

**The Israel Project Conference Call: Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA), Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ),
Ambassador Michael Oren, Israeli Ambassador to the United States
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.

So let me explain how this is going to work. This is going to be very interactive. People will have an opportunity to be asking questions. They do it via the Internet by sending their questions in through their RSVP forms. We've already gotten numerous, numerous questions.

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 --

COMPUTERIZED VOICE: The conference is now being recorded.

REP. SHERMAN: 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 of 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 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.

REP. TRENT FRANKS (R-AZ): Yes, I just wanted to let everyone know this is Congressman Trent Franks and I just joined the call. I apologize for the delay.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: No problem. We'll be joining you just momentarily.

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.

REP. FRANKS: Before Brad gets away, before -- Brad, are you still there?

REP. SHERMAN: Yeah, Trent, I'm still here.

REP. FRANKS: Listen, I just wanted to tell you, congratulations on your baby as well. But I also want to express to the group here, I apologize I just joined the call and didn't even know who was speaking, so I apologize for the interruption. But I do want to say that Brad and I are on opposite ends of the party line, but I truly believe he is one of the great champions for Israel in the Congress, and he has my deepest admiration for not only his clarity of mind, but his strength of purpose and his commitment to Israel.

REP. SHERMAN: Trent, that also goes for you. And I just -- I was asked earlier and didn't fully answer whether Democrats make strong statements in favor of Israel, and of course Hoyer and Pelosi have just issued another strong statement I believe -- that's what I'm being told by staff -- and have issued many strong statements in the past, as have many good and right-thinking Republicans as well.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Great. Congressman Sherman, thank you so much.

REP. SHERMAN: Thank you.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Let me introduce Congressman Trent Franks of Arizona. Congressman Franks is a conservative Reagan Republican, and he has spent most of his life working on children's issues and trying to build a better future for all children. Congressman Franks is serving his fourth term in the United States Congress, representing the second district of Arizona. And serves on the armed services committee and the judiciary committee where he is a ranking member of the Subcommittee on Commercial Law and Administration. He is an active member of the Republican Study Committee and is an executive committee member of the Tom Lantos Congressional Human Rights Commission.

Cofounder and cochairman of the International Religious Freedom Caucus, Congressman Franks also serves as a host to the taskforce of the caucus groups, including the House Working Group on -- (audio break) -- accountability, the Educational Freedom Caucus, the House Working Caucus on Waste, Fraud and Abuse, the Liberty Caucus, Human Rights Caucus, India Caucus, Antiterrorism Caucus and is cofounder -- very important to us -- of the Israel Allies Caucus.

Congressman Franks and his wife Josephine have been married since 1980 and they live in Peoria with their children Joshua and Emily. And they are members of the North Phoenix Baptist Church.

Congressman Franks, thank you so much for joining us today.

REP. FRANKS: Well, I just can't tell you what an honor it is for me to be with all of you. And, again, I apologize for the awkwardness of my introduction here. It was just one of those situations.

But I really would like to start by thanking the Israel Project. I know that some of the things that we say are repetition of some basic premises. But I believe that the work of TIP right now is vitally important because I am -- you know, I suppose all politicians try to emphasize the seriousness of the situation, but I truly believe that Israel is facing some of the greatest challenges that it's faced since its statehood. And I don't think the rest of the world understands that. Certainly Israel's enemies probably understand that, but I don't think the average American really understands the challenge that Israel faces.

And so I just can't express to you how thankful I am for your work and how important it is and how timely it is. And of course the primary discussion today related to the flotilla are very important now. Just for -- so I don't overtake my time, what is my time frame here? Do you want me to just talk a little bit and then take questions?

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Exactly. We have a 30-minute window before Ambassador Oren.

REP. FRANKS: Okay. Well, that's great. Well, let me just restate some basics. First of all, I believe that this entire incident is probably completely misconstrued by the media. This really fundamentally is about Israel being able to defend itself. This flotilla was not something that was designed ultimately to deliver humanitarian goods to Gaza. Israel has allowed that for a long -- a very long time. They've -- you know, about 10,000 tons of humanitarian materials go in directly from Israel into Gaza. But Israel has asked only one thing, and that is the ability to be able to make sure that these are indeed humanitarian goods and not something to further arm Hamas.

I think that probably the greatest problem with Americans in general right now is that we simply don't understand Israel's circumstance. I'm reminded of the comments years ago that Golda Meir said. You know, she said, you know, "In our long war with the Arabs, Israel has always had a secret weapon: No alternative." And I really believe that that same circumstance exists now except that the American people, and pretty much the people of Europe and the world in general don't understand the challenge that Israel faces.

In the last few years Israel has been -- the modern community has attacked Israel for trying to create a buffer zone between itself and enemies, and Israel has been forced to move away from that so that it's much more vulnerable to missile attack.

In the last few years somewhere in the neighborhood of 6 (thousand) to 7,000 rockets have fallen on Israel, mostly from Hamas, and I just suggest to you that if the people who are always attacking Israel had rockets falling in their neighborhood from these same terrorist organizations that the lairs of Hamas would have been made ashes long ago. And I'm just astonished sometimes that there's such a prevalence of ignorance related to real challenges that Israel faces.

I mean, there's certainly -- as Americans we have historical precedence for this. There was a time when the Soviet Union represented an existential threat to America. And, you know, it's easy for us to use that term existential threat, but everyone really knows what it means. It means that this a potential of a country that could annihilate our nation or at least our way of life, and the Soviet Union had enough of a nuclear arsenal to do us tremendous harm. And yet we counted primarily on our ability to respond to them, or ability to attack them back, to act as a deterrent.

