

## Report: U.S. Sending Cobras to Lebanon to Face Syrian Intervention Threats

Contributed by Naharnet, Debka  
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The U.S. has decided to withdraw Cobra gunship helicopters from Jordan to send them to Lebanon after Prime Minister Fouad Saniora alerted Washington about a Syrian plot of a large-scale terror attack or assassination to drum up an excuse for an intervention into northern Lebanon, the Israeli DEBKAFfile website reported.

Citing military sources, it said the decision was taken during talks between Lebanese officials and U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Hale and U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Mary Beth Long.

Long arrived in Beirut Sunday, joining Hale, who has held several days of talks with Lebanese politicians.

The helicopters were to be dispatched with the intention to put Damascus under the impression that the U.S. will intervene militarily if Syrian troops, massed on the northern border with Lebanon, should penetrate.

The website said a Lebanese military delegation will visit Jordan on Tuesday to inspect the Cobras stored there after fighting in Iraq.

They will have to work out, however, how to transport them to Lebanon, DEBKAFfile said:

- Either disassembled aboard large American transport planes via Israeli air space over the Mediterranean to Lebanon.
- Or have American pilots fly them by the same path.
- Or by the slowest route -- loaded in parts aboard a freighter at Jordan's Red Sea port of Aqaba, and then carried through the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean.

According to the military sources, the U.S. has promised Cobra flight training for Lebanese air crews. Until they are ready, the gunships will be flown by civilian fliers from the Middle East with military skills.

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 US pledges Cobra gunships to Lebanon against Syrian invasion threat  
 DEBKAFfile Exclusive Report  
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DEBKAFfile's military sources report that the US decided to withdraw Cobra military helicopters for the Lebanese army from emergency stores in Jordan after Lebanese prime minister Fouad Siniora alerted Washington to Damascus's plot for a large-scale terror attack or assassination to drum up a pretext for invading northern Lebanon.

The decision was taken in talks between Lebanese government and military leaders with deputy secretary of state David Hale and assistant defense secretary Mary Beth Long, who arrived in Beirut Saturday, Oct. 5.

The helicopters are intended to impress on Damascus that the US will intervene militarily if the Syrian troops massed on the North Lebanese border cross over.

Tuesday, Oct. 7, a Lebanese military delegation will visit Jordan to inspect the Cobras stored there after fighting in Iraq. They will have to work out how to transport them to Lebanon, either:

1) transported disassembled aboard large American transport planes via Israeli air space over the Mediterranean to Lebanon; or

2) have American pilots fly them by the same path; or by the slowest route

3) loaded in parts aboard a freighter at Jordan's Red Sea port of Aqaba, then carried through Suez to the Mediterranean.

According to our military sources, the US has promised Cobra flight training for Lebanese air crews. Until they are ready, the gunships will be flown by civilian fliers from the Middle East with military backgrounds.

DEBKAFfile reported earlier that Siniora and Lebanese president Michel Suleiman complained to the two US envoys that Washington's efforts to draw Damascus out of the Iranian orbit were throwing Lebanon to the wolves. The US also faced losing its foothold in the country. The prime minister said a tip-off he received uncovered a Syrian conspiracy to stage a major terrorist operation or assassinate a Lebanese figure of equal rank to the former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, whose murder in 2005 left Damascus under grave suspicion. The consequent turmoil in Beirut would trigger the Syrian incursion.

Two brigades of the 4th Syrian Mechanized Division, numbering up to 10,000 men have been poised on the Lebanese border since last month and are now on combat readiness.

(DEBKAFfile first disclosed this Syrian troop concentration on Sept. 20 and again on Sept. 27. For the second article, [Click HERE](#))

Damascus has accused the pro-West majority leader Saad Hariri (son of the dead politician) of organizing 45 extremist Islamic organizations, mostly Salafi, in northern Lebanon and establishing similar fronts in Sidon and the Ain Hilwa Palestinian camp in the south. As the pretext for a military invasion of northern Lebanon, Bashar Assad's emissaries claim that these fronts pose a threat to Syria's national security and Hizballah's position in the country.

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5633>