

The week ending September 19, 2014

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Temporary Agreement Is Intended to Allow Gaza to Import Materials for Rebuilding

Momentum for the rebuilding of the Gaza Strip advanced on Tuesday, with a senior United Nations diplomat briefing the Security Council on a temporary deal between Israeli and Palestinian officials to import cement and other building materials, reports [The New York Times](#). The diplomat, Robert H. Serry, the special envoy for the Middle East peace process, told the Council that he hoped the deal would lead to a broader agreement on opening border crossings to Gaza and on ending restrictions on imports to the Palestinian territory, where the economy was stagnating before the 50-day war this summer. The Palestinian Authority, led by President Mahmoud Abbas, will have “a lead role in the reconstruction effort,” while United Nations monitors will ensure that reconstruction materials are not “diverted from their entirely civilian purpose,” Mr. Serry said. “Arriving at this agreement has not been without its challenges,” Mr. Serry said, according to a prepared statement. “We consider this temporary mechanism, which must get up and running without delay, as an important step toward the objective of lifting all remaining closures, and a signal of hope to the people of Gaza.” The three-way agreement on reconstruction is between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations. Mr. Abbas announced the agreement last Thursday in a televised meeting of the Palestinian leadership. The cease-fire agreement says nothing about disarming Hamas, nor the dismantling of its underground tunnels, offering little comfort to Israel.

IRAN

Steinitz ahead of nuclear talks: Iran is Israel's greatest threat, not ISIS or Hezbollah

Israel is deeply concerned, Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz said on Wednesday, on the eve of the new round of nuclear talks between the P5+1 group of world powers and Iran. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), Steinitz, who returned over the weekend from strategic dialogue in Washington that focused largely on Iran, said that the Iranians have shown “no real flexibility.” The positions of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and nuclear negotiator Abbas Araqchi are no different than the positions of former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and former chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili. “The only thing that has changed is the tone,” Steinitz said. Steinitz also said that with the increased focus on the Islamic State, it is important for the international community to keep priorities correct, and “although it is important to defeat ISIS, if Iran gets nuclear weapons, it’s a different world for decades. This is the main threat to global security and should be the priority,” he relayed. Asked whether he came back from Washington more or less concerned, he answered “I went concerned and I came back concerned. I didn’t hear anything that the Iranians had made concessions that gave me hope.”

SYRIA

House Votes to Authorize Aid to Syrian Rebels in ISIS Fight

An unusual but overwhelming coalition in the House voted Wednesday to authorize the training and arming of Syrian rebels to confront the militant Islamic State, backing President Obama after he personally pleaded for support. The Senate hopes to pass the legislation Thursday [night]. [The New York Times](#) reports that the president, vice president and top White House officials personally lobbied for passing the bill, calling more than 70 Democrats and Republicans on national security committees and in leadership posts to appeal for their support. Mr. Obama and his allies pleaded with lawmakers not to undercut him as he tries to assemble an international coalition to confront the terrorist group. Opponents in both parties framed the vote as a step toward a wider conflict in a region where American troops have been fighting for more than a decade. Republican and Democratic vote-counting operations said they would not press for "yes" on what they termed a vote of conscience. Representative Duncan D. Hunter, a California Republican who fought with the Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan, joined others in questioning how the military could be sure the rebels of the Free Syrian Army could be trusted with United States arms and how suspect Saudis could host the training. For many Democrats, it came down to a show of support for an embattled president. Representative Gerald E. Connolly, Democrat of Virginia, said White House officials who called him made the case that the Islamic State's threat is real, that the vote was an opportunity for the United States to lead, and that the United States cannot solidify an international coalition if Congress undermines its commander in chief. The same battle lines will quickly form in the Senate, still, senators said, with Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, and Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the minority leader, backing it, there is little chance it will fail.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Chicago looks to Israel for tech startup lessons

Chicago-area corporations such as Motorola Solutions, Boeing, Abbott, Baxter, Allscripts and Groupon look to tech hubs throughout Israel as a source of R&D and tech acquisitions reports [The Chicago Tribune](#). Despite its assets—first-rate universities and research centers, an educated workforce, a major air hub, a reinvigorated downtown anchored by Millennium Park—Chicago continues to be a flyover zone for most tech investment in the U.S. Building a more muscular tech hub is essential if the city is to remain a viable and growing player in the global economy, observers say. Chicago-area CEOs, academics, investors and entrepreneurs in recent months have trekked to Israel to glean ideas for transforming the Chicago region's more traditional economy. A study trip by Northwestern University's Kellogg Innovation Network included Howard Tullman, CEO of 1871, and such local investors as former Allscripts President Lee Shapiro and Crate & Barrel founder Gordon Segal. "It's a culture that has really mastered a lot of the things that work well in innovation," Tullman said. "There's a sense of urgency there." The key, for Chicago, will be its ability to act as a sophisticated matchmaker that helps to line up cross-border partnerships, said Sherwin Pomerantz, the state of Illinois' trade representative in Jerusalem.