



UNRWA Terror Ties Extend to Highest Levels of Hamas

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The Israeli parliament's ban on United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) activities inside Israel is a response to a mounting pile of evidence that the UN agency, at the very least, has been penetrated and exploited by Hamas. The fact that low-level UNRWA staffers were known to have participated in the October 7 attack, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar was carrying the passport of an UNRWA teacher when he was killed, and other Hamas leaders were employed by UNRWA demonstrates that the agency's terror connections run to the highest levels of Hamas. Worse yet, UNRWA top brass knew for months that the agency employed Hamas leaders but took little action.

Rather than the work of a few bad apples, UNRWA's systemic involvement with terror organizations compromises the agency as a whole.

What Happened?

- On October 28, the Israeli parliament voted [92-10](#) and [87-9](#), respectively, to pass two bills pertaining to UNRWA's operations inside Israel. The first bill, according to *The Times of Israel*, [prevents](#) UNRWA "from operating in Israeli territory by revoking a 1967 exchange of notes providing the basis for its activities," while the second bill [ban\[s\]](#) state authorities from having any contact with UNRWA.
 - » *The Jerusalem Post* [reported](#) on October 27 that the bills, in practice, could "shut down [UNRWA] operations in east Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank within 90 days."
 - » As *The Times of Israel* [noted](#), "without coordination with Israel, it will be almost impossible, in turn, for UNRWA to work in Gaza or the West Bank, since Jerusalem would no longer be issuing entrance permits to those territories or allowing coordination with the [Israeli military]."
 - » Israel's foreign ministry [announced](#) in a statement that "Israel is committed to international law and to providing humanitarian aid to Gaza, and will continue to act on this subject with UN agencies and international organizations such as the World Food Program, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and a number of other organizations, this while complying with its international obligations."

Why Is It Important?


- Israel's ban on UNRWA activities inside Israel is a response to UNRWA's tacit acceptance of Hamas terror activity—including, as recent evidence [shows](#), extending to Lebanon. That Hamas's top official in Gaza was carrying the passport of an UNRWA teacher when he was

killed, and had previously been [hoarding](#) UNRWA food in his bunker, dispels notions of UNRWA's terror ties being aberrational or the work of a few bad actors.

- » Despite the overwhelming evidence of UNRWA's endemic corruption, anti-Israel and antisemitic incitement, and involvement with terrorism, UNRWA's recent near-satirical [nomination](#) for the Nobel Peace Prize highlights the international community's growing amnesia about the agency's deeply rooted terror ties.
- » Given these terror links UNRWA should be disqualified, at least until it undergoes significant reforms, from playing a role in rebuilding a Hamas-free Gaza.
- Israel has released a large volume of evidence showing that Hamas and UNRWA are deeply intertwined at the operational level.
 - » Following the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) October 16 killing of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in southern Gaza, Sinwar was found to have been carrying a passport [bearing](#) the identity of an UNRWA teacher.
 - Previously, in February, Israeli officials released a video of an underground bunker used by Sinwar that contained a bag of food [labeled](#) with the UNRWA logo.
 - » Besides the Sinwar link, recent additions to the mounting pile of evidence that UNRWA has deep ties to Hamas include:
 - Israel's October 24 [announcement](#) that Mohammed Abu Itiwi, a recently-killed Hamas Nukhba special forces commander and participant in the October 7 attack, had, according to UN [personnel files](#), been an UNRWA employee since 2022.
 - The September 30 [revelation](#) that the recently-killed head of Hamas's Lebanon branch, Fatah Sharif Abu el-Amin, [served](#) as the head of the UNRWA's teachers' union in Lebanon. El-Amin oversaw 65 schools and roughly 40,000 students and was also a principal at an UNRWA-run school in southern Lebanon.
 - El-Amin was [responsible](#) for Hamas's operations in Lebanon, including coordinating terror activities with Hezbollah, procuring weapons, and recruiting operatives. He [openly embraced](#) terrorism in a series of social media posts.
 - » Itiwi was one of over a dozen UNRWA employees who participated in the October 7 massacre. Israel initially [revealed](#) that at least 14 UNRWA staffers took part in the October 7 attack, but later uncovered further evidence [demonstrating](#) that at least 30 UNRWA staffers either directly or indirectly aided the murderous rampage.
 - » Though the highest-profile instance of UNRWA's involvement in terrorism, UNRWA staffers' participation in the October 7 attack was not an aberrational event, but instead was indicative of UNRWA's systemic, intrinsic terror ties.
 - As JINSA's Vice President for Policy Blaise Misztal has [noted](#), “the world [buried] its head in the sand for 17 years, saying, ‘this is fine’ as we basically let terrorists run Gaza—including UNRWA.”
 - » According to *The Wall Street Journal*, which [reviewed](#) Israel's January intelligence dossier on UNRWA's terror ties, Israeli intelligence's evidence showed that:
 - Over 10 percent of UNRWA's roughly 12,000 Gaza staffers have ties to terror groups;
 - Around half of UNRWA's Gaza staffers have close family ties to terror groups, and;
 - Hamas embedded itself in the UNRWA aid process to steal vast amounts of UNRWA supplies, including fuel and aid trucks. Hamas has [seized](#) an estimated \$500 million in aid since the war began.

