

Ban Hamas in Europe

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Brief Analysis

On June 25, 2003, shortly after the initiation of the Quartet Roadmap to Israeli-Palestinian peace, President George W. Bush urged European Union (EU) leaders to take "swift, decisive action against [Palestinian] terror groups such as Hamas, to cut off their funding and support." Much of the funding received by Hamas's military wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, is provided by donations to the organization's social and political activities.

At the EU summit meeting in Thessaloniki, Greece, on June 19-20, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana told reporters that Europe is ready, "if [Hamas] is not willing to cooperate in a constructive manner for a ceasefire, to take some measures particularly on the money and financial support of this organization." Both the August 12 suicide bombing at the Jewish settlement of Ariel and the devastating bus bombing in Jerusalem on August 19 (which killed 21 and injured over 100, including many children) clearly demonstrate Hamas's intention to scuttle the peace process. Hamas has also increased the range of its Gaza-based Qassam rockets, which hit the Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon (population 116,000) for the first time on August 28.

On September 5-6, European foreign ministers will meet in Italy, and the EU will again have the opportunity to make good on Solana's promise to curtail the group's funding. By now it should be clear that the EU will not prevent funds raised and laundered in Europe from financing Hamas terrorist attacks unless it bans the social and political "wings" that fund and facilitate such attacks and generate grassroots support for the group.

Evidence for the EU

Those still unconvinced that Hamas's terrorist wing has roots in Europe and is supported by the organization's political wing should consider the following examples:

A recently disclosed 1996 CIA document on worldwide charitable organizations financing terror refers to Hamas operatives and front organizations throughout Europe, including the United Kingdom (UK), Denmark, Austria, and Croatia.

Spanish investigators found documents revealing that Muhammad Zouaydi financed not only the Hamburg cell responsible for the September 11, 2001, attacks, but also Hamas. According to Spanish prosecutors, Zouaydi provided funds for the Hebron Muslim Youth Association, a "known" Hamas organization "financed by activists of said organization living abroad." Spanish police also claim Zouaydi gave \$6,600 to Shaykh Helal Jamal, a Palestinian

religious figure in Madrid who is tied to Hamas.

An Israeli raid of the Tulkarm Zakat (charity) Committee in April 2002 netted material lauding Hamas suicide attacks and records showing that the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), a Saudi charity deeply involved in terrorist financing, donated at least \$280,000 to the Tulkarm committee and other Palestinian organizations linked to Hamas.

The index of documents seized by Israeli forces from zakat committees across the West Bank revealed that donors from Italy to South Africa to Qatar contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars, often specifying that the funds were to benefit "the families of martyrs." Hamas front organizations in Europe are prominently featured in these documents. The donations themselves came from front organizations in Europe, North America, South Africa, Qatar, and elsewhere, and were usually transferred through local branches of Middle Eastern banks.

According to the FBI, Hamas members tied to terrorist activity often run the group's charity committees. For example, Fadel Muhammad Salah Hamdan (of the Ramallah Zakat Committee), Ahmed Salim Ahmed Saltana (of the Jenin Zakat Committee), and Khalil Ali Rashad Dar Rashad (of the Orphan Care Association in Bethlehem) were all involved in Qassam Brigades operations.

Over the past year, authorities in the United States, UK, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Switzerland have frozen the assets of the al-Aqsa International Foundation, a Hamas front organization operating throughout Europe, South Africa, Pakistan, and Yemen. In January 2003, the head of al-Aqsa's Yemen office, Shaykh Mohammad Ali Hassan al-Moayad, was arrested in Germany for providing money, arms, communication gear, and recruits to al-Qaeda.

Last week, the U.S. Treasury Department added the UK-based Palestinian Relief and Development Fund (Interpal) and Hamas front organizations in Austria, France, Switzerland, and Lebanon to its terrorism list. Interpal has been linked to a host of Hamas front organizations in the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel, most recently via telephone intercepts introduced in the case of Shaykh Raed Salah, an Israeli-Arab leader charged with funneling money to Hamas. In 1996, authorities determined that IIRO and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), another group associated with al-Qaeda, had funded Hamas through Interpal. In documents confiscated at the time, recipient Hamas organizations were asked to send thank-you letters directly to IIRO and WAMY rather than to Interpal. Investigators have also tied Interpal to the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (the largest Hamas front organization in the United States when it was shut in December 2001) and to Shaykh al-Moayad of the al-Aqsa International Foundation. As proof of his ability "to get money to the Jihad," al-Moayad offered an FBI informant a receipt showing that he had transferred \$70,000 to Interpal.

Taking Action

It is long past time for the EU to recognize that Hamas has been able to muddy the waters between charitable giving and terrorism in large part because so many European governments fall for the sophistic argument that terrorist groups maintain distinct political and militant wings. Hamas uses the hospitals it maintains as meeting places; buries caches of arms and explosives under its own kindergarten playgrounds; uses social-welfare operatives' cars and homes to ferry and hide fugitives; and transfers and launders funds for terrorist activity through local charity committees. Indeed, just last week, the Palestinian Authority (PA) itself announced that it frozen the accounts of nine local Islamic charities on suspicion that they were funding Hamas. Funds from abroad support these local Hamas fronts.

U.S. investigators have been aware of this problem for some time. An FBI memorandum on the Holy Land Foundation noted that Hamas's "benevolent programs are used to enhance its image and earn goodwill in the Palestinian community." FBI surveillance of a 1993 Hamas meeting in Philadelphia discovered Hamas fundraisers

deciding that "most or almost all" funds collected from that point on "should be directed to enhance the Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas] and to weaken the self-rule government [PA]." For reasons unknown, European decisionmakers failed to act on such evidence when it was presented to them.

Palestinians do indeed face dire social-welfare needs that are not addressed by the PA, and Hamas exploits this suffering to increase its popular support. It is critical that humanitarian support for needy Palestinians be detached from support for terrorist activity. This can only be accomplished, however, if the EU and other states (particularly those of the Persian Gulf) strictly regulate which Palestinian charities receive international aid and shut down front organizations that are raising funds for Hamas and other terrorist groups.

Judging by Solana's statement in June, the EU withheld its decision to crack down on affiliates of Hamas's political wing so as not to upset the delicate ceasefire between Hamas and the PA. Yet, it has become increasingly apparent that the group never intended to become a permanent partner for peace. Rather, Hamas used the ceasefire to rebuild, reorganize, rearm, and refinance. Hamas's resumption of terrorist attacks shows that it remains committed to its twin goals of murdering Israelis and undermining the PA and the peace process. Cutting off European funds to the social-political-military animal that is Hamas would make a significant contribution toward reversing these trends.

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