

Israel is a strategic US ally in the Middle East: When the American Empire falls, Israel will be Weakened

Interview with Joshua Frank

By [Kourosh Ziabari](#)

Global Research, July 12, 2010

11 July 2010

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Joshua Frank is an American progressive journalist and noted anti-war columnist. His articles and commentaries have appeared on CounterPunch, Z Magazine, AntiWar.com, Truthout and Alternet. He is author of "Left Out! How Liberals Helped Reelect George W. Bush" and co-editor with Jeffrey St. Clair of Red State Rebels: Tales of Grassroots Resistance in the Heartland.

Joshua took part in an interview with me to discuss the latest developments in the Middle East region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the prospect of Israel-U.S. relations, the recent controversy over the Freedom Flotilla attack and the media propaganda against Iran. Here is the complete text of our interview.

Kourosh Ziabari: What's the main reason behind the United States' unconditional support for the state of Israel? In his early days of assuming office, President Obama failed to address the international community's concern regarding the Operation Cast Lead in which the Israeli forces killed more than 1,300 Palestinian citizens. Moreover, it seems that the United States has retreated from its stance regarding the ongoing Israeli settlements on the Palestinian lands. Why is the relationship between the United States and Israel so profound that makes Israel immune to international law? Why is the United States always "committed" to the security of Israel?

Joshua Frank: I believe that the U.S.'s seemingly unconditional support of Israel is a complicated, multifaceted issue. First and foremost, Israel is a strategic ally for the U.S. interests in the region. As you know, there aren't many countries in the Middle East that support the United States' military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, nor do many countries see much of the benefit of the U.S. companies' profiting from their imperial resource extraction ventures. So Israel plays a powerful role in supporting the U.S. in these endeavors, if not directly, then at least politically and tactically. Military-wise, Israel is the most powerful country in the area, with a large nuclear cache and airports that serve the U.S. military uses often for its endeavors. After the Camp David Accords the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers actually helped construct Israeli Air Bases in the Negev Desert.

Likewise, Israel needs the U.S. to support its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories. Without U.S. backing, the Israel government could not afford its ongoing military forays. Indeed, the U.S. also plays a substantial role in deflecting criticism of Israel's ongoing human rights violations, whether by flexing muscle on the UN Security Council or in the

court of public opinion. Israel can most often rely on the U.S. to support its actions, illegal or otherwise, be they the invasion on Lebanon or the recent Flotilla attack. A lot of critics of Israel point their finger solely at the pro-Israeli lobby in the U.S. as the primary reason behind the U.S. close relationship to Israel. While the lobby is certainly strong, the U.S. Empire is stronger, and in fact I would argue, actually uses the Israel lobby to its benefit. It's a symbiotic relationship, and not entirely one-sided as many Zionist-conspiracy theorists seem to argue.

KZ: Israel possesses up to 200 nuclear warheads and this figure is confirmed by a number of international organizations, including the Federation of American Scientists; however, it's Iran which is being pressured over its nuclear program. How do the United States and its European allies justify their double standards regarding Iran's nuclear program? There's no proof that Iran has moved towards building nuclear weapons, but everybody knows that the Israeli nuclear technician Mordecai Vanunu has released the evidences which indicate that Israel has accumulated a number of nuclear bombs in its arsenal. What's your idea?

JF: I think you sort of answered your own question. The U.S. doesn't have to justify their double standards to anyone, especially not the international community. It's also about how the western world views itself, that our actions are always genuine and justified. Through this distorted lens Israel can view itself as the victim and not the perpetrator. So whereas Iran's alleged nuclear program, real or mythical, is seen as a threat, Israel's existing arsenal that could detonate the entire Middle East is for peace of mind, because you just never know when those darn Arabs will attack for no reason at all!

It may sound ridiculous, sure, but there are many people who follow this line of thinking. Of course, they can blame it on militant strains of Islam, which certainly has its problems, but by and large the outrage directed toward Israel is cross-sectional because so many of the country's policies are overtly arrogant. Of course, even within the country you have plenty of lively dissent, much of which does not get its due attention in the mainstream press. Vanunu is one historical figure example of this movement, a movement that is growing by the day.

KZ: Iran is under the spates of black propaganda by the western mainstream media. The western media depict Iranian nation as a backward, uncivilized and extremist people. How is it possible to acquaint the western public with the unseen and concealed realities of Iran?

JF: I think the new media is already breaking through this propaganda very effectively. I also believe there are plenty of people in western countries that know governments don't always represent the interests of the masses. The Iranian government is reckless to be sure, but that doesn't mean all Iranians agree with every single policy; same story for voting Jews that live in Israel. It is naive to think all Jews support the occupation of Palestine. Many do of course, but there are many that also believe it is illegal, unjust and counterproductive to achieving peace in the region.

The bigger issue is that Westerners are consistently inundated with misinformation. The U.S. government for example, has to continually sedate its citizens into compliance. It's brilliantly executed time and again and it's the reason why the antiwar movement, for instance, is virtually non-existent in this country at the moment. Even those that oppose the escalation of war in Afghanistan are by and large silent. That wasn't the case during the Bush era, where a surge in troop levels combined failure of an exit strategy would have

forced tens of thousands into the streets. But since liberals and progressives now have their liberal Obama, mums the word. They've been scared into complacency by the propaganda of "change" and "hope". They are literally afraid to resist the man they worked so hard to elect. It's a special kind of trepidation. Meanwhile, the PATRIOT Act gets reaffirmed, billions more is passed for war funding and U.S. soldiers continue to die in two endless, directionless wars.

