

Israel Is Losing Friends

Commentary for June 14, 2010 — Israel, Turkey and the Flotilla

Some potentially significant events are taking place in the Middle East. The political isolation of Israel among the nations in its region and around the world is increasing. In addition, the Obama administration is decidedly cooling toward Israel and its policies regarding the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. These small areas are governed by different political regimes. This volatile mixture, plus sudden actions by Turkey all make for movement eventually toward a prophesied enlarged Palestinian state along the Mediterranean coast.

This expanded territory will include the cities of Ashdod and Ashqelon. See Dr. Martin's article "[The Prophesied State of Palestine](#)" and the map approximating the territory to be occupied by Palestine in the future. Note also that the West Bank will become territory controlled by Israel. All this will take place, according to Dr. Martin, before Christ's return.

To give you background about the international issues involved in the current situation, read below the excellent presentation published by www.Stratfor.com by Dr. George Friedman. Stratfor is a strategic analysis website. This article is comprehensive, to the point, and clarifies the current issues involved with interdicting the flotilla of ships carrying supplies to Gaza, during which nine people on the largest ship were killed by Israeli military personnel. Israel imposed a blockade on all sea-borne traffic to Gaza after the Gaza War during the winter of 2008-2009. The blockade is maintained to prevent shipment of weapons to the ruling party of Hamas in Gaza. The article is reprinted in full:

"Flotillas and the Wars of Public Opinion"

By George Friedman, May 31, 2010:¹

"On Sunday [May 30, 2010], Israeli naval forces intercepted the ships of a Turkish nongovernmental organization (NGO) delivering humanitarian supplies to Gaza. Israel had demanded that the vessels not go directly to Gaza but instead dock in Israeli ports, where the supplies would be off-loaded and delivered to Gaza. The Turkish NGO refused, insisting on going directly to Gaza. Gunfire ensued



1. Accessed May 31, 2010 and reprinted with permission of STRATFOR.COM, a subscription website. I recommend you sign up for their internet [Weekly Intelligence Report](http://www.Stratfor.com), which is FREE.

when Israeli naval personnel boarded one of the vessels, and a significant number of the passengers and crew on the ship were killed or wounded.

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon charged that the mission was simply an attempt to provoke the Israelis. That was certainly the case. The mission was designed to demonstrate that the Israelis were unreasonable and brutal. The hope was that Israel would be provoked to extreme action, further alienating Israel from the global community and possibly driving a wedge between Israel and the United States. The operation's planners also hoped this would trigger a political crisis in Israel.

A logical Israeli response would have been avoiding falling into the provocation trap and suffering the political repercussions the Turkish NGO was trying to trigger. Instead, the Israelis decided to make a show of force. The Israelis appear to have reasoned that backing down would demonstrate weakness and encourage further flotillas to Gaza, unraveling the Israeli position vis-à-vis Hamas. In this thinking, a violent interception was a superior strategy to accommodation regardless of political consequences. Thus, the Israelis accepted the bait and were provoked.

The EXODUS Scenario

In the 1950s, an author named Leon Uris published a book called *Exodus*. Later made into a major motion picture, *Exodus* told the story of a Zionist provocation against the British. In the wake of World War II, the British — who controlled Palestine, as it was then known — maintained limits on Jewish immigration there. Would-be immigrants captured trying to run the blockade were detained in camps in Cyprus. In the book and movie, Zionists planned a propaganda exercise involving a breakout of Jews — mostly children — from the camp, who would then board a ship renamed the Exodus. When the Royal Navy intercepted the ship, the passengers would mount a hunger strike. The goal was to portray the British as brutes finishing the work of the Nazis. The image of children potentially dying of hunger would force the British to permit the ship to go to Palestine, to reconsider British policy on immigration, and ultimately to decide to abandon Palestine and turn the matter over to the United Nations.

