

Israel Swaps 1,027 Palestinian Prisoners for One Israeli Captive

Dear Teacher,

There's a certain irony that this week, just days before the world's population is projected to hit 7 billion people, Israel agreed to release 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a single Israeli soldier. While the motivations on both sides of the exchange are mired in mistrust and a long history of hostilities, the exchange itself is a reminder that no matter how many of us there may be, every human life is precious. The news story also links with the yearning to return to one's homeland, and the theology of redemption. All of those are biblical themes, and the news this week gives us an opportunity to explore them. So those will be the topics of this installment of **The Wired Word**.

Remember, if you wish to provide your class members with an abbreviated copy of the lesson, [click here](#), and you can send them a copy via e-mail today.

May God bless you as you teach the Scriptures this week.

The Editorial Team of **The Wired Word**



Israel Swaps 1,027 Palestinian Prisoners for One Israeli Captive

The Wired Word for October 23, 2011

In the News

This week, in a deal brokered through Egypt, Israel agreed to release 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, including some who have killed Israelis, in exchange for the only Israeli captive held by the militant Palestinian group Hamas, which controls Gaza. The first stage of the exchange took place on Tuesday, with Hamas freeing the Israeli soldier, Sgt. First Class Gilad Shalit, 25, and Israel releasing 477 Palestinians from its prisons. Five hundred fifty more Palestinians are slated to be released over the next two months.

Shalit had been captured in a cross-border raid in 2006 and held incommunicado ever since. Some of the Palestinians had spent many years in Israeli jails. While some of those released had been involved in major violence and killing of (or attempts to kill) Israelis, others had been detained for offenses such as rock-throwing.

While there were celebrations on both sides as the captives returned to their homelands, some in Israel, especially those whose loved ones had been killed by certain of the released Palestinians, opposed the swap. Most Israelis, however, supported it, as did the overwhelming majority of Palestinians.

Israelis were about equally divided on whether the release of terrorists will harm Israel's security. There is concern about the precedent set and whether the exchange will lead to more abductions of Israeli soldiers. A *New York Times* article quoted one Palestinian woman as saying that Palestinians should "take another Shalit" every year until all the remaining 5,000 prisoners in Israel are freed.

There appears to be more than one reason why Israel would give up so many captives for a single Israeli. For one, Israel has a history of being willing to pay dearly for its citizens' freedom. For another, Shalit's parents

had done an excellent job of keeping their son's story before the public and making him a national celebrity. Thus, seeking his release had become a national goal. For yet another reason, changes in the whole region due to the uprisings of the "Arab Spring" made the current time a window of opportunity that might soon close. Israel may also gain stronger ties with Egypt by collaborating on the exchange.

Still another reason is likely one of supply and demand. Israel has thousands of Palestinian prisoners, most of whom are mostly unknown in their homeland. Hamas had a single captive who had been elevated to celebrity status.

One more reason has to do with universal conscription in Israel. According to *The Telegraph* (London), "In return for the sacrifice of universal conscription, Israelis believe that it is incumbent on the government to do everything in its power to save a living soldier when something goes wrong -- whatever the cost." In addition, "in Judaism, winning the release of any Jew held captive by Gentiles -- something known in Hebrew as *pidyon shvuyim* -- is a commandment ordained by God. Heeding it brings you blessings; failing to fulfil it is a sin."

A final reason is rooted in biblical history. The return to the national homeland has been a powerful theme in Jewish life for more than 3,000 years. As Martin Peretz explained in *The New Republic*, the return to Zion "pertains to the people Israel itself. And it applies also to individual Jews, both in the abstract and in the tactile, as a matter of conscience and as a fact of communality."

In any case, Shalit is now home. Subsequent events will tell if Israel paid too high a price.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Israeli Soldier Swapped for Hundreds of Palestinians. *New York Times*](#)

[Prisoner Inflation. *Slate*](#)

[Gilad Shalit Release: Israel's Continuing Obsession with Soldiers and Conscription. *The Telegraph*](#)

[Why Israelis Believe One Soldier Is Worth 1,000 Palestinian Prisoners. *CNN*](#)

[Gilad Shalit Release: Why Israel and Hamas Agreed to a Prisoner Swap. *Christian Science Monitor*](#)

[Israel Divided Over Price of Freedom for Captive Soldier Gilad Shalit. *The Guardian*](#)

[The Return: Gilad Shalit Comes Home. *The New Republic*](#)

[US Awkwardly Welcomes Israeli-Hamas Prisoner Swap. *ABC News*](#)

The Big Questions

1. Should this prisoner exchange be measured in mathematical terms of the value of a human life? Why or why not? What biblical perspectives help to answer this question?
2. As a people, the Jews have experienced persecution over the centuries and, in modern times, were the primary target of the Holocaust. How might this history affect attitudes in Israel today regarding what price is paid to free a single Israeli citizen?
3. Martin Peretz said that the return to Zion applies "to individual Jews ... as a matter of conscience and as a fact of communality." How does the restoration of a single Jewish captive to his family impact the nation's sense of community? What effect is the return of the Palestinian prisoners to their families likely to have on their communities? Where does communality come into play in American life today? Where does it fit in the church? Comment on the concept of global communality that crosses national/ethnic boundaries, in light of God's intent for the world.
4. To what degree can the release of Shalit be considered a redemption? To what degree can the

release of the Palestinians be considered redemptions? What, if any, differences do you see?

5. If more taking of Israelis as hostages occurs after this swap, will the price for Shalit still be worth it? Why or why not? If this prisoner exchange leads to the abduction of non-Israeli nationals, including Americans, how would you feel? How would change the way you feel about Israel?

Confronting the News with Scripture

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Exodus 13:19

“And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites, saying, ‘God will surely take notice of you, and then you must carry my bones with you from here.’” (For context, read 13:17-22.)

At the time of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, Moses had the bones of their ancestor Joseph carried with them to be buried in the Promised Land, when they finally got there. This was to fulfill Joseph’s own request some 400 years earlier, as recorded in Genesis 50:24-26: “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’ So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, ‘When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.’ And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.”

Joseph’s request must have been passed down from one generation to another, and Moses fulfilled it. That showed that Joseph’s faith in God, and his belief that God would eventually lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, was not misplaced. Ironically, in Joseph’s time, the Israelites were still invited sojourners in Egypt, not the slaves they became by Moses’ time. But Joseph foresaw that God would one day lead them back to the land God had promised to them.

Thus, yearning to return to the homeland has a long history among the Jews. (In fact, it goes back even earlier than Joseph; his father Jacob, who was the first to be named Israel, also made a similar request -- see Genesis 49:29-33.)

Questions: The yearning to return to one’s homeland, even if only in death, is not limited to Israel, but is common in many cultures. What do you think drives that yearning? Some countries have laid claim not only to human remains, but also to artwork and cultural materials taken from their homeland. How do you compare the value of human remains versus cultural artifacts?

Deuteronomy 30:4

“Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back.” (For context, read 30:1-5.)

Among the last things Moses said to the Israelites was the statement above, which included the promise that if, after calamity, the people returned to God, God would bring them home.

Questions: Christianity is less tied to a specific location than is Judaism. Where is the Christian homeland, and how does that impact how you live your life? Is your homeland a place from the past, or an idea, or is it centered in the future?

Matthew 10:29-31

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many

sparrows.” (For context, read 10:26-31.)

This is a statement by Jesus about human worth.

