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## THE NGO-TERRORISM CONNECTION: THE CASE OF THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

*ABSTRACT: In the post 9/11 world, the issues of funding for terrorist organizations via Islamic charities and non-profits (as well as other sources) has received vast attention from global law enforcement and security agencies, as well as from scholars and other policy researchers. This paper attempts to shed light on a related but less explored phenomenon of Israeli, Palestinian, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, that receive international government support and have ties to terrorist organizations. This financial support provides NGOs with legitimacy to continue operating despite their terror connections. As is the case globally, NGOs that operate in conflict zones are subject to certain additional challenges, particularly the siphoning of aid by terrorist groups that control these areas. As we will demonstrate, and case of the Arab-Israeli conflict highlights the issue of aid diversion by terrorist groups as well as NGOs having personnel ties to terrorist organizations, resulting in significant challenges for government donors wishing to promote human rights and provide humanitarian assistance in the region.*

*KEYWORDS: NGOs, Terrorism, Humanitarian Aid, Human Rights, Islamic Charities, Middle East, Europe*

### INTRODUCTION: NGOS, ARMED CONFLICT, AND TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The ongoing Middle East upheaval leading to the downfall of autocratic regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, followed by the civil wars in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq has led to a global crisis not seen since the end of the Second World War. Millions of refugees of unprecedented numbers fleeing the conflict in Syria are crossing borders in an attempt to escape these civil wars.

The rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria, perhaps what some might consider to be a new type of global threat, has similarly created new and complex challenges for Europe and the US. These challenges include a dramatic increase in terrorist acts committed by “home-grown jihadists” or by ISIS fighters returning from Syria and Iraq in their home countries. The challenges of terrorism are magnified with the domestic political concerns of addressing the flow of refugees, social and religious conflict, and their economic ramifications.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance: Rettman, A. “EU reaction to Egypt coup: ‘Awkward. Disturbing’”. *EU Observer*, 4 July 2013. <http://euobserver.com/foreign/120766>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

The US decision to “degrade and destroy” ISIS<sup>3</sup> led to an ongoing Western military presence in Iraq and Syria. This effort is spearheaded by the US with other NATO countries taking part in cooperation with local forces.

The Russian intervention in the Syrian civil war began with an air campaign in support of the Assad regime on 2 October 2015, and intensified after the bombing of a Russian airliner on 30 October 2015.<sup>4</sup> The Russian campaign has solidified Assad’s control over certain parts of the country and reportedly killed more than 2,000 civilians in its first six months.<sup>5</sup> The Russian forces engaged in indiscriminate bombing of civilians, as well as apparent intentional bombings of hospitals, schools, and rescue workers.<sup>6</sup>

In response to the humanitarian crises caused by the Syrian civil war, a massive humanitarian relief effort is underway in Syria and Iraq, providing essential supplies to war stricken areas, as well as in neighbouring countries, which took in millions of refugees. Leading these activities are local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), funded by the US, European countries, and the UN.<sup>7</sup>

In 2014, a media report revealed that many of these various NGOs are directly or indirectly paying ISIS for permission to allow humanitarian supplies to reach their destination in areas under ISIS control. Some US officials questioned the wisdom of providing financial support to the terrorist organization, while at the same time using military means to destroy it.<sup>8</sup>

The exploitation of government-funded humanitarian aid by warring parties and/or terrorist groups in conflict areas is not a new phenomenon. Instead, we should understand the apparent influx in aid appropriation by terrorist groups in the context of the global post 9/11 “War on Terror” world order. Indeed, the use of Islamic charities and aid groups serving as conduits or sources of funding for terrorist activities has been highlighted in the past 15 years.

Humanitarian aid organizations constitute a largely unregulated industry. These NGOs often work in regions controlled by non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, making their stated moral activities subject to corruption. In recent years, an increasing number of journalists and academics have reported on this challenging balance, including Linda Polman and David Rieff who have extensively published on the subject.<sup>9</sup> Polman’s report exposes the ways in which global aid groups such as Oxfam and Trócaire (Ireland) and UN agencies that work in areas where there are African civil wars, such as Rwanda and the Congo, cooperate with leaders of terrorist groups in order to protect their operations and raise funds.

<sup>3</sup> Hudson, D. “President Obama: ‘We Will Degrade and Ultimately Destroy ISIL’”. The White House. 10 September 2014. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170517002708/https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/09/10/president-obama-we-will-degrade-and-ultimately-destroy-isil>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>4</sup> MacFarquhar, N. and Thomas, M. “Russian Airliner Crashes in Egypt, Killing 224”. *New York Times*, 31 October 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/middleeast/russian-plane-crashes-in-egypt-sinai-peninsula.html>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Graham-Harrison, E. “Russian airstrikes in Syria killed 2,000 civilians in six months”. *The Guardian*, 15 March 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/15/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-killed-2000-civilians-in-six-months>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Chulov, M., Shaheen, K. and Graham-Harrison, E. “East Aleppo’s last hospital destroyed by airstrikes”. *The Guardian*, 19 November 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/19/aleppo-hospitals-knocked-out-airstrikes>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Dettmer, J. “U.S. Humanitarian Aid Going to ISIS”. *The Daily Beast*, 20 October 2014. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/19/u-s-humanitarian-aid-going-to-isis.html>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Dettmer. “U.S. Humanitarian Aid...”.

