

The week ending June 7, 2013

IRAN

U.S. targets Iran with currency, auto-sector sanctions

The U.S. ratcheted up its efforts to isolate Iran for its suspected nuclear weapons program, targeting Tehran with currency and auto-sector sanctions. President Barack Obama imposed sanctions on foreign financial institutions that conduct or facilitate significant transactions in the Iranian rial, meant to further weaken a currency that has already lost two-thirds of its dollar value since late 2011 as a result of Western sanctions. According to [Reuters](#), a senior administration official said the low level of the rial was a key vulnerability for the Iranian government. "The objective is to take aim at the rial and to make it as unusable a currency as possible, which is all part and parcel of our efforts to apply significant financial pressure on the government of Iran," the official said on a call with reporters. The U.S. recently blacklisted eight companies in Iran's petrochemical industry, and further restrictions go into effect on July 1, with sanctions on the shipping and ship-building industries and a ban on the transfer of gold or any other precious metals to Iranian institutions and citizens.

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Abbas: No peace without J'lem as Palestinian capital

While Netanyahu overcame language differences by calling on Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in English to return to the negotiating table without preconditions on Wednesday, Abbas continues to hold that Jerusalem must be the capital of the Palestinian state in order for a peace agreement to ever be reached. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#) In a speech in Ramallah on the same day that Netanyahu called for renewed peace efforts without preconditions, Abbas told Palestinians that peace, security, along with a separate Palestinian state all rely on Jerusalem being named the capital. Abbas appeared far from approaching the negotiating table without Jerusalem as a precondition. Abbas also mentioned that the building of Israeli settlements in Jerusalem would not keep Palestinians from making it their capital, stating that "this land belongs to us and they must uproot their settlements in order to achieve peace." 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

Protests in Turkey focus on PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan

What began as local dispute about threatened green space in this metropolis has morphed into a [nationwide movement protesting](#) what critics say is the heavy-handed style and increasingly Islamist agenda of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "The

problem is Erdogan," said a protester. "He is imbued with authoritarianism. He can never change." Erdogan blamed the opposition Republican People's Party and "extremist" groups, while also lashing out at social media. Investors seemed anxious about the globally broadcast images of chaos in Turkey's streets, as the nation's main stock exchange dropped by 10 percent by day's end. The nation's major confederation of public workers unions reportedly said it would stage a two-day strike beginning Tuesday in opposition to the crackdown on protests. Erdogan, a former mayor of Istanbul, has dismissed the protesters as hooligans and extremists and rejected parallels to the "Arab Spring" turmoil. Anyone making such comparisons "knows nothing about this country," Erdogan told reporters.

U.N. Panel: Increasing Brutality by Both Sides in Syria

United Nations investigators said they believed chemical weapons and thermobaric bombs were used in recent weeks and urged the international community to cut off supplies of weapons that could only result in more civilian casualties. [*The New York Times*](#) reported, the Commission of Inquiry investigating the hostilities in Syria said it "documents for the first time the systematic imposition of sieges, the use of chemical agents and forcible displacement" in a report presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council. "War crimes, crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations continue apace," it added, reporting 17 incidents that could be called massacres between mid-January and mid-May. The four-person United Nations panel, which is seen by diplomats as providing the most factual and authoritative record of developments in Syria, said "there are reasonable grounds to believe limited quantities of toxic chemicals were used" in Aleppo and Damascus on March 19, in Aleppo again on April 13 and in Idlib on April 29. "Other incidents remain under investigation," the panel reported. The panel cited increasing use of indiscriminate weapons, including cluster munitions, barrel bombs and surface-to-surface missiles as evidence of the "flagrant disregard" of government forces for the distinction between combatants and civilians demanded by international law. "There is a strong element of retribution in the government's approach, with civilians paying a price for "allowing" armed groups to operate within their towns," the report said.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

'Reasons to Smile' in Israel

Daniel Pipes, President of the Middle East Forum, wrote in [*The Washington Times*](#) about how Israelis have a "sense of security and of prosperity." They are generally a happy lot. A recent poll found 93 percent of Jewish Israelis proud of be Israeli. He claims that although "Iranian nuclear weapons loom and confrontation with Moscow is possible, but things have never been so good." According to Bar-Ilan University, Israel is the only advanced country to exceed replacement with its high birthrate of 2.6 children on average, ensuring a growing Jewish population. Alongside this population growth, Israel's gross domestic product has expanded 14.5 percent in contrast to the average growth rate of 2.3 percent during the 2008-2012 recession. Not only did Israel have the highest growth rate, but it also invested the highest percent of its GDP in research and development, ensuring resources for continued advancements in the already vibrant economy. Other "reasons to smile" in Israel include recent gas and oil finds, reduced threats from surrounding countries due to advanced military techniques, and cultural contributions in music among others.