Question: How would you apply this statement to the Palestinians who were released from the Israeli jails in exchange for Shalit? If you were the one abducted, what price would you want your family, or your country, to pay for your return?

Matthew 13:45-46

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.” (For context, read 13:44-50.)

The high price in numbers of prisoners exchanged for Sgt. Shalit brings to mind this brief kingdom parable Jesus told. In context, Jesus is saying that entry into the kingdom of God is so to be desired that any price one has to pay to gain it is worth it.

Questions: What does it actually cost you to be a follower of Jesus? If you can’t think of any cost, what does that suggest?

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (For context, read 3:1-21.)

This well-known verse refers to something quite the opposite of the Shalit situation. Rather than many being given to redeem one, One was given to redeem many. And rather than that One being freed, he was sent to his death. This verse declares that all of humankind in general and each individual in particular is worth so much to God that he was willing to give his only Son to bring us to life eternal.

Questions: Jesus spoke these words in response to questions from Nicodemus, a seeker. How would you compare your search for God to his search? More intellectual? Less questioning? Driven by concern? Something else?

For Further Discussion

1. How might this prisoner swap affect the Palestinian-Israeli peace process?
2. Should this prisoner exchange have any bearing on U.S. policy about seeking to free POWs and to locate MIAs? If so, what bearing? What bearing should it have on those held by the United States as POWs?
3. In 1985, Israel traded 1,150 security prisoners for three Israeli soldiers captured during the first Lebanon War. Compared to that, the current swap seems to have an inflationary aspect. What matters should affect the “price” a country is willing to pay to retrieve its citizens?
4. Most, but not all, members of the Israeli cabinet supported this exchange. If you were on that cabinet, how would you have voted and why?
5. Shalit’s case was kept in the limelight by his parents, leading it to become a political football. Is it fair that some lives attain more importance because of public relations? What does this say about the value of all lives being equal?

Responding to the News

This is a good time to remind ourselves that all people -- including those with whose lifestyle and values we disagree -- are valued in God's eyes, and to consider how that should affect our treatment of such persons.

Closing Prayer

We pray, O God, that you will help those in a position to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian impasse to do all they peaceably can to bring that about. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Copyright 2011 Communication Resources

Israel Swaps 1,027 Palestinian Prisoners for One Israeli Captive

Dear Class Member,

There's a certain irony that this week, just days before the world's population is projected to hit 7 billion people, Israel agreed to release 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a single Israeli soldier. While the motivations on both sides of the exchange are mired in mistrust and a long history of hostilities, the exchange itself is a reminder that no matter how many of us there may be, every human life is precious. The news story also links with the yearning to return to one's homeland, and the theology of redemption. All of those are biblical themes, and the news this week gives us an opportunity to explore them. So those will be the topics of our next class.

If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.



Israel Swaps 1,027 Palestinian Prisoners for One Israeli Captive

The Wired Word for October 23, 2011

In the News

This week, in a deal brokered through Egypt, Israel agreed to release 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, including some who have killed Israelis, in exchange for the only Israeli captive held by the militant Palestinian group Hamas, which controls Gaza. The first stage of the exchange took place on Tuesday, with Hamas freeing the Israeli soldier, Sgt. First Class Gilad Shalit, 25, and Israel releasing 477 Palestinians from its prisons. Five hundred fifty more Palestinians are slated to be released over the next two months.

Shalit had been captured in a cross-border raid in 2006 and held incommunicado ever since. Some of the Palestinians had spent many years in Israeli jails. While some of those released had been involved in major violence and killing of (or attempts to kill) Israelis, others had been detained for offenses such as rock-throwing.

While there were celebrations on both sides as the captives returned to their homelands, some in Israel, especially those whose loved ones had been killed by certain of the released Palestinians, opposed the swap. Most Israelis, however, supported it, as did the overwhelming majority of Palestinians.

Israelis were about equally divided on whether the release of terrorists will harm Israel's security. There is concern about the precedent set and whether the exchange will lead to more abductions of Israeli soldiers. A *New York Times* article quoted one Palestinian woman as saying that Palestinians should "take another Shalit" every year until all the remaining 5,000 prisoners in Israel are freed.

There appears to be more than one reason why Israel would give up so many captives for a single Israeli. For one, Israel has a history of being willing to pay dearly for its citizens' freedom. For another, Shalit's parents had done an excellent job of keeping their son's story before the public and making him a national celebrity.

Thus, seeking his release had become a national goal. For yet another reason, changes in the whole region due to the uprisings of the “Arab Spring” made the current time a window of opportunity that might soon close. Israel may also gain stronger ties with Egypt by collaborating on the exchange.

Still another reason is likely one of supply and demand. Israel has thousands of Palestinian prisoners, most of whom are mostly unknown in their homeland. Hamas had a single captive who had been elevated to celebrity status.

One more reason has to do with universal conscription in Israel. According to *The Telegraph* (London), “In return for the sacrifice of universal conscription, Israelis believe that it is incumbent on the government to do everything in its power to save a living soldier when something goes wrong -- whatever the cost.” In addition, “in Judaism, winning the release of any Jew held captive by Gentiles -- something known in Hebrew as *pidyon shvuyim* -- is a commandment ordained by God. Heeding it brings you blessings; failing to fulfil it is a sin.”

A final reason is rooted in biblical history. The return to the national homeland has been a powerful theme in Jewish life for more than 3,000 years. As Martin Peretz explained in *The New Republic*, the return to Zion “pertains to the people Israel itself. And it applies also to individual Jews, both in the abstract and in the tactile, as a matter of conscience and as a fact of communality.”

In any case, Shalit is now home. Subsequent events will tell if Israel paid too high a price.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Israeli Soldier Swapped for Hundreds of Palestinians. *New York Times*](#)

[Prisoner Inflation. *Slate*](#)

[Gilad Shalit Release: Israel’s Continuing Obsession with Soldiers and Conscription. *The Telegraph*](#)

[Why Israelis Believe One Soldier Is Worth 1,000 Palestinian Prisoners. *CNN*](#)

[Gilad Shalit Release: Why Israel and Hamas Agreed to a Prisoner Swap. *Christian Science Monitor*](#)

[Israel Divided Over Price of Freedom for Captive Soldier Gilad Shalit. *The Guardian*](#)

[The Return: Gilad Shalit Comes Home. *The New Republic*](#)

[US Awkwardly Welcomes Israeli-Hamas Prisoner Swap. *ABC News*](#)

The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. Should this prisoner exchange be measured in mathematical terms of the value of a human life? Why or why not? What biblical perspectives help to answer this question?
2. As a people, the Jews have experienced persecution over the centuries and, in modern times, were the primary target of the Holocaust. How might this history affect attitudes in Israel today regarding what price is paid to free a single Israeli citizen?
3. Martin Peretz said that the return to Zion applies “to individual Jews ... as a matter of conscience and as a fact of communality.” How does the restoration of a single Jewish captive to his family impact the nation’s sense of community? What effect is the return of the Palestinian prisoners to their families likely to have on their communities? Where does communality come into play in American life today? Where does it fit in the church? Comment on the concept of global communality that crosses national/ethnic boundaries, in light of God’s intent for the world.
4. To what degree can the release of Shalit be considered a redemption? To what degree can the

release of the Palestinians be considered redemptions? What, if any, differences do you see?

5. If more taking of Israelis as hostages occurs after this swap, will the price for Shalit still be worth it? Why or why not? If this prisoner exchange leads to the abduction of non-Israeli nationals, including Americans, how would you feel? How would change the way you feel about Israel?

