

Beware of the 'New Order' Israel is imposing

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No peace or stability can emerge in West Asia through occupation, subjugation, and the military slaughter of civilians.

ON JULY 28, 1989, a detachment of heavily armed Israeli commandos descended upon the southern Lebanese village of Jibchit. The time was 2 a.m. They burst into the home of Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid, leader of the Hizbollah militia, beat up his wife, and shot dead a neighbour before bundling the Sheikh and two other men into a helicopter. One of those seized was a young man named Hashem Fahaf who had no connection to Hizbollah, the other was the Sheikh's bodyguard.

According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which carries a [helpful if damning account of the kidnapping](#) on its website, "Israel had hoped to use the sheikh as a card to affect an exchange of prisoners and hostages [held by Hizbollah] in return for all Shiites held by it."

So brazen was Israel's action that the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed a resolution (No. 638) calling for the "immediate safe release of all hostages and abducted persons, wherever and by whomever they are being held." Needless to say, Tel Aviv ignored the resolution. After all, kidnapping non-combatants, including minors, and holding them hostage, was an integral part of Israel's military strategy. In May 1994, Israeli soldiers abducted a prominent Lebanese businessman and former commander of the Shia Amal militia, Mustafa al-Dirani, and brought him into Israel. The aim of that kidnapping was to try and get information about the location of Ron Arad, an air force navigator who had been shot down over Sidon in 1986 during Israel's ongoing aggression against Lebanon.

Mr. Fahaf, whose presence Israel refused to recognise for years, spent 11 years in jail before the Supreme Court finally ordered his release. He was allowed to return home along with 18 other Lebanese nationals who — the Israeli newspaper Haaretz [reported in August 2003](#) — had been held "according to the official version ... as `bargaining chips' for Ron Arad". Two of those released had been kidnapped as boys and had grown into adulthood in captivity.

Sheikh Obeid and Mr. Dirani were finally released in 2004, after being held hostage by the Israeli government for 15 and 10 years respectively. Both men spent extended periods of time at Camp 1391, dubbed Israel's Guantanamo, a prison whose existence the Israeli authorities do not freely admit to. There, Mr. Dirani was [raped, sexually abused, and tortured by Israeli soldiers](#). A lawsuit filed by him against the State of Israel is [currently pending](#) before a judge in Tel Aviv. He is claiming NIS 6 million (\$1.5 million) in damages.

The 2004 release was part of a general prisoner swap brokered by the German government in which Hizbollah released an Israeli businessman and reserve colonel seized in 2000 in order to force Tel Aviv to free Sheikh Obeid. Hizbollah also returned the bodies of three

Israeli soldiers killed in action. In exchange, Israel set free the Sheikh, Mr. Dirani, and 33 other Lebanese and Arab hostages, as well as 400 Palestinian prisoners. It also returned the bodies of 59 Lebanese nationals killed by its security forces over the years.

It is necessary to recall this entire sordid episode in order to put in perspective Hizbollah's foolish action of seizing two Israeli soldiers across the blue line dividing Lebanon from Israel. Thanks to Israel, kidnapping and hostage-taking — as well as the targeting of non-combatants and even children — have become "acceptable" military tactics in the region though one would be hard pressed to come across any reference to Sheikh Obeid or Mr. Dirani in the international news coverage that followed Hizbollah's action. The Shia militia wants Tel Aviv to free the handful of Lebanese prisoners still in Israeli jails who were promised freedom in 2004 but never released. Most prominent among them is [Samir Kuntar](#), captured in 1978 during a guerrilla raid on an Israeli settlement near the Lebanese border. Kuntar was found guilty of killing a civilian man and his young daughter and sentenced to more than 500 years in prison by an Israeli court. The Israeli authorities may balk at releasing a "convicted child killer." But in rejecting the possibility of a negotiated settlement and indiscriminately bombarding Lebanon, Tel Aviv has turned its own soldiers into the executioners of children. When a well-marked United Nations post takes a direct hit and ambulances are struck — according to [a recent dispatch](#) by Robert Fisk — with missiles that pierce the Red Cross and Crescent symbol right at the centre, it is hard to accept the Israeli claim that all civilian deaths were unintended.

