

Prisoner Exchange, Symmetry and Israel's Siege of Gaza

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The Palestinian political prisoners, women and men, who will be freed are all freedom fighters who fulfilled their political and moral duty in the struggle against the Israeli colonial occupation. Gilad Shalit, on the other hand, was a soldier, and a soldier in Israel's colonial occupation army, which violates international law on a daily basis and regularly commits war crimes.

In two days we can celebrate the return home of 1037 Palestinian political prisoners and the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. For the thousands of Palestinian families who will soon meet their loved ones I'm happy, and for the Shalit family I'm also happy. However, beyond happiness over the release, there exists no symmetry: The Palestinian political prisoners, women and men, who will be freed are all freedom fighters who fulfilled their political and moral duty in the struggle against the Israeli colonial occupation. Gilad Shalit, on the other hand, was a soldier, and a soldier in Israel's colonial occupation army which violates international law on a daily basis and regularly commits war crimes. As was done by hundreds of Israelis before him, Shalit should have refused to take part in this war, which he did not do.

Those in Israel dubbed the "kidnappers" of Gilad Shalit actually took a prisoner of war and according to all testimonies at our disposal, he was treated as such. The Palestinian political prisoners, on the other hand, do not even dare dream of receiving treatment similar to that received by Shalit.

Just as an injured soldier is not left on the battlefield, the state is obligated to do everything in its power to return its prisoners of war, whatever the price may be. There is no "particularly special Jewish humanism" here, as related by the Israeli media, which is nourished by the office of Benjamin Netanyahu, but a regular and accepted act in a situation of war. What is not usual, and is in fact scandalous, is the intentional foot-dragging which characterized the governments responsible for the Shalit file. The agreement reached with the assistance of the German negotiator and the Egyptian and Turkish governments was closed already three years ago', but the Israeli government chose to ignore it and fantasise about a commando operation, which undoubtedly would have resulted in the death of the soldier.

It is easy to assume that if a child of Netanyahu or Lieberman was in captivity, the government would have moved much faster and accepted the agreement placed on its table. No! The government did not demonstrate any "Jewish humanism" but actually a true lack of humanity. Only the quiet determination of the Shalit family and their public support moved this immoral and heartless government.

And another thing: A government that transformed national dignity into a substitute for policy must now retreat from all of its arrogant declarations, such as in the cases of Turkey and Egypt. Here too it had to swallow its pride and to do exactly the opposite of what it promised: To free "terrorists with blood on their hands", while the relation of freedom (1:1037) is even higher than the relation of 3:1050 in the Rajub prisoner exchange of 1985.

One question remains open: what about ending Israel's siege on Gaza? It is said that this is part of the agreement with the Hamas, but Netanyahu has no difficulties in violating agreements; already now it is apparent that not all the women prisoners will be freed, despite an Israeli promise. Moreover, the excuse for the siege on Gaza was the captivity of Gilad Shalit. What new excuse will Israel come up with now?

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P.S.

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