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ECONOMIC POLICY


Far from war in Gaza, Hamas chief oversees vast financial network

Ismail Haniyeh, chairman of the militant group's political bureau, controls assets across the Middle East now under U.S. scrutiny



By [Jeff Stein](#)

November 2, 2023 at 5:00 a.m. EDT



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Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh visits eastern Gaza City in 2018. (Wissam Nassar for The Washington Post)

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The top Hamas political leader oversees a vast financial network while living hundreds of miles from the chaos and violence in Gaza, often traveling freely to represent the militant group before world leaders across the region.

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Already under U.S. [economic sanctions](#) since 2018, Ismail Haniyeh, 61, now faces an intensifying economic assault

from the West as part of the wider war against Hamas. Since the group's murderous [Oct. 7 attack on Israel](#), U.S. officials have vowed to crack down on Hamas's financial network just as Israel vows to eradicate it militarily, with senior Treasury Department officials traveling to Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Europe as part of a coordinated push to target the militant group's funding sources.

Senior Treasury officials have also accused Hamas's top leaders of living "in luxury." Haniyeh is based in Qatar, a U.S. ally that is now trying to broker the release of more than 200 hostages held by the militant group but says it will [reevaluate its relationship with Hamas](#) after that.

"Haniyeh is really important — he is one of the bin Ladens in this story," said Mark Wallace, chief executive of United Against Nuclear Iran and a former official in the George W. Bush administration. "It's wrong that he's living in Qatar in luxury, seemingly beyond our reach. Qatar must turn him over."

Israel-Gaza war



As U.S. and other world officials push for "[humanitarian pauses](#)" in Gaza, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu said that there would be no "temporary cease-fire" until all hostages are returned. Understand [what's behind the Israel-Gaza war](#).

Although the group and its leaders have faced [U.S. sanctions since 1995](#), Treasury has announced new sanctions against a range of senior Hamas leadership officials, trying to undermine the financial flows that fueled its rampage in Israel. But the difficult work in crippling its networks remains unfinished.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry has [claimed](#) that Haniyeh's personal fortune is in the billions of dollars, though independent experts say there is no evidence to support that claim. Hamas's financial resources contrast starkly with the vast poverty facing the people of Gaza, even before Israel's military unleashed a devastating bombardment on the

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territory in retaliation for Hamas's Oct. 7 attack, in which more than 1,400 people were killed.

It is unclear exactly how much Haniyeh knew about the attack, with experts divided over the extent to which Hamas's political wing controls its military leadership, which is based in Gaza.

"The United States Treasury Department is laser-focused today on dismantling Hamas's financial networks," Wally Adeyemo, the deputy treasury secretary, told the Royal United Services Institute, a foreign policy think tank, in London last week. "... Hamas and associated terrorist groups have long sought to destroy Israel and attack those in the region and around the world that do not ascribe to their hate-filled ideology. These groups need financial resources to help fuel their hate. To do so, they have developed ways to access or circumvent our financial systems."

Through its heavy taxation of Palestinians in Gaza, with levies as high as 20 percent on imports, Hamas raises as much as \$400 million per year, according to Matthew Levitt, a former Treasury Department official who is now the director of the Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute. The militant group has also stood up a vast investment portfolio that U.S. officials estimate is worth more than \$500 million, and possibly as much as \$1 billion, with assets in Sudan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and the United Arab Emirates, among other countries.

In addition, the militant group receives as much as \$450 million per year in black market smuggling fees, according to Daniel Roth, research director at United Against Nuclear Iran. The State Department has also said that Iran provides as much as \$120 million to Palestinian groups including Hamas, while experts estimate it also receives hundreds of millions from other international funding sources, including Qatar. Overall, Hamas spends roughly \$1.6 billion on government operations in Gaza, according to Roth.

Where we get our data about the Israel-Gaza war

When we're reporting on issues such as the death toll in the [Israel-Gaza war](#), we use information provided from the Gaza Health

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Ministry (an agency of the [Hamis-controlled government](#)), the Israeli government, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the U.S. State Department and other international agencies.

