

# Following the Hamas Money Trail

We've heard the endless cries of "Free Palestine!" in recent weeks, but there's a variation on this theme that hits the nail on the head: "Free Palestine from Hamas!"

It is true that the people of Gaza elected Hamas in 2006 and that, according to polling over the years, they continue to support Hamas.

At the same time, they did not have a wide range of choices when they voted. As noted on , "The election saw a political split between the secular Fatah (a branch of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)) that dominated the PLO since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and the Islamist Hamas that formed in 1987 as an offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood."

So, it was Fatah (part of the PLO) vs. Hamas, the more secular vs. the more religious, with neither one being a true peace partner with Israel. And in the end, Hamas only garnered 44% of the vote but gained a majority of legislative seats, from which point it took over the government.

Either way, however they came to power, their leadership has decimated Gaza and brought about great suffering on the populace, all while the leaders enrich themselves and countless hundreds of millions of dollars pour into anti-Israeli terrorist efforts.

As the New York Post reported this week, "While their people languish in poverty and are treated as human shields, the leaders of Hamas live billionaire lifestyles.

"The terror group's three top leaders alone are worth a staggering \$11 billion between them and enjoy a life of luxury in the sanctuary of the emirate of Qatar."

Not only so, but back in 2012, the Gatestone Institute noted that “according to an investigative report published in the pan-Arab newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat, there are at least 600 millionaires living in the Gaza Strip. The newspaper report also refutes the claim that the Gaza Strip has been facing a humanitarian crisis because of an Israeli blockade.”

Yes, “The Palestinian millionaires, according to the report, have made their wealth thanks to the hundreds of underground tunnels along the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.”

“Informed Palestinian sources revealed that every day, in addition to weapons, thousands of tons of fuel, medicine, various types of merchandise, vehicles, electrical appliances, drugs, medicine and cigarettes are smuggled into the Gaza Strip through more than 400 tunnels. A former Sudanese government official who visited the Gaza Strip lately was quoted as saying that he found basic goods that were not available in Sudan. Almost all the tunnels are controlled by the Hamas government, which has established a special commission to oversee the smuggling business, which makes the Hamas government the biggest benefactor of the smuggling industry.”

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Speaking of those tunnels, reports indicate that there are 300 miles of tunnels underneath Gaza to the point that Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant stated that, “Gaza is the largest terror base built by mankind, ever—the entire city is one big terror base.” And who can calculate the amount of money that has been spent on weaponry?

According to the Times of Israel, “As the residents of the Gaza Strip endure daily hardships due to the dire economic situation in the enclave, their Hamas leaders spend over \$100

million a year on the group's military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, according to estimates by both Israeli and Palestinian sources. Spending on digging tunnels accounts for some \$40 million of that annual sum."

NBC News reported that, "The unemployment rate in Gaza is 47% and more than 80% of its population lives in poverty, according to the United Nations. Hamas, however, has funded an armed force of thousands equipped with rockets and drones and built a vast web of tunnels under Gaza. Estimates of its annual military budget range from \$100 million to \$350 million, according to Israeli and Palestinian sources."

Not only so, but it is claimed that, "Hamas' leadership has invested its income in an international investment portfolio worth \$500 million in real estate and other assets from companies in Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, which it uses to conceal and launder its money, according to a Treasury announcement."

The Guardian notes that, "The World Food Programme estimates that in normal times, more than 60% of Gaza's population faces food insecurity."

And a report on the BESA (The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies), states that "the electricity infrastructure in Gaza is in deplorable condition. The population of Gaza receives an average of four hours per day of continuous electricity supply from the main grid. Much of this is due to the dilapidated electricity infrastructure in Gaza that was damaged during Operation Protective Edge in 2014. Though large sums in foreign aid were delivered to Hamas specifically to reconstruct the grid, Hamas has diverted the funds elsewhere and left the grid in its current condition."

So, to sum this up, Hamas leaders enrich themselves to obscene proportions while hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on terror tunnels and weaponry rather than on improving the

lifestyle of the people. They, in turn, struggle to make ends meet, with unemployment at 47 percent and more than 80% living in poverty and with roughly four hours per day of continuous electricity.

And I haven't said a word about the oppressive Sharia-related policies of Hamas. Just the money trail is enough to modify that ubiquitous chant. So, "Free Palestine" indeed—from Hamas.  
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