



U.S. Aid to Gaza Almost Certain to End Up in Hamas Hands

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On October 18, the White House announced that it would send approximately \$100 million in humanitarian aid to Gaza and the West Bank. Although the administration offered scant details, given the lack of other organizations present on the ground, it is most likely this aid would be distributed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Unfortunately, both groups have a history, including in the current conflict, of either failing to stop terrorists from appropriating aid meant for civilians or of, in the PA's case, actively "[incentivizing terror](#)," in the words of Congress. UNRWA in Gaza's former operations head, Matthias Schmale, [said](#) in 2021 that UNRWA "cannot work in a place like Gaza without coordinating with the local authorities," namely Hamas.

Despite Secretary of State Antony Blinken's [assurances](#) that the aid will "flow to civilians in Gaza in a way that does not benefit Hamas," the terrorist group's well-established history of seizing humanitarian assistance—including tens of thousands of liters of fuel and large quantities of other supplies from UNRWA since the current war began—suggests it will divert the aid for its own purposes. It also overlooks the complicated but too-close-for-comfort relationship between UNRWA and Hamas, with the aid group employing Hamas members, failing to stop Hamas from using its facilities to store and launch weapons, and filling its educational textbooks with terrorist and antisemitic propaganda.

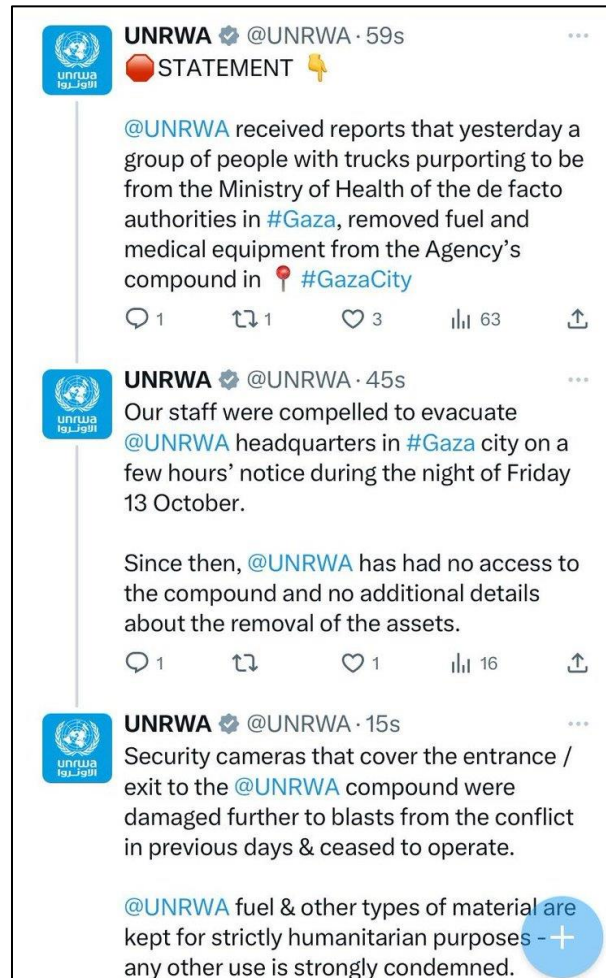
In the West Bank, any aid directed to the PA would, in violation of U.S. law, facilitate the group's ongoing pay-for-slay scheme, which encourages terrorism by providing direct payments to terrorists' families. These payouts totaled nearly \$3 million in October 2023 alone.

To guarantee Palestinians receive needed humanitarian assistance, and to uphold U.S. credibility, the United States should follow through on President Biden's guarantee that "if Hamas diverts or steals the assistance, they will have demonstrated once again that they have no concern for the welfare of the Palestinian people, and it [will end](#)."

What Happened?

- On October 18, the White House [announced](#) that the United States will provide \$100 million in humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people of the West Bank and Gaza. The White House has also, as part of its [requested](#) \$3.5 billion for the State Department's Migration and Refugee Assistance account for humanitarian assistance to both Ukraine and the Palestinian territories, including the "potential needs of Gazans."

- UNRWA, on October 16, [accused](#) Hamas in a series now-deleted social media posts of raiding its facilities and stealing fuel, as well as other unspecified supplies. These reports were confirmed by the Israeli Ministry of Defense.
- The Israeli-based NGO Palestinian Media Watch [revealed](#) in a report on October 17 that under its “pay-for-slay” policies mandated by law, the Palestinian Authority paid over \$2.8 million in October alone to the families of Hamas terrorists killed while committing terrorism.



Source: [Axios](#)

Why Is It Important?

- Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank deserve relief from their suffering under the rule of the Iran-backed terrorist organization Hamas, but they are unlikely to get it if the United States funnels its humanitarian assistance through UNRWA and the PA. The international organization charged with administering aid in Gaza, UNRWA, has proven that it cannot keep its own resources out of Hamas’s hands, Hamas’s fighters out of its ranks, Hamas’s weapons out of its facilities, or Hamas’s propaganda out of its textbooks. The PA, on the other hand, contributes to ongoing terrorism in the West Bank by supporting terrorists’ families with its “pay-for-slay” program.

- » Despite President Biden’s stern [warnings](#) that “if Hamas diverts or steals the assistance, they will have demonstrated once again that they have no concern for the welfare of the Palestinian people, and it will end as a practical matter,” Hamas has already stolen UNRWA resources during the current conflict. The United States currently lacks any mechanisms for distributing aid without going through UNRWA and for preventing aid given to UNRWA from being exploited by Hamas.
- The United States relies on intermediaries to administer humanitarian assistance in Gaza: UNRWA, which has sole responsibility for UN affairs in the Gaza Strip, and unspecified aid organizations.
 - » NSC spokesperson John Kirby [said](#) at a press conference on October 23 that “we don’t have a footprint [in Gaza]. I mean, we’re not on the ground to personally inspect these things, but we do have trusted partners on the ground, including the UN and some of these aid organizations.”
- UNRWA’s mandate, created in 1949 by UN Resolution 302, was originally intended to be a temporary means of addressing Palestinian refugee issues following Israel’s War of Independence in 1948.
 - » However, UNRWA has grown considerably in both size and resources since 1948 and has had its mandate to oversee Palestinian humanitarian issues [renewed](#) by the UN General Assembly every three or four years.
 - UNRWA’s current mandate [runs](#) through June 30, 2026. In the most recent UN General Assembly vote in December, the United States abstained from voting.
 - » Another UN body, the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), has responsibility for aid to all refugees globally other than Palestinians, for whom UNRWA has a unique mandate.
- The United States has [given](#) over \$6.5 billion to UNRWA since 1950, including over \$350 million annually from 2014 to 2017, despite an effort by the Trump administration to end U.S. aid to UNRWA.
 - » In 2017, the United States, led by U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Nikki Haley, sought to work with UNRWA to enact reforms that would ensure that U.S. funding would not slip into the hands of terrorists. After a year of pushback by the UN body, the United States cut aid to UNRWA, with State Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert [stating](#) that UNRWA is “irredeemably flawed.”
 - » U.S. aid to UNRWA was resumed in 2021 under the Biden administration. Secretary Blinken stated in April 2021 that the United States was [restoring](#) at least \$150 million of annual aid to UNRWA, including \$33 million to be dispensed immediately as part of an “emergency humanitarian appeal.”
 - Secretary Blinken stated at the time that aid would be given in a way that ensured “Hamas does not benefit from these reconstruction efforts” and that “does not permit Hamas to simply restock its military arsenal.”
- The U.S. Congress [allocated](#) \$225 million in FY23 for unspecified programs in the West Bank and Gaza as part of the State Department’s Economic Support Fund and an additional \$75 million for UNRWA.
 - » As of October 20, according to the Congressional Research Service, U.S contributions to UNRWA in FY2023 have thus far [totaled](#) over \$207 million.
 - » An October 19 [report](#), citing an unnamed U.S. official, suggests that the \$100 million in assistance promised by Biden would “come from existing funding already approved by Congress.”

