

The week ending May 31, 2013

IRAN

Anti-West hard-liner gains in Iranian race

Saeed Jalili, known as Iran's unyielding nuclear negotiator and a protégé of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is [emerging as the presumed front-runner](#) in Iran's presidential election on June 14, an unsettling prospect for future relations with the West. Jalili, 47, who many analysts say has long been groomed for a top position in Iran, is by far the most outspoken hard-liner among the eight candidates approved to participate in the elections. Opposing "détente a hundred percent" and promising no compromise "whatsoever" with the West over matters like Iran's nuclear program and involvement in Syria, Jalili seems set to further escalate Iran's standoff with the United States and its allies if elected president. "He seems to be Ahmadinejad Phase 2," said Rasool Nafisi, an Iran expert based in Virginia. "He would probably not be a partner to negotiate for the nuclear issues, as we have seen before when he was heading the delegations." This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

Prosecutor in Argentina sees Iranian plot in Latin America

The special prosecutor investigating the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people released a report claiming that Iran had set up intelligence stations in different parts of Latin America with the aim of carrying out terrorist attacks directly or through Hezbollah, the powerful Lebanese militant group. According to [The New York Times](#), the report contended that the 1994 bombing was not an isolated event. "It has to be investigated as a segment in a larger sequence," he said in a report summary, pointing to parallels with the case of two Guyanese men convicted in 2010 of conspiring to attack Kennedy International Airport in New York. Alberto Nisman who has investigated the bombing since 2005, suggested that "criminal plans" by Iran could be under development in Latin America, including Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guyana, Paraguay, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Kerry pushes investment plan for West Bank

In an effort to [revive the peace talks](#) between Israel and the Palestinians, Secretary of State John Kerry announced a plan to invest as much as \$4 billion to develop the economy of the West Bank. Sketching out a vision of a transformed Middle East, Kerry said an infusion of private sector investments could increase the gross domestic product of the West Bank by 50 percent over three years and slash unemployment, which now hovers around 21 percent, by two-thirds. Kerry hoped to spur Israel and the Palestinians to begin talks on a comprehensive Middle East peace agreement amid concerns that the

window for initiating negotiations may begin to close. “Negotiations can’t succeed if you don’t negotiate,” Kerry said. “We are reaching a critical point.”

Palestinians reject Kerry’s focus on boosting their economy

A day after U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry set out an ambitious \$4 billion economic plan designed to drastically boost the Palestinian economy and help galvanize diplomatic efforts, the Palestinian Authority summarily rejected the idea of gaining economic benefits in exchange for political concessions, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. President Mahmoud Abbas’s economic adviser, Mohammad Mustafa, said “The Palestinian leadership will not offer political concessions in exchange for economic benefits.” Mustafa, who also heads the Palestine Investment Fund, said the PA’s priorities are not economic but rather a political framework for the creation of Palestinian state based on the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital that also ensures the rights of refugees and a political compromise, the Palestinian news agency added. At the World Economic Forum in Jordan Sunday, Kerry unveiled a plan that he believes could grow the Palestinian economy by up to 50 percent in the next three years and could bring unprecedented wealth and stability that will spread across the entire region.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

Russia sends arms to Syria to reassert its role in region

According to [The Washington Post](#), the flow of arms to Syria, including the advanced S-300 missile defense batteries that Moscow said it would supply, continues amid hopes that an international conference, jointly proposed by the U.S. and Russia, will lead to a negotiated political settlement of Syria’s civil war. Moscow has served as the primary arms supplier to the government of President Bashar al-Assad, as it did for the predecessor government run by his father. The United States and its pro-opposition partners have appealed to Russia to preserve such long-term interests in Syria by moving to the winning side and have been perplexed by the Russians’ resistance. However, many Russia experts say the United States has misread Russia’s mind-set and goals. Russian President Vladimir Putin bases many of his policies on the concept that Russia does not take orders from the West. At the same time, diplomats and analysts said Russia is taking measures to reassert itself in the Middle East and is putting out the word that it plans to vigorously defend its interests.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israelis develop ‘Earthquake Proof Table’

A new work at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) can thank a pair of Israelis for its success. [The Algemeiner](#) reported, the “Earthquake Proof Table,” was a project conceived at Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem. The table is designed to withstand the impact and weight of immense objects by flexing and absorbing the pressure. It gives a superior level of protection in the event of an earthquake. In such a scenario, people taking shelter under the table have a much higher chance of survival, according to the designers. MOMA’s board recently inducted the “Earthquake Proof Table” into its permanent collection at the department of architecture and design. “The Earthquake Proof table” was a joint development of Arthur Brutter, designed as part of his final schoolwork project, and his lecturer Ido Bruno from the department of Industrial Design.