

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

February 16, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2202 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is conducting oversight of the Biden Administration's decision to restore U.S. funding to the United Nation's Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in 2021. According to a recent report, at least twelve UNRWA staff participated in the October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attacks and hostage kidnappings against Israel or in their aftermath.¹ And more recently, reports have emerged of a Hamas compound located under a UNRWA building in Gaza City, so connected as to utilize the same source of electricity.² The deeply concerning allegations surrounding UNRWA staff include participation in the kidnapping of Israelis and foreign nationals visiting or residing in Israel, procuring weapons or coordinating logistics for Hamas, and participating in the murder of civilians at a kibbutz.³ The United States and, to date, 11 other nations⁴ have now suspended payments to UNRWA while the United Nations investigates the reports.⁵ But the Administration had originally restored UNRWA's funding in 2021 even amidst mounting evidence that UNRWA has close ties to terror groups. The latest revelations of UNRWA's ties to terror groups warrant greater scrutiny of the Biden Administration's decision in April 2021 to partner with the agency.⁶ Therefore, the Committee seeks documents and information regarding the Biden Administration's decision to renew funding for UNRWA in 2021.

An intelligence report assesses that UNRWA is enmeshed with terrorist organizations, most notably Hamas, that carry out suicide bombings, indiscriminate rocket attacks, and use

¹ Barak Ravid, *Eight countries join U.S. in pausing funding to UN aid agency in Gaza*, AXIOS (Jan. 27, 2024).

² Dov Lieber, David Luhnnow, *Hamas Military Compound Found Beneath U.N. Agency Headquarters in Gaza*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Feb. 10, 2024).

³ Carrie Kell-Lynn, David Luhnnow, *Intelligence Reveals Details of U.N. Agency Staff's Links to Oct. 7 Attack*, The Wall Street Journal (Jan. 29, 2024).

⁴ Adam Taylor, *UNRWA funding pauses come amid uncertainty over Gaza aid future*, WASHINGTON POST (Feb. 1, 2024).

⁵ Press Release, U.S. Dep't of State, *Statement on UNRWA Allegations* (Jan. 26, 2024).

⁶ Barak Ravid, *Biden reverses Trump's aid cuts to Palestinians, including to UNRWA*, AXIOS (Apr. 7, 2021).

civilians as human shields.⁷ Hamas has been designated a terrorist organization by the United States since 1997.⁸ The attacks on October 7, 2023, in Israel that killed 1,200 people and led to the kidnappings of 200 others reiterated that, like ISIS and Al Qaeda, Hamas is a terrorist organization.⁹ Israeli intelligence estimates that around ten percent of UNRWA's staff have links to Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad, twenty three percent of its male employees have ties to Hamas, and nearly half of all its employees have close relatives with official ties to militant groups.¹⁰ Israeli intelligence further links cell phone data to six UNRWA staff in Israel on October 7, 2023, and one at a kibbutz where ninety seven people were murdered.¹¹ Other UNRWA staff surveilled in Gaza discussed their involvement in the attacks, while others received text messages ordering them to gather weapons and prepare to attack.¹²

In addition to participating in the terrorist attacks, the dossier reveals that UNRWA employees held hostages captive, agency vehicles were used to ferry terrorists across Israel's border, weapons for Hamas have been stored in agency buildings, Hamas tunnels run under UNRWA facilities, and UNRWA staff tried to conceal Hamas' theft of fuel, medicine, and humanitarian aid.¹³ Just days ago, a Hamas military complex, that drew its electricity from the U.N.'s power source, was discovered directly beneath UNRWA's location in Gaza City.¹⁴ According to Israeli officials, there is no way that U.N. officials were not aware of the terror compound, either because of the construction activity to build it, or because of the jump in power usage.¹⁵ Seven of the twelve identified participants were teachers at the agency.¹⁶ Interviews with a freed hostage corroborated these allegations and UNRWA tried to suppress the report that one of its teachers starved the Israeli hostage.¹⁷ The agency's teachers have openly used social media to praise Hamas for the October 7 attacks¹⁸ and a group of 3,000 teachers celebrated the attacks in an UNRWA-affiliated group chat.¹⁹ One of the posts in that group said that more than thirty of his "[b]rothers and friends" have become martyrs since October 7.²⁰ These sorts of inflammatory social media posts have been common by UNRWA staff for years. In 2015, social media posts from agency staff were documented encouraging the stabbing of Israelis, promoting

⁷ *Supra*, n.3.