We called it mutually assured destruction. It is still, unbelievably I suppose, but it's still a center point of the American strategy to prevent attack from countries that have that kind of nuclear arsenal. And yet, we knew that if the Soviets were able to place any sort of missiles in Cuba, that it could diminish our ability to respond in time, and that that increased the chances of some sort of major nuclear exchange.

And ironically we had the advantage of knowing that the Soviet Union at that time wanted to survive. You see, with Hamas and some of the Jihadist elements, you're faced with an enemy that is quite willing to destroy themselves to destroy Israel. I think it -- this is a -- I'm sitting outside. I don't have any notes, but if

I remember this quote right, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah said something like this. He said, "We have discovered how to hit the Jews where they are most vulnerable. The Jews love life, so that's what we shall take from them. They love life and we love death."

And that really points out the tremendous challenge that Israel faces -- that they face an enemy that's hard to deter without just incapacitating them. Yet, getting back to the issue in historical America, where we were facing the Cuban missile crisis, we blockaded Cuba to make sure that those dangerous weapons couldn't get into Cuba to threaten America. That was an entirely legal -- just as what Israel has done, Hamas is a self-declared enemy of Israel and we should recognize that Israel has a legal and appropriate right to defend themselves against allowing our self-declared enemy the weapons to kill Israeli citizens.

And Israel had the very simple equation that if they allow certain weapons into Gaza, that those weapons will fall on Israeli citizens and Israeli citizens will die. The equation is that fundamentally and that gravely simple. When we blockaded Cuba, not one missile had fallen from Cuba on American soil, not one. And I truly believe -- and I realize we were talking about the nuclear possibilities there, but let me suggest to you that with Iran on the horizon here with nuclear capability, we're looking at ultimately the same equation long-term. But if one missile had landed on America from Cuba, I think the American army would have marched all the way across the island of Cuba and we would have absolutely not allowed that to occur under any circumstances.

Yet Israel, Israel has had to withstand thousands of missiles and rockets falling on it, and today I am absolute -- I'm on the Strategic Forces Committee, which has to do with our nuclear arsenals and the nuclear profile of other countries -- and I can say this much. There's some of it certainly in open source. None of it is classified what I'm saying, but it comes up to a line that I can't go over. I'm convinced without a doubt that Hamas is seeking major supplies of scud missiles that can range all of Israel, that they're in the process of gaining that capability and that it represents a horrifying threat to Israel.

And that this is something that -- one of the things that Israel is trying to do is make sure that that does not occur. It's always amazing to me that once again when Israel tries to defend itself -- you know, everybody says -- like the prime minister said, you know, everyone says Israel has the right to defend itself but then when Israel does defend itself there's this outcry. And this outcry is always different for Israel than it is anywhere else in the world.

In North Korea, a nuclear-armed nation that is one of the great suppliers of terrorists in the world -- not the greatest, Iran is the greatest supplier of terrorists in the world -- but when North Korea, a dangerous police state, sinks a South Korean ship, you don't have near the outcry, whether it's from the media, from the left, or even from this administration, that you have when Israel boards a ship as they have done before, to protect themselves from allowing weapons to come into Gaza around their border.

Now really I -- I think the tragedy here -- and this is a personal opinion -- the tragedy of it is that Gaza was petitioned. I think that Gaza is a part of Israel and should have remained that. And Israel gave that up to try to placate the international community to try to demonstrate their commitment to peace. And their reward has been to see rockets come from Gaza and hit their innocent citizens.

So this is a much bigger issue than just about one flotilla. As everyone has probably already stated here before I joined this conference, that the IHH was essentially in control of this flotilla. They have known ties to Hamas and to al Qaeda. Their objective was not to bring humanitarian aide into Gaza. Their objective was to break the blockade and to deny Israel one of its few remaining opportunities to protect itself.

Now let me, if I could -- I don't want to take us away from that because I'll throw it open for your questions in a moment. I don't want to take us away from the main purpose that you called me for this gathering, but let me suggest to you that -- you know, I was the first in the Congress to call for Iran to be referred to the Security Council nearly five years ago when they had first started to enrich uranium. At the time they had

less than 150 centrifuges, but I believe that that moment, that when they were enriching uranium, that any thought of them doing that for peaceful purposes was ludicrous.

And of course at that time my voice was a little bit premature, because a lot of people thought I was overreacting. But I said at the time that Iran was going to march relentlessly toward a nuclear weapons capability if the world did not respond. Now today they have 8,000 centrifuges, which is almost three times the number that they need for a full-scale industrial base to create enough fissile material to turn out a dozen or more nuclear warheads a year.

I mean, this is not just a nuclear capability for Iran. This is about an industrial base to create nuclear weapons for Islamist nations across the world, and especially for Jihadist terrorist groups in the world. And I truly believe that if Iran gains nuclear weapons that the world will plunge itself into the shadow of nuclear terrorism and that Israel will be the prime target of that ultimate objective.

So it is really -- getting back to what I started to say in the very first place, this is not about humanitarian aide. Israel, as you know, has offered and tried to take the humanitarian aide that was on this flotilla and to take it in to Gaza, and of course Hamas refuses even to allow that to happen. So it's not about humanitarian aide. It's about Israel's ability to defend itself and there's this systematic approach to continue to box Israel in and to continue to deny them the ability to defend themselves. And this administration ought to be profoundly ashamed of itself for not speaking more boldly on this issue.

