

Exposing Hamas' Kidnapping Strategy: an Interview with Dan Diker

by Lisa Benson and Jerry Gordon (July 2014)



Deceased Israeli abductees likely slain by Hamas suspects

From left: Dual Israeli-American Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaar and Eyal Yifrach, in three undated family photos. Credit Image by Reuters

On June 12th, three youths, 16 year old American-Israeli Naftali Frenkel and two Israelis, Gilad Shaar, 16 and Eyal Yifrach, 19 were abducted while hitchhiking home from religious school in the Gush Etzion bloc between Bethlehem and Hebron. According to a *Washington Post* [report](#), one of the abductees got off a cell call saying, “we’ve been kidnapped.” Hamas is believed to be behind their abduction. At a June 15th Cabinet meeting, Israeli PM Netanyahu [said](#):

Those who perpetrated the abduction of our youths were members of Hamas; the same Hamas that Abu Mazen (Abbas) made a unity government with. This has severe repercussions.



IDF troops in Operation Brother's Keeper

June 24, 2014

An IDF paratrooper brigade virtually sealed off the area surrounding Hebron. As of June 24, 2014 more than 1,400 sites have been [searched](#) and 350 Palestinians, among them many Hamas leaders, have been detained for questioning regarding the abduction in Operation Brothers Keeper. The IDF expanded raids into Ramallah, Nablus, East Jerusalem and the [Qalandiya refugee camp](#) and crossing with resulting injuries and deaths of Palestinian youths confronting IDF troops with homemade grenades. Thousands of Israelis prayed for the safe return of the three youths at the Kotel, Western Wall, of the Temple in Jerusalem. The National Council of Young Israel in New York issued a call for a Prayer Service for their safe return. The announcement used the Twitter hashtag, #BringBackOurBoys.

Hamas issued a statement praising the abduction. According to an updated [report](#) by *The Daily*

Mail, Senior Hamas spokesperson, Sami Abu Zuhri in Gaza called the accusation by PM Netanyahu “silly.” While cooperating with the Palestinian security service, Israel also relies on their own resources in the West Bank to identify the abductors and the possible location of the three teens. This despite PA senior official Hanan Ashrawi [cited](#) by *The Daily Mail* [saying](#), “this is something we have no information on.” However, what can you expect from the Palestinian unity government with Hamas. Its Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah [acknowledges](#) that it has no control over Gaza.

Secretary of State Kerry issued a [statement](#) on June 15th saying:

The United States strongly condemns the kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers and calls for their immediate release. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families. We hope for their quick and safe return home. We continue to offer our full support for Israel in its search for the missing teens, and we have encouraged full cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian security services. We understand that cooperation is ongoing.

We are still seeking details on the parties responsible for this despicable terrorist act, although many indications point to Hamas’ involvement. As we gather this information, we reiterate our position that Hamas is a terrorist organization known for its attacks on innocent civilians and which has used kidnapping in the past.

On the evening of June 24th, the [IAF undertook](#) a series of raids in Gaza hitting more than 12 suspected targets with massive explosions. Just prior to this reprisal raid by the IAF on Israel’s Golan frontier with Syria, a 14 year old Israel Arab teenager [was killed](#) in an anti-tank rocket attack from Syria while seated in his father’s truck. His father is a civilian contractor supplying water to construction workers. The IAF [retaliated](#) shortly thereafter with raids against suspected targets in Syria. Questions remain as to what motivated Hamas to undertake the kidnapping and who might have been behind the Golan incident.



Marwan Qawasmeh, left, and Amer Abu Aisheh

Hamas operatives and kidnapping suspects

Source: Shin Bet and AP

On June 26th Shin Bet, Israel’s General Security Service [released](#) the names of two prime suspects in the kidnapping of the three youths. They are Marwan Qawasmeh and Amer Abu Aisheh. Known Hamas operatives in the Hebron area. They disappeared about the time of the kidnapping on June 12th.

June 30th, the IDF recovered in a field north of Hebron the bodies of the three Israeli abductees Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaar and Eyal Yifrach likely slain by Hamas suspects.

PM Netanyahu issued a [statement](#) saying:

“In great agony, we found three dead bodies this evening, and all signs are that these are the dead bodies of our three kidnapped youths – Eyal, Gilad and Naftali.

“They were kidnapped and murdered in cold blood by beasts,” he continued. “In the name of the entire people of Israel, I wish to say to the dear families – the mothers, the fathers, the grandmothers and grandfathers, the sisters and brothers – that our hearts bleed, the whole nation cries with you. We will bring the boys for burial in Israel... Hamas is responsible, and Hamas will pay. May the memories of the three boys be blessed.”

