

U.S. State Department's Deafening Silence After U.S. Citizens Engage In Israeli Settler Violence

The silence of the U.S. government when American citizens are actively engaged in anti-Palestinian terrorism suggests that we condemn Islamist terror while condoning Jewish terror.

By [Richard Silverstein](#)

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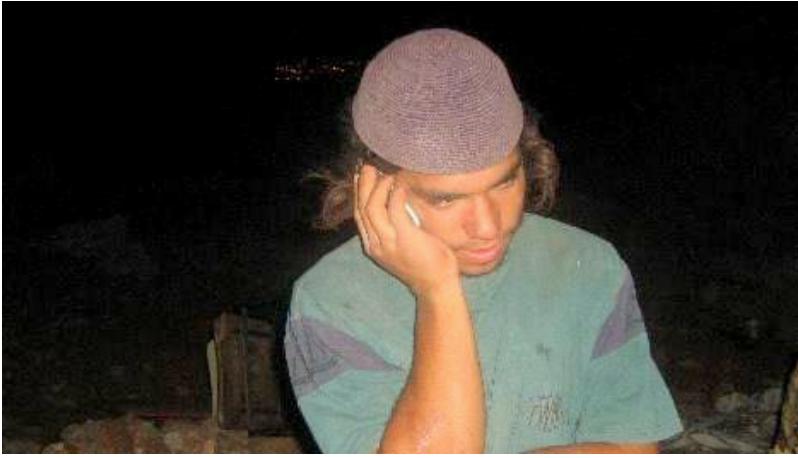
In July 2015, two Jewish settlers [threw a Molotov cocktail into a Palestinian home](#) and set it alight. Inside was a young family of four: a married couple and their two young sons. The building was fully engulfed by the time the parents awoke. They struggled desperately to get their boys out of the house. The mother swept up a blanket she thought contained her 18 month-old baby. But when she reached safety, to her horror she discovered the baby remained inside. They never reached him.

The mother and father had massive burns and each later died of their wounds after days of agonizing suffering in the hospital. Only their four year-old son survived them. Even he had burns over 60% of his body. They were eventually all taken to an Israeli hospital with a specialized burn unit. Ironically, in October the hospital [forwarded the medical bills](#) for treatment to the Palestinian Authority. Imagine: Israelis wipe out a family and Palestine has to foot the bill.

After the carnage was over, observers waited for the results of the investigation ... and waited, and waited. In September, the Israeli defense minister suddenly [announced](#) that justice might never be done in order to protect the "methods and sources" of the Shabak (a Hebrew acronym for one of Israel's major intelligence agencies, also known as Shin Bet). No suspects were arrested; the case seemed to be going nowhere.

International figures like [Ban Ki Moon](#) and other human rights authorities pressured the Israelis to announce results. All of a sudden, the hitherto somnolent security apparatus had to scramble to produce.

Arrests ... better late than never

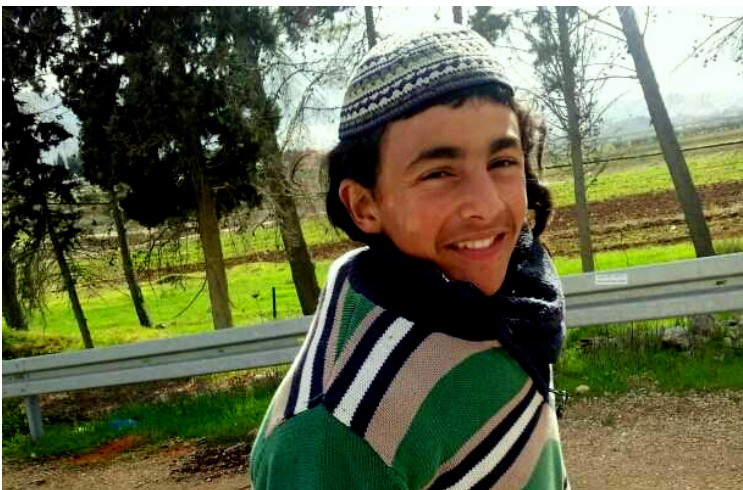


Amiram Benoliel, confessed murderer of Dawabsheh family.

In late November, several arrests were finally made. But, as in all similar security investigations, the Shabak put an ironclad gag order on the case. Names of suspects or their alleged roles could not be discussed in the media. Generally, the Shabak claim that these gag orders protect the integrity of the case and prevent other suspects from learning of the investigation.



Elisha Odess, 17, baby-eyed suspected killer of Dawabshe family. Caption: "We only have the Lord Blessed be He. We fear only Him."



Israel Keller, Jewish radical suspected in the Dawabsheh murders and likely informant for Israel's intelligence service, Shabak.

In many such cases, an Israeli security source provides confidential information to me that can't be reported domestically. Because it can't be reported inside Israel, it's almost never reported outside either.

