

ME-US:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):In Another Flip-Flop, Obama Raises ME Troop Level to 10,000.....	1
THE-US-MJO:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):How the US and Jordan Took Out Mustafa Badr Al-Din.....	2
AF:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):Algeria's Bouteflika Dying as ISIS, AQIM are Poised to Move In	3
TU-EU:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):Turkey Secretly Pushes Middle Eastern Refugees onto Italy, France	5
IS:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):Netanyahu's Bid for a Moderate Coalition Partner Misfires.....	6
MIN:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):Iran Becomes World's 6th Largest Cyber Warfare Power	7

ME-US:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):In Another Flip-Flop, Obama Raises ME Troop Level to 10,000

Debka 20-May-16



During the last two weeks, with just eight months remaining of his tenure, President **Barack Obama's** military strategy in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf has again reversed itself. After scaling back the US troop presence in the Middle East for eight years suddenly America started putting boots back on the ground.

DEBKA Weekly's military sources report that US forces have been deployed to four countries during the past couple of weeks:

Iraq – On Tuesday, March 17, Pentagon officials said the US has about 3,500 troops in Iraq, although that number does not include several thousand security contractors who are essentially soldiers. In other words, this brings to about 6,000 the total troops and security personnel in the country.

Syria – The extra 250 US special forces troops arriving in Syria have joined a few dozens of admitted existing forces, according to American statistics. But **DEBKA Weekly's** military and intelligence sources report that the number of troops currently based in Syria is much larger, with at least four to five companies of special forces, or between 1,250 and 1,500 troops in all.

On Tuesday, May 17, Washington expanded its involvement in the war in Syria, and for the first time since hostilities began in 2011, US F-16 fighter-bombers carried out airstrikes against Islamist rebels battling Iranian, Syrian and Hizballah forces near Aleppo.

Libya – The Pentagon's press secretary said May 17 that small teams of American troops were on the ground in Libya to evaluate the strength of ISIS forces and to get a "better sense of the players." Some sources said 20 to 25 American troops are in the North African country.

However, **DEBKA Weekly's** military and intelligence sources report that there are actually two US task forces made up of about 1,200 to 1,500 fighters in Libya. One of them is operating near the city of Misrata, on the Mediterranean coast of northwestern Libya, 187 km east of Tripoli and 825 km west of Benghazi. The troops are reportedly engaged in joint

operations with British and French special forces.

A second task force is operating near Tobruk, a northeastern port city near the border with Egypt, together with Egyptian elite troops that crossed the border.

DEBKA Weekly's military and intelligence sources estimate that there are at least 1,500 members of US special forces units in the country.

Yemen – On May 6, the Defense Department said a small number of American advisers had been in Yemen for about two weeks to help Emirati and Yemeni forces fighting Al Qaeda near the port city of Mukalla in the southeast. Officials added that the US is carrying out aerial refueling and surveillance missions as well as providing naval and medical support. Washington also placed a flotilla of Marine ships off the coast.

These figures do not represent a small number of advisors, but about 2,500 special forces, air force and navy troops.

All in all, between 10,000 and 12,000 US soldiers have been sent to the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and North Africa in recent weeks.

DEBKA Weekly's military sources point out that the Pentagon attached to these forces squadrons of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, for the following reasons:

1. The Pentagon does not want to involve warplanes (except in Syria) that require large airbases or aircraft carriers that are currently not in the region.
2. The use of Apache helicopters to support the special forces is the Pentagon's new method of operations in the war against ISIS.

[Top of the Document](#)

THE-US-MJO:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):How the US and Jordan Took Out Mustafa Badr Al-Din

Debka 20-May-16



The Obama administration reportedly planned to carry out a large-scale cyberattack against Iran if nuclear negotiations failed and a war broke out between Iran and Israel. One part of the “Nitro Zeus” contingency plan was the Stuxnet computer worm that destroyed centrifuges at Iran’s Natanz uranium enrichment facility in 2009 and 2010.

