

Islamic Extremism in Europe

Beyond al-Qaeda: Hamas and Hezbollah in Europe

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of global jihadist movements in Europe is alarming, not only because of the threat such movements pose to our European allies but because Europe has served as a launching pad for terrorist operatives plotting attacks elsewhere. As the 9/11 trial just begun in Spain highlights, the 9/11 hijackers and their logistical and financial collaborators plotted and planned their operations in Europe. Similarly, Richard Reid's failed shoe-bombing of a U.S. airliner was plotted and launched from Europe; Hezbollah operatives have launched attacks against Israel from Europe; and Hamas operatives have plotted and funded suicide and other terrorist attacks against civilians in Israel from Europe as well.

While terrorist groups remain the central structural unit in international terrorism, terrorist groups today are better described as networked groups tied together by individual relationships than as clearly defined organizations that are structured and discrete. The relationships between individual terrorists affiliated with different groups are paramount, especially when operating within Diaspora communities in places like Europe and the United States. This crossover and pollination facilitates cooperation among groups, including operational cooperation but far more often interconnectivity at the logistical and financial support levels. Such links exist even between groups that do not share similar ideologies, leading to cooperation between religious zealots and secular radicals; between ideologically- or theologically-driven terrorists and criminal entities (as has been the case in several terrorist attacks in Iraq, where criminal elements played critical roles in return for monetary compensation); between Sunni and Shi'a groups; and between individuals whose person-to-person contacts require no agreement between their respective headquarters.

As such, it should not surprise that several investigations into al-Qaeda operatives in Europe and elsewhere revealed significant crossover to terrorist elements tied to Hamas. A particularly interesting example is the Madrid Al-Qaeda cell, perhaps the most important cell broken up since 9/11. Around April 2002, Spanish authorities searched the home and offices of Muhammad Zouaydi, a senior al-Qaeda financier in Madrid. Investigators found a five-page fax dated October 24, 2001, revealing that 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."¹ Spanish police also say Zouaydi gave a total of almost \$6,600 marked "Gifts for Palestine" to Sheikh Helal Jamal, a Palestinian religious figure in Madrid tied to Hamas.²

The al-Taqwa banking system – with offices in Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Italy and the Caribbean – also facilitated the financing of multiple terrorist organizations, including Hamas. Bank al-Taqwa was added to the U.S. Treasury Department's terrorism list in November 2001 for "provid[ing] cash transfer mechanisms for Al Qaida,"³ and European

intelligence services confirm "al-Taqwa used Hamas funds in the late 1990s."⁴ Subsequent investigation has determined al-Taqwa was established in 1988 with financing from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, "\$60 million collected annually for Hamas was moved to accounts with Bank al-Taqwa."⁵ Al-Taqwa shareholders include known Hamas members and individuals linked to al-Qaeda.⁶ Ghalib Himmat, noted for his ties to the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO), another charity suspected of financing Hamas, is also an executive of the al-Taqwa banking network. Moreover, a 1996 report by Italian intelligence further linked al-Taqwa to Hamas and other Palestinian groups, as well as to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group and the Egyptian al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya.⁷

Beyond the presence in Europe of global jihadists tied to the al-Qaeda network, the activities of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah also pose significant national security risks. Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, these risks are not limited to the terrorist attacks these groups plot against Israel, they include risks to the countries in which they are operating and to the United States as well.

HEZBOLLAH IN EUROPE

Highlights of Hezbollah's record of terror attacks include suicide truck bombings targeting US and French forces in Beirut (in 1983 and 1984) and U.S. forces again in Saudi Arabia (in 1996), its record of suicide bombing attacks targeting Jewish and Israeli interests such as those in Argentina (1992 and 1994) and in Thailand (attempted in 1994), and a host of other plots targeting American, French, German, British, Kuwaiti, Bahraini and other interests in plots from Europe to Southeast Asia to the Middle East.

According to U.S. authorities, concern over the threat posed by Hezbollah is well placed. FBI officials testified in February 2002 that "FBI investigations to date continue to indicate that many Hezbollah subjects based in the United States have the capability to attempt terrorist attacks here should this be a desired objective of the group."⁸ Similarly, CIA Director George Tenet testified in February 2003 that "Hezbollah, as an organization with capability and worldwide presence, is [al-Qaeda's] equal, if not a far more capable organization."⁹ To be sure, Hezbollah is highly qualified, and capable of carrying out attacks not only in the U.S. – where it has never carried out operations before – but in Europe as well – where it has been active in the past.

