

Clinton: Syria on brink of catastrophe as rebels advance. The region in danger

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“There is still a chance to save the Syrian state from a catastrophic assault that would be very dangerous not only to Syria, but to the region,” said US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Tokyo, Sunday, July 8. She did not elaborate, but stressed earlier, “... the opposition is getting more effective in defense of themselves and going on the offensive against the Syrian military.”

DEBKAfile’s military sources note that her over-the-top language comes at a pivotal moment in the Syrian conflict: The rebels are winning more and more territory and not only encircling Damascus but fighting inside the capital. To save itself, the Assad regime which still controls the army outside Damascus may in desperation open up its arsenals and deploy weapons of mass destruction in a bid to drive off the rebels while also spreading the flames to other parts of the region, including Israel.

Persian Gulf sources reported Sunday that inside the capital, the Syrian army no longer moves troops in military convoys for fear of rebel attack. They now travel in unmarked civilian vehicles. Some officers prefer to stay on base for fear of assassination or kidnap on their way home.

Clinton did not explain how the rebels were suddenly able in the last few days to develop their ubiquitous capabilities, rising numbers and military organization - or where they procured weapons for their wholesale offensive against the Syrian army.

According to DEBKAfile’s intelligence and military sources, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have substantially stepped up the flow of munitions to the rebels. They are reaching combatants inside Syria as well as the trainees at Turkish military facilities.

Their numbers have, furthermore, risen to 50,000 armed men who are efficiently organized in 17 brigades. Fighting inside the country are 260 military units, each consisting of one or two battalions, which mostly range from 1,000-1,500 men - depending on the arena. Some are brigades of 3,000 men.

By the first week of July, the rebel army had put in place an efficient logistical system:

1. The Free Syrian Army had been able to establish a geographical presence in all of Syria’s provinces, barring the minority regions (Kurds and Druzes) which are outside the conflict, and the pro-regime Alawite region.
2. A regional operational command was working in all those provinces (260). It was equipped with hi-tech communications connecting the provinces and linked to the FSA’s high command in Turkey.
3. A well-organized arms smuggling ring was transferring weapons from one command to another as required for local attacks on Syrian military and security forces. This pipeline is fed by Turkish, Saudi and Qatari suppliers via Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey..
4. A foreign “military adviser” is posted at each provincial command center. They are usually special forces experts mainly from the British, French, Turkish, Saudi and Qatari armies.

Up until last month, the rebels were fighting primarily to sever a strategic strip of land from Idlib in the north to Deraa in the south in order to tie down the regime in Damascus and its Allawite loyalist forces in the west and center and cut it off from the rest of the country.

This goal has now been abandoned. Today, the anti-Assad forces are concentrating on a single objective: The regime’s overthrow.

Credit: Debka