

A Blurred Line Between Civil Society and Terrorism

Examining Charges of NGOs Funding the PFLP

by [Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](#)

Nov 4, 2021

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](#)

Matthew Levitt is the Fromer-Wexler Senior Fellow and director of the Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at The Washington Institute.



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The Israeli evidence could reveal a troubling reality wherein groups publicly defend the human rights of some people while supporting acts of terrorism targeting others.

On October 19, Israel designated six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist groups affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, causing a firestorm among international civil society and human rights organizations. While such action is inherently controversial, any assessment must consider the underlying evidence, which here emerged from a series of investigations pointing to massive fraud. The effort drew on various sources, including classified intelligence, seized materials, and statements made by arrested employees. And it cast light on high-profile cases such as the August 2019 murder of Israeli teen Rina Shnerb, whose killers were employed by one of the designated groups.

In this groundbreaking Policy Note, counterterrorism expert Matthew Levitt closely analyzes Israel's NGO designations. In doing so, he validates U.S., European, and international requests for an explanation, but simultaneously cautions that the evidence—if proven even partially true—could reveal a troubling reality wherein Palestinian NGOs publicly defend the human rights of some people while supporting terrorist acts against others. ❖

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