

SOME ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS by Si Frumkin, April 2007

The world relaxed. On April 5, 2007, the 15 British sailors and marines were released by Iran. There they were, on TV, 14 men and one woman, on British soil, smiling, talking, hurrying to meet their families.

For two weeks there was outrage. Sabers were rattled, headlines screamed, pundits and experts prognosticated, commented and analyzed: How should Britain respond? Was this a sign of Iran's weakness? Of strength? Was it incredible cunning or monumental stupidity?

Now that it is over I want to offer a few thoughts of my own. I am, of course, happy for the sailors and their families. But in addition, I am very angry. I am concerned with one aspect of this kidnapping that apparently went unnoticed.

I looked at the Iranian tapes of the 15 captives smiling on camera, eating, playing chess and praising the kindness of their captors. A thought struck me: How lucky, how incredibly fortunate were the parents, the spouses, the children of these captives to be able to know that their loved ones were alive and well.

Of course, there was no way of knowing the future, but at least they knew that now, at this time, this day, this hour – the 15 were alive and well. How much more horrible it is *not to know even that*.

And then I thought about those other parents and the other wives who know nothing about *their* soldiers – not even if they are still alive. They would probably give anything just to see a tape, hear a voice or get a scribbled letter, just once, but there is nothing. The world that was so excited and upset over the 15 Brits doesn't seem to be very concerned about these *other* abducted soldiers.

George Orwell was right when he said in *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal but some are more equal than others." Some soldiers *are* less equal –when they are Israelis, not Brits, there is no media coverage and the world isn't outraged.

Here they are: Zachary Baumel, Tzvi Feldman, Yehuda Katz, Ron Arad – captured 18 years ago; Guy Hever – taken in 1997, and the more recent Gilad Shalit, Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser kidnapped in October 2006.

Their fate is unknown. There have been no communications, no confirmed reports, nothing.

And then I thought about the International Red Cross – the respected, revered, caring organization whose business it is to monitor and intercede when human rights are violated.

I had just one contact with the Red Cross during the 4 years I spent in ghettos and concentration camps: a month or so before the war ended, Red Cross packages were distributed to us in Dachau - a pound of sugar, two cans of sardines, biscuits and 10 cigarettes; they were individual packages but we got one for every four prisoners. Also, I know that Red Cross representatives visited the Theresienstadt concentration camp during the war and were enthused – the Nazis had cleaned up the camp, provided food and adequate clothing, even a school and a theater, for the few days the inspectors were there - but, yes, they did go there.

Red Cross did monitor the American POWs in Germany – and German POWs in the U.S. and Britain – there was mail, food, medical care and no forced labor. There was just one exception: the Berga POW camp for Jewish American soldiers – the dog tags showed the soldier's religion; a Jew had an "H" for "Hebrew" – the Red Cross never went there and the soldiers at Berga and elsewhere were starved and worked to death. (For more info you can Google "Berga") I guess some GIs also were more equal than others.

Currently, the International Red Cross visits Guantanamo to make sure that the conditions there are humane, that prisoners have access to legal advice, prayers, medical care, physical exercise and a choice of menus that are meticulously prepared to conform with religious requirements – they can have regular or vegetarian or vegetarian with fish!

The Red Cross also regularly visits Israeli prisons to make sure that imprisoned terrorists – who had been tried and found guilty in open court - are treated humanely and are visited regularly by their families.

This is only fair and just. But why isn't this standard applied to prisoners of Islam? And why isn't the Red Cross calling for U.N. sanctions, why is there no pressure from the public, the media, from civilized nations?

I don't mean to imply that Red Cross is an anti-Semitic organization. Yes, the Red Star of David – *Magen David Adom* - is still not recognized as an international symbol unlike the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. The Magen David is not quite equal but recently, after much deliberation, the organization accepted a Red Crystal – sort of a rectangle with its point down - as a substitute for the Magen David.

But all this may be just a coincidence and any day now the world will react. The American Red Cross and the U.S. government will stop giving money to this hypocritical international body, the U.N. will call for openness in the treatment of Israeli prisoners, and Israelis will be allowed to help saving lives in disasters all over the world – at this time they are doing it anonymously – under the banner of a Red Star of David.

Are you laughing yet?

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