

Reporting about Middle East biased

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Until Sunday, when Israeli bombers leveled a three-story building in the tiny Lebanese village of Qana, killing at least 55 people, most of them children, the U.S. media has been anything but even-handed in covering Israel's three-week assault on southern Lebanon, a stronghold of Hezbollah.

Israel initiated a 48-hour pause in the aerial attacks, in the face of international condemnation, and later resumed its effort to cripple the military capability of rebel groups intent on destroying Israel. If the past is any indicator, the U.S. media — after its Sunday pause — will return to its mission of blaming Hezbollah and Hamas for all the strife in the Middle East.

Of course, both groups have blood on their hands, but they are not alone.

Fair and Accuracy in Reporting, or FAIR, the media watchdog group, reported prior to Sunday's fatal assault: "...The portrayal of Israel as the innocent victim in the Gaza conflict is hard to square with the death toll in the months leading up to the current crisis; between September 2005 and June 2006, 144 Palestinians in Gaza were killed by Israeli forces, according to a list compiled by the Israeli human rights group B'tselem; 29 of those killed were children. During the same period, no Israelis were killed as a result of violence from Gaza."

But you'd never know it by reading U.S. newspapers.

"On July 24, the day before Hamas' cross-border raid, Israel made an incursion of its own — capturing two Palestinians that it said were members of Hamas (something Hamas denied - *L.A. Times*, 7/25/06). This incident received far less coverage in the U.S. media than the subsequent seizure of the Israeli soldier; the few papers that covered it mostly dismissed it in a one-paragraph brief (e.g., *Chicago Tribune*, 7/25/06), while the Israeli taken prisoner got front-page headlines all over the world."

The nation's three leading dailies published one-sided, overly simplistic comments on the Middle East violence.

"In the wake of the most serious outbreak of Israeli/Arab violence in years, three U.S. papers — the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* — have each strongly editorialized that Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon were solely responsible for sparking violence, and that the Israeli military response was predictable and unavoidable. These editorials ignored recent events that indicate a much more complicated situation," FAIR observed.

Under the headline, "Hamas Provokes a Fight," (6/29/06), *The New York Times* edi-



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torialized that "the responsibility for this latest escalation rests squarely with Hamas" and that "Israeli military response was inevitable."

In another editorial two weeks later (7/15/06), the *Times* said: "It is important to be clear about not only who is responsible for the latest outbreak, but who stands to gain most from its continued escalation. Both questions have the same answer: Hamas and Hezbollah."

The media-monitoring group suggests that the fighting did not begin with the capture of two Israeli soldiers.

"A major incident fueling the latest cycle of violence was a May 26, 2006, car bombing in Sidon, Lebanon, that killed a senior official of Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian group allied with Hezbollah. Lebanon later arrested a suspect, Mahmoud Rafeh, whom Lebanese authorities claimed had confessed to carrying out the assassination on behalf of Mossad (*London Times*, 6/17/06). Israel denied involvement with the bombing, but even some Israelis are skeptical..."

But that wasn't the only precursor to the current conflict. In a July 21 column, FAIR's Alexander Cockburn pointed out three things:

- On June 20, an Israeli aircraft fired at least one missile at a car in an attempted ex-

tra judicial assassination attempt. The missile missed the car and killed three Palestinian children and wounded 15.

- One June 13, 2005, Israeli aircraft fired missiles at a van in another extra judicial assassination attempt; nine innocent Palestinians were killed.

- Israel shelled a beach in Beit Lahiya on June 9, 2006, killing eight civilians and injuring 32.

FAIR says, "While Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers may have re-ignited the smoldering conflict, the Israeli air campaign that followed was not a spontaneous reaction to aggression but a well-planned operation that was years in the making."

"Of all of Israel's wars since 1984, this was the one for which Israel was most prepared," Gerald Steinberg, a political science professor at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* (7/21/05). "By 2004, the military campaign scheduled to last about three weeks that we're seeing now had already been blocked out and, in the last year or two, it's been simulated and rehearsed across the board."

FAIR posed a sobering question: If journalists have been told by Israel for more than a year that a war was coming, why are they all pretending that it all started on July 12?

