

## Iran reportedly aiding Syrian crackdown / Syrian Update

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Syrian Update, Iran, Hezbollah

Iran sends advisers to Syria for unrest  
AFP  
Saturday, May 28, 2011 01:19:17 PM

WASHINGTON - Iran is sending trainers and advisers to Syria to help crush anti-government demonstrations threatening to topple Iran's most important ally in the region, The Washington Post reported.

The killings took place as pro-democracy protesters again took to the streets in several cities and towns.

The influx of Iranian manpower was adding to a steady stream of aid from Tehran, the newspaper said, citing unnamed US officials.

That aid includes not only weapons and riot gear but also sophisticated surveillance equipment that is helping Syrian authorities track down opponents through their Facebook and Twitter accounts, the sources said.

Iranian-assisted computer surveillance is believed to have led to the arrests of hundreds of Syrians seized from their homes in recent weeks, the paper said.

According to one diplomat and US officials, the Iranian military trainers are being brought to Damascus to instruct Syrians in techniques Iran used against the nation's "Green Movement" in 2009, the Post reported.

Officers from Iran's notorious Quds Force have played a key role in Syria's crackdown since at least mid-April, it said.

US sanctions imposed against the Quds Force in April had been intended as a warning to Iran to halt the practice, said the Post.

At least eight people were reported killed by security forces Friday as pro-democracy protesters took to the streets in cities and towns across the country after Friday prayers in defiance of a government crackdown.

The death toll by early evening was far lower than last Friday when at least 44 people were killed by security forces during similar protests.

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Hizbullah's strategic depth

The Lebanese Shia group Hizbullah has been ambivalent about the protests in neighbouring Syria, explained by its ties with the Syrian regime, writes Lucy Fielder in Beirut

The Lebanese Shia political and military group Hizbullah would be profoundly affected if its strategic ally Syria descended into chaos, observers say. But the group has a strong local support base and other allies and resources, and it would therefore survive, many believe.

Lebanon watched fearfully as the wave of anti-regime protests in Syria resurged over the weekend, according to rights groups and activists. The two neighbours' histories are intertwined, and Syria dominated Lebanon politically and militarily from the end of the latter country's civil war in the early 1990s until 2005.

Former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Al-Hariri's assassination in that year split the country into a western-backed camp that held Syria responsible and an alliance led by Damascus's firm ally Hizbullah.

Since mid-March, the strife in Syria has shone a spotlight on Hizbullah's close ties with the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Observers of the group believe that most of its weapons arsenal comes from key ally Iran, but that Syria often acts as a conduit for arms.

Funding comes mainly from Tehran, Hizbullah's network of associations and religious alms and wealthy patrons, many of them Lebanese expatriates. Syria provides the group with valuable political and strategic backing.

"Hizbullah would of course be affected if Syria were driven into a situation of civil war," said Walid Charara, author of a book on the group's secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah and an analyst at the Consultative Centre for Studies and Documentation, a Hizbullah think tank.

"But I think in general that the Lebanese are afraid of what's happening on the popular level and among the political elite. If Syria plunges into chaos, Lebanon will be the first country affected."

Hizbullah believes that its ally faces destabilisation attempts from outside and that Western and pro-Western Arab countries are using the wave of popular protests to pressure Syria into acceding to long-standing demands, Charara said.

The Syrian government has said that it is facing "armed gangs" that have killed at least 120 members of the country's security forces.

Thus far, Hizbullah has not spelled out an official line on the situation in Syria, though this was expected to change as Al-Ahram Weekly went to press when Nasrallah was due to address the issue in a long-awaited speech.

After it backed the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, albeit during their later stages, observers say the group found itself in a tight spot when Syria's protests began.

Al-Manar, the group's television station, has avoided challenging the Syrian government's version of events, focussing instead on the funerals of members of the country's security forces allegedly killed by insurgents, along with pro-regime demonstrations and vox pops in little-affected areas.

A Hizbullah statement criticised US sanctions against Syria as an attempt to push Damascus into dropping its support for resistance groups against Israel.

