

# **The Israel Project Conference Call on the Gaza Flotilla, Israel and Protecting America**

**June 4, 2010, 2:00PM ET**

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Good afternoon. This is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, founder and president of the Israel Project. The Israel Project is a non-profit educational organization that helps educate people about the Middle East. I'm very delighted because we have more than 400 people on this conference call with us this afternoon. It's Friday afternoon on what's been a very difficult and long week in the Middle East. But I'm very delighted to have three amazing experts with us on this call today.

Our first speaker will be Congressman Sherman and then Congressman Franks and then Ambassador Oren. Each of the speakers will be with us for approximately 30 minutes. They'll have a brief opening statement and then they'll do the Q&A. And as we said, we've got a number of questions that are already in. And questions are done via the Internet by sending them in through your RSVP form.

Congressman Brad Sherman is our first speaker. He was born and raised in southern California, represents California's San Fernando Valley and has served in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1997. Congressman Sherman is serving his seventh term in Congress. Congressman Sherman is chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade. He is a senior member of the Financial Services Committee.

Congressman Sherman has been a tireless advocate to stop the threat of a nuclear Iran. He was also a key congressional leader for passing a multimillion-dollar package to promote Israel and America working together to find solutions for alternative energy, which can help reduce dependency on foreign oil.

Brad Sherman is married to Lisa Kaplan Sherman and is the father of two daughters, Molly and Naomi. Naomi is a new baby. So congratulations, Congressman Sherman, on your newest baby girl.  
Congressman Sherman, thank you for spending time with us on this busy day.

**REP. BRAD SHERMAN (D-CA):** Hello. I'm Brad Sherman from California's best-named city, Sherman Oaks.

We talk at a problematic time. Hamas has a consistent and effective tactic, and that is to create confrontations in which people often who are willing to die -- some are actually seeking martyrdom -- try to create a political theater in which Israel will be portrayed adversely around the world.

The blame for these confrontations, whether they be on land in the Middle East or... [recording interrupted]... The blame for these confrontations and their inevitable casualties goes not to those who fail to craft the perfect tactical solution. You can always go back and say, "Oh, the Israelis should have landed on the ships in the daytime or the nighttime, or they should have seized the Gaza port or they should have mined the waters, or they should have just opened up Gaza to whatever rocket imports Hamas wanted." All of those are highly imperfect solutions.

The blame doesn't go to the soldier on the ground who can't come up with the perfect tactical solution to the confrontation. The blame goes to those politicians who are seeking to use confrontational means to achieve unreasonable ends.

Hamas is dedicated to the destruction of Israel and to the expulsion from the Middle East of all Jews. The Western press fails to comment on that or notice it. They can't take it seriously because they're simply so condescending to Arabs that they will not take at face value what Hamas says openly and explicitly, and which clearly guides its tactics.

There are many organizations whose title refers to freeing Gaza. Israel withdrew from Gaza. The response of Hamas was that Israel must not only withdraw from Gaza, but from Tel Aviv as well, and that rockets would rain down on Jews and kill as many as they possibly could until that goal was achieved.

The blockade is entirely legal and is consistent with U.S. policy in similar circumstances. For example, we blockaded the Confederacy, and we were far tighter with that blockade, or at least tried to be. We did not recognize the Confederacy as an independent government, but it was in hostilities with the United States. We imposed tougher blockades on Germany in World War I and Japan in World War II. Whenever the United States has been in a state of hostility, it has sought to blockade its opponent.

And the only way to say that Israel's actions were illegal is to say that there is no state of hostility between Hamas and Israel, which I think is difficult to assert. Blockades are entirely legal in international waters. And, of course, our efforts

against the confederacy, Cuba during the Cuban missile crisis, Germany in both world wars, Japan in the Second World War, all involved stopping neutral ships in international waters.

So what is illegal is helping Hamas. The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 makes it absolutely illegal for any American to give food, money, school supplies, paper clips, concrete or weapons to Hamas or any of its officials. And so I will be asking the attorney general to prosecute all Americans involved in what was a clear effort to give items of value to a terrorist organization.

In addition, any non-American engaged in such activities is excludable from the United States. Those who fund terrorists, those who give terrorists money and items of value, should be excluded from the United States. And I will call upon the secretary of Homeland Security to exclude all non-Americans who are engaged in this effort to fund, support a terrorist organization.

