee groups everywhere except Lebanon had basic outcomes on par with other, less vulnerable refugees."¹¹ Taking another example, we point at the series of World Bank assessment reports on the Israeli closure policy and the economic crisis in the oPt, which repeatedly emphasized the crucial importance of

¹¹Blome-Jacobsen, Laurie (ed.). 2003. *Summary Report: UNRWA's Financial Crisis and Refugee Living Conditions*, Fafo Report 427, page 59.

UNRWA's emergency intervention, underscored its effectiveness, and highlighted the relative satisfaction of the Agency's beneficiaries.¹²

Only by deliberately misrepresenting the nature of UNRWA's work, only by dwarfing the significance of both the role of the agency and the ongoing effort entailed in implementing it, and only by concealing an entire corpus of research that underscores the indispensability of UNRWA, then, could Lindsay introduce the fallacious and shameless contention that the persistence of Palestinian refugeehood is by and large a fabrication of UNRWA. In the words of Lindsay: "In truth, the vast majority of the UNRWA's registered refugees have been "resettled" – or to use the United Nations euphemism, "*reintegrated*"...and "...The only thing that is preventing these citizens [i.e., the now resettled refugees, MR] from ceasing to be "refugees" is UNRWA's singular definition of what constitutes a refugee." ["Future of UNRWA: U.S. Policy Options: Removing National Citizens"]. The desired corollary, needless to say, is that UNRWA should be disintegrated. In line with this message, and in what appears to reflect both his deep seated contempt towards the agency, let alone the refugees, and an attempt on his part to set a personal example to his addressees among US policy makers, Lindsay thereafter places the term (Palestinian) *Refugee* in quotation marks.

The heart of Lindsay's crusade lies in the endeavor to identify UNRWA with a political role and a political line that conflict with the agenda of the US Administration for the Middle East. To this end he devotes the most exhaustive sections of the paper, entitled "Evaluating Recent Criticisms of UNRWA" and "The Future of UNRWA: U.S. Policy Options", respectively. The discussion in the former draws on two sources: the first is a series of papers on UNRWA by Arlene Kushner,

¹² See, for example: The World Bank. May 2003. *Twenty Seven Months of Intifada, Closures and Palestinian Economic Crisis: An Assessment*, pp. 48-50. I am quoting from page 48, paragraphs 3.26 - 3.27: "UNRWA's emergency programs were described in "fifteen months" and continue to be held in high regard by the population. The January 2003 SDC survey found that 64 percent of those supported by the agency were satisfied with the services provided to them. ... As the crisis deepens, UNRWA has become more important than ever in helping the Palestinian population cope. With the current intensification of the closure regime, however, UNRWA is facing serious operational difficulties (all but some 86 of its WBG-based staff are Palestinian), despite adapting flexibly to curfew and closure by redeploying staff so they work closer to their homes and can minimize the need to cross checkpoints..."

an Israel-based (since 2001), ultra nationalist free-lance writer, who has written four reports (2003-2005) on UNRWA as "an investigative journalist for the Center for Near East Policy Research" and under the supervision of the "Israel Resource News Agency".¹³ The second source is a recent (May 2008) publication from the Global Research of International Affairs (GLORIA) Center, a stronghold of ultra-hawkish commentary on the Israeli Palestinian conflict and on Near East affairs at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. Entitled "UNRWA: Refuge of Rejectionism", the GLORIA paper is co-authored by Barry Rubin, Asaf Ramirowsky and Jonathan Spyer. Rubin is the director of GLORIA, editor of the GLORIA- sponsored journal, Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA), and member of the board of directors of the pro-Israel lobby-organization, Scholars For Peace in the Middle East (SPME); Ramirowsky is the manager of Israel & Middle East Affairs for the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia and an associate fellow at the Middle East Forum, "a think tank that seeks to define and promote American interests in the Middle East"¹⁴; Jonathan Spyer is a senior research fellow at the GLORIA Center.

