



ISRAEL NEWS
A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee
of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

ready to transform Judea and Samaria into a base for global jihadist forces just as occurred when Israel surrendered Gaza's border with Egypt in 2005.

That the government is squandering the IDF's hard-won achievements in Judea and Samaria is made clear in a paper on counterinsurgency warfare authored by Major General (res.) Yaakov Amidror released this week by

the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Amidror's paper, "Winning Counterinsurgency War: The Israeli Experience," focuses on Israel's military defeat of Palestinian terror forces in Judea and Samaria during and subsequent to Operation Defensive Shield.

AMIDROR IDENTIFIES six components of counterinsurgency warfare which he deems essential for effecting military victory over irregular forces. These components are: a political decision by the government to defeat terrorism; winning and maintaining control of the territory from which terrorists operate; acquiring relevant intelligence; isolating the terror enclaves from outside supporters; multidimensional cooperation between intelligence gatherers and fighting forces; and separating civilians from terrorists. Through its actions, the Olmert-Livni-Barak government it is undermining four of these components.

After identifying what he views as the essential components of successful counterinsurgency campaigns, Amidror identifies and defines three forms of military victory. First, there is "total victory" which involves both a military defeat of insurgent or terror forces and the political reorganization of their societies from terror-supporting societies into terror-combating societies. Second, there is "temporary victory" which involves a one-off military defeat of enemy forces which is not combined with any political transformation of their societies. Finally, Amidror considers what he refers to as "sufficient victory." As he defines it, a sufficient victory involves defeating an irreconcilable foe and then preventing him from rebuilding his capacity to wage war.

Like a temporary victory, a sufficient victory doesn't entail any political transformation of enemy society, and indeed it takes for granted that such a transformation is impossible to enact.

But as opposed to a temporary victory, Amidror argues that the effect of a sufficient victory can be longstanding if the victorious side is willing and able to consistently prevent enemy forces from reconstituting themselves. That is, a sufficient victory requires a continuous rather than one-off campaign.

Amidror's definition of sufficient victory leads him to conclude that contrary to the approach of the Israeli and Western Left, there is a military option for victory in counterinsurgency wars devoid of political transformation. From an Israeli perspective, Amidror's vision of counterinsurgency warfare view is reasonable and understandable.

Israel's options for transforming Palestinian society from a terror-supporting society to a terror-combating society are limited. Influenced by domestic, pan-Arab and pan-Islamic jihadist indoctrination; supported militarily, financially and politically by Arab states, Iran, terror groups and the West, the Palestinians have little reason to transform.

MOREOVER, ISRAEL'S strategic and national interests in maintaining control over Judea and Samaria could render sustainable a military strategy with no withdrawal element. This is not the case in other battlefields such as the US counterinsurgency in Iraq.

To a degree, Amidror's view that sufficient victory is possible is echoed in recent statements by US military commanders in Iraq. In a dispatch from Iraq published last month in National Review, Richard Lowry reported, "For all the security gains over the last year, American commanders believe they have hit a plateau." Absent coherent, competent action by the Iraqi government to secure and maintain the loyalty of Iraqis to the Iraqi state, like

Events...

Tuesday, May 6, 8:00 PM

Westmount Shul presents Rabbi Seth Mandell speaking on "Insanity or Inspiration: Why Risk Living in Israel" at their closing program for "60 Days for 60 Years: Israel", at BAYT

Quote of the Week...

"The PLO... has not changed its platform even one iota...when the ideology of Israel collapses, and we take, at least, Jerusalem, the Israeli ideology will collapse in its entirety, and we will begin to progress with our own ideology, Allah willing, and drive them out of all of Palestine." - PLO ambassador to Lebanon Abbas Zaki

Commentary...

What Is a Sufficient Victory? By Caroline Glick

Speaking to IDF commanders in Judea and Samaria last week, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert exhorted the officers tasked with preventing Palestinians from attacking Israel while operating under civilian cover to have sympathy for them. Olmert said "Take all the Palestinians who have been stripped at the roadblocks just because of fear that there may be terrorists and terror operatives among them. Take all those who wait at roadblocks because of fear that a car bomb may drive through the same roadblock. This could be a boiling cauldron, liable to explode and cause horrible burns, and it could be something else, dependent only on your ability to act wisely and forcefully."