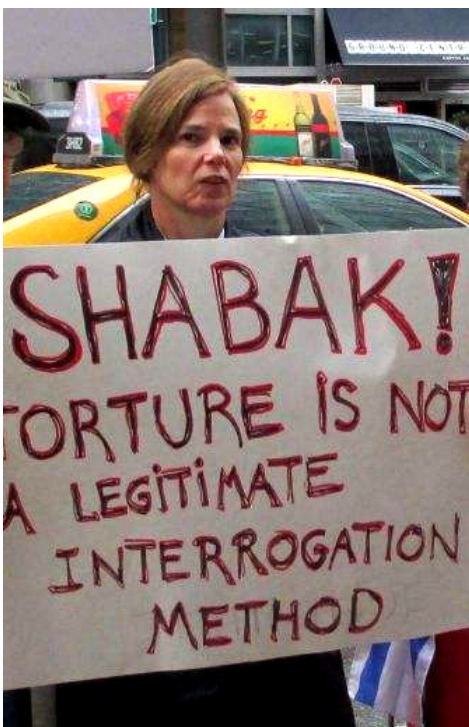
This source, though, offered an inside perspective on these matters. Throughout December, I reported the arrest of a number of individuals, their names, and what was known of their background. Some were arrested specifically for their connection to the Dawabsheh murders and others were arrested for other terror attacks against Palestinians. One of the most heinous of those was the [arson attack](#) against the historic Church of Loaves and Fishes in northern Israel.

Three of the suspects were of particular interest. [Amiram Benoliei](#) (sometimes transcribed "Ben Uliel"), Israel Keller and [Elisha Odess](#). Late in December, the Israeli press reported that one of the prisoners had confessed to his role in the murders and helped the police reconstruct the crime. Though they could not report who this individual was, a [coded Facebook posting from a settler activist alluded to Benoliei](#)

This was confirmed over the past weekend, when the [Shabak partially lifted the gag order](#) to confirm that Benoliei was the main perpetrator and had confessed. The same report says that an accomplice was also charged, though he was not at the scene of the crime. It didn't report his name. But my source confirms that the accomplice who helped plan the attack was Elisha Odess. He is also suspected in the church arson assault as well.

U.S. citizen charged in Dawabsheh murders

[Odess is a U.S. citizen](#). His family in the U.S. has met with senators and asked the State Department to intervene on his behalf. They complained that he'd been arrested without his medications. The powerful settler lobby, consisting of communal leaders and rabbis, [protested vehemently](#) against alleged torture tactics used on the Jewish terror detainees.



Ilana Odess protest the treatment of Elisha Odess.

Photo: (Glenn Richter/Jewish Forward)

They failed to note that Palestinian security suspects are routinely tortured far worse for far less severe offenses. The methods of torture used are well known and [documented](#) by B'Tselem and the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel. Though Israeli human rights NGOs routinely oppose torture in all forms, settler groups never denounce Palestinian torture.

This murder case seems to have aroused the Israeli security services when so much previous Jewish terrorism hasn't. They have arrested nearly 100 suspects. Many remain in administrative detention, under long-term arrest without trial. The Shabak itself tacitly acknowledges it has used torture and the Supreme Court, despite its prior rulings against the use of torture, has declined to direct the Shabak to desist.

Despite this reversal of decades of neglect, Israeli police continue using tactics that violate the rule of law and which are largely eschewed in democratic nations. The case relies largely on forced confessions rather than jury trials. In order to foil terror attacks, preventive detention (administrative detention) is used to put people away, rather than requiring prosecutors to build cases against them and try them. In addition, the illiberal use of gag orders hides the Shabak's motives and shields the case from public scrutiny.

The settlers ostentatious, even outrageous, behavior demonstrates the terror elements among them. Last month, two prominent settler families with violent pasts celebrated the marriage of their children at a settlement. Hundreds of guests [danced boisterously](#) with assault rifles, Molotov cocktails, and knives held high in the air (it's a common ritual at such weddings, and called the "Knife Dance"). They enlarged a photo of the Dawabsheh baby who died in the fire, and were seen on video stabbing it with a knife.

Watch Jewish Radicals Celebrating Wedding by Stabbing Photo of Dawabsheh Baby:

U.S. citizens' role in Anti-Palestinian terror

I've made repeated requests of the State Department to comment on the numerous Americans who've been similar charged with murder and other violent crimes against Palestinians. Among them, [Jack Teitel](#), [Adam Livvix](#), and, now, Odess.

In a related matter, I asked the State Department to comment on the reported [\\$220-million in tax-deductible donations](#) from American Jews which fund Israel's illegal settlements. A portion of these funds also support NGOs like Honenu, which [directly fund convicted Israeli terrorists](#) and their families during their prison terms. Among their largest donors are the Falic family of Florida, owners of Duty Free Shops of America. They made a 2011 [\\$60,000 gift](#) to an Israeli charity which is the fiscal sponsor for Honenu.

The State Department ignored my requests for comment. The silence of the U.S. government in the face of such support for terrorism suggests that we condemn Islamist terror while condoning Jewish terror.