- » In February, Israel's *Kan* media outlet [reported](#), citing Israeli intelligence sources, that at least 9,000 UNRWA employees in Gaza—constituting over 70 percent of UNRWA's Gaza staff—have ties to Hamas and around 2,000 staffers are registered members of Hamas's political wing. Israel's foreign ministry [announced](#) in April that more than 2,130 UNRWA employees are active members of Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad.
- » The crescendo of evidence showing UNRWA's active role in aiding, or at least providing cover for, Hamas was [unveiled](#) in February when Israel announced that its military forces had found a Hamas facility beneath UNRWA's Gaza headquarters.
 - The terror command-and-control compound had server banks and computers powered by electric cables extending down from the UNRWA facility above it. Despite this and other seemingly incontrovertible [evidence](#), UNRWA head Phillippe Lazzarini implausibly [claimed](#) that the agency “did not know what is under its headquarters in Gaza.”
- UNRWA's deep terror ties should come as no surprise. As United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric admitted on September 30, UNRWA has [no ability](#) to properly vet its staffers for terror ties.
 - » UNRWA's [woefully inadequate](#) screening process reportedly does not include checking names against U.S. or Israeli lists of Hamas operatives, nor cross-referencing lists with the Palestinian Authority for potential terror involvement.
 - » An Israeli official [told](#) *The Times of Israel* in March that the personnel lists UNRWA provides Israel do not include all personnel, lack ID numbers necessary for vetting employees, and are at times sent long after staffers began working for the agency.
- That el-Amin held a senior role in UNRWA's Lebanon school system while serving as a Hamas commander also underscores the fundamental flaws of UNRWA's broken and dangerous educational system.
 - » UNRWA textbooks are [replete](#) with anti-Israel invective in its textbooks and UNRWA teachers have serially [posted](#) antisemitic material online. During the October 7 attack, as JINSA has [noted](#), a Telegram chat of over 3,000 UNRWA teachers erupted with messages of praise for the Hamas terrorists attacking Israel.
 - » In a case strikingly [similar](#) to that of el-Amin's, then-head of UNRWA's Gaza teacher union Suhail al-Hindi was outed in 2011 as a senior Hamas terror operative. Moreover, former Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [served](#) as a teacher in UNRWA schools, and numerous terrorists have graduated UNRWA's Gaza schools.
 - » As JINSA has previously [noted](#), UNRWA schools' [fixation](#) on terror incitement—including providing children textbooks that use acts of terrorism as [examples](#) in mathematics and physics problems—have contributed to the schools producing dismal academic results.
 - In 2007, the most recent year UNRWA's Gaza schools [released](#) test scores, nearly 80 percent of students from grades 4 through 9 failed mathematics and over 40 percent failed Arabic, the native language of Palestinians.
- Rather than work to root out UNRWA's terror ties, Lazzarini has attempted to obfuscate the evidence that terrorists permeate his agency's ranks with repeated denials. The failure at the top of UNRWA to accept responsibility and undertake reforms only further discredits the agency.
 - » On September 30, Lazzarini [denied](#) that terrorists are employed by UNRWA and deflected blame by faulting a “large-scale campaign aimed at undermining the agency.”