In the event, talks on a nuclear agreement began in Oman between the US and Iran. So Washington later suspended all of its plans to attack Tehran’s nuclear program and military forces, including the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The “ceasefire” between the two countries lasted for six years. On Thursday, May 12, 2016 an American missile hit within two meters of a group of Hizballah and IRGC commanders, killing the head of Hizballah’s forces in Syria, Mustafa Badr Al-Din. The missile was fired by a small team of Syrian rebels in western Damascus that had secretly entered the country from Jordan after being trained by US military instructors and intelligence officers.

DEBKA Weekly's intelligence and counterterrorism sources report exclusively that the group of Iranian and Lebanese commanders was on its way to Hizballah’s military headquarters in Syria after meeting Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Al Qods brigades of the IRGC and of Iranian forces in Syria and Iraq, who had earlier participated in a meeting at the headquarters.

The hit squad which was in constant contact with US and Jordanian intelligence officers in charge of the secret operation from the CENTCOM forward command center in Jordan, recognized Gen. Soleimani among the commanders and asked the operations room whether to assassinate him as well. However, they were told to wait until he left the scene. Somebody in Washington who monitored the operation decided not to risk causing a rupture in ties with Tehran. The order to launch the missile was only given after those in charge of the operation in Washington and Amman were convinced that Soleimani was

no longer in range.

Our sources add that immediately after the missile was fired, the killers made their getaway with the help of a small unit of Jordanian special forces troops in the area that whisked them out of the country at top speed.

Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate was actually the one that tipped the CIA on Hizballah commander Al-Din's movements within and around his headquarters in Damascus. Previously, the GID provided intel that led to the December 2003 Operation Red Dawn, in which former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was captured, and to the June 2006 assassination of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the commander of Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Israel also had a role in the hit on Al-Din, although it was limited. It assisted in the background checks of the assassins and provided intelligence on the location of Hizballah's headquarters and its routine.

Everyone in the Obama administration and the CIA involved in Al-Din's assassination understood that it was a direct strike against an Iranian related target, not a Hizballah one. The question remains why Obama decided to attack Al-Din after six years in which he avoided attacking Iranian related targets, and less than a year since the July 2015 nuclear agreement with Tehran and ten months before leaving the White House.

