

The week of April 12, 2013

IRAN

U.S. voices concern over new Iran uranium mines

The United States [reacted](#) with concern Wednesday after Iran unveiled a new uranium production facility and two extraction mines. “They have continued to move forward, we are very concerned about what they are doing,” a senior State Department official said. “They did specify that they were going to proceed forward and do everything they could to fulfill what they see as their inalienable right,” the official told reporters. Secretary of State John Kerry denounced the Iranian news as provocative. “To make any step that increases the rapidity with which you move towards enriched fissile material raises the potential of questions, if not even threat,” he told reporters at the end of a visit to Israel. “The clock that is ticking on Iran’s program has a stop moment and it does not tick interminably.” The United States and its partners in the P5+1 talks wanted a diplomatic way forward, Kerry stressed, but “negotiations are not for the sake of negotiations... negotiations cannot be allowed to become a process of delay which in and of itself creates greater danger.” This information is an update to the information contained in this week’s [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Israel rejects Kerry proposal for renewing talks with PA

[Haaretz](#) reported Israel opposes Secretary of State John Kerry’s proposal to resume negotiations on the basis of discussing border and security issues alone. During his discussions with Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Kerry made it clear that in the event negotiations would be renewed, they would initially need to deal with a discussion over Israel’s security requirements, in parallel with a discussion regarding the borders of the future Palestinian state. Kerry requested Israel to direct a series of confidence-building measures, among them the release of prisoners and the transfer of weapons to Palestinian security forces in order to create a suitable atmosphere for the renewal of talks. Israel demands that if negotiations are to be resumed they will need to address all core issues of the final settlement. Israel also opposes making significant gestures towards the Palestinians before the resumption of negotiations. This information is an update to the information contained in this week’s [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

Defense Secretary Hagel to visit Israel this month

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel will pay a first visit to Israel since taking office later this month to bolster the allies’ cooperation in the Middle East, an Israeli official told [Reuters](#) on Tuesday. Hagel and his counterpart, Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon who is also newly appointed, discussed the visit by phone last month. Hagel’s visit will follow a trip by Secretary of State John Kerry who is currently visiting Israel and the Palestinian

territories to try to restart long-stalled peace talks and after a visit last month by President Barack Obama. Iran's perceived nuclear threat, an issue that is regularly on the agenda between the two allies, is certain to feature highly in discussions.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Jordan opens second camp for Syrian refugees

[The Los Angeles Times](#) reported that Jordan opened a second camp to shelter the increasing numbers of refugees pouring out of Syria, one day after a United Nations official warned that the regional crisis had hit "a breaking point." About 100 Syrians arrived Wednesday at the Mrajeeb Fhood camp, said Andrew Harper, the U.N. refugee agency representative in Jordan. The new camp, funded by the United Arab Emirates and operated by its Red Crescent Society, is equipped with solar power and a water treatment plant, Harper said. "It's been built to a much higher standard" than the existing refugee camp in Jordan, Harper said Wednesday in a telephone interview from near the Jaber border crossing. "But when we have thousands coming across every month, it's not possible to keep those standards in the other camps." Syrian refugees fleeing their country's civil war have already packed the Zaatari camp northeast of Amman, which was built for 50,000 refugees but hosted more than twice as many people.

Egypt's Morsi drops complaints against journalists

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi has ordered the withdrawal of legal complaints filed by the presidency against journalists, aimed at fending off accusations of a crackdown on dissent by the Islamist-led authorities. Morsi withdrew the complaints out of respect for freedom of expression, presidential spokesman Ehab Fahmy [said](#). However, the latest legal move does not apply to complaints filed independently by Morsi loyalists against journalists and media figures. These include complaints that led to an arrest warrant being issued against the popular satirist Bassem Youssef. He is accused of insulting the president and Islam in a probe that has added to concern inside and outside Egypt about freedom of expression in the post-Hosni Mubarak era.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israel's Natural Gas Finds Win the World's Notice

Noble Energy's Chief Executive Charles Davidson and his Israeli contemporaries will be celebrating the start of the country's first natural gas discoveries that are in the Mediterranean Sea's Tamar field, [Forbes](#) reported. This has just begun to generate 300 million cubic feet a day of natural gas. Noble says it's a game-changer not just for Israel but potentially in the geo-political-and-economic chess game: It provides Israel with more energy security while the gas could also be exported to needy countries. Noble, which is partnering with Israeli-based Delek Energy, also has other projects: The Leviathan basin, which is 80 miles off the shores of Haifa, Israel and which could hold as much as 16 trillion cubic feet of natural gas that would last 100 years. There, production could begin in 2017, which could help insulate the country from fluctuating fuel prices. The budding partnership between Israel and Noble Energy is off to a good start and it appears that the goodwill is attracting other private investors. That could all lead to a secure energy future and cleaner air for Israel as well as a firmer place for it in the global economic community. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).