



Like so many other diplomatic and political initiatives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the recent announcement of a new prisoner release is based on the same solution that has been proposed dozens of times before - only to collapse because the time, and often Israeli political will, wasn't right.

In this case, the separate announcements made by Hamas leader Khaled Meshal and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, asserted that Hamas would release Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, captured by Hamas in 2006, while Israel would release 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, some of whom have been in jail for decades.

As Tony Karon wrote in Time magazine's blog: "Win-win outcomes are all too rare in the Middle East, but the agreement that will see Hamas free captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for a reported 1,000 Palestinian prisoners will allow each of its stakeholders to claim victory."

That arrangement has been bandied about for years. The fact that it now appears imminent (though its success cannot be claimed until all the prisoners walk out of jail) reflects two seemingly contradictory realities: Israel, the occupying power, continues to control the lives of the occupied Palestinian population, and new regional and international conditions are challenging Israel in dramatic ways.

The control Israel wields over the occupied Palestinian population is evident in the disparity of the prisoner exchange: Palestinians, in this case Hamas, control the life of exactly one Israeli, a captured soldier (and, in fact, Hamas violated international law by denying Shalit access to the Red Cross).

On the other side, even if we put aside Israeli control of land, borders, economy, food, education, and virtually every facet of life in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, Israel directly maintains power over the lives of thousands of Palestinian prisoners, some convicted in military courts (illegal under the Geneva Conventions), and others, including elected members of the Palestinian parliament, imprisoned under administrative detention orders (similarly illegal).

Almost from the moment Shalit was captured, Palestinians attempted to arrange a prisoner swap - his freedom in exchange for the freedom of a thousand or more Palestinian prisoners. In this high-stakes poker game, with so many human lives at stake, Shalit was and remains the Palestinians' only chip. In fact, holding Shalit for a future prisoner exchange was the only reason

for Hamas to detain him at all.

TVNL Comment: According to [UNISPAL](#), since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967, at least 750,000 Palestinian civilians have been arrested, detained and imprisoned by Israel. Currently, thousands of Palestinians are held in political detention by Israel, including children, women and elected officials. Learn about the conditions under which they are detained and held prisoner. Then applaud the long overdue and politically beneficial return of Galid Shalit.

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