1/3



Israel and Egypt have imposed a strict blockade in Gaza since Hamas took over the territory in 2007 after a struggle with Fatah, the political party that controls the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank — which makes smuggling lucrative. These restrictions have also hurt average citizens in Gaza, choking Palestinians off from the international economic system.

Still, Hamas's illicit international financial channels played a crucial role in financing the Oct. 7 attack, which required it to pay for soldiers, munitions and other weaponry to pierce through the Israel Defense Forces and a high-tech, expensive surveillance system on the border with Gaza.

[[How Hamas's carefully planned Israel attack devolved into a chaotic rampage](#)]

On Oct. 18, Treasury [announced](#) sanctions on Hamas backers and “financial facilitators” that report to the Hamas political bureau overseen by Haniyeh. Experts said that even if the Gaza economy shut entirely, Hamas could still receive funding from Iran and its investment portfolio that could be redirected to operations in the West Bank or elsewhere without U.S. action.

“One of the things that stands out from Treasury's designations is that they all operate under the command of the Hamas political leadership, including Haniyeh,” said Levitt, of the Washington Institute. “All of the Treasury designations make clear they answer to the political bureau” that Haniyeh chairs.

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Levitt also said Treasury should go further by imposing penalties that would cut off from the U.S. financial system entities that work with Hamas — penalties that it already applies to Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed political party in Lebanon and its military arm.

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Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian meets with Haniyeh in Doha, Qatar, on Oct. 14. (Wana News Agency/Reuters)

Born in the Shati refugee camp in the Gaza Strip to two refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Haniyeh was detained by Israeli authorities for joining protests as part of the first intifada in 1987, according to the BBC, then imprisoned again in 1988. Haniyeh quickly rose through the ranks of the militant group. The BBC also reported that Haniyeh was injured in a September 2003 Israeli airstrike on an apartment complex in Gaza City.

Haniyeh was chosen as Hamas's leader by a council of the militant group's officials, whose membership is unknown, according to the European Council on Foreign Relations. This council elevated Haniyeh to the post in 2017 and again in 2021, giving him another four-year term.

In a video released shortly after the Oct. 7 attack, Haniyeh and a group of about a dozen men gathered to pray on the floor while images of the massacre played on television.

Treasury officials have repeatedly accused Hamas's top leadership of enjoying lavish lifestyles outside of Gaza while average Palestinians suffer the consequences of the militant group's actions. Adeyemo, the deputy treasury secretary, said last week that "much like many Russian elites, senior Hamas officials often live in luxury, while the average Gazan faces dire living conditions." Brian Nelson, Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, also said in an address last month that the investment portfolio allows Hamas officials to "live in luxury, including elsewhere

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in the Middle East, while ordinary Palestinians in Gaza face harsh living conditions and dire prospects.”

Treasury spokespeople declined to provide any evidence, however, supporting these assertions. Israel's Foreign Ministry also declined to provide any evidence supporting its claim that Haniyeh and other top Hamas leaders are personally worth billions of dollars.

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A Hamas spokesman also did not return requests for comment about Haniyeh's personal wealth.

Haniyeh has been able to run operations from Qatar because the United States and Israel have long tacitly endorsed his presence there, believing it is preferable to have Hamas's leaders somewhere they can be monitored rather than somewhere, such as Iran, where they can't. The events of Oct. 7, however, seem to have complicated that arrangement in the eyes of some hawkish members of Congress, even as Qatar helps play a crucial role in negotiating the release of hostages held by Hamas.

[*Israel says Hamas 'is ISIS.' But it's not.*]

Israel imposes restrictions on the movement of Palestinians within Gaza, which makes it far more practical for Hamas leaders such as Haniyeh to live abroad. And while Gazans are suffering under Hamas rule, the Israeli bombardment and the war — which has seen nearly 8,800 people, including more than 3,600 children, killed, according to the Gaza Health Ministry — could strengthen the group's popularity.

