Palestinian Prisoner Exchange Deals 1968–2025: Every Deal in Numbers



The Palestinian cause has seen a series of prisoner exchange deals, from the hijacking of an El Al plane in 1968 to the deal of 13 October 2025, in which 1,968 Palestinian prisoners were freed in return for the twenty living Israeli captives. This article sets out every Palestinian deal with its date, figures and parties, from Arabic sources. [1][2][3]

Contents

1. The exchange deals at a glance
2. The early deals (1968–1980)
3. The Leila Khaled exchange
4. The 1983 and 1985 deals

5. Shalit: 2009 and 2011
6. Deals during the war on Gaza (2023–2025)
7. Hezbollah and Arab-state deals
8. Political releases that were not exchanges
9. Timeline
10. Frequently asked questions about Palestinian prisoner exchange deals

The exchange deals at a glance

Date	Party	Prisoners freed	In return
23 July 1968	Popular Front	37 prisoners	Passengers of the hijacked El Al plane
28 January 1971	Fatah	The prisoner Mahmoud Bakr Hijazi	Soldier Shmuel Fayez
14 March 1979	PFLP–General Command	76 prisoners, 12 of them women	Soldier Avraham Amram
13 February 1980	Fatah	Mahdi Basisu and William Nassar	Amina al-Mufti
23 November 1983	Fatah	More than 5,000	6 soldiers
20 May 1985	PFLP–General Command	1,155 prisoners	3 soldiers
1 October 2009	Hamas	20 women prisoners	A video of soldier Gilad Shalit
18 October and 18 December 2011	Hamas (“Wafa al-Ahrar”)	1,027 prisoners	Soldier Gilad Shalit
22 November 2023	Hamas	240 prisoners during the truce (per Al Jazeera English)	Israeli and foreign captives
15 January 2025	Hamas	About 1,737 prisoners planned for the first phase	33 Israeli captives

Date	Party	Prisoners freed	In return
13 October 2025	Hamas	1,968 prisoners	20 living Israeli captives

[1][2][4][3][5]

The early deals (1968–1980)

1968: On 23 July 1968 the Popular Front hijacked an El Al plane flying from Rome to Israel, and the crisis ended with the release of 37 Palestinian prisoners serving high sentences in return for the plane's passengers. [1][2]

1971: On 28 January 1971 Israel released the prisoner Mahmoud Bakr Hijazi in return for the soldier Shmuel Fayez, whom Fatah had captured near the settlement of Metula on the northern border in January 1970. Alwatan Voice describes Hijazi as the first prisoner of the contemporary Palestinian revolution, arrested on 18 January 1965, and says the exchange took place at Ras al-Naqoura under the Red Cross. [1][6]

1979: On 14 March 1979 Israel released 76 prisoners, 12 of them women, in return for the reserve soldier Avraham Amram, captured by the PFLP–General Command in an ambush near Tyre in south Lebanon on 5 April 1978, in what became known as the Litani operation. Alwatan Voice says the women freed included Afifa Hanna Banura of Beit Sahour. [1][6]

1980: On 13 February 1980 Mahdi Basisu and William Nassar were released in return for Amina al-Mufti, whom Al Jazeera Net describes as an Israeli intelligence agent and not a soldier; the exchange took place in Cyprus under the Red Cross supervision, according to Alwatan Voice. [1][6]

The Leila Khaled exchange

Alwatan Voice says a Popular Front group led by Leila Khaled hijacked an El Al plane and landed in Britain, the activist Patrick Argüello was martyred and Leila Khaled was arrested; a group from the same organisation then hijacked a British

plane, and Leila Khaled was released under an exchange.

The 1983 and 1985 deals

November 1983 (Fatah): More than 5,000 Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners were freed, among them 4,700 from the Ansar camp and 65 from Israeli prisons, in return for six soldiers captured at Bhamdoun in Lebanon on 4 September 1982; the PFLP–General Command kept two other soldiers. [1][2]

20 May 1985 (PFLP–General Command): 1,155 prisoners were freed, among them Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, in return for three soldiers, Yosef Azon, Nissim Shalem and Hezi Shai. The figure breaks down as 118 from the Ansar camp, 154 and 883 others. [1]

Shalit: 2009 and 2011

1 October 2009: Israel released 20 women prisoners in return for a two-minute video of the soldier Gilad Shalit, whom the Qassam Brigades had captured with the Popular Resistance Committees and the Army of Islam at Kerem Shalom east of Rafah on 25 June 2006, through German mediation. [1][2]

“Wafa al-Ahrar” (2011): Through Egyptian mediation 1,027 prisoners were freed in return for Shalit, in two stages: 477 on 18 October (450 men and 27 women) and 550 on 18 December 2011. [1][2]

Deals during the war on Gaza (2023–2025)

The truce (November 2023): through Qatari, Egyptian and American mediation the parties agreed a four-day truce in which Hamas would free 50 captives in return for 150 Palestinian women and minors. The truce was extended and ended on 1 December 2023. According to Al Jazeera English Israel freed 240 prisoners during the truce, while Hamas freed 80 Israelis and 30 non-Israelis, most of them from Thailand. [7][5]

In the third batch, on 26 November, 39 Palestinian prisoners were freed according to Al Jazeera Net, in return for 17 captives. [8][9]

The January 2025 deal: a ceasefire began on 19 January 2025 in three phases, the first lasting 42 days, in which 33 Israeli captives were to be freed in return for 1,737 Palestinian prisoners according to WAFA. By 1 February, after the fourth batch, the resistance had freed 13 Israelis and 5 Thais in return for 583 prisoners. The fourth batch freed 183 prisoners, 111 of them arrested in Gaza after 7 October 2023. Many prisoners were deported to Egypt and others from the northern governorates to Gaza. [4][10]