⁸ Press Release, U.S. Dep't of the Treasury, *Following Terrorist Attack on Israel Treasury Sanctions Hamas Operatives and Financial Facilitators* (Oct. 18, 2023).

⁹ Anna Schecter, Raf Sanchez, *U.N. workers played a direct role in Oct. 7 Hamas attack, Israeli intelligence says*, NBC NEWS (Jan. 29, 2024).

¹⁰ *Supra*, n.3.

¹¹ Ronen Bergman, Patrick Kingsley, *Details Emerge on U.N. Workers Accused of Aiding Hamas Raid*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (Jan. 28, 2024).

¹² *Supra*, n.3.

¹³ *Id.*; Emanuel Fabian, *IDF says it destroyed Hamas tunnel next to UNRWA school in Gaza*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Nov. 8, 2023).

¹⁴ Dov Lieber, David Luhnnow, *Hamas Military Compound Found Beneath U.N. Agency Headquarters in Gaza*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (Feb. 10, 2024).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Supra*, n.3.

¹⁷ *UNRWA fact-checked after calling report about hostage 'unsubstantiated'*, THE JERUSALEM POST (Dec. 3, 2023); Ed Leon Killinger (@edleonklinger), X, (Dec. 2, 2023, 11:00AM) available at <https://twitter.com/edleonklinger/status/1730980238253822106>.

¹⁸ Jeremy Sharon, *Several UNRWA staffers praised Hamas' October 7 massacres report finds*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Nov. 6, 2023).

¹⁹ Press Release, UN Watch, *Group of 3,000 UNRWA teachers celebrates Hamas massacre and rape* (Jan. 10, 2024).

²⁰ Press Release, UN Watch, *UNRWA Terror Support Widespread Not "A Few Bad Apples"* (Jan. 28, 2024).

sermons encouraging violence against Israelis, and the UNRWA youth ambassador extorting “[F]ight back until you defeat the aggressor.”²¹

In 2018, the Trump Administration suspended funding for the agency because it assessed that UNRWA’s operation was “irredeemably flawed.”²² Suspicions that UNRWA staff have ties to Hamas and other terror groups have existed for years. In 2017, the head of UNRWA’s union in Gaza was fired because it was discovered he was a member of Hamas’ leadership.²³ In 2014, rockets were found in three UNRWA schools in Gaza and the agency’s policy was to hand the weapons over to “local authorities.”²⁴

UNRWA also uses classrooms to promote antisemitism, violence, jihad, and martyrdom. The agency distributes the Palestinian Authority’s curriculum even though the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination determined the textbooks “[f]uel hatred and may incite violence.”²⁵ UNRWA has complimented this curriculum with its own teaching materials that glorify terrorists and rejects peace with Israel.²⁶ In 2023, UNRWA posted exam lessons that taught students that Al-Aqsa mosque must be “liberated.”²⁷ Hundreds of examples of the agency’s staff participating in racist, violent, and extremist dialogue have been found since 2015.²⁸

All of these allegations, many of which predate the October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks, call into question whether the Biden Administration adequately reviewed its decision to renew funding to UNRWA. To assist the Committee in its oversight of the risk that U.S. funds to UNRWA may have promoted terrorism, please provide the following documents and information, covering the time period January 20, 2021, to the present unless otherwise indicated, no later than March 1, 2024:

1. All documents and communications between or among any State Department official and the White House relating to the decision, announced April 7, 2021, to resume funding to UNRWA;
2. All documents and communications demonstrating what safeguards are in place to prevent U.S. aid designated for UNRWA from funding or providing material support for terrorists or terrorist organizations;
3. All documents and communications related to or discussing the diversion of UNRWA funds or resources by Hamas or any other foreign terrorist organization.