“Historically, the political bureau for Hamas was moved abroad, and that is something they did for security tactics early on” in response to targeted assassinations by the Israelis, said Tareq Baconi, board president of al-Shabaka, a Palestinian think tank, and the author of a book about Hamas. Baconi also said while there is much resentment in Gaza toward Hamas over the current moment, it is important not to overstate the extent of a backlash. “I think historically Palestinians in Gaza have also rallied around Hamas at moments where it escalated its resistance because

they understand that is the only way for them to engage with the Israeli authorities and its apartheid regime.”

On Capitol Hill, pressure is already mounting for the United States to ensure that top Hamas leaders such as Haniyeh can no longer oversee the group’s financial networks from the safety of Qatar.

“The administration should tell the Qataris that these guys should be handed over by the U.S. or Israeli governments. They shouldn’t be able to stay there,” said Rep. Juan Vargas (D-Calif.), a member of the House Financial Services subcommittee on national security and illicit finance. “The Qataris ought to make a choice: What side are you on, the side of terrorists or the side of the Americans? That choice should be forced upon them.”

Read more on the Israel-Gaza war ←

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Israel-Gaza war

As U.S. and other world officials push for “[humanitarian pauses](#)” in Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that there would be no “temporary cease-fire” until all hostages are returned. [Hezbollah’s leader](#) warned that [all options were “on the table”](#) in battles with Israel but did not announce an all-out escalation. Understand [what’s behind the Israel-Gaza war](#).

Hostages: Israeli officials say Hamas militants abducted about 240 hostages in a highly organized attack. Four hostages have been

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By [Jeff Stein](#)

Jeff Stein is the White House economics reporter for The Washington Post. He was a crime reporter for the Syracuse Post-Standard and, in 2014, founded the local news nonprofit the Ithaca Voice in Upstate New York. He was also a reporter for Vox. [Twitter](#)

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sargar 1 day ago

Same was true of Arafat, he was a millionaire as are his sons. Corruption and greed kill. If only the average Palestinian knew the truth. Arafat was offered 90% of what the Palestinians asked for from a right wing Rabin, president of Israel in a meeting Bill Clinton organized at the White House. Arafat refused and that was the end of hope for a 2 state solution. These leaders are all greedy and corrupt.



steelybill 2 days ago

Recent comments bring to mind the term, insipid.



SBC_DC 2 days ago (Edited)

You should look up the definition. It doesn't mean what you think it means.



Not your enemy 2 days ago (Edited)

They should have gone in there and taken the leaders hostage in Qatar. That would have actually been the smart solution. Started executing them one by one on live television or whatever if Hamas didn't return their kidnapped hostages in return

Not air strikes on kids

Oh well. Israel's gonna do stupid and cruel

And for that, they've lost the world



Tarekato 2 days ago

Most people don't even understand the middle east.
the only reason we USA are there is because of Oil, if there is no Oil in the middle east we would care less about them just like we care less

about south America or siri-lanka or east Asia

Isreal stole Palestine. the Palestinian will continue to fight Zionist movement till their last breath. if some one stole your house and kicked you out .. are you going to sit there and accept it ? .



SBC_DC 2 days ago (Edited)

How did Israel steal Palestine when Palestine didn't exist at the time Israel was created? Egypt and Jordan created 'palestinian refugees' when they attacked Israel.



houseblend2 2 days ago

Treasury should go further by imposing penalties that would cut off from the U.S. financial system entities that work with Hamas

Agreed. Hamas obviously enjoys support across the Middle East. Iran subsidizes them. Their leaders live it up in Qatar.

Today they are coming after Israel, but there is no doubt in my mind they would like to be coming after America.

Support for Israel is support for American interests.

Do we want a rule based world where diplomacy settles our differences? Or do we want a world where dictators and aggressors do whatever they want?

If you want world peace – and a domestic society where people are free from fear – you have to vote for the Democratic Party candidates!



Tarekato 2 days ago

if there is no oil in the Middle east America will not be supporting Isreal.
and that is a fact.