Since Olmert knows that IDF soldiers are as courteous as possible to Palestinians at roadblocks, his statement will have two major consequences. First it will cause a loosening of regulations at roadblocks and so impair IDF counterterror capabilities. Second, by insultingly insinuating that IDF forces are cruel, Olmert demoralized his own soldiers and reduced their willingness to accomplish their mission by hinting that they cannot expect the government to back them.

Olmert's message is just the latest action his government has taken in recent weeks that undermine the IDF's ability to maintain its military success since 2002 in defeating Palestinian terrorists in Judea and Samaria and preventing them from reorganizing.

The Olmert-Livni-Barak government's decision to take down roadblocks throughout Judea and Samaria; provide immunity from arrest to wanted terror fugitives; and permit the deployment of US-backed Fatah militias in Jenin all serve to directly undermine the IDF's remarkable achievements in defeating and preventing the reconstitution of the Palestinian terror war machine in Judea and Samaria since Operation Defensive Shield was carried out in 2002. Even more disturbingly, its reported willingness to cede the Jordan Valley to Fatah in the negotiations it is now conducting with Fatah leaders Mahmoud Abbas and Ahmed Qurei indicate that the Olmert-Livni-Barak government is

חג כשר ושמה

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the IDF in Judea and Samaria, all US forces in Iraq can do is keep violence down to sufferable levels.

Yet in contrast to Israel's success in Judea and Samaria, the success of US counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq is the consequence first and foremost of their politically-transformative guiding principles. As Lowry noted, the 80,000 Iraqi security volunteers who now openly collaborate with US forces in counter-terror operations, "represent more or less a direct transfer of forces from the enemy's side to ours."

In Israel, the basic assumption that guided both the decision by the Rabin-Peres government to embrace the PLO and form the Palestinian Authority in 1993 and the decisions by subsequent governments to leave the PA in place and maintain allegiance to the PLO as a negotiating partner was that like the Iraqi security volunteers, and like the South Lebanese Army which supported IDF operations in South Lebanon from 1985 through 2000, PLO and Fatah forces would act as transformative agents in Palestinian society moving it from a terror-supporting society to a terror-combating society.

This view, always controversial, has been proven wrong again and again. Just last week, the PLO ambassador to Lebanon Abbas Zaki restated the PLO's aim of destroying Israel in an interview with Lebanese television.

In Zaki's words, "The PLO... has not changed its platform even one iota." That platform, to destroy Israel in stages, remains the objective of the PLO. He continued, "In light of the weakness of the Arab nation and the lack of values, and in light of the American control over the world, the PLO proceeds through phases, without changing its strategy. Let me tell you, when the ideology of Israel collapses, and we take, at least, Jerusalem, the Israeli ideology will collapse in its entirety, and we will begin to progress with our own ideology, Allah willing, and drive them out of all of Palestine."

Israel's willingness to maintain its support for the PLO in spite of the PLO and Fatah's obvious rejection of Israel's right to exist and their continuous support and involvement in terror attacks against Israel exposes two flaws inherent in Amidror's view that it is possible to maintain a sufficient victory in counterinsurgency wars over the long term without inducing political transformation of enemy societies.

The first flaw is that it takes as a given that the will of the victorious army's government to maintain counterinsurgency operations will remain constant. The Olmert-Livni-Barak government's maintenance of the inherently adversarial Fatah terror group as a legitimate negotiating partner shows that this is not the case. The government's commitment to Fatah necessarily induces it to undermine IDF achievements in Judea and Samaria. Those achievements are inimical to the interests of Fatah and so, from the government's current perspective, they must be cancelled to please Fatah.

Since 2002, the IDF's military control over Judea and Samaria has not involved any serious efforts to transform Palestinian society on the grassroots level. It has not enhanced security for Palestinian civilians who are terrorized by terror operatives operating in their villages and towns. As Amidror notes, Israel's actions to separate civilians from terrorists in Judea and Samaria are limited to crafting operations that minimize collateral damage. But while Israel does not target Palestinian civilians, it has done nothing to prevent them from being targeted by Palestinian terrorists. And so, it has given them no option to fight those terrorists. As a consequence although militarily the situation in Judea and Samaria has been transformed over the past six years, politically, the only change among Palestinians is that they have become more radicalized.

