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# *Palestinians Blast Trump's Aid Cut as Political 'Blackmail'*

By Isabel Kershner

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JERUSALEM — Palestinian officials denounced the Trump administration's cancellation of more than \$200 million in aid, accusing Washington of "weaponizing" humanitarian assistance by using it as a tool to coerce political concessions.

The aid cut, announced Friday, was the latest in a series of measures apparently aimed at forcing the Palestinian leadership to return to the negotiating table with Israel while American officials work on a long-awaited peace proposal, the details of which remain opaque.

An earlier freeze by Washington of tens of millions of dollars of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which assists Palestinian refugees, and the move in May of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to the contested city of Jerusalem, had already infuriated the Palestinian Authority, led by President Mahmoud Abbas.

The Palestinians, who claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future independent state, expressed defiance this weekend, blaming the Trump administration for forsaking the role its predecessors had long sought as an honest broker in the dispute with Israel.

"This administration is dismantling decades of U.S. vision and engagement in Palestine," Husam Zomlot, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization's general delegation to the United States, said in a statement.

"This is another confirmation of abandoning the two-state solution and fully embracing Netanyahu's anti-peace agenda," he added, referring to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. "Weaponizing humanitarian and developmental aid as political blackmail does not work."

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Hanan Ashrawi, a senior Palestinian official, said, "the Palestinian people and leadership will not be intimidated and will not succumb to coercion."

“The rights of the Palestinian people are not for sale,” Ms. Ashrawi added. “There is no glory in constantly bullying and punishing a people under occupation.”

The withdrawal of the assistance comes as the Trump administration considers canceling nearly \$3 billion in foreign aid projects around the world. The State Department says it intends to redirect funds that were meant for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to higher-priority projects elsewhere.



Medics evacuated a wounded youth amid tear gas fired by Israeli troops near the border with the Gaza Strip on Friday. Adel Hana/Associated Press

During a visit to Israel this week, John R. Bolton, Mr. Trump's national security adviser, said there were no decisions yet about the details of the American peace plan or when it would be unveiled.

Referring to the American plan, Mr. Netanyahu, who heads a right-wing government, many of whose ministers oppose a Palestinian state, said during a visit to Lithuania on Friday that, “It may come, even though I don't see any urgency on the matter.”

Palestinian officials said the aid withdrawal could affect many programs of the United States Agency for International Development, the principal body administering American foreign assistance in the West Bank and Gaza. The agency oversees support for a wide range of issues in the Palestinian territories, including debt relief, economic growth, water and sanitation, education, health and governance.

Washington provided about \$290 million to the Palestinians in 2016 through the agency and has provided about \$5.2 billion in total since 1994.

The United States also supplies funds for security assistance, public diplomacy and mine clearance operations.

The United States Consulate General in Jerusalem recently announced that more than 1,000 Palestinian students had graduated in July from an 18-month program to improve their English and community leadership skills. That program costs more than \$2 million a year.

European Union support to the Palestinians amounted to nearly 359 million euros, or about \$416 million, in 2017. As well as humanitarian assistance, that money helps fund the salaries of Palestinian Authority employees.

R. David Harden, a former mission chief in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the United States Agency for International Development, wrote on Twitter that the funding had been “a force for stability” and that the cut would empower forces like Hamas, the Islamist militant group that controls Gaza.

Daniel B. Shapiro, who served as the United States ambassador to Israel from 2011 to 2017, said that successive Israeli governments had seen “great value” in the American humanitarian assistance, in part because it saved Israel shouldering the cost and also because it provided a more secure environment.

“This decision represents a terrible decision by Trump’s team, which seems to think it will put pressure on the Palestinians to come to the table (it won’t),” he wrote on Twitter.

In an additional blow to the Palestinians, FIFA, the global soccer governing body, on Friday banned Jibril Rajoub, the head of the Palestinian Football Association, from all soccer-related activity for a year for “inciting hatred and violence” over a planned exhibition match between Israel and Argentina that was canceled in June.

Follow Isabel Kershner on Twitter: @IKershner.

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