<sup>9</sup> Reiff, D. *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002.; Polman, L. *The Crisis Caravan: What’s Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* New York: Picador, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Simply stated, regardless of whether a terrorist group controls the region or not, an NGO will do whatever it takes in order to fulfil its own goals.

Despite this initial research on the complexities of NGOs operating in zones controlled by terrorists, many gaps in the understanding of aid appropriation still exist. The links between NGOs and terror can be understood as a three-pronged problem: (1) NGOs overtly work with terrorist actors in order to fulfil their goals, (2) NGOs are set up or used by terrorist actors and serve as fronts for transferring funds under a legal guise to the terrorist group, (3) NGOs serve as the “political arms” of terrorist groups, providing them legitimacy vis a vis various regional and global actors.

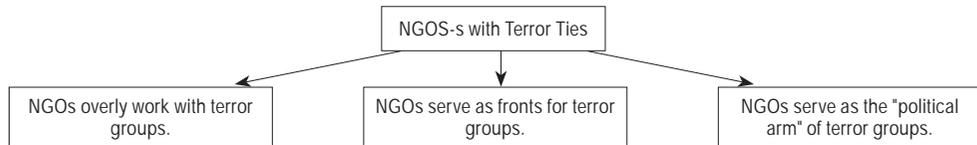


Figure 1: *The three types of NGO ties to terrorist groups.*

This paper will compare the case of (2) with the little explored (3), in an effort to demonstrate how NGOs and terrorist links are both direct and indirect, and the challenges these actors pose for policy makers committed to combatting terrorism, on one hand, and at the same time desires to contribute to human rights and humanitarian organizations, on the other. The paper will analyse this phenomenon through the case study of NGOs with ties to terrorism in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

## THE HISTORY OF NGOS AS POLITICAL ACTORS

International NGOs emerged in parallel to the development of the United Nations, and were designed to support the norms and institutions of the post-World War Two era, namely democracy, human rights, and economic development. In 1948, 69 NGOs had formal consultative status at the United Nations and in 2015 their number was over four thousand, with many emphasizing “universal human rights” in their mission statements.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the term “non-governmental” in their names, NGOs often receive substantial support from governmental donors. These governmental funders have facilitated the growth of what is referred to as the “NGO industry,” aiding the organizations in exerting influence on the international stage. NGOs also receive significant amounts of private funding from philanthropists, foundations, and religious institutions (although these too often receive government funding and simply serve as a “pass-through” to NGOs). The scale of funding provided by both governmental and private donors results in many NGOs operating like bureaucratic enterprises. For instance, World Vision (which will be discussed in detail below) has a global annual budget of \$2.8 billion.

Another example is the EU’s primary democracy and human rights program, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). EIDHR grants €160 million annually

<sup>10</sup> Polman, L. *War Games: The Story of Aid and War in Modern Times*. London: Penguin Books, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> “List of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council as of 1 September 2014”. UN Economic and Social Council. 3 December 2014. <http://csonet.org/content/documents/E-2014-INF-5%20Issued.pdf>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

to 900 NGOs involved in 1,200 projects, and in over 100 countries.<sup>12</sup> Other European NGO funding frameworks include ECHO (Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection), the ENP (European Neighbourhood Policy), Partnership for Peace (PFP), and EU delegations and missions located around the world, which each distribute millions of euros annually to civil society.

With this financial support, NGOs are able to exert considerable influence in the media, governmental policy frameworks, and in diplomatic and academic frameworks. The ability of NGOs to influence these bodies is a direct consequence of the widespread perception that NGOs embody core universal ethical values, and the claim to be politically neutral and non-partisan. The “halo-effect” enables these actors to operate with little public scrutiny, despite the many shortcomings that will be discussed. For example, in its mission statement Amnesty International declares that it is “independent of any political ideology, economic interest or religion,”<sup>13</sup> and is therefore often perceived as such with little scrutiny.

Due to this perception, NGO officials – from both human rights and humanitarian aid groups – are often given further open access and freedom of movement in countries, including areas controlled by terrorist organizations. These officials cross borders in war zones as VIPs, at times in the company of their diplomatic sponsors.<sup>14</sup>

In parallel to this rapidly growing number of NGOs around the world, there is a separate yet at times overlapping world of Islamic NGOs and charities, funded through the charitable contributions (Zakat) of Muslims worldwide and by the governments of Muslim states (as well as Western states in some cases).<sup>15</sup>

These Islamic organizations work on various social issues, including education, religious services, healthcare, and more. Those with ties to specific Islamic movements (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) are considered an essential part of their Da’wa efforts (literally “invitation”) – proselytizing other Muslims to join their movements. In many cases, the organizations also serve as stages for political or religious indoctrination. They are viewed as important sources of power and legitimacy in Islamic movements.

Since the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the issue of financial support to terrorist organizations has received attention from global law enforcement and security agencies, as well as from scholars and other policy researchers. Over the past 15 years, there have been many discoveries of Islamic charities based in both Pakistan and the US serving as either unwitting or willing financiers of terrorist organizations.<sup>16</sup> The issue of funding terrorism through charities (as well as through various other channels) is currently a major battle front in the global “war on terror.”

