Trump Admin Cuts U.S. Aid to Palestinians

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The Trump administration late Friday announced that it had cut $200 million in U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority until it can ensure this American taxpayer money will not be used to fund terrorism, according to U.S. officials who spoke to the Washington Free Beacon.

The announcement follows the recent passage of the Taylor Force Act in Congress, a bill aimed at providing greater oversight over how U.S. taxpayer dollars fund the Palestinians. The PA has for years been accused of using aid dollars to pay accused terrorists and their families annual salaries.

President Donald Trump directed his administration to freeze $200 million in aid dollars allocated to the PA for economic support, according to an announcement by the State Department issued just a short time after lawmakers on Capitol Hill were informed of the move, sources said.

One senior U.S. official familiar with the decision to cut U.S. aid told the Free Beacon the administration will no longer enable the Palestinian Authority and those in the Hamas terrorist government to use aid dollars in their war against Israel.

"Hamas is fighting a morally-bankrupt war at the expense of the Palestinian people," said the official, who was only authorized to speak on background. "Hamas's corrupt and illegitimate control has provoked conflict and led to poverty and hopelessness, while hampering the ability of the international community to help."

The administration's decision is separate from Congress' mandate in the Taylor Force Act but designed to work in parallel with it, the source said.

"Regarding why the decision was made, this decision is separate from but consistent with Congress's purpose in passing the Taylor Force Act, which restricts assistance to the Palestinian Authority unless it ends the abhorrent practice of payments to imprisoned terrorists and the families of terrorists," the official explained.

The administration acknowledges "the challenges the international community faces in providing humanitarian and economic assistance in Gaza, where Hamas control endangers the lives of Gaza's citizens and degrades an already dire humanitarian and economic situation," the official added.

One former senior Trump administration official told the Free Beacon the decision represents a step in the right direction to push the Palestinian government into genuine peace negotiations with Israel.

"For too long the Palestinian government has relied on a State Department that caved to their whims," the former official, speaking only on background, said. "It's nice to see America's foreign policy actions reflecting the president's rhetoric and the will of the American people."

"The American people should not see their precious—and generous—aid dollars spent on a regime that brazenly funds terrorism and works against American interests and values," the source added.

A senior congressional official who was briefed on the administration's decision prior to its public release told the Free Beacon the president is taking action long overdue and intentionally ignored by the Obama administration.

"Congress has been working on reducing Palestinian aid for years, which both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas spend on corruption, terrorism incitement, and in many outright terrorism," said the source, who was only authorized to speak on background. "The Obama administration found a variety of ways to work around Congress's restrictions and laws. The Trump administration is finally doing the right thing, which is implementing our aid policies the way that Congress has repeatedly signaled it wants them implemented."

In its formal statement, the State Department said that as a result of its investigations into U.S. aid to the Palestinian government it determined a full halt must be implemented "to ensure these funds are spent in accordance with U.S. national interests and provide value to the U.S. taxpayer."

"This decision takes into account the challenges the international community faces in providing assistance in Gaza, where Hamas control endangers the lives of Gaza's citizens and degrades an already dire humanitarian and economic situation," the State Department said.