Must Lebanon and Gaza be destroyed for three kidnapped Israeli soldiers?

LETTER FROM AMERICA

What about the Bush administration sacred mantra, "Democracies do not attack democracies"? Although Lebanon has not attacked Israel, Israel, presumably a democracy, has proved Bush wrong by attacking a sovereign democratic country, Lebanon. As Israel destroys Lebanon's infrastructure, airports, bridges, roads, buildings, military installations, electrical grid and fuel depot, the world looks the other way and pretends as though nothing is

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED

T a time the world should be commiserating with India for the Mumbai massacre of over two hundred innocent civilians, Israel hogs the world's limelight with a two-pronged attack on Gaza and Lebanon, for the kidnapping of three Israeli soldiers. President Bush's diplomacy has been predictable: a ringing endorsement of the Israeli invasion. Afraid of reprisal from the Israeli lobby and its neoconservative wing, American politicians of all hue and the talking heads on television are falling head over heels to toe the Israeli line. It is tiresome to hear everyone parrot the same nonsense: Israel is innocent, Arabs are guilty.

Fortunately, not all Americans are being fooled. A letter published in The New York Times on July 15 stated: "As the Middle East drama escalates, the United States must realize that it is both in its own interest as well as in the interest of regional peace to avoid backing Israel unconditionally. The universal association of Israel with America has translated 'anger with Israel' into 'anger with America,' so that in addition to its own enemies. the United States must also face opponents of Israel. In terms of peace, America's enthusiastic support removes pressure on Israel to negotiate with its neighhors: with an American crutch Israel can act independently and inconsiderately, without fear of aftermath. Peace can be achieved only when all parties share an interest in it, and who needs peace when you have America?"

Another read: "Israeli soldiers should not be kidnapped, and Palestinians should not fire rockets into Israel. But the Israelis should also not assassinate Palestinian members of Hamas and kill civilians when they miss their targets. This cycle of violence did not start with the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier. If the Israelis have a right to defend themselves, so do the Palestinians. Let us not take sides. Let us not help one side make war but force both sides to make a just

A third writer commented: "Israel's response to the kidnappings of its soldiers in Gaza and Lebanon threatens to destabilize the region, which is exactly what Iran and Syria would like. I do not condone the kidnappings in any way, but I can't help but wonder how many Arabs must die for each kidnapped Israeli: 100, 200, 300, 1,000? There must be another way."

And finally, a fourth person wrote: "For years, Americans have accepted Israel's claims to be a nation concerned with peace and justice and democracy, but unfortunately, it is now clear that that image is far removed from reality. Before our very eyes, Israel's

armed forces have invaded neighboring Lebanon, as Israeli artillery blasts away at that country and as the Israeli Air Force bombs Beirut. Now the masquerade is over; Israel has made itself visible to the world as a militaristic nation that continues to impose a brutal occupation on the Palestinians and that has violently invaded Lebanon. Sadly, we must recognize and deal with Israel's behavior for what it is. not for what we would have idealistically wanted it to be."

People, especially Americans,

seem to have forgotten the context of the current flare up. It all started with President Bush's muchballyhooed prescription, widely echoed by the media cheerleaders such as Tom Friedman of The New York Times, that democracy is the panacea for all that ails the Middle East. So, with international monitors watching, fair elections were held in the Palestinian territories. Lebanon and Iraq. However, Israel and America did not like the outcome: Hamas's victory in the Palestinian election and Hezbollah's minority role in the Lebanese government. Someone forgot to tell the Palestinians and the Lebanese that democracy is good for them only if they vote for parties Israel and America like. What Bush people do not seem to understand is that if people with radical backgrounds are rebuffed when they embrace democracy, they will inevitably return to extrem-



