



## Israel's Prisoner Swap: 1027 to 1

In June 2006, Hamas terrorists tunneled into Israel from the Gaza strip, surprised an Israeli tank crew, killed two of its soldiers, and took a third soldier, 19-year-old Gilad Shalit, prisoner. It was simply a case of deliberate kidnapping since this was not a combat situation. Shalit was taken back into Gaza and held incommunicado for five years, until Tuesday, October 18, 2011, when he was released in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners. It was Egyptian mediation which made the exchange possible.



Most of the Palestinian prisoners were terrorists guilty of multiple murders of innocent Israelis. Yet, Israel was willing to release them in order to get Gilad Shalit back to his family in Israel. Was this a wise deal or an act of stupidity on the part of Netanyahu's government? Some see it as a sign of Israel's strength that it could agree to such an exchange. They think that it might even bring the parties closer to a peace settlement. What could be a better good-will gesture for peace than releasing all of these prisoners?

Others see this idea as wishful thinking, as a sign of dangerous weakness. After all, it is assumed that some of these released killers will want to kill again, and Hamas has not given up its aim to destroy Israel.

So far, there has not been much reaction from the international community. Perhaps the Netanyahu government thought it could gain some sympathy from other nations by its magnanimous act. It is doubtful that any other nation would have done what the Israelis did. Usually, there is a prisoner exchange at the end of a war, but I am not aware of this kind of exchange taking place while a war is still going on. Perhaps it may convince nations in the UN General Assembly that the Palestinians ought to go back to the negotiation table while Israel is in the mood for dramatic concessions.

But nothing is rational in the Middle East, let alone the relations between the Palestinians and Israelis. There would have been peace a long time ago if the moderates had prevailed. But moderates don't last very long once they open their conciliatory mouths.

According to an [article](#), October 18th, by David Brog of Christians United for Israel (CUFI):

It's a sad reality of the Middle East that moderates have short life spans. In the summer of 1951, rumors began circulating that Lebanon and Jordan were discussing a joint peace deal with Israel. That July, both Jordan's king, Abdullah I, and Lebanon's former prime minister, Riad Bey al-Solh, were assassinated. In 1979, Egypt's president, Anwar Sadat, became the first Arab leader to sign a peace treaty with Israel. He was assassinated for this "treason" two years later. In 1982, Lebanon's president-elect, Bashir Gemayel, began discussing peace with Israel. He was assassinated that year for "selling the country to Israel." The list goes on.

Why did both Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas turn down generous peace offers from Israel? The



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most benign explanation is that they both feared assassination for making concessions to Israel such as recognizing Jewish sovereignty over the land or giving up the Palestinian “right of return.”

Brog calls these moderates “an endangered species.” The most recent Arab moderate to be threatened is Sheikh Abu Kader al-Jabari of Hebron. He was willing to meet with Pastor Hagee and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin during Glenn Beck’s “Restoring Courage” event in Israel. Brog writes:

Seeing these three leaders of these three faiths sitting next to one another gave our gathering an historic feel. Yet what was most encouraging about the meeting was not the nature of their agreement. The fact is that these three men have fundamental disagreements on significant issues. Instead, what made the meeting important was the way in which they agreed to disagree. All three religious leaders stressed that violence and killing have no place in resolving differences over the future of the land.

After this historic meeting, Sheikh Jabari returned to Hebron and continued to speak out. In the week that followed, he criticized Abbas for seeking a unilateral declaration of statehood from the United Nations. He also reiterated that Jews have a right to live in Hebron — their second holiest city — alongside the Muslim majority. Brog writes:

But while Sheikh Jabari rejects violence as a tool of politics, his opponents do not. On September 10, Palestinian terrorists issued a fatwa against Sheikh Jabari. These terrorists warned that if the Sheikh does not “recant” his statements criticizing Abbas and recognizing Jewish rights in Hebron, “our response will be with armaments.” This is a death threat, pure and simple.

Meanwhile, the Shalit family is celebrating the return of their son, and Israelis are happy that Gilad’s five-year ordeal has come to a successful end. The young soldier expressed the hope that this exchange will lead to peace between the two peoples.

The Palestinians see this exchange as a great victory. But one wonders what Israel will do if Hamas kidnaps another Israeli soldier. This kidnapping paid off big time. But what will the international community think if they do it again? And what will Israelis think if one of these released prisoners kills another innocent Israeli citizen?

If anything, this prisoner exchange has at least informed the rest of the world that the tiny, beleaguered state of Israel is far more interested in peace than their adversaries. But so far, the response from Hamas and Abbas has been anything but conciliatory.

Perhaps the attitude of the freed prisoners was best expressed by Wafa al-Biss, who was imprisoned 2005 when it was discovered that she was wearing a 22-pound bomb around her waist to blow up a hospital she was going to for treatment in Beersheba. After her release, she told a group of cheering children in Gaza she hoped they would follow her example:

“I hope you will walk the same path we took and God willing, we will see some of you as martyrs,” she told dozens of children who came to her home in the northern Gaza Strip.

After she spoke, the children cheered and waved Palestinian flags and chanted: “We will give souls and blood to redeem the prisoners. We will give souls and blood for you, Palestine.”

Biss said she had planned to blow herself up at the checkpoint but her detonator malfunctioned. “Unfortunately, the button did not work at the last minute before I was to be martyred,” Biss told Reuters.

“We will pursue our struggle and (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu) knows that. Arrests will



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not deter us from our strong battles and confrontation in the face of Zionist arrogance in the land of Palestine,” she said.

That doesn’t sound very conciliatory. And no doubt her fellow prisoners share her commitment to wage further war against Israel. Not a very happy prospect to say the least.



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