

The week ending August 2, 2013

IRAN

House Sends Message to Iran with Tougher Sanctions

The House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved The Nuclear Iran Prevention Act (H.R. 850) on Wednesday, in a critical measure to further cripple the country's illicit nuclear weapons program, according to [The New York Times](#). By an astounding 400-20 vote, the toughest sanctions on Iran to date passed four days before the inauguration of President-elect Hassan Rouhani, Iran's former nuclear negotiator who has said that talks should be used to keep the West at bay. Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Ed Royce (R-CA), was a main sponsor of the bill and spoke of the urgency to forge tough new sanctions through Congress against the Iranian regime. "Iran may have a new president, but its march toward a nuclear program continues. The economic pressure on Tehran must be ratcheted up." The new legislation passed through the House just one day before the Congressional summer recess, and will be brought before the Senate in September. If enacted, the law would devastate what remains of Iranian oil export capabilities by threatening consuming states with heavy penalties. It would also eliminate Iran's already-depleted foreign currency reserves and expand the American blacklist to myriad Iranian industrial sectors, penalizing any state that engages with Tehran and ostracizing them internationally. The House's action has sent a clear message to Rouhani, Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Iranian regime—the United States will not tolerate a nuclear Iran. To learn more about this historic legislation click [here](#).

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Assad Praises Army, Forecasts Victory

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad praised his troops Thursday for their campaign against opposition forces, saying that he is confident they will win his country's conflict, now in its third year. According to the [Associated Press](#), Assad's comments coincided with an alarm raised by five major aid agencies warning that the extreme refugee crisis is stretching their aid efforts to their limits. The five agencies, including CARE International, Oxfam, Danish Refugee Council, Handicap International and World Vision, said they are increasingly worried that the international response is failing to match the scale of the crisis. In a statement marking Syria's Army Day, Assad said his men are fighting the "fiercest barbaric war in modern history." The military's efforts to crush opposition rebellion have led to the deaths of over 100,000 people since March 2011. An estimated 5,000 Syrians are dying every month, while refugees are fleeing at a rate unprecedented since the 1994 Rwanda genocide.

Arab Gulf Countries Plan Tough Hezbollah Sanctions

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), comprising of six Arab countries, plans to impose harsh sanctions against Hezbollah that will surpass the severity of the recent European Union measures, according to [The Jerusalem Post](#). Saudi Arabian paper Al-Watan stated, the GCC “does not differentiate between Hezbollah’s military and political wings.” The six GCC members seeking to sanction all of Hezbollah are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and are collectively studying counterterrorism methods to crack down on the Iranian-backed group. The United States, Israel, Canada and the Netherlands already consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization. America and Israel have both urged the E.U. to blacklist the entity, stressing that Hezbollah’s network fundraises and recruits for terrorist activities worldwide. In July 2012, Hezbollah was linked to a lethal bus bombing in Burgas, Bulgaria that killed five Israeli tourists. The group also receives funding from Iran’s Islamic Republic, and supports Bashar al-Assad in Syria. This information derives from this week’s [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Kerry Sets 9-Month Goal for Peace

As Israelis and Palestinians resume long-stalled peace talks this week in Washington, Secretary of State John Kerry said Tuesday that the goal of negotiations is a comprehensive peace agreement leading to an independent Palestinian state within nine months, according to [The New York Times](#). Kerry also mentioned that both sides would convene again in the Middle East within two weeks, accompanied by U.S. Special Envoy Martin Indyk. “We all understand the goal that we’re working towards: two states living side by side in peace and security,” said the top U.S. diplomat. “The parties have agreed to remain engaged in sustained, continuous and substantive negotiations on the core issues.” Kerry and the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met with President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. White House spokesman Jay Carney said that Obama used the opportunity “to convey his appreciation to both sides for the leadership and courage they have shown in coming to the table.” Monday and Tuesday’s meetings between U.S. Israeli and Palestinian officials were largely procedural and did not delve directly into final status issues such as borders. Speaking to Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni voiced her hopes of reaching a deal within Kerry’s prescribed timeframe. “A new opportunity is being created for us, for all of us, and we cannot afford to waste it.”

Hours into Peace Talks, Gaza Rocket Strikes Israel

In the initial hours of peace talks resuming between Israelis and Palestinians in Washington, a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory, near the coastal city of Ashkelon, [Haaretz](#) reported. No damage or casualties were reported. The rocket fire is the third such incident since Secretary of State John Kerry’s announcement of renewed negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. According to Israeli security sources, the three rockets were fired by Islamic extremists in the Gaza Strip. Israel is concerned that the situation on its border with Gaza could escalate, after eight months of relative quiet since the ceasefire that formally ended Operation Pillar of Defense last November. Since Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, Hamas and other terrorist groups have fired more than 11,000 rockets into Israel.