Ever since Hamas's victory in last year's Palestinian elections, Israel, and at Israel's insistence America, have done everything in their power to undermine the democratically-elected Palestinian government. They have successfully cut off funds for the Palestinians and have attempted to starve the entire population. Tragicomically, thanks to the efforts of the Israel and the US, Palestinians became the first occupied population to be placed under international sanctions. Israel continued its campaign of bombing Gaza and the targetedkilling of Hamas leaders without any criticism from the Bush administration whatsoever. In May, a young Palestinian girl and her entire family were blown into smith-

Pro-Israeli neoconservative apologists like Charles Krauthammer of Time and the Washing Post are propagandizing that since last August. Gaza is "free." In reality, with Israel controlling Gaza's air space, water supply, entrance and egress and the sea coast, to the Palestinians Gaza is a massive Israeli prison "where 79 percent of households live in poverty, and children scavenge through dumpsters. It is also an Israeli target range, where schools,

ereens as they vacationed on the

Gaza beach, by an Israeli missile.

None of these qualifies as provoca-



bridges and electric plants have been destroyed."

A Princeton clergy elaborated in our local newspaper on July 13: "The 1.5 million residents of the Gaza strip are sealed into a prison without clean water, food or electricity; without the means to export goods, without access to international financial aid or aid from nongovernment organizations -- not even from the UN High Commission for Refugees -- and without personal funds from family members from other countries. Our media are not giving the crisis the attention it deserves and our government is paying no attention. Genocide is wrong in Gaza."

With the Arab world seething in anger, it is in the context of the strangulation of Gaza by Israel that one Israeli soldier was kidnapped by Hamas operatives and two more by Hezbollah. Hamas and Hezbollah want to exchange 9,000 Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails for these soldiers. Has the world stopped to ask why there are 9,000 Palestinians and Lebanese captives languishing in Israeli iails?

Ever since the 1979 fall of Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was a staunch supporter of Israel, the Iranians have supported Israel's adversaries the Palestinians, Hamas and Hezbollah. If that sounds unreasonable, consider this: led by the US, the military and economic might of the Western world sup-



ports Israel to the hilt. All the rage in the Western world currently is how to punish Iran for its nuclear ambitions. No one wants to discuss the excesses being committed by the nuclear-armed Frankenstein created by the West, Israel! Emboldened, rogue Israel is looking for an excuse to attack Iran next! It may be recalled that the dictator Shah signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty without consulting the Iranian people. Israel has not signed it. It is now becoming clear to why the West insists on keeping the Islamic nations disarmed, militarily weak and without nuclear-capability -- so that they and their proxy states like Israel can attack Muslim countries with impunity.

If Israel is so incensed by the kidnapping of three of its soldiers, just imagine how angry Palestinians and Lebanese must feel when Israeli retaliation kills hundreds of their innocent civilians. As The New York Times editorial on July 13 correctly pointed out, use of such disproportionate force by Israel does not make the Arab civilians "angry at the terrorists who provoked the violence. It makes them angrier at Israel." And at America, Israel's prime sponsor, the Times should have added. Israel's use of overwhelming force does not intimidate the Arabs, it only infuriates them further.

Because of its overwhelming military superiority over the Arabs,



Israel's knee-ierk reaction to any

crisis is to shell, bomb, invade and blockade Arab lands, as it is doing in Gaza and Lebanon now. After a while, the Times adds, such operations "lose its clear territorial and counterterrorism definition," and begins "to take on a perverse momentum of its own." What about the Bush administration sacred mantra, "Democracies do not attack democracies"? Although Lebanon has not attacked Israel, Israel, presumably a democracy, has proved Bush wrong by attacking a sovereign democratic country, Lebanon. As Israel destroys Lebanon's infrastructure, airports, bridges, roads, buildings, military installations, electrical grid and fuel depot, the world looks the other way and pretends as though nothing is happening. As Israel systematically destroys Lebanon, and the militarily weak, pro-western Lebanese government begs the UN and the US to ask Israel to cease fire to no avail, where is the UN, the agency so guick to punish the Muslim nations?