²¹ Press Release, UN Watch, *UNRWA Employees Incite to Murder on Facebook* (Oct. 19, 2015).

²² *US announces it's cutting all funding to Palestinian refugee agency*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Aug. 31, 2018).

²³ *Top UN staffer in Gaza said elected to Hamas leadership*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (March 7, 2017).

²⁴ Ilan Ben Zion, *Rockets found in UNRWA school for third time*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (July 30, 2014).

²⁵ IMPACT-se, *UNRWA Education: Reform or Regression* (March 14, 2023).

²⁶ IMPACT-se, *Review of UNRWA-Produced Study Materials in Palestinian Territories* (Jan. 2021); IMPACT-se, *The 2020-21 Palestinian School Curriculum Grades 1-12* (Sept. 2020).

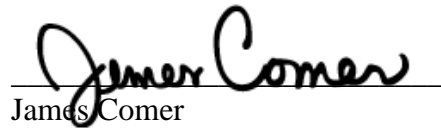
²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Supra*, n.20.

Attached are instructions for producing the documents and information to the Committee. If you have any questions, contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at 202-225-5074.

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

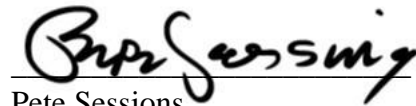
Sincerely,



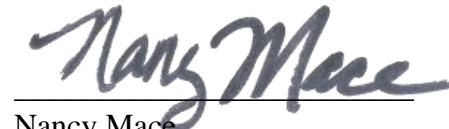
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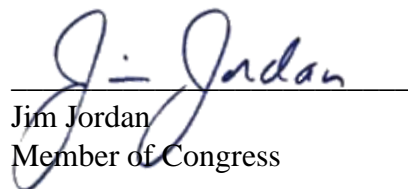
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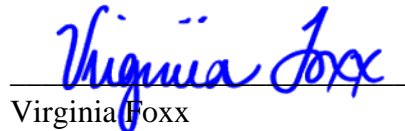
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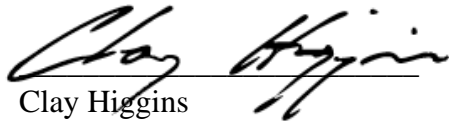
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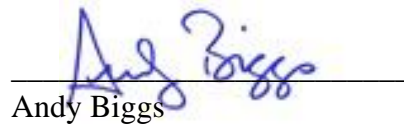
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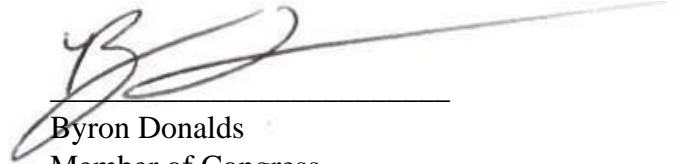
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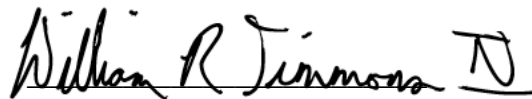
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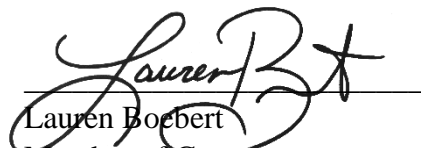
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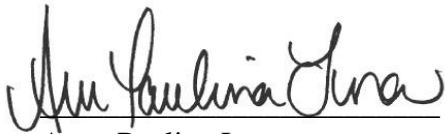
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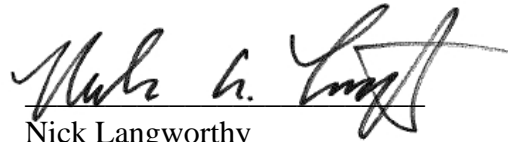
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cc: The Honorable Jamie B. Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

The Honorable Robert Garcia, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs

The Honorable Kweisi Mfume, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce

The Honorable Gerald Connolly, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation

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The Honorable Katie Porter, Ranking Member
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