

The week ending May 17, 2013

IRAN

Lawmakers push to tighten pressure on Iran

At a Senate hearing on Iran, lawmakers [called](#) for new curbs on Tehran's ability to sell oil or obtain gold and other hard currency to stabilize the Iranian rial. Sanctions put in place last summer have reduced Iran's oil exports by more than a third while cutting the value of its currency in half. Despite that, Iran has accelerated expansion of its uranium-enrichment program, which U.S. officials say is intended to give Iranian leaders nuclear weapons capability. Wendy Sherman, the State Department's point person for nuclear negotiations with Iran and the department's undersecretary for political affairs stated, "We are determined to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Our preference is to resolve this through diplomacy. However, . . . there should be no doubt that the United States will use all elements of American power to achieve that objective." Sherman and David S. Cohen, the Treasury Department's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said new measures in the pipeline would increase the strain on Iran's economy in coming months. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

Iranian Officials Threaten Candidates for the Presidency

Iranian officials on Monday [issued blunt threats of violence](#) against two last-minute registrants for the June 14 presidential election whose unwanted presence on the ballot has angered the country's governing establishment. The two latecomers, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president, and Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, an aide to the current president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, shook up the landscape of the elections on Saturday. Until they appeared, the registration process had been almost exclusively dominated by candidates representing the country's establishment of conservative Shiite Muslim clerics and Revolutionary Guards commanders. Iran's national deputy police commander, Esmael Ahmadi Moghaddam, was quoted by the newspaper Shargh as issuing a warning to President Ahmadinejad and Mr. Mashaei that the "shedding of blood is allowed" if they do not stop claiming to take their orders from the Shiite messiah. The message is the strongest indication yet that Ahmadinejad's faction could be purged, after or even during the elections.

ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Hezbollah to open new front in Golan Heights

According to [The Times of Israel](#), Iran has convinced Syria to allow Hezbollah to open a "new front" against Israel in the Golan Heights. Tehran, seeking to prevent the fall of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government, asked Damascus if Hezbollah could set up a new military front against Israel in the Golan. "All Arabs and Muslims" are requested to join the fight against Israel, Tehran said, according to Israel Radio. The Palestinian

newspaper al-Quds also reported Wednesday that Tehran had persuaded Damascus “to open the door to jihad” in the Golan Heights in an effort enable Arab and Muslim fighters to unite and confront Israel, so that they’re “ready” if Israel strikes Syria again. The Lebanese daily al-Akhbar suggested last week that Iran had “reached a final decision” to respond to Israel’s reported strike on Syria by “turning the Golan into a new Fatah-land. The front has become open to Syrians and Palestinians and anyone who wants to fight Israel.”

Mortars hit Mt. Hermon for the first time since uprising

For the first time since the outbreak of the Syrian uprising, two mortar shells exploded in the Mount Hermon area, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. There were no reported injuries or casualties. The area in the Hermon, the mountain range that straddles the Lebanese-Syrian border and the Golan Heights, was promptly closed to hikers on the Shavuot holiday. The shells that landed inside Israeli territory were reportedly a result of fighting between Syrian President Bashar Assad’s regime and the rebels, not a planned attack on Israel. Israel lodged a complaint with UNDOF, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, which oversees the buffer zone between Syria and Israel established by the Security Council in the wake of the Yom Kippur War.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Turkey bombings cause outcry over Syrian rebel support

Deadly car bombings in the southern Turkish city of Reyhanli have galvanized domestic opposition to the government’s steadfast support for Syrian rebels amid fears that Turkey is being dragged into the bloody conflict across its border. [The Los Angeles Times](#) reported that the attacks have been widely viewed as “blowback” from the Turkish government’s support for the Syrian political and military opposition. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has allowed Turkish territory to be used as a logistics and organizing base for both armed rebels and political factions seeking to oust the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad. The bombings have ratcheted up the discord here about Turkey’s role in Syria. But some analysts noted that the rebels, some of whom have considerable expertise in car bombs, also could have a motive: to spur Turkish retaliation against the Assad regime or even international intervention on behalf of Turkey, the eastern bulwark of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Gas presence found in new Israeli reservoir

According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), A significant gas presence was reported from the Karish 1 well located about 75 kilometers northwest of Haifa, said The Delek Group, an Israel based conglomerate and gas provider. While official analyses of the drilling results will be conducted within the next two months, the Delek Group and its partners are stressing that there is likely a sizable gas presence in the well. Preliminary estimates have revealed that Karish 1 probably contains about 57 billion cubic meters of gas, the Delek Group said. “This is proof of the power of the Israeli gas industry and of the great gas potential that exists off the coast of Israel, and we must keep up the momentum,” said Delek Drilling chairman and Avner Oil Exploration CEO Gideon Tadmor. This future natural gas industry, will allow the State of Israel to thrive with an additional hundreds of billions of shekels that come from taxes and royalties generated from gas extraction.