US intelligence officials have also expressed concern over possible links between Hezbollah and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, highlighting the ad hoc tactical relationship brewing between Iran's shi'a proxy and the loosely affiliated al-Qaeda network. In September 2003, when US authorities designated Zarqawi and several of his associates as 'Specially Designated Global Terrorist' entities, the Treasury said that Zarqawi not only had "ties" to Hezbollah, but that plans were in place for his deputies to meet with both Hezbollah and Asbat al-Ansar (a Lebanese Sunni terrorist group), "and any other group that would enable them to smuggle mujaheddin [sic] into Palestine."¹⁰ To this end, Zarqawi received "more than \$35,000" in mid 2001 "for work in Palestine," which

included "finding a mechanism that would enable more suicide martyrs to enter Israel" as well as "to provide training on explosives, poisons, and remote controlled devices."¹¹

Similarly, while the 9/11 Commission found no evidence that Iran or Hezbollah had advance knowledge of the September 11 plot, the commission's report does note that Iran and Hezbollah provided assistance to al-Qaeda on several occasions. For example, al-Qaeda operatives were allowed to travel through Iran with great ease. Entry stamps were not put in Saudi operatives' passports at the border, though at least eight of the September 11 hijackers transited the country between October 2000 and February 2001. The report also noted a "persistence of contacts between Iranian security officials and senior al-Qaeda figures" and drew attention to an informal agreement by which Iran would support al-Qaeda training with the understanding that such training would be used "for actions carried out primarily against Israel and the United States." Indeed, al-Qaeda operatives were trained in explosives, security, and intelligence on at least two occasions, with one group trained in Iran around 1992, and a second trained by Hezbollah in Lebanon's Beka'a Valley in the fall of 1993.¹²

In the final analysis, whether suspected ties between Hezbollah and global jihadist elements such as Zarqawi and the 9/11 plotters are proved or not, Hezbollah warrants being designated a terrorist group of global reach on the merits of its own activities.

On top of its efforts to cripple the peace process, Hezbollah warrants European attention for its operations there. In the 1980s Hezbollah operatives carried out bombings in France and assassinations in Germany, and killed French peacekeeping forces in Beirut. But the group continues to operate out of Europe today. Consider some of Hezbollah's operations in Europe:

In 1989, Bassam Gharib Makki, a Hezbollah operative and student in Germany, collected intelligence on Israeli, Jewish and American targets in Germany. In 1989 and 1990, authorities apprehended a Hezbollah cell operating in Valencia, Spain. The cell was caught smuggling weapons in a ship from Cyprus so that they could be pre-positioned and cached in Europe. After tracking that shipment, authorities found additional explosives that had already been stashed in Europe. It was determined that the cell had been targeting US and Israeli targets in Europe. In 1997, Hezbollah was found to be collecting intelligence on the US Embassy in Nicosia, Cyprus. During the same period, members of a Hezbollah cell in Charlotte, North Carolina, paid indigent Americans to travel to Cyprus at Hezbollah's expense and engage in sham marriages so additional operatives could get visas to come to America.¹³ Throughout the mid- to late-1990s, Hezbollah recruited Palestinian students studying in Russia, and collected intelligence on Israeli, Jewish and American targets there.

Today, German intelligence estimates that 800 Lebanese Hezbollah members live in Germany. The organization publishes a weekly newsletter in Germany, *al-Ahd*, though it scaled back its overt presence there after September 11, fearing a clampdown. An investigation in the summer of 2002 led German authorities to monitor the activities of an

organization in Berlin suspected of being tied to Hezbollah and of establishing a “training center.”¹⁴