Neither the Rubin et al paper nor the Kushner series¹⁵, however, are studies of UNRWA. Written in the style of the cheapest and most arrogant propaganda, the Rubin et al paper is devoid of any investigative research whatsoever. Rather, it consists of a re-assemblage of quotations from eclectic sources that bear direct or indirect relation to Palestinian politics and or to the Palestinian refugee issue, which the authors drew out of their original contexts and mobilized to support the view that

¹³ Kushner's affiliation with the "Center for Near East Policy Research" and "Israel Resource News Agency" is stated on each of her papers and is also mentioned in her personal website. A search of the "Israel Resource" website suggests that the latter agency is more or less a "one man and one woman project": the director of the agency David Bedein, and Kushner, both ultra right-wing extremists. What is further suggested by the website search is that, in reality, the Jerusalem based "Israel Resource News Agency" and the US based "Center for Near East Policy Research" are one and the same enterprise.

¹⁴ According to its website, "The Middle East Forum is a think tank that seeks to define and promote American interests in the Middle East. It defines U.S. interests to include fighting radical Islam, whether terroristic or lawful; working for Palestinian acceptance of Israel; improving the management of U.S. democracy efforts; reducing energy dependence on the Middle East; more robustly asserting U.S. interests vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia; and countering the Iranian threat. The Forum also works to improve Middle East studies in North America."

¹⁵ The Kushner series consists of four papers, all under the auspices of the Center for Near East Policy Research. These include: "UNRWA: A Report" (March 2003); "UNRWA: A Supplementary Report: A Rigorous Review of Agency Practices" (May 2004); "UNRWA: Links to Terrorism" (October 2004); "UNRWA: A Hard Look at an Agency in Trouble" (September 2005). All four are available at Kushner's website. The Rubin et al paper, "UNRWA: Refuge of Rejectionism", by Barry Rubin, Asaf Ramirowsky and Jonathan Spyer (May 2008), can be obtained through the GLORIA Center website.

UNRWA is no less (and no more) than an instrument at the service of Palestinian terror¹⁶. Accordingly, their text is replete with absurd, indeed fanatic and sickening allegations against UNRWA, as the below selection amply indicates¹⁷:

"... the "badge of honor"--indeed the very entry ticket for acceptance as a proper citizen--associated with UNRWA fosters eternal hatred towards Israel. Israel very existence is the cause of one being a refugee; only Israel's extinction can change that status. Nothing else is important; nothing else is responsible for one's daily fate."

"Over time, it has become apparent that UNRWA does not only embrace Hamas, it actually teaches the violent Hamas platform. Since UNRWA teachers are typically alumni of the UNRWA school system, they perpetuate the vitriolic curriculum they were taught which vilifies Israel and the West."

"Not surprisingly, UNRWA institutions have produced terrorist ideologues. They have also produced terrorist masterminds. As Dore Gold, former Israeli ambassador to the UN, writes, UNWRA has produced graduates like Ibrahim Maqadama, who "helped create the military structure of Hamas." Gold notes that, "at least 46 terrorist operatives were students in the UNRWA schools.""

"On the surface, UNRWA seems a humanitarian group helping Palestinian refugees. In reality, it actually helps destroy the chance of Arab-Israeli peace, promotes terrorism, and holds Palestinians back from rebuilding their lives."

"UNRWA's job is to keep Palestinian refugees in suspended animation - and low living standards – until they achieve the goal set for them by the PLO and Hamas: Israel's extinction."

The Kushner series compares favorably with the Rubin et al text, as it is at least based on a considerable investigative effort on the part of the author, the main thrust of which is to trace "evidence" that would ultimately link UNRWA to terrorism. Her failure to establish the connection she set out to prove probably accounts for the somewhat less arrogant tone that Kushner adopts. The message, however, remains equally inciting¹⁸:

"Thus, what is in evidence here, at best, is an agency mandated to serve a humanitarian purpose that is being held hostage by terrorist elements—so that it is literally afraid to interfere with recipients who are terrorists. At worst, the terrorist population and the refugee population (from which the UNRWA staff is drawn) are so enmeshed that it becomes impossible to separate them".