Israel has to understand that the only way to achieve peace with the Palestinians and security for itself is to end its occupation of Palestinian lands, withdraw behind the pre-1967 border and stop controlling the daily lives of the Palestinians through hundreds of check points. Whether Israel has



territories would notice that Israel is becoming more and more entrenched in the West Bank. Noam Chomsky believes that Israel's sole intention is to make sure that no Palestinian state ever exists. With America in its pocket, Israel can do pretty much what it wants and flout international laws at will, as it is doing now. The world is being asked to accept two sets of laws: one for Israel and one for the rest of the world

In the mainstream American media and political circles, any discussion of the long and shortterm cost to America for the Israeli intransigence is taboo. Commentators are expected only to heap praise on Israel and heave scorn on Arabs and Muslims. Yet, slowly but surely, the costs are being accrued. In the Islamic world, under the Bush administration, America is being blamed for all of Israel's irrational invasions Since Israel's incursion into Lebanon, crude oil prices have iumped almost \$10 a barrel. Americans will pay much more at the pumps and for myriad of petroleum-based products in the coming months because of Israeli adventure. Yet, criticism of Israel remains tantamount to treason.

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is a columnist of

Middle East in flames

ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

HE Middle East is once again the theatre of bloodshed and destruction on a large scale. Against Israeli bombardments of Gaza and now the Lebanon, the Palestinians are no longer depending on rock throwing children or suicide bombers but rockets launched at Israeli targets by the Hezbollah.

The present phase began with Israel regularly pounding Palestinians in their Gaza targets. The heat went up a notch when ar Israeli soldier was abducted. Israel threatened severe punishment and if need be to destroy everything around to save the Israeli soldier.

The Palestine Authority proposed a quid pro quo and wanted that Israel release thousands of Palestinians held for long time in Israeli jails. Israel turned a deaf ear and went ahead with merciless air strikes and her tanks and heavy armour entered Gaza, which Israel Premier Ariel Sharon had handed back to the Palestinians not long ago. The defenseless Palestinians in Gaza bore the brunt of the attack.

The escalation went one step higher when two Israeli soldiers were abducted near South Lebanon by the Hezbollah. Israeli planes rained rockets in Lebanon in the north and Gaza in the south. Drawing Lebanon into the war that had remained restricted between the Palestinians and the Israelis was a dangerous provocation. It alarmed the world capitals. The Security Council of the UN met and a draft resolution supported by the West, Russia and Chine, was vetoed as usual by the US. The US was bailing out her client state

G8 in St. Petersberg in Russia. The leaders of the US and Russia, George Bush and Vladimir Putin faced the world through the media. Both stuck by their guns, that is Bush went on insisting that Israel had a right to self defense and Putin retorting that Israel had no right to use excessive force. Although in public they have maintained an inflexible posture there can be no doubt that Israeli incursion into Lebanon will be viewed with great dismay in all capitals of the world.

After occupying South Lebanon for nearly two decades Israel pulled out from the entire area in 2000 and this tiny beautiful country on the Mediterranean started breathing again. The hard working and talented Lebanese went ahead to work and with their well proven business acumen succeeded in rebuilding the country. It is a painful spectacle to see the rubble in beautiful Beyrouth. The Israelis are insisting that the Hezbollah must return the captured soldiers. Behind this tussle between

Palestine and Israel, is the reality of Hezbollah that Israel refuses to face by dismissing it disdainfully as a terrorist organization. Taking a cue from Israel President Georg Bush also refuses to deal with Hezbollah (as with Hamas). This is reminiscent of President Bush refusing to shake hands with the late President Yaser Arafat, the democratically elected leader of the Palestinians. Israel must come to terms that Hamas graduated from her "terrorist" description some time ago when she won a freely held election in Gaza and the West Bank, defeating Fatah, founder of modern Palestine, and that the same is true for Hezbollah.

