

The week ending August 15, 2014

ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIANS

Rocket Fire Casts Doubt on Truce in Gaza

Palestinian leaders said early Thursday that in the last moments before the midnight expiration of their cease-fire with Israel in Gaza, the two sides had agreed to hold their fire for an additional five days to continue talks about a more durable truce. But an exchange of rockets and missiles around the end of one cease-fire and the beginning of the next, cast immediate doubt about whether it would even last. Hamas, denied responsibility for the rockets, suggesting that other militants outside its control had carried them out. Israel had initiated a unilateral cease-fire, declaring that the country's most recent military campaign in Gaza had met its goals of weakening Hamas, so the commitment of the Palestinian militants to hold their rocket fire was always the key to renewing the cease-fire. [The New York Times](#) writes that President Obama had talked by phone with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel on Wednesday night and discussed "the ongoing negotiations in Cairo to achieve a sustainable cease-fire agreement."

Israel transfers hurt Palestinians from Gaza to Ben-Gurion Airport for medical evacuation

Israel in cooperation with Turkey transported 18 wounded Palestinians from Gaza to Ben-Gurion Airport Wednesday where they were medically evacuated to Ankara, Israeli and Palestinian officials said. According to the Government Press Office, one of the wounded was in serious condition, four were in moderate condition and 13 sustained light injuries reported [The Jerusalem Post](#). As they passed through the Erez crossing from Gaza, the injured were met by a series of Israeli ambulances. The ambulances transported the wounded to Ben-Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, where a Turkish Air Force aircraft waited for them on the tarmac. The imitative [action] was taken alongside the framework of Israel's ongoing efforts to transfer the sick and wounded from Gaza to Israeli hospitals, the GPO said in a statement. Turkish officials said they planned to bring in around 200 wounded in the first stage of a plan to transport wounded, and would hold further talks with Israel and Egypt—which has acted as a mediator in the conflict—to agree to more flights.

For the latest information on the situation in Israel please click [here](#).

IRAN

Iran's supreme leader Khamenei: Nuclear talks with U.S. are 'useless'

Iran's supreme leader issued some of his toughest statements yet on international negotiations over his country's nuclear ambitions, declaring Wednesday that talking to the Americans was "useless" and that nothing positive could come of it. Speaking to Foreign Ministry officials, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei praised Iranian negotiators who have conducted the talks with the United States and five other world powers, and he did not call for abandoning them. But he appeared to give succor to Iranian hard-liners who are adamantly opposed to discussions that could lead to a scaling back of Iran's nuclear program, which they insist, is intended for peaceful purposes only. [The Los Angeles Times](#) reports that the remarks came two days after President Hassan Rouhani stirred controversy in Iran by calling opponents of the talks "cowards" and telling them to go to hell. Khamenei has consistently been far more skeptical about the talks. The cleric's remarks Wednesday echoed those he made about the negotiations in February, when he was quoted as saying, "I'm not optimistic about the nuclear talks but not opposed to them either." They would "lead nowhere," he predicted then. He said that the Iranian negotiators, led by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, responded "with stronger, firmer" positions, but "it became clear that, contrary to some people's wishful thinking, negotiation does not help at all." Though some sanctions have been temporarily relaxed over the course of the talks, Khamenei insisted they had actually been increased. "Of course we do not prohibit continuation of the nuclear negotiations, and what Dr. Zarif and his colleagues have started and well pursued will continue, but it was another valuable experience for everyone to know that being in touch with Americans and talking to them is useless and has absolutely no effect on decreasing their enmity," he said.

IRAQ

Thousands of Iraq's Yazidi Refugees Still Need Help, Locals Say

Thousands of Yazidi refugees on an Iraqi mountainside still need aid even though U.S. airstrikes and airdrops appear to have improved conditions there, according to some local officials and families that have escaped. According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), The U.S. on Wednesday dispatched a small assessment team that spent 24 hours on the Sinjar Mountains and concluded that a large number of the trapped members of Iraq's Yazidi religious minority had already managed to flee. U.S. officials said the assessment makes it unlikely the U.S. military will carry out a risky evacuation, which had been considered. That finding appeared to surprise local Iraqi officials and disappoint some Yazidis who have relatives still on the mountains. The Yazidis have been escaping their mountain hide-outs using different ways and routes—some fleeing along the base of the mountain, others going across the border to Syria with the help of a Kurdish militia, or more recently, being plucked to safety in Iraqi helicopter rescue missions. Hero Mirza, a 40-year-old market-stall owner, said that thousands on the mountain were trapped or too weak to leave. Mr. Mirza said he arrived in Zakho on Thursday carrying his 90-year-old mother. "The corridors to walk across the Islamic State lines are shifting and it is very dangerous," Mr. Mirza said. "Many are too scared or too weak."