



Attorney General Transcript
News Conference with President Bush and Secretary O'Neill
Tuesday, December 4, 2001
The White House

PRESIDENT BUSH: Good morning.

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Today we take another important step in the financial fight against terror. From the beginning of this fight, I have said our enemies are terrorist networks of global reach, and all who harbor them and support them are our enemies as well. We began with al Qaeda and the Taliban. We identified some of al Qaeda's financial backers and we moved against their accounts. In November, we advanced further and identified 22 more global terrorist organizations. And now we are moving against their financing as well.

At midnight yesterday, the Treasury Department froze the assets and accounts of the Holy Land Foundation in Richardson, Texas, whose money is used to support the Hamas terror organization. Earlier today, federal agents secured the offices and records of the Holy Land Foundation in Texas, California, New Jersey and Illinois as a part of an ongoing investigation. At the same time, we have blocked the accounts of an Hamas-linked bank, an Hamas-linked holding company based in the West Bank.

The message is this: Those who do business with terror will do no business with the United States -- or anywhere else the United States can reach.

Hamas is an extremist group that calls for the total destruction of the state of Israel. It is one of the deadliest terrorist organizations in the world today. Hamas openly claimed responsibility for this past weekend's suicide attacks in Israel that killed 25 innocent people, many of them teenagers, and wounded almost 200 other people. Hamas is guilty of hundreds of other deaths over the years, and just in the past 12 months, it killed two Americans. And today we act.

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Hamas has obtained much of the money that it pays for murder abroad right here in the United States, money originally raised by the Holy Land Foundation. The Holy Land Foundation is registered with the IRS as a tax-exempt charity based in Richardson. It raised 13 million dollars from people in America last year. The Holy Land Foundation claims that the money it solicits go to care for needy Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Money raised by the Holy Land Foundation is used by Hamas to support schools and indoctrinate children to grow up into suicide bombers. Money raised by the Holy Land Foundation is also used by Hamas to recruit suicide bombers and to support their families.

America has called on other nations to suppress the financing of terror. Today we take further steps to suppress it inside our borders. I'm confident that most of the donors to the Holy Land Foundation and perhaps even some of the individuals who are associated with the foundation had no idea how its money was being used. They wanted to relieve suffering in a region of the world that has suffered too much.

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But the facts are clear: the terrorists benefit from the Holy Land Foundation, and we're not going to allow it.

Our action today is another step in the war on terrorism. It's not the final step. There are more terrorist networks of global reach and more front groups who use deceit to support them. The net is closing.

Today it just got tighter.

And now it's my honor to welcome to the podium the Secretary of Treasury, Paul O'Neill.

SEC. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. President.

When the president declared war on terrorist financing in September, we made al Qaeda our primary focus of attention and have since blocked \$61 million worldwide in assets of the Taliban and of al Qaeda.

In October, we broadened our pursuit of terrorist assets to include all foreign terrorist organizations, including Hamas. We stated very clearly our intent to pursue the bankers who finance these terrorists. Today we're advancing on those financiers of terror.

The Hamas terrorist organization has taken the lives of scores of individuals, including American citizens. They have proudly claimed credit for their acts of evil, including the horrific attacks this past Sunday. They raise money in the United States and around the world. Clearly, Hamas is a terrorist organization of global reach.

Today we're shutting down three Hamas-controlled organizations that finance terror. The Holy Land Foundation masquerades as a charity, while its primary purpose is to fund Hamas. This is not a case of one bad actor stealing from the petty-cash drawer and giving the stolen money to terrorists. This organization exists to raise money in the United States to promote terror. Last year, Holy Land raised \$13 million in the United States.

Government agents today shut down four offices of the Holy Land Foundation in the U.S. Innocent donors who thought they were helping someone in need deserve protection from these scam artists who prey on their benevolence. Similarly, the al Aqsa Bank and the Beit El-Mal Bank aren't just banks that unknowingly administer accounts for terrorists. They are direct arms of Hamas established and used to do Hamas business.

We will continue to name the financiers of terrorism to ensure that Hamas and other terrorist organizations have no ability to finance their acts of evil.

We will work with every civilized nation around the globe to ensure there is no safe haven for terrorist money. Just as in the ground war, we will win by taking one hill at a time, advancing tirelessly every day, until terrorists and their money have nowhere to hide.

Thank you.

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: I thank the president of the United States and Secretary O'Neill for their outstanding work, and I'm honored to stand with them today in the fight against terrorism.

1 Today we've launched another coordinated enforcement action against more organizations that finance terrorism around the world. With this action, we go beyond the al Qaeda network to target groups whose violent actions are designed to destroy the Middle East peace process. The suicide bombings in Israel over the weekend and previous attacks claimed by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad over the last few years leave no doubt about the urgency of stopping terrorism in all its forms, whether the terrorism emanates from Afghanistan or from the West Bank and Gaza.

2 By freezing the financial apparatus of Hamas, we signal that the United States of America will not be used as a staging ground for the financing of those groups that violently oppose peace as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We won't tolerate it any more than we will tolerate the financing of groups that on September 11th attacked our homeland.

3 Today's action is a result of the FBI's work with the Treasury Department on a continuing terrorist financing investigation coordinated by the Department of Justice's Terrorist Financing Task Force.

4 This task force's sole mission is to dismantle U.S.-based organizations financing terrorist operations. The task force was created in the aftermath of September 11th and is comprised of prosecutors from the Criminal and Tax Divisions, U.S. attorneys' offices, and FBI agents across the nation, in conjunction, of course, with the Treasury Department -- these individuals who have expertise in investigating and prosecuting white-collar crime.

5 Today's action targets a U.S.-based organization operated by individuals who have been the focus of joint law enforcement action prior to September 11th. The Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, based in Richardson, Texas, shares employees of an Internet company known as Infocom. Infocom was raided by the FBI and had its assets frozen by the Treasury Department six days before the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks and the plane crash in Pennsylvania. Infocom, like the Holy Land Foundation, received much of its early money from Mousa Abu Marzook, a top Hamas official who, the U.S. courts have determined, was directly involved in terrorism.

6 In addition to sharing Marzook as an early sponsor, Infocom and the Holy Land Foundation were both established in California and moved to Texas in the same period of time. They are currently located in the same business park and appear to share office space and personnel.

7 I want to thank the Treasury Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the members of the terrorism task force working together constructively to investigate and dismantle these organizations which support terrorism.

8 In addition to developing this information, the FBI is accompanying Treasury personnel to various Holy Land Foundation sites around the country to conduct voluntary interviews with employees and to help secure the facilities, pursuant to the Treasury Department's lawful actions.

9 I'm grateful for this opportunity and thank the president and the secretary of the Treasury. PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you all.

(Cross talk.)

Q I have a question about Israel. Do you think Yasser Arafat harbors Hamas and other terrorist groups?

Q Should the PLO be treated like the Taliban? Should the PLO be treated like the Taliban, sir?

(No audible replies.)

Q He's walking away.

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