And here lies the second flaw in his analysis. To be successful, a counterinsurgency war must have a political component that reaches out to enemy populations. While it is true that Israel has limited capacity to change the way that Palestinians think about Israel and the form their society ought to take, Israel does have some capacity. For instance, Israel could launch a hearts and minds campaign among Israeli Arabs who are both politically and demographically linked to the Palestinians.

Such a campaign would be two-pronged. First it would involve a concentrated law and order campaign whose aim would be to reassert Israel's sovereign authority in Israeli Arab areas. Second, it would secure law-abiding Israeli Arabs while delegitimizing the current anti-Israel, pro-terror leadership now in charge of Israeli Arab society and so cultivate the conditions necessary to replace that leadership with Israeli Arabs who embrace their identity as Israelis and oppose terrorism. The impact of such a campaign on the Palestinians in both Judea and Samaria would no doubt be dramatic.

Amidror makes the important point that there is no empirical data that proves the oft-repeated contention that terror-supporting societies are more willing to sacrifice for victory than terror-combating societies. As the Israeli public has shown since the Palestinians began their terror war in 2000, Israelis

are just as willing, if not more willing, to make sacrifices for victory as the Palestinians. But for victory to be accomplished and secured, a military campaign needs to be complimented by a political campaign led by a political leadership that explains reality to its own public and is able to give terror-supporting societies another option. (Jerusalem Post Apr 14)

Ehud Olmert Against the Israeli Zeitgeist By Efraim Inbar

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is negotiating the future of Jerusalem with his Palestinian interlocutors. Tzipi Livni, his minister for foreign affairs, admitted that all core issues "are on the table." Few know that before the July 2000 Camp David summit, the then Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, consulted with the mayor of Jerusalem, Olmert, on how to divide the city. Barak violated the taboo on Jerusalem by offering the Palestinians sovereignty on the Temple Mount. This elicited the largest rally ever held in Israel - over 250,000 people demonstrated against it. Barak's coalition disintegrated (for other reasons as well), leading to his political fall.

Today, Olmert is similarly desperate for reaching an agreement with the Palestinians before elections. Yet, no Israeli government is likely to survive concessions in Jerusalem under the current political constellation. The Israel Beiteinu party has already left the coalition in opposition to talks over permanent status issues, while the Shas party threatens to do likewise if the government discusses Jerusalem with the Palestinians. Even elements within the ruling Kadima party will likely desert the coalition if the Jerusalem issue is touched. At least one Laborite (Yoram Martziano) shares a similar position. If elections will be held in the near future, the strength of the opposition to concessions on Jerusalem will only grow.

Nevertheless, Olmert's arrogance leads him to believe that he knows better than his people what is good for the Jews. He ignores the will of the Knesset and is in the process of making concessions on Jerusalem without having the political mandate to do so.

Olmert is out of sync with the Israeli public. His popularity is very low and few trust him. For example, 60 percent of the electorate does not believe his disclaimer that he is not negotiating over Jerusalem. Moreover, his nonchalant attitude is not shared by his fellow countrymen. They look with trepidation at Olmert's intrigues to survive politically even if the price might be the division of Jerusalem.

THE POLLS on the issue of Jerusalem, including a recent survey conducted by the BESA Center for Strategic Studies, clearly indicate that over 70 percent of the Jews in Israel oppose relinquishing Israel's sovereignty over the Temple Mount, even if this will be necessary to lead to a peace treaty with the Palestinians. A similar amount of Israelis think it is unacceptable to have a Palestinian capital in the eternal city. In other words, an overwhelming proportion of Israelis are ready to forgo a peace treaty and continue the armed struggle against the Palestinians in order to assure Israel's sovereignty over the holiest place to the Jews. Their views show that they are not tired by the protracted conflict as Olmert, a hedonist, wrongly presumes.