We released a statement yesterday -- the day before -- I think it actually hit the media yesterday to some extent. We've always done that from our office, but people expect that. But this administration, this administration has stood idly by and allowed the march toward nuclear weaponization of Iran. It's stood idly by while Israel continues to be restricted more and more in its ability to defend itself, and it has allowed one of -- I don't know of any country in the world that is as good a friend to America as Israel and as vital a friend as America is to Israel, and yet this administration has made more noise about Israel building a few houses in Jerusalem when they've been building -- when the Jews have been building houses in Jerusalem for 3,000 years.

When this administration makes more noise about that than they do about Iran building a nuclear weapons industrial base to supply to terrorists the world over, then something is terribly, terribly wrong. And this administration ought to make it very clear that there is no space between Israel and America, that we are united on this effort, and that we will veto anything that comes across the U.N. Security Council that in any way diminishes Israel's ability to defend itself or in any way strengthens the terrorist groups, the jihadist groups in the world, that threaten not only Israel, but America, and really freedom of the human family and the world.

And with that, I'm going to go ahead and just open it up for questions and try to talk about some of the things you'd like to talk about.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Fabulous, Congressman. Coming from Michele Kelemen, from National Public Radio, she asks, how concerned are you about the risk in Turkish-Israeli relations? David Ignatius had said in a column this week that Turkey could be even more dangerous foe than Hamas.

REP. FRANKS: Well, I would say, first of all, that the Turkish leaders have a great deal of culpability in this situation. And I think they understood to some degree what was happening. And I'm grateful for the alliance that they've had with Israel in the past. I'm grateful for the cooperation that they've had with America. And I had been a vocal -- an advocate for that to continue. But in this case, Turkish officials allowed their country to be used --

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Bless you.

REP. FRANKS: -- as a prop to further the effort to break the Israeli blockade. And I think that they Turkish officials owe the world an explanation and an apology.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: The Turkish president today said that Hamas is not a terrorist organization. Does such statement impact on your feelings towards their membership in NATO?

REP. FRANKS: Well, it certainly makes me question where in the world a Turkish president would come up with that kind of asinine comment because of course Hamas is a terrorist group. Hamas has dedicated themselves to terrorism and gaining the -- you can say all you want about their political goals, but their willingness to use terrorism to achieve those goals is simply not up for discussion. Anybody that's paying any kind of attention at all to the activities of Hamas has to recognize that Hamas is a terrorist organization.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Sy Burschlag asked, how can there be a two- state solution as long as Hamas controls Gaza, a territory that will be part of such a two-state solution?

REP. FRANKS: Well, you know, over the years, I have been someone that was willing, on behalf of even voices in Israel, to say, well, we need a two-state solution. But I'm coming to the conclusion that any sort of two-state solution that doesn't fundamentally recognize Israel's right to exist and doesn't have safety measures put in place so that the territories that would be close to Israeli lines would be free of their weapons capability to attack Israel, I think, is just simply not going to work. I no longer am someone that holds to a two- state solution because I simply believe that history has taught us that every time Israel gives up land, or gives up territory to gain peace, it only brings those that seek to destroy Israel closer to doing so.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: The way you put your comment was so interesting because there are many that believe Israel does not support a two-state solution. In your actions with the -- and interactions with the government of Israel, is it your sense that Israel supports a two-state solution?

REP. FRANKS: Well, I mean, there's -- I think there have been some movement in the past, you know, the -- some of the American administrations have advocated that. And I think Israel tried to go along with it in order to try to demonstrate their commitment to peace. It was something that I always questioned, and it was something that over time I began to conclude was no longer a workable solution because of the things that I mentioned, that every time Israel has tried to give up be it buffer zones, land -- whatever you might want to call it -- to try to protect their country, it only allowed a relentless enemy that seeks to wipe them off the map to come closer and to have more capability to proceed.

And so I've come to the conclusion where I no longer support the two-state solution. I support allowing Palestinians to live in peace in Israel. Israeli does that all the time. Israel -- you know, ironically, Israel works very hard to make sure the Arab world has the right to religious freedom in their country. And yet, the only religious restrictions in Israel, or certainly in Jerusalem, is that Jews cannot pray on the Temple Mount. So I just find it astonishing that we always say that the problem is that Israel is not willing to give up land or they're not willing to compromise. Israel has compromised so many times, in so many ways, that sometimes I question why they continue to do it.

I understand the challenging circumstances that they have. And I've tried to be careful not to say anything that would contradict an important Israeli policy, because I know that they have a very fine line to walk. It's a very difficult thing for them to walk because they're, again, treated in a completely different way; there's such a double standard that takes place. But nevertheless, it's my opinion that Israel continuing to give up land for peace is an equation that has not worked in the past and will not work in the future.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: You mentioned earlier, Congressman -- and there's so many questions -- but I was so interested in your provocative opening statement about nuclear weapons. The recent NPT Treaty mentions Israel, but does not mention Iran. Can you speak to that issue?

REP. FRANKS: Well, yes. I'm on the Armed Services Committee, and if you had followed what had occurred there, a lot of us went after the NPT Treaty because we believe that it is just completely flawed. And it is astonishing to me that given the fact that Iran has threatened American and threatened Israel and threatened to give nuclear weapons to other Islamist nations, according to their need -- that last part's a quote from Ahmadinejad -- that we don't recognize the seriousness of that.