KZ: It seems that whoever wants to rise to prominence as a potential choice for presidency in the United States should avow his commitment to the security and stability of Israel, even at the cost of killing thousands of people or destructing the other countries. As you quoted him in one of your articles, Barack Obama had told a crowd of pro-Israeli Americans that he would never put the military option off the table concerning Iran's nuclear program. My question is that, is the Israeli lobby so powerful and influential in the United States that even determines the destiny of White House?

JF: It's bigger than that, I think. Like I said, it's not the lobby that determines the destiny of the White House, it is the Empire apparatus that does. For example, Obama, had he challenged U.S. imperialism during his campaign and tenure in the Senate, would never have been supported by the arms industry, the oil companies and the like. The Israel lobby is just one of these major forces and shouldn't be viewed in isolation. The energy cartels, I think, have just as much or even more sway over the administration, as the catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico so boldly symbolizes. Same goes for the corporate GM food giants, the pharmaceutical industry, military contractors among others. Ultimately it is about corporate and military domination of public policy and the pro-Israel lobby is one of the big players, but not the only one that holds the US government and the U.S. people hostage.

KZ: Some analysts believe that Israel has paved the ground for its growing isolation by unjustifiably attacking the Freedom Flotilla. As an instance, the government of Nicaragua decided to sever its diplomatic ties with Israel. What's your estimation? Will the state of Israel succeed in getting through with this pivotal juncture safely?

JF: The Freedom Flotilla was a horrific, bloody episode that will surely be notched up as another military defeat for Israel. Anytime this sort of thing happens, Israel has to work overtime to save face. Previously, and to a greater extent, I think the attack on Lebanon for dubious reasons was also a blemish for Israel power. They ended up having to halt their excursions and bombings because the international community by-and-large believed their actions were not justified.

I think, as Alexander Cockburn and others have pointed out, that this is an example of Israel's power rapidly dwindling. The fact that Israel felt threatened by a Freedom Flotilla should be enough for anyone to realize that their use of force was not only illegal under international law, but unethical and a sign that they are losing the fight they started. Such bullying acts won't win Israel many new supporters; it will only harden its militarist admirers.

KZ: Israel's ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren has called the IDF incursion into the Freedom Flotilla a human and responsible action. He likened the massacre of civilians onboard the Freedom Flotilla to the America's fight against the Nazi Germany in the Second World War. What do you think about what he has said?

JF: Honestly I don't think much about it. Military talking heads like Oren are pure vessels of propaganda. They will do whatever they can, soul already sold, to defend Israeli military

actions. Internationally such rhetoric is taken at face value: never believe half of what Israel taking heads say — or any other political leaders for that matter — who spout in defense of such brutal actions. If anything, Oren is quite adept at employing the very Nazi propaganda he so despises.

KZ: It's widely believed that the political regime of Israel will immediately collapse should the White House lift its support to Tel Aviv. Is it possible for Israel to survive without the U.S. backing? Will the influence of Israeli lobby over the corporate government of the United States allow any independent president to rise to power and oppose to Israel ideologically?

JF: Israel would certainly survive without U.S. backing, but in a much more modest capacity. As a supporter of a one state solution, I don't believe any peace between Palestine and Israel will occur until the U.S. takes a more brokered approach. If Israel makes concessions and the U.S. backs off its monetary support, the international community will ensure that a new Israel, one that is truly democratic and less economically stratified, will survive in its place. I think that the American people would support a candidate that spoke truth to power with regard to Israel. They really haven't had a chance to do it. Would the lobby accept this? Not likely, but nor would any of the other corporate and military powers that capitalize on American intentions in the Middle East.

KZ: What do you think about the U.S. and UK mainstream media which are said to be controlled by the Zionist owners and media moguls such as Rupert Murdoch? How do these media outlets shape reach-out to their international audiences and shape their opinions?

JF: Biased news and commentary is just that, biased, and plenty of outlets spew gross lies and propaganda. However, the new media is breaking ground every day. Here in the U.S. Glenn Greenwald's analysis has become widely read, mainly because it's free and uncensored on the web. As a result of his popularity, he is consistently being interviewed in the mainstream press and on popular cable news programs. This is just one example of alternative views making their way to the public. The freer the media, the more informed the public and the less censorship that ultimately occurs. So I'm hopeful that the Murdochs of the world will continually be challenged by this new reality.

KZ: What's your prediction for the destiny of Israel in the Middle East? With a U.S. government which offers its unconditional support to Tel Aviv and the EU countries that follow the U.S. trajectory passively, can Israel rescue itself from the growing isolation it's facing internationally?

JF: Israel will have to make large and significant compromises if it is to survive as a Jewish state. The world is watching their every move very closely. Despite the media blackout and the power of pro-Israel forces, the plight of Palestinians is being exposed daily, not only in other countries, but within Israel itself. Israelis are not all in support of the occupation and do not by any means believe it makes them any safer. On the contrary, it makes them less safe.

The bigger question is, can the U.S. survive in its current state? Can the U.S. continue to exploit the resources and people of the Middle East for its own profit and greed? Can it abuse and exploit its own people for much longer? I don't believe so. Our economy is crumbling and our military is overextended and local budgets continue to dip into the red. We simply cannot continue to expand U.S. Empire. And when the U.S. Empire falls, Israel's power and ego will be deflated as well. Again, it's a symbiotic relationship and intimately

intertwined.

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