Real war aims

Recalling the recent history of kidnappings is also necessary for another reason: To puncture the myth that the disproportionate and utterly criminal Israeli military response that is pulverising Lebanon and its people today is somehow driven by an urge to free its two kidnapped soldiers.

Read what Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former U.S. National Security Advisor, [told a small gathering in Washington](#) last week about this. "I hate to say this but I will say it. I think what the Israelis are doing today for example in Lebanon is in effect — maybe not in intent — the killing of hostages. The killing of hostages ... Because when you kill 300 people, 400 people, who have nothing to do with the provocations Hizbollah staged, but you do it in effect deliberately by being indifferent to the scale of collateral damage, you're killing hostages in the hope of intimidating those that you want to intimidate. And more likely than not you will not intimidate them. You'll simply outrage them and make them into permanent enemies with the number of such enemies increasing."

On a par with the fantasy that the latest Israeli aggression against Lebanon is about protecting the legitimate security interests of Israel is the demand being raised in various quarters for a NATO peacekeeping force to be deployed on the Lebanese side of the border in order to disarm Hizbollah. Frequent reference is made to [Security Council resolution 1559](#) of 2004, which called on the Lebanese government to assert its sovereignty over the whole of its territory and disarm the Shiite militia. When it suits Israel and the United States, United Nations resolutions such as 242 and 338 on Palestine or 638 on releasing hostages can be ignored for years on end. But other resolutions acquire a Biblical patina and instant compliance is required of them. By grossly interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs, Resolution 1559 was clearly ultra vires of the U.N. Charter. That is why it passed with the barest possible majority. Russia and China chose to abstain rather than exercise their veto

because the resolution envisaged no enforcement mechanism. In any case, it is absurd for Israel — which is bombing Lebanon at will and sending in its troops — to speak in favour of a resolution that calls for the Lebanese government to assert its sovereignty.

As the Israeli peace bloc, Gush Shalom, [has said](#), the current offensive against Lebanon — like the 1982 invasion which led to two decades of occupation — was prepared in advance in anticipation of a suitable provocation. Hizbollah's kidnap raid provided the Olmert regime the excuse it needed to launch a war for the physical elimination of the militia and the eventual installation of a pliant regime in Lebanon that would do Israel's — and the U.S.' — bidding. In many ways, the script is not that different from the manner in which the abduction of an Israeli soldier by Palestinian guerrillas gave Tel Aviv the pretext to do something it was itching to do ever since Hamas won the elections.

In both cases, Israel and its principal international backer, the U.S., have proved how bogus is their vision of a “New Middle East” centred around respect for democracy and human rights. By attacking Gaza and Lebanon, that too with such overwhelming and disproportionate military force, Israel has decisively turned its back on the possibility of a negotiated peace settlement with the Palestinians and Syrians. The Olmert regime has no intention of relinquishing its illegal control over land and aquifers that belong to others. The U.S. does not want democracy to flourish in the region. Nor does Israel. What it wants are partners who are too weak, isolated or pliant to insist on their rights. What it has in mind are unilateral outcomes, imposed through gunboat negotiations if possible or through war if necessary. In both cases, the active support of the Bush administration and the silence of the rest of the world are essential.

The refusal of the U.N. to condemn the Israeli aggression against Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority, its failure to bring about an immediate ceasefire despite the mounting civilian toll, and its inability to get Israel to lift its inhuman blockade of Gaza and release the Hamas Ministers and MPs it kidnapped last month are paving the way for a human tragedy of monumental proportions. As long as the world continues to appease Israel in this manner, the people of the region — and especially the Israelis — will never know peace.

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