

The week ending June 28, 2013

IRAN

Iran's Khamenei: Nuclear talks would be easy if West were to stop being stubborn

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the dispute over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program could easily be resolved if the West were to stop being so stubborn, [Reuters](#) reported. While accusing the West of being more interested in regime change than ending the dispute, Khamenei did express a desire to resolve an issue that has led to even tighter sanctions on Iran's oil sector and the wider economy. "The Islamic Republic has acted legally and transparently in the nuclear debate and offers logic in its arguments, but the aim of the enemies is through constant pressure, to tire Iran and change the regime and they will not allow the issue to be resolved," Khamenei said. Moreover, after the recent elections in Iran, experts were taken aback that Rouhani was chosen since many had predicted a hardliner more strongly aligned with Khamenei would be installed, following the 2009 election that the opposition said was rigged against reformist candidates. 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

Kerry resumes efforts to restart Mideast peace talks

As Secretary of state John Kerry made his fifth trip to the Middle East in four months, he [said](#) that any potential new opening for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks could be lost if there was no progress by September. "The time is getting near where we need to make some judgments," Kerry said. "The passage of time allows a vacuum to be filled by people who don't want things to happen." Ahead of the visit, Palestinian officials rejected reports published in the Israeli media stating that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had agreed to drop long-held positions on borders and Jewish settlements in the West Bank as a requirement for resuming talks. Israeli media also reported that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government was prepared to pave the way for talks by freezing Israeli construction in the West Bank outside large "settlement blocs" and freeing some Palestinian prisoners who have been in jail since before the signing of the Oslo Accords 20 years ago. However, Palestinian officials dismissed reports that they were abandoning their demand for recognition of the 1967 border or a settlement freeze, which Israel describes as "preconditions" which they see as the starting parameters for any peace talks. Kerry is expected to meet Netanyahu and then Abbas in Jordan, a country that is playing a role in brokering efforts to bring the two sides to the negotiating table. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Lebanese Bank Settles U.S. Laundering Suit

According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), a Lebanese bank will pay \$102 million to settle a civil lawsuit accusing it of laundering hundreds of millions of dollars of illicit funds linked to the terrorist group Hezbollah through American banks, U.S. officials said. The lawsuit was filed against Beirut's Lebanese Canadian Bank (LCB) in 2011 as the Obama administration ramped up its efforts to stop the flow of funds to Hezbollah. The bank resolved the civil forfeiture case "without any admission or acknowledgement of wrongdoing," the bank said. "Today's settlement shows that banks laundering money for terrorists and narco-traffickers will face consequences for their actions, wherever they may be located," said Preet Bharara, the U.S. attorney in Manhattan. In its lawsuit filed in federal court in Manhattan, the U.S. Justice Department alleged that LCB and two Lebanese exchange houses aided Hezbollah and a narcotics network in moving funds through the U.S. The bank was taken over by Beirut officials in 2011 after the U.S. Treasury Department accused LCB of money laundering.

Hopes for Syria Talks Hinge on Kerry-Lavrov Meeting

Secretary of State John Kerry and Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, plan to meet to discuss Syria, according to a statement by the United Nations released after senior Russian, U.S. and U.N. officials meeting in Geneva failed to make headway on plans for a peace conference. According to [The New York Times](#), Plans for the Kerry-Lavrov meeting provided the only concrete detail to come out of more than five hours of talks between Wendy R. Sherman, the United States under secretary of state for political affairs; two Russian deputy foreign ministers, Mikhail Bogdanov and Gennady Gatilov; and the United Nations special representative for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi. The statement issued at the end of their meeting said that Russia, the United States and the United Nations would consult further to determine the date of a conference and complete the list of participants. Brahimi said he doubted any conference could take place in July and expressed hope that the major powers and regional powers would act to contain a conflict that was "getting out of hand."

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

J'lem team hopes to build solar oasis in Rwanda

The developing nation of Rwanda—through the vision of a Jerusalem-based team—may soon become home to an 8.5 megawatt solar oasis capable of providing 8 percent of the country's energy supply, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The Rwandan government is still working on signing a final agreement, but a progress report on the project reported that if the agreement is finalized, the country's first solar field will be located at a boarding school for genocide orphans just east of Kigali. The company hopes not only to bring a new and clean source of energy to Rwanda but also to catalyze industrial growth, create jobs and generate revenue for healthcare and education. "We feel that we are brothers and sisters with the Rwandan people, because we have also come from darkness into light," Yosef Abramowitz, the leader of Energiya Global, said. "In Rwanda we feel very much closely associated with Israel," Rwandan President Paul Kagame said. "We are happy to build on this, on these symbols of togetherness."