Israel is no exception to this battleground, and in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the State has blacklisted several Islamic charities due to their affiliation with Hamas or other terrorist organizations. In some cases, terrorist organizations infiltrated non-Islamic NGOs, as it allegedly took place in Gaza in the case of World Vision’s Gaza director Mohammad el-Halabi (explained in detail below).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> “Compendium 2007–2010”. EIDHR. [http://www.eidhr.eu/files/dmfile/EUAID\\_EIDHR\\_Compendium\\_LR\\_20110609.pdf](http://www.eidhr.eu/files/dmfile/EUAID_EIDHR_Compendium_LR_20110609.pdf), Accessed on 17 Jan 2016.

<sup>13</sup> “Who we are”. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/who-we-are/>, Accessed on 13 July 2017.

<sup>14</sup> See: Polman. *War Games...*

<sup>15</sup> The obstacles to suppressing radical Islamic terrorist financing, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Passive sponsors of terrorism, 119–120.

<sup>17</sup> “Israel’s UN ambassador rejects request to release worker accused of aiding Hamas”. JNS. 25 August 2016. <http://www.jns.org/news-briefs/2016/8/25/israels-un-ambassador-rejects-request-to-release-worker-accused-of-aiding-amas#.V8VbzZh94dU=>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

In a less direct manner, the evidence shows that some prominent NGOs also act as political participants in these conflicts, acting on behalf of terrorist groups on the basis of ideological affinity. In this ideology, terrorism and violent “resistance” are considered to be legitimate, while anti-terror self-defence is a “war crime.”<sup>18</sup> This type of NGO actors is in the primary focus of this paper.

## NGOS, POST-COLONIAL IDEOLOGY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM

In broad terms, the ideology of post-colonialism is based on the division of the world into “victims” and “aggressors,” with the empowerment of the former and the weakening of the latter as the path to peace and justice. Western capitalist society is identified with the aggressors, while Third World societies (the Global South), even including many dictatorships and terrorist movements, are automatically embraced as perennial victims. Post-colonial agendas are advanced through intense political advocacy in the name of “social justice,” and can even include the use of violence.

The centrality of post-colonial ideology in the NGO sphere is reflected in their publications and advocacy campaigns, which often demonstrate strong support for pre-defined victims.<sup>19</sup> As such, the post-colonial ideologues claim justification for the use of violence, in the form of terror attacks, “resistance”, and heroic “armed struggle,” including attacks against civilian targets. In addition, the implementation of counter-terrorism by states and military forces to defend civilian populations from such attacks is systematically opposed and condemned in different soft-power platforms, such as the UN Human Rights Council, parliamentary bodies in Western democracies, and the media.

The ideological bias is also reflected in the fact that the activities of such NGOs are not universally distributed according to humanitarian needs, but reflect narrow political agendas. These organizations frequently attack Israel, while Hezbollah and Palestinian violations of human rights – including terrorism and internal violence – receive little attention from the NGO community, or are even justified by activists and officials.<sup>20</sup>

The NGO “halo effect” explains the process by which allegations are generally accepted by the media and other actors without question. Groups which are perceived to promote moral principles are protected from investigation, and their claims are taken at face value. As academics studying this phenomenon have noted, “There is a widespread attitude that NGOs consist of altruistic people campaigning in the general public interest.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Steinberg, G. “Postcolonial Ideology and the Arab-Israeli Conflict”. In Bailer, B. (ed), *Israel – Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Vienna: Barumuller, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Steinberg. “Postcolonial Ideology...”.

<sup>20</sup> “Examining Human Rights Watch in 2008: Double Standards and Post-Colonial Ideology”. NGO Monitor. 13 January 2009. [http://www.ngo-monitor.org/article/hrw\\_annual\\_report](http://www.ngo-monitor.org/article/hrw_annual_report), Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Willetts, P. “Introduction”. In Willetts, P. (ed), *“The Conscience of the World”: The Influence of Non-Governmental Organisations in the UN System*. Washington D.C: Brookings University Press, 1996, 11.

## ISLAMIC NGOS WITH TERRORIST LINKS IN THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

The connection between terrorism and Islamic NGOs and charities in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is well known. In particular, a number of prominent cases have come to light in recent years. The organizations involved present themselves as carefully accounting for every dollar spent, yet, most often, neither these organizations nor their financial auditors can trace funds that are spent in war zones and areas controlled by terrorist groups.

For example, in December 2016, Israeli defence minister Avigdor Lieberman outlawed the Turkish NGO Kanadil for allegedly identifying “with Hamas and with the Muslim Brotherhood and in recent years...used as a main pipeline for funding projects by Hamas in Jerusalem.” Kanadil, which was allegedly operating educational and other projects in Jerusalem (its website has since been removed) was also “closely associated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood,” through its director and numerous employees.<sup>22</sup>

There are also cases in which NGOs and their staffs have been directly implicated in support for Hamas and other terrorist groups, such as the case of Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW). IRW has a vast documented history of supporting Hamas. On May 10, 2006, Iyaz Ali, a Pakistani-born British national, admitted to working for the NGO in order to transfer funds and assistance to various Hamas institutions and organizations, which had been banned in Israel.<sup>23</sup> He also admitted to working in Jordan and cooperating with local Hamas operatives. In 2006 the Israeli security forces arrested IRW’s Gaza project coordinator for links to the terrorist group.