There was in fact a ship called Exodus, but the affair did not play out precisely as portrayed by Uris, who used an amalgam of incidents to display the propaganda war waged by the Jews. Those carrying out this war had two goals. The first was to create sympathy in Britain and throughout the world for Jews who, just a couple of years after German concentration camps, were now being held in British camps. Second, they sought to portray their struggle as being against the British. The British were portrayed as continuing Nazi policies toward the Jews in order to maintain their empire. The Jews were portrayed as anti-imperialists, fighting the British much as the Americans had.

It was a brilliant strategy. By focusing on Jewish victimhood and on the British, the Zionists defined the battle as being against the British, with the Arabs playing the role of people trying to create the second phase of the Holocaust. The British were portrayed as pro-Arab for economic and imperial reasons, indifferent at best to the survivors of the Holocaust. Rather than restraining the Arabs, the British were arming them. The goal was not to vilify the Arabs but to vilify the British, and to position the Jews with other nationalist groups whether in India or Egypt rising against the British.

The precise truth or falsehood of this portrayal didn't particularly matter. For most of the world, the Palestine issue was poorly understood and not a matter of immediate concern. The Zionists intended to shape the perceptions of a global public with limited interest in or understanding of the issues, filling in the blanks with their own narrative. And they succeeded.

The success was rooted in a political reality. Where knowledge is limited, and the desire to learn the complex reality doesn't exist, public opinion can be shaped by whoever generates the most powerful symbols. And on a matter of only tangential interest, governments tend to follow their publics' wishes, however they originate. There is little to be gained for governments in resisting public opinion and much to be gained by giving in. By shaping the battlefield of public perception, it is thus possible to get governments to change positions.

In this way, the Zionists' ability to shape global public perceptions of what was happening in Palestine — to demonize the British and turn the question of Palestine into a Jewish-British issue — shaped the political decisions of a range of governments. It was not the truth or falsehood of the narrative that mattered. What mattered was the ability to identify the victim and victimizer such

that global opinion caused both London and governments not directly involved in the issue to adopt political stances advantageous to the Zionists. It is in this context that we need to view the Turkish flotilla.

The Turkish Flotilla to Gaza

The Palestinians have long argued that they are the victims of Israel, an invention of British and American imperialism. Since 1967, they have focused not so much on the existence of the state of Israel (at least in messages geared toward the West) as on the oppression of Palestinians in the occupied territories. Since the split between Hamas and Fatah and the Gaza War, the focus has been on the plight of the citizens of Gaza, who have been portrayed as the dispossessed victims of Israeli violence.

The bid to shape global perceptions by portraying the Palestinians as victims of Israel was the first prong of a longtime two-part campaign. The second part of this campaign involved armed resistance against the Israelis. The way this resistance was carried out, from airplane hijackings to stone-throwing children to suicide bombers, interfered with the first part of the campaign, however. The Israelis could point to suicide bombings or the use of children against soldiers as symbols of Palestinian inhumanity. This in turn was used to justify conditions in Gaza. While the Palestinians had made significant inroads in placing Israel on the defensive in global public opinion, they thus consistently gave the Israelis the opportunity to turn the tables. And this is where the flotilla comes in.

The Turkish flotilla aimed to replicate the Exodus story or, more precisely, to define the global image of Israel in the same way the Zionists defined the image that they wanted to project. As with the Zionist portrayal of the situation in 1947, the Gaza situation is far more complicated than as portrayed by the Palestinians. The moral question is also far more ambiguous. But as in 1947, when the Zionist portrayal was not intended to be a scholarly analysis of the situation but a political weapon designed to define perceptions, the Turkish flotilla was not designed to carry out a moral inquest.

Instead, the flotilla was designed to achieve two ends. The first is to divide Israel and Western governments by shifting public opinion against Israel. The second is to create a political crisis inside Israel between those who feel that Israel's increasing isolation over the Gaza issue is dangerous versus those who think any weakening of resolve is dangerous.

The Geopolitical Fallout for Israel

It is vital that the Israelis succeed in portraying the flotilla as an extremist plot. Whether extremist or not, the plot has generated an image of Israel quite damaging to Israeli political interests. Israel is increasingly isolated internationally, with heavy pressure on its relationship with Europe and the United States.

