

## 10 Ways to Kill Fatah

979 DAYS HAVE passed since the soldier Gilad Shalit was taken prisoner. On any one of these days it would have been possible to free him for the price fixed by Hamas right from the beginning: 450 "important" Palestinian prisoners, in addition to hundreds of others, as well as all the women and juvenile prisoners.

In the eyes of our government, it is all about the return of the "kidnapped" soldier in exchange for "heinous murderers" who have "blood on their hands".

In the eyes of Hamas, it is about releasing a Jewish "prisoner of war" in return for the freeing of hundreds of "resistance fighters" who have "carried out heroic attacks deep in the territory of the Zionist occupier."

Many had hoped that Ehud Olmert would tie up the affair before leaving office in the next few weeks. But Olmert is afraid. Recently he has made several U-turns. One moment he decides this way, another time the other. Which would be more popular? To act or not to act?

If he carries out the prisoner exchange and the soldier comes home, there will be an eruption of public joy. Olmert will be the hero of the hour. But for how long? Two days? Three? After this, a reaction will set in: How could he release hundreds of vicious murderers? Surely they will carry out new attacks, Jewish blood will be spilled, children will be murdered. Olmert will be the scoundrel of the year.

A leader of stature makes a decision and accepts the consequences. But Olmert is a politician, only a politician. He has never been more than that. He is cynical rather than moral, cunning rather than wise. He still hopes to come out intact from his manifold corruption affairs, and then, after the failure of Binyamin Netanyahu and Tzipi Livni, to return to power. So perhaps, he may calculate, it is best to leave the whole Shalit affair to the next prime minister.

BUT BEHIND the personal considerations there lurks a political problem, too. How will the prisoner exchange affect the balance of power between Fatah and Hamas?

The release of 1200 Palestinian prisoners will be perceived by the Palestinian people as a huge victory for Hamas. For them, it will demonstrate once again that the Israelis understand only the language of force, as Hamas has consistently maintained. It will shame Mahmoud Abbas, the more so if Hamas brings about the release of Fatah's No. 2, Marwan Barghouti.

Olmert could, of course, prevent the humiliation of Abbas. Tomorrow morning he could free a thousand prisoners belonging to Fatah, including Barghouti, as a gesture to Abbas. That would take the sting out of the Hamas victory.

Simple? Certainly. Smart? For sure. Possible? Not at all. Not in our country. Not for Olmert and his ilk. To give Abbas something for nothing? Preposterous. Out of the question!

This exposes again the divided attitude vis-à-vis the PLO that has bedeviled Israeli policy for dozens of years already. An inconsistency that is political, but also psychological.

SOME 40 YEARS ago I read a book by the psychologist Eric Berne, "Games People Play".

One of the book's theses is that the ostensible motive for an action often contradicts the real, unconscious one. For example: a habitual felon sets out to rob a bank, and is caught and sent to prison. The obvious motive is clear: he wants to get rich the easy way. But his real motive is quite different: he is afraid of life outside prison. In his unconscious mind he hopes to be caught, because in prison he feels secure. His place in the prison hierarchy is assured.

I am often reminded of this theory when I think about the curious behavior of successive Israeli governments towards the PLO.

IN SEPTEMBER 1993, after a long and bloody fight, Yitzhak Rabin signed an agreement with Yasser Arafat and recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. The logical continuation would have been for Israel to help in establishing a Palestinian state next to Israel and to do everything to strengthen Arafat and the Palestinian Authority created by the agreement.

But, oddly enough, successive Israeli governments have done exactly the opposite.

It started already with Rabin himself on the morrow of the Oslo agreement. After deciding that our national interest demanded a partnership with Arafat, it would have been logical for him to reinforce Arafat's authority in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and sign a peace agreement with him as soon as possible, even before the time limit set by Oslo (1999).

Contrary to the demonic image that Israel constructed for him, Arafat was the ideal partner. He was a strong leader and all sections of the Palestinian public accepted his authority completely – including those who criticized him, even including Hamas. He had the two attributes essential for making peace: the will to achieve it and the ability to convince his own people to accept it.

But, strangely enough, our government moved in the very opposite direction. The peace negotiations did not even start. The settlement drive continued unabated. Everywhere in the West Bank one could see the red tile roofs of the settlers springing up. The absolutely essential passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was not opened – in spite of the solemn undertaking of the Israeli government to open four "safe passages". Not only did the economic situation of the Palestinians not improve, but on the contrary, it worsened perceptibly. Before Oslo, Palestinians could move freely in the whole of the country (including Israel proper). After Oslo, that freedom of movement was restricted more and more.

All this was already happening under Rabin, and became much worse after his murder. The stupid decision of his successor, Shimon Peres, to assassinate the Hamas bomb-maker Yahya Ayyash brought about a series of bloody revenge attacks and raised the prestige of Hamas – something totally opposed to Israeli interests as presented by our leadership.