- UNRWA has a long history of cooperation with Hamas, and ultimately all aid entering Gaza is subject to search and seizure by Hamas as the governing authority. Hamas has frequently seized UNRWA's funds and resources—intended for humanitarian assistance purposes—for terrorist activity, such as diverting fuel to power Hamas's tunnel networks, repurposing water piping to use as weapons, and even stealing first-aid kits for terrorist operations.
 - » UNRWA itself, on October 16, [accused](#) Hamas in a series now-deleted social media posts of raiding its facilities and stealing fuel, as well as other unspecified supplies. Israeli press corroborated the account, citing both UN and Israeli officials.
 - The Israeli Ministry of Defense [claimed](#) that Hamas stole over 24,000 liters of fuel in the incident.
 - The IDF released satellite imagery on October 23 [showing](#) fuel tanks inside a heavily fortified Hamas compound in the Gaza Strip. According to the IDF, the fuel tanks contain more than 500,000 liters of fuel.
 - » Hamas has also [seized](#) and repurposed water pipes intended for humanitarian purposes and used them for makeshift rockets, according to Hamas videos posted in 2021.
 - » Photos [released](#) by the Israel Defense Forces show that the Hamas terrorists had multiple UN first-aid kits with them during the October 7 attacks on Israel.
 - » In an October 23 press briefing, NSC spokesperson John Kirby [acknowledged](#) that “we share concerns about any diversion of humanitarian assistance for Hamas purposes. I mean, for instance, fuel is a good example, you know. We know that they need fuel to be able to electrify and power up their tunnels.”
- UNRWA itself has repeatedly, either knowingly or unknowingly, facilitated Hamas activity under the auspices of its supposed neutrality as a UN organization.
 - » During fighting between Israel and Hamas in July 2014, three Israeli soldiers were killed while inspecting a UNRWA health facility that was booby-trapped by Hamas. The health facility also [contained](#) a subterranean entrance to a Hamas terror tunnel network.
 - » Following that 2014 conflict, a UN Board of Inquiry [found](#) that Palestinian terrorist groups had used three separate UNRWA schools in the Gaza Strip to store weapons and that two of the schools had likely been used to launch mortars at Israel.
 - Then-UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon stated in response to the report that “the fact that [UNRWA schools] were used by those involved in the fighting to store their weaponry and, in two cases, probably to fire from is unacceptable.”
 - A total of 20 rockets were [found](#) stored in one UNRWA school alone.
 - » UNRWA staffers have also been arrested and convicted for using UN vehicles to [bypass](#) Israeli checkpoints and transport arms, explosives, and terrorist operatives in UN ambulances.
 - In 2002, Israel arrested and convicted Nahed Rashid Ahmed Attalah, director of food supplies for UNRWA in Gaza, and Nidal Abd al-Fatah Abdallah Nazal, an UNRWA ambulance driver, of using their UNRWA credentials as cover to facilitate terrorism by using UNRWA vehicles, including ambulances, to transport weapons and terrorist operatives through Israeli checkpoints.
- UNRWA also promotes violence by inculcating Palestinian students in UNRWA schools with hateful propaganda glorifying terrorism and promoting the right of return. Though UNRWA does not itself write the textbooks used in its schools, it uses material provided by the Palestinian Authority, which are filled with calls to violence and invectives against Jews and Israel.

- UNRWA school textbooks include numerous instances of glamorizing terrorism, inciting students to violence, or promoting antisemitic canards. The Israel-based media watchdog Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se), in 2021, [found](#) over 30 such instances in UNRWA textbooks, including:
 - One textbook which [included](#) Dalal al-Mughrabi, who orchestrated a terrorist attack in 1978 which killed 13 children, in a list of “heroes”;
 - A math textbook which [uses](#) the numbers of Palestinian terrorists (referred to as “martyrs”) killed in the First Intifada and Second Intifada as the variables in a math exercise;
 - The [erasure](#) of Israel from maps of the region; and
 - Numerous poems and literary passages explicitly [glorifying](#) “jihad” and martyrdom in Arabic language textbooks.
- » Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, one of the co-founders of Hamas and at the time one of Hamas’s most senior members, [delivered](#) a speech at an UNRWA school in July 2001. Yassin himself [attended](#) UNRWA’s schools in Gaza, as did a number of prominent terrorists, including two co-founders of Hamas and Ismail Haniyeh, the current head of Hamas.
- » Demonstrating the effects of such dangerous incitement, at least two Hamas terrorists who attended UNRWA schools [participated](#) in the October 7 terrorist attacks on Israel which killed over 1,400 people, according to IMPACT-se, and over 100 Hamas terrorists have graduated UNRWA schools.
- A large percentage of UNRWA employees, despite being technically prohibited from being Hamas members, are nevertheless either members of or sympathetic to the terrorist group.
 - » The leadership of the union representing UNRWA employees in Gaza has long been dominated by pro-Hamas factions.
 - In the 2012 union elections, a pro-Hamas bloc [won](#) 25 of the 27 open seats for the union’s board. The vast majority of the approximately 10,000 UNRWA employees in Gaza participated in the vote.
 - In the 2019 union elections, pro-Hamas blocs or blocs [supporting](#) other terrorist organizations, such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad, won twenty-two of the twenty-seven open seats.
 - UNRWA unions also reportedly actively [recruit](#) prospective Hamas fighters from UNRWA schools.
 - » In April 2017, the Israeli Defense Ministry [revealed](#) that the head of UNRWA’s Gaza union, Suhail al-Hindi, was a senior member of Hamas.
 - » In February 2017, top UNRWA staffer Muhammad al-Jamassi was [elected](#) to a senior post in Hamas’s political bureau. Al-Jamassi’s appointment [underscores](#) the nexus of UNRWA infrastructure projects and Hamas’s terrorism, as al-Jamassi was responsible for all UNRWA infrastructure projects in central Gaza at the time of the election.
- Additionally, UNRWA perpetuates Palestinian suffering far more than it helps to alleviate it, not only through its complicity in terrorist activity, but also in its inability to deliver true humanitarian relief.
 - » The UN’s Office of Internal Oversight Services conducted an extensive audit of UNRWA in 2017, strongly criticizing the agency’s operations and transparency.