At the time in the committee that just took place, we marked up the National Defense Authorization bill here two weeks ago, and I offered an amendment that -- I've offered to type of an amendment for three years in a row. But finally it was accepted by the committee. And it simply said, it required the Department of Defense to form and compose a national strategic military plan to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons.

Now, that sort of flies under the radar, because I don't -- I'm hoping that, you know, that they don't try to take that amendment out. If they do, there will certainly be an outcry, I think, that they would stand by and let Iran do that. But this administration has been asleep at the wheel when it comes to Iran and the nuclear -- the NPT, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, really is an example of their continued naivete or just dangerous policy in that area.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: The "Epoch Times" asks, is the U.S. concerned about al Qaeda ties that one of the groups aboard the flotilla had through the organization, the IHH? And what are the implications, not for Israel, but to the United States?

REP. FRANKS: Well, I mean, I think that the implications for the United States and for Israel are very similar. Whenever terrorism gains strength, whenever they gain the ability to have some sort of safe haven, or base, to launch terrorist attacks on the world, America is always going to be one of their prime targets. And, yes, there's no question that the IHH has ties both to Hamas and to al Qaeda.

Now, the next we're going to hear, some president across the country -- across the world, I should say -- are they going to say that al Qaeda is not a terrorist group? I mean, help me understand the real difference between the aims of al Qaeda and the aims of Hamas. They may be regional in nature -- there may be regional differences -- but their ultimate aims are the same. And unfortunately, al Qaeda is really like a Hamas on steroids. They simply are willing to use this tactic of murdering and terrorizing innocent civilians to promote and achieve their political goals. And that, in my judgment, is kind of the definition of terrorism.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Indeed. The Jerusalem World News asks, how close are we to a major confrontation between Israel and Iran?

REP. FRANKS: Well, I'm afraid -- I'm afraid it's getting dangerously close. And I think that that is a shame on the Barak -- or on the Obama administration.

That is unbelievable that this administration would stand by and force Israel to carry the water for the rest of the world to prevent an Iran -- to threaten the human family with nuclear weapons. And yet that appears to be exactly what they intend to do.

I'm afraid that this administration has embraced a policy of allowing Iran to gain nuclear weapons and in pursuing a policy of appeasement -- I'm sorry -- a policy of containment -- I want to make sure I say that right so the reporters listening -- pursuing a policy of containment after that.

And I think that is an inexpressibly dangerous and blindly naive policy. And so I think it puts Israel in a no-win situation. And if the day comes -- if the day comes when Israel is forced to defend its citizens and its country by preemptively and militarily acting to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear capability, this administration -- the Obama administration -- will owe the world and especially Israel a profound apology for standing by and leaving Israel with no alternative and no time left.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Congressman, we only have about five more minutes before Ambassador Oren jumps on, and there's so many more questions. I'd like to consolidate some by sort of asking you about the future.

Given that next week, on Wednesday, the Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, is coming to meet with President Obama and that, likely, the week following we'll see a visit from Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, what do you expect to see in the days and weeks ahead? And what do you think the key things are that reporters should be looking for? And, additionally, how do you rate what the Palestinians are doing on the issue of the culture of hate in terms of what they're teaching their children via their textbooks or their media?

REP. FRANKS: Well, you asked so much important things. Let me just touch on the last one.

The effort to teach children hate is one of the most dangerous things what exists for any long-term hope for peace. You know, it's a lot easier to build men and women than it is to try to rebuild -- you know, from child up than to try to rebuild them after they're adults.

And I just believe that, somehow, the world needs to understand what the real equation here really is. And it is -- unfortunately, it is a theological position on the part of certain jihadist groups that believes that Israel and any threat to the total domination of the jihadist world view must be eliminated.

And if we don't understand that, then the future, indeed, is very, very dark.

I believe that reporters need to do two things. Number one, they need to school themselves into the reality that Israel faces. What their real threats are to them that they do, indeed, more than they have in a long time, face a fundamental, existential threat and a complete possibility that -- whether it's a missile from Iran with a nuclear warhead on it, an EMP attack, or just, you know, a regular nuclear attack on Tel Aviv or otherward (sic) that Israel is facing a profound and real threat in the world.

And, secondly, they need to understand that Iran has no intention of stopping or relenting in their commitment to gain nuclear weapons to effect the demise of Israel ultimately, and ultimately, to affect the goal of seeing sharia and jihad (sic) prevail over humanity. Those are strong words, but, unfortunately, they have the tragic disadvantage of being true.

And I'm just convinced that, if the reporters of the world will simply understand what the equation really is, that they will not only be helping Israel, not only be helping America, not only be helping freedom, but they'll be helping their own children walk in the same light of liberty some day.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Congressman, how will folks follow up with you? How would they get on your e-mail list or be in touch with your office?

REP. FRANKS: I'll give an office phone number: 202-225-4576. That's 202-252-4576.

Let me just leave this with you. With all of the great concerns that I have for Israel and the great concerns I have about peace in the world and the danger of jihad gaining a nuclear capability, all those things are dark and grave, really, beyond expression. But I also believe that the god of the universe has a special plan for America and for Israel and for the survival of peace on this planet and that we need to, as a part of that, need to be courageous and go forward and make sure that we do our part to defend our fellow human beings.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Congressman Trent Franks, we are just so grateful to have you with us today. Thank you for sharing your time, your talent, your commitment with the Israel Project. And approximately 400 people who are on the telephone with us today thank you so much for being with us.

REP. FRANKS: Thank all of you. Do not relent. The time is critically important. Thank you very much.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Thank you, Congressman.