However, pressure to explain the group's discrepancy in approach has grown. Nasrallah made a speech supporting Bahrain's pro-democracy protesters in March -- most of whom are from the disenfranchised Shia community -- and against the ruling Sunni regime.

This sparked the anger of several Gulf states, fuelling accusations of inconsistency or bias, as the uprising was portrayed

in the Gulf as a sectarian battle.

Commenting on the group's stance, Charara said Hizbullah was first and foremost a resistance group and that it needed as broad a spectrum of allies as possible. "This is a strategic alliance with the only Arab state bordering on Lebanon. Hizbullah cannot interfere in Syria's internal affairs, and it must stand firm on principle against what it sees as attempts to destabilise it."

According to Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, a Beirut-based Hizbullah expert and research adviser for the Doha Institute, Hizbullah's allies and supporters in Lebanon rationalise the group's support for the Syrian regime by prioritising the latter's military capability to fight Israel.

"No one is blind to Syria's political corruption, use of violence or growing economic neo-liberalism," she said. "But this tends to minimise the regime's repression and blame foreign interference and media distortion."

Washington has for several years harboured ambitions to prise Syria away from Iran's embrace, along with its support for Hizbullah. Chair of the Lebanese daily Al-Akhbar Ibrahim Al-Amine wrote a piece last weekend arguing that Western and pro-Western Arab countries were putting covert pressure on Al-Assad to conclude a peace agreement with Israel that would guarantee the latter's pullout from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights as a prelude to dropping ties with Hizbullah.

Al-Amine and the newspaper he chairs are seen as supportive of Hizbullah, at least in its fight against Israel. However, since the Syrian unrest began the paper has surprised critics by reporting on the demonstrations and publishing a range of opinions, including articles attacking the regime's crackdown on protesters.

As a result, some editions have been prevented from reaching Syrian newsstands.

Al-Assad would also be required to sever connections with Iran and Hamas as part of a peace deal, Al-Amine wrote, as well as enact domestic reforms and sack members of the ruling coterie.

In return, he would receive financial and development aid. "Needless to say, Al-Assad rejected these offers," Al-Amine wrote. "He told Arab delegates that Iran and the forces of the resistance were his constant allies and that this had been proven through experience."

Saad-Ghorayeb said that if Al-Assad were to fall, it would be a serious blow to Hizbullah. "Whoever replaced him would almost certainly not support the resistance movements in the way he has," she said.

"We're not just talking about supply lines. It would weaken the strategy of deterrence and tie Hizbullah's hands much more in any future war with Israel. It could even encourage Israel to strike Hizbullah."

Fidaa Itani, a left-wing journalist with Al-Akhbar knowledgeable about Hizbullah and a fierce critic of Damascus, said the group derived much of its strength and legitimacy from its mainly Shia Lebanese constituency, which is concentrated in the south of the country and in Beirut's southern suburbs.

The group had also been careful to bolster its security by avoiding dependence on Syria or any other single source of backing. "It has worked from the beginning to ensure that its financial and political support and its supply lines are not from any single source," Itani said.

"If the Syrian regime falls, Hizbullah won't collapse."

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<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1049/re8.htm?>

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Number of Syrian refugees unknown  
May 28, 2011 12:51 PM  
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: It is not known how many Syrian refugees have crossed into Lebanon in the past two months, caretaker Social Affairs Minister Salim Sayegh has said, warning of a possible refugee crisis in the country.

"We have put great effort into [trying to count the refugees], but it is impossible to make an accurate count of the location or number of the refugees," Sayegh told Voice of Lebanon Radio Station Saturday.

Sayegh also said that the number of refugees will increase if the security situation in Syria worsens.

"We fear that what we are facing today is just preparing us for a bigger problem [with more refugees coming in], if the situation in Syria worsens," Sayegh said.

Syrians began crossing into Lebanon in large numbers two months ago, as Syrian authorities cracked down on protesters in the Syrian town of Tall Kalakh, 5 kilometers north of the Lebanese border.