Over the past few years, Hezbollah has used Europe as a launching pad from which to infiltrate operatives into Israel to conduct surveillance and carry out attacks. In 1996 Hussien Makdad left Lebanon for Europe where members of a Hezbollah logistical support network provided him with a stolen British passport which he used to enter Israel on a flight from Switzerland. A few days later Makdad was badly injured in an explosion in his East Jerusalem hotel room where he was assembling a bomb made of RDX explosives. In 1997, Hezbollah operative Stephan Smyrek, a German convert to Islam trained by Hezbollah in Lebanon, left Lebanon for Europe and then flew from Amsterdam to Israel on his own German passport. He was tasked with photographing prospective targets for attacks but was arrested at Israel's Ben Gurion airport. In 2000, Hezbollah dispatched Fawzi Ayub, a Canadian of Lebanese decent, to infiltrate Israel from Europe. He traveled from Lebanon on his own Canadian passport, and then sailed to Israel on a forged American passport he received in Europe. Ayub is described as a hardened Hezbollah operative, and is believed to have been sent to conduct attacks in Israel. And in 2001 Hezbollah operative Gerard Shuman, a dual British-Lebanese citizen, flew from Lebanon to Britain on his Lebanese passport and then on to Israel on his British passport. Arrested in Israel, Shuman is believed to have been sent to conduct surveillance operations.

In some of these cases, the authorities have determined that the operatives entered Israel to conduct operations, while in other cases it remains unclear whether they entered Israel just to collect pre-operational surveillance, assist other operatives already there, or conduct attacks themselves. Significantly, each of these operatives relied on European logistical support networks to carry out their missions. Moreover, each is also believed to have been trained by elements tied directly to Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's chief operations officer.

In at least one case, Hezbollah's European operations and the group's efforts to undermine the peace process intersect. In mid-2003, Israeli forces arrested Ghulam Mahmud Qawqa, a member of an al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades cell tied to Hezbollah, for his role in several al-Aqsa bombings in Jerusalem. According to information discovered after his arrest, Qawqa was in the process of engineering attacks on Israeli interests in Europe and Asia on behalf of Hezbollah. In late 2002, Qawqa tasked a Lebanese woman he knew in Germany to photograph the Israeli embassy in Berlin from multiple angles for a possible attack.¹⁵

The above is just a sampling of Hezbollah activity in Europe. Intelligence experts maintain that Hezbollah operatives are located throughout the European continent, including Belgium, Bosnia, Britain, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and Ukraine.

Perhaps what should concern European officials most is the fact that one of the most significant modus operandi that runs through all Hezbollah global activities -- financial, logistical and operational -- is that at some level all Hezbollah networks are overseen by and are in contact with senior Hezbollah and/or Iranian officials. Moreover, Hezbollah cells are adept multi-taskers, responsible for a variety of logistical, financial and operational duties. They raise funds, recruit new members, conduct preoperational surveillance, provide logistical support, procure weapons and dual use technologies (for both Hezbollah and Iran), and conduct operations.

Investigators in several countries have concluded independently that security services should avoid looking for cells that are strictly engaged in fundraising, logistical support or terrorist operations. Indeed, cells known only to have raised funds have later been found to have played active roles in terrorist operations, as was the case, for example, in the 1992 and 1994 suicide bombings in Argentina. In the words of one U.S. intelligence official, "Hezbollah cells are always a bit operational."¹⁶ They are always in contact with senior operatives. For example, Hezbollah operatives in Charlotte, North Carolina, responded directly to Sheikh Abbas Haraki, a senior Hezbollah military commander in South Beirut. At the same time, Hezbollah procurement agents in Canada who coordinated with the Charlotte cell worked directly with Haj Hasan Hilu Laqis, Hezbollah's chief procurement officer who operates closely with Iranian intelligence.¹⁷ Similarly, in Southeast Asia, members of the Hezbollah network behind a failed truck-bombing targeting the Israeli embassy in Bangkok in 1994, as well as a series of other terrorist plots in the region throughout the 1990s, were intimately tied to Iranian intelligence agents. Comprised almost entirely of local sunni Muslims, the network was led by Pandu Yudhawitna who was himself recruited by Iranian intelligence officers stationed in Malaysia in the early 1980s.¹⁸

Hezbollah uses charities and front organizations to conceal its fundraising activities worldwide. Take, for example, the al-Aqsa International Foundation, a terrorist front organization banned by the United States, Germany and Great Britain (though not the European Union). While al-Aqsa primarily served as a Hamas front organization, Sheikh Moayad, the head of the the al-Aqsa office in Yemen, was arrested in Germany and extradited to the United States for providing financial support to al-Qaeda. Moayad proudly told an undercover FBI informant that he not only funded Hamas but also raised millions of dollars, recruited operatives, and provided weapons to al-Qaeda. According to one report, one of the foundation's offices in Europe also raised funds for Hezbollah.¹⁹

