



*United States Senator • Illinois*

**Peter G. Fitzgerald**

**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Attn: News Director (5 pages)  
March 15, 2001

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## **Fitzgerald urges Bush to seek return of kidnapped Israelis**

*Fitzgerald leads team of 30 senators in asking  
president to make this a diplomatic priority*

WASHINGTON, DC...U.S. Senator Peter G. Fitzgerald (R-Illinois) led a bipartisan team of 30 senators today in urging President Bush to make the return of three kidnapped Israeli soldiers and an Israeli businessman a diplomatic priority. The group also asked Bush to send a clear signal to Middle Eastern nations that the U.S. stands unequivocally with Israel in its quest to stop the violence in the region.

“We urge you to ask Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, and other countries and organizations with involvement in the region to assist the United States in obtaining information about the hostages and in securing their release,” the senators said today in a letter to President Bush authored by Fitzgerald. “We also request that when you formulate overall policy toward these governments and organizations you take into account their willingness to help in securing the return of the hostages.”

On October 7, 2000, Hezbollah terrorists crossed the U.N.-certified Lebanese border to kidnap three Israeli Defense Force soldiers—Adi Avitan, Benny Avraham, and Omar Souad. One week later, Hezbollah kidnapped Elhanan Tanenbaum, an Israeli businessman and reserve officer. Hezbollah has refused to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the victims and will not release any information on their whereabouts or condition.

The senators also called the president’s attention to the cases of Zachary Baumel, a U.S. citizen serving in the Israeli military, and Israeli soldiers Yehuda Katz and Zvi Feldman. Baumel, Katz, and Feldman were abducted by PLO-affiliated forces in Lebanon in 1982. In 1999, Fitzgerald co-sponsored Senate legislation instructing the U.S. State Department to actively pursue the return of Baumel and the other soldiers in its dealings with Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority.

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In their letter to President Bush, the senators also emphasized the need for the United States to stand firmly behind, and work closely with, Israel in its efforts to end the violence in the region and ensure the security of Israeli citizens.

“The United States must send a clear signal to the nations of the Middle East that America abhors the calculated use of violence and that the American people stand by Israel—our democratic ally and closest partner in Middle East peace,” the senators concluded.

Senators Robert Torricelli (D-New Jersey), Gordon Smith (R-Oregon), and Max Cleland (D-Georgia) joined Fitzgerald in circulating the letter. A copy of the letter to President Bush is attached.

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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 15, 2001

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our deep concern about the continued detention of three Israeli soldiers and an Israeli civilian by Hezbollah terrorists.

On October 7, 2000, Hezbollah terrorists crossed the U.N.-certified Lebanese border to kidnap three Israeli Defense Force soldiers—Adi Avitan, Benny Avraham, and Omar Souad. One week later, Hezbollah kidnapped Elhanan Tanenbaum, an Israeli businessman and reserve officer.

Hezbollah has refused to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit these kidnapping victims or to release any information about their whereabouts or condition. It is intolerable that the families of these captives remain completely in the dark about the fate of their relatives over four months after they were abducted.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated that these kidnappings constitute a breach of U.N. Resolution 425. Only last month, Mr. Annan reported to the Security Council that the Lebanese government has failed to comply with Resolution 425 in its refusal to prevent Hezbollah from using southern Lebanon as a base to attack Israel. This stands in sharp contrast to Israel—the U.N. Security Council has certified that Israel's May 2000 withdrawal of its forces from southern Lebanon fully met the terms of Resolution 425.

The four kidnapped Israelis are not alone—Zachary Baumel, a U.S. citizen serving in the Israeli military forces, has been missing in action since June 1982, when he was captured by P.L.O.-affiliated forces in Syrian-controlled Lebanon. Yehuda Katz and Zvi Feldman, Israeli citizens serving in the Israeli military forces, have been missing in action since June 1982, when they also were captured by these same forces in Lebanon.

We therefore ask you to make the fate of the kidnapped Israelis a high priority in your dealings with the countries of the Middle East. We urge you to ask Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, and other governments and organizations with involvement in the region to assist the United States in obtaining information about the hostages and in securing their release. We also request that when you formulate overall policy toward these governments and organizations you take into account their willingness to help in securing the return of the hostages.

The failure of the July 2000 Camp David peace talks—and the subsequent campaign of Palestinian violence that has resulted in the loss of lives of hundreds since September—serve as stark reminders that achieving an enduring peace in the Middle East will not be easy. Nevertheless, we believe the United States must continue to work closely with Israel to help bring an end to the violence, facilitating constructive negotiations when possible while continuing to firmly support Israel's security.

The United States must send a clear signal to the nations of the Middle East that America abhors the calculated use of violence and that the American people stand by Israel—our democratic ally and closest partner in Middle East peace.

Sincerely yours,

Pat G. Toell

Thoz. Toell

Carl S.

Max Cleland

W. J. G. G. G.

Sam Rumsfeld

Dick Durbin

J. L. L.

Allen S.

Charles Schumer

Susan Collins

Mike DeWine

W. M. C.

Patty Murray

John Eisign  
Giff Bond

George V. Kenovich

Barbara Boyer

Paul Sant

Herb Kohl

Jim Cahope

Red Kennedy

Harry Keil

Jean Carnahan

~~John~~

Rick Santorum

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Trent Lott

Don Nickles

Ernie Boyd