Residents of the Lebanese town of Wadi Khaled have welcomed some of the refugees into their homes, while nongovernmental organizations, the Lebanese government and UNHCR have also worked to accommodate the large numbers who have fled.

The minister also said that Rahhal Hospital in Wadi Khaled has been welcoming Syrian refugees for treatment.

Meanwhile, a delegation from the Syrian authority Friday informed Syrian refugees in Lebanon that they should return to Syria and are allowed to use the Bkayaa border crossing to do so.

The delegation said that the border will be open from 6 a.m. till 7 p.m. daily.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since March 15 as demonstrators demand reform in the tightly controlled Arab state. The Syrian leadership has repeatedly described the protests as a conspiracy against the country, cracking down on dissent and prompting an international condemnation over the violence used against protesters.

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/May-28/Number-of-Syrian-refugees-unknown.ashx?#ixzz1NeyTNtfa>  
(The Daily Star :: Lebanon News :: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb>)

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Anger grips Lebanon after bomb strikes at UN patrol  
By Weedah Hamzah May 28, 2011, 8:49 GMT

Sidon, Lebanon - The bomb attack against UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon, wounding six Italian soldiers, on Friday has shocked Lebanon and raised speculation of Syrian involvement to avenge EU sanctions against the Syrian

president.

Nohad al-Mashnouq, a member of former premier Saad Hariri's parliamentary bloc, told the German Press Agency dpa, 'the explosion which targeted the UNIFIL patrol in south Lebanon is a message to the international community.

'It is a clear Iranian-Syrian message to the international community not to interfere in Syrian affairs,' Mashnouq added.

Earlier this week European Union foreign ministers approved a laundry list of fresh sanctions against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in a bid to end months of government-sanctioned repression of opposition movements which started against the regime on March 15.

In Friday's roadside bomb attack, three Lebanese passers-by were also wounded. It was the first attack on the UN in Lebanon in over three years.

According to Lebanese army investigators, the blast was caused by a bomb placed behind a low concrete barrier lining the highway that links Beirut with southern Lebanon.

The blast caused extensive damage to two of the four cars in the convoy as it traveled south on the main highway in Sidon. The police said that the bomb, which left a crater in the road, contained up to 10 kilograms of explosive material.

The Lebanese daily As Safir quoted unnamed security sources Saturday as saying that the attack on the UNIFIL patrol 'shows that there was advanced technology involved with the preparing, planting and directing of the explosive package.'

The source added that the package exploded despite electronic jammers used by UNIFIL to try to protect against such remote-controlled explosions.

A diplomatic source in Beirut told dpa 'Syria might be involved in the roadside bomb...especially since it came after Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem said that the European Union would regret its sanctions against President Bashar al-Assad.'

On Thursday, Moallem had warned that 'Syria will not remain silent' to the EU measures against Assad.

The daily An Nahar, quoting another diplomatic source, said 'the attack on the Italian contingent hints that the messages sent to Europe, which began with the kidnapping of the seven Estonian tourists in the Bekaa valley in March, are on the rise.'

Seven Estonian bikers were kidnapped on March 23 in eastern Lebanon and their whereabouts are still unknown.

The blast against the Italian soldiers also caused anger among the residents of southern Lebanon who praised the Italian contingent's work in the region.

'This is a criminal act against our good friends the Italian soldiers who are assisting us in our daily lives, by giving us free medical health care, helping our farmers and preserving the peace in this volatile region,' Abu Mohammed Salameh, a southern villager, told dpa.

'This is a blow for Lebanon's security and it will have negative effects on Lebanon,' said Hassan Habli, a resident of Sidon.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack on the UNIFIL, which has been monitoring a fragile

ceasefire since the 33-day war between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006.

The last attack on UN forces in Lebanon was in January 2008, when a roadside bomb struck UN vehicles traveling along the same road south of Beirut, lightly wounding two peacekeepers.

On June 2007, a deadly attack targeted a convoy for the Spanish UN soldiers near the border with Israel, killing six peacekeepers.