Indeed, Olmert is not listening to the fears of his people. A large majority of the Israeli public believes that concessions in Jerusalem are dangerous to Israel's security. Significantly, 61 percent of the Jews in Israel do not believe that the division of the city within the context of an agreement with the Palestinians will end the conflict and put to rest Palestinian additional claims. Moreover, 69 percent believe that Palestinian terrorism will continue unabated even after concessions on the Temple Mount. A majority also believes that areas ceded in Jerusalem to the Palestinians will serve as terrorist bases and if holy places are transferred to Palestinian control, they will not be safeguarded.

Olmert arrogantly dismisses the national security concerns of Israel's citizenry. This is not only usurping Israeli democracy, but also prolonging the conflict by providing false hope to the Palestinians that they may gain a foothold in Jerusalem. Olmert's behavior whets the Palestinian appetite for concessions.

Finally, the partition of Jerusalem is simply a bad idea when the zeitgeist dictates uniting cities such as Berlin, Belfast or Nicosia. Why should Jerusalem be different?! Jews have held a majority in the city for the past 150 years. The Palestinian demand to apply the principle of self-determination to Ramallah is valid for Jerusalem as well. Even the Arab minority in the city has shown its preference for living under Israeli rule, as many have moved to the Israeli side of the security barrier being built around Jerusalem. Their choice is reasonable, as Jerusalem offers the quality of life of a modern Western city, while only a few kilometers away, a Third World standard of

living, chaos and religious intolerance are the norm. An undivided Jerusalem is the best guarantee for a better life for all Jerusalemites.

Olmert's irresponsible encouragement for the unreasonable Palestinian demand for dividing Jerusalem is dangerous. Days before Passover, when we join past generations of Jews in declaring "Next Year in Jerusalem," Olmert's insistence on dividing the city looks more lunatic than ever. (Jerusalem Post Apr 16)

The writer is professor of political studies at Bar-Ilan University and the director of its Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies.

Wanted: A Hebrew Fox News Channel By Michael Freund

Amid all the doom and gloom that seems to fill the news of late, here is a neat little statistic that offers a glimmer of hope.

Despite years of relentless propaganda and concerted media indoctrination, a majority of Israelis continue to hold patriotic views.

In its latest monthly peace index survey for March 2008, Tel Aviv University's Steinmetz Center for Peace Research found that, by a wide margin, the majority of Israeli Jews view Judea and Samaria, the heartland of the Jewish people, as "liberated" rather than "occupied" territory.

Summarizing their findings, the researchers noted that, "We were surprised to discover that even though, over the years, the concept of 'occupation' has become more common both in the political discourse and the media, today a majority of the Jewish public defines the West Bank as 'liberated territory' (55%) and not as 'occupied territory' (32%)."

This is an astonishing and welcome bit of data, for it demonstrates unequivocally just how strong and resilient the bond still is between the people of Israel and their land.

Even with the onslaught of negative portrayals of Jewish settlers over the years, and the persistently poison pens of various Israeli journalists, the bulk of Israelis have remained immune to the venom.

They continue to see this land as ours and have not allowed the mainstream media's cynicism and disapproval to cloud their most basic of instincts.

No less interesting were several other findings contained in the survey, which further underline the durability of the public's patriotic leanings.

By a margin of 57% to 23%, or more than two to one, Israeli Jews oppose a return to the pre-1967 borders, and a clear plurality (47% vs. 40%) now agree that the Oslo peace process was "a mistake."

Not surprisingly, the authors of the survey suggest that "the hard-line positions that most of the Jewish public now takes" are attributable to "pessimism", as though recognizing that Oslo has failed is merely a function of mood swings, rather than taking a cold, hard look at reality.

TO BE sure, not all the results were encouraging. The poll found that strong support remains for the establishment of "two states for two people" despite the Palestinians' ongoing failure to curb terror and halt anti-Israel incitement and violence.

But even there, a dose of realism has begun to creep in. For the results also showed that nearly three-quarters believe that even if an agreement is signed with the Palestinians, "it will not, from the Palestinians' standpoint, end the historic conflict with Israel."

