# US support for UNRWA has gone on long enough

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The United States has [slashed](https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-withholds-65-million-from-un-agency-for-palestinians/) its contribution to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees by more than $65 million, but still gave the agency $60 million. That’s $60 million too much. UNRWA has become the poster child for U.N. bureaucratic bloat, mission creep, and twisted morality.

UNRWA was founded in 1949 to help Palestinian refugees displaced by Israel’s war of independence. Even that decision was questionable. After all, putting Israel’s creation aside, in the 1940s alone, wars created more than 40 million refugees. There was World War II, of course, but the 1947 partition of India also displaced 14 million persons and created millions of refugees. In the wake of Israel’s creation, Arab states expelled hundreds of thousands of their Jews. This is why the U.N. created the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to be the permanent agency charged with refugee assistance and protection.

Individual Palestinian Arab families suffered dislocation and tragedy, but they were hardly alone. They were alone, however, in having a U.N. agency created to cater specifically to them. Still, when the U.N. created UNRWA, it was meant to be a temporary agency to address a temporary problem. Once it resettled Palestinian refugees, its job was done and it was to shut its doors forever and dissolve.

In a 1951 report to the UN General Assembly, UNRWA [reported](https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/91377BAF198AFBA6052565AE0068263D), “There must be a firm goal of terminating relief operations. Sustained relief operations inevitably contain the germ of human deterioration.” It was right, but Arab state rejectionism got in the way. Arab states like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq quickly concluded that they could use UNRWA to perpetuate the problem, to undercut normalization with Israel, and to transform an aid agency into a weapon against Israel.

The rest is history. Both current UNRWA Commissioner General Pierre Krahenbuhl and UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness were born years after UNRWA was meant to dissolve.

Nor does UNRWA’s track record make it worth saving. While UNHCR has resettled refugees and allowed them to get on with their lives, UNRWA has actively undercut settlement. It has embraced a unique definition of refugee that differs with UNHCR and that is used everywhere else in the world. Consider: If India and Pakistan used the same definition of refugee from their partition that UNRWA embraces, there would be more than 100 million refugees in South Asia today. UNRWA has helped make the Palestinians the largest per capita recipient of aid on earth, but has the least to show for it.

The problem isn’t just waste of money, however. Almost a quarter-century after the Palestinian Authority began, UNRWA has eroded rather than supported the foundations of good governance. After all, if UNRWA promises to take care of housing, education, and support, why shouldn’t both the Palestinian Authority and their sometime-partner Hamas spend money on terror pensions, terror tunnels, and an arsenal of rockets?

Add into the mix UNRWA incompetence: schools used as arsenals, school books teaching incitement, UNRWA employees moonlighting as bomb makers, and terror recruitment in UNRWA high schools and the problem is even worse. UNRWA denials of complicity in such activities, if taken at face value, are just acknowledgment of its own poor oversight.

It’s long past time to cut off UNRWA and ask UNHCR to take over. The Palestinians deserve an apolitical agency rather than an amplifier for radicalism and waste. UNRWA has become a cancer not only for those who seek peace and reconciliation, but also for the entire UN system.

UNRWA in 1951 was right. Permanence is not a virtue; it’s an impediment.