

## Hamas Blood Money:

### Mixing Good Works and Terror is No Formula for Peace

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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#### Brief Analysis

**W**ithin hours of Mahmoud Abbas's (Abu Mazen) confirmation as the new Palestinian prime minister and the presentation of the Quartet's roadmap to peace, two suicide bombers struck a seaside bar next to the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv, killing three civilians and wounding sixty more. As is frequently the case, authorities investigating the attack are likely to find that the bombers were fed, housed, prepared, armed, and transported to their target by terrorists drawn from the social welfare "wing" of one terrorist group or another. The most critical test facing the nascent Palestinian government is the immediate task of weeding out the logistical support networks that facilitate such attacks under the cover of charitable or humanitarian activities.

#### Dawa Support for Terror

Hamas social welfare support organizations play a direct role in facilitating its 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 in Madrid whose home and offices were searched. Spanish investigators found a five-page fax dated October 24, 2001, revealing Zouaydi was not only financing the Hamburg cell responsible for the September 11 attacks, but also Hamas. In the fax, which Zouaydi kept for his records, the Hebron Muslim Youth Association solicited funds from the Islamic Association of Spain. According to Spanish prosecutors, "the Hebron Muslim Youth Association is an organization known to belong to the Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas which is financed by activists of said organization living abroad."

U.S. investigations led to similar conclusions. A November 2001 FBI memorandum on the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development—the primary Hamas front organization in the United States until its closure in December 2001—noted that Hamas "benevolent programs" like the Hebron Muslim Youth Association "are used to enhance its image and earn goodwill in the Palestinian community." Indeed, the FBI cited electronic surveillance of a 1993

Hamas meeting in Philadelphia where Hamas fundraisers in the United States decided 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 [Palestinian Authority]." 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. Frequently, they are current or former members of Hamas terror cells. Consider just three of the many examples cited in the FBI memorandum:

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.

#### Forgiving Terror for Good Works

The latest effort to downplay the role that elements of the social welfare network play in financing, supporting, and facilitating Hamas terror attacks came in a report recently released by the Brussels based International Crisis Group (ICG). Sadly, the report concluded that humanitarian organizations associated with Hamas provide Palestinians with such desperately needed social welfare services that their good works somehow legitimize their support for Hamas and its other, more deadly, activities.

ICG researchers interviewed many people, including Hamas leader Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, but no Israelis. They interviewed American officials with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), but not experts like David Aufhauser, the general counsel to the Treasury Department and chair of the National Security Council's policy coordinating committee on terrorist financing. Indeed, Aufhauser describes the logic of making distinctions between terrorist groups' charitable and military wings as "sophistry," and he correctly maintains that "the idea that there's a firewall between the two defies common sense."

Palestinians face dire social welfare needs unaddressed by the Palestinian Authority, creating an opportunity Hamas eagerly exploits. Tolerating this exploitation is not in the interest of either Israeli-Palestinian peace or Palestinian humanitarian assistance. 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.

#### Targeting the Terror Infrastructure Alone

Under the first phase of the roadmap, Abu Mazen's government is required 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 indications are that Abu Mazen will receive little support from key segments of the international community should he attempt to stop the flow of funds and support to Hamas front organizations facilitating attacks like the one that greeted him and his new cabinet.

Even as they call for renewed U.S. "engagement" in Mideast peace, European and Arab governments continue to whitewash the role of Hamas dawa activists and organizations in facilitating the group's terror attacks. Despite

overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Syria insists Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad offices in Damascus are merely "media offices." Even more disturbing, several European countries refuse to crack down on Hamas front organizations and the Hamas social welfare (dawa) infrastructure—both of which provide financial and logistical support for Hamas terrorist attacks—even as they demand such action of the PA in the roadmap they coauthored. For example, the European Union's financial blocking list of terrorist entities lists only the Izz al-Din al-Qassem Brigades, but not the rest of the Hamas support infrastructure.

### Terror and Charity Do Not Mix

Islamic social welfare groups cannot be given a free pass for their support of terror simply because they also provide critical humanitarian support. Instead, the international community must insist that humanitarian support for Palestinians be divorced from support for terrorist activity—both to obstruct Hamas efforts to torpedo the peace process and to clear the names of humanitarian groups untainted by terror. It is essential that Europe, the Gulf States, and other countries strictly regulate which Palestinian charities receive international aid and shut down front organizations raising funds for Hamas and other terrorist groups.

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 any renewed peace initiative to take hold, the international community must endorse this basic principle.

Matthew Levitt is a senior fellow in terrorism studies at The Washington Institute and author of *Targeting Terror: U.S. Policy toward Middle Eastern State Sponsors and Terrorist Organizations, Post-September 11* (The Washington Institute, 2002). ❖

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