SBC_DC 2 days ago

Is there oil in Ukraine too?



MajorTomToGroundControl 2 days ago

Everyone is focusing on Hamas. Perhaps we should be focusing at least as much on Qatar. I doubt there is anything that goes in that tiny nation that the emir doesn't know about.



RhetoricRelief 2 days ago

Yea - but we can always get them later... Not a priority...



jay jay eh 2 days ago

Indeed, America & Israel are very happy to be using Qatar & their ability to communicate with Hamas just now, in order to facilitate more hostage releases & other decisions affecting all.

— if they insist that Qatar begin taking orders from U.S. or Israel, that communication well wd dry up fast.



Tarekato 2 days ago

why don't you focus on the US and it's middle east policy. The 10 trillion dollar war of Iraq and killed 2 million Iraqis, did that war produce anything ? No.

Afghanistan war did it resolve anything ? No.

did the war in Libya after Qadhafi produce anything other than protect the oil? no.

we support Isreal what does that do for us except gives them 5 billion dollar a year . so how much more money and mistakes can we continue to shell out ?



Roccotaco 2 days ago

No surprise.



jay jay eh 2 days ago

Discussion of how many 'millions' Hamas leaders have at their disposal, and their life of luxury compared to Palestinians.

— but the same difference exists for politicians in every country ...

the world's various presidents & other dignitaries always live a relatively Royal & protected life ... and their worth often discussed in 'billions' not just millions.

— they are not all Gandhis either.



Tarekato 2 days ago

Gandhi, sold divided India and Pakistan to appease the British. learn history.. India have 200 million Muslims that basically under oppression because of Gandhi.



Reita Anderson 2 days ago

Hamas terrorists hiding behind Palestinians, their fat leaders hiding in Qatar. 🤔🤔



jay jay eh 2 days ago

Their leaders should be stupid & display themselves openly in the world's largest open-air prison,
— where they will be almost instantly 'vaporized' with an American or Israeli bomb? THINK.



RhetoricRelief 2 days ago

Hama-big boy!



Tarekato 2 days ago

do you understand politics ? I'm sure you don't.
where are the people of Gaza going to go ? where is Hamas is going to go. Gaza is the most densely populated are in the world .. because it is an open door prison and the guard and slave master is Isreal.



Basil jide fadipe 2 days ago

Fanaticism and Luxuriousness cannot exist in same sentence.

The fanatic is too singular to be luxuriant and the luxuriant is too indulged to be fanatic.

Even when/ if they swim in money, (like Osama did) they live a caveman (troglodyte) life committed to the undistracted service of their cause. These are not the traits to be found with the luxuriant or indulgent.

So that line of attack ? ... very poor sales pitch .

But more directly to the subject ?

Israel needs to drop militarized approach to the Hamas syndrome

It has never diminished the fervour or focus of that syndrome. nor its symptom complex and chronicity. .

The crueler the response to Hamas, the harder the determination of the group. I'm in fact surprised any one still opts to be head of Hamas knowing its a death sentence. But such is the group messianistic psyche death doesn't faze them. The kamikaze spirit is too indomitable to fall prey to bullets.

Hopefully some unusual brains in Tel Aviv will one day factor this psychology into their game plans, seeing it fit to change tactics.

a 'love your enemy' strategy displacing the tested and failing 'slay the dragon' catharsis. '

slaughter soothes the raw emotions but offers no solution to the real problem.

No matter how supreme the Israeli military, it will need to be lucky always to escape horrors from its enemies but it's enemies only need to be lucky once to catch it napping and inflict pains.

Treat Palestinians well and see how much faster and steadier you recruit converts away from Hamas or similar groups.

But like the US, the instinctive reaction to offence is militarized counteroffensive... too complex/ tasking to brainstorm alternatives
And just like the US, militarism has never solved one problem... kicks the can down the road for the next moment.

Frozen versus resolved conflict?

So the globe is dotted with conflicts frozen from a 'one size fits all ' hypermilitarisms.