We're just waiting right now for Ambassador Oren, who is currently dialing in to us. This is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, founder and president of the Israel Project, and you are listening to our bipartisan call with American leaders and Ambassador Oren.

We heard first from Congressman Brad Sherman from Sherman Oaks, California, who is on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Subcommittee and has been a leader on working to create solutions for alternative energy between Israel and America. He made some breaking news when he was on the call today when he said that Americans who work on the ships -- the flotillas that were headed towards Gaza that were trying to break the Gaza blockade -- that he will try to have them prosecuted for aiding and abetting terrorists, which is in violation of U.S. law.

Congressman Brad Sherman also said that he will look to make sure that the INS, America's immigration service, does not allow non-Americans -- foreigners -- who were a part of those flotillas the ability to have visas so that they can gain entrance into the United States of America.

Congressman Trent Franks expressed very deeply his concern over the threat of Iran and the different challenges that Israel faces today. This was the first time that Congressman Franks was on a call with the Israel Project, and he offered very many fresh perspectives.

I want to remind our listeners that the Israel Project is a non-partisan organization. Obviously, members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have their own views. We do not rate or endorse any political statements but are very happy we are able to bring both a Democratic and a Republican perspective to this conversation today.

I believe I heard a beep that might be Ambassador Oren on the line.

OPERATOR: I'm going to transfer Ambassador Oren in one second.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Okay. So let me start introducing Ambassador Michael Oren. Ambassador Michael Oren is the state of Israel's ambassador to the United States. A graduate of Princeton and Columbia, Dr. Oren has received fellowships from the United States Department of State and Defense and from the British and Canadian governments.

Formally, he was the Lady Davis fellow of Hebrew University, a Moshe Dayan fellow at Tel Aviv University, and the distinguished fellow at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard, Yale and Georgetown.

Ambassador Oren has written extensively for the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, New Republic where he was a contributing editor. His two most recent books, "Six Days of War June 1967" and "The Making of Modern Middle East: Power, Faith and Fantasy, America in the Middle East 1776 to Present" were both New York Times best sellers. They won the Los Angeles Times History Book of the Year prize and a National Council of the Humanities Award and the National Jewish book Award.

Raised in New Jersey where he was an activist in the Zionist youth movement and a gold-medal winning athlete in the Maccabiah Games, Ambassador Oren moved to Israel in the 1970s. He served as an officer in the IDF in the paratroopers in the Lebanon war, a liaison to the U.S. Sixth Fleet during the Gulf War, and as an IDF spokesman during the second Lebanon war and the Gaza operation in 2009.

He acted as an Israeli emissary to the Jewish refuseniks in the Soviet Union, as an adviser to Israel's delegation to the United Nations, and as the government's director of interreligious affairs. He has testified before Congress and briefed the White House on Middle Eastern affairs.

Ambassador Oren is married to Sally, and they have three children, Yoav, Lia and Noam.

If you want to see his new New York Times editorial, which was quite fantastic, you can see it, "An Assault Cloaked in Peace," that appeared on June 2, 2010. We did a link to it on the invitation to the program today with Ambassador Oren, and several of his recent TV appearances are on our Web site.

If you go to www.TheIsraelProject.org/flotilla, you'll see a slew of videos that will include those provided by the IDF of what actually happened on the ship; and many of the interviews with Ambassador Oren; and, indeed, also the prime minister of Israel's recent statement also on what happened on the ship.

Is the Ambassador with us at this moment? (No response.) It appears he's still dialing in.

I know that it's been a very busy time for him -- spending a lot of time at the White House and with other officials. I was delighted to be able to spend 30 minutes with him yesterday going over current events. It is quite a dramatic moment in Israel's history.

While we're waiting for the congressmen, I want to remind our listeners that today four rockets hit Israel -- four rockets hit southern Israel. So that when people talk about this "delivery of humanitarian supplies," quote, unquote, to Gaza, what we are seeing is that there is a really dramatic need to make sure that rockets are not being shot into southern Israel.

The Israel Project had an office in Sderot and was there during the Gaza wars. Such a traumatic time to see, after Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. I was in Gaza in 2005 during the withdrawal. Ambassador Oren, who was in a different capacity at that time, was also in the Gaza in 2005. It was August. It was 117 degrees on one of the days that we were there, watching thousands of Jews who were living in Gaza -- some of them born in that area, being pulled from their homes so that Israel could give up Gaza with hopes of peace.

So it is very important to remember that Gaza used to be, quote, unquote, "occupied by Israel;" but as of 2005, 9,000 Israeli citizens, men, women and children, all evacuated from Israel (sic) with hopes of jump-starting the peace process, moving towards a Two-state solution. Even the cemetery in Gaza was evacuated. All Jews, both alive and dead, were brought out of Gaza so that it could be ready for a new start for the Palestinians.

I remember very deeply how then the Palestinians were even given a number of greenhouses so they could start their own farming, and how those greenhouses were torn down, very sadly, and causing more harm. Since then, Israel's --

OPERATOR: I'm sorry to interrupt. Ambassador Oren is ready.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Fabulous.

Ambassador Michael Oren --

OPERATOR: One second, please.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Ambassador Oren, we're very grateful that you're on the call with us today. We've given a formal introduction of your biography, but you are somebody who our listeners need no introduction to.

We'd like you to please give an opening set of remarks, and if you can then do Q & A with us, we would be so grateful. And Ambassador, we're standing with you at this time, and so grateful for what you are doing to help protect Israel, and we appreciate your time.

