



Alleged UNRWA Involvement in 10/7 Attack Highlights Dangers of Agency

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) [announced](#) on January 25 it had dismissed several employees after Israeli authorities provided information [reportedly](#) demonstrating that 12 UNRWA staffers were involved in the October 7 attack, including six staffers that directly participated. Additionally, Israeli intelligence reportedly shows that 190 UNRWA staffers are [documented](#) Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operatives, approximately 1,200 UNRWA staffers have [direct ties](#) to terrorist groups, and Hamas operatives help [coordinate](#) UNRWA aid deliveries.

These revelations should not come as a surprise, nor can be dismissed as just a few bad actors. UNRWA has long had a [too-close-for-comfort relationship](#) with Hamas, despite its putative role as a neutral humanitarian agency. The agency's dismissal of a small handful of its staffers is too late and too little to fix its endemic problems or ensure that U.S. taxpayer money is not being used to pay or abet terrorists. Meanwhile, the U.S. announcement that it is [pausing](#) "additional" funding for UNRWA will still allow for the agency to receive at least \$51 million in U.S. [funding](#) this year. Israel's allegations, if proven accurate, should disqualify UNRWA from receiving any further U.S. funding.

What Happened?

- On January 26, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) [announced](#) in a statement it had dismissed several employees after Israeli authorities "provided UNRWA with information about the alleged involvement of several UNRWA employees in the horrific attacks on Israel on 7 October."
 - » The agency announced that the UN had opened an investigation into the allegations—reportedly [led](#) by the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services—and noted that "any UNRWA employee who was involved in acts of terror will be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution."
- U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller [announced](#) on January 26 that the United States had "temporarily paused additional funding for UNRWA while we review these allegations and the steps the United Nations is taking to address them."
 - » However, the State Department will reportedly [continue](#) to provide UNRWA with funding already [allocated](#) to it for FY2024, including at least \$51 million.
- Over a dozen countries subsequently announced a temporary pause of UNRWA funding, including [Australia](#), [Austria](#), [Canada](#), [Estonia](#), [Finland](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), [Iceland](#), [Italy](#), [Japan](#), [the Netherlands](#), [Romania](#), [Switzerland](#), and the [United Kingdom](#). The European Union's executive body, the European Commission, [announced](#) that it would review UNRWA

funding “in light of the outcome of the investigation announced by the UN and the actions it will take.”

- According to Israeli intelligence assessments [reviewed](#) by *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 UNRWA staffers—including 10 [Hamas members](#)—were involved in the attack, including six who directly participated in the attack.
 - » Of the six alleged participants, two reportedly helped kidnap Israelis and another two were tracked to sites where Israeli civilians were killed. Other UNRWA staffers reportedly helped procure weapons and coordinate logistics for the attack.
 - » The assessment cited the six staffers’ cell phone locations as well as text messages, phone calls, intelligence materials recovered from dead terrorists, and interrogations of captured Hamas fighters. UNRWA IDs were also [reportedly](#) found on the bodies of terrorists killed in the attack and in the possession of terrorists captured by Israel.
- UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric [said](#) on January 28 that “the tens of thousands of men and women who work for UNRWA” should not be grouped in with “the abhorrent alleged acts of these staff members,” and former UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness [stated](#) that “these are 12 very bad apples among 13,000 staff.”
- However, Israel’s intelligence reports reportedly [demonstrated](#) the existence of widespread, systemic ties between UNRWA staffers and terrorist organizations in Gaza.
 - » According to a January 29 [report](#) from CBS News, citing an Israeli intelligence dossier it reviewed, at least 190 UNRWA workers in Gaza are documented Hamas or PIJ operatives.
 - » The Israeli intelligence assessments reportedly [show](#) that approximately 10 percent of UNRWA’s roughly 12,000 staffers in Gaza have ties to terrorist organizations, and that approximately 49 percent of UNRWA staffers in Gaza have close family members with ties to terrorist groups.
 - » Reports also [cited](#) the assessments as showing that Hamas has stolen over \$1 million worth of UNRWA supplies, including fuel and aid trucks, since the war began. Documents reportedly showed that Hamas operatives—potentially moonlighting as UNRWA staffers—are directly involved in UNRWA’s aid delivery process in Gaza, including coordinating aid transfers.

Why Is It Important?

- UNRWA, which has reaped several billion dollars in U.S. funding since its creation in 1949, has long had a too-close-for-comfort [relationship](#) with Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups, despite its putative role as a neutral humanitarian agency. Though UNRWA suffers from a number of other endemic issues, including [corruption](#), [inefficiency](#), and [misallocation of aid](#), Israel’s allegations against UNRWA are sufficiently serious, if proven accurate, to disqualify UNRWA from receiving U.S. funding.
- UNRWA was initially [established](#) in 1949 under UN Resolution 302 with a temporary mandate to address Palestinian refugee issues following the 1948 War of Independence. However, the agency has had its mandate to oversee Palestinian humanitarian issues renewed by the UN General Assembly every three or four years since then.
- The United States has provided considerable [funding](#) to UNRWA, including at least \$6.5 billion since 1950 and over \$350 million annually from 2014 to 2017. In FY2023, the United States [provided](#) the agency with a total of at least \$153 million and reportedly [as much](#) as \$371 million in funding.