In all of these countries, politicians are extremely sensitive to public opinion. It is difficult to imagine circumstances under which public opinion will see Israel as the victim. The general response in the Western public is likely to be that the Israelis probably should have allowed the ships to go to Gaza and offload rather than to precipitate bloodshed. Israel's enemies will fan these flames by arguing that the Israelis prefer bloodshed to reasonable accommodation. And as Western public opinion shifts against Israel, Western political leaders will track with this shift.

The incident also wrecks Israeli relations with Turkey, historically an Israeli ally in the Muslim world with longstanding military cooperation with Israel. The Turkish government undoubtedly has wanted to move away from this relationship, but it faced resistance within the Turkish military and among secularists. The new Israeli action makes a break with Israel easy, and indeed almost necessary for Ankara.

With roughly the population of Houston, Texas, Israel is just not large enough to withstand extended isolation, meaning this event has profound geopolitical implications.

Public opinion matters where issues are not of fundamental interest to a nation. Israel is not a fundamental interest to other nations. The ability to generate public antipathy to Israel can therefore reshape Israeli relations with countries critical to Israel. For example, a redefinition of U.S.-Israeli relations will have much less effect on the United States than on Israel. The Obama administration,

already irritated by the Israelis, might now see a shift in U.S. public opinion that will open the way to a new U.S.-Israeli relationship disadvantageous to Israel.

The Israelis will argue that this is all unfair, as they were provoked. Like the British, they seem to think that the issue is whose logic is correct. But the issue actually is, whose logic will be heard? As with a tank battle or an airstrike, this sort of warfare has nothing to do with fairness. It has to do with controlling public perception and using that public perception to shape foreign policy around the world. In this case, the issue will be whether the deaths were necessary. The Israeli argument of provocation will have limited traction.

Internationally, there is little doubt that the incident will generate a firestorm. Certainly, Turkey will break cooperation with Israel. Opinion in Europe will likely harden. And public opinion in the United States — by far the most important in the equation — might shift to a 'plague-on-both-your-houses' position.

While the international reaction is predictable, the interesting question is whether this evolution will cause a political crisis in Israel. Those in Israel who feel that international isolation is preferable to accommodation with the Palestinians are in control now. Many in the opposition see Israel's isolation as a strategic threat. Economically and militarily, they argue, Israel cannot survive in isolation. The current regime will respond that there will be no isolation. The flotilla aimed to generate what the government has said would not happen.

The tougher Israel is, the more the flotilla's narrative takes hold. As the Zionists knew in 1947 and the Palestinians are learning, controlling public opinion requires subtlety, a selective narrative and cynicism. As they also knew, losing the battle can be catastrophic. It cost Britain the Mandate and allowed Israel to survive. Israel's enemies are now turning the tables. This maneuver was far more effective than suicide bombings or the Intifada in challenging Israel's public perception and therefore its geopolitical position (though if the Palestinians return to some of their more distasteful tactics like suicide bombing, the Turkish strategy of portraying Israel as the instigator of violence will be undermined).

Israel is now in uncharted waters. It does not know how to respond. It is not clear that the Palestinians know how to take full advantage of the situation, either. But even so, this places the battle on a new field, far more fluid and uncontrollable than what went before. The next steps will involve calls for sanctions against Israel. The Israeli threats against Iran will be seen in a different context, and Israeli portrayal of Iran will hold less sway over the world.

And this will cause a political crisis in Israel. If this government survives, then Israel is locked into a course that gives it freedom of action but international isolation. If the government falls, then Israel enters a period of domestic uncertainty. In either case, the flotilla achieved its strategic mission. It got Israel to take violent action against it. In doing so, Israel ran into its own fist."

I consider this analysis by Stratfor to be a perceptive and clear presentation of the facts, issues, and strategies of the parties involved in this confrontation of Israel with nations in the region.

There is another significant danger involved in this confrontation, as political commentator Mark Steyn explained it:

"In the wake of the Israeli raid, Ankara promised to provide Turkish naval protection for the next 'aid' convoy to Gaza. This would be, in effect, an act of war — more to the point, an act of war by a NATO member against the State of Israel."