Confronting the News with Scripture

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

Exodus 13:17-22

Deuteronomy 30:1-5

Matthew 10:26-31

Matthew 13:44-50

John 3:1-21

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight on the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.

Scriptures for The Wired Word Online Bible Study for October 23, 2011

Exodus 13:17-22

¹⁷When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, "If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt." ¹⁸So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle. ¹⁹And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites, saying, "God will surely take notice of you, and then you must carry my bones with you from here." ²⁰They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. ²²Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Deuteronomy 30:1-5

³⁰When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, ²and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, ³then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you. ⁴Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. ⁵The Lord your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.

Matthew 10:26-31

²⁶"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

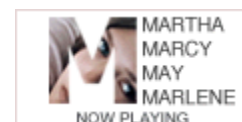
Matthew 13:44-50

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

John 3:1-21

³Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)



October 18, 2011

Israeli Soldier Swapped for Hundreds of Palestinians

By **ETHAN BRONNER** and **STEPHEN FARRELL**

JERUSALEM — In an elaborate prisoner exchange that could roil Middle East politics, an Israeli soldier held for more than five years by the militant **Palestinian** group **Hamas** was swapped on Tuesday for hundreds of Palestinians who have spent many years in Israeli jails, all them freed to jubilant welcomes tinged with bitterness and grief.

Buses transporting the Palestinian prisoners — the first group of what will eventually number more than 1,000 — made their way into Egypt, which helped broker the exchange, and from there to the **West Bank** and **Gaza Strip** where relatives and celebrations awaited.

The soldier, Sgt. First Class **Gilad Shalit**, 25, was taken from Gaza, where he had been held since Palestinian militants abducted him in a cross-border raid in 2006, into Egypt and from there to **Israel**, where he was given a medical check and declared in good health. Looking pale and thin, he changed into a military uniform and was flown by helicopter to an Israeli military air base where he was reunited with his family and met with Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**.

“Today we are all united in joy and in pain,” Mr. Netanyahu said shortly after in a televised address from the base, Tel Nof, south of Tel Aviv.

The question of whether the exchange would lead to more abductions of Israeli soldiers hung in the air on Tuesday for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The armed wing of Hamas made clear that for it the conflict with Israel was hardly over. “We will not give up until prisons are shut down,” a masked spokesman for the group, who identified himself as Abu Obaida, said in a televised statement in Gaza. “A chapter has ended but there are other chapters.”

Abu Obaida also said that Hamas treated Sergeant Shalit “according to the Islamic morals,” while Israel “deliberately dealt with our prisoners with torture, compulsion and revenge.”

One of the freed prisoners, Yehya Sinwar, a co-founder of an early security wing of Hamas, was defiant. He promised “to work hard to free all prisoners, especially those who serve high sentences, whatever the price was.”

Another was Wafa al-Bass, who has been in prison since 2005 when she used the chance for treatment at an Israeli hospital as a pretext to bring a suicide belt through the Erez crossing — trying to explode it when caught. Upon arrival in Gaza, she said that Palestinians should “take another Shalit” every year until all the remaining 5,000 Palestinians prisoners in Israeli jails went free.

Israel displayed a calibrated mix of relieved celebration and acknowledgment — both of the pain and death that the released Palestinians caused many families and of the risk that their release may pose to Israelis.

Several petitions to block or alter the exchange had been rejected by Israel’s high court on Monday. The scene at the courtroom was emotionally charged, with some families who lost members in terrorist attacks assailing the Shalit family and the government.

Mr. Netanyahu wrote letters to the bereaved families saying he understood their heartache.

“I know that the price is very heavy for you,” he wrote. “I understand the difficulty to countenance that the evil people who perpetrated the appalling crimes against your loved ones will not pay the full price that they deserve. During these moments I hope that you will find solace that I and the entire nation of Israel embrace you and share your pain.”

On Tuesday, Mr. Netanyahu, in his remarks at Tel Nof base, said Israel would continue to fight terrorism and warned that any released prisoner who returned to violence was “taking his life into his hands.”

The deal is likely to strengthen Hamas within Palestinian politics, adding to the difficulties for President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah and efforts to revive the peace process with Israel. Egypt, a key broker of the deal, will likely gain, as will Turkey, a supporter of Hamas. Hamas may even move its headquarters to Egypt from the Syrian capital, Damascus, where President [Bashar al-Assad](#) is facing strong popular revolt. And if the prisoner exchange emboldens Hamas to carry out more actions against Israel, that would likely empower the hawkish right in Israel.

Sergeant Shalit, the first captive Israeli soldier returned home alive in 26 years, was unexpectedly interviewed on Egyptian television before being handed over to Israel. Sitting in a blue checked shirt and speaking Hebrew, he smiled and reflected on the questions before answering them.

Asked if he had feared that he would never get out, Sergeant Shalit answered that he worried it would take many more years although in the past month he had suspected a deal was in the works. He said he was told of his release a week ago.

Asked what he missed most in prison, he replied, “My family and my friends and seeing and talking with people. The worst was having to do the same thing every day over and over.”

He was told that Israel still had thousands of prisoners and was asked if he would like them released. “I will be happy for them to be released if they don’t return to fight us,” he said. “I very much hope that this deal will advance peace.”

Rafah, the most isolated part of Gaza, was where the Shalit saga began and ended. In June 2006, Hamas and two other militant factions raided an Israeli military post at Kerem Shalom via a long tunnel beneath the Rafah sands under the border, capturing the young soldier, then a corporal. He was never seen in public during his captivity. On Tuesday, Egyptian television showed Sergeant Shalit being rushed through the Rafah crossing terminal from Gaza into Egypt accompanied by Hamas and Egyptian officials.

Soon afterward, an Israeli military statement said: “Gilad Shalit crossed the border into Israel, ending over five years in captivity.”

Sergeant Shalit — who was promoted twice while in captivity — was brought to the Tel Nof base after his medical check, which took longer than expected, raising concern about his health. At the base where he reunited with his family and met Mr. Netanyahu, he also met Defense Minister [Ehud Barak](#) and Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, the military chief of staff.

After a more extensive medical examination and some time with the officials and his family, Sergeant Shalit and his family were transported by helicopter to their home in northern Israel. Reporters and onlookers were barred from his neighborhood to give the family a measure of privacy. Chiefs of major Israeli news organizations vowed to respect the restrictions.

Fawzi Barhoum, a Hamas spokesman, told Al Jazeera television that the first step of the agreement was complete. Speaking from the Rafah crossing point, Mr. Barhoum warned Israel against “maneuvering or playing with any article of the agreement.” He added that Egyptian mediators had assured Hamas that they would not allow Israel to violate the agreement.

Both Israel and the divided [Palestinian leadership](#) — Fatah runs the West Bank while Hamas controls the Gaza Strip — had made elaborate preparations for the handover of the prisoners, many of them held far longer than Sergeant Shalit.

Throngs of excited Palestinians woke to mosque loudspeakers crying “God is great!” and “Victory to God!” as they awaited the arrival of buses carrying the 477 prisoners. Another 550 are expected to be released in two months. Two female prisoners due to be sent to Gaza were demanding instead to be sent to Egypt. Turkey was expecting to receive about 10 prisoners, according to its foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu. The Anatolian news agency reported that around 40 Palestinians would be relocated to Turkey, Syria and Egypt and Turkey.