According to a research report based on declassified Israeli intelligence Hezbollah receives funds not only from Iran but from charities that are radical Islamist organizations and donate to Hezbollah out of ideological affinity, even if they are not themselves run by Hezbollah operatives. "Besides operating a worldwide network of fundraisers, funds are also raised through so-called 'charity funds.' Some of these are extremist Islamic institutions that, while not directly connected to Hezbollah, support it, albeit marginally, in view of their radical Islamic orientation."²⁰ The report cites many such charities

worldwide, including four in the Detroit area alone: The Islamic Resistance Support Association, the al-Shaid Fund, the Educational Development Association (EDA) and the Goodwill Charitable Organization (GCO). Also cited are the the al-Shahid Organization in Canada, the Karballah Foundation for Liberation in South Africa, the Lebanese Islamic Association and al-Shahid Social Relief Institution in Germany, and the Lebanese Welfare Committee, The Help Foundation and The Jam'iyat al-Abrar (Association of the Righteous) in Britain.

The United States and Israel have long pressed their European allies to take action against Hezbollah, but France in particular has refused to follow America, Israel, Canada and Australia in banning Hezbollah, ostensibly for fear of upsetting the domestic political balance in Lebanon where members of the group hold seats in Parliament.

The issue of banning Hezbollah in Europe – where the EU is a member of the peace process Quartet – is now back on the table, this time at the request of Palestinian officials. “We know that Hezbollah has been trying to recruit suicide bombers in the name of al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades to carry out attacks which would sabotage the truce,” stated one Palestinian official. Indeed, just hours after the most recent ceasefire announcement, al-Aqsa members fired on a car near an Israeli settlement in the West Bank and then attacked the army unit sent to investigate the shooting. Another PA official cited intercepted email communications and bank transactions indicating that Hezbollah has increased its payments to terrorists: “Now they are willing to pay \$100,000 for a whole operation whereas in the past they paid \$20,000, then raised it to \$50,000.” Indeed, in a late January meeting in Beirut, even as ceasefire negotiations were well underway, Hassan Nasrallah and Khaled Mishal, the leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas, respectively, declared that resistance against Israel was the only option until “all of Palestine” was liberated. A Palestinian official concluded, “Hizbullah and Iran are not happy with Abbas's efforts to achieve a cease-fire with Israel and resume negotiations with Israel. That's why we don't rule out the possibility that they might try to kill him if he continues with his policy.”²¹

Despite this, Hezbollah remains markedly absent from the European Union’s list of banned terrorist organizations. On May 3, 2002, the EU added eleven organizations and seven individuals to its financial-blocking list of “persons, groups, and entities involved in terrorist acts.” The action was significant because it marked the first time that the EU froze the assets of non-European terrorist groups. But in an effort to maintain a distinction between terrorist groups' political and charitable activities on the one hand, and their direct terror wings on the other, the EU placed several individual Hezbollah terrorists on its list, but not the organization itself. The decision implied Hezbollah operatives are somehow independent of the group that recruits, trains, and funds them.

At the time, the EU decided not to ban the social-welfare or political wings of Hamas either. But in August 2003 the EU reversed its decision, recognizing the entirety of Hamas as a terrorist organization and banning its political and social wings as well. Despite this history of whitewashing Hezbollah terrorist activity, there are small signs that change may be in the offing. While visiting Israel in February 2000, then-French

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin referred to Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. "France condemns Hezbollah's attacks, and all types of terrorist attacks which may be carried out against soldiers or possibly Israel's civilian population," he said.²² Jospin was stoned by Palestinians in Jerusalem and received grief at home for his comments. Reverting to its traditional position, French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier stated in February 2005 that "Hezbollah has a parliamentary and political dimension in Lebanon. They have members of parliament who are participating in parliamentary life. As you know, political life in Lebanon is difficult and fragile."²³

But both France and Germany have taken recent action against Hezbollah, suggesting the possibility that European officials may seriously consider the Palestinian request to ban Hezbollah, though likely not until after Lebanese elections. In December 13, 2004, after a year-long debate, France's highest administrative court ordered France-based satellite provider Eutelsat to discontinue all broadcasts of the Hezbollah's satellite channel, Al-Manar.²⁴ The ban was finally instituted after a guest asserted there were Zionist attempts to spread AIDS among Arabs.²⁵