It is a case of the tail wagging the dog and this is the story of the last half century plus. Israel has successfully mobilized the American

Jewry, who have given unconditional effective support to Israel. No US politician worth his or her salt can do politics without a pilgrimage to Israel. Israel continues to dream of becoming the dominant power in the Middle East. On the basis of her being the sole possessor of nuclear weapons this claim cannot be dismissed. Furthermore she has the unconditional support of the most powerful country of the world although becoming the dominant power is bound to remain a distant

After the first world war when several Empires were dismantled. France, with her influence in Francophone countries specially Syria and Lebanon, built up special relationship. France is a member of the Security Council. In the light of the powerful restraint administered by Israel on the Bush White House, would it be too much to expect that France takes the lead in saving Lebanon from returning to the role where she would be theatre of destruction and a mute spectator of her own demolition?

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What should we do about oil prices?

M. FAZLUL HAQUE

IL prices hit record highs above us \$78 per barrel in the Asian market. Israel's escalating offensive in Palestine and Lebanon and the Iran nuclear issue sparked new fears of widespread Middle East crisis which is ultimately destined to help rise the prices of crude oil.

The crude oil prices now look set to break \$80 per barrel very soon. Some oil experts and analysts are predicting that the oil prices may reach up to \$100 per barrel in the near future if the conflicts in Palestine and Lebanon continue and the nuclear issues of Iran and North Korea are not resolved soon.

Such abnormal high prices of crude oil will hit the Bangladesh economy drastically. The current oil import bill of Bangladesh is over \$1.5 billion. With further increase of crude oil prices, the oil import bill will stand at over \$2 billion.

Global increase of oil prices have already affected all sectors of the economy and prices of products including essential items have registered higher levels. Further rise of oil prices will affect all consumer items adversely:

Bangladesh economy cannot sustain the impact of all time high prices of crude oil and refined petroleum products. The government of Bangladesh

shock and impact of record high prices of oil: 1.Immediately increasing the domestic retail prices of petroleum products in keeping with the import

2.Maximize use of CNG by converting existing vehicles.

gasoline engines into CNG fuelling 4.Conversion of diesel-run

vehicles into CNG in phases.

5.Import of CNG run buses, trucks and cars on emergency basis by public and private sectors. Soft term loans should be given to the importers and duty relaxation should also be given to the CNG vehicle importers.

6.Railways and riverine transports should be run with CNG with necessary conversion in dual fuel.

7.Rationing system for petroleum products should be introduced immediately as in war-like

Radicals push for war

8.Steps should be taken for manufacturing bio-fuels. 9.Bio-gas plants should be

and limited electricity wherever possible should immediately take the follow-10.Markets and shopping malls ing steps to arrest the tremendous should be closed after 6:30 pm.

11.Government should immediately approach bilateral and multilateral donor countries/agencies to provide grant for financing petroleum products purchase, otherwise all the development efforts will be stalled.

12.Enco of vehicles. Government should consider giving soft loans to CNG conversion workshops to import CNG kits and CNG cylinders.

13.CNG refueling stations along the high ways of Dhaka-Chittagong, Dhaka-Sylhet and Dhaka-Bogra should be installed by RPGCL or private parties. In this case preferential treatment should be given for allotment of land and/or acquisition of land.

14. Super gas network should be installed along the streets and highways in and around Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet cities to supply natural gas at required pressure to CNG refueling stations.

long time back and lack proper pressure for supply of gas to CNG nstalled for producing cooking gas refueling stations. 15.All the production wells in all

Most of the pipelines were built a

the producing fields, bottom hole surveys and pressure tests should be carried out in phases and corrective measures should be taken to ensure uninterrupted supply of natural gas.

16.Bangladesh imports every year about Tk 20,000 crores worth of petroleum products. At least Tk 2,000 crores should be spent every year on exploration to find new fields of oil and gas

17. Deep drilling by crossing the high pressure zones should be carried out to find more gas and oil Titas field and Kailashtilla fields are considered more prospective for finding oil by deep drilling.