Shortly after dawn, the Hamas-run government took busloads of journalists in a tightly controlled media operation to the Rafah crossing. Armed members of Hamas’s militant wing, the Qassam

Brigades, lined the main highway to the crossing, wearing black and green bandanas and balaclavas. Some carried Kalashnikov assault rifles while others bore rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

Many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of the guards — at some points posted every 15 feet — had apparently been deployed to forestall disruptions. A celebratory rally was planned at Brigades Park in one of Gaza’s largest open spaces. There a stage had been erected for the Hamas prime minister, Ismail Haniya, to address the crowd and welcome the returnees.

The buses carrying the prisoners drove through a huge crowd of Hamas police and a drum band and honor guard. The men disembarked one by one and ran a gantlet of people who cheered them, held up camera phones, saluted and patted them on the back. Some were given sashes with the Palestinian colors.

All along Salahuddin Street, the main north-south road that runs the length of the Gaza Strip, Hamas activists had attached Islamist banners to streetlights on Monday.

Dozens of the released prisoners attended a reception given by President Abbas in Ramallah in the West Bank. Although the exchange was negotiated by his rivals in Hamas, the release of prisoners was a source of national celebration. School was canceled so that children could participate.

“We thank God that you returned safe and sound to your families, your brothers, and your homeland after this forced disappearance because you struggled for your homeland,” Mr. Abbas told the freed prisoners and well wishers. “We pray that God enables us to see the rest of our sisters and brothers freed in this yard. Your sacrifices, and efforts and work were not in vain. You worked and struggled and sacrificed. You will see the results of your sacrifices in the independent Palestinian state.”

At Rafah, a woman arrived with a photograph of her son, who was killed in the raid that captured Gilad Shalit. He was Mohammad Azmi Firwana, 23, from Khan Younis.

“I have come to greet the prisoners because they are all like my sons and daughters,” said the woman, Ahlam Firwana. “We have not got Mohammad’s body back yet. We have heard nothing.”

Ethan Bronner reported from Jerusalem, and Stephen Farrell from Gaza. Reporting was contributed by Fares Akram from Gaza, Khaled Abu-Aker from the West Bank, Isabel Kershner from Tel Nof Air Force base, and Sebnem Arsu from Istanbul.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: October 18, 2011

An earlier version of this article misstated the name of Israel’s Defense Minister. It is Ehud Barak, not

Gilad Shalit: Are Israeli soldiers worth 1,000 Palestinians?

By Will Oremus | Posted Thursday, Oct. 13, 2011, at 6:55 PM ET

| Posted Thursday, Oct. 13, 2011, at 6:55 PM ET

Israel traded 1,000 Palestinians for one soldier. Is that the going rate?

Israel announced a deal this week to bring home soldier Gilad Shalit, taken hostage by Hamas militants in 2006. In exchange, the country will free 1,027 Palestinian prisoners. On a per-Israeli basis, that's more than double what was paid in a famous 1985 swap, when Israel traded 1,150 security prisoners for three soldiers captured in the first Lebanon War. What's the going exchange rate for Israelis?

About 350-to-1. While each deal to free political or military hostages arises from a unique set of circumstances, this week's trade of 1,027 for one is unusually lopsided. According to Reuters, Israel has released an estimated 7,000 Palestinians and other Arab prisoners over the past three decades in exchange for the freedom of 16 Israelis. That puts the average exchange rate at about 438 Arabs for each one, or 269 Arabs each if you include the 10 corpses that were also returned in prisoner swaps. The Jibril Agreement of 1985, mentioned above, implied a valuation of 383 Arabs to the Israeli. A more complex deal in 2004 saw one living former Israeli colonel and three dead soldiers change hands for 400 Palestinian prisoners, 35 prisoners of various other nationalities, and the remains of 59 Lebanese fighters and civilians.

Elsewhere in the world, such deals tend to be less lopsided, for a variety of reasons. The United States generally refuses to negotiate with groups that take hostages, preferring to recoup its citizens by force. In the Iran hostage crisis, for instance, President Jimmy Carter declined to hand over the deposed Shah in exchange for the release of 52 American citizens. Instead, he imposed sanctions and eventually launched a helicopter rescue mission that failed disastrously. The hostages were finally returned in an Algeria-brokered agreement after the Shah had died and Reagan had replaced Carter in office. When Somali pirates captured an American ship captain in 2009 and demanded a \$2 million ransom, President Obama sent in a team of Navy snipers, who ended up killing three pirates and rescuing the hostage. Other countries and private entities have been willing to pay cash in order to avoid bloodshed.

In traditional military conflicts, swaps are rare. The Geneva Conventions allow both sides to hold prisoners of war until hostilities cease, at which point they are required to release them all. Prisoners may also be turned over unilaterally for humanitarian reasons. In the Cold War, however, there were several spy swaps between the United States and the Soviet Union. The trades were often one-to-one, but not always. Two years after the Soviets shot down a CIA pilot in a U2 spy plane over central Russia, they released him, along with an American student, in exchange for a single Soviet KGB colonel. In 2010, the United States turned over 10 Russian sleeper spies in exchange for four alleged Western double agents.

The numbers in such exchanges vary because prisoners, unlike money, usually aren't a fungible commodity—some are worth more to their governments than others. The Colombian rebel group FARC offered most of its hostages for ransom but held back about 40, whom it deemed “exchangeables,” redeemable only with the release of some 500 imprisoned FARC members. That's an exchange rate of 12.5 to 1. The government has generally refused to trade, however, instead rescuing some of the hostages in military raids.

So why were the Palestinians able to charge the Israelis so much for Gilad Shalit's release? Supply and demand. Israel has vast numbers of Palestinian prisoners, most of whom are relative unknowns in their home country. But the capture of a single Israeli soldier makes big news, and the Israeli government has shown a willingness to pay dearly for its citizens' freedom. While both sides celebrated news of the Shalit deal, there are signs that some in Israel are beginning to question whether prisoner inflation has gone too far.

Got a question about today's news? Ask the Explainer.

Explainer thanks Mary Ellen O'Connell of Notre Dame Law School.

Gilad Shalit release: Israel's continuing obsession with soldiers and conscription

Never in the history of modern Israel has so much been paid for the liberty of one man – Gilad Shalit.



Sgt. Maj. Shalit will be exchanged for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners Photo: REUTERS



By [Adrian Blomfield \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/adrian-blomfield/\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/adrian-blomfield/) , Jerusalem

8:20AM BST 18 Oct 2011

True, the Jewish state has a record of lopsided prisoner swaps, on several occasions in the past freeing hundreds of Arab militants in exchange for the handover of captive Israeli nationals or even their corpses.

But none has been as lopsided as the deal to release Gilad Shalit; for the freedom of one 25-year-old conscript, the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister who came to office on a platform of never yielding to terror, has agreed to surrender to Hamas 1,027 jailed Palestinian militants.

The political cost is clear: the deal will bolster Hamas at the expense of its moderate rivals in Fatah, convincing many Palestinians that the only way to wring concessions from Israel is through acts of violence rather than diplomacy. After all, Mahmoud Abbas, the moderate Palestinian leader, has used peaceful means to push for the release of Arab prisoners for years – to no avail.

Likewise, it is not just the families of those who lost relatives in suicide bombings who know that some of those to be released from prison on Tuesday may revert to terror to press their cause for Palestinian statehood. Almost

everyone in Israel is aware of that risk.

And yet, if the opinion polls are to be believed, 79 per cent of Israelis support a deal that seems, on the face of it, so reckless. Why?

