



**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center  
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage  
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**Tensions between Hamas and UNRWA  
following the theft of food and blankets and  
the Hamas takeover of a supply convoy.  
Eventually, Hamas returned the stolen  
humanitarian aid. Those incidents are a result  
of the policy of Hamas, which strives to control  
the humanitarian aid brought to the Gaza Strip.**

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UNRWA supply trucks in the Gaza Strip (UNRWA website, January 17)

## Overview

1. In two incidents on February 3 and 5, Hamas operatives stole aid supplies (for Gaza Strip) from a convoy and a warehouse belonging to UNRWA. In response, UNRWA suspended delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. On February 9, Hamas returned to UNRWA the stolen aid supplies and UNRWA resumed its routine activities. The UN Secretary General and UNRWA strongly condemned the theft of the humanitarian aid, demanding from Hamas to return it immediately and not to interfere with its distribution.

2. Those incidents are a result of **Hamas's policy**, expressions of which were seen during Operation Cast Lead. This policy strives to **control** the humanitarian aid brought into the Gaza Strip and **use it for Hamas's political and financial advantage**. Recently, that policy has generated unprecedented levels of **tension** between Hamas and UNRWA, the organization in charge of distributing the humanitarian aid. Following the recent events, Hamas had to return the stolen aid supplies and reach an understanding with UNRWA. However, because of Hamas's policy, tensions between Hamas and UNRWA, and between Hamas and other organizations and countries involved in rebuilding the Gaza Strip, may rise again.

## Hamas steals food and blankets from UNRWA's warehouse

3. On February 3, 2009, **members of the Hamas police force raided a UNRWA warehouse in one of the Gaza Strip refugee camps, taking 3,500 blankets and over 400 food packages that were supposed to be distributed to Gaza Strip residents** (AP, February 4; AFP, February 9).

4. UNRWA reacted strongly, condemning the theft of the supplies and demanding their immediate return. Hamas spokesman **Taher al-Nunu** denied UNRWA's claims, calling on it to promptly issue an apology for its allegations and for "publishing false information" (Pal-Media, February 4). **Ahmad al-Kurd**, the welfare minister in the Hamas administration, accused UNRWA of taking over all the equipment meant for victims of the war and of unfair distribution of the humanitarian aid (Pal-Media, February 4).



UNRWA humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip (UNRWA website, January 17).  
 Hamas takes over the aid and delivers it to its supporters.

## Hamas's takeover of humanitarian aid for Gaza Strip residents

5. On February 5, 2009, UNRWA reported that **Hamas took over a convoy of ten trucks** loaded with aid supplies for Gaza Strip residents at Nitzana Crossing. UNRWA strongly condemned Hamas's confiscation of the humanitarian aid, demanding its immediate return (UN website, February 5). The aid supplies seized included 200 tons of rice and flour brought into Gaza by UNRWA (AFP, February 9).

6. The UN Secretary General's spokesperson said that the Secretary General was demanding that Hamas immediately return the seized aid supplies, calling on it not to interfere with the distribution of humanitarian aid to Gaza Strip residents (AFP, February 6). UNRWA announced it was **suspending the humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip** because of the confiscation of hundreds of tons of aid and stressed that the suspension would continue until the seized aid was returned (UNRWA website, February 6).

7. In response, Hamas issued a statement claiming that its takeover of the supply convoy resulted from a mistake and that UNRWA's allegations against Hamas were unfounded, seeing as Hamas had done nothing to hinder UNRWA's supply trucks. Hamas also stressed that it appreciated UNRWA's role and the assistance it provided to the Palestinian people, calling on it not to cut off the aid because that would worsen the situation of the Palestinian people (Palestine-info, February 6).

8. Hamas spokesmen attempted to excuse the convoy takeover:

a. The excuse given by Hamas secretary **Fawzi Barhoum** was that the supplies had been taken by mistake, due to the fact that there was no Hamas administration representative present at the crossing and therefore the drivers did not know which supplies belonged to the administration and which belonged to UNRWA. He claimed that it was only when Welfare Minister Ahmad al-Kurd ordered the relevant parties to resolve the problem that it became clear that the supplies were UNRWA's (AFP, February 6, Maan News Agency, February 6).

b. **Taher al-Nunu**, a spokesman for the Hamas administration, stressed that the relations between Hamas and UNRWA were strong, and that the incident was a "misunderstanding between drivers". He added that even though the Hamas administration had nothing to do with the incident, he intervened immediately in order to solve the problem. He further said that meetings with top UNRWA officials would be held soon to resolve the controversy and establish an apparatus that would resolve any possible future issues (AFP, February 6). In another interview granted by Taher al-Nunu, he said that the incident should never have made it to the media (Al-Jazeera, February 6).

## Summary and assessment

9. The theft of the food and blankets and the Hamas takeover of the supply trucks are a reflection of **Hamas's policy**, striving to control the massive humanitarian aid brought into the Gaza Strip and to use it for the advancement of its political objectives. Hamas attempts to channel the aid to its operatives and population groups which support it, and to make financial profits by selling the humanitarian aid instead of distributing it free of charge.<sup>1</sup> That policy began during Operation Cast Lead and it continues after the operation as well.

10. The Hamas policy naturally generates growing tensions between it and UNRWA, recently reflected in **mutual public accusations**:

a. Hamas Welfare Minister **Hashem Ahmed al-Kurd accused UNRWA** of taking over all of the humanitarian aid for the war victims and of not distributing it in a fair manner. He said that large-scale humanitarian aid sent to the Hamas administration was still in Egypt and not being brought into the Gaza Strip (Pal-Media, February 4).

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<sup>1</sup> See our Information Bulletin: ["Evidence of the Use of the Civilian Population as Human Shields: Hamas operatives detained during Operation Cast Lead related that weapons were situated in schools, mosques and residential dwellings, that operatives shot from within residential neighborhoods, and that Hamas operatives stole the humanitarian aid for their own use"](#) (February 4, 2009). Recently, a website associated with Fatah reported that Gaza Strip residents claimed that Hamas was selling on the black market infant formula from the humanitarian aid which it took over (Pal-Press, February 5).

b. **John Ging, UNRWA's chief of operation in the Gaza Strip**, said that the situation was becoming unbearable. He added that the Hamas administration was running a negative propaganda campaign against the agency's work in the Gaza Strip. He called on the Hamas leadership to regain control over its operatives on the ground, as they jeopardized UNRWA's activities. He also said that UNRWA would not take seriously any promises made by Hamas unless accompanied by a guarantee that incidents such as the confiscation of the supply trucks do not happen again and until the stolen humanitarian aid is returned (Relief Web, February 6).

11. In the wake of the latest incidents, Hamas administration representatives, including Health Minister **Bassam Na'im** and the Hamas administration Secretary-General **Muhammed Awad** met with UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd. In the meeting, which was said to have been positive, both sides agreed that all supply trucks confiscated by Hamas would be returned. Hamas and UNRWA sources stressed that both sides agreed on the establishment of a monitoring committee to solve possible future issues (BBC, February 6).



**UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd (UNRWA website, February 9)**

12. On February 9, Hamas returned to UNRWA's warehouses in Gaza and Rafah all the aid supplies it had seized on February 3 and 5. In return, UNRWA resumed the import of its humanitarian supplies to the Gaza Strip (AFP, February 9).