In June, 2014, Israel’s Defence Minister signed a decree that banned Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) from operating in Israel and the West Bank, on the basis of its alleged role in funneling money to Hamas. According to news reports, the decision was made after the Israel Security General Security Service (Shin Bet), the coordinator for government activities in the territories (COGAT), and legal authorities provided incriminating information against IRW. The Shin Bet stated that the decision to ban IRW was “based on information that has been accumulated over years, that the fund is a central player in financing of Hamas... [and] on accumulated knowledge and experience in fighting terror and financing of terror organisations.”<sup>24</sup>

Following these accusations of funding terror organizations, IRW submitted an incident report to the UK Charities Commission in June 2014 and began an internal audit.<sup>25</sup> The Commission issued no special advisory regarding donations to IRW; rather, a Charity Commission spokeswoman said that “it was satisfied that the charity was responding appropriately

<sup>22</sup> “Defense minister outlaws Turkish group over Hamas allegations,” Times of Israel. 14 December 2016. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/defense-minister-outlaws-turkish-group-over-hamas-allegations/>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>23</sup> “British national arrested for assisting Hamas.” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 29 May 2006. <http://embasies.gov.il/MFA/FOREIGNPOLICY/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/British%20national%20arrested%20for%20assisting%20Hamas%2029-May-2006.aspx>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Price, M. “Audit ‘clears Islamic Relief’ of terror funding claim”. BBC. 12 December 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-30443693>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Lazareva, I. and Bingham, J. “Islamic Relief turns down Gaza funds after Israeli ban”. *Telegraph*, 3 September 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/11073602/Islamic-Relief-turns-down-Gaza-funds-after-Israeli-ban.html>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

to the incident.”<sup>26</sup> However, In January 2016, the UK-based bank HSBC announced that it was ending all links to IRW, “amid concerns that cash for aid could end up with terrorist groups abroad.”<sup>27</sup>

IRW receives millions of Euros each year from European governments, such as the UK and Switzerland, the EU, Oxfam,<sup>28</sup> UNDP, Catholic Agency for Overseas Development,<sup>29</sup> and the UN.<sup>30</sup>

World Vision similarly has a history of entanglements with terrorist groups and regimes. In the 1980s, the NGO was criticized for cooperating with the Ethiopian government while it was raising money for relief for the famine caused by the very same government.<sup>31</sup>

In August 2016, the head of World Vision’s operations in Gaza, Mohammad el-Halabi, was accused by Israel of diverting approximately 60 percent of World Vision’s Gaza budget to Hamas<sup>32</sup> to build tunnels and fund other terrorist activity. The siphoned funds amounted to approximately \$50 million.<sup>33</sup> El-Halabi hijacked World Vision funds by creating humanitarian projects<sup>34</sup> and fictitious agricultural associations to act as a cover for the transfer of monies and materials to Hamas. El-Halabi had previously worked for the United Nations Development Agency (UNDP), before being accepted by World Vision.<sup>35</sup> His indictment stated that he had been trained and planted by Hamas for this task “creating fictitious humanitarian projects and doctoring inflated receipts in order to get the funds to Hamas.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Birkwood, S. “Islamic Relief stops taking DEC donations during internal investigation into allegations by Israel of links to Hamas”. Third Sector. 1 September 2014. <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/islamic-relief-stops-taking-dec-donations-during-internal-investigation-allegations-israel-links-hamas/governance/article/1310143>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>27</sup> “HSBC cuts ties with UK Islamic charity over ‘terror’ fears”. The Economic Times. 3 January 2016. [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-01-03/news/69486378\\_1\\_hsbc-dfid-charity](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-01-03/news/69486378_1_hsbc-dfid-charity), Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>28</sup> “Oxfam International”. NGO Monitor. 24 August 2014. <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/ngos/oxfam/>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

<sup>29</sup> “Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)”. NGO Monitor. 13 May 2015. [http://www.ngo-monitor.org/funder/catholic\\_agency\\_for\\_overseas\\_development\\_cafod\\_/](http://www.ngo-monitor.org/funder/catholic_agency_for_overseas_development_cafod_/), Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>30</sup> “United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)”. NGO Monitor. 4 May 2016. [http://www.ngo-monitor.org/funder/united\\_nations\\_office\\_for\\_the\\_coordination\\_of\\_humanitarian\\_affairs\\_ocha\\_/](http://www.ngo-monitor.org/funder/united_nations_office_for_the_coordination_of_humanitarian_affairs_ocha_/), Accessed on 30 July 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Clay, J. W. “Ethiopian Famine and the Relief Agencies”. In Nichols, B. and Loescher, G. (eds), *The Moral Nation*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989, 239., cited by Van Zile, D. “World Vision: Strategies for Fund-Raising and Support for Hamas”. JCPA. 1 March 2015. <http://jcpa.org/article/world-vision-strategies-fund-raising-hamas/>, Accessed on 30 July 2017.