[Prisoner exchange in pictures \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/8833341/Israeli-soldier-Gilad-Shalit-released-in-deal-to-free-1000-Palestinian-prisoners.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/8833341/Israeli-soldier-Gilad-Shalit-released-in-deal-to-free-1000-Palestinian-prisoners.html)

[Quartet to meet Israel and Palestinian officials separately \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8833056/Quartet-to-meet-Israel-and-Palestinian-officials-separately.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8833056/Quartet-to-meet-Israel-and-Palestinian-officials-separately.html)

[Israel rejects attempt to block Gilad Shalit swap \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8832977/Israel-court-rejects-last-minute-attempt-to-block-Gilad-Shalit-prisoner-swap.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8832977/Israel-court-rejects-last-minute-attempt-to-block-Gilad-Shalit-prisoner-swap.html)

[Israel: last-minute attempt to block Shalit swap \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8832447/Israel-court-hears-last-minute-attempt-to-block-Gilad-Shalit-swap.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8832447/Israel-court-hears-last-minute-attempt-to-block-Gilad-Shalit-swap.html)

[Gilad Shalit release: Q&A \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8832606/Gilad-Shalit-release-QandA.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8832606/Gilad-Shalit-release-QandA.html)

[Gilad Shalit release: Timetable \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8832498/Gilad-Shalit-release-Timetable.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8832498/Gilad-Shalit-release-Timetable.html)

In part, the answer is, of course, human instinct. It is hard not to empathise with the plight of a young man, just 19 when he was captured, held for five years in almost total isolation, robbed not just of contact with his family and friends, but of human interaction in general. In Israel, it is widely believed that Sgt Maj Shalit has not seen more than four or five people – all of them his captors – in the entire time he has been incarcerated.

Then there is a fact that Israel is a nation of conscripts. Every parent must surrender his son or daughter to the army for up to three years, and national service is often conducted in the most perilous of circumstances.

For every Israeli who has served in the armed forces there is a feeling they could easily have been Gilad Shalit. For every Israeli parent, the young conscript could quite conceivably have been their own son.

In return for a sacrifice everyone has to make, Israelis believe that it is incumbent on the government to do everything in its power to save a living soldier when something goes wrong – whatever the cost.

But it also runs deeper than that. The notion of doing everything in one's power to free someone unjustly taken

prisoner is deep rooted in the fabric of Israeli society.

This is partly due to the country's Jewish heritage. In Judaism, winning the release of any Jew held captive by gentiles – something known in Hebrew as pidyon shvuyim – is a commandment ordained by God. Heeding it brings you blessings; failing to fulfil it is a sin.

Captivity is worse than starvation or death, Jewish teaching says. "The redeeming of captives take precedence over supporting the poor or clothing them," wrote the Jewish scholar Maimonides in the Middle Ages.

For modern Israel, with its almost universal belief of being a country under siege, the Jewish notion of pidgin shvuyim is a hallowed creed, an affirmation that a militarised state can only be strong if it protects all its citizens, particularly its soldiers – no matter how lowly.

"Israel's main asset in human and security terms is the sense of mutual responsibility that its citizens and soldiers feel towards one another," wrote Avi Shavit, a columnist for the Israeli newspaper Haaretz.

"Without this feeling, there is no meaning to our lives here. Without this feeling, we have neither army, security, nor the ability to protect ourselves.

"Rightly or not, Shalit has become a symbol of mutual responsibility. And therefore his forthcoming release will not only be the redemption of a captive and the saving of a life and the return home of a son. Shalit's release will be the realisation of Israeli solidarity."

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2011

Why Israelis believe one soldier is worth 1,000 Palestinian prisoners - CNN.com

By Peter Wilkinson, CNN

2011-10-17T20:19:06Z

(CNN) -- Israel is freeing more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, including hundreds serving life sentences for attacks on Israelis, in exchange for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit who was captured by Hamas in 2006. How and why has the controversial deal come about?

Why is Shalit considered important enough by the Israelis to be exchanged for so many Palestinian prisoners?

Militants captured the young sergeant in June 2006 after tunneling into the Jewish state and attacking an Israeli army outpost. Israel immediately launched a military incursion into Gaza to rescue Shalit, then 19, but failed to free him.

As the Israeli attacks continued, the Palestinians death toll steadily grew -- hundreds killed, many militants, but also, according to Palestinian sources, innocent men women and children.

Shalit's captors, affiliated with the Islamic Hamas government, demanded a prisoner swap, but the Israeli government said no -- at least in public.

Until Tuesday, when Shalit was freed and returned to Israel, he was held incommunicado by Hamas, which controls Gaza.

Efforts to free him became a rallying cry for thousands of Israelis who urged the government to secure his release. Shalit's supporters feared that if a deal was not reached, his fate could have become similar to that of Israeli Air Force Navigator Ron Arad, who crashed his warplane in Lebanon 25 years ago. He was captured by a local Shiite Amal militia and later handed over to Hezbollah, Shiite militants strongly influenced by Iran and now in de facto control of Lebanon.

Despite reported attempts to negotiate his return, Israel failed to free Arad and the trail went cold. Over the years he became a symbol of the failure of successive Israeli governments to strike a deal that would bring him back alive. In June 2008 Hezbollah announced Arad was dead.

Who are the Palestinians being freed by Israel?

Israel Monday announced it would release 1,027 prisoners and it identified the first 477 to be freed Tuesday. The group includes two prominent female prisoners: Ahlam Tamimi, serving life terms for being an accomplice in the 2001 bombing of a Sbarro pizza restaurant that killed 15 people; and Amneh Muna, who plotted the killing of a 16-year-old Israeli boy in 2001 and received a life sentence. Twenty-five other women will also be freed.

The most notable name not on the list is that of jailed Palestinian lawmaker Marwan Barghouti, who is serving five life sentences for murder and other charges related to his role in planning attacks on Israelis during the second Intifada.

He had been considered by many Palestinians the most important prisoner who might have been released in exchange for Shalit.

How is the handover taking place?

The first swap took place Tuesday, with a second stage scheduled for later this year. Israel freed 477 Palestinian inmates from Israeli jails shortly before Shalit was released, the first group of a batch of more than 1,000 Palestinians being swapped for Shalit's freedom.

Freed prisoners praised Egypt's role as a mediator in interviews on Palestinian television after they were released.

Some are being sent to the West Bank and others to Gaza, while just under half are being sent abroad. A handful are going to homes in Jerusalem, elsewhere in Israel or to Jordan.

Once freed, they will be under various restrictions on a case-by-case basis: Some will not be allowed to leave the country, while others will have restrictions on their movement or be required to report their whereabouts to local police according to Justice Ministry spokesman Moshe Cohen.

Hamas later handed Shalit over to Egyptian security forces, and he later crossed into Israel. Egyptian television showed a short clip of Shalit walking unaided with an escort of about half a dozen people soon after his release was announced. He looked thin and dazed, wearing a dark baseball cap and collared shirt.

Shalit will undergo medical tests and debriefing at an air force base, the Israeli military said. Once that is complete, he will be flown to his home at Mitzpe Hila, north of Haifa.

Why is this happening now?

Speaking to his Cabinet this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that with so much change sweeping the region, he did not know whether a better deal for Shalit was possible, and warned that he didn't act during this window of opportunity, it could close indefinitely.

It represented a vast change in outlook and rhetoric for the combative prime minister, who seems to have calculated that a softer approach was the more politically expedient road to follow.

