U.S. envoy Kushner calls UNRWA corrupt, inefficient, unhelpful for peace

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By [Michael Wilner](https://www.jpost.com/Author/Michael-Wilner)

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Emails published by Foreign Policy magazine this week shed light on discussions within the Trump administration on phasing out support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, an organization that provides aid to descendants of refugees from 1940s Mandate Palestine.

Advisers to US President Donald Trump have publicly questioned the purpose of UNRWA throughout the last year, partially [suspending US funding to the UN body](https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Palestinian-UN-aid-still-200-million-short-after-Trump-cuts-552609) in January and suggesting to Mideast allies that its continued existence is a disservice to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Supporters of UNRWA believe the organization provides critical assistance to nearly five million Palestinians region-wide, and that its collapse would result in a humanitarian crisis for the community. But opponents say it perpetuates a myth that the descendants of refugees displaced during the 1948 partition will be able to settle in modern-day Israel.

Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and senior adviser; Jason Greenblatt, his special representative for international negotiations; and Nikki Haley, his envoy to the UN, all side with the critics, according to the emails obtained by *Foreign Policy*.

“It is important to have an honest and sincere effort to disrupt UNRWA,” Kushner wrote in an email dated January 11, addressed to several other senior officials. “This [agency] perpetuates a status quo, is corrupt, inefficient and doesn’t help peace.

“Our goal can’t be to keep things stable and as they are,” he added. “Sometimes you have to strategically risk breaking things in order to get there.”

Victoria Coates, a special assistant to the president and adviser on the Middle East peace team, wrote separately that from her discussions with Kushner, Greenblatt and Haley, the administration might agree on a strategy to phase out UNRWA altogether “by the time its charter comes up again in 2019.”

“UNRWA should come up with a plan to unwind itself and become part of the UNHCR,” she wrote, referring to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, also according to Foreign Policy.

The Palestinian Authority leadership claims Kushner’s true goal is to remove claims of a “right of return” to Israeli land by Palestinian refugees from the negotiating table.

The Israeli government, which has long criticized UNRWA’s role, insists it will never recognize Palestinians’ “right of return.” They claim that the negotiating position is in fact a strategy to create two Arab states – an Arab state of Israel and an Arab state of Palestine – by flooding the Jewish state with generations of Palestinians far removed from the initial War of Independence.

UNRWA has also been a target of congressional Republicans for years, and is the subject of two current draft bills originating in the House and Senate. The premise of both would be to defund the agency, which relies on US assistance.