13 October 2025: 1,968 Palestinian prisoners were freed, among them 250 serving life sentences and 1,718 Gaza prisoners arrested after the assault on the Strip, according to the Commission of Detainees' Affairs and the Prisoners' Club. On the same day Hamas handed over all twenty living Israeli captives. [3][11]

Hezbollah and Arab-state deals

Several further deals involved Palestinian and Arab prisoners even though the counterpart was not Palestinian. We give them here according to Al Jazeera Net and Madar21. [1][2]

Date	Party	Prisoners freed	In return
March 1974	Egypt	65 Egyptian and Palestinian prisoners	Two Israeli spies held in Egypt
September 1997	Jordan	Sheikh Ahmad Yassin	Two Israeli agents held in Jordan after the attempt on the life of Khaled Meshaal
29 January 2004	Hezbollah	23 Lebanese, 5 Syrians, a Libyan, 3 Moroccans, 3 Sudanese, 400 Palestinians and a German Muslim	Elhanan Tannenbaum and the remains of 3 soldiers

Date	Party	Prisoners freed	In return
5 and 28 December 2004	Egypt	165 Palestinian detainees and 6 Egyptian students	Azzam Azzam
15 July 2008	Hezbollah	Samir Kuntar and four Lebanese, 5 Palestinian children as a goodwill gesture, and the return of 199 remains	The bodies of the soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev

[1][2]

Political releases that were not exchanges

Israel released prisoners in agreements that were not exchanges: the Cairo Agreement of 4 May 1994 (about 5,000, which Israel cut to 4,450), the Taba Agreement of 28 September 1995 (a plan for 1,924 prisoners, which Israel reduced), and the Wye River Memorandum of 23 October 1998 (a pledge of 750 prisoners which, according to Al Jazeera Net, Israel did not honour). [1][2]

Timeline

Date	Event
23 July 1968	The El Al hijacking and the release of 37 prisoners [1]
28 January 1971	Mahmoud Bakr Hijazi freed for the soldier Shmuel Fayez [1]
March 1974	Egyptian deal: 65 prisoners for two Israeli spies [1]
14 March 1979	76 prisoners freed for Avraham Amram [1]
23 November 1983	More than 5,000 prisoners freed for 6 soldiers [1]
20 May 1985	1,155 prisoners freed for 3 soldiers [1]
September 1997	Sheikh Ahmad Yassin freed for two Israeli agents [1]
29 January 2004	Hezbollah deal: 400 Palestinians among those freed [1]
15 July 2008	Hezbollah deal and Samir Kuntar [1]
1 October 2009	20 women prisoners freed for a Shalit video [1]

Date	Event
18 October 2011	First phase of “Wafa al-Ahrar”, 477 prisoners [2]
18 December 2011	Second phase, 550 prisoners [2]
24 November 2023	The truce and the exchange of prisoners and captives begin [7]
1 December 2023	The truce ends [5]
19 January 2025	The ceasefire and the first phase of the deal begin [4]
13 October 2025	1,968 prisoners freed for 20 living captives [3]

Frequently asked questions about Palestinian prisoner exchange deals

How many Palestinian exchange deals are there?

This article counts eleven Palestinian exchanges from 1968 to 2025, and five further deals with Hezbollah, Egypt and Jordan. Al Jazeera Net and Alwatan Voice say Arab and Palestinian exchange operations numbered 38 between 1948 and 2011, and Alwatan Voice lists most of them, among them the 1949 (Faluja), 1957, 1967 and 1973 deals with Arab states. [1][6]

Which was the biggest deal?

The 1983 deal, with more than 5,000 prisoners, followed by the 13 October 2025 deal with 1,968 prisoners. [1][3]

How many prisoners were freed in Wafa al-Ahrar?

1,027 prisoners in two stages, 477 and then 550, in return for the soldier Gilad Shalit. [1][2]

Were the Oslo-era agreements exchange deals?

No, they were political releases within agreements, with no Israelis in return, and

Israel reduced the numbers. [1][2]

Sources and references

1. Al Jazeera Net encyclopedia, “The most prominent prisoner exchange deals with Israel” (in Arabic).
2. Madar21, “The most prominent prisoner exchange deals between the Palestinian resistance and Israel” (in Arabic).
3. WAFA, “The Commission of Detainees’ Affairs and the Prisoners’ Club: 1,968 prisoners, including 250 serving life sentences, freed today”, 13 October 2025 (in Arabic).
4. WAFA, “The deported prisoners in the exchange deal, January and February 2025” (in Arabic).
5. Al Jazeera English, “Palestinians celebrate release of another batch of prisoners”, 1 December 2023.
6. Alwatan Voice, “Prisoner exchange operations with the occupation from 1948 to 2011”, for Palestinian Prisoners’ Day (in Arabic; the link is to the site’s home page).
7. Emarat Al Youm, “Details of the agreement between Israel and Hamas on a truce and exchange of hostages and prisoners”, 23 November 2023 (in Arabic).
8. Asharq News, “Completion of the exchange of the third batch”, 26 November 2023 (in Arabic).
9. Al Jazeera Net, “Israel receives a list of 39 Palestinian prisoners to be freed today”, 26 November 2023 (in Arabic).
10. Al Jazeera Net, “Abuse and a ban on celebrations: the occupation frees 183 prisoners in the fourth batch”, 1 February 2025 (in Arabic).
11. Al Arabiya, “Hamas hands over all 20 living hostages... and 4 bodies”, 13 October 2025 (in Arabic; headline only, the page could not be opened).