<sup>32</sup> “MFA Dir-Gen Gold’s letter following the arrest of the director of the Gaza branch of World Vision”. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 4 August 2016. <http://www.israelemb.org/washington/NewsAndEvents/Pages/MFA-Dir-Gen-Gold%E2%80%99s-letter-following-the-arrest-of-the-director-of-the-Gaza-branch-of-World-Vision-4-August-2016.aspx>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Goldenberg, T. and Cheslow, D. “Israel: World Vision manager in Gaza funneled money to Hamas”. *Business Insider*, <http://www.businessinsider.com/ap-israel-world-vision-manager-in-gaza-funneled-money-to-hamas-2016-8>. accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>34</sup> “Behind the Headlines: Hamas exploitation of World Vision in Gaza to support terrorism”. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 4 August 2016. <http://www.humanrightsvoices.org/assets/attachments/documents/israel.mfa.world.vision.docx>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Neuer, H. C. “The aid workers aiding Hamas”. UnWatch. 19 August 2016. <http://www.unwatch.org/un-watch-op-ed-jerusalem-report-aid-workers-aiding-hamas/>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Goldenberg and Cheslow. “Israel: World Vision manager...”.

The examples of IRW and World Vision are not unique. The Palestinian Relief and Development Fund (also known as Interpal) is a well-established UK charity (enjoying the support of prominent Labour politicians, including Jeremy Corbyn<sup>37</sup>) and has been a principal organization hiding the flow of money to Hamas. It was designated a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” organization by the United States in 2003, for its links to Hamas.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the US Treasury Department refers to Interpal as “the funding coordinator of Hamas.” A 2002 Israeli investigation found that each of Interpal’s ‘local partner’ charities within the Palestinian territories was “affiliated with Hamas or works on its behalf, not only with regard to humanitarian issues but as part of its terrorism-supporting apparatus.”<sup>39</sup> Interpal is also a member of the Union of Good, an internationally recognized network of charities that fund Hamas.<sup>40</sup>

Despite this, Interpal was cleared by the UK Commission after a number of investigations, claiming that “the Commission was satisfied that the Charity had put in place a number of procedures to take account of and address the failings identified by the inquiry which required rectification.”<sup>41</sup> The clearance allows the British government to provide funds to the organization.

The British government’s decision is, however, subject to ongoing criticism and debate. Following an April 2016 Interpal-funded event in Gaza which featured Palestinian children simulating terrorist attacks against Israeli soldiers and praising stabbing attacks, MPs demanded an additional investigation into the NGO’s activities. In response, the Charity Commission stated that it is “aware about concerns about the contents of this video” and that they “are assessing the material as a matter of priority before deciding what regulatory action may be required.”<sup>42</sup>

Another member of the UK-based Union of Good, the Human Relief Foundation (HRF), was also banned for its ties to Hamas.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, HRF listed Qatar Charity as one of its “institutional supporters,” which was a group named by Osama bin-Laden as a financier of al-Qaeda.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Wallis-Simmons, J. “Sickening footage of Palestinian children pretending to stab Jews exposes ‘festival of hate’ funded by Jeremy Corbyn’s pet charity as Labour anti-Semitism row deepens”. Daily Mail. 28 April 2016. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3561337/As-Labour-anti-Semitism-row-deepens-revealed-Jeremy-Corbyn-s-pet-charity-funded-Palestinian-festival-hate-children-dressed-terrorists-acted-murdering-Jews.html>, Accessed on 30 July 2017.

<sup>38</sup> “Interpal/The Palestinian Relief and Development Fund”. U.S. Department of the Treasury. 5 April 2016. [https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/terrorist-illicit-finance/Pages/protecting-charities\\_execorder\\_13224-i.aspx#interpal](https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/terrorist-illicit-finance/Pages/protecting-charities_execorder_13224-i.aspx#interpal), Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Westrop, S. “Supporting our Own Demise: Part 1”. Gatestone Institute. 7 January 2013. <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3514/terror-finance>, Accessed on 30 July 2017.

<sup>40</sup> “The Union of Good – Analysis and Mapping of Terror Funds Network”. Israeli Security Agency. [https://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/TerrorInfo/coalition\\_en.pdf](https://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/TerrorInfo/coalition_en.pdf), Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>41</sup> “Inquiry Report: Palestinians Relief and Development Fund (Interpal)”. Charity Commission. 1 June 2012. [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140505102719/http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/interpal\\_supplementary.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140505102719/http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Library/interpal_supplementary.pdf), Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Wallis-Simmons. “Sickening footage...”.

<sup>43</sup> “Defense Minister signs order banning Hamas-affiliated charitable organizations”. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 7 July 2008. <http://www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=39861>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>44</sup> “Who We Are”. Human Relief Foundation. <http://web.archive.org/web/20151020065629/http://www.hrf.org.uk/who-we-are#5>. accessed on 1 August 2017.

Medical Aid for Palestinians is another British organization with ties to terrorist groups. The organization receives financial support from the European Union, the UK, Ireland, and others. In 2015, IRW provided MAP with funding. In the past, MAP has also transferred funds to the Al-Ihsan Charitable Society, *designated* by the US Treasury Department in 2005 as a “charitable front for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad ... [Al-Ihsan] masquerades as a charity, while actually helping to finance Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s acts of terror against the Israeli people and other innocents.”<sup>45</sup>

MAP also partnered with the Islah Charitable Society (ICS) and the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), which have ties to Hamas and the PFLP respectively. ICS founder Jamal Muhammed Tawil is allegedly a member of Hamas and was arrested in 2002 for his role in planning bombing attacks against Israeli civilians.<sup>46</sup> According to two former Treasury Department terrorism experts, ICS has been used as a conduit for funneling money to Hamas for various purposes, including financial aid to the families of suicide bombers.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, the Turkish IHH (Insani Yardim Vakfi) also poses as a humanitarian aid organization and was the central backer of the May 2010 flotilla to Gaza, where participants attacked Israeli naval commandoes. Several Israeli soldiers were wounded and 8 Turkish and one Turkish-American activists were killed during the incident. The IHH has been designated by Israel as an “unlawful association” in 2008 due to its membership in the Union of the Good. According to the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), during the 2002 Jenin counter-terrorist operation, the Union of the Good transferred money, via Hamas charities, to families of suicide bombers.<sup>48</sup> In 2012 it was officially classified as a “terrorist organization” by the Israeli Ministry of Defence.