And in January 2005, a German court upheld a lower court's deportation order against a Hezbollah representative who had lived in Germany for some 20 years. The Dusseldorf court denied the Hezbollah member a visa saying he "is a member of an organization that supports international terrorism." In a statement, the court said that "Hezbollah is waging a war with bomb attacks against Israel with 'inhumane brutality' against civilians." The court also ruled that Germany should not be bound by the absence of Hezbollah from the EU terrorism list.²⁶

Now that the PA has joined the chorus of those calling on Europe to take action against Hezbollah, Washington should press the EU collectively, and its constituent members individually, to add Hezbollah to the EU terrorism list. While some Europeans point to Hezbollah representation in Parliament and resist banning the group, the fact is that Hezbollah operatives are active throughout Europe and pose a security threat to Jewish, Israeli, American and European targets as well.

Moreover, Israelis and Palestinians agree that the organization represents the single most dangerous threat to the peace process. Hezbollah is the only so-called political party that finances suicide bombings and has an arsenal of 13,000 rockets; its terrorist operations must not be forgiven for its parallel political activities. As a member of the Quartet, and in light of calls throughout Europe for more proactive attention to the peace process, the EU should do everything in its power to ensure that the ceasefire holds. Banning Hezbollah would go a long way toward facilitating Israeli-Palestinian peace.

HAMAS

Hamas front organizations in Europe started to receive increased attention in 2003, in large part due to the fact that in April of that year two British Muslims of South Asian descent from Derby and Hounslow carried out a Hamas suicide bombing in Tel Aviv after being recruited by the global jihadist group al-Muhajiroon in Britain and instructed

by Hamas leaders in Syria. The following month, U.S. and British authorities both froze the funds of the al Aqsa International Foundation. But the U.S. alone listed Hamas front organizations such as Britain's Interpal, France's Commite de Bienfaisance et de Secours aux Palestiniens (CBSP), Switzerland's Association de Secours Palestinien, and Austria's Palestinian Association. The fact that groups like Hamas run charities in Europe should not surprise: a 1996 CIA document widely reported on in the press reveals that authorities were aware even then that Hamas fronts like Human Appeal International and Human Relief International were operating offices in London.

At a 1994 Hamas planning meeting in Philadelphia, one participant stressed that the U.S. "is a secure place for the movement" and noted that "Europe also can play the same role."²⁷ To be sure, similar Hamas support networks are indeed active across Europe.

For example, over the course of 2003, authorities in the United States, UK, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Switzerland took action against the al-Aqsa International Foundation (also referred to as the al Aqsa Fund or the al Aqsa Charitable Foundation), a Hamas front organization operating throughout Europe, South Africa, Pakistan, and Yemen that "raised millions of dollars a year."²⁸ The organization had already been outlawed in Israel in 1997 and declared a terrorist organization there the following year. According to a statement issued by Britain's Treasury Ministry in May 2003, "strong evidence from international law enforcement agencies links al-Aqsa Foundation with terrorist activity."²⁹ A Canadian intelligence report also lists al-Aqsa as a charity providing "fundraising and propaganda activities for Hamas."³⁰ In January 2003, the head of al-Aqsa's Yemen office, Shaykh Mohammad Ali Hassan al-Moayad, was arrested in Germany. According to court documents filed in support of his arrest warrant, Moayad offered an FBI informant a receipt showing that he had transferred \$70,000 to Interpal, the Hamas front in London, as proof of his ability "to get money to the Jihad." Moayad also told FBI informants he had provided \$3.5 million to Hamas and \$20 million to al-Qaeda.³¹ A Palestinian intelligence document dated July 2000 and seized by Israeli authorities two years later included the al Aqsa Charitable Foundation in a list of foreign institutions that support Hamas.³² Documents seized from the offices of Hamas charities in the West Bank revealed significant funding was received from the al Aqsa Foundation.³³ While some documents refer to otherwise innocuous donations such as "food packages" and "holiday packages," many specifically note "The project of assistance to the families of the martyrs, the wounded and those who sustained damage."³⁴ In one case, a document found at the al-Islah Charitable Society in Bethlehem documented donations for thousands of dollars earmarked for the families of martyrs from the al Aqsa offices in Germany, Holland, South Africa, as well as from Interpal (which also coordinated the donations).³⁵