The idea that there is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, if it were true, it is the fault of Hamas, which could solve the problem or any problem simply by declaring that it is willing to live in peace alongside Israel. But the fact is that there is not a hunger crisis in Gaza. There is not a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

There is a building-supply shortage in Gaza, and that is because Israel and Egypt do not want to provide Hamas with unrestricted access to cement. They have allowed cement in for particular purposes. But when that cement becomes available to Hamas to build tunnels, to smuggle in rockets or to build defensive fortifications, that is a military use.

As to life in Gaza, it is certainly not pleasant for many. But the life expectancy there of 73.86 years is not only greater than that of Estonia and Bulgaria; it is greater than that in many American cities. Likewise, the infant mortality rate of 17.71 per thousand is lower than that in China and lower than that in many American cities.

So life in Gaza is not as pleasant as it ought to be, and I look forward to the people of Gaza getting a pro- peace government, a government that wants to live alongside Israel and for Gaza then to flourish.

Thank you.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Congressman, you've certainly made news here by saying that you're going to seek prosecution of the people who are American citizens on that boat who were there bringing supplies to aid and abet terrorist organizations. And you've made news in saying that you're going to seek that non-Americans who were involved not be allowed to enter the United States in the future.

Your first question comes from Michele Kelemen from National Public Radio, who asks, "How concerned are you about the rift in Turkish-Israeli relations? David Ignatius suggested in a column this week that Turkey could be even more dangerous foe than Hamas."

**REP. SHERMAN:** Well, I think that Turkey is an important country in the Middle East, but this difficulty began long before the ships were intercepted. Turkey acted as a proxy for the Iranian foreign ministry in trying to protect Iran's nuclear program and to protect Iran from the sanctions designed to stop that program. And that occurred weeks and days before the boarding of these ships.

The IHH, which was the key Turkish organization involved in this effort, has clear terrorist ties and was regarded as a terrorist organization in the '90s by the then-Turkish government. Now it's regarded as more mainstream by an Islamist-flavored Turkish government.

In the '90s, the Turkish government raided this organization. And in the year 2000, the IHH worked with al Qaeda to bomb Los Angeles International Airport, which is something that I take pretty seriously, coming from Los Angeles.

So you have a shift in Turkish policy toward the IHH, toward Israel and toward Iran that may be exacerbated by what happened on the ships but was in full swing before -- when those ships left and even before those ships left Turkish ports.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Do you think this will impact Turkey's membership in NATO?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I doubt that Turkey will be expelled from NATO as a result of this.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** The next question is from Genevieve Long from the Epoch Times, who asked, "Is the U.S. concerned about al Qaeda ties that one of

the groups aboard the flotilla had through the organization the IHS -- HH? What are the implications of this for the United States?"

**REP. SHERMAN:** Well, I wish that, rather than releasing all of these individuals, some of whom were, I think, dedicated to peace and dupes of Hamas, but others of which are part of an international terrorist network, that perhaps Israel should have retained and detained some of them, particularly those with ties to al Qaeda, as some of them have ties to al Qaeda.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Mike Evans of Jerusalem World News asks, "Is there any indication that President Obama is going to attempt a Madrid-type peace conference? How close are we to a major confrontation between Israel and Iran over nuclear ambitions? And what economic cards can Obama use to pressure Israel?"

**REP. SHERMAN:** I don't think we're going to have a major peace conference anytime soon. What was the -- the second question was Israel and Iran.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Yes.

**REP. SHERMAN:** I have no idea whether Israel will take military action against Iran. I would say that the sanctions that are on the drawing boards now are insufficient, very insufficient to stop Iran's nuclear program, and that puts Israel in a very difficult position.

Then finally, I can't imagine the president of the United States would try to put economic pressure on Israel, and as a practical matter, if any administration -- it couldn't be the Obama administration, so future administration tried to do so -- the people, the Congress would prevent it.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Gary Zimmers of Rockville asks, with the MPT treaty and the blockade incident all attention has been removed from Iran's developing a nuclear weapon. Does the rest of the world not feel threatened by Iran having a WMD? Is only Israel threatened by it? How close are we, Israel, to being at war with Lebanon, Hezbollah, Syria, Turkey, Gaza, Hamas or Iran? Will anyone help Israel if war breaks out against everyone that I've listed before?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I can't answer all those questions. Obviously between the oil spill, the U.S. economy, the Greek economy and this action at sea, Iran's nuclear program is not getting the attention it deserves. Whether Iran would use nuclear

weapons, and against whom, is hard to figure, but if that regime feels 10 years from now that it's going to be swept out of power, I don't think they'll do as Gorbachev did and shrug their shoulders and walk off the world stage. I think they'll smuggle those nuclear weapons, perhaps into the cities of the great Satan, perhaps the little Satan, or perhaps Satans to be identified later.