Furthermore, according to a paper published by the Danish Institute for International Studies, the Turkish authorities began investigating IHH in 1997, after receiving information that “leaders of IHH were purchasing automatic weapons from other regional Islamic militant groups.” A Turkish raid on the organization’s offices found weapons, explosives, and instructions for making IEDs.<sup>49</sup> The Danish researchers also cite the investigation into IHH by French counter-terrorism magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguiere, which disclosed that IHH maintained contact with al-Qaeda in Milan and Algerian terrorists in Europe; recruited militants for fighting in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan; and played a “central role” in the al-Qaida bomb plot targeting LAX airport.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Roy, S. *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*. Princeton University Press, Kindle Edition, 140.

<sup>46</sup> “Operation for the confiscation of terror funds-Background,” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 26 February 2004. <https://israelforeignaffairs.com/2015/10/operation-for-the-confiscation-of-terror-funds-background/>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

<sup>47</sup> For a broader analysis of the connections between Islah Charitable Society, Jamal Tawil and Hamas, see Levitt, M. *Hamas: Politics, Charity and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*. Yale University Press, 2006. and Gurule, J. *Unfunding Terror: The Legal Response to the Financing of Global Terrorism*. Northampton: Edwar Elgar Publishing, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> “IHH, which plays a central role in organizing the flotilla to the Gaza Strip, is a Turkish humanitarian relief fund with a radical Islamic anti-Western orientation”. ITIC. 27 May 2010. <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/article/18108>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Kohlmann, E. F. “The Role of Islamic Charities in International Terrorist Recruitment and Financing,” *DIIS Working Paper 2006/7*. 10–11. [http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/67462/DIIS\\_WP\\_2006\\_7.web.pdf](http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/67462/DIIS_WP_2006_7.web.pdf), Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Kohlmann. “The Role of Islamic Charities...”. 10–11.

As these multiple and diverse examples demonstrate, the links between Islamic NGOs and terrorist groups are widespread and significant. In all likelihood, there are many more of such links that have yet to be uncovered.

## POLITICAL NGOS AS A LEGITIMATE FRONT FOR TERRORIST GROUPS

In a different but parallel process, some (including non-Islamic) terror organizations have established “soft power” branches, creating or co-opting NGOs to serve as source for ideological and practical legitimacy, recruitment, and fundraising. Through the creation of civil society frameworks, these groups can freely operate and legally receive funds from donors, including governments.

The NGO ties to terrorist groups range from establishment and operation of NGOs by the organization itself to NGO officials and staffers being convicted of terrorism. Specifically, as it will be demonstrated in detail below, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) has a network of at least eight European-funded NGOs with various degrees of connections to it.<sup>51</sup>

Founded by George Habash in 1967, the PFLP is a secular Palestinian Marxist-Leninist organization, originally supported by the former Soviet Union and China. PFLP members have carried out numerous terrorist acts since its founding, being the first Palestinian organization to hijack planes in the 1960s and 1970s. Most notably, the group was responsible for the assassination of Israeli Minister of Tourism Rechavam Ze’evi in 2001, and its members joined the Baader-Meinhof Gang (a West German radical group) to hijack a Tel Aviv-bound Air France flight in 1976, landing it in Entebbe, Uganda. It is also responsible for suicide bombings in Israel, and its members took credit for the house invasion and murder of the Fogel family in 2011 and the massacre at a synagogue in Jerusalem’s Har Nof neighborhood in 2014. The PFLP is classified a terrorist organization by the US, EU, Canada, and Israel. Today, the organization reportedly receives support from the Syrian and Iranian governments.<sup>52</sup>

The network of PFLP linked NGOs receiving funding from European governments and international frameworks includes Addameer, Al-Haq, Alternative Information Centre (AIC), Defence for Children International – Palestine (DCI-P), Health Work Committee (HWC), Stop the Wall, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), and the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC).<sup>53</sup> Government donors to these NGOs include the EU, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Norway, Ireland, UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the United Nations.<sup>54</sup>

Addameer, an official PFLP “affiliate” is led by two individuals with clear ties to the PFLP.<sup>55</sup> Khalida Jarrar, Addameer’s vice-chairperson, is a senior PFLP official.<sup>56</sup> On April 15, 2015 she was indicted for various offenses, including active membership in a terrorist

<sup>51</sup> “The European-Funded NGO PFLP Network”. NGO Monitor. 14 November 2016. 1. <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/nm/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/PFLP-Report-English.pdf>, Accessed on 20 July 2017.

<sup>52</sup> “The European-Funded NGO PFLP Network,” 1.

<sup>53</sup> “The European-Funded NGO PFLP Network,” 1.