In other words, deep down, most Israelis acknowledge that the thrust of the conflict with the Palestinians is not about land, but about our very existence.

What are we to make of all this?

Consider the following: if more than 40 years after the Six Day War, just a third of Jewish Israelis consider the territories to be "occupied," then it means that however vocal and strident the Left might be, they remain nothing more than a small and unpersuasive minority in this country.

For all the sympathetic coverage, reports, articles and editorials that have amplified its position over the years, the Left has clearly failed to do more than dent the nation's underlying attachment to places such as Hebron, Bethlehem and Shiloh.

This represents a colossal failure on their part in the battle for public opinion. While they may have succeeded in altering the reality on the ground by establishing the Palestinian Authority and supporting the Gaza withdrawal, the Left has not succeeded in wearing down our faith.

And, as Menachem Begin pointed out in *The Revolt*, "Faith is perhaps stronger than reality, for faith itself creates reality."

The findings of the peace index also point to a tremendous opportunity. They underline the fact that Israelis are not "suicidal" or "lemmings," as some on the far right are wont to believe. Rather, they continue to hold on to a healthy set of nationalist values and beliefs, however unpopular these might

be among our media elites.

Perhaps that is precisely why the media does its best to shut us up and shut us out.

Indeed, just think what would happen if Israel had a more impartial media, one that actually gave equal time and respect to those who remain loyal to the Land of Israel.

Imagine the difference it would make if there were one - even one! - major media outlet that allowed Israel's right to air its views alongside those of the left. It would, quite simply, revolutionize the entire political system.

In the United States, media baron Rupert Murdoch tapped into the disconnect between the liberal media and America's conservative impulses by creating Fox News Channel. Within a few years, Fox had rocketed to the top of cable news ratings, leaving CNN and MSNBC in the dust.

In an October 2006 interview with the *Financial Times*, Murdoch explained the secret of Fox's success. He said, "The real story about Fox is the business story. The real thing is by being fair and balanced - by putting on both sides all the time - we really have changed the political equation in this country."

"People think we're conservative," he added, "but we're not conservative... I mean that it has given room to both sides, whereas only one side had it before. I think people are responding to that very strongly."

There is no doubt that Israelis would too. Just imagine if Israel had its own version of Fox News - balanced yet patriotic, fair yet loyal. It would further energize the country's underlying nationalist and Zionist proclivities, and possibly even invigorate the near-dormant political right.

Hence, establishing such a channel should become a top priority for those who wish to preserve the land of Israel and protect her from harm.

For, if the peace index teaches us anything, it is that the right must never make the mistake of writing off the Israeli public or giving up on them as a lost cause.

The public can see through the mainstream media's left-wing political agenda, and they are obviously hungering for something new and different.

Now is the time to do something about it. And a good place to start would be to change the channel, and give the Israeli people a media they can be proud of.

One that isn't ashamed to wave the flag and boost the country and its values.

What a breath of fresh air that would be. (Jerusalem Post Apr. 15)

A Mystery in the Middle East By George Friedman

The Arab-Israeli region of the Middle East is filled with rumors of war. That is about as unusual as the rising of the sun, so normally it would not be worth mentioning. But like the proverbial broken clock that is right twice a day, such rumors occasionally will be true. In this case, we don't know that they are true, and certainly it's not the rumors that are driving us. But other things — minor and readily explicable individually — have drawn our attention to the possibility that something is happening.

The first thing that drew our attention was a minor, routine matter. Back in February, the United States started purchasing oil for its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR). The SPR is a reserve of crude oil stored in underground salt domes. Back in February, it stood at 96.2 percent of capacity, which is pretty full as far as we are concerned. But the U.S. Department of Energy decided to increase its capacity. This move came in spite of record-high oil prices and the fact that the purchase would not help matters. It also came despite potential political fallout, since during times like these there is generally pressure to release reserves. Part of the step could have been the bureaucracy cranking away, and part of it could have been the feeling that the step didn't make much difference. But part of it could have been based on real fears of a disruption in oil supplies. By itself, the move meant nothing. But it did cause us to become thoughtful.