18.RPGCL should be allowed to act as regulatory body for CNG conversions and uses. RPGCL's certification should be mandatory for all conversion of motorized

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Who needs the G8?

DENIS MACSHANE

F the G8 did not exist, would anyone want to invent it? The forum started in 1975 as a fireside chat among six national leaders, all of whom spoke English. That was in the good old days when communism still ran half of Europe, the Chinese rode bikes and terrorism consisted of local affairs containable in obscure corners of the world like Ulster, Sri Lanka or the Pyrenees

Canada later muscled its way in, and the president of the European Commission got himself invited as an observer. The seven became the eight when Russia -- whose economy ranks somewhere between Sweden and the Netherlands -- was added in 1997.

The guiding principle of the G8 has always been Churchill's maxim that "jaw-jaw is better than warwar." And it's true that no G8 member has declared war on a fellow member of the club.

But what has been achieved? While ostensibly reducing suspicions among the world's most powerful nations, the confabs have only deepened global suspicions about their leaders. In recent years G8 meetings have spawned horrifying, violent demonstrations from Genoa, Italy, to Evian, France, where the poor Swiss watched as

the nearby cities of Geneva and Lausanne were trashed by antiglobalization protesters

Far from convincing citizens that such world leadership enhances economic security and political stability, the G8 has become a symbol of how a tiny, self-selected group of leaders can no longer come up with answers adequate to todav's challenges. Where before there may have

been virtue in forging a common anti-communist front, the world's leading economies can no longer solve their biggest problems on their own. Europe, for example, is facing a tsunami of economic migrants and refugees fleeing political disaster and potentia genocide in Africa. But no African sits at the G8

table. Nor is Latin America represented, despite the pressure of south-north immigration in the United States. As a result the rich, northern, nearly all-white leaders meeting in St. Petersburg appear better at defending established interests than at helping to manage

Where G8 leaders could have an impact, they no longer do. The first meetings of the G6 were fire- or poolside chats. The event was what mattered, and minds could really engage in the clubby atmosphere. Now the top-rank diplomats who prepare the meetings --

the sherpas -- devote half a year or more to producing a final communique that is as unreadable as it is unread.

An obvious task for this year's G8 would be an EU-US-Japan agreement to wind down of barriers to agricultural trade and increase north-south investment so the world's poor have a reason not to migrate en masse. Yet no G8 summit to this point has managed to get an extra cent of investment flowing south, nor persuaded the protectionist agro-lobbies in the United States, Japan and Europe to reduce their subsidies and barriers to open trade. This year will be no different.

If the G8 were being set up today, it would not even include Canada or Italy, and would instead find a place for China. India and maybe South Korea and Brazil. And why should the new powers of the 21st century listen to yesterday's elite when G8 leaders won't even play by their own rules? The United States shows contempt for international law and global treaties, and has scant respect for world democratic opinion. Russia reverts to Soviet-style intimidation tactics by threatening energy cutoffs to bend its neighbours to Moscow's will. Europe's leaders patronize non-EU nations but cannot implement the simplest

reforms to get growth going again.

The one raison d'etre for the G8 would be to defend open trade, open borders, open minds. But the lowest-common-denominator politics practiced at its gatherings ensures that nothing but lip service is put toward that effort. (And the image of G8 meetings, blocked off by riot troops, aptly symbolizes the protectionist attitude more common among these nations.) The World Economic Forum at Davos is a more useful place for politicians to meet economic players and each other for discussions that are not pre-cooked; trips to see President Bush in Crawford or Chancellor Merkel in Berlin get better results.