Things reached a climax at the 2000 Camp David summit conference. Ehud Barak, the then prime minister, initiated the

conference and then scuttled it himself with a blend of arrogance and ignorance. In the following days, instead of declaring that the talks would continue until peace was achieved, he spread the mantra "There is no one to talk with! We have no partner for peace!" In this he was inspired by the evil genius of his advisor (then and now), Amos Gilad, who twisted army intelligence reports to suit his destructive purpose.

Not only did Barak destroy the "Zionist Left", but he also dealt a shattering blow to Fatah, the movement that had promised the Palestinians peace with Israel. Not content with that, Barak allowed Ariel Sharon to carry out his provocative visit to the Temple Mount, accompanied by hundreds of soldiers and policemen. Thus he triggered the outbreak of the second

intifada and prepared the ground for Sharon to come to power.

When Sharon was elected Prime Minister at the beginning of 2001, he was determined to destroy Arafat and Fatah. He blockaded Arafat in the Ramallah Mukataa and demolished the Fatah infrastructure throughout the occupied territories. When Arafat was murdered (one can guess by whom) Mahmoud Abbas was elected to fill his place.

Contrary to Arafat, who had been demonized by the Israeli leadership for decades, Abbas was seen in Israel as a nice, peace-loving person, an absolutely ideal partner for peace. It could have been expected that our leadership would now move energetically to fortify his regime by a rapid advancement in the peace negotiations, a massive release of prisoners and the freezing of the settlements. But lo and behold: the opposite happened. Sharon ridiculed him publicly by calling him a "plucked chicken", the settlements were enlarged and the Wall was extended at a frantic pace.

Even more blatantly, Sharon evacuated the costly Gaza Strip settlements without any arrangement with the Palestinian Authority, leaving behind a complete chaos in which Hamas thrived.

THE CONSEQUENCES were not late in arriving: in the Palestinian elections, closely monitored by international inspectors, Hamas won a victory that surprised everyone, including the Hamas leadership itself. Israel boycotted the new Hamas government. In order to minimize the damage to his party, Abbas formed a Fatah-Hamas unity government, but Israel (followed by Europe and the US) boycotted that one, too.

This situation benefitted, of course, Hamas. Palestinian support for Abbas is based mainly on the hope that he can bring about peace with Israel. If he is unable to do that, who needs him?

The Israeli government – and its satellites in Washington DC – were not content with that. They tried to establish Muhammad Dahlan, a man considered by many Palestinians as an agent of Israel and the US, as the strong-man of the Gaza Strip. To preempt this move, Hamas assumed direct power in the Strip, turning it into "Hamastan". Thus Abbas lost all power over almost half of the Palestinians in the

occupied territories.

This would probably have been impossible if Israel had not completely cut off the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, in violation of the agreements it had signed. In Oslo it was declared that the West Bank and the Strip constitute one single entity, and that they would be connected by safe passages. In practice, not a single passage was opened, not for a single day. Those who claim that Israel has served the Strip to Hamas on a platter do not exaggerate.

The continuation is well-known: Israel imposed a blockade on Gaza, Hamas launched rockets at Israel, a cease-fire was declared, which the Israeli army violated on November 4 by entering the Strip and killing several Hamas militants, Hamas launched more Qassam rockets, Israel started the Gaza War. Israeli leaders asserted publicly that they were waging the war also for Abbas' sake, thus marking him in the eyes of the Palestinians as a collaborator with the enemy against his own people. The Hamas regime in Gaza survived.

The net result: Hamas was hugely strengthened and according to all expectations will increase its power in the next elections. Most governments in the world understand now that they must start a dialogue with Hamas.

MANY PEOPLE around the world believe in the anti-Semitic myth that we Jews are immensely clever and that all our actions prove our diabolical cunning. Therefore, the ascent of Hamas must be the result of a shrewd Zionist conspiracy. The existence of Abbas (and Arafat before him) hinders the Jews from taking hold of the whole country, because the world demands a compromise with the "moderate" Palestinian leadership. But the world accepts that there can be no compromise with the murderous Hamas, and therefore the clever Jews are interested in a Hamas victory.

On the other hand, many Israelis believe that our governments are composed of exceedingly stupid politicians who do not know what they are doing. These Israelis believe that the series of actions that have weakened Fatah and reinforced Hamas are just a march of folly, the result of Israeli stupidity.

I propose a compromise between the two perceptions: Israeli policy is indeed foolish, but there is method in this foolishness. It can go on only because it conforms with a deep-seated desire, which most people are not conscious of or do not want to admit: to hold on to all of Eretz Israel and not to allow a Palestinian state to come into being.

If we want to change this, we must drag the unconscious motivation up to the level of consciousness: what do we want? Peace or more territory? Co-existence between two states or occupation and eternal war?

It is too late to turn the wheel back. Hamas is now a part of reality. It is in the Israeli interest that a Palestinian unity government be set up, a government with which we can reach an agreement that will be kept. If we have already played such a pivotal role in turning Hamas into a central Palestinian power, by all means let's talk with them!

This way we can also free Gilad Shalit in a prisoner exchange – before his 1000th day in captivity.