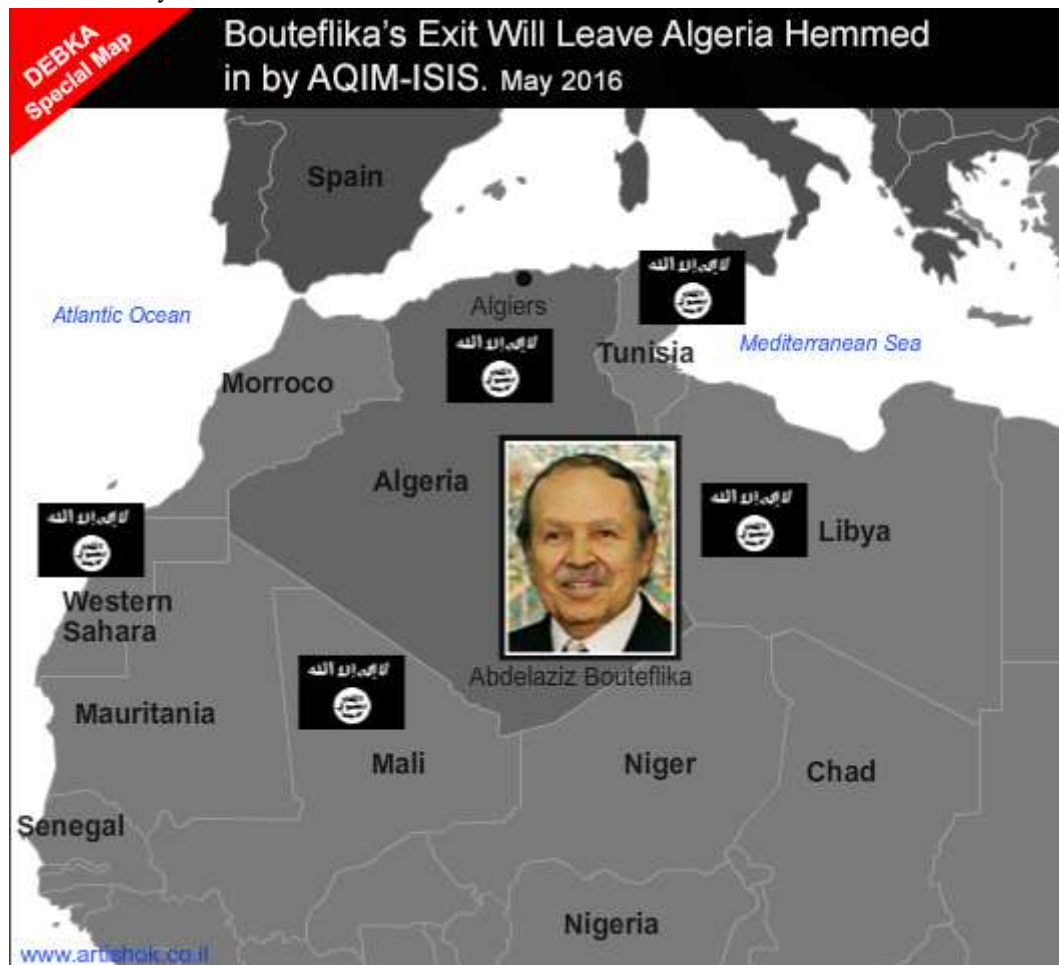
Al-Din was targeted for two main reasons:

1. This month, Tehran violated UN resolutions and the nuclear agreement for the third time since the nuclear deal became effective. It tested a new ballistic missile capable of carrying multiple warheads in October and November, tested two ballistic missiles in March and two weeks ago tested a missile that hit within 25 feet of its intended target. Obama has decided to respond.
2. The attack was connected to Obama's decision to renew large-scale US military and intelligence operations in the Middle East.

[Top of the Document](#)

AF:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):Algeria's Bouteflika Dying as ISIS, AQIM are Poised to Move In

Debka 20-May-16



On April 29, 79-year-old Algerian President **Abdelaziz Bouteflika** arrived in Geneva for two weeks of medical treatment.

He then returned to Algiers without any announcement regarding his health.

But **DEBKA Weekly's** intelligence sources report that the president, who has not been seen in public for two years, is dying, and the day-to-day affairs of the North African oil and gas producer are being run by his close family members. American and French intelligence sources familiar with the events in Algiers say that Bouteflika's health is rapidly deteriorating, and most of the time he is unaware of what is happening around him.

Our sources report that both Washington and Paris would like his successor to be Algeria's 77-year-old oil minister, **Chakib Khelil**, who worked for many years for the IMF and other Western international economic institutions. But Khelil is not a shoo-in for the position due to two reasons:

1. Bouteflika (or perhaps his close aides) has refused to sign a presidential order appointing Khelil as his successor.
2. It is not clear whether such an appointment would be backed by military top brass, especially the senior commanders of Algeria's military intelligence branch, the DRS, which holds most positions of power in the country.

In September 2015, Bouteflika sacked the powerful chief of the DRS, **Mohamed Mediene**, in an effort to curb his influence on local politics, and replaced him with Gen. **Athmane Tartag**, the president's former security advisor.

The Algerian president became ill immediately after removing Mediene, creating a situation in which nobody in Algiers or elsewhere was sure if the spy chief and the generals loyal to him were in fact out, or whether they were still pulling the strings.

DEBKA Weekly's intelligence and counterterrorism sources say that this kind of fluid political situations in Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, make it possible for elements of the military and other security forces which maintain contacts with ISIS or Al Qaeda to try to solicit their support or assistance in seizing power or promoting their political plans.