Whether it was the prospect of going down in history as the Israeli leader who missed the chance to free Shalit, the calculation of larger geopolitical changes in the region, or a mere reflection of public sentiment, Netanyahu has chosen a path that has taken him away from much of what he has spent decades preaching.

The Hamas rulers of Gaza also felt pressure to make the deal now. The rival Palestinian Authority that governs parts of the West Bank is enjoying increased popularity following its recent United Nations bid for recognition of an independent state and a large scale prisoner release was seen by many in Hamas as a way of seizing back the political initiative. Hamas is also contemplating moving its headquarters out of Damascus and concluding the Shalit deal would make it easier to negotiate a possible relocation to Cairo with the post-Mubarak Egyptian government.

What is the reaction in Israel and the Palestinian territories?

The deal to free Shalit was backed by a commanding Israeli Cabinet majority of 26-3 and enjoys wide support from the Israeli public, but there was extensive debate about whether so many Palestinian prisoners should be freed.

Families of victims of terror, as well as some members of the Israeli government, have expressed fierce opposition to the deal. One minister who voted against the agreement called it "a great victory for terrorism," and there are fears that the release of convicted murderers will lead to further attacks on Israeli civilians -- a fear that, critics say, is borne out by statistics. According to the Israeli association of terror victims, Almagor, 180 Israelis have lost their lives to terrorists freed in previous deals since 2000.

For Palestinians the issue of prisoners in Israeli prisons cuts deep. For several decades human rights groups estimate that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have spent time in Israeli prisons for a wide range of alleged crimes. In many cases Palestinians face incarceration without any formal charges, and children under the age of 18 are frequently detained for offenses like rock-throwing. Most Palestinians see these

inmates and those convicted of violent crimes against Israeli citizens as political prisoners detained within the course of an ongoing liberation struggle.

Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza welcomed the prospect of so many prisoners being released but there are reservations about the conditions requiring many of them to be exiled from their homeland.

One Palestinian in Ramallah told CNN, "If I was a prisoner and I am released, I need to go to my family, my country, to my city. Why send me to Turkey or Venezuela whatever -- why?"

How will this affect the peace process?

Israelis are equally split on whether "the release of terrorists" will harm Israeli security, with 50% saying Yes and 48% saying No -- a statistical deadlock given the margin of error for the number of people polled.

One expert, Ronald W. Zweig, the Taub Professor of Israel Studies at New York University, said the deal showed that both sides had made concessions. "And that is a sign of hope."

"Pessimists will point to the dangers of rewarding terror -- both the terror of those released from jail and the act of kidnapping Israelis to have future terrorists released. Cynics will ask if Israel's willingness to conclude the deal was not an attempt to punish (Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud) Abbas for pushing ahead with his policies in the U.N., despite Israeli and American opposition," Zweig wrote in a recent commentary for CNN.

"But there are other considerations which give grounds for optimism. Any movement in the stalled peace process might be enough to get the wheels of this heavy cart out of the rut in which it is trapped. It appears that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had a role in the final deal, perhaps indicating a return of Turkey to constructive dealing with Israel. And the fact that Israel and Hamas have talked -- albeit indirectly -- is a welcome development. Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza might have had more positive long-term effect had this channel of communication been used then.

"Even more significant, the release of these prisoners removes a major obstacle from any future peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians."

CNN's Jerusalem Bureau Chief Kevin Flower and Guy Azriel contributed to this report.

© 2011 Cable News Network. Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Government Phone Plan](#) Free Phone & 250 Min. Government Assisted Cell Plans. Activate Now! [BudgetMobile.com/Government.P](#)

[10 Stocks to Hold Forever](#) Buy them, forget about them, and never sell them. [www.StreetAuthority.com](#)

[Post University Online](#) Get info now about our online Legal Studies degree! [www.Post.edu](#)

The Christian Science Monitor - CSMonitor.com

Gilad Shalit release: Why Israel and Hamas agreed to a prisoner swap

Gilad Shalit, a young Israeli soldier captured more than five years ago, is due to be released along with some 1,000 Palestinian prisoners under a deal announced today.



Captured Israeli soldier Sgt. Gilad Shalit appears in this undated photo. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Tuesday that Israel and Hamas have agreed to a prisoner swap deal that will release Shalit, who has been held for five years in the Gaza Strip, in return for some 1,000 Palestinian prisoners.

(Reuters/Handout/Files)

By [Joshua Mitnick](#), Correspondent
posted October 11, 2011 at 4:54 pm EDT

Tel Aviv

[Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#) announced tonight that [Israel](#) and [Hamas](#) have agreed to an historic prisoner swap deal that will release [Sgt. Gilad Shalit](#), who has been held for five years in the [Gaza Strip](#), in return for some 1,000 Palestinian prisoners.

After thanking the Egyptian government for mediating the deal, Mr. Netanyahu said that if everything goes according to plan, Mr. Shalit would return home in the coming days.

"Today I am bringing the cabinet a proposal that will bring Gilad home healthy and in one piece," he said.

[MONITOR PHOTOS: Daily life in Gaza under Hamas rule](#)

The diplomatic breakthrough gives a much needed boost to Hamas, [Egypt](#), and Mr. Netanyahu, all of whom have been struggling of late amid the regional changes prompted by the so-called Arab Spring.

How the deal helps Israel, Hamas

The Israeli prime minister is likely to get a boost in popular support for releasing a soldier who has become a nationwide celebrity since being kidnapped from the Gaza border in June 2006. In addition, he was likely keen to boost ties with [Cairo](#) by collaborating on the prisoner deal, analysts say. Relations had grown chilly after a terrorist attack on the Israel-Egyptian border in August, and the storming of Israel's embassy in Cairo by a mob of Egyptians.

[Gerald Steinberg](#), a political science professor at [Bar Ilan University](#), says Israel wanted to shore up Egypt's interim military rulers as a counterweight to the growing efforts of [Turkey](#) to gain regional prominence.

"The goal is to help stabilize [Cairo], so they play a constructive role" in the region, Mr. Steinberg says. "It's to show to other countries" that Egypt is still a regional power after this year's revolution.

Hamas has been struggling recently because of the revolt in [Syria](#) against its strategic and political patron, [President Bashar al-Assad](#). The release of hundreds of convicted militants will give the Islamist militant rulers of Gaza newfound prestige among Palestinians in its rivalry with the Western-backed government of [President Mahmoud Abbas](#).

In a televised address, Hamas leader [Khaled Meshaal](#) said that the release of Palestinian prisoners would be carried out in two stages: 450 prisoners within a week, and the remainder within two months. Calling the deal a "huge national achievement," Meshaal said the deal would include some 315 prisoners serving life sentences in Israel.

[MONITOR PHOTOS: Daily life in Gaza under Hamas rule](#)

The identity of the prisoners to be included in the deal remains unclear.

Key deal for Netanyahu, but hard to implement

The agreement is the culmination of five years of on-and-off negotiations. Twice since Shalit's imprisonment – at the end of the term of former [Prime Minister Ehud Olmert](#) and nearly two years ago – a deal seemed close, but fell through.

Israel's [Haaretz](#) newspaper, describing a closing window of opportunity, speculated that the government believes that the uncertainty created by the Arab Spring was liable to destabilize regional governments in the future and further complicate the deal. After the announcement of the deal, activists campaigning for Shalit's release embraced each other in an encampment outside the prime minister's office in [Jerusalem](#), where Shalit's parents have camped out for more than a year.

Steinberg says that the deal would be painful for Netanyahu, stirring up protests by Israeli families whose relatives have been killed or injured in terrorist attacks during the Palestinian intifada. He suggests that the agreement was also done with an eye toward Israeli parliamentary elections, which could come as early as next year.