Also in February, someone assassinated Imad Mughniyah, a leader of Hezbollah, in a car bomb explosion in Syria. It was assumed the Israelis had killed him, although there were some suspicions the Syrians might have had him killed for their own arcane reasons. In any case, Hezbollah publicly claimed the Israelis killed Mughniyah, and therefore it was expected the militant Shiite group would take revenge. In the past, Hezbollah responded not by attacking Israel but by attacking Jewish targets elsewhere, as in the Buenos Aires attacks of 1992 and 1994.

In March, the United States decided to dispatch the USS Cole, then under

Sixth Fleet command, to Lebanese coastal waters. Washington later replaced it with two escorts from the Nassau (LHA-4) Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG), reportedly maintaining a minor naval presence in the area. (Most of the ESG, on a regularly scheduled deployment, is no more than a few days sail from the coast, as it remains in the Mediterranean Sea.) The reason given for the American naval presence was to serve as a warning to the Syrians not to involve themselves in Lebanese affairs. The exact mission of the naval presence off the Levantine coast — and the exact deterrent function it served — was not clear, but there they were. The Sixth Fleet has gone out of its way to park and maintain U.S. warships off the Lebanese coast.

Hezbollah leaders being killed by the Israelis and the presence of American ships off the shores of Mediterranean countries are not news in and of themselves. These things happen. The killing of Mughniyah is notable only to point out that as much as Israel might have wanted him dead, the Israelis knew this fight would escalate. But anyone would have known this. So all we know is that whoever killed Mughniyah wanted to trigger a conflict. The U.S. naval presence off the Levantine coast is notable in that Washington, rather busy with matters elsewhere, found the bandwidth to get involved here as well.

With the situation becoming tense, the Israelis announced in March that they would carry out an exercise in April called Turning Point 2. Once again, an Israeli military exercise is hardly interesting news. But the Syrians apparently got quite interested. After the announcement, the Syrians deployed three divisions — two armored, one mechanized — to the Lebanese-Syrian border in the Bekaa Valley, the western part of which is Hezbollah's stronghold. The Syrians didn't appear to be aggressive. Rather, they deployed these forces in a defensive posture, in a way walling off their part of the valley.

The Syrians are well aware that in the event of a conventional war with Israel, they would experience a short but exciting life, as they say. They thus are hardly going to attack Israel. The deployment therefore seemed intended to keep the Israelis on the Lebanese side of the border — on the apparent assumption the Israelis were going into the Bekaa Valley. Despite Israeli and Syrian denials of the Syrian troop buildup along the border, Stratfor sources maintain that the buildup in fact happened. Normally, Israel would be jumping at the chance to trumpet Syrian aggression in response to these troop movements, but, instead, the Israelis downplayed the buildup.

When the Israelis kicked off Turning Point 2, which we regard as a pretty interesting name, it turned out to be the largest exercise in Israeli history. It involved the entire country, and was designed to test civil defenses and the ability of the national command authority to continue to function in the event of an attack with unconventional weapons — chemical and nuclear, we would assume. This was a costly exercise. It also involved calling up reserves, some of them for the exercise, and, by some reports, others for deployment to the north against Syria. Israel does not call up reserves casually. Reserve call-ups are expensive and disrupt the civilian economy. These appear small, but in the environment of Turning Point 2, it would not be difficult to mobilize larger forces without being noticed.

The Syrians already were deeply concerned by the Israeli exercise. Eventually, the Lebanese government got worried, too, and started to evacuate some civilians from the South. Hezbollah, which still hadn't retaliated for the Mughniyah assassination, also claimed the Israelis were about to attack it, and reportedly went on alert and mobilized its forces. The Americans, who normally issue warnings and cautions to everyone, said nothing to try to calm the situation. They just sat offshore on their ships.

It is noteworthy that Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak canceled a scheduled visit to Germany this week. The cancellation came immediately after the reports of the Syrian military redeployment were released. Obviously, Barak needed to be in Israel for Turning Point 2, but then he had known about the exercise for at least a month. Why cancel at the last minute? While we are discussing diplomacy, we note that U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney visited Oman — a country with close relations with Iran — and then was followed by U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. By itself not interesting, but why the high-level interest in Oman at this point?

