

UNRWA's Bloated Farce

by Hugh Fitzgerald



[introduced a bill](#) Thursday that would require the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to change its definition of what constitutes a Palestinian refugee in order to receive future US assistance.” The Trump administration wants UNRWA, corrupt and inefficient, to be cut down to size. They want “Palestinian” refugees to be limited to those who really are refugees, that is, people who left Mandatory Palestine, or Israel, almost 70 years ago. They want “Palestinian refugees” to be defined the same way all other refugees have been defined: as people who have fled a particular territory or country, which does not include their descendants. How many “Palestinians” who left Palestine/Israel between 1947 and 1949 are alive today? Estimates range from

20,000 to 40,000. Compare that with the five million “Palestinian refugees” that UNRWA now claims are eligible for its services. But it is UNRWA that is wrong.

One further point that deserves to be made is that even those Arabs who left Palestine/Israel from 1947 to 1949 are not exactly “refugees” in the full meaning of the term. They did not flee persecution at the hands of Israelis. There was no persecution. Some left before, or during, the hostilities, to get out of the way of battles they assumed the Arabs would win, in the belief that they could soon return. Others left after the Arab defeat, for they assumed – wrongly – that the victorious Jews would treat them as the Arabs would have treated the Jews had they won. Again, there was no forcing them out. They did not flee. They chose to leave. If this history were to be taken into account, there would be no “Palestinian” refugees in the proper sense of the term.

UNRWA is a completely corrupt organization. It has been grossly overstaffed, mainly by extravagantly-paid “Palestinians.” The more UNRWA inflates its rolls with the names of millions of descendants of refugees, described and treated as refugees themselves, and the more dead people it keeps on those rolls, the more aid UNRWA can request from its donors. Who are those donors? Ambassador Nikki Haley has pointed out that the fabulously rich Gulf Arabs give very little to support the “Palestinian refugees.” Of the top fourteen contributors to UNRWA, only one – Saudi Arabia – is an Arab country. All the rest are in Europe, save for the United States, which has been the most generous contributor, by far, to UNRWA.

The Americans have now done something the Arabs find outrageous and, until now, unthinkable. They have decided to refuse to continue accepting, much less, bankrolling, this state of affairs. They want exactly one thing: for the world to define a “Palestinian refugee” as someone who left Mandatory Palestine, or Israel, between 1947 and 1949, and to

stop pretending that the millions of descendants of those people are “Palestinian refugees” themselves. After the billions that the United States has poured into UNRWA, it has both the right and the duty to put an end to funding that bloated farce. It is willing to help UNRWA minister to the needs of the 20,000-30,000 Arab refugees still living, but not to those five million descendants. If UNRWA refuses to agree, let it go its own way. Our contribution, and ideally that of our Western allies as well, should at that point be reduced to zero.

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