"Netanyahu needed to show that he could pull the deal off, and not leave us hanging," he said. "This sort of agreement is going to be difficult to implement, there's going to be a lot of opposition."

[The Bar/Ba Mitzvah Expert](#) Great Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience in Israel with Keshet keshetisrael.co.il/

[WNE M.Ed. in 16 Months](#) Advance Your Teaching Career. Earn Your Master's Degree in Education! Mastersineducation.wne.edu

© The Christian Science Monitor. All Rights Reserved. [Terms](#) under which this service is provided to you. [Privacy Policy](#).

Israel divided over price of freedom for captive soldier Gilad Shalit

More than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners are to be released in exchange for one serviceman

Phoebe Greenwood in Tel Aviv
The Observer, Saturday 15 October 2011

[A larger](#) | [smaller](#)



Noam Shalit stands near cardboard cut-outs of his son Gilad in Jerusalem. Photograph: Ronen Zvulun/REUTERS

Fresh lilies are regularly laid at a monument by the Tel Aviv Dolphinarium bearing witness to an evening in 2001 when 21 Israeli teenagers were killed while queuing outside a nightclub. Another 132 were injured in the attack by Saeed Hotari, a young Palestinian suicide bomber affiliated with [Hamas](#).

But last week flowers arrived more in protest than in sorrow. Husam Badran, the former head of Hamas's military wing in the West Bank and instigator of the Dolphinarium attack, is expected to be among 477 Palestinian prisoners released on Tuesday in a deal to free Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. A further 550 will be freed within two months.

"It's surreal. It's beyond belief," said one young mother angrily as she looked at the monument. "I may be the only one against it, but no good deal sees the release of 1,000 killers. People say Netanyahu showed courage in agreeing to set them free, but I say he has given in to terrorism."

Over the past five years, the parents of captive soldier Gilad Shalit have won the Israeli public with their tireless campaign to free their son, demanding the Israeli government do whatever it takes to rescue him from his captors in the Gaza Strip. [Israel](#) celebrated last week when they finally succeeded. But the nation's joy is tempered with grave misgivings.

To Palestinians, the 1,027 prisoners exchanged for Shalit are freedom fighters. To Israelis, they are terrorists responsible for some of the country's bloodiest atrocities. Israel wants Shalit free but is struggling to stomach the cost of his freedom.

Gustav Specht, 47, who runs a restaurant close to the Dolphinarium on Tel Aviv Beach, shares the broad public reaction as described in the Israeli media: "I think it's the least bad result. Everyone I know is happy Gilad will be free."

But his colleague Alon Reuvney, 28, thinks differently. His friend lost his father in a suicide attack in Jerusalem several years ago: "He heard about the release of his father's killer on the news. No one thought to tell his family. He is very angry."

The official list of prisoners agreed for release has not been published, but several leaked versions have appeared on Arabic news websites. Israelis recognised some of the region's most notorious terrorists. There was Muhammad Duglas, implicated in a suicide bombing at the Sbarro pizza restaurant in Jerusalem in which 15 people were killed. Abdel Hadi Ghanem of Islamic Jihad, responsible for the 1989 attack on a public bus in which 16 Israelis died. And hundreds more like them. Others were convicted of lesser offences.

Few doubt that securing Shalit's return has boosted prime minister [Binyamin Netanyahu](#)'s popularity but *Jerusalem Post* columnist Jonathan Spyer warns he has taken a gamble for public affection. "Within six months time, we will see terrorist attacks linked to these men who are being released. And at that point Bibi [Netanyahu] will pay a very serious price," Spyer said. "In all of this, the Shalit family and Hamas are the winners; the Israeli public will be the loser." Israeli terror expert Boaz Ganor agrees the release of these political prisoners has provided Hamas with legitimacy but predicts they will not pose an immediate threat to Israeli security.

Hamas, listed by the US and the UK as a terror organisation, has proved itself a pragmatic negotiating partner. By insisting on the release of prisoners from all factions, it has regained popular support across Gaza and the West Bank, undermining the Palestinian Authority midway through its UN bid for statehood. It would not serve Hamas's interests, Ganor says, to let the situation deteriorate by allowing released prisoners to wage a campaign of terror. "But I'm not ruling out further kidnappings. This has proved so strategically effective in the past, I believe they [Hamas] would try to kidnap more Israeli soldiers and civilians to gather more power in their hands." Boaz also said it was the prisoner swap negotiated in 1985 by Shimon Peres — 1,150 Palestinian prisoners for three Israeli soldiers captured in the Lebanon war — that ignited the first intifada.

Despite a history of militants freed in swaps killing again, Israel has always negotiated to free its soldiers. Nimrod Kahn, 33, who runs a cookery school in Tel Aviv, says, however unpalatable the deal, Israelis expect their state to make this compromise. It is a guarantee for every high-school graduate expected to devote three years to military service.

"I don't object to the releasing of these prisoners in principle; they would be released in a peace deal sooner or later. I object to this deal because it opens the gate for blackmail," Kahn said. "But it's expected our state will take responsibility for its soldiers. In Israel, the soldier is the holy cow — it cannot be slaughtered under any circumstances."

The New
REPUBLIC

Published on *The New Republic* (<http://www.tnr.com>)

The Return: Gilad Shalit Comes Home

Martin Peretz October 19, 2011 | 12:00 am



The return to Zion has been a trope in Jewish history for more than 3,000 years. It pertains to the people Israel itself. And it applies also to individual Jews, both in the abstract and in the tactile, as a matter of conscience and as a fact of communality. You will know already from my other writings just how much I pity those Jews who are alienated from these considerations or, worse yet, haven't the slightest idea of what I mean. Of course, ignorance of one's past can excuse a lot. But it's not a satisfying answer to inquiring children. Good luck to those who feel they can wing it.

Gilad Shalit's return to Israel after nearly five years and four months in captivity to Hamas, the official and unembarrassed terrorist wing of the Palestinian movement, and

incommunicado even to the International Red Cross (which has a mortifying record of utter indifference to the Jewish prisoners in the concentration camps of another totalist ideology to live down), was experienced by Israel as a whole, by Israel in its home, and by Israel in its dispersion. As *The New York Times* aptly pointed out, Shalit was the first captured Israeli soldier to be returned alive in 26 years. For those Jews who pray and especially for those who don't really but try—which, in the present season, means just about all of Jewry, yes, this tiny remnant of 14 million living souls—the journey of Shalit back to his family and to his nation is a moment of celebration and a kind of victory. It is also a conflicted moment given the number of terrorists who were released at the same time; this line from Yehuda Amichai (**cited by Rabbi Avraham Weiss in a commentary on Shalit**) sums up the situation perfectly: “A person needs to love and hate at the same moment. To laugh and cry with the same eyes. ... To make love in war and war in love.”