No where more so than the Gaza debacle



jay jay eh 2 days ago

A good CNN article in Opinion section discussing the essence of what you say here.

— all the militarism in Israel & America's arsenal hasn't succeeded in the ME despite many wars; for every Hamas member killed (and innocent Palestinian citizens) another 1-2 or more becomes incentivized to take their place.

— the people have few options other than to 'obey' Israel as if they are sheep, or to rely on Hamas to give them hope & express their frustration & anger at not being self-determining ... while living in the world's largest outdoor open prison.



Rocotaco 2 days ago

They have plenty of options. Get rid of Hamas and Iran. Come to an agreement with Israel and the surrounding Arab Countries for financial aid. Take a bead from the American Indian. They turned their land into Resorts using the money generated to house, feed and educate their people.



jay jay eh 2 days ago

An 'agreement with Israel' wd mean Palestinians being displaced to other Arab countries that disagree with them being displaced & that don't want the sudden responsibility of their care, or remaining as prisoners in an ever-decreasing

land mass, it's borders being constantly encroached upon by Jewish 'settlers', much like the .Europeans did with American Indigenous people.

How many Canadians wd america be willing to 'take in' tomorrow if the same sort of edict were in place?



[READ MORE OF THIS CONVERSATION >](#)

Tarekato 2 days ago

Netanyahu and Zionist terrorist got to go. there is no place for any baby killers in society. Hamas exists because of the Zionist polices and Zionist Terrorist that been forced on the Palestinians. call it on both sides. the Israeli army is also Baby killers. so no one gets a pass here. Hitler and Zionist are no different then each other



Another New Day 2 days ago

Your so-called Zionists haven't built ghettos feeding gas chambers to kill innocent people because they are not Jews. Hitler did. But, perhaps facts don't matter to Hamas.



jay jay eh 2 days ago

Israel just sent how many Palestinians working in Israel back to Gaza, where they will bomb them into oblivion?
— it becomes a matter of self-righteous semantics as to how which People kill other people in this scenario.



RhetoricRelief 2 days ago

No - facts are like snowflakes!



Rocotaco 2 days ago

Hamas exists because they are Muslim terrorist Jew haters. This is War started by Hamas.



ThirdGenDC 2 days ago

The source of the vast amount of money the Hamas terrorists have been using to commit war crimes against Israel has come from foreign aid. It has not been used for schools, hospitals, roads, or parks, but weapons and tunnel-building. Hamas doesn't care about Palestinian civilians.



Tarekato 2 days ago

this is a repeat of the Israeli propaganda



Reita Anderson 2 days ago (Edited)

Tarekato:

No, WHERE have Hamas and other Terrorists ever assisted The Palestinian People? One food center, hospital, etc? 😞



jay jay eh 2 days ago

C'mon Reita ... is Joe serving in a soup kitchen, or has Netanyahu ever scrubbed a hospital sink or floor?

— no, they too, live a life of luxury.

The actual political solutions to war need to be discussed, rather than comparing leaders' relative luxury.

— and in fact, twice in this article both Israel & the U.S. seemed reluctant to provide actual sources supporting their claims Re: Hamas money ... and both Israel & American politicians & their countries have 1000's times more money to live in luxury & play these war games with.

— Palestinians need to be granted security, autonomy & an option to Hamas leadership, then Hamas will melt away. But no, Israel needs more land & they will increase their stranglehold on Palestinians till they crush them out of existence.

— if Palestinians resort to allowing Hamas to run things in the meantime, it is out of desperation, not a love of chaos, death & destruction.



RhetoricRelief 2 days ago

Defund the useless UN and audit them for kickbacks and corruption!



Phunster 2 days ago

Political corruption is ignored by the ignorant.



Frank G 2 days ago (Edited)

"But BiBi's bad too!"

This is the answer of every single "Israeli bad" hashtag hysteric that reads anything that confirms the base cruelty of Hamas towards innocent Israelis or the Palestinian people whom they use as cardboard shields for their horrific acts of terrorism. There is no atrocity they won't dismiss in the name of their hatred of Israel.