DPA

[http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article\\_1642027.php/Anger-grips-Lebanon-after-bomb-strikes-at-UN-patrol?](http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article_1642027.php/Anger-grips-Lebanon-after-bomb-strikes-at-UN-patrol?)

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One of the founders of the Arab Baath party disappears in Lebanon  
May 28, 2011, 9:05 GMT

Beirut - Syrian national Shebli Aysami, one of the founders of the Arab Baath Socialist Party, has disappeared from a mountain village, east of Beirut, Lebanese security sources and his family said Saturday.

According to a Lebanese security source, Aysami had come to Lebanon with his Syrian wife from Washington to spend the summer in Aley, 35 kilometers east of Beirut, where his married daughter lives.

The source added that Aysami, 86, disappeared while walking near his house amid 'mysterious circumstances.'

'We call on the Lebanese authorities to help us in finding his whereabouts,' the family said in a statement issued in Beirut.

Aysami left the political arena in Syria in 1992 and went to live in the United States. He headed several government portfolio's in Syria between 1962-1966.

The Arab socialist party, is a political party, which was founded in Damascus in 1946 by the Syrian intellectuals Michel Aflaq, and Salah al-Bitar. It has only established power in two Arab states, Syria and Iraq.

DPA

[http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article\\_1642031.php/One-of-the-founders-of-the-Arab-Baath-party-disappears-in-Lebanon?](http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article_1642031.php/One-of-the-founders-of-the-Arab-Baath-party-disappears-in-Lebanon?)

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Another deadly Friday in Syria  
28/05 00:40 CET

Seven more people died in Syria on Friday, the 11th in a row of popular protests against the rule of Bashar al-Assad.

Second city Aleppo saw protests, but on nothing like the scale of Qamishi, the central city of Homs where three people

were shot, or in Albu Kamal, where protesters burned posters of Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, who backed Assad this week.

Human rights activists say tens of thousands took to the streets of Hama, where Assad's father killed up to 30,000 people in a 1982 revolt, and there were protests in Deraa, Latakia, and the Kurdish northeast of the country. The authorities say nine security personnel died, bringing to 120 the total in 10 weeks of unrest.

Human rights groups say at least 1000 people have been killed over the same period.

Three suburbs in Damascus also saw protests, and in one of them, Qatana, three protesters were killed.

The G8 issued a statement saying it was "appalled" by the deaths, and while Russia said it would veto any move to impose UN sanctions, one Western diplomatic source said they believed Russia and China would not veto any UN resolution condemning crimes against humanity committed by the al-Assad regime.

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<http://www.euronews.net/2011/05/28/another-deadly-friday-in-syria/>

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'Iran aiding Assad in crackdown against protesters'  
By JPOST.COM STAFF  
05/28/2011 09:07

'Washington Post' reports members of Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force helping regime quell unrest despite US sanctions.

Talkbacks (1)

Iran has continued to send trainers and advisers to Syria in order to help Bashar Assad's government clamp down on anti-regime protests despite US sanctions against Iranian military officials, The Washington Post reported on Friday.

According to the report, the aid is not limited to riot gear and manpower, but also includes surveillance equipment that helps the Syrian government follow activists on their Facebook and Twitter accounts.

RELATED:

'At least 8 killed as anti-gov't protests sweep Syria'  
Turkey urges Syria to impose reforms as protests rage

Iran reportedly sent to Syria trained officials who had experience following the so-called "Green Revolution" in 2009 which had threatened the Ahmadinejad government following elections which had seen his victory.

The Washington Post quoted US officials as saying the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force have been aiding Syria's regime in its crackdown on protests since April. The Quds Force was included in US sanctions laid down on Syria in late April in the wake of the regime's violence, a move meant to warn Iran to stay out of Syria's affairs, according to the officials.

Despite US warnings, the officials stated that the number of Iranians operating in Syria had progressively grown in recent weeks.

A second set of US sanctions slapped on Syria on May 18, in which President Bashar Assad was personally targeted, also included two senior Iranian officials accused of helping Syria put down the protests. Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force, and Mohsen Chizari, another senior Quds Force official were designated for sanctions.

