



# Rabbinic Recap

The week ending March 21, 2014

## IRAN

### **Congress Sends Critical Letters to President on Iran**

An overwhelming bipartisan majority of 83 Senators sent a [letter](#) to President Obama expressing that a final agreement must end Iran's nuclear quest. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Charles Schumer (D-NY), Mark Kirk (R-IL), Christopher Coons (D-DE) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) initiated the letter. The letter expressed support for the negotiations and pointed out that sanctions pressure forced Iran to the table and pressure should intensify if "Iran violates the interim agreement, uses talks simply as a delaying tactic, or walks away from the table." It also stresses the essential role of Congress. Moreover, 395 House members from both parties also wrote to President Obama addressing the necessary terms for a final agreement with Iran and emphasizing the stringent transparency measures required in any agreement. The House letter was initiated by House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) and House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD).

## U.S. ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

### **Senate Bill Awards Medal to Shimon Peres**

The Senate [passed legislation](#) by unanimous consent on March 13 that would award the Congressional Gold Medal to Israeli President Shimon Peres. The bill, introduced by Sens. Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) and Michael Bennet (D-CO), had 81 cosponsors, and now awaits a vote in the House. If enacted, this would be the first case of a sitting Israeli President receiving the honor. "I'm pleased to honor President Peres' extraordinary record of service that has strengthened the unbreakable bond between the U.S. and Israel, our closest and most reliable ally in the Middle East," Sen. Ayotte said. "This legislation demonstrates that the United States stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Israel in these uncertain times." Senator Bennet added: "In a world that is more complicated than ever, President Peres' leadership has helped strengthen a U.S.-Israel relationship forged by our shared commitment to democracy, human rights, and rule of law. His career will serve as a beacon for the next generation of leaders. We are pleased to celebrate and honor President Peres as one of Israel's most dedicated public servants."

## ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

### **Jailed militant key to Mideast talks**

According to several top officials, the Palestinians are seeking the freedom of Marwan Barghouti, who is serving multiple life sentences for his alleged role in killings of Israelis, as part of any plan to extend negotiations with Israel beyond an April deadline. Israel

and the Palestinians restarted negotiations last July. Secretary of State John Kerry has been working tirelessly with the two parties on a framework peace deal by the April deadline. The sides are now searching for a way to extend the talks. The Palestinians are demanding the release of the most senior prisoners held by Israel. Israel was already forced to release dozens of prisoners convicted of deadly violence to make the current round of talks possible, but Barghouti, a popular figure among Palestinians, remains jailed. Barghouti's release could be critical for Abbas. The Palestinian leader has seen his popularity plummet due to the lack of progress in peace talks. Winning Barghouti's freedom would be a huge moral victory for him. Abbas has recently acknowledged he cannot serve forever. Yet he has never designated a successor and is facing a rising challenge by an exiled former aide, Mohammed Dahlan. Barghouti is perhaps the only member of Fatah's next generation of leaders with the gravitas to confront that challenge. The previous releases, including dozens of men who were convicted in deadly attacks, have been accompanied by jubilant celebrations by Palestinians and attended by Abbas himself, angering many in Israel who see these prisoners as terrorists.

### **State Dept. Calls for Halt to Rocket Attacks Against Israel**

The State Department harshly criticized recent rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for firing more than 30 rockets, triggering alarms across parts of southern Israel. This year, more than [60 rockets](#) have been fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip. The March 12 barrage marks the largest attack against Israel since 2012. "The United States condemns in the strongest terms today's rocket attacks into Israel by terrorists from the Gaza Strip," said Jen Psaki, State Department spokesperson. "It is reprehensible that dozens of rockets have been fired today alone. There is no justification for such attacks. We call for these terrorist attacks to cease immediately. Israel, like any nation, has a right to defend itself."

## **SYRIA**

### **Confrontation between Israel and Syria**

[The Washington Post](#) reported that Israeli warplanes attacked Syrian military positions Wednesday in retaliation for a bombing the previous day, in the most serious confrontation between the two countries since the Syrian conflict erupted three years ago. Israel said that the targets were an army training facility, a military headquarters and an artillery battery, and that the raid was a response to a bombing along the line Tuesday that [injured four Israeli soldiers](#). Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon warned that if the situation escalates there may be more attacks. "We hold the Assad regime responsible for what happens in its territory, and if it continues to collaborate with terrorists striving to hurt Israel, then we will keep on exacting a heavy price from it and make it regret its actions," Yaalon said. Addressing the Israeli cabinet, Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also directly blamed Syria. "Our policy is clear. We hurt those who hurt us," he said. "Syrian elements not only allowed but also cooperated in the attacks on our forces."