President Shimon Peres [said](#):

“The whole nation bows its head this evening with a grief too heavy to bear,” Peres said in a statement. These 18 days the nation has prayed in one voice that our wonderful boys would be found alive and well. Now, upon receiving the bitter news, the people of Israel mourn the untimely deaths of the best of our young. Alongside this heavy sorrow, we are determined to punish the wicked terrorists with a strong hand. Our war against terror will get stronger, it will not weaken, so that this murderous terror will not dare raise its head.

President Obama issued the following [statement](#):

On behalf of the American people I extend my deepest and heartfelt condolences to the families of Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Shaar, and Naftali Fraenkel – who held Israeli and American citizenship. As a father, I cannot imagine the indescribable pain that the parents of these teenage boys are experiencing. The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms this senseless act of terror against innocent youth. . . . I also urge all parties to refrain from steps that could further destabilize the situation. As the Israeli people deal with this tragedy, they have the full support and friendship of the United States.

Delving deeper into this murder and the politics surrounding it, the Lisa Benson Show interviewed Dan Diker with the International Institute for Counter Terrorism and Foreign Policy and the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. This interview was conducted before the

boys' remains were discovered.



Lisa Benson: Good afternoon. Welcome. It is Sunday, June 22nd, 2014. This is Lisa Benson, your host for the Lisa Benson Radio Show for National Security Matters. Today we have several breaking stories to bring to you. Week after week this broadcast brings you intelligent, accurate and measured response to urgent matters regarding National Security and Foreign Policy. Today we have s a riveting show with breaking news happening in Israel and Iraq. These are rapidly unfolding developments. It is my privilege today to bring on to the show my co-host Jerry Gordon. Jerry, welcome back to the program.



Jerry Gordon: Glad to be here.

Benson: It's a great pleasure to have Dan Diker from Israel. Dan is a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Counter Terrorism and Foreign Policy Fellow at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. He is a former Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress, an umbrella group representing Jewish communities and organizations in one hundred countries. He often appears as a commentator and analyst on Israeli and Middle Eastern Affairs on news networks including CNN, FOX News, Al Jazeera, ABC and BBC. He is also a columnist with the *Jerusalem Post* where he writes on the Middle East and diplomatic affairs. Dan we have breaking news out of Israel about the kidnapped teens. Do we know where they are? I also understand this afternoon that on the Israel-Syrian border an Israeli teenager was killed.

Diker: That's right, as a matter of fact there are two severe developments today in addition to the ongoing terror kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers now in its tenth day. This morning a Palestinian Arab from Gaza was caught with a grenade on his way to a terror attack. Late this morning there was an attack that is being attributed to Syria using an anti-tank Kornet rocket that killed an Israeli Arab teenager who was sitting in a car with his dad in the Golan Heights. I think what we need to look at in the assault coming out of Syria is that it very well may have been Hezbollah. There is a tremendous amount of confusion regarding who is doing what and when in Syria. Whether it is the Syrian Army, whether it is the rebel factions, whether is Hezbollah which has 20,000 men in Syria at this point. I think we need to look at

the Iranian regime's connection to this attack. The Iranian regime executes these types of attacks when it wants to distract international attention away from its race to the nuclear finish line and particularly when it's now attacking the United States diplomatically regarding its actions in Iraq. They like to light up the Israeli piece on the chessboard which Iran looks at the Middle East as another chessboard in order to push international tension away from its own activity closer to home.

Benson: The Palestinian Authority yesterday said they believe that there were no teenagers abducted, kidnapped in Judea or Samaria.

Diker: You're right. As a matter of fact I was listening this morning to Israel's main news commentator and host, Razi Barkai, who was interviewing, two Arab residents of Hebron who were explaining to the Israeli public that in fact there was no kidnapping. That this was a conspiracy theory in their view. That Israelis have actually manufactured a false kidnapping claim in order to create the pretext for the Israeli Army to invade the West Bank. Now those students of the Middle East will recognize this type of absurd conspiratorial chatter as being very typical of Arab political culture.

Gordon: Dan, what has been the reaction from the US Administration? On the one hand you had Secretary Kerry who came out last Sunday and expressed the opinion that perhaps Hamas did the abduction. Several days after the abduction occurred there is total silence from the White House. What's going on here?

Diker: Quite true. There was some concern in Israel that the Administration's response was delayed. When they finally did respond, they were actually questioning Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Intelligence Echelon's assessment that it was Hamas. The Prime Minister said the evidence was incontrovertible that it was Hamas. And still the Secretary of State publically doubted Israel's initial assessment. Then within forty-eight hours he ended up agreeing with Israel's assessment. I think this is a product of what is publically known as a serious disagreement between the Administration and Israel on a number of issues. Not the least of which is the problem over the Iranian regime's behavior in Iraq and its own nuclear race for supremacy in the Middle East. I think Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Israeli government, especially Defense Minister Moshe Bogie Ya'alon, are particularly concerned over Iran's behavior in Iraq. The assessments here are that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are really being fronted by the Iranian regime themselves. As absurd as that sounds you have Sunni extremists, even to the right of Al Qaeda, acting on behalf of the Iranian regime. I have actually heard this assessment from Kurdish analysts in the last couple of days. These same assessments are being bandied about here in Israel.

