

The week ending August 16, 2013

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Israelis, Palestinians kick off peace talks

In the third attempt since 2000 to agree on the terms of establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators kicked off their first substantive round of peace talks in nearly five years, meeting at an undisclosed location Wednesday in search of an end to decades of conflict. According to the [Associated Press](#), the meeting was cloaked in secrecy, an attempt by both sides to prevent leaks to the media and maintain trust. Officials would say only that the talks took place in Jerusalem, and there was no immediate comment from either side. The Israeli government released a brief video showing the chief negotiators shaking hands as the talks continued into the evening. "We are committed to making the effort, for the sake of Israel and for Israel's values," Israel's chief negotiator, Tzipi Livni, told Channel 10 TV before the talks began. "It will be complicated and complex, but I am not giving up." Late Wednesday, both sides confirmed the meeting had ended after several hours. A Palestinian official said they had agreed to meet weekly, alternating between Jerusalem and the West Bank town of Jericho. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sides' commitment to maintain secrecy. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Iran and Syria Seeking Militant Expansion in West Bank

There are growing concerns that Iran, Syria and their local proxies are attempting to build up militant capabilities in the West Bank to eventually threaten Israel, according to [Forbes](#). Although recent arrests of weapons smugglers in Jordan prove the difficulty of arms transfers to the area, the heightened collaboration between Iranian and Syrian forces in Jordan signals a burgeoning threat to Israel. In recent days, Jordanian officials have reported two separate arrests of weapons smugglers from Syria, caught trying to conceal anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air missiles and assault rifles inside pickup trucks. Jordan is already on high alert for attacks, given the proliferation of jihadists in neighboring Syria and indications that al-Qaeda elements within the rebel opposition may seek to destabilize the monarchy for its own enforcement. Though Jordanian authorities have attempted to reinforce security along its border with Syria, militants are making increasing efforts to blend in with the thousands of refugees fleeing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's campaign. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

Iron Dome Intercepts Rocket Bound for Eilat

Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system intercepted a grad rocket bound for the Israeli southern resort city of Eilat overnight Monday, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. An al-

Qaeda-linked group in the Sinai Peninsula claimed responsibility for the attack, saying, “Jews will pay the price.” Warning sirens sounded over the Red Sea resort—crowded with tourists at the height of the summer vacation season—at around 1 a.m. in response to the incoming rocket. Booms were heard shortly thereafter, as Iron Dome was successfully deployed. Three people were treated for shock by Magen David Adom paramedics, but no significant damage was reported. Iron Dome’s effective interception, which comes amid rising tensions along the Israel-Egypt border, marks its first since Israel deployed it in the country’s south. The missile defense system, which shoots down rockets with radar-guided missiles, intercepts rockets with a success rate of more than 80 percent. With significant American financing, Iron Dome protected thousands of Israeli civilians from rockets last November in the face of Hamas rockets aimed for populated areas inside Israel.

IRAN

Rouhani Appoints Former ‘Death Commission’ Leader

An Iranian official accused of playing a key role in the executions of thousands of political prisoners in 1988 has been appointed Iran’s new Justice Minister by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, according to [reports](#). The appointment of Mostafa Purmohammadi, who allegedly played a leading role in the 1988 Death Commissions that ordered the executions of political prisoners, has elicited stark criticisms from human rights groups. “This is an individual who should actually be investigated and who should likely be prosecuted for the crimes he was involved in,” said Faraz Sanei of Human Rights Watch. “Rouhani campaigned on freeing political prisoners [and] making reforms with regard to the situation of citizens’ rights. On the 25th anniversary of the 1988 prison massacre to now suggest that this individual, Purmohammadi, could become a cabinet member, no less in the Justice Ministry, is really quite a slap in the face to many of the families of the individuals who lost their lives.” A similar joint statement by Reporters Without Borders, the International Campaign for Human Rights, and Human Rights Watch called on President Rouhani to withdraw the nomination of Purmohammadi. The U.S. and Israel are committed to judging Iran’s new leader by his actions alone, urging him to substantiate his rhetorical promises of moderation with concrete steps toward halting Tehran’s illicit nuclear program. This information is an update to the information contained in this week’s [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israeli ‘Human Backpack’ Helps Save Lives Worldwide

Israeli company Agilite has developed a new innovation that is already helping to save lives around the world. The Injured Personnel Carrier (IPC) or “Human Backpack” weighs less than a pound and folds down to just 10 inches but allows rescuers to carry up to 5,000 pounds on his or her back, hands-free. “If you have a natural disaster with mass casualties, you don’t have a helicopter and an ambulance for every casualty,” explains Agilite founder Elie Isaacson. “Having the ability to use your hands to crawl out with the injured person on your back, with hands free to climb, is a huge step forward.” Law-enforcement, firefighters, emergency rescue teams and military personnel have begun integrating the Israeli innovation into their respective rescue programs. Israeli rescue equipment is utilized by first responders and militaries around the world. Agilite’s Instant Harness was most recently used to help [save the lives](#) of at least eight trapped miners in South Africa on July 28. Agilite technologies have likewise been adopted by many top U.S. Marine Corps units.