

The week ending July 26, 2013

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

EU Declares Hezbollah Military Wing Terror Group

In a major change of its policy toward the region, the European Union placed Hezbollah's military wing on its terror list Monday, the [Associated Press](#) reported. The EU's 28 foreign ministers unanimously reached their decision, blacklisting the Lebanese terrorist organization and imposing visa bans and asset freezes upon it. Israel's Justice Minister, Tzipi Livni, welcomed the move. "Finally, after years of deliberations, the claim that Hezbollah is a legitimate political party has rightfully failed. Now it is clear to the entire world that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization," she said. The Iranian-backed terror group has dramatically upgraded the range and lethality of its weapons stockpiles since 2006, and has been responsible for a long series of terrorist attacks since its creation in the early 1980s. The group was responsible for a lethal suicide bombing on a bus in the Bulgarian resort of Burgas last February, which killed five Israeli tourists.

Syria Death Toll Now Officially above 100,000

More than 100,000 people have been killed in Syria's civil war, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced at the U.N. headquarters alongside Secretary of State John Kerry. The announcement also estimates that an additional 1.7 million Syrians have been forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Both leaders presented the latest UN report with a stressed urgency of finding a political solution to the conflict, according to [BBC News](#). Ban appealed for fresh efforts to convene a peace conference, emphasizing that "the military and violent actions must be stopped by both parties, and it is this imperative to have a peace conference in Geneva as soon as possible." Previous attempts to hold a peace conference have been delayed by divergences between Russia and the United States. Kerry, however, said that he had spoken to his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, and that both countries were committed to convening. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that it believes the official death toll is an underestimate, as both President Bashar al-Assad's forces and their opposition "do not reveal the true total of human losses."

Carnage in Cairo, Lawlessness in Sinai

Six people were killed in Cairo on Tuesday in clashes between Islamist supporters of Egypt's ex-President Mohamed Morsi and opponents, [Reuters](#) reported. The violence broke out near a Muslim Brotherhood protest at Cairo University early Tuesday morning, where Morsi supporters have camped out in protest since the army's ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood leader on July 3. Police sources said hundreds of pro-Morsi protesters clashed with local residents and street vendors near the sit-in, firing gunshots and hurling stones. The newest episode of bloodshed is the latest example of the instability facing Egypt, as the newly-installed interim government presses towards army-backed elections in about six months. Over 100 people have died in violence since Morsi

was dispelled. Meanwhile, a civilian and a policeman were killed in overnight violence in the North Sinai region, which shares Israel's southern border. Marked lawlessness since the removal of President Hosni Mubarak has resulted in a drastic surge of attacks in the Sinai Peninsula. At least 20 people have been killed in militant violence there this month.

IRAN

Iranian Inflation Surges

Iran's inflation rate surged to 45 percent in June according to official data, adding heightened pressure on Iranian households and an indication of the huge challenges facing President-elect Hassan Rouhani to repair the failing economy. Spiraling prices and drastically constricted spending power have left millions of Iranians struggling against a combination of poor fiscal management and punishing Western economic sanctions. Despite Rouhani's pledge following his election last month to create a government of financial "prudence and hope," [Reuters](#) reported that prices rose up to 45 percent higher in the month up to June 21 than increases in the same month last year. Inflation likewise averages an astounding 35.9 percent over the 12 months through June 21, according to the central bank. Yet independent analysts say the official figures do not portray the actual inflation rates, which could be more than double. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

House Plans to Slash All Iranian Oil Exports

The U.S. House of Representatives will vote next week on legislation designed to cut off all of Iran's oil export capabilities, according to [The Jerusalem Post](#). The bill will pass with 360 co-sponsors out of the 435-member body, and is expected to be matched in the Senate after Congress' August recess. The sanctions call on President Barack Obama to devise a strategy within two months to cut Iran's remaining export sales, which currently amount to roughly one-million barrels per day. Additionally, the legislation will end exemptions to countries that continue to import Iranian oil, such as China, Japan, Turkey, and South Korea, and will cut them off from the United States economy. The series of U.S.-implemented sanctions have helped cut Iranian imports by more than 65%, in response to the Islamic Republic's illicit and rapidly-developing nuclear weapons program. These new sanctions will tighten restrictions even further, targeting loopholes in the current package and placing increased pressure on Iran's newly-elected President Hassan Rouhani. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Israelis and Palestinians to Resume Peace Talks

After three years of deadlock, negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will resume on Tuesday in Washington, DC, according to [Ha'aretz](#). A senior Israeli official confirmed the announcement, saying that the decision to return to the negotiating table was made by senior US, Israeli and Palestinian officials during a series of telephone conversations in the wake of U.S. Senator John Kerry's diplomacy last week. Expected to participate in the Washington meetings are Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, Israel's chief negotiator with the Palestinians, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's personal envoy Isaac Molho. The two Israeli officials will join Saeb Erekat, who will represent the Palestinians, as well as Secretary Kerry.