

The week ending December 20, 2013

IRAN

U.K., U.S. Pledge No Let-up in Iran Sanctions Enforcement

Western powers will not relax their [enforcement of Iran sanctions](#), U.K. and U.S. officials pledged. Last week, talks between Iran and six major powers on implementing the Geneva interim agreement were put on hold after Iran reacted angrily to a U.S. decision to expand its list of Iranian sanctions targets. The Obama administration blacklisted more than a dozen companies and individuals for breaching sanctions already in place. They were accused of helping Tehran procure equipment for its nuclear and missile programs and evade existing international oil sanctions. But senior Iranian officials charged that even enforcement actions involving existing sanctions breached the spirit of last month's deal. Speaking to reporters on his way into a meeting of E.U. foreign ministers in Brussels, U.K. Foreign Secretary William Hague said there would likely be "difficult negotiations" with Iran in coming weeks. "Meanwhile, we must maintain our vigilance on sanctions and maintain the sanctions that we aren't suspending so that Iran has a clear incentive to make a comprehensive deal" on its nuclear program, he said. White House press secretary Jay Carney also said Monday the U.S. always intended to implement existing sanctions that weren't part of last month's interim deal. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

States hope to repeat Massachusetts-Israel tech success

High-tech has had a profound impact on Israel's economy; tech accounts for nearly half of Israel's exports. A new [report](#) shows that Israel's technology companies are having a similar impact in other places. According to a study released by the New England-Israel Business Council (NEIBC), Israeli businesses operating in Massachusetts have contributed significantly to the economy there through jobs and investment, revitalizing key components of the state's economy and helping it to rise from the doldrums of the nagging, long-running recession that still plagues the United States. The Massachusetts study is the first in-depth analysis on the impact of Israeli tech on any US city or state. But the positive effect is apparently evident to leaders in other places, as other US states are doing their best to woo Israeli companies to open operations in their locations in the hope that they, too, will be able to bring in the jobs, investment and innovation that Israeli companies have brought to Massachusetts.

THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Israel-Egypt 140 mile-long Security Fence Completed

Israel constructed a [140 mile-long security fence](#) along its entire southern border with

Egypt. The overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 left a growing presence of dangerous militant groups in the Sinai breeding an insurgency of Islamist militants with ties to Hamas, al-Qaeda, and other religious extremist groups. Violence between Sinai militants and Egyptian security officers rose significantly and the threats of spillover from these deadly clashes posed major concerns for Israel. Since taking control last July, the Egyptian government has reinforced its commitment to curtail extremist mobilization in the Sinai. "Israel and Egypt have a joint interest in the suppression of militant Islamists," Efraim Karsh, a professor at Israel's Bar Ilan University said. Jerusalem's foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor stated, "The relationship between Israel and Egypt is the cornerstone of stability and peacemaking in the region."

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

U.S. scholars endorse academic boycott of Israel

The American Studies Association endorsed a [boycott of Israeli universities](#), the largest group of U.S. scholars to do so. About one-third of the group's more than 3,800 members voted, approving the boycott by 66 percent. "The ASA condemns the United States' significant role in aiding and abetting Israel's violations of human rights against Palestinians and its occupation of Palestinian lands through its use of the veto in the UN Security Council," the American Studies Association said in a statement. The vote, which is largely symbolic, is nonetheless a sign of the increasing momentum of the international boycott movement against Israel. While the movement—which presses for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel—has scored some successes in Europe and elsewhere, it has had far less influence in the United States, Israel's closest and most important ally. "The reason this is so significant is that it's a victory within the United States within a mainstream academic association and it was overwhelmingly supported," said a Palestinian-American human rights attorney who is a member of the American Studies Association. Israeli officials have denounced the campaign as an attempt to delegitimize the Jewish state.

From Agriculture to Aid, Israel Cooperates with Gaza

Israel recently organized a special summit for members of Gaza's agricultural community. Israeli officials brought together key figures who specialize in the production and sale of agricultural products from Israel and Gaza. According to the [IDF Blog](#), the meeting focused on strengthening cooperation between producers in Gaza and Israeli professionals from a range of fields. Organized by the Gaza Coordination and Liaison Administration (CLA), under the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), the summit was attended by twelve leaders of Gaza agricultural organizations and representatives of the Israeli Ministry of Health, customs agents and entrepreneurs who market Gaza crops in Europe. "These kinds of meetings are constant," explains Uri Madar, coordinator of agricultural cooperation for the CLA. On a regular basis, Israel holds talks, workshops and summits designed to strengthen relations and promote trade from Gaza. "It's important to be able to help your neighbors grow their own food and market it," he explained.