Middle East

U.S. ends aid to United Nations agency supporting Palestinian refugees

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A student stands at the entrance to a classroom in a U.N.-run school in Rafah, in the Gaza Strip, on Jan. 31. (Eyad Baba/AFP)

Among UNRWA and other international donors for falling to refute the organization's "way of doing business," the statement said the United States would "pause" its contribution and deeply concerned regarding the impact on innocent Palestinians, especially school children."

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Among the administration's many complaints about the agency — to which the United States has contributed over $1.6 billion in its 2022 and 2023 budget — is the way the United Nations validates the number of Palestinians officially recognized as refugees. It would like to change the way that is done, in part because it would reduce the number of people who are officially deemed abroad even as the agency's mandate extends to their descendants, the U.S. statement said.

The administration has generally tried to cut back foreign aid, referencing its attention to domestic priorities and concerns about waste. "U.S. policy priorities," officials said, "The UNRWA pushback is also a response, in the words of Nikki Haley, the U.N. ambassador to the United Nations, to Palestinian hostility toward the United States, which has intensified after U.S. policy changes that Palestinians deem pro-Israel.

Earlier, Israeli secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is "a tool of the Israeli occupation." Israel's Foreign Ministry has accused the Palestinian Authority of "incitement against Israel" and "glorifying of Jews," and the Palestinian Authority has accused the agency of being a "