Death Penalty for Terrorists Sparks Fierce Debate in Israel

Israel's Knesset on Wednesday voted 52-49 in favor of a bill that would enable both military and state courts to sentence convicted terrorists to death.

Technically, Israeli courts can already sentence convicts to death, but only via the unanimous decision of multiple judges. Such a sentence has not been handed down since Israel executed Nazi Holocaust frontman Adolf Eichmann in 1962.

The new bill would enable courts to hand down the death penalty with just a simple majority decision.

The bill must still pass several more readings before it becomes law.

The Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) is urging members of Knesset to vote against the law, warning that use of the death penalty could encourage a new wave of kidnappings of Israeli and foreign Jews by Palestinian terrorists.

Israel's security chiefs fear that convicting a terrorists to death would spark concerted efforts to abduct Jews either here or abroad to force the convicted terrorist's release before his execution.

Similar warnings from the Shin Bet have resulted in past death penalty proposals being defeated in the Knesset.

Another point of concern is that the same death penalty law could be used against Jewish terrorists.

In fact, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a member of the party pushing the death penalty bill (Yisrael Beiteinu) said it most certainly would apply in the rare case of Jewish terrorism.

Trying to trap Netanyahu, who is supporting the bill, firebrand Arab MK Ahmad Tibi asked if the death penalty would be doled out to those like the Jewish extremist who firebombed a Palestinian home in 2015, killing a baby and his parents.

Netanyahu responded: "Yes."

Yisrael Beiteinu MK Robert Ilatov was similarly asked if the Jewish extremist who brutally murdered Palestinian teenager Mohammed Abu Khdeir in 2014 deserved the death penalty.

Ilatov stated unequivocally: "A terrorists is a terrorist."

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