

The week ending August 23, 2013

SYRIA

Assad's brutal chemical weapons attacks in Syria

One day after Syrian rebels accused President Bashar al-Assad of massacring 1,300 people in a brutal chemical weapons attack, White House spokesman Josh Earnest condemned the offensive and emphasized the need for U.N. inspectors to have free access to the attack sites. The government's alleged use of toxic gas to kill civilians would be the deadliest atrocity in the country's civil war. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said Wednesday that the reports of [hundreds dying in Syria](#) without external traumas evidenced the Syrian government's use of non-conventional weapons. "The civil war in Syria is continuing, with one hundred thousand dead, and, not for the first time, the regime is employing chemical weapons," he said

IRAN

U.S. Institute: Iran asphalts possible nuke site

An American institute tracking Iran's nuclear program reported that recent satellite images reveal major alterations to a military site, where heavy asphalt was used to cover an area linked to repeated nuclear tests. The four photos from satellite companies DigitalGlobe and GeoEye were seen by [The Associated Press](#). The images show progressive asphaltting of an area of the Parchin complex that the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has said was a possible location for testing conventional explosive triggers for a nuclear blast. Experts of the U.N. nuclear watchdog organization met Iranian negotiators 10 times over 18 months in sessions ending earlier this year in futile attempts to gain access to the site and test Tehran's insistence that it was a conventional military area with no link to nuclear tests. Iran has said the asphaltting is part of regular maintenance and road work. But with its probe blocked—and signs of other activity—IAEA concerns have grown that it might be an attempt to cover up work on a weapons program while it keeps away inspectors. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Four rockets fired into north by al-Qaeda-inspired group

Four [rockets were fired from Lebanon](#) at Israel in the cities of Nahariya, Acre and Kiryat Shmona, Israel. Residents reported hearing explosions after air-raid sirens blared throughout the northern region, dispersing residents into bomb shelters. An Iron Dome battery intercepted one rocket, and no casualties were reported. IDF sources said they regarded the incident as a one-off attack by a jihadist group rather than the beginning of a wider campaign. Residents said they hadn't heard alarms for seven years—since the

2006 Second Lebanon War. There were reports in the past year of attempts to fire rockets into Israel from southern Lebanon. In November, during Israel's brief round of fighting with Hamas in Gaza, Lebanese army forces operating about 6 miles north of the border, found and disarmed several rockets aimed at Israel.

Hamas justice under scrutiny over Gaza executions

Gaza's Hamas government is sticking to plans to carry out more executions and to do so in public. Hamas authorities have executed 16 prisoners since 2010, most convicted of killings or spying for Israel, according to the New York-based Human Rights Watch. Sixteen more await execution. [The Associated Press](#) reported, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, said the Gaza government must halt all executions, arguing that a fair trial is not possible there, either legally or practically. She said she was concerned about allegations of ill-treatment and torture during interrogations. Raji Sourani of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights wrote to Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, urging him to halt executions. Sourani expressed to Haniyeh that hanging prisoners in front of an audience "constitutes a form of humiliation that aggravates the cruelty of this inhumane penalty."

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Israeli and PA negotiators hold unannounced meetings

Peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian officials took place Tuesday, in meetings withheld from media attention. Though neither side hinted to the substance of the discussions, Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni said "there will be dramatic decisions" made by Israel in order to reach a deal. Reflecting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's dictate to keep the talks far from the public, there was no pre-announcement of the meetings, or any statement following them. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), the first round of talks—which lasted five hours—was held last week in an undisclosed location in Jerusalem. The meeting was described as "serious." Livni said on Tuesday that "there will be dramatic decisions" by Israel at the end of the negotiations, but the sides had agreed not to disclose details about their deliberations in order to build trust. 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

Tel Aviv memorializes homosexuals persecuted by Nazis

A new monument to memorialize the thousands of homosexuals murdered in the Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis is slated to be placed in Meir Park, the center of Tel Aviv's LGBT community. According to [The Times of Israel](#), the Memorial will remember 50,000 gay men, including over 7,000 murdered in death camps. An inscription will read "to the memory of those persecuted by the Nazi regime for their sexual preference and gender identity." City councilman and Meretz party member Eran Lev initiated the project, which received the blessing of Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai. Tel Aviv has over recent years become noted as one of the world's most gay-friendly cities, with a popular pride parade and thriving LGBT community. MK Nitzan Horowitz is currently running to become the city's first openly gay mayor.