

The week ending May 2nd, 2014

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Abbas Places Peace with Hamas above Peace with Israel

Last week, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas regrettably placed the peace process in severe jeopardy by embracing the terrorist group Hamas, and inviting it to join with Fatah to form a Palestinian unity government. This reckless maneuver by Abbas came amid reports that Israel was willing to make serious concessions for peace. However, by preferring unity with Hamas instead of negotiations with Israel, Abbas has stymied the negotiations and sided with a U.S.- and EU-designated terrorist group. State Department Spokeswoman Jen Psaki expressed dismay on April 23 over the announcement and its potential impact on peace talks. "It's hard to see how Israel can be expected to negotiate with a government that does not believe in its right to exist," she said. "Any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognition of the State of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations between the parties," Psaki added. The three principles referenced by Psaki were agreed to by the Quartet (United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia) as requisites for any Palestinian government to demonstrate its seriousness to make peace.

This editorial was published in the current edition AIPAC's *Near East Report* and can be found [here](#). **It is an update to the information contained in this week's Sermon Tidbits.** To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, [click here](#).

Netanyahu wants to define Israel as Jewish state in law

[Reuters](#) reports Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated Thursday he would seek a new law declaring Israel a Jewish state, striking back against a Palestinian refusal to recognize that status in now-collapsed peace talks. "I will promote a Basic Law that will define Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people," Netanyahu said in a speech in Tel Aviv that alluded to Palestinian rejection of his demand to recognize Israel as such in the U.S.-backed negotiations. Palestinians fear this label would lead to discrimination against Israel's sizeable Arab minority, which makes up a fifth of its population, and negate any right of return of Palestinian refugees from wars since 1948 to what is now Israel. Israeli enshrinement in law of the concept of Israel as a Jewish state - a definition that was included in its 1948 Declaration of Independence - could complicate any efforts to restart negotiations that stumbled over that issue and others. Netanyahu, speaking in the hall where the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1948, said those seeking the creation of a Palestinian state, while refusing to recognize Israel as a Jewish nation, were challenging its right to exist.

IRAN

U.S. Government Intensifies Sanctions Enforcement

The U.S. government took a series of steps this week to further enforce sanctions on Iran. The Treasury Department announced new sanctions on April 29 targeting individuals and entities assisting Iran's evasion of oil sanctions and for supporting Iran's ballistic missile program. Among those sanctioned was a United Arab Emirates company that arranges oil sales for Iran's Revolutionary Guard and works to evade sanctions by disguising the oil's origin. Treasury also designated eight Chinese front companies for acting on behalf of Karl Lee, a well-known sanctions evader with a history of setting up front companies to receive funds from Iran in exchange for the purchase of goods used to further develop Iran's ballistic missile program. In conjunction with Tuesday's Treasury sanctions, the Justice Department indicted Lee for charges related to money laundering and bank fraud. The State Department has offered a \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest. "As we have made clear, we will continue vigorously to enforce our sanctions, even as we explore the possibility of a comprehensive deal addressing Iran's nuclear program," Treasury Undersecretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen said in a statement.

SYRIA

Jordan opens new Syria refugee camp for 130,000 people

[Haaretz](#) reports that a UN official said Wednesday that Jordan is opening a new, sprawling tent city to accommodate tens of thousands more Syrian refugees who are expected to flee fighting as their nation's civil war continues unabated. Helene Daubelcour said Jordanian officials will open the Azraq refugee camp on Wednesday, about 90 kilometers (55 miles) from the Syrian border. The United Nations says the camp will ultimately host 130,000 people, as many as there are now in Zaatari, currently Jordan's largest camp. Jordan already hosts some 600,000 Syrian refugees, forming 10 percent of the country's population. Syria's conflict, now in its fourth year, has spawned a massive displacement crisis. There are nearly 2.7 million Syrian refugees, mostly in neighboring countries, and another 6.5 million Syrians have been displaced from their homes inside the country.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Survey shows Israelis to be among world's most liberal

[The Jewish Chronicle](#) reported that in an international "morality" survey, Israelis have emerged as more relaxed than the average global citizen on a range of issues including homosexuality and pre-marital sex. Across the 40 countries surveyed by the Pew Research Centre, an average of 46 per cent of respondents said that pre-marital sex was wrong and 24 per cent said it was acceptable. In Israel, fewer people disapproved — 37 per cent. Approval of pre-marital sex was some 12 per cent above than the global average. On homosexuality, 59 per cent of people across all nationalities said it was unacceptable, while only 43 per cent of Israelis took this view. Only 20 per cent globally said that homosexuality was acceptable, but in Israel the figure was 27 per cent. What is more, one in four Israelis said that homosexuality was not an issue for moral judgment, while among everyone polled only 13 per cent voiced this opinion. There was a big gulf between Israeli and global attitudes on abortion, with only 35 per cent of Israelis against, while globally the figure was 56 per cent.