

Syrian commandos invade seven N. Lebanese villages outside Tripoli

Contributed by Debka, Naharnet
Sunday, 14 September 2008

Syrian Commandos Deploy in 7 North Lebanon Villages, Israeli Website

Syrian commandos invade seven N. Lebanese villages outside Tripoli
DEBKAFile Exclusive Report
September 13, 2008, 12:10 PM (GMT+02:00)

Two Syrian commando battalions accompanied by reconnaissance and engineering corps units have crossed into Lebanon in the last 48 hours and taken up positions in seven villages, most of them Allawite Muslim, outside Tripoli, DEBKAFile's military sources reported Saturday, Sept. 13. They are the vanguard of a large armored force poised on the border.

Damascus has signaled to Washington and Paris: Don't interfere.

It is the largest Syrian force to invade Lebanon since Damascus was forced to end its occupation of the country in May 2005, three months after former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated.

Tripoli is Lebanon's second-largest city, with half a million inhabitants, most of them Sunni Moslems but including large Christian and Alawite communities.

The Syrian incursion coincided with the expected arrival of Russian naval and engineering experts for renovating Tartus, the Syrian port 40 kilometers north of Tripoli, to serve as the Russian fleet's first permanent Mediterranean base. Bashar Assad clearly feels he can safely embark on a fresh foreign adventure to occupy northern Lebanon without fear of restraint.

According to DEBKAFile's Washington and Paris sources, the US and French governments knew what was coming. Both had heard Damascus accusing the pro-Western Lebanese majority leader Saad Hariri and Saudi Arabia of sponsoring a bid by Muslim Salafite movements and radicals close to al Qaeda to set up a "Lebanese Kandahar" in Tripoli, in order to keep the Shiite Hizballah out. Israel was in the picture too.

During French president Nicolas Sarkozy's visit to Damascus last month, Bashar Assad said the West should understand that Syria could not accept a "jihadist base on its doorstep";

DEBKAFile's sources report this pretext for Syria's blatant invasion of northern Lebanon is hardly likely to go down seriously. For five years, Assad provided al Qaeda and other radical Islamists a corridor through Syria to fight American troops in Iraq plus training facilities.

Seen from Israel, once Assad's army completes its advance on Tripoli, he will control the full length of the military supply route for Hizballah from the Syrian ports of Latakia and Tartus. The Russian presence will add a new and troubling dimension to this development

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5579>

Syrian Commandos Deploy in 7 North Lebanon Villages, Israeli Website

Two Syrian commando battalions have crossed into Lebanon during the last 48 hours and taken up positions in seven Alawite-controlled villages in north Lebanon, an Israeli website reported.

The Israeli DEBKAFile website, citing military sources, said the battalions were accompanied by reconnaissance and engineering units.

It is the largest Syrian force to "invade" Lebanon since Damascus was forced to end its occupation of the country in May 2005, three months after ex-Premier Rafik Hariri was assassinated, DEBKAFile said.

It said the Syrian incursion coincided with the expected arrival of Russian naval and engineering experts in Tartus, the Syrian port 40 kilometers north of Tripoli, to serve as the Russian fleet's first permanent Mediterranean base.

The website said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad "clearly feels he can safely embark on a fresh foreign adventure to occupy northern Lebanon without fear of restraint."

According to DEBKAfile's Washington and Paris sources, the U.S. and French governments knew what was coming in light of Damascus's accusations to MP Saad Hariri and Saudi Arabia of sponsoring efforts by the Salafis and radicals close to al-Qaida to set up a "Lebanese Kandahar" in Tripoli in order to keep Hizbullah out.

The website said Israel, too, was in the picture.

DEBKAfile said that during French President Nicolas Sarkozy's visit to Damascus last month, Assad said the West should understand that Syria could not accept a "jihadist base on its doorstep."

It quoted sources as saying that Assad's pretext for Syria's "blatant invasion" of northern Lebanon "is hardly likely to go down seriously."

"For five years, Assad provided al-Qaida and other radical Islamists a corridor through Syria to fight American troops in Iraq plus, training facilities," DEBKAfile said.

It said that once Syrian troops complete their advance into Tripoli, Assad will have control over the full length of the military supply route for Hizbullah from the Syrian ports of Latakia and Tartus.

The Russian presence will add a new and troubling dimension to this development, it concluded.

Beirut, 14 Sep 08, 11:00

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&2975711A14590B11C22574C4002D3291>