One of the clearest pieces of evidence tying al Aqsa and its most senior officers to Hamas comes from the 1993 interrogation of Abd al-Hakim Muhammad abd al-Fatah Abd al-Rahman, a Hamas activist from the Palestinian village of Bir Naballah near Jerusalem. Abd al-Rahman revealed that before he left for Germany to pursue his studies, he approached Sheikh Jamil Hamami – a senior Hamas leader in the West Bank – about joining Hamas. Hamami instructed Abd al-Rahman to contact Mahmoud Amru, the head

of the al Aqsa Foundation in Germany, who Hamami described as a senior Hamas activist in Aachen, Germany. Abd al-Rahman contacted Amru through the local Islamic Center, and continued to be in touch with him throughout the course of his studies in Germany. Amru served as his contact with other Hamas activists in Germany, provided him with ideological materials, and helped him contact Hamas activists in Jordan.³⁶

The al Aqsa International Foundation, like many European charities tied to Hamas, has operated in close cooperation with Interpal, a designated Hamas front in London. On August 22, 2003, the U.S. Treasury Department added Interpal and Hamas front organizations in Austria, France, Switzerland, and Lebanon to its terrorism list. The other charities were the Commite de Bienfaisance et de Secours aux Palestiniens (CBSP) in France, the Association de Secours Palestinien (ASP) in Switzerland, the Palestinian Association in Austria (PVOE), and the since defunct Sanabil Association for Relief and Development in Lebanon.³⁷ On November 21, 2003, Australia followed suit and listed these same Hamas fronts, along with six Hamas leaders, as terrorist entities and seized their funds.³⁸ The Canadians also cited Interpal (Palestinian's Relief and Development Fund) and the Comite de Bienfaisance et de Soliarity avec la Palestine, a charity in France, as Hamas fronts.³⁹ Interpal has been linked to a host of Hamas front organizations in the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel, not only through receipts found in Hamas charities, but also via telephone intercepts introduced in the case of Sheikh Raed Salah, an Israeli-Arab leader charged with funneling money to Hamas. Transcripts reveal Salah engaged in conversations with Interpal officials and other Hamas financial supporters throughout Europe.⁴⁰

Despite extensive public evidence of its ties to Hamas, on September 24, 2003, Britain's Charity Commission for England and Wales gave Interpal a clean bill of health. While the Commission came to the same conclusion after investigating Interpal in 1996, the group has since been widely recognized as one of largest Hamas front organizations operating in the West. For example, already in 1996, authorities determined that the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), both humanitarian organizations involved in funding global jihadist groups, were funding Hamas through Interpal. In documents confiscated at the time, recipient Hamas organizations were asked to send thank-you letters directly to the IIRO and WAMY rather than Interpal. Authorities now know the trend continued after the Charity Commission last cleared Interpal of charges linking it to Hamas in 1996. Interpal featured prominently in the index of documents seized by Israeli forces from Hamas charity committees across the West Bank in April 2002. Donations from fronts like Interpal came in droves, usually transferred through local branches of Middle Eastern banks.

It was just a few weeks before the Charity Commission's decision to clear Interpal, on August 22, 2003, that the United States announced its designation of Interpal and several other groups with which it is affiliated as "Specially Designated Global Terrorist."⁴¹ Against this backdrop, and coming on the heels of the European Union's long overdue decision to include Hamas on its list of banned terrorist groups, a decision it finally took on September 6, 2003, the Charity Commission's ruling to unfreeze Interpal's accounts

was a particularly unwelcome setback to the international effort to sideline Hamas and resurrect the peace process.

Though the Charity Commission claimed U.S. authorities failed to provide evidence to substantiate their charges, a senior US Treasury Department official testified before the US Congress the day after the Commission's decision that the US provided definitive proof of Interpal's financial ties to Hamas.⁴² Moreover, evidence of Interpal's terror connections comes from a variety of open and classified sources and from several countries, not just the United States.⁴³ Additionally, the Charity Commission's failure to account for the plethora of open source evidence linking Interpal to Hamas was only half the problem. The Commission did not investigate whether Interpal funded Hamas charities or organizations, only whether Interpal was linked to the group's "political or violent militant activities."⁴⁴ The Commission concluded that, "in the absence of any clear evidence showing Interpal had links to Hamas' political or violent military activities" its accounts deserved to be unfrozen.⁴⁵ Though the Commission found that Interpal received funds from The Al Aqsa Foundation in the Netherlands, banned as a Hamas front by several countries – including Britain – it excused the transaction because "the funds received were in respect of humanitarian work already carried out by Interpal and then invoiced to The Al Aqsa Foundation."⁴⁶

