

The week ending May 10, 2013

IRAN

Senate Bill Aims To Toughen Iran Sanctions

A bipartisan group of senators introduced legislation Wednesday that would sharply toughen U.S. economic sanctions on Iran, [The Los Angeles Times](#) reported. Advocates say the Senate proposal could, at least in theory, block Iran from accessing about one-third of the foreign exchange reserves it relies on to pay for government programs, to finance trade and to prop up its currency. The United States and its allies already have imposed sanctions on Iran's nuclear and missile programs, its oil and gas industry, insurance and banking, financial sectors and other parts of the economy. International negotiations to curb Iran's nuclear program have not progressed, and "the time has come for the Senate to take action to close this loophole," the senators said in a statement.

THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

White House Reiterates Israel's Right to Self Defense

According to [The Times of Israel](#), White House spokesman Jay Carney reiterated Israel's right to defend itself against weapons that could pose a threat to its civilians. The White House asserted that it is highly likely that Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime, not the rebel opposition, was behind any chemical weapons use in Syria. Responding to weekend airstrikes in Syria, the White House also reiterated its view that Israel has the right to protect itself against weapons that could pose a threat to Israelis. "Israel certainly has the right to be concerned about the transfer of sophisticated weapons to Hezbollah," Carney said. "And that has been a concern of Israel's for a long time. The transfer of sophisticated weapons to terrorist organizations like Hezbollah is certainly a concern and a threat to Israel, and they have the right to act in their own sovereign interest..."

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Kerry pursues Syria, Mideast plans in Rome talks

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry doggedly [pursued](#) his hopes of both ending the war in Syria and bringing Israel and the Palestinians back to negotiations on the third day of a whirlwind tour. Fresh from a marathon day of diplomacy in Moscow at which he agreed with Russian leaders to organize a conference seeking to end the bloodshed in Syria, the new top U.S. diplomat met for talks with Israeli peace negotiators. In a surprise move, Kerry announced he would make his fourth trip back to Israel in less than three months towards the end of May, as he seeks to breathe fresh life into the talks stalled since late 2010. All sides were approaching the issues "with a seriousness of purpose that has not been present in a while and we all believe that we are working with a short time span,"

Kerry said as he met top Israeli negotiator Tzipi Livni in the U.S ambassador's residence in Rome.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Israel and Turkey Reach Agreement to End Rift

Israeli and Turkish officials reached a draft agreement to mend the three-year diplomatic crisis between the two countries, after a productive day-long meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. "The two sides expect to come to an agreement in the near future," said a statement released by the Prime Minister's Office. "The meeting was conducted in a good and positive manner. The delegations reached an agreed draft, but further clarifications are required on certain subjects," the PMO said. National Security Council head Yaakov Amidror along with Joseph Ciechanover from the Prime Minister's Office led the Israeli delegation. Turkish Foreign Ministry undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu, a former Turkish ambassador to Israel, led his country's delegation. It was the highest-level Turkish delegation to visit Israel in the last three years. In light of the growing threats from Syria and Iran, Israel and Turkey are looking to repair their severed relationship and normalize ties. This reconciliation will include an exchange of ambassadors, as had existed in the past.

U.S. to give \$100 million more to aid displaced Syrians

The Obama administration is providing an additional \$100 million for humanitarian aid for displaced Syrians, officials said, bringing to \$510 million the total U.S. aid commitment since the civil war began more than two years ago, [The Los Angeles Times](#) reported. This conflict has killed nearly 80,000 Syrians and threatens to engulf the broader Mideast region. The new aid will help support 1.4 million civilians trapped by violence within Syria's borders, as well as refugees who have fled to camps in neighboring Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, they said. The administration provides some nonlethal aid to the rebels, such as communications equipment, military-style rations and bandages. But U.S. officials fear that arming the insurgents could wind up strengthening extremist militias, including factions linked to Al Qaeda. The money will be administered by United Nations agencies to help provide food, shelter and healthcare at refugee camps. The aid also will include some cash payments to civilians in Syria.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israel, once energy-dependent, is new big gas producer

The huge reservoirs of natural gas discovered off the coast of Israel now flowing toward shore have the potential to transform the energy-challenged country into a lean, green manufacturing machine—capable of supplying cheap, clean energy to its people, factories and vehicles for a generation. According to [The Washington Post](#), long bereft of the petroleum bonanza that created the modern Middle East, Israel suddenly finds itself a major player in the Mediterranean, and perhaps even the European, natural gas market. The deep-water gas fields, discovered in 2009 and 2010, will soon turn Israel into an energy exporter, putting the Jewish state in the enviable but tricky position of trying to sell billions of dollars in surplus gas to neighbors that range from cool to downright hostile.