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Hamas Is a Threat to Peace, Despite Propaganda Claims

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Criticism of Israel's May 31 interception of an "aid" flotilla has prompted a misguided call from the European Union for "an urgent and fundamental change of policy" to allow for the unconditional opening of Gaza border crossings.¹ This criticism directly contradicts the EU's designation of Hamas as a proscribed terrorist organization and represents a *de facto* legitimization of Hamas, which violently seized power in Gaza in 2007 and remains implacably committed to the destruction of Israel.

By taking this action in response to a provocative propaganda campaign, the EU would boost Hamas and damage the long-term prospects for peace by making it easier for Hamas to acquire arms for its next war against Israel. Such a policy change would also undermine Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in his struggle against Hamas and undercut the diplomatic strategy of the Quartet (United States, Russia, United Nations, and EU), which is pledged to isolate Hamas so long as Hamas refuses the Quartet's three principles for engagement—(1) renunciation of violence, (2) recognition of Israel, and (3) acceptance of previous peace agreements.

Terrorism as Hamas's Weapon of Choice. Given Hamas's history of building up huge stockpiles of arms—including increasingly sophisticated rockets shipped from Iran—smuggled in from the sea and across the border with Egypt, Israel has good reason to maintain a blockade. The blockade prevents Hamas from rearming itself with devastating weapons to use against Israel.

If the EU persists in pressing for the unconditional opening of border crossings and the end of

the arms embargo, then it will become an accomplice to Israel's enemies, including Hamas, Iran, and the Turkish Islamists on board the *Mavi Marmara* who attacked an Israeli boarding party to precipitate the crisis. Ending the arms embargo would inevitably allow Hamas to build up for another spasm of rocket terrorism that would threaten Israeli and Palestinian civilians, ignite another war, and destroy the prospects for reviving peace negotiations.

Israel has the legal right to impose a blockade on Gaza because it is at war with Hamas. Although some have suggested that the Israeli navy should be replaced with a U.N. or NATO naval presence, such a move would be impractical and unacceptable to Israel. The U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon has failed to prevent the rearmament of Hezbollah following its 2006 war against Israel, and NATO naval forces are already stretched thin by deployments in the Persian Gulf, anti-terrorist missions, and escorting ships threatened by Somali pirates.

Ensuring Aid and Comfort Does Not Reach Hamas. The EU designates groups as "foreign terrorist organizations" in order to freeze the assets of designated individuals and groups, thereby restricting the financing of terrorism. Such a designation also restricts access and support for

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terrorism from citizens within the designating jurisdiction. However, in a devastating report, the TaxPayers' Alliance, a British-based think tank, found that bilateral British and EU assistance was being used to fund hate education in Gaza and the West Bank.² It found that EU-funded textbooks promoted martyrdom and, further, that EU aid for essential services had freed up resources for Hamas to enhance its military capability. Even with special mechanisms designed to target aid directly to Palestinians, there is still great risk in providing large amounts of international aid to Gaza.

As the biggest aid donor to the Palestinians, the EU should coordinate its work with Washington, which remains the leading foreign power in the region and the indispensable force for peace. EU and U.S. policies should be aimed at further isolating Hamas. Unless Hamas renounces violence and recognizes Israel, the EU and the U.S. should not establish diplomatic contacts with that organization or take any action that could help it advance its extremist Islamist agenda at the expense of Israel, Egypt, or the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas and its policies are the root cause of Gaza's plight—not Israel. The border crossings were open and heavily used before Hamas turned Gaza into a base for terrorism. Although the Obama Administration has lost sight of this fact as it backpedals away from Israel, Congress should keep this in mind as it considers the Administration's request for \$400 million in humanitarian aid for Gaza. Congress should also closely examine the Administration's plans for Gaza aid and determine whether aid is really needed on such a huge scale.

Congress also needs to take action to scrutinize the Administration's aid plans to make sure that there is absolutely no chance that funds provided by American taxpayers end up being pocketed by members of terrorist groups—a development that would violate Section 301c of the Foreign Assis-

tance Act. Both houses of Congress should hold hearings and exercise their oversight powers to make sure that all aid to the Palestinians is dispensed via closely vetted non-governmental organizations, not through corrupt U.N. bodies operating at cross-purposes with U.S. foreign policy goals.³

Recommendations. Despite the reflexive impulse to “fix” the suffering in Gaza, the EU and U.S. must remain clearheaded about how to proceed. Specifically:

- As a member of the Quartet, the EU should refuse to engage Hamas until it has fulfilled the three criteria announced in 2006;
- Hamas must remain a proscribed terrorist organization on both the U.S. and EU lists;
- The EU and U.S. should support Israel's right to maintain the blockade of Gaza; and
- The EU and U.S. should stand behind Israeli calls for the release of Gilad Shalit, who was kidnapped by Hamas almost four years ago.

Hamas: The Main Obstacle to Peace. The main obstacle to peace in the Middle East is not Israel but Hamas. The EU and U.S. should remain sensitive to Israeli security concerns and stand alongside Jerusalem in facing down the terrorist threat posed by Hamas. A lasting peace between Israeli and the Palestinians is possible only after Hamas has been defeated and its harsh ideology is discredited. If the EU is serious about improving the welfare of Palestinians, it should help them liberate themselves from Hamas's brutal rule.

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1. Council of the European Union, “Council Conclusions on Gaza,” 3023rd Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Luxembourg, June 14, 2010, at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/115158.pdf (June 16, 2010).
2. TaxPayers' Alliance, “Funding Hate Education,” January 7, 2008, at http://tpa.typepad.com/home/files/funding_hate_proof6_cors.pdf (June 16, 2010).
3. James Phillips, “The Gaza Aid Package: Time to Rethink U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Palestinians,” Heritage Foundation WebMemo No. 2333, March 9, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/03/The-Gaza-Aid-Package-Time-to-Rethink-US-Foreign-Assistance-to-the-Palestinians>.