- » The United States has already allocated \$51 million in FY2024 to UNRWA, funds which reportedly will still be supplied to the agency.
 - A State Department spokesperson told a journalist that “we are pausing any new or additional funding. Contributions to UNRWA that were not obligated as of January 24 are suspended, contributions to UNRWA obligated prior to this date remain in effect.”
 - Given that the FY2024 funds were already appropriated, or “obligated,” the State Department’s statement suggests the United States will only pause future UNRWA appropriations, not the tens of millions of dollars allotted for FY2024.
- UNRWA staffers’ alleged involvement in the October 7 attack represents the latest in a series of serious allegations against the agency since the war began.
 - » On November 29, Israeli media reported that a released hostage held in Hamas captivity in Gaza said that he spent nearly 50 days in the attic of an UNRWA teacher’s house.
 - » Photos released by Israel showed that Hamas terrorists killed on October 7 had multiple UN first-aid kits with them during the attack.
 - » Following the October 7 attack, a number of UNRWA employees praised the massacre, which killed over 1,000 people and injured thousands of others. A Telegram chat with approximately 3,000 UNRWA teachers was found to be filled with messages celebrating the October 7 massacre on the day of the attack, such as “may Allah grant them victory.”
- Allegations of UNRWA involvement in the October 7 attacks, if true, would be the latest in a long list of instances of the agency, either inadvertently or intentionally, facilitating terrorist activity in the Gaza Strip.
 - » In 2002, at the height of the Second Intifada terror campaign that killed hundreds of Israelis, Israel arrested and convicted UNRWA’s director of food distribution in Gaza and an UNRWA ambulance driver for involvement in terrorism.
 - The two men used UNRWA vehicles to transport terror operatives and weapons, exploiting their UNRWA credentials to bypass Israeli security checkpoints.
 - » In the agency’s 2012 union elections, in which the vast majority of UNRWA’s 10,000 employees participated, a pro-Hamas bloc won 25 of the 27 open seats for the union’s board. In the 2019 union elections, terror-supporting blocs won 22 of 27 seats.
 - » Three Israeli soldiers were killed while inspecting a UNRWA health facility in Gaza that had been booby-trapped by Hamas during the 2014 Israel-Hamas war. The building also contained entrances to a Hamas tunnel network.
 - » After the war, a UN Board of Inquiry investigation determined that Palestinian terrorist groups had used two UNRWA schools to fire mortars at Israel and store weapons during the war.
 - » UNRWA’s connection to terrorism has for decades included a steady drumbeat of terror incitement in UNRWA schools. UNRWA textbooks are replete with reading passages and math problems glorifying terrorism, such as using Palestinian terrorists (described as “martyrs”) as variables in math equations.
- Despite years of circumstantial evidence tying individual UNRWA members to Hamas and PIJ terrorist activities, Israel’s allegations demonstrating that the agency is fundamentally compromised—including allegations that Hamas operatives are overseeing UNRWA aid deliveries in Gaza—are revelatory, if accurate.
 - » If accurate, Israel’s claims would demonstrate, as one Israeli official said, that “UNRWA’s problem is not just a few bad apples,” but rather that “the institution as a whole” is a haven for Hamas.

- » Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz [stated](#) on January 27 that Israel's intelligence findings demonstrate that UNRWA "serves as a civilian arm of Hamas in Gaza."
- Israel's allegations that roughly 10 percent of UNRWA staffers—representing approximately 1,200 employees—have ties to terrorist groups undermine a key pillar of the disinformation campaign against Israel, namely that Israel's alleged [killing](#) of 152 UNRWA staffers demonstrates that it is arbitrarily targeting civilians, including aid workers.
- » UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini has used the alleged number of UNRWA staffers killed to [claim](#) that Israel has displayed a "blatant disregard for U.N. premises" in its combat operations. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [said](#) that the 152 figure represents "the largest single loss of life in the history of our organization."
- » However, if Israel's intelligence findings are accurate, many of the UNRWA employees killed—if the figures given by UNRWA are precise, itself dubious given Israel's allegations—in fact may have been killed while participating in terrorist activity.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- The United States should make permanent its temporary suspension of UNRWA funding if Israel's claims are corroborated by either the UN's internal investigation or the United States's own probe into the matter.
 - » If the State Department's "[review](#)" of Israel's allegations does not include its own investigation into Israel's claims, it should initiate one promptly—preferably spearheaded by the State Department's Inspector General office—and release the results of the probe as quickly and transparently as possible.
 - » The United States should pause all funding to UNRWA, including the \$51 million in funds already allocated to the agency for FY2024 which [reportedly](#) will not be frozen, pending the results of such an investigation.
 - » Congress should hold hearings seeking more information into Israel's allegations as well as UNRWA operations more generally, given the agency's [broader failures](#).
 - The House Foreign Affairs Committee's January 30 [hearing](#) on UNRWA's ties to Hamas and the October 7 attack should represent only the first of several Congressional hearings investigating UNRWA.
 - » Members of Congress should also seek answers regarding the extent of the State Department's review of Israel's allegations, approximately when the findings from the State Department's review will be publicly released, and under what circumstances the funding pause would not be made permanent.
- If Israel's allegations are proven credible, the United States should hold UNRWA accountable for its connections to terrorism. Members of Congress and relevant U.S. federal agencies should explore alternative structures and processes to replace UNRWA's role as lead humanitarian agency in Gaza.
- The United States should initiate a diplomatic campaign to encourage European allies that have not already halted funding to UNRWA to do so, and should encourage those allies who have temporarily suspended funding to UNRWA to do so permanently if Israel's allegations are proven accurate.