

The week ending May 3, 2013

IRAN

Iran Told Hezbollah to Join Syrian War

Iran pressed Hezbollah fighters to join the civil war in Syria to bolster President Bashar al-Assad's armed struggle, according to Sobhi al-Tofaili, a disaffected former leader of the militant group. According to [Bloomberg](#), Hezbollah has denied it is backing Assad in the fighting, saying it is helping Lebanese Shiites living in Syrian border towns and villages to defend themselves against rebel assaults. It has remained largely silent amid a wave of recent accusations by Syrian opposition leaders and Lebanese groups about its involvement in Syria. Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, told the Security Council. "Hezbollah not only continues to undermine Lebanon from within by violating the government's policy of disassociation, but actively enables Assad to wage war on the Syrian people by providing money, weapons, and expertise to the regime in close coordination with Iran," she said. 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

Arabs soften stance on Israel's final borders

Arab countries [endorsed a Mideast peace plan](#) Monday that would allow for small shifts in Israel's 1967 border, moving them closer to President Barack Obama's two-state vision. Speaking on behalf of an Arab League delegation to Washington, Qatari Prime Minister Sheik Hamad Bin Jassem Al Thani called for an agreement between Israel and a future Palestine based on the Jewish state's border before the 1967 Mideast War. But, unlike in previous such offers, he cited the possibility of "comparable," mutually agreed and "minor" land swaps between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Al Thani spoke after his delegation met across the street from the White House with Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry, who has been pushing Arab leaders to embrace a modified version of their decade-old "Arab Peace Initiative" as part of a new U.S.-led effort to corral Israel and the Palestinians back into direct peace talks. Top officials from the Arab League, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia attended the meeting. It's unclear what effect the modified conditions, as outlined by Al Thani, might have on the Israeli-Palestinian impasse.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

U.S. delivers first aid shipment to Free Syrian Army

Tuesday morning at an undisclosed location across Syria's northern border, a U.S. C-17 transport aircraft offloaded the [first of several shipments](#) totaling \$8 million in halal

"Meals Ready to Eat" and combat medical packs called Warrior Aid and Litter Kits. Those supplies are marked with a note from the Syrian Support Group (SSG), the U.S. government's implementing partner, which coordinated the logistics for the transfer to the FSA. The SSG is the only U.S.-based organization licensed to provide support directly to the Free Syrian Army. Gen. Salim Idris, the leader of the FSA's Supreme Military Command wrote, "The Regime's history of desensitizing the international community to its gradual use of internationally banned weapons as led me to the alarming conclusion that these incidents are but a prelude to larger and more systematic deployment of chemical weapons as part of Assad's military strategy."

Jordan warns UN of 'crushing weight' of Syria refugees

Jordan [warned](#) the UN Security Council that the growing exodus of Syrian refugees was a threat to its stability and the council is now considering a visit to the camps. Jordan faces a "crushing weight" if the refugee numbers, already over 500,000, keep growing at the current rate, said the ambassador, Prince Zeid al-Hussein, after a private meeting with Security Council envoys. Zeid said international help had been "insufficient" and that "from the perspective of the Jordanian government unless the support is forthcoming then we consider this to be a threat to our future stability."

Egyptian detained on charges of insulting president

A prominent Egyptian campaigner was detained over accusations of insulting President Mohamed Morsi, [Reuters](#) reported. This is a case activists said highlighted a crackdown on dissent by the Islamist government. A court in the town of Tanta ruled Ahmed Douma should be held for four days, pending investigation into charges of "deliberately spreading false news and rumors" during two recent television appearances, a court official told Reuters. Dozens of cases of "insulting the president" have been brought in Egypt since Morsi took office last June. Activists said the case was the latest example of the government using the courts to target its liberal and secular opponents. "They feel that those activists who criticize the president are, according to their words, harming the president, so they try to silence them," said Hafez Abu Seada, head of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

U.S. Companies Are Drooling Over Israel's Startup Scene

U.S. companies and investors are falling over themselves to get a piece of [Israel's startup action](#) these days. There are at least two dozen accelerator programs in the Tel Aviv area, including some run by Microsoft and Google. It seems like every U.S. VC has at least one Israeli startup in its portfolio. Some even have full offices here, like Battery Ventures, Benchmark, Bessemer, Sequoia, according to the Mapped In Israel startup map. With 4,800 startups in the country today, Israel is known as the "startup nation." That's more startups per capita than any other country, and No. 2 in actual numbers after the United States (not counting those who claim the tax shelter Cayman Islands as their home). Of those 4,800, about 700 are VC backed. The rest are bootstrapped, Microsoft's Tzahi Weisfeld, senior director of Microsoft global startup group in Tel Aviv, told Business Insider.