

Blood Money

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

Jun 4, 2003

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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

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



Articles & Testimony

Even as President Bush invests his considerable personal prestige and the power of his office in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, his initiative is threatened by the continued flow of financial and logistical support for Hamas terror attacks through the group's social-welfare infrastructure.

The first phase of the road map requires the Palestinian Authority to begin "sustained, targeted, and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terror and the dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure." Unfortunately, all signs indicate that key segments of the international community will do little to help stem the flow of funds and support through Hamas front organizations.

Even as they call for renewed U.S. "engagement" in Mideast peace, European and Arab governments continue to whitewash the role of Hamas social-welfare (dawa) activists and organizations in facilitating the group's terror attacks. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Syria insists Hamas and Islamic Jihad offices in Damascus are merely "media offices." Even more disturbing, the European Union refuses to crack down on Hamas front organizations and the Hamas dawa infrastructure -- both of which provide financial and logistical support for Hamas terrorist attacks -- even as it demands such action of the PA in the road map it co-authored.

Last week, the U.S. and Britain froze the assets of the al Aqsa International Foundation, a Hamas front organization funding "Palestinian fighters" while recording its disbursements as "contributions for charitable projects." Germany and Denmark already shut the group's offices there, and the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Switzerland also took action against the foundation. Still, the group's offices and activities in Holland, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Yemen, Pakistan and South Africa remain untouched.

Nor has the EU added al Aqsa to its financial blocking list of terrorist entities. The EU lists only the Izz al-Din al-Qassem Brigades military "wing," not Hamas itself or its support infrastructure, and therefore refuses to add fronts like al Aqsa to its terrorism list. (Ironically, al Aqsa's Yemen representative was arrested not only for funding Hamas, but also for providing money, arms, communication gear and recruits to al Qaeda). The EU stance is particularly galling in light of a recently disclosed 1996 CIA document on world-wide charitable organizations financing terror that refers to Hamas operatives and front organizations throughout Europe, including the United Kingdom, Denmark, Austria and Croatia.

Hamas fund-raising in Europe and elsewhere is nothing new, and the social-welfare organizations it funds play a direct role in facilitating terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings. Hamas is known to use the hospitals it maintains as meeting places; to bury caches of arms and explosives under its own kindergarten playgrounds; to use dawa operatives' cars and homes to ferry and hide fugitives; and to transfer and launder funds for terrorist activity through local charity (zakat) committees. Funds from abroad support these activities.

Take for example Muhammad Zouaydi, a senior al Qaeda financier detained by Spanish police. Spanish investigators found documents revealing Zouaydi financed not only the Hamburg cell responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks, but also Hamas. According to Spanish prosecutors, Zouaydi funded the Hebron Muslim Youth Association, a "known" Hamas organization "financed by activists of said organization living abroad." Spanish police also say Zouaydi gave \$6,600 to Sheikh Helal Jamal, a Palestinian religious figure in Madrid tied to Hamas.

U.S. investigations led to similar conclusions. An FBI memorandum on the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development -- the primary Hamas front organization in the U.S. until its closure in December 2001 -- noted that Hamas "benevolent programs are used to enhance its image and earn goodwill in the Palestinian community." FBI surveillance of a 1993 Hamas meeting in Philadelphia captured Hamas fund-raisers 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]." To that end, the Holy Land Foundation funded zakat committees tied to Hamas.

The Hamas social-welfare activists running these organizations are often closely tied to the group's terror cells, or are themselves current or former terror-cell members. Consider just three of the FBI's many examples:

Fadel Muhammad Salah Hamdan, a member of the Ramallah Zakat Committee, was "directly connected with the planning of suicide attacks and the spiritual preparation of those about to commit suicide attacks, including the Mahane Yehuda attack in July 1997."

Ahmed Salim Ahmed Saltana, head of the Jenin Zakat Committee, was involved in transferring bomb-making materials for the preparation of explosives in 1992, participated in a car bombing in 1993, and recruited young men working for the charity committee into Hamas.

Khalil Ali Rashad Dar Rashad, an associated member of the Orphan Care Association in Bethlehem, was known to provide shelter and assistance to Hamas fugitives, including Hamas bomb maker Muhi a-Din al-Sharif and Hassan Salameh, the commander behind the string of suicide bus bombings in February-March 1996.

More recently, when Israeli forces raided the Tulkarm zakat committee in April 2002 they found material lauding Hamas suicide attacks and records showing the International Islamic Relief Organization, a Saudi charity deeply involved in terror financing, donated at least \$280,000 to the Tulkarm Zakat Committee and other Palestinian organizations linked to Hamas.

Such evidence led David Aufhauser, general counsel to the Treasury Department and chair of the National Security Council's policy coordinating committee on terrorist financing, to describe the logic of making distinctions between terrorist groups' charitable and military wings as "sophistry." By his assessment, "the idea that there's a firewall between the two defies common sense."

Palestinians face dire social-welfare needs unaddressed by the PA, a situation Hamas eagerly exploits. Tolerating this exploitation is neither in the interest of Israeli-Palestinian peace nor Palestinian humanitarian aid. Indeed, Islamic social welfare groups that contaminate their benevolent activities with support for terrorism muddy the waters of charitable giving and good works, making the job that much harder for those simply trying to better conditions in the West Bank and Gaza.

The international community must insist that humanitarian support for Palestinians be divorced from support for terrorist activity -- both to obstruct Hamas efforts to torpedo President Bush's peace initiative and to clear the names of humanitarian groups untainted by terror. It is essential that the EU, Gulf states and others strictly regulate which Palestinian charities receive international aid and shut down front organizations raising funds for Hamas and other terrorist groups.

Mr. Aufhauser hit the nail on the head when he said, "No one is at war with the idea of building hospitals or orphanages or taking care of people who are displaced. But the same people that govern how to apply the money to hospitals govern how to apply the money to killing people, and you cannot abdicate responsibility for one and celebrate what you're doing on the other: it remains blood money." For the president's peace initiative to succeed, the international community must endorse this basic principle. ❖

Wall Street Journal

RECOMMENDED

BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022



Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

TOPICS

Peace Process (/policy-analysis/peace-process)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)