

News

Top Secret: In a 2018 letter, Netanyahu asks Qatar to fund Hamas

In letter seen by handful of people, PM urges Doha to deliver \$30 million to Gaza monthly, claiming funding Hamas would preserve regional stability and avert humanitarian crisis



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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged the government of Qatar to continue the transfer of money to Gaza, in a secret letter sent to the Qatari leadership in 2018 and only seen by a handful of people since. In the letter, Netanyahu explained that the funding would reduce the motivation of terror groups there to carry out attacks, would prevent a humanitarian crisis and was vital for preserving regional stability.

There are two different time periods for Qatari funding of the Gaza Strip, which allowed Hamas to grow from an insignificant terror organization into a military empire with battalions, an underground network of tunnels and the fire power of a small army.



Benjamin Netanyahu, Sheikh Mohammed Thani , Yahya Sinwar (Photo: Dana Kopel , Mark Schiefelbein/ Reuters, Reuters)

Between 2007 and 2014, Qatar provided Hamas with funds, away from any international oversight or review and from 2014 on, funding from Qatar was coordinated with the United States and Israel.

~~new system in which \$30 million would be delivered to the coastal strip by Doha each month. Some \$10 million~~ was to buy fuel from Israel, needed to operate Gaza's power station, \$10 million to pay the salaries of government employees, and the final \$10 million was to be given in \$100 stipends to some 100,000 Gazan families in need.

That was the time when the notion that Hamas would back away from its intent to destroy Israel as long as it accumulates governing and economic assets took root in Israel.

Until 2018, Qatari funds were not given to Gaza on a regular basis and delivered only occasionally with approval from Israel and the Palestinian Authority. "The PA said it would no longer agree to fund Hamas and rather than let the terror group collapse, Israel decided on an alternative route for its funding," says Dr. Udi Levi, who was the Mossad official charged with fighting the funding of terror until 2016. "That was part of Israel's policy to buy quiet. Hamas demanded that the \$30 million per month would be delivered directly to the ruling faction. It was naïve to believe Hamas would provide the money to the population in Gaza."



IDF soldier in a massive Hamas tunnel uncovered in northern Gaza (Photo: IDF)

It is now evident that Qatar was not fond of the new arrangement. "They were playing a double game then and are still doing so now," Levi says. "We are talking about the greatest funder of terrorism in the world, but in 2018 Qatar was concerned that funding Hamas – which had been designated a terror organization – would create problems with international institutions."

Meanwhile, in November of 2018, then-Defense Minister Avigdor [Liberman resigned](#) in protest against the government over a cease-fire in Gaza. "We are on one hand [passing a law](#) to withhold funds from the PA, for

who says there is oversight of where those funds go, is being inaccurate, to put it mildly.

Netanyahu understood the Qatari predicament and sent his urgent letter to Doha but the officials there demanded further assurances. "There was a sense that the Americans were needed, in order to seal the deal," Levi says.

Then-U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin, who was in charge of finance for the campaign to reelect Donald Trump and who is Jewish, agreed to a request from Netanyahu and sent an additional letter to Doha, this time from Washington, in effect, ensuring Qatar that the funding of Hamas would not be considered funding terror.

Levi explains that, although he had run the financial war on funding of terrorism between 2001 and 2016, he was never consulted by the political leadership about the transfer of funds to Hamas. "Unlike previous administrations I have served under, during the governments of [Ariel] Sharon and [Ehud] Olmert, Netanyahu did not consult with me despite the fact that I served directly under him," he says. "I, of course, strongly objected to the transfer of Qatari funding to Hamas, even before 2018, but that did not interest Netanyahu."



Then-US Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Photo: Emile Salman)

Ultimately the letters from Netanyahu and Mnuchin satisfied the Qataris and the first instalment in cash was delivered on November 8, 2014, and the rest is history that is still unfolding.

The Prime Minister's Office did not respond to a request for comment on this topic.