I don't think Iran would use their nuclear weapons on a sunny day without any pressure, but I would expect that some time in the next 10 or 20 years they're going to be under either international or domestic pressure.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Everett Oakley asks, why not unilaterally help the U.N. enforce the no-weapons provision of the 2006 ceasefire with Hezbollah after the Lebanon war?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I'm just going to skip that question. I don't know whether they're asking what should be U.S. policy or should be Israeli policy.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** What should be U.S. policy?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I would hope the U.S. would do everything possible to prevent weapons from reaching Hamas, and that includes making sure that Hamas does not have the ability to build tunnels into Egypt and the cement to build those tunnels. I would hope that building materials that get into Gaza are strictly accounted for and go in only with the approval of the Egyptian and Israeli governments.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Joshua Berkovitz asks, why does Israel not recognize the Armenian holocaust?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I have been -- I use the -- I think the term is Armenian genocide. I've been a strong advocate for the U.S. recognizing the Armenian genocide. We have failed to do so in the United States Congress. I know that at Yad Vashem there's a clear recognition of the Armenian genocide, and scholars point out that when Hitler needed to convince his henchmen that they could indeed get away with it, he pointed to the Armenian genocide and said, "Who speaks today of the Armenians?"

So the Armenian genocide is directly relevant to Jewish history and ought to be formally recognized by all governments around the world, and certainly is in, the most significant Israeli memorial to the Holocaust.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Seema Liston asks, why do we not see the pictures of Gaza market with food and people buying items, on TV? We only see the pictures of blown-up buildings.

**REP. SHERMAN:** The press -- well, there's two presses here. First is an Arab press that takes sides against Israel. And the second is a European/American press that likes to portray a morality play in which whoever is wealthy or doing well, or Western, is bad, and whoever's living at a lower standard of living is morally good. And starting with that assumption -- I call it kind of the Kent State Rorschach test.

A lot of today's American journalists like me grew up with Kent State and the Vietnam War, where we saw uniformed Guardsmen confront scruffy looking students throwing rocks. And those who opposed the Vietnam war tended to be the ones who went into journalism, and they tended to root for the antiwar demonstrators. And now today, they play that out in their minds. When they see the scruffy versus the uniform, they root for the scruffy. It's -- the fact is that the health indicators in Gaza are better than those in many American cities.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Lauren Mescon asks, where does the Obama administration stand concerning Israel? From the reaction to a zoning announcement about East Jerusalem, to the failure to condemn Fatah for naming a square after a -- (inaudible) -- immediately, to the most recent incident, will this administration stand with Israel?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I think the administration could do a better job, particularly in public. I think at the U.N. -- I mean, one would have -- or given the makeup of the U.N., et cetera -- expected a much harsher anti- Israel resolution, whereas in fact the resolution that was ultimately passed condemns the acts that led to the deaths. I believe those acts are entirely those of -- that the acts that led to the deaths are those of Hamas' supporters and called for an impartial investigation, as has the Israeli government, which is putting together its own impartial investigation.

The United States is solely responsible for the fact that that resolution does not condemn Israel, or indicate that the acts that caused these events were the acts of Israel, nor does the resolution call for an investigation other than one led by or entirely made up of the Israeli government. So that is a success at the U.N., success in the sense of putting out a fire; you can't really succeed in a fire except you put it out.

So I think the administration did well there, but I think it could be far louder now, condemning Hamas as the responsible entity for these nine deaths.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Robert Costrell of Arkansas asks, it appears that more Republican congressional members are issuing strong statements in support of Israel in this incident than Democrats. This continues the pattern we saw in the letters that were sent to the administration objecting to the way that Israel was treated earlier this spring, where the Republican caucus signed in almost unanimously, and the Democratic caucus was more split.