Shabak's "Man in Samaria"



A man mourns alongside the body of a one-and-a-half year old boy, Ali Dawabsheh, during his funeral in Duma village near the West Bank city of Nablus. The sleeping toddler was burned to death when Jewish assailants set fire to two Palestinian homes, an attack that also critically wounded the child's 4-year-old brother and parents. (AP Photo/Majdi Mohammed)

Returning to the night of the Dawabsheh murders, a Palestinian eyewitness saw two masked attackers stand over the burning figures of the father and mother taunting them. An Israeli settler security unit reported seeing Israelis (plural) leaving Duma that night. Yet the charge sheet for Benoliel says he was there alone.

We know that Odess was not at the scene of the crime. He had been supposed to meet Benoliel in a nearby cave, where they made their preparations for the assault. But he never showed and the eventual perpetrator left on his mission without him. So who was the mystery man?

That is where things get interesting. Returning to Defense Minister Bogie Yaalon's earlier claim the case might never be solved because doing would compromise security sources. My source tells me that there was a mystery man involved in the plot. I call him, ironically, "Our Man in Samaria," echoing Graham Greene's [Our Man in Havana](#). He was a settler youth who had a dual allegiance. He was among the plotters, but had been turned by a Shabak recruiter. The "plant" was supposed to report everything to his handler about the conspiracy (which had been given the name "The Rebellion," echoing that of [Bar Kochba](#) against the ancient Romans), enabling authorities to disrupt violent crimes before they were committed. Except a most unfortunate thing happened. The agent provocateur betrayed his handlers and left them out in the cold.

Such a security betrayal is not without precedent in Israeli history. The Shabak had recruited someone in Yigal Amir's circle to report on his plans before the Yitzhak Rabin assassination. Yet [Avishai Raviv](#) conveniently "forgot" to tell his handler that Amir had repeatedly threatened to kill Rabin. This left them blind at the very moment the most devastating political murder in the state's history was being planned.

Israel's security agencies (Shabak, Mossad and military intelligence) are exquisitely sensitive to how they are portrayed in the media and Israeli society. They have faced their share of embarrassments, scandals, and farces. They understand that their budgets and prestige are dependent on successes. Exposing yet another failure which led to the murder of a baby and the orphaning of his surviving brother would only bring further opprobrium on the Shabak.

So it was in no hurry to solve the crime if it didn't have to. But after the international hue and cry, when it became clear that action was required, the domestic spy agency had to ensure the most damaging part of the story would not come out. At least not in the

mainstream press.

But I believe that there was indeed a second attacker there that night. And it was the agent provocateur whose identity the Shabak desperately wants concealed.

I also have a suspicion (unconfirmed by my source) who the Shabak turncoat may be. One of the suspects Israel arrested is [Israel Keller](#). But of all those arrested under suspicion of involvement in the Dawabsheh case, Keller was the only one released. I think there is a reason he was treated differently than the rest: Shabak's Man in Samaria is Israel Keller.

Keller's father enjoys a minor celebrity in Israeli pop consciousness. Nir Keller as a youth, developed an unlikely passion for surfing. Israel isn't known for its surfing so he travels the world seeking out the world's best surf spots. Even more startling, in early adulthood he became a Bratslaver Hasid, a follower of the 19th century wonder Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav.

If this set of personal qualities strikes you as fertile ground for fiction, an Israeli novelist agreed and wrote the book, [Mekimi](#). It includes a character, Brenner, based loosely on the real Keller. He's a fun-loving surfer dude who basks in the aura of the wisdom of "The Rebbe." The book was adapted for a successful cable TV miniseries, which is where Keller's celebrity was made. Keller adds "terror dad" to his other striking appellations as surfer-Hasid.

Nir Keller [holds especially racist views](#) of both Palestinians and Blacks. During Hanukah, when Israel's beloved President Reuven Rivlin travel to the White House to light Hanukkah candles with President Obama, Keller was calling the Israeli president "Der Fuhrer" on his Facebook page:

I never saw a *kippah* [head-covering] on the head of *Der Führer* Rivlin when he lit candles with the Arab [Obama] in the Black House. I'm sure he never said the blessings over the candles either. But even had he donned a *kippah* and said the blessings, there is no worse example of someone who goes down on bended knee and defiling God's name in the history of the people of Israel..

Keller called Israel a "criminal state" for arresting his son and taunted Israel's defense minister saying he lived in "Dumaland," which is an insult comparable to calling Gaza "Hamastan."

Israeli Media Falls Short in Reporting National Security

As this case develops, after authorities have elicited a confessed or laid charges, the gag orders will eventually be eased or removed entirely. Then Israeli media can report on it more openly. Possibly they can even expose aspects of it which are hitherto unknown, given how little information those reporting on it now have. But of one thing you may be sure: Israeli journalists will [refuse to acknowledge](#) the journalist who broke the gag as they've done with [previous stories of mine](#); these very stories which put much of the pressure on the security apparatus to remove the gags, because they know a reporter [already had the goods and was reporting it abroad anyway](#). It does seem, except in a few instances, there is an oath of omerta among Israeli media about acknowledging the role of outsider journalists, those who reject the national consensus on security matters and expose the secrets of the national security state.

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