- The audit [found](#) that UNRWA had “[broad] organizational shortcomings,” needed to “strengthen its accountability framework,” and concluded “evidence of how UNRWA has improved the lives of Palestine refugees has been elusive.”
- » Despite ostensibly [spending](#) nearly sixty percent of its annual budget on youth education, educational achievement in UNRWA’s Gazan schools has been dismal.
 - According to UNRWA’s own figures, in 2007, nearly eighty percent of UNRWA students in grades four through nine [failed](#) mathematics and over forty percent failed Arabic, the native language of Palestinians.
 - Underscoring UNRWA’s transparency issues, UNRWA has not released test scores from its Gazan schools since 2009.
- Congress has sought to address UNRWA’s many problems with a number of recent legislative efforts.
 - » These efforts included a proposed amendment to the FY2024 National Defense Authorization Act introduced by Rep. Scott Perry (R-PA) which would have [mandated](#) that no appropriations funding in the bill went to UNRWA. The amendment narrowly [failed](#) by a vote of 213 in favor to 218 against, with eight abstentions.
 - » Other efforts have included legislation sponsored in February by Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX), with companion legislation in the Senate sponsored by Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and James Risch (R-ID), called the UNRWA Accountability and Transparency Act. The legislation, which has stalled in committee in both the House and Senate, calls for the State Department to end funding to UNRWA unless the State Department conclusively [certifies](#) that:
 - UNRWA facilities and funds are not used for terrorism;
 - UNRWA is subject to comprehensive independent financial audits;
 - UNRWA has ceased rhetoric demonizing or delegitimizing Israel and calling for violence; and
 - That UNRWA is not affiliated with institutions involved in money laundering or terror financing.
- Other aid implementers charged with dispersing U.S. assistance in Gaza are just as problematic as UNRWA. For example, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) has also either been exploited by Hamas for, or had employees who participated in, terrorist activity.
 - » During the 2009 Gaza conflict, in an interview with an Australian press outlet, a Palestinian ambulance driver for the PRCS-operated al-Quds Hospital in Gaza City revealed that Hamas frequently attempted to [hijack](#) PRCS ambulances to use them for transporting Hamas terrorists and weapons.
 - » In March 2002, an Israeli inspection of a PRCS ambulance [transporting](#) a sick Palestinian child found explosives and firearms hidden directly underneath the child’s stretcher.
 - » In January 2002, a PRCS medical staffer named Wafa Idris presented her PRCS credentials at Israeli checkpoints en route to [carrying out](#) a suicide bombing in Jerusalem that injured 127 people and killed one person. Two other PRCS employees were implicated in the plot.
- Foreign aid given to the West Bank also directly and indirectly funds Palestinian terrorist activity, though less overtly than in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority has long provided cash incentives to terrorists, including at least one of the October 7 attackers.

- » As JINSA has [noted](#), the Palestinian Authority has long conducted a “pay-for-slay” in which it administers direct payments to the perpetrators of terrorist attacks. These payments [comprise](#) about seven percent of the Palestinian Authority’s annual budget.
 - Under Palestinian Authority law, the Palestinian Authority [pays](#) the families of terrorists killed by Israeli forces a minimum of \$1,511 upfront and \$353 monthly for life. These stipends are increased if the terrorist was married and had children.
 - Additionally, the Palestinian Authority [transfers](#) considerable sums of money to the family members of terrorists who have been captured, with payments ranging from \$340 to nearly \$3,000 a month.
 - Support for UNRWA also indirectly supports Palestinian terrorism by providing services in the West Bank—however insufficient—that the corrupt Palestinian Authority does not need to provide.
- » One of the terrorists killed while perpetrating the October 7 attacks was [carrying](#) a monthly wage paycheck from the Palestinian Ministry of Interior and National Security at the time of his death.
 - The paycheck indicated that the terrorist was earning a monthly wage of \$1,260 from the Palestinian interior ministry, a [far greater](#) sum than the average monthly wage in Gaza of \$395.