

The week ending October 25, 2013

## THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

### **30 Years Ago: 241 Americans Killed in Beirut Suicide Blasts**

Wednesday marked the 30th anniversary of a U.S. Marine barracks suicide [bombing in Beirut](#), Lebanon that killed 241 Americans. The deceased victims included 200 Marine Corps, 18 Navy and 3 Army soldiers. The deadly attack, considered then to be the most lethal non-nuclear bombing in history, was carried out by an affiliate of the Iranian- and Syrian-supported Hezbollah. Today, 30 years later, the Hezbollah terrorist network still poses a direct threat to American interests and Israel, dominates the Lebanese government and has amassed more than 60,000 rockets. Hezbollah has killed more Americans than any terrorist group other than al-Qaeda and has launched dozens of attacks against Israel since it withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000.

## IRAN

### **Iran human rights record should not be overlooked**

Iran's human rights record should not be overlooked amid overtures to the West by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, a U.N. envoy said on Wednesday. The envoy criticized Tehran for executing 724 people in 18 months, including dozens just after Rouhani was elected in June. According to [Reuters](#), Ahmed Shaheed, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, said at least 44 people were executed shortly after the Iranian polls. "Any renewed or revitalized dialogue between Iran and the international community must include and not seek to sideline the issue of human rights," Shaheed, who was not allowed to visit Iran to investigate the rights situation, told the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee, which focuses on human rights. A representative of Iran's U.N. mission claimed that Iran has put a new emphasis on its unwavering dedication towards the promotion and protection of all human rights inside and outside the country.

### **Hamas moves to improve ties with Iran**

The Palestinian militant group Hamas, which has dominated the Gaza Strip since it defeated its rival Fatah in a bitter 2007 conflict, has suffered a series of setbacks recently. According to [Voice of America](#), in a bid to revive his group's flagging finances and political profile, Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal is likely to visit Iran shortly to patch-up damaged ties with Tehran. Those ties were severely strained after Meshaal broke ties with long-time patron Bashar al-Assad of Syria and moved Hamas' headquarters to Qatar. But now with Gaza isolated by Egypt's military-dominated government and a new less supportive ruler in Qatar there are daily reports that the cash-strapped Palestinian resistance group is looking to shift its headquarters from an increasingly unfriendly Qatar and is casting around for an alternative host country in the Middle East. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

## THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

### U.S., Israel Talk for 7 Hours

Secretary of State John Kerry and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met for seven hours in Rome to try to synchronize positions on two tracks of Middle East diplomacy—Iran and the Palestinian peace process. According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), Netanyahu insisted in opening remarks that the West continues applying pressure on Iran by maintaining tough U.S.-led economic sanctions. “Iran must not have a nuclear weapons capability, which means that they shouldn’t have centrifuges for enrichment,” he said. “They shouldn’t have a plutonium heavy water plant which is used only for nuclear weapons. They should get rid of the amassed fissile material. And they shouldn’t have underground nuclear facilities, underground for one reason—for military purposes.” Netanyahu seemed to draw a link between the Iran nuclear talks and the peace process with the Palestinians, suggesting that if Iran were to build a nuclear weapon, Israel would be less inclined to make concessions for peace with its Arab neighbors. 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

### Israel prepares to release 30 Palestinian prisoners

[The Times of Israel](#) reported that Israel is expected to release a second group of 30 Palestinian prisoners on October 29 as part of ongoing peace efforts. The batch will include more members of the group of 104 pre-Oslo Peace Accords inmates Israel has pledged to release, contingent on progress in the talks. Just after talks began, 26 prisoners were released in the first wave on August 13. The Prime Minister’s Office declined to confirm the reports, but said a public notice would be sent out before any prisoner release and it would not be done in the dead of night. Israel agreed in July to a four-stage release of 104 prisoners, many of whom were convicted of brutal murders, serving sentences for acts of terror committed before the signing of the Oslo Accords. The agreement was intended as a sign of good faith ahead of the renewed American-brokered peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu resisted pressure to delay or cancel the prisoner releases in the wake of a series of violent incidents in the West Bank, including the killing of two IDF soldiers.

## ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

### For Syrians, aid from Israel comes in a whisper

In Jordan, where 500,000 Syrian refugees have poured in from the north of the country seeking refuge in overcrowded, disease-filled and crime-ridden camps, IsraAID is quietly distributing vital aid to refugees in need. While the Israel Defense Forces work to bring afflicted Syrians into its emergency rooms, Israel’s humanitarian agencies are engaging in comprehensive relief efforts. Earlier this month, [The Times of Israel](#) interviewed a number of volunteers taking part in the relief efforts. “You see a lot of Americans doing humanitarian work all over the world,” says Mickey Alon, an IsraAID volunteer. “It’s a bit more complicated for Israelis to do it.” Yet for the Israeli volunteers, the work is worth it. “For us, this has nothing to do with politics at home...We come because we are people who want to do humanitarian work.”