

Palestinian-Israeli Prisoner Exchange Deals: A Historical Overview

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Over the previous years, Palestinian resistance movements have carried out prisoner exchange operations with the Israeli occupation. As a result, thousands of male and female prisoners have been released, the majority of whom had high sentences and life imprisonment. One of the prominent deals carried out by Palestinian resistance movements with the Israeli occupation side began in 1968. Palestinian militants from the “Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,” led by Yousef Al-Radie and Leila Khaled, hijacked an Israeli occupation plane belonging to El Al, the Israeli airline. The plane was en route from the Italian capital Rome to “Tel Aviv,” and they forced it to divert and land in Algeria, with over 100 passengers on board. At that time, the “Front” stipulated the release of the passengers in exchange for Israel releasing 37 Palestinian prisoners with high convictions.

In 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, led by Leila Khaled, successfully hijacked an Israeli El Al plane, which landed in Britain. Comrade “Patrick Argüello” was killed during the operation, and Leila Khaled was arrested. Subsequently, a British plane was hijacked by a group affiliated with the same organization, leading to an exchange operation resulting in the release of the activist Leila Khaled.

In January 1971, a prisoner exchange deal took place between the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) and Israel. Mahmoud Bakr Hijazi, the first Palestinian prisoner in the contemporary Palestinian revolution that began in January 1965, was released in exchange for the release of Israeli occupation soldier Shmuel Fais, who was abducted by Fatah in late 1969.

In March 1979, the operation “Operation Nours” was conducted, where the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine released an Israeli occupation soldier it had captured during the Litani operation on April 5, 1978. In return, Israel released 76 Palestinian prisoners. In mid-February 1980, the Israeli occupation government released detainees Mahdi Bassiso and William Nassar in exchange for the release of Jordanian citizen Amina Dawood Al-Mufti. She had worked as a spy for the Israeli occupation Mossad, being held by the Palestinian National Liberation Movement “Fatah,” and is considered the most famous Arab spy working for Mossad.

In November 1983, the “Jalil Exchange” deal took place. The Israeli occupation government released all detainees from Ansar prison in southern Lebanon, totalling 4,700 Palestinian and Lebanese detainees, and 65 prisoners from Israeli occupation prisons. This was in exchange for the release of six Israeli occupation soldiers captured by the Palestine Liberation Organization's Fatah movement on September 4, 1982, in the Bhamdoun area of Lebanon. The released Israeli occupation soldiers were Yeho Avotfoul, Dani Golboa, Rafi Hazan, Robin Cohen, Abraham Montbliski, and Avi Kornfeld. Additionally, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's General Command captured two other soldiers.

In May 1985, the Israeli occupation conducted an exchange operation with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, named “Operation Jalil.” In this operation, 1,155 Palestinian and Lebanese



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prisoners were released from Israeli occupation prisons in exchange for three Israeli occupation soldiers who were in the hands of the Front. In 1997, an exchange operation took place between the Jordanian government and the Israeli occupation. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), and two of his associates were released in return for the release of Israeli Mossad agents who had been arrested by the Jordanian security forces after their failed attempt to assassinate the head of the political bureau of Hamas at that time, Khalid Mashaal.

In October 2009, Israeli occupation forces released 20 Palestinian female prisoners from the West Bank and Gaza in exchange for a newly recorded video lasting two minutes showing the Israeli occupation soldier Gilad Shalit, who was captured by the Islamic Resistance Movement “Hamas” on June 25, 2006. In October 2011, the “Wafaa Al-Ahrar,” deal took place, involving the release of 1,027 Palestinian prisoners by the Israeli occupation authorities in exchange for the release of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit by the Hamas movement. The deal was mediated by Egypt, marking the first instance in the history of the Palestinian issue where the process of capture, detention location, and negotiation occurred within Palestinian territory.

The Wafaa Al-Ahrar deal included the release of 450 detainees serving life sentences, and the release of all female detainees in Israeli prisons, totalling 30 women, including those serving life sentences. The agreement also covered the release of elderly detainees, all sick detainees, and detainees from Jerusalem, totalling 45 individuals. Additionally, an agreement was reached for the release of detainees from Occupied Palestinian territories in 1948. Moreover, 200 detainees, to be released agreed to be deported, residing either in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or to Arab countries.

Since October 7, a military operation, named “Al-Aqsa Flood,” led by the Islamic Resistance Movement “Hamas,” has been underway. Around 1,500 Palestinian fighters crossed the massive separation barrier between Gaza and Israeli occupation, resulting in the killing of hundreds of Israelis and the injury of thousands. Hamas captured over 250 Israelis from settlements and Israeli occupation military points around Gaza, including high-ranking military officers. Since then, the Israeli occupation army has waged a destructive war on Gaza, causing over 14,000 martyrs and more than 34,000 injuries, mostly among women and children.

A humanitarian ceasefire agreement was announced in the Gaza Strip on November 22, with joint mediation efforts by Egypt and the United States between the Israeli occupation and the Hamas movement. The agreement includes the exchange of 50 Israeli prisoners, including women and children in Gaza, in the first phase, in return for the release of 150 Palestinian women and children detained in Israeli occupation prisons.