Given the importance of Democratic members pressuring the administration to stand firmly with Israel, how can this be improved?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I think there is strong support for Israel among Democrats and Republicans. Every vote that's come to the floor has had 90 percent, 95 percent, 98 percent of the Democrats' vote on the pro- Israel side. I've seen some letters circulate which seem to be -- have partisan criticisms of the Obama administration, which of course Democrats are reluctant to sign. I've seen other letters circulate that I've been happy and proud to sign. But even I have not signed every single letter that begins with the words, "Because we support Israel." I think there's strong support on both sides.

I do think that in the press the liberal media -- and that is a little closer to Democratic politicians -- is misled by that Kent State Rorschach test that I identified earlier, and that is a feeling among liberals that those who are poor, less technological, less wealthy and more scruffy looking must be right, and those that are uniformed and/or Western must be wrong.

And the fact is the world is not a morality play in which the West oppresses other people.

If you view the world through that lens, that all Western and European and Americans are wrong, and anybody from any other region of the world is right, then you can reach some bad conclusions, and a few in the liberal media start with that assumption.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Sarah Biser of New Jersey asks, "Where does America go from here? Does this and the diplomatic fallout limit our options vis-a-vis Iran, and how do we defend Israel against Hezbollah and Hamas in the next war?"

**REP. SHERMAN:** Well, I think Israel can defend itself from everything other than nuclear weapons. And I think 20 years from now, when the history of this decade is written, everything that has gotten our attention will be a footnote or a side paragraph and the entire chapter will be, why did the world allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons? And we need harsh, immediate, extra-territorial, absolute sanctions on Iran as the only way that we could stop its nuclear program. We are in conference committee on a bill that might be 10 percent of what we need, and it's a great first step, but we need 10 times more in 10 weeks or 10 months, not 10 years.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Do you want to expand on that in terms of what people can do on the Iran issue, particularly given the U.N. Security council is looking at this issue in these next couple of days, and the conference committee is looking at this issue at this very moment?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I would say contact the conference committee members, particularly the senators -- and I think we're stronger in the House -- and contact the press. You've got 400 people on this line who are pretty press-savvy, and yet I have -- I've gone on Washington Journal, which is the call-in show from C-SPAN, America's least-watched cable television network, and I get a lot of anti-Israel calls, very few pro-Israel calls. And I get anti-Israel -- (inaudible) -- when I'm there to talk about the Iran -- when I'm there to talk about the North Korea nuclear program. It doesn't matter. If I'm on, the anti-Israel calls are coming in.

And so I think make use of every effort to get the message out. And I think in the United States, the key message has got to be that we're not safe. A nuclear weapon is about the size of person. You could smuggle one into the United States inside a bale of marijuana. Iran may not do that just on a sunny day, but once Iran has nuclear weapons, that's terrorism with impunity followed by nuclear -- state- to-nuclear state confrontation. That worked well on the Cuban missile crisis, but I don't think Ahmadinejad is as sane as Khrushchev.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Indeed. Well, as the congressman mentions, there are a lot of savvy people on this line, so I want to remind those who are activists that if you go to [TheIsraelProject.org](http://TheIsraelProject.org) website, that there is an automated system where you can write a personal letter from your heart and from your mind about these issues, and they will go automatically to your members of Congress that represent you and to the media outlets that are local to you. It sorts it by where your zip code is, so it's a very easy way to have your voice heard in Washington.

We're going to start soon with Congressman Franks, but Congressman Sherman, we have just a few more moments with you, and we're so grateful for your time on this very busy day. Are there any closing statements or things that you would like to leave with us as we think about these issues?

**REP. SHERMAN:** I think it's important that we focus on what happened in the Mediterranean, but what really matter is the Iran nuclear program. We have a short amount of time to stop that program. And our failure to take all of the action that we should have taken and could take today that may put Israel in a position where it has to do something far more controversial than events in the last week. And at that point -- well, at that point, we'll deal with it then.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Congressman Sherman, was there anything else you wanted to add?

**REP. SHERMAN:** No, I think I've covered it all. Thank you very much. People can be in touch with my press secretary, Matt Farrauto at 202-225-5911.

**Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi:** Congressman Brad Sherman, thank you so much for your time, and congratulations on your new baby daughter.

**REP. SHERMAN:** Thank you.