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Long Overdue

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Long Overdue

January 29, 1997 - Ken Lasson - The Jerusalem Post

Yasser Arafat's announcement that Israel will release Palestinian prisoners as part of the Hebron agreement contrasts sharply with the recent statement by Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi that every effort must be made to bring Jonathan Pollard to the Holy Land so he can serve out the rest of his sentence here.

Such suggestions demonstrate the weakness of the government's resolve (the emptiness of its promises?) to seek Pollard's redemption.

Can Israel seriously believe that a life term in one of its own prisons will do anything more than perpetuate an injustice in which it was demonstrably complicit?

It would mock the meaning of express national policy, namely that "Israel will use all means at its disposal to bring home the Prisoners of War and Missing in Action and all those who worked for the security of the state, and will insist on this point during negotiations with all relevant parties." ([Guidelines of the Government](#), 6/16/96).

The emphasized clause refers specifically to Pollard, the Israeli citizen whose "immediate release," said [Binyamin Netanyahu](#) last May, "... between close friends and strong allies is the only thing to do... it is long overdue."

Similar assurances were given to Pollard supporters in meetings with religious and political leaders now part of the coalition government.

But the gap between word and deed has been woeful

No prime minister

, for example, has ever openly sought to link Pollard's release with any of the numerous concessions (all strongly encouraged by the US) Israel has made during the peace process.

No foreign minister

, ambassador or MK has straightforwardly enlisted the support of friends on Capitol Hill for this cause.

No Israeli leader has forthrightly exercised public leverage on Pollard's behalf, despite knowing full well that everything said or done in private has had little effect.

The US, on the other hand, has had no compunction about openly pressuring Israel to release convicted terrorists as a conciliatory gesture to the Palestinians, or demanding that its strongest ally in the Middle East trade land for peace.

The Clinton administration's policy toward Pollard has been dictated largely by members of its intelligence community, before whom the president appears to cower.

Their righteous indignation at having been betrayed seemingly masks their inability to draw a distinction between Pollard's sins and those of more recently convicted mercenaries in their midst, between the misguided passing of confidential information to a friendly nation perceived at risk and flagrant treason.

It calls into question both their sense of moral balance and the quality of their moral outrage.

Moreover, the architects of Pollard's [life sentence](#) have continually used it to question Israel's reliability as an ally.

Besides smacking of antisemitism, such posturing reinforces the seemingly ageless paranoia of the American Jewish "leadership," which has been content to take

repeated denials of justice for Pollard in its politically correct and docile stride

The undisputed facts of Pollard's tragic plight need not be rehearsed, any more than the barely deniable declaration that his

blatantly disproportionate life sentence

- not only the harshest possible ever meted out for a similar offense, but **the longest served to date**

- is (as a dissenting [appellate judge](#) called it) "a complete and gross miscarriage of justice."

Even if it were not, in Pollard's case justice has already been amply served. "Now," as Nobel Laureate [Elie Wiesel](#) wrote recently, "is the time for human compassion."

Now, to put it another way, is the time for Israel to show its strength of character, to shoulder its responsibility, to demonstrate once and for all that it need not only respect the biddings of a benefactor;

it must make the principled demands of a partner as well

That means insisting that

Jonathan Pollard go home to Israel from, not to, captivity

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