Clearly, a major factor that inhibited Commission action against Interpal was the popular and alluring though erroneous theory that one can distinguish between the charitable, political and military "wings" of terrorist groups like Hamas. In fact, Interpal is tied to Hamas political and violent activities. But even were it not, its support for the group's social service infrastructure – which itself supports Hamas terror – should have been reason enough to ban Interpal as a Hamas front. Consider, for example, a Palestinian General Intelligence report entitled "Who Finances Hamas?," written in the late 1990s, which estimated that Hamas' annual income was between \$60-\$70 million. The report estimated that of this total, \$12 million came from Britain.⁴⁷

Hamas operatives in Europe have also played hands-on roles in the groups' terrorist attacks. Mohammed Qassem Sawalha, a Hamas activist and longtime Muslim leader in Britain, was appointed a trustee of the radical Finsbury Park mosque in London in February 2005. The mosque was closed in 2004 because it had come under the influence of Abu Hamza al-Masri, a radical Islamic cleric arrested in Britain and charged of some sixteen offenses, including incitement to murder and possessing a document that would be useful to someone plotting terrorism, among other counts. The mosque was shut for a period after al-Masri's arrest, and Sawalha was named one of five trustees to lead the mosque when it was reopened in early 2005.⁴⁸ Sawalha's appointment, however, marked little if any improvement upon al-Masri's leadership given Sawalha's own history of supporting Hamas terrorist operations for well over a decade. An August 2003 indictment against Hamas activists in the United States named Sawalha as a co-conspirator and a Hamas activist who provided assistance to those indicted for racketeering and conspiracy, among other charges.⁴⁹ The indictment, in the case of *United States of America v. Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook et al.*, states that before Sawalha moved to London in the early 1990s he was "a Hamas leader in the West Bank"

and goes on to cite several cases in which Sawalha conspired with others to support Hamas terrorist operations.⁵⁰

For example, while in London Sawalha met and conspired with Mohammad Salah (one of the defendants) and Mohammad Jarad (another co-conspirator) who were passing through London on route to Israel. According to the indictment, Sawalha provided the two men with instructions on “Hamas-related activities they were to carry out while in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.” The indictment further explains how, in August 1992, Sawalha met with Marzook and Salah to discuss the need to “revitalize Hamas terrorist operations in the West Bank.” At that meeting Sawalha suggested specific Hamas members in the West Bank who Salah and Jarad could rely on to help revitalize Hamas’s terrorist activities. Less than six months later, in January 1993, Sawalha and Salah met yet again in London. At this meeting Sawalha specifically directed Salah to “provide money to various Hamas members in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.”⁵¹

The presence of Hamas operatives in Europe is especially disconcerting given the extent of the financial, logistical and even operational links Hamas maintains to a wide array of international terrorist groups. For example, a Hamas delegation participated in the 1995 Islamic People’s Congress in Sudan where they met Osama bin Laden and representatives of Algerian, Pakistani, Tunisian and other groups.⁵² In Pakistan, the leader of a jihadi organization there openly admitted to having “person-to-person contacts” with other groups, adding, “sometimes fighters from Hamas and Hezbollah help us.” Asked where contacts with groups like Hamas and Hezbollah are held, the Pakistani answered, “a good place to meet is in Iran.” Offering insight into the importance of interpersonal relationships between members of disparate terrorist groups, he added, “We don’t involve other organizations. Just individuals.”⁵³

In another sign of the group’s global reach, in 2002 Romanian intelligence was reportedly investigating seventy-three Hamas supporters there, mostly on university campuses. Hamas operatives in Romania were said to operate there “under the screen of the Islamic and Cultural League in Romania.” According to their investigation, Romanian intelligence concluded, “Hamas benefits from the logistics of the Islamic and Cultural League.” Romanian intelligence feared Hamas posed a “potential threat” in Romania, “fueled by the possibility of [Hamas] carrying out attacks on Israeli and U.S. interests or objectives worldwide.”⁵⁴ Similarly, U.S. officials noted in May 2003 that the Islamic League in Norway sent funds, gold and jewelry it raised to the al Aqsa International Foundation offices in Sweden “to be provided to Hamas.”⁵⁵ Unlike many other Hamas fronts whose leaders are publicly circumspect about the final destination of the funds they solicit for Hamas, the Islamic League openly acknowledged such funds were intended to support terrorism. At its May 2002 annual conference, the League’s secretary general called on “all Muslims to provide support and to participate in continuing the suicide operations against Israel.”⁵⁶

