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## COMMENTARY

## Expose the Palestinian 'Refugee' Scam

Obama concealed a myth-smashing report. Trump can reveal it to the world.



Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency Pierre Krahenbuhl speaks during a press conference in Gaza City, May 22. PHOTO: MAHMOUD AJOUR/ZUMA PRESS

By *Richard Goldberg and Jonathan Schanzer*

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If President Trump wants to promote peace in the Middle East, his first step should be to declassify a key State Department report that would end the myth of Palestinian “refugees.”

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency is singularly devoted to the Palestinian refugee issue. Unrwa labels more than five million Palestinians “refugees”—an impossible figure. The first Arab-Israeli war, in 1948, yielded roughly 800,000 Palestinian Arab refugees. Perhaps 30,000 remain alive today, but Unrwa has kept the refugee issue alive by labeling their descendants—in some cases great-great-grandchildren—as “refugees,” who insist on the “right of return” to their ancestors’ homes. Israel categorically rejects this demand.

Unrwa’s operations run counter to the broader mission of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, which is to resettle those displaced by war. Unrwa’s mission, on the other hand, keeps the conflict’s embers glowing by refusing to resettle Palestinians in neighboring countries or even in the Palestinian territories.

If Mr. Trump wants his peace plan to have a chance, he has to challenge false Palestinian narratives. He did this by recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moving the U.S. Embassy there. For decades, Palestinian leaders issued maximalist claims on Jerusalem. Mr. Trump’s move sent the message that making peace requires accepting reality.

Mr. Trump can send the same message by declassifying one document. In 2012 Congress ordered the State Department to disclose how many Palestinians currently served by Unrwa fled the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and how many are merely their descendants. The Obama administration classified the report, citing national security—as if revealing foreign census data were a threat to America.

A year and half into office, Mr. Trump hasn’t reversed this policy, but momentum is building against it. In April more than 50 House members urged State to declassify the report. Florida Sen. Marco Rubio has done the same.

Removing the label of “refugee” from millions of Palestinians wouldn’t hurt them. Instead, it would unlock their economic potential and create an opportunity for lasting peace. Perhaps that’s why the Palestinian leadership is fighting it. Once the refugee issue is exposed as a scam, Palestinian leaders would have to learn how to govern, not merely stir up antagonism with Israel.

The inability of Palestinian leaders to detach from this 70-year-old story raises real concerns about whether peace is possible. But if Mr. Trump is committed, he can send a clear message to the millions living in Unrwa camps: Your leaders want to keep you in squalor, while America wants you to prosper. It’s the most pro-Palestinian step an American president could take.

*Mr. Goldberg is a senior adviser and Mr. Schanzer senior vice president at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.*

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