The Quds Force has been implicated in helping train Hezbollah and Hamas terrorists and was recently accused of offering support to al-Qaida in a report released by the US Congressional Anti-Terrorism Caucus.

The report contends that despite the popular misconception that Shi'ite Iran would not work with Sunni al-Qaida, the ties between the two entities date back to the 1990s when members of the Quds Force worked with Hezbollah to train and equip bin Laden's holy warriors.

Reuters contributed to this report.

<http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=222559>

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Report: Syrian dissidents tracked online  
Published: May 28, 2011 at 9:13 AM

DAMASCUS, Syria, May 28 (UPI) -- Anti-government Syrian protesters are being captured based on information from their Facebook and Twitter accounts, U.S. intelligence officials said.

As unrest and protests were mounting in early March, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad banned the online networking sites, but abruptly lifted the ban later in the month.

That coincides with the arrival of surveillance software from Iran that enabled the government to track down dissidents through their online accounts, The Washington Post reported.

Iran has long been a supporter of Assad and is known to have shipped weapons from Tehran to Damascus, U.S. officials said.

Lately however, intelligence officials say Iran has also been sending highly-trained military specialists from its elite Quds force to train Syrian forces in anti-insurgency techniques, the Post said.

U.S. analysts claim the Quds force has also helped train rebels in Iraq, Hamas fighters in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon.

Rights groups have said since the rebellion began, more than 800 people have been killed and as many as 10,000 people have imprisoned.

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Iran reportedly aiding Syrian crackdown

By Joby Warrick, Published: May 27

U.S. officials say Iran is dispatching increasing numbers of trainers and advisers — including members of its elite Quds Force — into Syria to help crush anti-government demonstrations that are threatening to topple Iran’s most important ally in the region.

The influx of Iranian manpower is adding to a steady stream of aid from Tehran that includes not only weapons and riot gear but also sophisticated surveillance equipment that is helping Syrian authorities track down opponents through their Facebook and Twitter accounts, the sources said. Iranian-assisted computer surveillance is believed to have led to the arrests of hundreds of Syrians seized from their homes in recent weeks.

The United States and its allies long have accused Iran of supporting repressive or violent regimes in the region, including Syria’s government, the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Many previous reports, mostly provided by Western officials, have described Iranian technical help in providing Syria with riot helmets, batons and other implements of crowd control during 10 weeks of demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad.

The new assertions — provided by two U.S. officials and a diplomat from an allied nation, all of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe sensitive intelligence — are clearly aimed at suggesting deepening involvement of Iranian military personnel in Syria’s brutal crackdown against anti-Assad demonstrators. There was no response on Friday to requests for comment left with the Syrian Embassy and Iranian interests section in Washington.

In the account provided by the diplomat and the U.S. officials, the Iranian military trainers were being brought to Damascus to instruct Syrians in techniques Iran used against the nation’s “Green Movement” in 2009, the diplomat said. The Iranians were brutally effective in crushing those protests.

Officers from Iran’s notorious Quds Force have played a key role in Syria’s crackdown since at least mid-April, said the U.S. and allied officials. They said U.S. sanctions imposed against the Quds Force in April were implicitly intended as a warning to Iran to halt the practice.

The Quds Force is a unit of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps responsible for operations outside the country. It has helped fund and train Hezbollah and Hamas militants and supported anti-U.S. insurgents inside Iraq.

While the size of the Iranian contingent in Syria is not known, the numbers of advisers has grown steadily in recent weeks despite U.S. warnings, according to the U.S. and allied officials.

The Obama administration mentioned the role of the Quds Forces in announcing two sets of sanctions imposed against Syrian government officials in the past month. A White House executive order last week that targeted Assad and six other top government officials also included a little-noticed reference to Mohsen Chizari, an Iranian military officer who is the No. 3 leader in the Quds Force in charge of training.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/iran-reportedly-aiding-syrian-crackdown/2011/05/27/AGUJe0CH\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/iran-reportedly-aiding-syrian-crackdown/2011/05/27/AGUJe0CH_story.html)

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