

Prisoners Swap in Palestine

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Militarily, Israel has the upper hand in Palestine. It is the occupying force, has efficient and effective security service, a strong army, and assorted measures. Since the war of 1967 when Israel took over the West Bank and Gaza, around 700, 000 Palestinians have been arrested and detained in Israeli jails. I am, the writer of this article, is four of these because I have been detained four times. So many of these had been detained or imprisoned for short periods of time; but so many others had been for life or for very lengthy periods of time. Now, in Israeli jails there are Palestinians who have been there for around thirty years.

Ethically, who is responsible for the release of these Palestinian prisoners? These aren't ordinary prisoners. For the Palestinians, they are freedom fighters who are trying to free their own people from the yoke of occupation; for the Israelis, they are terrorists who are trying to harm the security of a peace loving country. The Israelis, at their choice, decide whom to release but according to their own laws. It happens that they release people before the period of imprisonment is over, but never do that if the person involved is indicted of military attacks against ISRAELI TERGETS AND RESULTED IN KILLING OR injuring people whether soldiers or civilians.

The Palestinians learned over the years that the best way to release their freedom fighters is through prisoners swap or exchange. In 1979, they could capture an Israeli soldier and exchange him with around 80 Palestinian prisoners among of who were sentenced for long periods. Another swap took place in 1983, when Fateh, the organization led by Arafat exchange five prisoners for thousands of Palestinian prisoners. The biggest and most harmful swap for the Israelis took place in 1985 when Ahmed Jebreel, the leader of a Palestinian faction, released around 1150 Palestinians and Lebanese in return of three Israeli soldiers. That was an important deal because hundreds of long-term imprisonments were released. All of these soldiers who had been the subject of the swap were captured in Lebanon.

Hizballah of Lebanon have been of the same experience. It could make prisoner swaps with the Israelis in which Lebanese and Palestinians have been released. Now hizballah detains two Israeli soldiers and insists on a swap that will include Palestinians and Lebanese.

What is under public discussion now is a prisoner swap between Hamas, a Palestinian organization, and the Israelis. Few months ago, Hamas could capture an Israeli soldier in a very courageous and daring military attack against an Israeli military post in Gaza. Hamas immediately called for a swap. For Israel, that became outrageous and started waging sever bloody attacks against the people in Gaza.

Although the Palestinians could capture Israeli soldiers in the occupied territories in the years that passed, this is the first time that they could carefully hide their hunt and insist on the swap. For Israel, that has been humiliating and unacceptable. Israel started putting so much pressure on the Palestinian on the hope that the soldier will be released. It started waging attacks that have claimed so far the lives of 520 Palestinians, thousands of injuries, the demolition of many homes, and the destruction of many industrial and agricultural installations. It also decided to detain members of the Palestinian cabinet and the legislative council who belong to Hamas organization. Israel aimed at crippling the

political life of the Palestinians, and to inflict so much harm on the Palestinian civilians who might, in turn, pressure Hamas so as to release the soldier.

For Hamas, that was an historic event that should become a hard lesson for the Israelis. The Israelis, according to Hamas, must learn that they can't detain the Palestinians forever, and that the Palestinians are using effective measures so as to release their own freedom fighters. Hamas didn't pay so much attention to the Palestinian losses because that is part of the conflict, and those who want to win a war should be able to absorb the losses. Instead of yielding, Hamas and other Palestinian organizations have been mounting their military pressure on Israel through the primitive locally made missiles. The Palestinians could hit some Israeli towns that are on the borders with Gaza, and create an atmosphere of insecurity in southern Israel.

The Israelis lacked at certain times the wisdom of punishing the Palestinians, and instead of hitting military targets, they hit civilians and caused massacres. These massacres were discussed in the UN security council and only the American veto could protect Israel from international condemnation. Besides, internal Israeli pressure on the Israeli government for the release of the soldier has been mounting.

Military means have been fruitless and destructive. Israeli citizens of southern Israel started abandoning their homes toward the populated middle of Israel. The Palestinian government didn't fall, and Hamas remained in tact. Finally, the Israelis found themselves in a situation of accepting reality: they have to agree on a swap if they want their soldier back.

The Palestinians are demanding the release of cabinet and legislature members. They also demand the release of Palestinian factions leaders such as Saadat who is the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and Marwan Bargouthy who is a Fateh leader. Besides they insist that women, children and sick people should be released, along with hundreds of long-term imprisonments.

Most probable that the Israelis will release cabinet and legislature members, women, children and the ill. But they will be reluctant to release hundreds of life sentenced people. I think that the Palestinians won't get all of what they want, and the Israelis have no choice but to concede. And overall, the Palestinians will emerge the winners although they lost hundreds of lives.