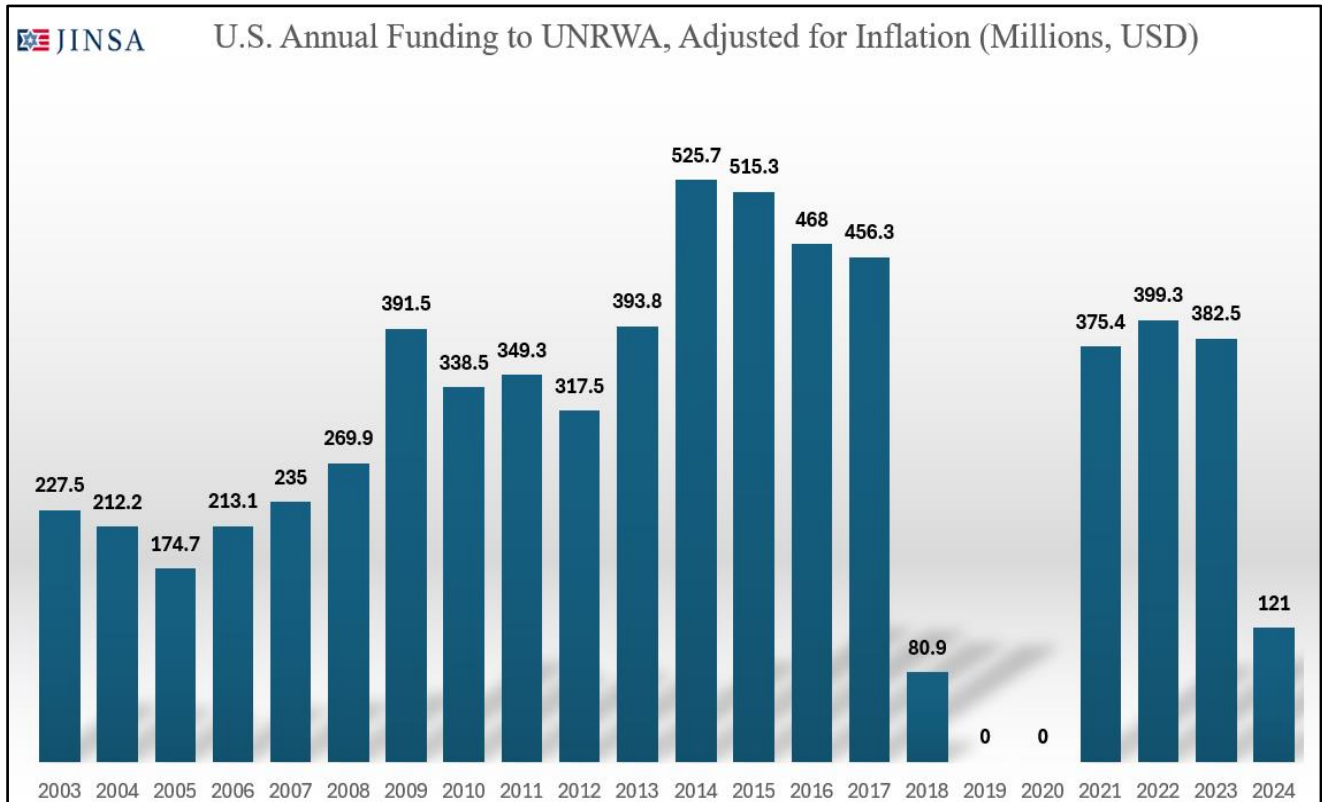
- » Lazzarini further [claimed](#) in November that he “rejects claims linking [UNRWA] personnel to the ... October 7 attacks” and argued that he “question[s] the motivation of those who make such claims.”
- » Even after being presented with pictures of el-Amin at Hamas rallies and in the company of Hamas leaders, UNRWA leadership—reportedly [involving](#) Lazzarini himself—only placed el-Amin on three-month [administrative leave](#). The incident further shows the lack of accountability UNRWA is willing to impose on itself.
- Recent efforts to downplay UNRWA’s systemic ties with terrorism, such as the ostensibly independent UN-commissioned Colonna Report, worked backward from the preconceived notion that any terror activity was tangential, at most, to UNRWA’s operations.
 - » The head of the Colonna Report review group, former French foreign minister Catherine Colonna, [indicated](#) before the report had even been written that its purpose was to depict UNRWA in a positive light.
 - Colonna [stated](#) that the report’s goal was to “enable donors ... to regain confidence, when they have lost it or when they have doubts, in the way UNRWA operates.”
 - » Accepting the report’s conclusions as fact, a number of countries that initially paused UNRWA funding have since [resumed](#) their funding.