• *["Israel, Turkey, and the End of Stability"](#)*²

My expectation is that the United States government, due to world and American public opinion, will begin to withdraw financial, military, and governmental support from Israel. A June 13, 2010 *Jerusalem Post* article, "[ME conflict poses economic threat to Israel](#)" notes:

2. Underlining mine. Mark Steyn, "National Review Weekend," *National Review Online*, accessed June 6, 2010.

“The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict disrupts Israel’s economic stability, limits its social development, draws on the energies of its political leadership, undermines the IDF’s legitimacy and isolates Israel in the international arena.” So states a report by the Adva Center for Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel.”

Israel’s increasing isolation will hurt politically. Eventually United States policy will seek to “punish” Israel economically by withdrawing the approximately \$10 billion dollars in aid and loan guarantees provided to Israel each year. This amount approached 8% of Israel’s gross domestic product in 2004.³ Suspension of that aid would substantially threaten Israel’s economy.

However, Israel’s production of high-technology goods and services will continue to be offered, bought, and sold in lucrative world markets. This will mitigate somewhat the economic impact of Israel’s political isolation. Many of the high-tech goods and services sold to the world will be weapons. The discovery of oil offshore or within Israel will also help its economy.

A Prophetic Event?

At some time before Christ returns the world will be so against Israel that the nations of the world will come against Israel in some kind of attack. This attack might be military in nature, but the biblical text could allow some kind of economic siege or attack or even an economic blockade imposed upon Israel by the world’s nations:

“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling [dizziness or drunkenness] unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.”

• ***Zechariah 12:2–3***

After much suffering God will directly intervene in a way that the people in Judah [Israel] and particularly Jerusalem will acknowledge God’s role in their defense. God will give Judah and Jerusalem a victory so supernaturally stunning that they will acknowledge God’s existence, presence, and care for them. The result will be the destruction of those attackers:

“In that day shall YHWH defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of YHWH before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.”

• ***Zechariah 12:8–9***

This will occur just before God’s Spirit of grace and supplication is poured **“upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem”** (Zechariah 12: 10). This incident of God fighting for Israel (the people, not necessarily the political state), will be a clearly identifiable prophetic event. Even before this occurs, the isolation of Israel is necessary so that Israel will be forced to stop depending upon the United States. The prophesied attack will come in the future, perhaps decades from now. However, the isolation of Israel must occur. Perhaps it will begin in earnest soon. Whether this present incident is part of that isolation process or not, we shall see. Many more events must lead up to the attack and God’s rescue described in Zechariah chapter 12.

Another article from Stratfor.com was published a few days after their “Flotilla” article. It gives a snapshot of the international situation that the region is confronting at this moment:

3. See the opening sentence in a July 12, 2004 Congressional Research Service updated report where it is stated: **“Israel is not economically self-sufficient, and relies on foreign assistance and borrowing to maintain its economy.”** See the report **“[Israel: U.S. Foreign Assistance.](#)”** Much of the aid and assistance is used to finance or provide loan guarantees for the controversial settlements.

“The Limits of Public Opinion: Arabs, Israelis and the Strategic Balance”

by George Friedman, June 8, 2010:⁴

“Last week’s events off the coast of Israel continue to resonate. Turkish-Israeli relations have not quite collapsed since then but are at their lowest level since Israel’s founding. U.S.-Israeli tensions have emerged, and European hostility toward Israel continues to intensify. The question has now become whether substantial consequences will follow from the incident. Put differently, the question is whether and how it will be exploited beyond the arena of public opinion.

The most significant threat to Israel would, of course, be military. International criticism is not without significance, but nations do not change direction absent direct threats to their interests. But powers outside the region are unlikely to exert military power against Israel, and even significant economic or political sanctions are unlikely to happen. Apart from the desire of outside powers to limit their involvement, this is rooted in the fact that significant actions are unlikely from inside the region either.

