

The week ending December 6, 2013

## IRAN

### **Iran plans to ‘immediately’ export oil once sanctions eased**

Iran’s oil minister [vowed](#) to “immediately” export more crude oil once sanctions are eased in the wake of Tehran’s first-step agreement reached with the P5+1 last month. “Immediately we can” return to full export capacity of four million barrels per day, Iran Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh told reporters ahead of OPEC’s meeting on oil production in Vienna. “We believe it is our right to increase our exports,” the minister added. Meanwhile, Iranian officials will meet representatives of the P5+1 next week to begin working out the process of fulfilling last month’s interim accord. Though the terms of the deal were reached on Nov. 24, implementation of the agreement has yet to be finalized—a phase described by one Western diplomat as “extremely complex and difficult.” This information is an update to the information contained in this week’s [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

### **Rouhani: Iran to begin building 2nd nuclear plant**

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said construction will soon start on a second nuclear power plant in the country’s southwest Bushehr province, Iranian [Tasnim news agency](#) reported. “The first nuclear power plant is in operation in Bushehr province, and the construction of the second one will soon kick off; development of new atomic power plants in the country will start in earnest and there will be nuclear reactors in most parts of Bushehr province,” Tasnim quoted him as saying. The Bushehr site is located in a highly seismic area on Iran’s Gulf coast and began operations in 2011 after decades of delays. The site is capable of holding six power reactors and Tehran has identified 16 sites elsewhere in the country suitable for other atomic plants.

## THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

### **Israel is admitted to U.N. Human Rights group**

[Associated Press](#) reported that the U.S. and other Western countries have admitted Israel into a group in Geneva that will provide it with some influence before the U.N.’s top human rights body. Israel’s admittance into the U.N. Human Rights Council’s (UNHRC) Western European and Others Group (WEOG) marks an important step toward normalizing Israel’s status at the United Nations. The exclusion of Israel from a regional working group in Geneva was a profound affront to decency and justice which the U.S. has sought to correct for many years. In a statement, Samantha Power, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. said, “For far too long Israel has been unfairly excluded from regional bodies at the United Nations. I applaud the decision to admit Israel into the WEOG...providing Israel membership into one of the regional bodies that shape policy and determine leadership posts in U.N. fora.” Power added, “This long-overdue decision brings Geneva in line with the decision to admit Israel into WEOG in New York in 2000,

which continues to pay dividends more than a decade later, as well as more recent efforts by this administration to more fully normalize Israel's treatment across the U.N. system." Israel's U.N. Mission said on Twitter that "after decades of discrimination, a historical wrong has been corrected. Israel's voice will finally be heard loud & clear in WEOG in Geneva."

## THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

### **Syrian death toll reaching 126,000**

The death toll in Syria's civil war has risen to at least 125,835, more than a third of them civilians, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The pro-opposition monitoring group also appealed to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and "all people in the international community who have a conscience" to increase their efforts to end the 2-1/2 year war. The conflict began as peaceful protests against four decades of rule by President Bashar al-Assad's family, but turned into an armed insurgency whose sectarian dimensions have echoed across the Middle East. The Observatory, based in Britain but with a network of activists across Syria, put the number of children killed in the conflict so far at 6,627. It put the death toll among rebels fighting the Assad government at least 27,746 rebels, including more than 6,000 categorized as foreign fighters or unknown combatants. "The number is likely much higher but in many battles, the number of rebels killed is hidden" Rami Abdelrahman, head of the Observatory, told [Reuters](#).

## ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

### **Kerry to meet with Netanyahu and Abbas Thursday**

Secretary of State John Kerry met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and reassured him that core sanctions against Iran remain in place. According to [Haaretz](#), Prior to the meeting Kerry planned to continue the peace process through discussions with both parties that will focus on security issues. Retired U.S. Gen. John Allen, a special U.S. administration envoy to the peace talks, will reportedly present a security plan that will address Israel's security needs in the territory of the West Bank and include American military aid to the Israel Defense Forces. Meanwhile, the Israeli government has agreed to allocate new West Bank land to the Palestinian Authority for agricultural projects that would reduce the P.A.'s reliance on international aid. According to reports, the move would boost Palestinian revenue by some \$800 million.

## ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

### **Israel's Mekorot Group signs deal to protect Mexico's water**

Israel's Mekorot Group has signed a cooperation [agreement](#) with Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources to bolster the country's water quality and restore its aquifers. According to the agreement, the group will provide the National Water Commission of Mexico "technical assistance in protection of groundwater quality, carrying out rehabilitation of the underground reservoirs and quality control of the restoration of water resources." The deal makes Mexico the latest recipient of Israel's cutting-edge water technologies, which are providing countries around the world with elite water desalination, purification and conservation systems.