Now let's swing back to September 2007, when the Israelis bombed something in Syria near the Turkish border. As we discussed at the time, for some reason the Israelis refused to say what they had attacked. It made no sense for them not to trumpet what they carefully leaked — namely, that they had attacked a nuclear facility. Proving that Syria had a secret nuclear program would have been a public relations coup for Israel. Nevertheless, no public charges were leveled. And the Syrians remained awfully calm about the bombing.

Rumors now are swirling that the Israelis are about to reveal publicly that

they in fact bombed a nuclear reactor provided to Syria by North Korea. But this news isn't all that big. Also rumored is that the Israelis will claim Iranian complicity in building the reactor. And one Israeli TV station reported April 8 that Israel really had discovered Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, which it said had been smuggled to Syria.

Now why the Bush administration wouldn't have trumpeted news of the Syrian reactor worldwide in September 2007 is beyond us, but there obviously were some reasons — assuming the TV report is true, which we have no way of establishing. In fact, we have no idea why the Israelis are choosing this moment to rehash the bombing of this site. But whatever their reason, it certainly raises a critical question. If the Syrians are developing a nuclear capability, what are the Israelis planning to do about it?

No one of these things, by itself, is of very great interest. And taken together they do not provide the means for a clear forecast. Nevertheless, a series of rather ordinary events, taken together, can constitute something significant. Tensions in the Middle East are moving well beyond the normal point, and given everything that is happening, events are moving to a point where someone is likely to take military action. Whether Hezbollah will carry out a retaliatory strike or Israel a pre-emptive strike in Lebanon, or whether the Israelis' real target is Iran, tensions systematically have been ratcheted up to the point where we, in our simple way, are beginning to wonder whether something has to give.

All together, these events are fairly extraordinary. Ignoring all rhetoric — and the Israelis have gone out of their way to say that they are not looking for a fight — it would seem that each side, but particularly the Americans and Israelis, have gone out of their way to signal that they are expecting conflict. The Syrians have also signaled that they expect conflict, and Hezbollah always claims there is about to be conflict.

What is missing is this: who will fight whom, and why, and why now. The simple explanation is that Israel wants a second round with Hezbollah. But while that might be true, it doesn't explain everything else that has happened. Most important, it doesn't explain the simultaneous revelations about the bombing of Syria. It also doesn't explain the U.S. naval deployment. Is the United States about to get involved in a war with Hezbollah, a war that the Israelis should handle themselves? Are the Israelis going to topple Syrian President Bashar al Assad — and then wind up with a Sunni government, or worse, an Israeli occupation of Syria? None of that makes a lot of sense.

In truth, all of this may dissolve into nothing much. In intelligence analysis, however, sometimes a set of not-fully-coherent facts must be reported, and that is what we are doing now. There is no clear pattern; there is no obvious direction this is taking. Nevertheless, when we string together events from February until now, we see a persistently escalating pattern of behavior. In fact, what we can say most clearly is that there is escalation, without being able to say what is the clear direction of the escalation or the purpose.

We would like to wrap this up with a crystal clear explanation and forecast. But we can't. The motives of the various actors are opaque; and taken separately, the individual events all have quite innocent explanations. We are not prepared to say war is imminent, nor even what sort of war there would be. We are simply prepared to say that the course of events since February — and really since the September 2007 attack on Syria — have been startling, and they appear to be reaching some sort of hard-to-understand crescendo.

The bombing of Syria symbolizes our confusion. Why would Syria want a nuclear reactor and why put it on the border of Turkey, a country the Syrians aren't particularly friendly with? If the Syrians had a nuclear reactor, why would the Israelis be coy about it? Why would the Americans? Having said nothing for months apart from careful leaks, why are the Israelis going to speak publicly now? And if what they are going to say is simply that the North Koreans provided the equipment, what's the big deal? That was leaked months ago.

The events of September 2007 make no sense and have never made any sense. The events we have seen since February make no sense either. That is noteworthy, and we bring it to your attention. We are not saying that the events are meaningless. We are saying that we do not know their meaning. But we can't help but regard them as ominous. (Stratfor Apr 10)