The first generations of Israelis lived under the threat of conventional military defeat by neighboring countries. More recent generations still faced threats, but not this one. Israel is operating in an advantageous strategic context save for the arena of public opinion and diplomatic relations and the question of Iranian nuclear weapons. All of these issues are significant, but none is as immediate a threat as the specter of a defeat in conventional warfare had been. Israel’s regional enemies are so profoundly divided among themselves and have such divergent relations with Israel that an effective coalition against Israel does not exist — and is unlikely to arise in the near future.

Given this, the probability of an effective, as opposed to rhetorical, shift in the behavior of powers outside the region is unlikely. At every level, Israel’s Arab neighbors are incapable of forming even a partial coalition against Israel. Israel is not forced to calibrate its actions with an eye toward regional consequences, explaining Israel’s willingness to accept broad international condemnation.

Palestinian Divisions

To begin to understand how deeply the Arabs are split, simply consider the split among the Palestinians themselves. They are currently divided between two very different and hostile factions. On one side is Fatah, which dominates the West Bank. On the other side is Hamas, which dominates the Gaza Strip. Aside from the geographic division of the Palestinian territories — which causes the Palestinians to behave almost as if they comprised two separate and hostile countries — the two groups have profoundly different ideologies.

Fatah arose from the secular, socialist, Arab-nationalist and militarist movement of Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser in the 1950s. Created in the 1960s, Fatah was closely aligned with the Soviet Union. It was the dominant, though far from the only, faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO was an umbrella group that brought together the highly fragmented elements of the Palestinian movement. Yasser Arafat long dominated Fatah; his death left Fatah without a charismatic leader, but with a strong bureaucracy increasingly devoid of a coherent ideology or strategy.

Hamas arose from the Islamist movement. It was driven by religious motivations quite alien from Fatah and hostile to it. For Hamas, the liberation of Palestine was not simply a nationalist imperative, but also a religious requirement. Hamas was also hostile to what it saw as the financial corruption Arafat brought to the Palestinian movement, as well as to Fatah’s secularism.

Hamas and Fatah are playing a zero-sum game. Given their inability to form a coalition and their mutual desire for the other to fail, a victory for one is a defeat for the other. This means that whatever public statements Fatah makes, the current international focus on Gaza and Hamas weakens Fatah. And this means that at some point, Fatah will try to undermine the political gains the flotilla has offered Hamas.

4. Originally published and accessed June 8, 2010 and reprinted with permission of STRATFOR.

The Palestinians' deep geographic, ideological and historical divisions occasionally flare up into violence. Their movement has always been split, its single greatest weakness. Though revolutionary movements frequently are torn by sectarianism, these divisions are so deep that even without Israeli manipulation, the threat the Palestinians pose to the Israelis is diminished. With manipulation, the Israelis can pit Fatah against Hamas.

The Arab States and the Palestinians

The split within the Palestinians is also reflected in divergent opinions among what used to be called the confrontation states surrounding Israel — Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

Egypt, for example, is directly hostile to Hamas, a religious movement amid a sea of essentially secular Arab states. Hamas' roots are in Egypt's largest Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Egyptian state has historically considered its main domestic threat. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's regime has moved aggressively against Egyptian Islamists and sees Hamas' ideology as a threat, as it could spread back to Egypt. For this and other reasons, Egypt has maintained its own blockade of Gaza. Egypt is much closer to Fatah, whose ideology derives from Egyptian secularism, and for this reason, Hamas deeply distrusts Cairo.

Jordan views Fatah with deep distrust. In 1970, Fatah under Arafat tried to stage a revolution against the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan. The resulting massacres, referred to as Black September, cost about 10,000 Palestinian lives. Fatah has never truly forgiven Jordan for Black September, and the Jordanians have never really trusted Fatah since then. The idea of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank unsettles the Hashemite regime, as Jordan's population is mostly Palestinian. Meanwhile, Hamas with its Islamist ideology worries Jordan, which has had its own problems with the Muslim Brotherhood. So rhetoric aside, the Jordanians are uneasy at best with the Palestinians, and despite years of Israeli-Palestinian hostility, Jordan (and Egypt) has a peace treaty with Israel that remains in place.