AMB. OREN: (No response.)

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Ambassador?

OPERATOR: Ambassador Oren is on the line.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Thank you very much.

Ambassador, we're ready for your comments. Thank you so much for joining us.

AMB. OREN: Jennifer, thanks. Okay.

I've come in in the middle of this and I don't know what you've discussed already -- general Middle-Eastern policies. But I think that my principal interest today is to talk about the episode that has been occupying us since Monday morning -- at 2:00 in the morning, the Turkish flotilla.

A little bit of background for those of you unfamiliar with the history of this particular incident: And that is that Israel, since the Gaza evacuation in 2005, and with greater force after the overthrow of -- since the election of Hamas, the overthrow of the Fatah government in Gaza, and the firing of 10,000 missiles from Gaza into, at civilian targets in Israel, has imposed a naval blockade on Gaza.

The blockade is intended to prevent the shipment of large-scale -- of large amounts of rockets and other munitions to the Gaza Strip. To this point, the Gazans have access to munitions through the tunnels -- through roughly 1,000 tunnels under the Egyptian border.

But it's hard to get a rocket through a tunnel. They can come in maybe one at a time, and then piecemeal at that. But if you have a ship coming in, they can get them thousands at a time. And Israel, in the past, has intercepted three such ships massively laden with munitions meant for Hezbollah and Hamas. So we know that that possibility exists.

We also maintain a partial land blockade around Gaza. We allow through vital food stuffs and medicines. But certain items are listed as contraband, particularly construction materials which we believe can be used by Hamas not to build schools and homes, but to build military infrastructures -- bunkers. With that, we have been letting amounts of construction materials through to Gaza to end -- where the end destination is clear, such as a recent shipment of cement and iron rods to UNRWA for the construction of an UNRWA school -- a U.N. school. So that is on.

The land-based blockade is designed not only to keep weapons out of Gaza, but to keep a certain amount of pressure on the Hamas regime to release our captured soldier, Gilad Shalit, who has now been four years in illegal captivity without access to outside visitors, or the Red Cross, in violation of all international law.

And with that, we still have Hamas. Hamas is a regime that is dedicated to destroy Israel. If you look at its covenant, it is dedicated not only to destroy the Jewish state, but to destroy the Jews worldwide. It's a genocidal organization linked with the Brotherhood in Egypt, and allied with Iran. In fact, Hamas takes its orders from Iran.

So the question of a naval blockade of the Gaza Strip is simply not an option for Israel. There is no way that we can open the sea lanes to these rockets, which now have a range of -- to reaching Tel Aviv, but they will soon be able to reach any city in the State of Israel. It is a matter of vital, vital national security.

And were Hamas allowed access to these weaponry, then the Palestinian Authority would probably also crumble on the West Bank and there'd be no peace process. No peace. A direct route to war. That would be the result of any breakdown in our naval blockade.

Now, in the past few years we have intercepted nine such flotillas, all of which without violence. In this particular flotilla, there were six ships. Five were directed to an Israeli port without violence. One of these ships put up a -- put up a fight.

And to understand that, you have to understand that this ship came from Turkey. It was a -- it was a ship that was under the control of I.H.H., a ship that is -- an organization that has been linked, by Israeli, American and other foreign intelligence agencies, with radical extremist groups, including al Qaeda.

Members of this organization chanted the equivalent of "Death to the Jews. Death to the Jews," before getting on-board. Some of them made martyrdom tapes before getting on-board. And they came on-board armed with iron rods, knives; possibly weapons -- we're still investigating that because we found several cartridges on-board, spent cartridges that did not match Israeli weaponry and several of our soldiers were shot.

The flotilla was met in the open sea, far from the coast, for the simple reason that Hezbollah has rockets that can reach 65 miles out to sea; and they have certainly machineguns, light weapons that could shoot several miles out to sea. And it was feared, for our -- for the troops' safety, indeed, the safety of the people aboard the flotilla, that this operation take place outside the sea -- outside the territorial waters of Israel. Gaza does not have territorial waters because it's not a sovereign state.

And that is in complete conformity with international law. By international law, a naval blockade against a hostile entity -- ships belonging or destined for that hostile entity can be intercepted on the open seas. That is precisely how the United States and its allies maintained their naval blockade of Germany and Japan during World War II.

The operation was very complex. You know, the Israeli commandos landing on-board had no idea what they would encounter there. They could have encountered women and children, and so they did not use tear gas, especially in a closed environment with 600 people aboard that ship. They could not use the technical means that we use to disabled lighter ships because this ship was very, very big.

We did not have the technical means to stop it, so they had to board it. And they boarded armed with paint guns, hoping to disperse the crowd. But a specially paid mercenary force of the I.H.H. -- basically, a bunch of large thugs, were prepositioned on the deck where our soldiers landed.

They had divided into platoons. They were armed, and they set upon our soldiers. Whereupon, in order to save their own lives, these soldiers were forced to resort to their sidearms and literally save their lives.

We have one story of a soldier whose gun had been taken away from him. He was shot. One of these thugs had pointed the gun at his head, and only his friend's quick reactions saved him.

And as a result of this action, as you well know, nine people were killed, several dozen wounded. And the ship was subdued, brought to port. By the way, the cargoes of all six ships were transferred to Gaza minus the construction materials. But Hamas refused to receive them.

Now, there's been much talk about our relationship with Turkey. And, certainly, I can only say that our policy has not changed, but Turkey's policy has changed very much over the last few years. Under a different government with an Islamic orientation, Turkey has turned away from the West and has cancelled its maneuvers with us.