 Top UNRWA Donor Funding Status		
UNRWA’s Top Donors (2023*)	2023 Contributions	Response to Revelations of UNRWA’s Terror Ties
1. United States	\$422,004,945**	Congress Paused Funding Through March 25, 2025
2. Germany	\$212,890,232	Paused Funding in January; Announced Resumption of \$48.5mn of Funding in March and Add’l \$10.8mn in June
3. European Union	\$120,165,744	Paused “Additional” Funding in January; Announced Resumption of \$71.1mn in Total 2024 Funding in May
4. France	\$62,421,104	No Funding Pause ; Announced \$41mn in Total 2024 Funding in July
5. Sweden	\$48,893,860	Paused Funding in January; Announced Resumption of \$18.9mn in Total 2024 Funding in March and Noted Possible Add’l Funding
6. Japan	\$48,530,158	Paused Funding in January; Announced Resumption of \$35mn in Funding in April
7. Norway	\$45,718,620	No Funding Pause ; Announced \$25mn in Funding in February and Add’l \$10mn in Funding in July
8. Netherlands	\$40,754,272	Paused Funding in January; Announced \$3.2mn in Funding “ Earmarked ” for UNRWA, Pending Reforms, in June
9. Canada	\$36,385,264	Paused “Additional” Funding in January; Announced Resumption of \$25mn in Funding in May
10. United Kingdom	\$36,872,747	Paused Funding in January; Announced Resumption of \$27.3mn in Funding in July

Source: [UNRWA](#), Donor Governments

*2024 figures not released by United Nations. **Pledged amount, some funds not dispersed.

- UNRWA staffers' complicity in terrorism led Congress, in March, to freeze all U.S. funding to the agency through March 2025. However, the United States could [resume](#) funding to UNRWA again as soon as April under current appropriations law.
 - » Congress [constructed](#) the UNRWA funding ban as a calendar-year, rather than fiscal-year, ban, potentially leaving the door open for funds to be allocated as soon as April.



Source: [Congressional Research Service](#)

- » U.S. funding has traditionally been the largest source of UNRWA's total funding, including approximately [30 percent](#) of UNRWA's funding in 2023. The United States has [contributed](#) over \$1 billion since January 2021 to UNRWA and over \$5 billion since 2001.
- Though expressing her opposition to replacing UNRWA, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf [noted](#) in April that while there is no "ready replacement" for UNRWA, there are "many other avenues ... [many other] channels and organizations by which we can assist the Palestinian people."
- As JINSA and The Vandenberg Coalition's Gaza Futures Task Force, a task force of former senior U.S. officials, noted in their February report [The Day After: A Plan For Gaza](#), potential alternatives to UNRWA include:
 - » An international trust of European and friendly Arab partners to take on, in the short-term, some of the humanitarian services ostensibly conducted by UNRWA;
 - » The greater involvement of other international organizations to replace UNRWA's functions over time, and;
 - » Outside efforts to develop "new Palestinian assistance institutions" in Gaza. These institutions should include extensive vetting protocols for employees, detailed metrics on aid distribution and educational attainment in Gaza's schools, consistent international oversight, and both internal and external accountability.