Syria is far more interested in Lebanon than it is in the Palestinians. Its co-sponsorship (along with Iran) of Hezbollah has more to do with Syria's desire to dominate Lebanon than it does with Hezbollah as an anti-Israeli force. Indeed, whenever fighting breaks out between Hezbollah and Israel, the Syrians get nervous and their tensions with Iran increase. And of course, while Hezbollah is anti-Israeli, it is not a Palestinian movement. It is a Lebanese Shiite movement. Most Palestinians are Sunni, and while they share a common goal — the destruction of Israel — it is not clear that Hezbollah would want the same kind of regime in Palestine that either Hamas or Fatah would want. So Syria is playing a side game with an anti-Israeli movement that isn't Palestinian, while also maintaining relations with both factions of the Palestinian movement.

Outside the confrontation states, the Saudis and other Arabian Peninsula regimes remember the threat that Nasser and the PLO posed to their regimes. They do not easily forgive, and their support for Fatah comes in full awareness of the potential destabilizing influence of the Palestinians. And while the Iranians would love to have influence over the Palestinians, Tehran is more than 1,000 miles away. Sometimes Iranian arms get through to the Palestinians. But Fatah doesn't trust the Iranians, and Hamas, though a religious movement, is Sunni while Iran is Shiite. Hamas and the Iranians may cooperate on some tactical issues, but they do not share the same vision.

Israel's Short-term Free Hand and Long-term Challenge

Given this environment, it is extremely difficult to translate hostility to Israeli policies in Europe and other areas into meaningful levers against Israel. Under these circumstances, the Israelis see the consequences of actions that excite hostility toward Israel from the Arabs and the rest of the world as less dangerous than losing control of Gaza. The more independent Gaza becomes, the greater the threat it poses to Israel. The suppression of Gaza is much safer and is something Fatah ultimately supports, Egypt participates in, Jordan is relieved by and Syria is ultimately indifferent to.

Nations base their actions on risks and rewards. The configuration of the Palestinians and Arabs rewards Israeli assertiveness and provides few rewards for caution. The Israelis do not see global hostility toward Israel translating into a meaningful threat because the Arab reality cancels it out. Therefore, relieving pressure on Hamas makes no sense to the Israelis. Doing so would be as likely to alienate Fatah and Egypt as it would to satisfy the Swedes, for example. As Israel has less interest in the Swedes than in Egypt and Fatah, it proceeds as it has.

A single point sums up the story of Israel and the Gaza blockade-runners: Not one Egyptian aircraft threatened the Israeli naval vessels, nor did any Syrian warship approach the intercept point. The Israelis could be certain of complete command of the sea and air without challenge. And this underscores how the Arab countries no longer have a military force that can challenge the Israelis, nor the will nor interest to acquire one. Where Egyptian and Syrian forces posed a profound threat to Israeli forces in 1973, no such threat exists now. Israel has a completely free hand in the region militarily; it does not have to take into account military counteraction. The threat posed by intifada, suicide bombers, rockets from Lebanon and Gaza, and Hezbollah fighters is real, but it does not threaten the survival of Israel the way the threat from Egypt and Syria once did (and the Israelis see actions like the Gaza blockade as actually reducing the threat of intifada, suicide bombers and rockets). Non-state actors simply lack the force needed to reach this threshold. When we search for the reasons behind Israeli actions, it is this singular military fact that explains Israeli decision-making.

And while the break between Turkey and Israel is real, Turkey alone cannot bring significant pressure to bear on Israel beyond the sphere of public opinion and diplomacy because of the profound divisions in the region. Turkey has the option to reduce or end cooperation with Israel, but it does not have potential allies in the Arab world it would need against Israel. Israel therefore feels buffered against the Turkish reaction. Though its relationship with Turkey is significant to Israel, it is clearly not significant enough for Israel to give in on the blockade and accept the risks from Gaza.

At present, Israel takes the same view of the United States. While the United States became essential to Israeli security after 1967, Israel is far less dependent on the United States today. The quantity of aid the United States supplies Israel has shrunk in significance as the Israeli economy has grown. In the long run, a split with the United States would be significant, but interestingly, in the short run, the Israelis would be able to function quite effectively.