I am back in Israel myself, having arrived on Monday, and thus able to experience the *éclat* of the reunion. There is a sense in the streets and in the cafes that, aside from the torment suffered by the isolated young sergeant, his restoration to his mother and father and to the wider fellowship of his people was a penitential happening. Frankly, it's hard to grasp and harder to convey the sense that Shalit's ordeal was a social phenomenon that bound Israel and Jewry together. After all, Israel is a complicated—no, intricate—society with interest groups and motives of all sorts, some rough and even selfish, some tender and even silly, some reasonable and fraternal. One reason why most of Israel, almost all of Israel, thrilled to this summer's taking to the streets was that it represented a vast number of the country's citizenry and its aim was social union. There was no violence, although there was occasional ideological rancor. But the essence of it, *mirabili dicta*, was democratic communalism,

private initiative, and patriotism. There is no country I know with so strong a mesh of individualism and cooperative sentiment at its core. That's why love of country, true love of country, is an ideal to which virtually every Israeli Jew adheres. I cannot imagine in Israel a confrontation between the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street, with two nutcase scenarios, each guaranteed to fail. "Hatikvah" still commands the heartstrings that, alas, "The Star-Spangled Banner" does not quite command.

It is true that over the years many in the 20 percent of the Israeli population that is Arab have been increasingly alienated from the whole. Some of this is attributable to small, very small, even tiny neo-fascist elements among Jews in the country. But, believe me, no crime committed by even those Jews against a Muslim mosque or an Arab olive grove can be compared—or should be—with the murders that are more or less routinely committed by Palestinian patriots. For example, less than a month ago, a car pursued by rocks (no one admits to throwing the rocks) was overturned and its 25 year-old Israeli driver and his one year-old son were dead when the dust settled. There are plenty of references to this incident in the ordinary news aggregators. No mention that I can find in the *Times*. You probably also recall the Fogel family, five of whom were killed by butcher-knife-wielding men at their house. A three-month-old boy was one of the victims. Presumably, he would grow up to be a Zionist. There are plenty of accounts of this one. There was a YouTube clip of the bloody evidence. Too violent, I suppose.

But not too violent for Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority. He's been serving for more than two years since his term ran out. But that's okay with nearly everyone except Hamas which, in any case, is the hero of the hour, having kidnapped Shalit in the first place and then playing high stakes diplomacy for his release and the so-to-speak reciprocal release of 1,027 Palestinians, a bit less than half in Tuesday's transaction and the rest in about two months. Abbas welcomed the freed prisoners: "Your sacrifice and hard work were not in vain. ... You freedom fighters and holy warriors worked for the sake of God and the holy land."

I did not find any reports yet from the wider Arab world of the response to the diplomatic victory registered by Hamas who, as it happens, promised more of the same. But the near-frostbite of the Egyptian Arab Spring leaves little room for joy and solidarity. The Syrian death count threnody goes on and on. The Yemeni conflagration gets worse, and even we Americans can't really tell whether the ally we are helping is worthy of our help. King Abdullah of Jordan has for the second time in eight months dismissed his premier and hired himself another—when, in fact, the issue is His Majesty himself. But if he leaves the only option for Jordan would be another Palestine—that's three Palestines and still no constituted Palestinian people. You'll have to figure out the Libyan condition by yourself.

Terrorists don't keep accurate or faithful statistics on their achievements. But, according to the Israeli press, the heroes of the Palestinian mob murdered at least 500 Israeli civilians, maimed and wounded many hundreds more, and left so many families and communities torn that these men (and some two dozen women) must belong in some macabre book of world records. We will see how many of these criminals return by habit, by ingrained character, and by ideological belief to their crimes. My guess is that within months there will be at least several who will have returned to this horrifying work.

Still, the Israeli population triumphed over this realistic anxiety and in the end did not leave a single living son in the hands of the enemy. It is a brave act, carried out over a long five years.

After Shalit crossed out of Gaza into Egypt, the Cairo government, such as it is, played a shabby trick by forcing him to be questioned at a full-fledged press conference—as if he could answer honestly rather than in strained diplomatese in the process. He was asked how he was treated during his

incarceration in Gaza. Would you answer truthfully when you are still in the hands of an Arab government that is not Hamas but is maneuvering in a way the last regime did not to be on the best of terms with it? In the end, the truth came out. Anyone could see that Shalit was starved for Vitamin C. His wounds from explosives were not tended to in the aftermath of his kidnapping. He limped. He was woefully thin.

A curious footnote emerged in the last days of the negotiations. And it is one that is, as they say, curiouser and curiouser. The president of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres, can't shut up when he has nothing to say and he can't shut up when he should remain quiet. I don't know which case exactly this one is. But he leaked to journalists who live off leaks that he had contacts with the Turks that paved the path or were paving the path for a diplomatic breakthrough. In any case, I don't believe it. But I don't believe anything that President Peres says—most especially his old invention of “the new middle east.” It looks pretty ragged to me.

Martin Peretz is editor-in-chief emeritus of The New Republic.

Source URL: <http://www.tnr.com/article/tel-aviv-journal/96438/gilad-shalit>

US Awkwardly Welcomes Israeli-Hamas Prisoner Swap

By BRADLEY KLAPPER

WASHINGTON

The United States awkwardly welcomed Tuesday's release of Israeli soldier Gilad Schalit after five years of captivity by Hamas, voicing concerns over some of the Palestinians freed in return and declining to say whether the prisoner swap between Israel and the Islamic militant group could help moribund Mideast peace talks in any way.

On a trip to Libya, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the U.S. was pleased that Schalit's ordeal was over, saying "he was held for far too long in captivity." But Clinton and other U.S. officials avoided specifically addressing Hamas' part in the agreement or the merit of Israel's decision to free more than 1,000 Palestinians to secure Schalit's release.

"I don't think it's for us to necessarily say whether it's a good or bad agreement," State Department spokesman Mark Toner told reporters. Asked about the deal with Hamas and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Toner conceded that "if you're parsing what this means for the peace process, it's difficult for us to say."

Thousands of people jammed the streets in Schalit's hometown in northern Israel to celebrate his homecoming, after he had been reunited with his parents and met Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. An equally boisterous reception awaited the first group of Palestinians transferred under the deal from Israeli prisons to the West Bank and Gaza, where massive celebratory rallies festooned with green Hamas flags were held.

But U.S. reaction was muted for a number of reasons. The deal reflected a complicated agreement after negotiations between the Jewish state and Hamas, which the United States considers a terrorist organization and has tried to isolate internationally since the Iran-backed militant group took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007.

At a time when the U.S.-backed peace process is foundering, the massively disproportional exchange Hamas leaders were able to press on Israel is likely to strengthen their movement at the expense of President Mahmoud Abbas' American-backed government in the West Bank.

That is problematic for the United States because of Hamas' long opposition to a peaceful, two-state settlement with Israel. The prisoner swap occurred only a day after the U.S. and other Mideast mediators acknowledged they wouldn't be able to revive direct peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians by the end of this weekend, the latest in a string of setbacks that has seen no direct talks between the parties in more than a year.

Toner urged both sides to build a "constructive atmosphere" for peace negotiations, but said he was referring only to Israel and Abbas' government, not Hamas. While Israel may win some credit with the Obama administration for its willingness to compromise, Toner said Hamas' part in the deal wouldn't lead the U.S. to reassess its blanket ban on contacts with the organization.

"We have the three red lines about Hamas," Toner said, "that they renounce violence, that they accept existing agreements and that they recognize Israel's right to exist. And if they could meet those requirements, then we certainly would welcome them as part of the political process."

He said that while the prisoner exchange was an independent Israeli decision, the U.S. communicated its concerns about a number of the Palestinian prisoners who were released despite records for violent attacks on U.S. citizens.

"As a matter of principle, the U.S. opposes the release of individuals who have been convicted of crimes against Americans," Toner said.

Four hundred seventy-seven Palestinian prisoners were freed Tuesday, of 1,027 to be released under the agreement. Many of them were serving life sentences for deadly attacks on Israelis.