<sup>54</sup> “The European-Funded NGO PFLP Network,” 1.

<sup>55</sup> “About”. Fatah Official Website. 2 December 2012. (Arabic) [http://www.fatehorg.ps/index.php?action=show\\_page&ID=11455&lang=ar](http://www.fatehorg.ps/index.php?action=show_page&ID=11455&lang=ar), Accessed on 29 March 2017.

<sup>56</sup> “Board & General Assembly”. Addameer. <http://www.addameer.org/about/board-general-assembly>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

organization and inciting violence through a call to kidnap Israeli soldiers.<sup>57</sup> Jarrar accepted a plea bargain and, according to reports, was convicted on “one count of belonging to an illegal organization and another of incitement.”<sup>58</sup> She received a 15-month prison sentence with an additional 10-month suspended sentence. Jarrar was released from prison on June 3, 2016.<sup>59</sup>

Addameer’s chairperson and co-founder, Abdul-latif Ghaith, was banned by Israel from travelling internationally and from entering the West Bank from 2011 to 2015.<sup>60</sup> Abdul-latif Ghaith was described in an article posted by Miftah (another Palestinian NGO) as a representative of the PFLP.<sup>61</sup> Several other staff members of Addameer have alleged ties to the PFLP, and some have been convicted for various offenses.

One of the most prominent Palestinian human rights NGOs, Al-Haq, is another example of an organization with ties to the PFLP. Al-Haq is a member of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Habitat International Coalition (HIC), and the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO).<sup>62</sup>

Al-Haq’s general director, Shawan Jabarin, has alleged ties to the terrorist organization PFLP and has been denied exit visas by Israel and Jordan. According to a 1995 Israeli submission to the UN,<sup>63</sup> Jabarin was convicted in 1985 for recruiting members for the PFLP. He was also found guilty of arranging PFLP training outside Israel and was sentenced to 24-months imprisonment by Israeli courts, of which he served nine. In 1994, Jabarin was again arrested for alleged links and placed in administrative detention for six months.<sup>64</sup> An Israeli statement to the UN notes that he “had not discontinued his terrorist involvement and maintains his position in the leadership of the PFLP.”<sup>65</sup>

In 2007, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected Jabarin’s appeal to go abroad stating that, *“The objections by security forces are all rooted in security concerns based on classified information, showing that the petitioner is a senior activist in the PFLP terrorist group.... the current petitioner is apparently acting as a manner of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde, acting some of the time as the CEO of a human rights organization, and at other times*

<sup>57</sup> “An indictment against a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council”. Military Prosecution. 15 April 2015. (Hebrew)<http://www.law.idf.il/163-7238-he/Patzar.aspx>, Accessed on 30 July 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Khoury, J. “Military Court Hands Palestinian Lawmaker Khalida Jarrar 15-month Jail Sentence”. Haaretz. 7 December 2015. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.690481>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>59</sup> “Khalida Jarrar Solidarity Campaign: Free Khalida Jarrar!” Samidoun. 3 June 2016. <http://samidoun.net/khalidajarrar/>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>60</sup> “Prisoner rights leader Abdul Latif Ghaith banned from entering the West Bank or leaving Palestine”. Samidoun. 4 October 2014. <http://samidoun.ca/2014/10/prisoner-rights-leader-abdul-latif-ghaith-banned-from-entering-the-west-bank-or-leaving-palestine/>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

<sup>61</sup> “Starving for Justice”. MIFTAH. 7 July 2004. <http://www.miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=4181&CategoryId=11>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

<sup>62</sup> “About Alhaq”. Al-Haq. <http://www.alhaq.org/about-al-haq/about-al-haq>, Accessed on 30 July 2017.

<sup>63</sup> “Question Of The Human Rights Of All Persons Subjected To Any Form Of Detention Or Imprisonment”. United Nations, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. 18 November 1994. <http://web.archive.org/web/20090129205347/http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/85255db800470aa485255d8b004e349a/4f4e2d2311ab624485256c53006afa92!OpenDocument>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

<sup>64</sup> “Question Of The Human Rights...”.

<sup>65</sup> “Question Of The Human Rights...”.

as an activist in a terror organization which has not shied away from murder and attempted murder, which have nothing to do with rights.”<sup>66</sup>

In 2009, Jabarin was again prohibited by the Israeli authorities from travelling abroad. Jabarin appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court which rejected his appeal, stating, “We found that the material pointing to the petitioner’s involvement in the activity of terrorist entities is concrete and reliable material. We also found that additional negative material concerning the petitioner has been added even after his previous petition was rejected.”<sup>67</sup>

In addition to his role at Al-Haq, Shawan Jabarin is the Secretary General of International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and is on the Middle East Advisory Board of Human Rights Watch (HRW).<sup>68</sup>

In an even more direct example, The Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) describes itself as a “non-profit organization by a group of volunteers and agronomists.”<sup>69</sup> It was founded in 1968 by members of PFLP<sup>70</sup> and is an official PFLP “affiliate.”<sup>71</sup> USAID identifies UAWC as the “agricultural arm” of the PFLP.<sup>72</sup>

UAWC clearly demonstrated its links to the PFLP by hosting “a solidarity day with the Secretary General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Ahmed Saadat.”<sup>73</sup> The “solidarity day” featured Muhammad Bakri, executive director of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees in Gaza, and celebrated “the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze’evi” (an attack committed by the PFLP). The issue of foreign government funding (via World Vision Australia) to UAWC and its links to the PFLP was highlighted by the Israeli NGO Shurat HaDin, which submitted a report on the matter to the Australian government.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>66</sup> “Unofficial translation by NGO Monitor”. NGO Monitor. 17 August 2016. [http://www.ngo-monitor.org/nm/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Jabarin-2007-decision-translation\\_NGO-Monitor-aug2016.pdf](http://www.ngo-monitor.org/nm/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Jabarin-2007-decision-translation_NGO-Monitor-aug2016.pdf), Accessed on 31 July 2017.

