

The week ending July 12, 2013

IRAN

Syria, Iran to run for U.N. Human Rights Council: envoys

According to [Reuters](#), Syria and Iran are planning to run for a spot on the U.N. Human Rights Council later this year despite criticism from watchdog groups about widespread rights abuses in both countries. The General Assembly's annual elections for the United Nations' 47-nation Geneva-based human rights body will be held later this year in New York. There will be 14 seats available for three-year terms beginning in January 2014. Some diplomats predict that Syria and Iran would fail in their bids to join the U.N. rights watchdog when the 193-nation General Assembly votes in the fall, while others think they could be elected. Hillel Neuer, the head of UN Watch, a Geneva-based advocacy group that monitors the work of the United Nations, said "countries that murder and torture their own people must not be allowed to become the world's judges on human rights...Because both regimes were recently elected to other U.N. human rights panels—Iran on the women's rights commission, and Syria on UNESCO's human rights committee — we cannot take anything for granted." This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

Netanyahu Names Adviser Israeli Ambassador to U.S.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu named one of his closest advisers, Ron Dermer, to be Israel's next ambassador to the United States. Dermer has a deep understanding of the critical value of the U.S.-Israel relationship and the importance of further strengthening the alliance between these two democratic allies. In the past year, Dermer played critical roles in negotiating a cease-fire after Israel's eight-day operation in the Gaza Strip, helped in reconciling relations between Turkey and Israel and assisted in planning President Obama's March visit to Israel. He is expected to start the job in the fall, replacing Ambassador Michael Oren who for the past four years has served and worked tirelessly and effectively to bolster the bond between the United States and Israel. [The Times of Israel](#) reported that Dermer is a graduate of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania and holds a master's degree in philosophy, politics and economics from Oxford. In 1995, while still a student at Oxford, he helped manage Natan Sharansky's Yisrael b'Aliyah party's Knesset campaign. He later became an adviser to Sharansky and co-wrote Sharansky's bestselling foreign-policy treatise, "The Case for Democracy," before moving on to work for Netanyahu.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Egypt Leaders' Transition Plan Meets Swift Criticism

Egypt's new military-led government enlisted internationally recognized figures to serve as its public face and promised swift elections, but introduced [a transitional plan](#) that was widely criticized as muddled, authoritarian and rushed. The so-called road map, in the form of a "constitutional declaration" by the military-appointed president, elicited immediate opposition from civilian leaders across the political spectrum. The groups included the liberals and activists who sought the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi, the faction of ultraconservative Islamists who joined them and the many thousands protesting to demand his reinstatement. The military-led government widened its crackdown on Mr. Morsi's Islamist supporters a day after security forces shot hundreds of them and killed more than 50 at a sit-in to demand his reinstatement. Security officials blamed the Islamists for instigating the lopsided clashes, and as part of its investigation of the episode ordered the arrests of 650 leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's mainstream Islamist movement, and of Gamaa Islamiyya, a more conservative and once-violent group.

Istanbul Park Becomes Scene of Violence after Reopening

Istanbul's Gezi Park quickly became the scene of more unrest after reopening on Monday, offering a volatile reminder of how divided the government and its opponents remain, according to [The New York Times](#). The public park was at the center of last month's antigovernment protests in Turkey, which initially stemmed from concerns over a government-backed plan to redevelop the site, the only green area in the district. It has been sealed off for weeks to keep demonstrators at bay. But the governor announced the reopening of the park and dozens of people were injured and at least 32 were detained after scores of them streamed back in. When a large group of people led by protest organizers marched toward the park, it was confronted by the police, who dispersed the crowd with water cannons and tear gas, detaining those who refused to leave. In all, four people died and dozens were seriously wounded in the tumult last month, according to the Turkish Physicians' Association, including 11 cases in which people lost eyes after being struck by tear-gas canisters.

Israel strengthens Syria border with an eye on Hezbollah

Israel is bolstering its forces on the once-quiet frontier with Syria where it believes Lebanese Hezbollah militants are [preparing](#) for the day when they could fight Israel. Syria's civil war has brought an end to decades of calm on the Golan Heights. Battles between rebels fighting against President Bashar al-Assad's forces in Syrian villages nearby are being watched intensely by Israel's military. Hezbollah, which is also backed by Iran, has sent thousands of its own fighters to combat Syrian rebels, according to Israeli and Western estimates. Israel last fought Hezbollah in a 2006 Lebanon war and still closely monitors the Lebanese border. Israel says Hezbollah has tens of thousands of rockets in its south Lebanon stronghold. The Jewish state is worried Hezbollah is making initial preparations for future confrontation with it on a new front with Syria and is accruing valuable combat experience on the Syrian battlefield. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).