There was sort of a misinformation disseminated this week that maneuvers were cancelled because of this incident but, of course, the maneuvers were cancelled last year. And this year, we were not invited to participate in the maneuvers. And all this happened well in advance of this episode.

Turkey has embraced the leaders of Iran, of Hamas, all of whom call for Israel's destruction. There's a tremendous amount of anti-Semitism. Now even on the Turkish television airwaves, a less than well-disposed atmosphere toward Israel reigns in Turkey.

Prior to this episode, Israel had reached out to Turkey. And in an attempt to persuade Turkish leaders to rein in this flotilla, and failing that, at least it convinced the organizer of the flotilla to transfer the cargoes to Israeli authorities in the southern Israeli city of Ashdod. The cargoes would have been vetted, and they would have been transferred to responsible parties in Gaza.

Egypt, by the way, made a very similar offer. In both cases, we were refused.

Also refused was a request we had given through the Turks to the flotilla organizers that aid packages be conveyed to Gilad Shalit. They turned that down, too.

So a very energetic and good-faith effort was rejected. Turkey claimed that it could not control its NGOs, but it wanted it both ways. Once the NGOs got into trouble, all of a sudden, it's a paramount Turkish issue.

We certainly do not see -- have any desire and any further deterioration in our relations with Turkey. It's an important Middle Eastern power. It has been a friend in the past, and we hope that the Turks understand that, if they want to be players in the Middle East, we'll also seek to stem any further deterioration. But, you know, we haven't seen a lessening of the verbal attacks on us by the Turks even today, and I can't say where this is going with any certainty.

Our relationship with the Obama administration -- the Obama administration was very understanding during the entire week. During that entire week, and I say this without reservation, I did not hear a word of rancor from anybody in the administration. They understood our predicament.

With that, the administration has asked that the Israeli investigation into this incident include some type of international component on the South Korea model. The Israeli government is considering this, but there are great reservations in Israel to this. The fear is that this will create a precedent through which Israel will be subject to international scrutiny every time it acts to defend itself from Hamas and that our soldiers will be branded war criminals on the Goldstone model. So there's a significant amount of resistance to the idea, but we are discussing it.

We also agree with Secretary of State Clinton when she says that the status quo on Gaza is not sustainable. We, too, would like to see an improvement in the status quo, and we are open to any ideas that will help us balance our desire to meet the civil needs of the population in Gaza -- the Palestinian population -- reconciling that with our very real security needs.

There have been lots of ideas, you know, floated around the last few days of some type of international supervision, but we've had some very bad experiences with international supervision. The international force in Lebanon was supposed to have disarmed Hezbollah. Hezbollah has more than tripled its rocket arsenal under the aegis of these international observers. We've tried open borders with European

observers, and Hamas chased them all away. There is no quick solution here. There's no magic wand is what I want to tell you.

As of the next few hours, we know that at least two more ships are steaming our way, and we will maintain our blockade all the time trying to convince the host government -- in this case, Ireland -- to accept our offer. Let the boats come peacefully into an Israeli port. We will assist in unloading the cargo. We'll vet the cargo. We will transfer it to responsible figures in Gaza.

If these flotillas are genuinely interested in the welfare of the people of Gaza, they'll do this. If they're not interested in the welfare of Gaza, then they will -- if what they're interested in is a political provocation, then, you know, we simply will not be able to let them pass. We cannot take a precedent of having open sea lanes to munitions ships to Gaza.

In the interim, we continue the policy of letting about a hundred trucks a day laden with food and medicine to Gaza. There is a shortage of neither food nor medicine, and that will be our policy until we can find a better formula.

So I'll stop there and entertain from questions, if you have them.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Ambassador, the first question is actually on the status of your soldiers. How are they recuperating? What is the extent of their injuries? And what is their status?

AMB. OREN: I do not have an accurate update on that. I know that two of the soldiers were seriously wounded. Two of the soldiers had sustained gun-shot wounds. One of them had severe head injuries, and they're still recovering.

All together, about nine of our soldiers were wounded.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: A question from National Public Radio, Michele Kelemen, asks: How concerned are you -- and you've really started to address this -- but how concerned are you about the rift in the Turkish-Israeli relations? David Ignatius suggested in a column this week that Turkey could be even more dangerous foes than Hamas.

AMB. OREN: I'm sorry. I missed the last sentence. Excuse me?

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: David Ignatius suggested in a column this week that Turkey could be an even more dangerous foe than Hamas.

AMB. OREN: Well, no one wants to, you know, to get into a permanent state of enmity with the Turks. Turkey is a massive nation -- 70 million people at least -- with a very powerful armed force. And it's a traditional friend of Israel.

So we are not looking, certainly, to engage in further disagreements or tensions with Turkey. We are actually exploring ways to ameliorate the situation. Our defense minister has spoken with the foreign minister of Turkey, but the Turks, as of yet -- I think I said earlier -- do not show any signs of wanting to seek a sort of an amelioration of the situation without putting all sorts of conditions on us which we will be, you know -- which is not, I think, the way friends operate -- friends and allies operate in the world.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Congressman Brad Sherman, who was on this call earlier, made news by saying that he would like to see the United States of America enforce legislation that we have in terms of aiding and abetting terrorists; that anyone who, as an American citizen aboard the ships, be told that they will be prosecuted for aiding and abetting terrorists under a 1996 law. And he has said that he would like to ask

the U.S. immigrations service to make sure that anyone who was aboard the ships who was not an American be put on a do-not-enter list so that they cannot enter America.