¹⁶ Although it is quite evident that Rubin et al made use of the Kushner reports, it is noteworthy that they do not acknowledge any debt to Kushner in neither the text nor the references.

¹⁷ All the quotations are from Rubin, Romirowsky, Spyer, "UNRWA: A Refuge of Rejectionism" (May 2008)

¹⁸ The two below quotations are from Kushner's 4th report "UNRWA: A Hard Look at an Agency in Trouble" (September 2005).

She concludes:

"That status quo [of UNRWA policies and practices] fosters terrorism, is antagonistic to the establishment of peace in the Middle East, and works to the detriment of the refugees themselves."

Yet Lindsay refers to sheer defamation of this kind as perfectly legitimate, academic "critique". What is more relevant for our concern, while he raises several reservations regarding some allegations against UNRWA, it appears that, by and large, Lindsay accepts the conclusions and recommendations and shares the general approach of Kushner and of Rubin et al, especially that of Kushner. In fact, closer examination reveals that major items in Lindsay's "What Is To Be Done" are adaptations from Kushner. Specifically, the call for the US and other donors to withhold contributions to UNRWA as a means of pressuring the agency to introduce policy changes, the call for the vetting of all UNRWA employees and for subjecting refugee beneficiaries to "security" tests, and above all, the call for promoting Palestinian refugee resettlement outside Palestine through the curtailing of UNRWA's mandate and authority, were all raised by Kushner. Lindsay elaborated further on each of these recommendations and added an operative or practical dimension that builds on his inside knowledge of UNRWA and the donor community and on his familiarity with the US State Department. Thus, for example, he argues that the weakening of UNRWA is in the interest of the US despite considerations that might suggest otherwise, proposes how UNRWA's vulnerability, in particular its dependence on voluntary contributions, can be used to exert exceeding pressure on the agency, argues that the transfer of UNRWA's authorities to Arab states would be more effective than extending UNHCR mandate to include Palestine refugees, etc. To be sure, a number of Lindsay's recommendations are solely the fruit of his own creative mind; e.g., the idea of restraining UNRWA's Commissioner General, so as to prevent her from delivering speeches that convey identification with the refugee plight, and the advice to stop UNRWA's ambulance service.

To wrap things up, then: the policy recommendations on UNRWA that a former legal adviser for this agency and a current affiliate of the Washington Institute addresses to the US State Department are based, by and large, on incitement and defamation campaigns against UNRWA by the Israel-based, extreme right wing "Israel Resource News Agency" (better known as Arlene Kushner) and GLORIA Center.

As we have shown, Lindsay mobilized a host of lamentable means in attempt to advance the false and absurd allegation that it is the prolongation of UNRWA's mandate that perpetuates Palestinian refugeehood and hence the Palestinian refugee problem rather than the other way round. Any attempt on our part to encompass and assess the nearly sixty years of UNRWA's intervention on behalf of Palestine refugees within the confines of this rejoinder would do injustice to the Agency. Suffice it to recall then that UNRWA's lengthened existence, including both the extended duration of the Agency's regular operations and the recurring activation of its emergency intervention programs is a direct result of the persistence of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict and of the highly negative, often destructive, consequences that the conflict bears for the most vulnerable amongst its victims, i.e. the Palestinian refugees. Above all, the perpetuation of UNRWA is indicative of the ongoing failure of the international community to use the power necessary to bring about a comprehensive solution to the Israeli –Palestinian conflict in accordance with the premises of international law and with the relevant UN resolutions. In fact, in light of that failure and with more than a grain of irony it may be argued that the continuation of UNRWA does a great service to the international community. After all, if not for the "cushioning" presence of UNRWA, the adoption of measures that the main international players have so far been reluctant to employ, like sanctions against Israel and the deployment of a UN force throughout the oPt, would have become unavoidable.