Israel does, however, face this strategic problem: In the short run, it has freedom of action, but its actions could change the strategic framework in which it operates over the long run. The most significant threat to Israel is not world opinion; though not trivial, world opinion is not decisive. The threat to Israel is that its actions will generate forces in the Arab world that eventually change the balance of power. The politico-military consequences of public opinion is the key question, and it is in this context that Israel must evaluate its split with Turkey.

The most important change for Israel would not be unity among the Palestinians, but a shift in Egyptian policy back toward the position it held prior to Camp David. Egypt is the center of gravity of the Arab world, the largest country and formerly the driving force behind Arab unity. It was the power Israel feared above all others. But Egypt under Mubarak has shifted its stance versus the Palestinians, and far more important, allowed Egypt's military capability to atrophy.

Should Mubarak's successor choose to align with these forces and move to rebuild Egypt's military capability, however, Israel would face a very different regional equation. A hostile Turkey aligned with Egypt could speed Egyptian military recovery and create a significant threat to Israel. Turkish sponsorship of Syrian military expansion would increase the pressure further. Imagine a world in which the Egyptians, Syrians and Turks formed a coalition that revived the Arab threat to Israel and the United States returned to its position of the 1950s when it did not materially support Israel, and it becomes clear that Turkey's emerging power combined with a political shift in the Arab world could represent a profound danger to Israel.

Where there is no balance of power, the dominant nation can act freely. The problem with this is that doing so tends to force neighbors to try to create a balance of power. Egypt and Syria were not a negligible threat to Israel in the past. It is in Israel's interest to keep them passive. The Israelis can't dismiss the threat that its actions could trigger political processes that cause these countries to revert to prior behavior. They still remember what underestimating Egypt and Syria cost them in 1973. It is remarkable how rapidly military capabilities can revive: Recall that the Egyptian army was shattered in 1967, but by 1973 was able to mount an offensive that frightened Israel quite a bit.

The Israelis have the upper hand in the short term. What they must calculate is whether they will retain the upper hand if they continue on their course. Division in the Arab world, including among the Palestinians, cannot disappear overnight, nor can it quickly generate a strategic military threat.

But the current configuration of the Arab world is not fixed. Therefore, defusing the current crisis would seem to be a long-term strategic necessity for Israel.

Israel's actions have generated shifts in public opinion and diplomacy regionally and globally. The Israelis are calculating that these actions will not generate a long-term shift in the strategic posture of the Arab world. If they are wrong about this, recent actions will have been a significant strategic error. If they are right, then this is simply another passing incident. In the end, the profound divisions in the Arab world both protect Israel and make diplomatic solutions to its challenge almost impossible — you don't need to fight forces that are so divided, but it is very difficult to negotiate comprehensively with a group that lacks anything approaching a unified voice."

Dr. Friedman's analysis from this June 8, 2010 article brings you up to the current moment on how things stand on the international scene with Israel and the nations of the world.

One issue that Dr. Friedman did not cover in either article is the shift in public opinion within the Jewish community in the United States and within Israel itself. As a result of the Gaza War of 2008-2009, opposition to government policy regarding the Palestinian issue within Israel itself is growing. American Jewish public opinion is still strongly pro-Israel, but more and more of the Jewish community in the United States is beginning to question Israel's policies toward the Palestinian people and territories. Of course, none of them have any solutions. No one does at this time.

The shift in Jewish public opinion in Israel will have an even greater impact than American Jewish public opinion. Israeli public opinion can bring a change in government and create a political vacuum in Israel. Politics abhors a vacuum and they are quickly filled, either by domestic solutions — or solutions imposed from outside. Many players, including the United States are willing to impose "solutions" if necessary. The likelihood is that any imposed solution will only aggravate the problems and conflicts.

Keeping Up to Date on Middle East Events

We try to keep you apprised of events in the Middle East, but only when they bear on biblical events. Events that occur in the world like earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes and other natural and man-made disasters such as oil spills and wars, usually do not have biblical significance except as part of general trends. Natural disasters, show how fragile human society, is and how simply and easily God can bring nations to their knees through "acts of nature" that are in reality (and legally) "acts of God." When biblically identifiable events do occur, we shall let you know as soon as practicable so that those events can be analyzed carefully from the Bible.