Did you have a list? Does Israel have a list of the passengers on the ships?

AMB. OREN: I believe our list is partial because they would not cooperate with us in identifying themselves.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Question from Alan Friedman asks: Ambassador Oren, in light of the discovery of non-Israeli cartridges on the ship, were autopsies performed to determine whether it was truly Israeli bullets that were the cause of death?

AMB. OREN: To the best of my knowledge, we did not conduct autopsies.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: A question from Inter Press Service from Ali Gharib asks: Can you expand to the ties that you have alleged on CNN between al Qaeda and the activists aboard the flotilla? Was this specifically referring to the IHH? The IDF walked back a press release stating that members of al Qaeda were aboard the flotilla ships. Do you stand by your statement? You cited the CIA, an assertion that the Israeli embassy in Washington could not back up, it says, when pressured.

AMB. OREN: I disagree. I never made the statement that there were al Qaeda agents on board the ship. I don't know about that. But we have documented a CIA report and a report from a Danish research institute, even from the previous Turkish government, connections between IHH and radical Islamic groups, including Hamas, including Islamic jihad and al Qaeda and that the IHH has been involved in jihadist groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and elsewhere. And it's all documented.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: I have a question from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, from a staffer who asks: What do you make of a recent report in the New York Times quoting an unnamed member of the Israeli government saying that it would, quote, "explore new ways," unquote, of allowing humanitarian goods to reach Gaza?

AMB. OREN: I think that we're well disposed to that. Again, we're not at war with the people of Gaza. We're at war with Hamas. Hamas is at war with us. And we have no interest in, you know, certainly elevating, escalating any discomfort within Gaza. So I think we will be interested in exploring ideas.

But once again, I caution, we have to balance our concern for the welfare of the people of Gaza with our very real concern for the safety and survival of the people of Israel.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Neal Borovitz asks you to comment on press reports that the Israeli government is suggesting that the Quartet take over responsibility for searching ships for contraband.

AMB. OREN: That has not been -- I'm not sure if I understood the question. Please repeat it.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: The question is if you are suggesting that the Quartet take over responsibility for searching the ships that are going towards Gaza.

AMB. OREN: I have not heard that suggestion.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Okay. And another question is: Why is America not being more vocal in supporting Israel's demand for the release of Gilad Shalit?

AMB. OREN: We are closely communicating with the United States about the Gilad Shalit issue, and we have had offers of assistance from the United States. Sometimes, we have availed ourselves of those

offers, sometimes, not. This has been done by very, very quiet channels that are far removed from the public eye.

And the state of Israel, the government of Israel is deeply committed to securing Gilad Shalit's release. It's a delicate issue.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: World News asks three questions. The first is: Is there any indication that President Obama is going to attempt a Madrid-type peace conference? The second question --

AMB. OREN: No. (Laughs.) Okay. Next?

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: The second is: How close are we to a major confrontation between Israel and Iran?

AMB. OREN: Right now, Israel is committed to the sanctions process. We hope that next week -- as early as next week, a fourth U.N. Security Council sanctions resolution will be passed and that will serve as a platform for launching multilateral, bilateral, perhaps, in the case of the United States, unilateral sanctions against Iran which may prove effective in bringing about a modification of Iranian behavior.

We're particularly focused on the energy component -- denying Iran refined petroleum products that they have to import as well as interdicting exports of Iranian petroleum products. So that is where we are right now. We're focused on the sanctions. We have to see if they work.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Ambassador, we have only three more minutes. I know your time is so precious. You gave us a big window of your time on such a busy day.

With only three minutes left, there are 400 people on the call, many of them are supporters of Israel. What would you like to see in terms of support from those who do support Israel?

AMB. OREN: Well, we've had a hard week, as you know. The press scrutiny on this issue has just been almost unprecedented. And what has actually transpired here?

An attempt was made to break a blockade which is essential for Israel's safety, which is essential for the peace process. Israeli soldiers, armed with paintball guns, attempted to interdict this flotilla, and they were assaulted and attacked brutally by a radical Islamic group.

And who ended up at the end of the week or during the course of the week being charged? It was Israel. We were on the defensive. We were on the defensive. We need every assistance you can muster to uphold our right to defend ourselves, to uphold our right to judge ourselves, to inspect and investigate ourselves as a democracy. We need awareness of what the breaking of the blockade will mean not only for Israel, for the peace process.

People who care about the peace process should be the biggest exponents of the Gaza blockade. And that awareness is just not out there.

And so my message to you is: Help us get the message out there. We are a small staff in this embassy, and in the conflicts around the United States, we've put in a lot of work this week, many, many hours. We need more help, and we would certainly appreciate it.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Ambassador Michael Oren, we wish you a peaceful Shabbat. We hope that the issues with Rachel Corrie ship, the new flotilla coming in, that it goes smoothly and safely. I know that the leader of the Palestinians, Abbas, is coming to Washington to meet with President Obama on Wednesday, and we hope that Prime Minister Netanyahu will come soon.

Know, no matter what the events are, that you're doing a fantastic job representing the state of Israel. We're so delighted to have you as a guest in our country representing the state of Israel, and we're pleased to have you as a guest with the Israel Project today.

So we wish you a Shabbat shalom.

AMB. OREN: Thank you. Shabbat shalom to you, too.

Jennifer Lazlo Mizrahi: Thank you.

END.