Operation Dispelled Illusion 2006: The Kerem Shalom Tunnel and Shalit's Capture to the Wafa al-Ahrar Exchange



At dawn on **25 June 2006**, at about 5:15, eight fighters emerged from a tunnel dug from the Gaza Strip to beyond the fence, behind the **Kerem Shalom** (Karm Abu Salem) military post east of Rafah. Within minutes they destroyed a tank, an armoured personnel carrier and a watchtower, killed two soldiers and captured the soldier **Gilad Shalit** from inside his tank, taking him back into Gaza before the occupation recovered from the shock. [1][2]

The three factions that carried it out – the Qassam Brigades, the Nasser Salah al-Din Brigades and the Army of Islam – named it “Dispelled Illusion,” for it dispelled the illusion of security the occupation believed the fence provided. After five years in which the occupation failed to reach Shalit, the story ended with the “Wafa al-Ahrar” exchange of 2011, which freed 1,027 Palestinian prisoners. [2][3]

Contents

1. At a glance
2. The context
3. The operation
4. Five years of failure
5. The “Wafa al-Ahrar” exchange
6. Between the accounts
7. Timeline
8. Frequently asked questions about Operation Dispelled Illusion

At a glance

Item	Details
Date	Dawn, 25 June 2006, about 5:15
Place	The Kerem Shalom (Karm Abu Salem) military post east of Rafah
Factions	The Qassam Brigades, the Nasser Salah al-Din Brigades and the Army of Islam
Fighters	Eight, in three groups
Means	A tunnel running from the Gaza Strip into the territory occupied in 1948
Targets	A tank, an armoured personnel carrier and a watchtower of a Givati armoured force
Occupation losses	Two killed and five wounded; soldier Gilad Shalit captured
Outcome	The “Wafa al-Ahrar” exchange of October 2011, freeing 1,027 prisoners

[1][2][3]

The context

After the occupation withdrew from the Gaza settlements in 2005, it surrounded the Strip with a fence, military posts and watchtowers and tightened its grip on the

crossings. Thousands of Palestinian prisoners were in its jails, and negotiations opened no door for them, so the resistance began to plan capturing soldiers to exchange for prisoners. [2][3]

The operation

The eight fighters crossed a tunnel dug in advance under the fence and took the Israeli armoured force at Kerem Shalom by surprise. They split into three groups that struck at the same moment: the first destroyed a tank, the second an armoured personnel carrier, and the third partly destroyed a watchtower. [1][2]

Two soldiers were killed and five wounded, and Gilad Shalit was taken alive from inside his tank. The fighters moved him quickly into Gaza despite air reinforcements, crossing back over the fence by about 5:21, while the “Hannibal” protocol was activated only more than an hour after the capture. [1][2]

Five years of failure

The resistance hid Shalit in a secret location inside the Gaza Strip, and the occupation failed to reach him for more than five years despite the siege and repeated assaults on the Strip, including the 2008–2009 war. [2]

In October 2009 the resistance handed over a short video showing Shalit alive, in exchange for the release of 20 Palestinian women prisoners – 19 from the West Bank and one from Gaza, released with her child. [3][2]

In 2015 the Qassam Brigades revealed the names of five field commanders who had held Shalit throughout his captivity – Sami al-Hamayda, Abdullah Ali Labad, Khaled Abu Bakra, Mohammed Rashid Dawoud and Abd al-Rahman al-Mubashir – saying they had been martyred at different times, and published a photo showing Shalit relaxed in a room resembling an ordinary home. [4][2]

The “Wafa al-Ahrar” exchange

After years of indirect negotiations through several mediators, an Egyptian mediator reached the final agreement, announced on 11 October 2011. On **18 October 2011** Shalit was handed over at the Rafah crossing, escorted by the Qassam commander **Ahmed al-Jaabari**. [2][3]

The exchange freed **1,027 Palestinian prisoners** in two stages, around 500 of them serving life or long sentences, among them the longest-held Palestinian prisoner, Mohammed Abu Khousa. It is considered the highest price the occupation has paid for a single soldier. [2][3]

Between the accounts

Number freed: 1,027 according to the Al Jazeera Encyclopedia and Arabi Post, and 1,050 according to Al Jazeera Net’s 2015 report. [2][3][4]

Martyrs of the operation: the available sources do not name the fighters martyred during the operation. [1][2]

Timeline

Date	Event
2005	The occupation withdraws from the Gaza settlements and fences in the Strip [2]
5:15 a.m., 25 June 2006	The fighters emerge from the tunnel and attack Kerem Shalom [1]
5:21 a.m.	Shalit taken back across the fence [2]
October 2009	The Shalit video in exchange for 20 women prisoners [3]
11 October 2011	The Wafa al-Ahrar exchange announced [3]
18 October 2011	Shalit handed over at the Rafah crossing [2]
31 December 2015	Qassam reveals the names of Shalit’s captors [4]

Frequently asked questions about Operation Dispelled Illusion

What was Operation Dispelled Illusion?

An operation by the Qassam Brigades, the Nasser Salah al-Din Brigades and the Army of Islam at dawn on 25 June 2006 on the Kerem Shalom post, in which soldier Gilad Shalit was captured. [2][1]

How did the fighters reach the post?

Through a tunnel running from the Gaza Strip to beyond the fence. [1]

What were the results?

A tank, an APC and a watchtower destroyed, two soldiers killed and five wounded, and Shalit captured. [1][2]

What was the Wafa al-Ahrar exchange?

An Egyptian-mediated exchange in October 2011 that freed 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in return for Shalit. [2][3]

Why was it called “Dispelled Illusion”?

Because it dispelled the illusion of security the occupation believed the fence and fortified posts around Gaza provided. [1]

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Sources and references

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3. Arabi Post, "More than 1,000 prisoners for one Israeli soldier: what was the Shalit deal?," 14 December 2023 (in Arabic).
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