I want to tell you about some websites that will help you keep apprised of important events in the Middle East. I have already told you about www.stratfor.com. ASK subscribes to this useful resource, receiving email news items several times each day that are relevant to the Middle East and particularly to Israel.⁵ but Stratfor provides free information as well. Sign up for their weekly email reports if you choose to do so. The reports that I included in this Commentary are two of their free reports.

There are two Israeli news organizations that should be monitored regularly as well. One is [The Jerusalem Post](http://www.jpost.com). The other is [Haaretz](http://www.haaretz.com). Both are free on the internet. I find *Haaretz* to be more useful in its news, and more independent and evenhanded in its politics, so I view it more often. My complaint against both of these new sources is their sparse use of maps showing where events take place.

5. Stratfor's article "[The Geopolitics of Israel, Ancient and Modern](#)" was reprinted as a May 2008 ASK article. It is an excellent background article about the historical geopolitical issues and strategic challenges of the land of Israel throughout history. I highly recommend you re-read this article.

Archaeological coverage by these two Israeli sources is never complete and additional research usually has to be done to get a more complete story. Here again maps of where a dig or an archaeological find took place is usually lacking. Often, where a find is made is very important, especially if it is in Jerusalem.

You should also monitor foreign news publications such as [Pravda](#) from Russia. This English language Russian news site provides interesting perspective on non-political events such as social trends and science, and occasionally on political perspective as well. Middle East events are covered in this Russian source. Iran's English news service [Iran Daily](#), is an Iranian government sponsored website. Finally, [Al Jazeera.com](#) English edition is occasionally useful in its presentation of the Muslim perspective. Some of their interviews are excellent. This does not mean I agree with what these sources say, just that they are useful.

Economic Trends Website

Another useful website that should be looked at every few months or so is the "[Weekly Railfax Rail Carloading Report](#)." This website and its charts provide commodity breakdowns for carload traffic to help you understand economic activity and trends in all of North America (Canada, the United States, and Mexico). Scroll down to the charts showing "Total Industry Charts (US, Canada and Mexico)." These visually show the trends of bulk railcar shipments across the country. The charts "Weekly Loaded Units" show the trends for a 2-year period.

Railcars ship raw materials to and from seaports around the United States and distribute sea-borne imports around the country. Manufactured products are also shipped by rail around the country, particularly automobiles. When railcar usage and shipments increase that is one positive sign of increasing economic activity. When railcar usage decreases that is a negative indicator. Look also at the "Recession Watch" charts. These charts of Crushed Stone and Lumber are two leading indicators of new commercial and residential construction.

The location and distribution of the seaports of the United States help keep the economy strong. The rail and highway network help keep the country unified. See Dr. Martin's article "[The Secret of United States Economic Success](#)" and my article "[The Power of the United States](#)." Most manufactured goods are shipped by truck around the United States, but railcar usage is an important part of the American ship-rail-truck nationwide delivery system. The United States is still — by far — the largest producer of manufactured goods in the world.

Conclusion

Events prophesied in Zechariah chapter 12 (and on through chapter 14) have never happened in history. Written during the prophet Jeremiah's time, the nations never attacked Judah en masse as described in chapter 12, nor has God intervened in Judah's behalf since the time of King Hezekiah, nor have the hearts of the people of Judah and Jerusalem ever been changed.

As the apostle Paul wrote, the veil is still over the eyes of the people (2 Corinthians 3:13–16). The thousands of conversions recorded in the Book of Acts involved individuals and families, not most of the nation or even most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The apostles never claimed the prophecies of Zechariah chapters 12–14 were fulfilled.⁶

Watch the world events. Watch the Middle East. Watch Israel. Watch Jerusalem.

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6. Although John 19:37 cites 4 words from Zechariah 12:10. Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27 both have Jesus citing Zechariah 13:7.