Trump Administration Cuts More Than $200 Million in Aid for Palestinians

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/24/us/politics/trump-palestinians-aid-cut.html>

The Trump administration announced on Friday that it would not spend more than $200 million set aside for Palestinian aid in the West Bank and Gaza, the latest in a series of measures that have infuriated the Palestinians.

The cancellation follows [a similar decision last week](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/17/us/politics/syria-stabilization-foreign-aid.html) against spending $230 million reserved by Congress to help stabilize areas in Syria devastated by the country’s seven-year war. And it comes as the administration considers canceling nearly $3 billion in foreign aid projects around the world.

As with the money for Syria, the administration intends to redirect the funds intended for Palestinians to higher-priority projects elsewhere, according to a senior State Department official. The administration has yet to identify what those projects are.

The official said the decision took into account the challenges of providing assistance in Gaza, where Hamas has governing authority. The United States considers the group, which has launched multiple attacks against Israel, a terrorist organization.

J Street, a liberal Jewish organization that advocates better relations between Israel and the Palestinians, denounced the aid cuts as “a moral outrage and a major strategic blunder.”

“This is just the latest move by this administration to cruelly punish Palestinian civilians and marginalize and undercut Palestinian leadership,” the organization said.

Josh Block of the Israel Project, a right-leaning advocacy group, welcomed the cuts, saying that as long as Palestinian leaders supported terrorism and refused to engage with President Trump, then the Palestinians “will continue seeing its international aid cut not only by the U.S. but others as well.”

A spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington said the government had no reaction to the cuts, though it has generally been supportive of decisions by the Trump administration to reduce aid to Palestinians. But in Israel, the aid decreased have been [greeted with anxiety](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/world/middleeast/trump-israel-palestinians-twitter.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article&region=Footer), since many Israelis worry they will be asked to shoulder the burden instead.

Fiercely pro-Israel, Mr. Trump has largely abandoned the role American presidents have for decades sought to play as a broker between Israel and the Palestinians. In December, Mr. Trump [formally recognized Jerusalem](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html)as the capital of Israel, reversing decades of American foreign policy.

In January, the administration decided [to cut funding for a United Nations agency that aids Palestinian refugees](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/16/us/politics/us-palestinian-aid-refugee-un.html). Around that time, [Mr. Trump tweeted](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/948322496591384576?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E948322496591384576&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2018%2F01%2F16%2Fus%2Fpolitics%2Fus-palestinian-aid-refugee-un.html) that “we pay the Palestinians HUNDRED OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS a year and get no appreciation or respect.”

The moves have angered Palestinian leaders and led them to end their participation in efforts by Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and senior adviser, to forge a wide-ranging Middle East peace deal. Mr. Kushner has said that the plan is largely finished and that the administration is waiting for the right moment to unveil it, but few analysts believe that the plan has much chance of success.

The diversion of the money comes only weeks before the end of the fiscal year, all but ensuring that Congress cannot reverse the decision.