

Palestinian aid must be carefully tracked

by *The Detroit News*

Foreign aid of \$7.4 billion has been pledged by major donor nations to help the Palestinians create a state. The money can go a long way in building the infrastructure and institutions necessary for the Palestinians to sustain an independent nation.

But the massive infusion of aid also presents challenges.

The Palestinian Authority, which will be the recipient of most of the funds, has a long history of funneling foreign aid into the pockets of its officials. Rampant corruption within the authority was a major reason Palestinian voters turned to Hamas in elections two years ago.

Money intended to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people has also ended up financing the terrorist groups responsible for the misery in the territories.

This time, the donors say they will keep the money from reaching Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, where three-quarters of the people now live in poverty. But given the dire conditions in Gaza, it will be difficult to resist the temptation to direct a greater portion of the aid there.

That would be a mistake. Hamas is responsible for daily rocket attacks on Israel and is a major impediment to the peace process.

It should be assumed that any dollar that goes into Gaza will ultimately strengthen Hamas.

Officials of the terrorist organization have decried the aid pact for leaving them out, calling it a declaration of war on Hamas. That is an intriguing thought. The Palestinians have little hope of achieving statehood as long as Gaza remains in anarchy. Sweeping Hamas from the strip would do more to ready the territories for statehood than would any amount of foreign cash.

Israel is not contributing financially to the aid package, but it is being urged to support the effort by loosening restrictions on the movement of goods and people within the territories. The money can't accomplish its intended mission of building an economy as long as the Palestinians are in lockdown.

Israel indicates a willingness to cooperate, but can only do so to the extent that it doesn't jeopardize the security of its residents. If an easing comes with an increase in terrorist attacks, the Israelis will have no choice but to resume the restrictions.

Aiding the Palestinians has always been a delicate matter. For this latest package to work, every dollar must be meticulously tracked and accounted for to guarantee it doesn't reach the wrong hands.

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