POTUS is silent on UNRWA

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Why is the Trump administration continuing the Obama policy of suppressing a report that will expose the truth about Palestinian “refugees”?

This disturbing situation concerns the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. UNRWA is supposed to help Palestinian Arab refugees. But for the past 70 years, it has been supporting huge numbers of Palestinians who do not qualify as “refugees.”

It has also been caught red-handed storing Hamas rockets in its schools and using anti-Semitic hate in their curricula.

UNRWA currently provides financial and other assistance to 5.3 million Arabs whom it claims are Palestinian refugees. Yet even the most generous estimates of the number of Arabs who left Israel during the 1948 war are 700,000.

Normally, the number of refugees from any war decreases with each generation, as the people in question gradually find jobs and housing and become absorbed in their host society. So how did the number of Palestinian refugees manage to grow from less than one million to more than five million in 70 years?

Simple: by inventing a new definition of “refugee.” According to UNRWA, children and grandchildren of refugees are automatically “refugees,” too. My grandfather, like many first-generation American Jews, was a refugee from Russia. So, by UNRWA’s standard, that makes me and my children “refugees,” too. What a joke.

But the joke is on us taxpayers. For all these years, the United States has been contributing a large portion of UNRWA’s budget. For example, in the last year of the Obama administration (2016), the U.S. gave UNRWA $368-million.

Earlier this year, the Trump administration announced that it was holding back $65-million from America’s annual donation to UNRWA. That’s a small step in the right direction. But now it looks like the US is taking two steps backward. The Washington Free Beacon reports that the Trump administration is continuing the Obama policy of refusing to release a secret State Department report about Palestinian refugees.

In 2015, Congress passed a law requiring the State Department to prepare a report calculating the number of Palestinians who fit the actual definition of a refugee—that is, individuals who were living in British Mandatory Palestine from 1946 to 1948.

According to the Free Beacon, the State Department completed the report nearly two years ago, but never provided it to Congress. The report “ puts the number of actual Palestinian refugees at around 20,000, far fewer than the 5.3 million figure routinely pushed by UNRWA and pro-Palestinian advocates who want to see the United States and international partners continue sending millions in aid to the Palestinian government,” the Free Beacon says.

Asked when the State Department will be sending the report to Congress, a spokesman blandly told the Free Beacon: "The State Department is committed to taking all appropriate measures to provide information in response to requests from Congress.” In other words, the spokesman said nothing. No explanation for the delays. No timetable for the release.

That’s the kind of disingenuousness we came to expect from the Obama administration regarding the Palestinian Arab issue. But this is a new administration, which has claimed it is taking a different approach when it comes to Israel and the Arabs.

This week, a group of members of Congress, led by Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) called on the administration to release the UNRWA report. But it shouldn’t take Congressional pressure to get the Trump administration to do something that is required by law, and which every taxpayer has a right to expect.

During the first two years of this administration, we have seen—and appreciated—several important gestures, including the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and the US withdrawal from the United Nations anti-Human Rights Council.

But when it has come to practical policy, there have been some disappointing holdovers from the Obama days. The pressure on Israel to refrain from construction in the territories is continuing. The refusal to bring Palestinian killers of Americans to justice is continuing. And now the refusal to release the UNRWA report is continuing, too.