Finally, there are increasingly disturbing signs that elements within Hamas are seriously considering conducting attacks targeting Western interests. In some cases Hamas

operatives are being recruited into al-Qaeda; in at least one case Hamas trained a Palestinian living in Canada to conduct operations in North America. This activity, though focused on North America, must be assumed to parallel Hamas activity in Europe as well.

In its August 2004 affidavit for a warrant to search Ismael Elbarasse's car, the FBI noted that while Hamas does not typically target U.S. interests, a 1993 plot to bomb New York landmarks was carried out by conspirators from several jihadist groups, including Hamas. It also noted that "al Qaeda commanders and officials stationed in western countries, including the United States, have recruited operatives and volunteers to carry out reconnaissance or serve as couriers." The post-9/11 crackdown on al-Qaeda has produced "a renewed emphasis by al Qaeda to find confirmed jihadist supporters in the United States by trying to enlist proven members of other groups such as Hamas to make up for the vacuum on the field level."⁵⁷

In at least one other case, Hamas members themselves plotted potential attacks against Western targets. Jamal Akal, a Palestinian with Canadian citizenship, was charged by Israeli authorities with using the ruse of visiting family in Gaza to be trained by Hamas for operations in Canada and the U.S. According to an Israeli press release, Akal admitted he was trained in explosives production and taught to use an M-16 by recently recruited Hamas operative Ahmed Wahabe.⁵⁸ Wahabe tasked Akal to return home and "gather information (via the media) on a senior Israeli official who was arriving in the U.S. Wahabe instructed him to then monitor the senior Israeli official's movements and attempt to assassinate her in a sniper attack. Wahabe also asked Akal to attack members of the US and Canadian Jewish communities, either by shooting or by bombing their homes and/or cars."⁵⁹ Akal's lawyer, Jamil al-Qhateb, confirmed Akal was approached by Hamas and underwent small arms training in Gaza, but insisted Akal never agreed to conduct attacks in Canada.⁶⁰ According to information released by Israeli authorities, "Wahabe told Akal (inter alia): 'New York is an easy place to find Jews'."⁶¹ In a statement issued by the Israeli Embassy in Ottawa an Israeli official confirmed that Akal was to use his Canadian passport to "carry out terrorist attacks in North America against Israeli and Jewish targets ... Some of the scenarios for those terrorist attacks were assassinating a high-level Israeli official during his visit to North America, booby-trapping cars that belong to Israeli officials – diplomats – and killing a Jew who would come across Mr. Akal's way."⁶²

Akal was specifically instructed to draw on the support of Hamas sympathizers in Canada to fund his attacks. In typical *dawa* tradition, Akal was told to approach people in the mosques he frequents in Canada and "raise funds, ostensibly for the families of suicide bombers, which he would actually use for purchasing a weapon and financing his expenses in monitoring his prospective targets and in perpetrating attacks."⁶³ In another sign of the link between Hamas political and military leaders, at the time of Akal's arrest he and Wahabe were reportedly awaiting approval from the Hamas political leadership to conduct the attacks under al-Qaeda's name, not Hamas, in an effort to evade the potential blowback of conducting such attacks in the West.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The foreign funding of subversive domestic organizations linked to designated terrorist groups poses immediate dangers to the national security of the United States and our European allies alike. This much is clear: should Western democracies fail to adapt the culture of our law enforcement and intelligence communities, to enact appropriate laws and procedures, and to commit the necessary resources and resolve, we will find the war on terror that much harder to fight, lasting that much longer in duration, and exacting that much higher and tragic a cost in human life.

Counterterrorism is not about defeating terrorism; it is about constricting the environment in which terrorists operate -- making it harder for them to do what they want to do at every level: conducting operations, procuring and transferring false documents, ferrying fugitives from one place to another; financing, raising, and laundering funds. It is about making it more difficult for terrorists to conduct their operational, logistical, and financial activities. Only with greater international coordination will authorities succeed in targeting Hezbollah's international financial support network and constricting the operating environment in which this designated terrorist organization currently thrives.

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