Maga-adjacent absolutist populists who care more about social media likes than truth.



Randy Mont-Reynaud 2 days ago

Hamas gotta go. Period punkt. Terrorism has got to be more than staunched, it has got to be contained, constrained, restrained, despite the cost to so many innocents...we cannot live in a world ruled by thugs. The management if not eradication of Hamas will be a lesson to gangs (Haiit) and warlords elsewhere. Brave Israelis taking a stand! on behalf of the world.



jay jay eh 2 days ago

Palestinians need other political options to Hamas, but the way Israel has gone about things just drives the Palestinians into the only arms open to them - Hamas. In fact, Netanyahu preferred Hamas to the Palestinian Authority in the past, and even enabled Hamas politically. — now it's come back to haunt him, Israel & the world.



RhetoricRelief 2 days ago

Please! There were others but hamas killed them... They didn't have guns!



Diotema 1 2 days ago

Let's see: he's a jerk. Netanyahu, more of a jerk. Back to baby slaughter.



Frank G 2 days ago (Edited)

Must be nice to live in simplistic world of absolutism in which the leader of a terrorist organization who abandons his people is the same as the leader who responds to an attack on his.

Why is it with incurious thinkers that the answer to every single problem is "What about the other guy?!"



Ray Bas 2 days ago

still the same breed of man.



AlbertC33 2 days ago

Hitler should have been killed in the early years! This guy is no different.



Diotema 1 2 days ago

Add Bibi? Were I not pretty pacifist, I'd go for the both/and.



RhetoricRelief 2 days ago

You are a petty troll alright - how many hours have you been at it today?!



Frank G 2 days ago (Edited)

Why is it with the chronically ignorant that the answer to every single atrocity is "What about the other guy?!"



Ray Bas 2 days ago

Because both are still around, still in power, and are quite responsible for all this tragedy. Both deserve punishment, don't you think?



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pverleger 2 days ago

There is one word missing from the report: oil. Hamas would be nothing if the world's consumers had moved aggressively to end the use of oil after 1973. The complicity of the Middle Eastern oil exporting countries in funding Hamas and other terrorist organizations is a curse on the world - made worse by the efforts of the same countries to stall efforts to address global warming.



Bigtrain 2 days ago (Edited)

Can't we just have the CIA "take care" of him as they have done in the past.



LukeBoyd 2 days ago

why hasn't Mossad already taken care of it?



RhetoricRelief 2 days ago (Edited)

I bet he is hard to get to - he knows he has a target on his forehead...

So he will be protected and locked in a villa - it will take time to plan an operation to get to him it takes patience!

But it will come! Right now his army is getting smoked! Things die down... And dude will just disappear... Also maybe they want him alive to be prosecuted... Who knows...



heftyroy 2 days ago

This article is biased. Stein references ONE Palestinian man, who he declares without proof, is a billionaire and we're supposed to think his fortune was obtained illegitimately.

There are an untold number of Israeli billionaires living all over the world with dual citizenship. How did they amass wealth? Subtext is important, especially when hidden.



Dazed n Confused 2 days ago

Did you actually read the article, or just blurt out your own biases for the heck of it? "The **Israeli Foreign Ministry** has **claimed** that Haniyeh's personal fortune is in the billions of dollars, though **independent experts say there is no evidence** to support that claim." That's what the article says. The author 'declared' nothing. This is called 'reporting the facts'. Secondly, Hamas is a terrorist group. Israel is not. Palestinians are living in poverty, while this ONE man (representing a terrorist group, supposedly in the interest of Gaza and Palestinians) is living in luxury. Israel is prosperous, in general, so of course there are many wealthy people. Forget about subtext....the facts are right in front of you. Read them.



RhetoricRelief 2 days ago

Really - everyone else seems to take it for granted!

I don't doubt that WaPoo is biased!



Frank G 2 days ago

What is it with the chronically ignorant that the answer to every single atrocity is "What about the other guy?!"



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