



The Sbarro bombing

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**25 years ago, my
daughter was killed in
the Sbarro bombing. Her
killer is free**

I am in the grotesque position of being politically inconvenient, while the confessed terrorist is protected by a US ally. Her freedom mocks justice itself

August 9, 2001, was a school vacation morning in Jerusalem. I left early for the drug-technology company I managed, while the house slept. Around 2 p.m., my wife Frimet called my office. Instead of her usual update, she was screaming: “There’s been a terror attack — a *pigua*. I can’t reach the children.” The line went dead.

Twelve hours of frantic calls, hospital checks, prayers, and mounting dread followed. Malki, 15, our oldest daughter and the middle child, had gone out with her closest friend Michal for a day of teenage fun. Frimet, sidelined by a migraine, had not seen her leave.

At 2 a.m., our two oldest sons phoned from the government pathology center in Jaffa. A municipal social worker had taken them there. The call no parent ever wants to receive. It marked the end of the first chapter of our lives.

Malki was gentle and loving by nature. She adored her blind, non-verbal little sister Haya and helped with every medical emergency and hospital stay. Her empathy came naturally; her smile lit up rooms. That pure, sweet life was ripped away in an instant.

The memories never fade: the funeral, sitting shiva on the floor of our suddenly crowded home, the stream of friends and strangers offering comfort.

Twenty-five years later, the pain returns sharper than ever — layered now with the knowledge that the woman who orchestrated the massacre

walks free, defiant, unrepentant, and celebrated. Her name is Ahlam Tamimi. She calls the Sbarro pizzeria bombing “my operation,” says she would do it again the same way, and lives openly in Jordan under Jordanian protection. A \$5 million US State Department reward on her head has been in effect since 2018. She is the sole woman on the FBI Most Wanted Terrorists list.

Born, raised, and educated in Jordan, Tamimi crossed into the West Bank in 2000 at the age of 20 to study journalism at a Ramallah-area university. She worked nights as a news presenter on Arabic television. Within her first year, she moved from Fatah to Hamas, becoming the first woman the group accepted for terror operations. She planted one bomb in a Jerusalem supermarket that failed to detonate. A week later, she succeeded.

Tamimi escorted the man I call her human bomb — a religious zealot carrying a guitar case packed with explosives and nails — to the entrance of the crowded Sbarro pizzeria in central Jerusalem. There were no security guards in those innocent days.

She recounts in a now-viral video how she left ahead of the carnage and, in a taxi back to Ramallah listened to radio reports as the casualty count climbed. She recalls her disappointment at hearing “only three dead” — and the rising elation as the toll mounted. Fellow passengers applauded. The final count: 15 dead, including eight children, and dozens wounded. A 16th victim, a young mother left unconscious, died of her injuries in 2023.

Back in Ramallah, Tamimi delivered the news on a local station that evening, reporting on the carnage as if someone else had carried it out. Arrested weeks later by the IDF, she pleaded guilty to all charges, received 16 life sentences, and grinned at the judges throughout the proceedings.

In 2011, barely eight years after her conviction, she walked free as part of the lopsided deal that secured the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, held hostage for five years by Hamas. Her return to Jordan was greeted with ecstatic rallies, media tours, interviews, and VIP visits.

In March 2012, Tamimi launched a television program, “Breezes of the Free,” produced by the Muslim Brotherhood, focused on solidarity with terrorists, and broadcast from Amman. That this happened in Jordan’s tightly controlled media environment makes clear it had official approval. The show ran weekly for five years.

Jordan, where surveys show some of the world’s highest levels of antisemitic sentiment, has shown that it cannot be expected to hold Tamimi accountable.

But Malki was an American citizen — one of three murdered at Sbarro. In early 2012, after Tamimi began her television show, I traveled to Washington, DC, to seek justice. Senior officials at the Department of Justice and FBI were responsive. I urged them to enforce a little-known US law allowing prosecution of those who murder Americans in terrorist attacks abroad.

It was years before I learned that the Obama administration secretly indicted Tamimi in 2013. Those charges eventually went public in 2017 under President Donald Trump; the United States formally requested her extradition under the 1995 US-Jordan extradition treaty in February of that year. Within days of the charges being unsealed in Washington, an appellate court in Jordan, citing a contrived technical objection that has found no support outside the kingdom, declared the treaty invalid and thus unenforceable. (Though it does so in a disturbingly quiet voice, the United States has declared repeatedly since then that the treaty remains in effect.) Jordan's failure to extradite Tamimi continues to this day. The United States provides Jordan with generous annual aid — currently about \$1.45 billion and rising. It has ample leverage to insist Jordan honor the treaty. But no meaningful pressure has ever been applied. The United States has never even issued a public call for Jordan to stop violating the agreement and surrender Tamimi. The passivity from Washington, sustained across multiple administrations, is as stunning as it is underreported.

As the parents of a murdered child, we are in a grotesque position: treated as politically more inconvenient than the confessed mastermind of a massacre who enjoys open protection from a US ally. The betrayal is profound and choking.

Tamimi's very public freedom mocks her victims, their families, the fundamental principle that terrorism must carry a price, and justice itself. It's incomprehensible. Ordinary families like mine should not be left to wage years-long campaigns so that basic accountability can happen.

Glimmers of light have emerged. A senior cabinet official in the Trump administration told us in an official communication in recent weeks that “attacks against Americans will not go unanswered and we will not rest until Tamimi is brought to justice.” Words come easily to politicians, but these are from a more elevated source than we have heard in all these years of fighting for justice to be done.

And on Wednesday, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations officially and publicly renewed its call for the State Department to press for Tamimi’s extradition, urging Secretary of State Marco Rubio to “raise the matter directly with King Abdullah II.”

Defeating terror is core to every credible vision of peace in our region. As the 25th anniversary approaches, I want Americans to press their elected officials and community leaders, particularly those at every level of America’s diverse Jewish community, to use available tools — diplomatic, financial and legal — so Ahlam Tamimi is brought from Jordan to Washington and finally tried there for the unspeakable murder of Americans.

When that happens, the second part of our lives can start.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arnold Roth, an attorney and technology business manager, serves as honorary chair of the Malki Foundation, which he and his wife Frimet established in 2001. Its work honors the memory of their daughter Malki, murdered in a terrorist attack on the Sbarro pizza shop in the center of Jerusalem.