That's a good question. I wish we had some good answers.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the *NNPA News Service*.

Fighting childhood obesity starts at home

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Former President Bill Clinton and Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee are from different political parties, but they've teamed up on a new campaign: battling childhood obesity. The American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation have partnered to create the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and together with Governor Huckabee, the Alliance is dedicated to stopping the rise in childhood obesity by 2010 and teaching all children about the importance of good nutrition and physical activity. Black parents and all parents need to join this fight to protect our children's health:

What's the issue? Experts estimate 16 percent of American children are currently overweight — more than 11 million. They're especially alarmed because just like for American adults, these numbers are rising rapidly: The rate has doubled for children over the last 25 years, and tripled for teenagers. Some adults may see a heavy child as a sign of a healthy eater, or might think of weight as mostly connected to looks. But we

need to be reminded that there are serious risks for some overweight children that go far beyond teasing on the playground.

Diseases once associated only with adults, such as Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, are on the rise at younger and younger ages. Overweight children are also estimated to have a 70 percent chance of being overweight adults. So for many children, this may be more than just a "chubby" phase they'll someday outgrow. Instead, they may be getting set up for a lifetime of the increased health risks that come with being overweight. The most pressing one, cardiovascular disease, remains the leading killer in America, and if the trends in childhood obesity continue experts predict they could cut two to five years off the average American lifespan.

There are many reasons childhood obesity is on the rise. For one, American children are immersed in the same "supersize



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me" culture that snares adults, surrounded by high-calorie, high-fat food that's plentiful, cheap, and often served in unrealistically big portions. Today's children and teenagers are also less likely than past generations to spend free time running around outdoors and more likely to spend it on the couch watching television or playing video games, often

with snacks and sodas right next to them.

Even schools have been blamed as part of the problem. Many districts have cut back on gym time and even recess. The quality of school meals and easy availability of snacks and soft drinks in many school vending machines have been some of the first targets in the new war on child obesity, and one of the places there's already been progress.

A number of school districts and state legislatures are pushing to improve the health content of school breakfasts and lunches and ban or limit the unhealthy products children are able to buy instead of meals, cutting down

on the number of children who right now grab a candy bar and soda from the machine in the hallway and call that "lunch." In response to growing pressure around the issue, the three largest soft drink companies recently agreed to new voluntary limits on the types of drinks they'll distribute in schools. They'll now focus on providing milk, 100 percent juice, and bottled water to elementary and middle school students, with a few other low-calorie choices like diet sodas or sports drinks added for older students. This may be just one piece of the puzzle, but advocates are hoping as more people become aware of the current risks to children's health, more and more industries, schools, restaurants, and communities will make positive changes like this one that will add up to make a big difference for America's children.

Even with these kinds of changes in children's environments, the biggest influence in their habits will come from the same place it always has — home. Parents have always been the ones to tell their children to eat more green vegetables, or get some fresh air. We know our beautiful children come in all shapes and sizes, but by being aware of the serious health risks some overweight children do face and the long-term value of a balanced diet and regular exercise for all children, we can help make sure all our children grow up to be the healthiest they can be.

Making healthy food and exercise part of family life is the right place to start — and will be good for many adults too! Teaching good habits to children early can have lifelong consequences, and someday our children — and grandchildren — will thank us.

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people that it is unsupportable by the international community.

Most important, since this was also the method used in the Bush administration's intervention into Iraq, the combined military adventures of the U.S. and Israel in the region fly in the face of the movement of the international system toward collective security as the methodology of peace. In fact, it has been supplanted as a convenient method

that is expedient to clean up a problem created by autonomous perceptions that lead to rogue actions by powerful states.

At bottom, both military actions are the engine of motivation for successive generations of the affected to respond by methods of their own choosing.

So, as the bombs fall, the real damage pushed by the illusions of pursuing a "global war on terrorism" or "breaking the back of Hezbollah," Al Qaeda or Hamas is that they

can be accomplished by war. The reality — not the illusion — that policy makers refuse to face is that these political manifestations are ideas that ultimately makes their form or name unimportant. And they will reoccur time and again as victims of war and failed human approaches until the lessons of the past are respected.

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