<sup>67</sup> “Shawan Ghatab Abdallah Jabarin vs. IDF commander in the West Bank”. HCJ 1520/09. 10 March 2009. (Hebrew) [http://www.ruling.co.il/%D7%91%D7%92%22%D7%A5-1520-09-%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%90%D7%9F-%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%AA%D7%91-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%93%D7%90%D7%9C%D7%9C%D7%94-%D7%92%27%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9F-%D7%A0-%D7%9E%D7%A4%D7%A7%D7%93-%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%97...\\_ce434187-a228-6fc9-6ae6-de025d3f4559](http://www.ruling.co.il/%D7%91%D7%92%22%D7%A5-1520-09-%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%90%D7%9F-%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%AA%D7%91-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%93%D7%90%D7%9C%D7%9C%D7%94-%D7%92%27%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9F-%D7%A0-%D7%9E%D7%A4%D7%A7%D7%93-%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%97..._ce434187-a228-6fc9-6ae6-de025d3f4559), Accessed on 20 July 2017.

<sup>68</sup> “Shawan Jabarin Elected as Secretary General of FIDH”. Al-Haq. 29 August 2016. <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/topics/human-rights-defenders/1067-shawan-jabarin-elected-secretary-general-of-fidh>, Accessed on 1 August 2017.

<sup>69</sup> “About”. Union of Agricultural Work Committees. (Arabic) <http://uawc-pal.org/UAWCAbout>, Accessed on 29 March 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Robinson, G. E. *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1997..

<sup>71</sup> “About”. Fatah Official Website. 2 December 2012.

<sup>72</sup> “Palestinian Institutional Configurations in the West Bank and Gaza Under Four Autonomy Scenarios”. Democratic Institutions Support Project. May 1993. [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNABY769.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNABY769.pdf), Accessed on 29 July 2017.

<sup>73</sup> “Union of Agricultural Work Committees in a day of solidarity with prisoners and farmers”. Sama News. 16 October 2010. (Arabic) <http://samanews.com/ar/post/78928/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%89-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%86>, Accessed on 30 July 2017.

<sup>74</sup> “Alleged breach of anti-terror law by World Vision Australia”. Shurat HaDin. 29 March 2012. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/110665551/Alleged-breach-of-anti-terror-law-by-World-Vision-Australia-Detailed-Evidence>, Accessed on 30 July 2017.

While these NGO activists rarely committed violent acts of terrorism themselves, they serve an important role for terror organizations. Indeed, the mentioned NGOs provide a veneer of legitimacy for the PFLP, allowing it to influence both Palestinian society, through its public programs (in agriculture, health, etc.) and the global arena through the international activism of these NGOs.

## OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The relations between Islamic NGOs and terrorist organizations are a well know issue. Governments, law enforcement agencies, and academics have recognized it as an essential battleground in the fight in countering terrorist activities and have accordingly given it much attention.

The case of clearly partisan and political NGOs, such as Al-Haq and Addameer, which have visible connections to terrorism, is more complex and less explored. This paper has attempted to shed light on the phenomenon of Israeli and Palestinian organizations that receive international government support and have ties to terrorist organizations. This financial support provides the NGOs with legitimacy to continue operating despite their terrorist connections. The fact that NGOs are headed by individuals with terrorist backgrounds, and/or individuals involved in supporting terrorist activities, as reflected in the “Jekyll and Hyde” comment of the Israeli High Court, does not appear to gain much attention from government donors.

The willingness of government funders to ignore these terrorist ties is either based on the premise that “one man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” or justified as a necessary evil – part of the cost of doing business in conflict zones. In addressing the Israeli charges against World Vision and other NGOs related to assisting Hamas, Michael Sfar, a prominent Israeli NGO activist and lawyer, declared: “Even the best-organised operations have no choice but to operate in a grey zone in Gaza.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, the objective of assisting poor people who live in a region controlled by terrorists, as in Gaza, is used to justify operating in “grey zones,” where funds and resources are regularly siphoned off and NGO officials also participate in terrorism.

Despite the apparent justification for these NGO ties, the decade and a half since September 2001 has demonstrated that ignoring the financing of those with direct or indirect ties to terrorism holds many perils. With the danger of global terrorism reaching new heights, it is imperative that mistakes not be repeated. European government funders must re-examine the funding for NGOs with PFLP ties, as well as of those with Hamas ties, if they do not want to be implicated in supporting, even indirectly, violent crimes.

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<sup>75</sup> “Alms for the Enemy”. *The Economist*. 20 August 2016. <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21705357-allowing-humanitarian-aid-risks-having-it-diverted-hamas-alms-enemy>, Accessed on 30 July 2017.

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