

The week ending May 9, 2014

## U.S. – ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

### **President Obama Commemorates 66th Israeli Independence Day**

President Barack Obama released a statement on May 6 celebrating Israel's Independence Day. "I send my warmest wishes to the Israeli people as they celebrate their independence," Obama said. "Generations of Jews dreamed of the day when the Jewish people would have their own state in their historic homeland, and 66 years ago today that dream came true. Today, Israel thrives as a diverse and vibrant democracy and as a "start-up nation" that celebrates entrepreneurship and innovation." He added: "The United States was the first nation to recognize the government of Israel in 1948, and today we are still the first to come to Israel's defense. The enduring relationship between our two nations, based on shared democratic values and our unwavering commitment to Israel's security, has never been stronger. We will continue to work with Israel to support a two-state solution to the decades-old conflict, one that ensures that the Israelis will live alongside their neighbors in peace and with security." Obama concluded his statement by wishing Israeli President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the people of Israel a joyous Yom Ha'atzmaut. Israel was founded May 14, 1948.

## ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

### **Hamas Must Recognize Israel; Top Egyptian Official Says**

Hamas must recognize the existence of Israel if the Palestinians are to move forward with their hopes of establishing their own state, [AFP](#) reports former Egyptian foreign minister Amr Mussa as saying Wednesday. "It is normal for the Palestinians to reconcile," Mussa said of a recent unity deal struck between the Hamas militants who run the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. However, "I believe that Hamas should declare its acceptance of the Arab initiative of 2002, which is the map of normalization and recognition of the State of Israel together with the establishing of the Palestinian state and the withdrawal of the occupied territory," he insisted. "If Hamas does do this, it would be a major step in the direction of formulating a favorable all-Palestinian policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." Hamas and the Western-backed PLO, which is dominated by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's secular Fatah party, signed a surprise reconciliation agreement on April 23 in a bid to end years of bitter and sometime bloody rivalry. Under terms of the deal, the two sides would work together to form an "independent government" of technocrats, to be headed by Abbas, that would pave the way for long-delayed elections. The move angered Israel, which has suspended its participation in US-led peace talks, saying it cannot be expected to negotiate with a government which includes members of a party dedicated to its destruction. Egypt, which was once close to Hamas, has grown increasingly hostile to

the militant movement after the Egyptian military ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi. Hamas is a Palestinian offshoot of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood. The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative was launched by Saudi Arabia and backed by the Arab League. Under the plan, Arab states would forge full diplomatic relations with the Jewish state in exchange for a withdrawal from land it occupied during the 1967 Six Day War or mutually-agreed upon land swaps. Mussa, who was Egypt's top diplomat from 1991 to 2001 before becoming secretary general of the Arab League until 2011, is close to Egypt's electoral frontrunner Abdel Fattah al-Sissi.

This article expands upon the information contained in last week's Sermon Tidbits. To view the original article click [here](#).

## IRAN

### **Iran, Six Powers Hold 'Useful' Nuclear Talks; Agreement Elusive**

[Reuters](#) reports Iran and six world powers held more "useful" talks on Tehran's nuclear program, both sides said, although a Western diplomat said they were still struggling to overcome deep disagreements on the future of Iranian atomic capabilities. Their remarks came after two days of expert-level talks in New York between Iran and the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia on a long-term accord meant to end by a deadline of July 20 a decade-old dispute over suspicions that Tehran has sought the means to develop nuclear weapons. "(The six powers) and Iranian technical experts had a useful meeting on 6-7 May in New York," an EU spokesman said. "The talks aimed at further deepening of the knowledge on the issues and to contribute to the preparations for the next round of (senior-level) negotiations on a comprehensive agreement due to take place next week in Vienna." The talks were a prelude to next week's political-level negotiations in the Austrian capital Vienna. Iranian nuclear negotiator Hamid Baeedinejad also described the New York discussions as "useful", the official IRNA news agency said on Thursday. "Parties involved in technical and expert will continue discussions to prepare for the next round of talks next week in Vienna," Baeedinejad said. Iran says its nuclear program is entirely peaceful, intended solely for generating electricity and isotopes usable in cancer treatment. Iran's priority in the negotiations is to bring about an end to biting international sanctions that have damaged its oil-dependent economy by forcing a sharp reduction in crude exports from the Islamic Republic.

## SYRIA

### **Syrian Rebels Depart Homs District Under Deal**

On Wednesday, the last insurgent-held neighborhoods of Homs in Syria fell to the government as the last fighters and their families evacuated under a deal. Syria's third-largest city, Homs, was one of the first to hold large demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad. Protesters there were among the first to take up arms against the state, and Homs neighborhoods were the first to suffer indiscriminate bombardment by government forces. Homs split along sectarian lines as populations fled and slowly unraveled. Neighborhoods were destroyed and rebels held out in the Old City. For the rebels, handing over enclaves that withstood a nearly two-year blockade is an emotional blow. The fighters were allowed to flee with light weapons to a safe haven where they vowed to continue the battle. Both sides continue to refuse a broad negotiated settlement to a war that has taken more than 150,000 lives.