

The week ending May 24, 2013

IRAN

U.S. Congress moves to tighten sanctions on Iran

The Senate unanimously [passed](#) a resolution calling for Washington's support should Israel strike Iran's nuclear weapons program. "If the Government of Israel is compelled to take military action in legitimate self-defense against Iran's nuclear weapons program, the United States Government should stand with Israel and provide, in accordance with United States law and the constitutional responsibility of Congress to authorize the use of military force, diplomatic, military, and economic support to the Government of Israel in its defense of its territory, people, and existence," the resolution reads. Through the passing of Resolution S. R. 65, the Senate unanimously pledged to stand by our Israeli ally should it take military action in its own legitimate defense against the nuclear threat from Iran. Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) sponsored the resolution. The resolution gathered 92 co-sponsors.

Iran bars prominent candidates from ballot

According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), the committee that vets election candidates in Iran barred two important contenders from the ballot for June's presidential election, virtually guaranteeing that the next head of government will be loyal to the regime of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran's Guardian Council disqualified former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, an aide to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, from running for president. The council didn't explain its decisions, but it generally examines loyalty to the Iranian Revolution, Islam and the Supreme Leader. U.S. State Department Spokesman Patrick Ventrell said the Guardian Council wasn't accountable to the Iranian people. "The lack of transparency makes it unlikely that the slate of candidates represents the will of the Iranian people, who should be given every opportunity to choose a president who best embodies their views."

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

U.S., Israel raise hopes for Mideast peace restart

The U.S. and Israel are hopeful of Secretary of State John Kerry's effort to get Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table, [Reuters](#) reported. As they met in Jerusalem, Kerry praised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the "seriousness" with which he is looking at ways to revitalize peace hopes. Netanyahu said his conversation with the top American diplomat would touch on mutual concerns about Iran and Syria. "But above all," he said, "what we want to do is restart the peace talks with the Palestinians." "It's something I want, it's something you want," Netanyahu told Kerry. "It's something I hope the Palestinians want as well and we ought to be successful for a simple reason: When there's a will, we'll find a way." This information is

an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

Hamas textbooks to teach about 'liberation plans'

Hamas has begun preparing new school textbooks that teach children about “plans to liberate Palestine and the legitimacy and various forms of resistance [against Israel].” According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), an advisor to the Hamas-controlled education ministry, said new books would be introduced as part of National Education Studies for grades 8-10. The new curriculum, which is expected to be introduced into the Gaza Strip schools next academic year, will refer to the “Zionist project and ambitions, the Balfour Declaration, the 1948 Nakba and massacres, the 1956, 1967 and 1973 wars,” according to the Hamas official. One teaching unit, he said, will talk about the “right of return” for Palestinian refugees and the “project to liberate Palestine, including the issue of resistance and its legitimacy, and various forms.” The new books will teach children about the Palestinian “resistance” groups such as Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Three in Europe Now Oppose Hezbollah

Three of Europe's most powerful countries—Britain, Germany and France—have thrown their weight behind a push for the European Union to designate the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, a move that could have far-reaching consequences for the group's fund-raising activities on the continent. According to [The New York Times](#), Germany came out with a statement saying Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle supported listing “at least the military wing” of the organization as a terrorist group. The announcement came just a day after Britain's Foreign Office said it would pursue doing the same, promising to “work closely with our European partners on this issue to reach a robust, collective E.U. position.” France had been undecided, but recently Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said it would join Britain and Germany in seeking to have the “military wing” of Hezbollah put on the European Union terrorist list.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Tel Aviv to be the world's first 'digitalized' city

“Digi-Tel” will allow residents to do all municipal business online, from paying real estate taxes to filing requests for permits, license applications, and renewals, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. Residents will be able get tailor-made information about events in their neighborhoods based on their preferences, reserve and pay for tickets to the theater and sporting events, sign kids up for school (and after-school activities), and avoid traffic by checking out up-to-the-minute reports on what streets are closed for construction and where an accident has just taken place. “We have a lot of young people here who are involved in the high-tech industry,” Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai said at a press conference introducing the program. “We have done a lot to encourage creative entrepreneurs to move to the city, including providing incubator environments for entrepreneurs to work, and working closely with the many start-ups that have opened offices in the center of the city. Now we want to marshal this talent to developing ways that will make life easier for residents. It's part of our vision of making everything as accessible and open to residents as possible.”