

The week ending March 13, 2015

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Israel resumes imports of Gaza fruit and vegetables, easing embargo

According to [Reuters](#), Israel imported its first fruit and vegetables from the Gaza Strip in almost eight years on Thursday, in a partial easing of an economic blockade maintained since the Islamist group Hamas seized control of the Palestinian territory. Twenty-seven tons of tomatoes and five tons of eggplants were trucked across the border under an Israeli plan to bring in around 1,200 tons of produce a month. The Palestinians welcomed the move, though the scale fell short of the some 3,300 tons they said they had previously exported to Israel monthly. Israel says its blockade is intended to restrict goods that could be used in weapons production and underground tunnels. It said its purchases of fruit and vegetables from Gaza were meant to help the Palestinian economy and make up for a shortfall in Israeli produce caused by a Jewish biblical fallow year.

IRAN

Hardliner wins key post to influence choice of Iran's next leader

A prominent hardliner was elected on Tuesday to head the influential body that will pick Iran's next Supreme Leader. According to [Reuters](#), the surprise choice of Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi as head of the Assembly of Experts took place at a highly sensitive time, as Iran and six world powers face a March 31 deadline to reach the outline of an agreement over Tehran's disputed nuclear program. "This was unexpected," said Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, an Iranian journalist and political analyst based in Tehran. "I was genuinely surprised that Yazdi won." "The main message of this election was that hardliners refuse to loosen the grip on power in key state entities, and when the day comes, chances of a hardliner successor to Ayatollah Khamenei continue to remain strong for now," [said] Hossein Rassam, a former political analyst at the British embassy in Tehran who is now a business consultant focused on Iran. The Assembly of Experts has the power both to dismiss a Supreme Leader and to choose one. The former has not happened, and the latter only once, when Khamenei was selected after the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989. Tuesday's vote was a blow to Rafsanjani, a veteran player in Iranian politics. He had been expected to play a more significant role in the Assembly, including possibly as its head, after a general election for its members next year, and has also been mentioned in the past as a potential successor to Khamenei. Despite the setback, Rafsanjani has not been shut out of the Iranian political landscape: he is the head of the Expediency Discernment Council, a body that advises the Supreme Leader and also resolves disputes between the Guardian Council and the parliament. Yazdi is 84, according to Iran's Press TV, presumably ruling him out as a contender for Supreme Leader. He is expected to serve until Iranians elect a new Assembly of Experts next February, which will coincide with parliamentary elections.

U.S. offers \$5 mn for return of ex-FBI agent missing in Iran

The United States announced a \$5 million increased reward Monday for information leading to the return of former FBI agent Robert Levinson, as it marked the eighth

anniversary of his mysterious disappearance in Iran, reports [The Global Post](#). The FBI had previously issued a \$1 million reward for Levinson's return in 2012, five years after he went missing. "Today, we mark eight years since Bob disappeared in Iran, and we are increasing the reward for his location and safe return to his family," said FBI Director James Comey. "We ask anyone with information to contact the FBI. It is long past time for Bob to come home." The National Security Council took to Twitter to say it was "committed to the safe return of Bob Levinson to his family & appreciate the support and assistance from our international partners." Levinson, who turns 67 on March 10, retired from the FBI 17 years ago. He disappeared on March 9, 2007 during a visit to the Iranian island of Kish.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israelis among the healthiest eaters—study

A new study in this month's *The Lancet Global Health Journal* places the diet of the average Israeli among the healthiest in the world. According to [The Times of Israel](#), the study, which looked at dietary habits—both good and bad—of adults in 187 countries, placed Israel in ninth place overall. The study, led by Dr Fumiaki Imamura of the University of Cambridge, is the first ever to assess diet quality in such a large number of countries at one time, covering 4.5 billion people. In Israel, as in nearly all countries in the world, diet improved with age, with adults in their 50s and 60s eating the healthiest foods, while eschewing the unhealthiest. Israelis, according to researchers, eat less saturated fat than most Westerners do, and generally have among the lowest rates of cholesterol in the world. Little butter is consumed in Israel, but large quantities of soybean, corn and safflower oil are, noted the report. The countries with the worst diets included the United States and Canada, most of central and northern Europe, Russia, India and China – which, the authors said, was no surprise, given the prevalence of the "fast food culture." But, perhaps surprisingly, it was the countries of central Africa that scored the highest – with Chad having the healthiest diet, followed by other Africa countries including Sierra Leone, Mali, The Gambia, Uganda, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Senegal. The reason for that, according to the report is that Africans do not have the money to buy highly processed foods that Westerners do, and subsist on a simpler diet—which, as it turns out, is healthier. "By 2020, projections indicate that non-communicable diseases will account for 75% of all deaths. Improving diet has a crucial role to play in reducing this burden," Imamura said. "Our findings have implications for governments and international bodies worldwide. Policy actions in multiple domains are essential to help people achieve optimal diets to control the obesity epidemic and reduce non-communicable diseases in all regions of the world."