There was a time when top leaders could write the Atlantic Charter or the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the language echoed around the world. Now what world leaders really need is a long vacation to read, think, walk and reflect. Like Churchill, whose summer holidays lasted three months, they might then have some ideas to make the world a better place. Starting the G6, now G8, was easy. But who has the courage to say its time has been

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DAVID IGNATIUS

FTER Hizbullah guerrillas captured Israeli soldiers Wednesday, a furious Dan Halutz, Israel's military chief of staff, warned that the Israeli Army would "turn back the clock in Lebanon by 20 years." Unfortunately, that statement was truer than he may have intended. By pounding Beirut's airport and other civilian targets Thursday, the Israelis have taken a step back in time -- to tactics that have been tried repeatedly in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories without much

Many Lebanese will be angry at Hizbullah's leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, for provoking the crisis. but that won't translate into new control of the militia's actions. Instead, the outcome is likely to be similar to what has happened in Gaza over the past several weeks, where Israeli attacks to free a captured soldier further weakened the Palestinian Authority without

much damaging the terrorists. Watching the events of the past few davs, vou can't help but feel that this is the rerun of an old movie -- one in which the guerrillas and kidnappers end up as the winners. Israel's fledgling prime minister,

Fhud Olmert, wants to emulate the toughness of his predecessor, Ariel Sharon, but that shouldn't include a replay of Sharon's 1982 Lebanon invasion, a strategic mistake that spawned Hizbullah in the first

Hizbullah's action in seizing the Israeli soldiers was utterly reckless. That's the new part of this crisis -that Iranian-backed radicals deliberately opened another front in a war that, in their minds, stretches from Gaza to Iraq. Watching Nasrallah's performance at a news conference Wednesday, he seemed almost to be inviting an Israeli counterattack -- knowing it would destabilize the Lebanese government of Fouad Siniora. whose establishment in the wake of the Syrian withdrawal last year was one of the few solid achievements of US policy in the region.

Israeli and American doctrine is premised on the idea that military force will deter adversaries. But as more force has been used in recent years, the deterrent value has inevitably gone down. That's the inner spring of this crisis: The Iranians (and their clients in Hizbullah and Hamas) watch the American military mired in Iraq and see weakness. They are emboldened rather than intimidated. The same is true for the Israelis in Gaza.

Rather than reinforcing the image of strength, the use of force (short of outright, pulverizing invasion and occupation) has encouraged

The danger of Iranian-backed adventurism is immense right now. but that's all the more reason for America and Israel to avoid past mistakes in countering it. Reliable strategic lessons are hard to come by in this part of the world, but here

The first is that in countering aggression, international solidarity and legitimacy matter. In responding to the Lebanon crisis, the United States should work closely with its allies at the G-8 summit and the United Nations. Iran and its proxies would like nothing more than to isolate America and Israel.

A second point -- obvious from Gaza to Beirut to Baghdad -- is that the power of non-state actors is magnified when there is no strong central government. That may sound like a truism, but responding wisely can require some creative diplomacy. The way to blunt Hamas is to build a strong Palestinian Authority that delivers benefits for the Palestinian people. The way to curb Hizbullah is to build up the Lebanese government and army One way to boost the Lebanese government (and deflate Hizbullah)

would be to negotiate the return of the Israeli-occupied territory known as the Shebaa Farms. That chance is lost for now, but the Bush administration should find other ways to enhance Siniora's authority.

A final obvious lesson is that in an open, interconnected world, public opinion matters. This is a tricky battlefield for an unpopular America and Israel, but not an impossible one. To fight the Long War, America and Israel have to get out of the devil suit in global public opinion. For a generation, America maintained a role as honest broker between Israel and the Arabs. The Bush administration should work hard to refurbish that role.

In the Lebanon crisis, we have a terrifying glimpse of the future: Iran and its radical allies are pushing toward war. That's the chilling reality behind this week's events. On Tuesday, the Iranians spurned an American offer of talks on their nuclear program; on Wednesday, their Hizbullah proxy made what Israel rightly called "an act of war." The radicals want to lure America and Israel deeper into the killing ground, confident that they have the staying power to prevail. We should not play their game.