



Rabbinic Recap

The week ending June 20, 2014

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Israel clamps down on Hamas in West Bank after abduction of three Jewish teenagers

[The Washington Post](#) reported that as Israel searches for three teenagers it says were kidnapped by Hamas, Israeli security forces are pursuing a parallel campaign to cripple the Islamist militant movement in the West Bank. In the past four nights, Israeli troops have conducted predawn raids and detained at least 240 Palestinians, most of them members of Hamas. The troops have shut down Hamas radio stations, confiscated the group's cash, captured its weapons and jailed its top-tier political leaders across the West Bank. Israeli military commanders describe it as one of the most aggressive operations against Hamas in the territory in the past decade. Israel this week also deployed three combat brigades to the West Bank, supplementing the six already there. Israel and the United States consider Hamas a terrorist organization. Israel [accuses](#) Hamas members of kidnapping the three teens, who disappeared almost a week ago while hitchhiking home from their religious schools in the West Bank. Israel's leadership is angry that Hamas and its longtime rival, the moderate Fatah party of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, recently joined forces in a transitional "[unity government](#)." This week, Israel's security cabinet ordered the military to hit Hamas hard. The kidnapping of the teens was seen by some Palestinians as a legitimate blow against their occupiers, but it has not been [unanimously applauded](#). "Those who kidnapped the three teenagers want to destroy us. We will hold them accountable," Abbas said Wednesday at an Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia. "The three young men are human beings just like us and must be returned to their families," he said.

IRAN

Official: Iran talks enter 'critical' week with parties far apart

Iran and six world powers began a "critical" week of nuclear negotiations in Vienna still far apart despite daily contacts over the past month, a senior administration official said Monday. With a negotiating deadline of July 20 now nearly a month away, the group held a round of nation-to-nation meetings with the Iranians last week, including an unusual session between high-level U.S. and Iranian officials. [The Los Angeles Times](#) notes that though the two sides have some better ideas about how they could theoretically bridge the gaps, there remain "significant differences" between them, the official told reporters in a briefing. The official, who declined to be identified under administration ground rules, was unable to say that the two days of U.S.-Iranian meeting had yielded progress. That meeting included two senior U.S. officials, Deputy Secretary of State William Burns and White House foreign policy aide Jacob Sullivan. Iran and the six powers — the United States, Germany, Britain, France, Russia and China — have been

seeking a deal that would ease economic sanctions on Iran in exchange for curbs aimed at ensuring that Tehran doesn't develop nuclear weapons capability.

Conflict in Iraq Adds New Angle to U.S.-Iran Nuclear Talks

A [New York Times](#) article noted that the Iranian leadership had a message for Washington on Wednesday: If President Obama really wants some cooperation on stabilizing Iraq, he might first think about speeding forward with a permanent deal over Iran's nuclear capability. That statement by President Hassan Rouhani's chief of staff, Mohammad Nahavandian, to reporters at an international relations forum in Oslo, hardly surprised the American and European negotiators. They are growing skeptical that a deal both Mr. Obama and Mr. Rouhani can embrace — and sell at home — is possible by a deadline agreed upon with the Iranians last year, now a little more than a month away. “The Iranians desperately needed leverage,” one European negotiator said Wednesday after weeks of arguments over how many centrifuges Iran would be permitted to keep spinning, and how fast the sanctions that have so crippled the economic lives of ordinary Iranians could be lifted. “They clearly think the American fear of getting sucked back into Iraq may be just the thing, at just the right moment.” To the Iranians, an agreement that preserves what they call their “nuclear rights” and the collapse of century-old borders and the American-enforced order in the Middle East are both, if played right in Tehran, an opportunity to restore and expand Iran's influence in the region. To the White House, however, a long-term nuclear accord in which the United States has direct strategic interests while managing the latest spasm of sectarian violence in a conflict Mr. Obama is loath to re-engage is a prescription for a bad deal. So when Mr. Nahavandian said a nuclear agreement would be “the test for confidence building” that could lead to “opportunities for other issues,” the response was swift. **“Any discussion about Iraq with Iran will be entirely separate” from the negotiations, Marie Harf, a State Department spokeswoman, said Wednesday. “And any effort to link the two — or any other regional issue — is a nonstarter. We have been clear about this since the start of our negotiations over the nuclear program.”**

SYRIA

Syria probably used chlorine gas in attacks this year, weapons inspectors say

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) mission said this week that evidence “lends credence to the view that toxic chemicals, most likely pulmonary irritating agents such as chlorine, have been used.” The OPCW investigation reported on by [The Washington Post](#) followed French and U.S. allegations that Assad's forces may have used industrial chemicals against rebel-held areas this spring. The agency also said that a deadline to remove Assad's declared stockpile of chemical weapons from Syrian soil is unlikely to be met. International inspectors have removed about 92 percent of the declared material, including sarin, but have not been able to get the necessary cooperation and clearances to extract the final 8 percent. “Ongoing delays in transporting the remaining 8 percent of chemicals mean that Syria will miss the target date of June 30 for the complete destruction of its chemical weapons program,” said OPCW Director General Ahmet Uzumcu. The Obama administration has not decided what action, if any, it might take in reaction to the preliminary evidence cited by the OPCW, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Wednesday. “We will evaluate” the final conclusions before deciding whether Syria had again crossed President Obama's “red line” that chemical warfare is intolerable, Psaki said. She would not speculate about any U.S. action that might follow.