

EZ – אקטואליה

The forgiveness game

By Yoel Marcus

Tony Blair's warning of "further measures" if the kidnapped British seamen were not released immediately reminds me of the Jewish joke about Hershele Astronomer, who walked into a restaurant and demanded free food. Otherwise, he threatened, he'd do what his father did. The proprietors, quaking in their boots, quickly set the food before him. After the danger passed, they asked him what his father did. Hershele's reply: He went to bed hungry.

The moral of the story is that even the biggest, strongest superpowers have no answer for the primitive form of warfare known as kidnapping that Islamic bullies have added to the menu in their fight against Western civilization. With our experience of brutal kidnappings, who knows better than we how problematic they can be, and how high a price one is forced to pay to bring hostages home, alive or in a box.

In this cruel game, they are on top. The kidnapping of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev dragged us into a war that ruined our reputation, and we still have no idea whether they are alive and where they are. Not to mention Gilad Shalit, who has been held hostage under our noses for nine months without a letter or a single sign of life. In this game of horror, the kidnappers have the upper hand, because they know that in the civilization they are out to destroy, human life is valued above all. How did Yitzhak Rabin put it when he agreed to the Jibril Rajoub prisoner exchange deal? "I couldn't take the pressure of the mothers descending on my home and office."

A country with values is at a disadvantage when it comes to kidnapping. Yes, Blair raised his voice and threatened to take firmer action if a solution wasn't found right away. So he threatened. So what? The Iranians countered that the use of force would only complicate matters. The fact that an angry mob stormed the British Embassy in Tehran, lobbing stones and smoke bombs, hinted that using force might endanger the lives of the navy men and diplomats. Theoretically, Britain could respond in a variety of ways, but in the case of hostages held by people who will stop at nothing, employing force would have been the devil's doing for sure.

Unlike the kidnappings carried out by Hezbollah and terror organizations in Israel, Iran has treated the British naval crew reasonably well. Fourteen days after their capture, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced he would release them as a "gift to Britain." By the same token, the opposite could have happened: They might have disappeared for a year or two until Iran's demands were met. One thing is certain: Within a couple of days or weeks, we will find out the price Great Britain paid for the release of these hostages. Iranians are known for their keen business sense. There is no such thing as a free gift.

Axis-of-evil-type kidnapping is planned with steely reserve on orders from above. The targets are carefully chosen. In February 1979, shortly after Khomeini returned to Iran and the despised Shah fled, the Revolutionary Guards were ordered to take the whole U.S. Embassy hostage. For 444 days, 52 American diplomats were imprisoned in the compound as angry crowds gathered outside every day, cursing them and hurling stones and garbage. All America watched in shock. Yellow ribbons were tied around trees as an expression of solidarity with the hostages. President Jimmy Carter, who was hated by the Iranians because of Camp David and for giving asylum to the dying Shah, ordered a military rescue operation. The mission failed after of a slew of ridiculous blunders.

The Iranian hostage crisis ruined Carter's chances for reelection. The "gift" of releasing the diplomats was bestowed on President Ronald Reagan, who coined the term "evil empire," toppled the Soviet Union and became Israel's greatest friend. Since the first Lebanon war, hostage-taking has been used against us as a cruel instrument of war, torturing the families of captured soldiers and crushing the spirit of Israeli peace-seekers. Behind this violence stands Iran, which is not only threatening Israel, but also moderate Arab countries and Europe.

One can only hope that this supposedly humanitarian gesture of "forgiving" Britain will not stop Bush and Blair from persisting in their battle to keep Iran, whose declared goal is the destruction of Israel, from achieving a nuclear capability.

VOCABULARY

further - נוסף, רחוק יותר

kidnapped - חטופים

threatened - איים

proprietors - בעלים (של רכוש)

quaking in their boots - ביטוי - "רועדים מפחד"

moral - מוסר השכל

warfare - לוחמה

brutal - אכזרי, גס, פראי, ברוטאלי

hostages - בני ערובה

cruel - אכזרי

reputation - מוניטין, שם, כבוד

horror - אימה

valued - מוערך

descending - יורד

disadvantage - נחיתות, חיסרון

firmer - נוקשה יותר

countered - הגיבו, השיבו

mob - המון, אספסוף

lobbing - לזרוק אבנים

employing - נקיטה ב, שימוש ב

naval crew - אנשי חיל הים

token - אות, סימן

keen - משתוקק, להוט, נלהב

Axis-of-evil - "ציר הרשע"

steely - קשוח, כמו פלדה

fled - נמלט

Revolutionary Guards - משמרות המהפכה

compound - מתחם

gathered - התאספו, התקהלו

solidarity - הזדהות, סולידאריות

asylum - מקלט, מחסה

slew - כמות עצומה

blunder - טעות חמורה

bestow - להעניק

coined - טבע ביטוי

toppled - להפיל, למוטט

torturing - לענות

moderate - למתן, לרכך

gesture - מחווה

capability - יכולת