Benson: I have Israeli friends of all political persuasions. Do you believe the Israeli people understand what we in America are facing in regard to the infiltration and penetration by the Muslim Brotherhood in our government?

Diker: To be frank with you I think that the Israeli public is up to their neck treading water in problems here in the region. From an Israeli point of view, you look to the north and you see Hezbollah, ISIS, and Al Qaeda in Syria. We have Hezbollah in Lebanon with somewhere between 85,000 to 100,000 rockets. You have Gaza to the South with some 20,000 rockets that can reach North of Tel Aviv and then across to Jerusalem. You have kidnapped teenagers and local socioeconomic matters. I think that Israelis really are focused on what is happening around them. They are not involved in what they would view as an American domestic problem. However, it makes sense of Israelis of American descent. It is not a story that is sort of being widely distributed or widely talked about.

Gordon: Dan, today we had a tableau in Cairo. We had the arrival back of Secretary of State Kerry who met with President al-Sisi and his Foreign Minister. He made some interesting noises that sounded like the words of democracy and inclusive government. He was appealing to al-Sisi to allow the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists back into their parliament and into their government. This is in the face of significant death sentences handed to over a hundred Muslim Brotherhood operatives. How friendly is the al-Sisi government to Israel now and do they share mutual security concerns about the Muslim Brotherhood and the terrorists in the Sinai?

Diker: One thing is clear; the Egyptians are very concerned about the U.S. Administration. They are concerned that the administration is not supporting President al-Sisi who even more than former President Mubarak has committed himself to fighting jihadism. Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda affiliates in Sinai are on the run. He is smoking them out of tunnels. He is destroying all of the smuggling and terror tunnels from Sinai into Gaza where the Muslim Brotherhood branch in the Palestinian area is called the Hamas. They are now looking for day labor jobs because their illegal smuggling and weapons transfer businesses have been shut down by al-Sisi. It is curious to some Israelis why the U.S. Administration is insisting on the issues of democracy and human rights. We all believe that democracy and human rights are critically important for all countries in the region and clearly Israel has been a shining example of them. They are the founding principles of both the United States and Israel. People are asking lots of questions about why, you know, that is the emphasis in Cairo when this president in Egypt is probably the strongest friend that Israel has had in sharing the goal in chasing down terrorists and fighting for stability in the Middle East. President al-Sisi has made this a key element of his administration. I know through my contacts in Cairo that President al-Sisi, in contrast to former presidents Morsi and Mubarak, is listening to the Egyptian public and

taking public opinion very carefully. He is a friend of the West. He is not an opponent or an adversary of the West. From an Israeli point of view Egypt should be treated like an ally.

Benson: Why did Mahmoud Abbas form a unity government with Hamas offending Israel?

Diker: Mahmoud Abbas is in a corner. He painted himself into a corner. He was playing with fire when he decided to form a unity government with Hamas. Why? Because from his point of view the United States put him into a corner on the peace process. The secret that many Americans don't know which I'll reveal now on the Lisa Benson Show is that the Palestinians, far more than the Israelis, were furious with the Americans and how Secretary of State Kerry treated them with a great sense of disrespect in the last meetings. Israel was ready to go forward with additional concessions. I can tell you authoritatively through my Palestinian sources, they were telling Kerry there is nothing to talk about. That they didn't want to meet with Kerry and that continued American pressure forced Mahmoud Abbas into the arms of Hamas. In order to win the war for Palestinian public opinion, Mahmoud Abbas' numbers had declined in his peace process dealings, not increased.

Benson: We had no idea.

Diker: Absolutely. Hamas and Fatah are in a tense competition to win the Palestinian street and that is what caused these kidnappings. The kidnapping of these three Israeli teenagers is as much a function of the internal civil war between Hamas and Fatah because it is against Israel. The Hamas rogue cell that undertook these kidnappings believed that Hamas leaders in Gaza and Fatah sold Hamas down the river. Therefore the Hamas opposition groups in the West Bank, otherwise known as Judea and Samaria, needed to show the Palestinian public that the Hamas opposition groups would fight the so-called reconciliation government. That is how complicated the situation is here in the Middle East with regards to the kidnapping.

Gordon: What we have revealed today are the dynamics behind the kidnapping episode, the internal problems between Fatah and Hamas. That the U.S. is consciously distancing itself from a valued ally in the Middle East, the new government of Egypt under President al-Sisi.

Benson: Dan Diker you have been a tremendous guest with us today and we look forward to having you on this program again.

Also see Jerry Gordon's collection of interviews,