

The week ending October 4, 2013

IRAN

Iran elected to U.N. disarmament committee post

Members of the U.N. General Assembly elected Iran as rapporteur for the committee responsible for Disarmament and International Security, a body that deals with all matters regarding disarmament—including nuclear weapons, [The Times of Israel reported](#). Replacing Norwegian diplomat Knut Langeland, the Iranian representative will relay information relating to the committee's proceedings during the U.N.'s 68th session, spanning 2013-14, to the General Assembly. When Iran applied for the rapporteur position, Israel's U.N. Ambassador Ron Prosor said in a statement that "allowing Iran to be on the U.N. committee dealing with nuclear disarmament and weapons proliferation is like inviting Assad, the Syrian dictator responsible for the death of 100,000 of his own people, to be the head of the population census bureau." The decision came hours after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to the General Assembly about the dangers of a nuclear Iran, and a day after President Barack Obama said the U.S. would "take no options off the table, including military options," in order to stop Tehran from possessing such weapons. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

Gov't shutdown empties offices enforcing sanctions on Iran

With the government shut down, most U.S. officials [enforcing sanctions on Iran](#) are not at work, potentially undermining pressure on Tehran as U.S.-Iran negotiations recommence, according to administration officials, lawmakers, and experts. The Treasury Department has furloughed approximately 90 percent of the employees in its Office of Terrorist Financing and Intelligence (TFI), which is responsible for the monitoring of illicit activities and enforcement of sanctions related to several countries, including Iran, Syria, and North Korea, according to Treasury officials. The drastic scaling down of personnel working on those activities comes just as the Obama administration is engaging in its first set of diplomatic negotiations with the new Iranian government, led by President Hassan Rouhani. A subsection of TFI, the Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC), which implements the U.S. government's financial sanctions, has been forced to furlough nearly all its staff due to the lapse in congressional funding, said a Treasury Department spokesman. "As a result, OFAC is unable to sustain its core functions of: issuing new sanctions designations against those enabling the governments of Iran and Syria," the spokesman said.

THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

State Dept says shutdown could hit funding for Israel

[Reuters](#) reported that a prolonged U.S. federal government shutdown could delay military assistance to Israel and other American allies, State Department deputy

spokeswoman Marie Harf told a news briefing. Harf gave only the specific example of Israel, the largest recipient of U.S. foreign military funding and a country which enjoys strong bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress. The Obama administration had requested \$3.1 billion for Israel for the 2014 fiscal year that began on October 1, the day U.S. political stalemate forced a partial shutdown of government. In 2007, the two countries agreed on a 10-year, \$30-billion military aid package covering the 2009-18 fiscal years. Total U.S. foreign military funding was about \$5.5 billion for more than 80 countries in 2011, according to State Department data. Additionally, the Defense Ministry could be forced to slow down the development of the Arrow 3 anti-ballistic-missile system, designed to intercept Iranian missiles in space, due to budget cuts. The missile defense system, which sends interceptors out of the atmosphere to provide the air force with additional attempts to shoot down incoming projectiles, had been fast-tracked in recent months in response to Iran's missile development program, but its development may now be spread out over a longer period of time if a funding solution is not found.

SYRIA

U.N. chemical experts start Syria mission

Experts tasked with implementing the U.N. resolution ordering the [destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal](#) began work Thursday, as the world body demanded access to civilians trapped by the conflict. Nine disarmament experts from The Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) were seen leaving their Damascus hotel in a three-vehicle convoy, heading for an unknown destination. Resolution 2118 was passed after gas attacks on the outskirts of Damascus killed hundreds of people on August 21, an atrocity that prompted the United States to threaten military strikes on the Syrian government. The OPCW team faces a daunting task, as President Bashar al-Assad's regime is understood to have stockpiled more than 1,000 tons of the nerve agent sarin, mustard gas and other banned chemical weapons. Their immediate aim is to disable chemical weapons production sites by late October or early November using "expedient methods" including the use of explosives, sledgehammers or pouring in concrete, an OPCW official said. It is the first time in the OPCW's history that a mission to destroy chemical weapons is being undertaken in a country embroiled in a civil war.

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Israel, PA negotiations set to resume

U.S. Special envoy Martin Indyk arrived in Israel for the [eighth meeting](#) of Israeli and Palestinian negotiators since July. The talks resumed after a two week break while the Israeli and Palestinian leaders were at the U.N. and the focus was on Iran's nuclear program. Both sides have kept the details of the negotiations, which are being shepherded by Secretary of State John Kerry, under wraps. The talks are meant to reach a final-status peace deal that will solve all outstanding issues between the two sides, including borders, refugees, water, and Jerusalem. Israel and the Palestinians have agreed to intensify their peace talks with greater participation by the United States, Kerry said. "When I have met with both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, we have agreed now to intensify these talks," Kerry said at the United Nations last week. The Israeli-Palestinian peace talks were resumed in July, after a three-year stalemate. Violent incidents over recent weeks, including the killings of two IDF soldiers in the West Bank, raised tensions even higher.