Two examples of this are the secret understandings that the Turkish and Syrian intelligence services have with ISIS to promote issues of major importance to Turkish President **Tayyip Erdogan** and his Syrian counterpart **Bashar Assad**, such as the problem of migrants streaming to Europe.

Western analysts believe that several Algerian generals, including ones from the DRS, are in contact with figures from Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which seeks to topple the government and establish an Islamic state.

Our sources in Washington and Paris report that during the last two weeks French President **Francois Hollande** sent several urgent messages to US President **Barack Obama** about Algeria:

1. If Bouteflika suddenly dies, several cities or entire parts of Algeria may fall into the hands of AQIM or ISIS. Hollande warned that the entire Western military effort in Tunisia and Libya would then collapse, and the terrorist groups would have territorial continuity from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coast.
2. Such a situation would lead to a wave of millions of Algerian refugees to Europe, especially France where many of them have close or extended families. Hollande said the wave would be much bigger than the one from Turkey and transform France into a nation with 20 million Muslims, endangering France's national security and character.

[back to top](#)

TU-EU:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):Turkey Secretly Pushes Middle Eastern Refugees onto Italy, France

Debka 20-May-16



Concerns continue to mount in Europe over the short and long-term implications of the migration of millions of Middle Easterners and Africans to the continent.

On Monday, May 16, former MI6 director **Richard Dearlove** warned against the EU giving millions of Turks visa-free access to Europe, comparing it to “storing gasoline next to the fire” although he said stopping migration completely is “not an option.” He predicted that many of the 1.6 million migrants who came to Europe in 2015 would soon be able to move freely within the 28 EU member states, and that millions more would arrive over the next five years.

There is also growing uncertainty over the fate of the EU’s agreement with Turkey under which Ankara will receive 3 billion euros to take back illegal immigrants from Greece. Turkish citizens may be granted visa-free travel to Europe as part of the deal. EU officials are apprehensive regarding the resignation of Turkish Prime Minister **Ahmet Davutoglu**, whom European officials had hoped would ensure that the deal is implemented. On its part, Ankara is grumbling over the pace of EU payments until now.

DEBKA Weekly’s intelligence sources report that France’s CIA, the DGSE, warned French President **Francois Hollande** over the past few days that events taking place behind the scenes are completely different from those reported in the European media, and directly threatening France’s security.

The DGSE is considered the European intelligence agency with the best information on the mass migration from the Middle East and Africa.

The DGSE reports that in order to bypass the registration sites for refugees that the EU set up on Greek islands for sending the migrants back to Turkey, Turkish President **Tayyip Erdogan** issued a secret order to direct the flow of refugees to Eastern Europe, especially Bulgaria and Hungary. According to the DGSE, this was aimed at pushing them towards Italy, a country already swamped with refugees from Africa and the Middle East.

The French intelligence agency reports that the first wave of these refugees has already started to reach Italy, and since the Italian government has no intention of allowing them to stay, it is transferring them immediately towards the French border. The collapse of the EU-Turkish agreement in the near future, or a decision by Erdogan not to honor it, will transform France into the main destination for more than one million Muslim refugees.

According to official French statistics, the country now has seven million Muslims. The unofficial but actual figure, however, is 12 million. If the DGSE’s prediction comes true, the Muslim population of France will officially reach over eight million, or unofficially exceed 13 million, by the beginning of 2017.

Since German Chancellor **Angela Merkel** opened Germany’s gates to migrants and agreed to absorb them with an enormous investment of 96 billion euros, relations between her and French President Hollande, who was opposes to her policy, have deteriorated to the point of almost no contact. The only Western leader Hollande could turn to resolve the problem was US President **Barack Obama**.

DEBKA Weekly’s intelligence sources say that Hollande not only turned to Obama on the issue of the stream of migrants from Turkey, but also warned him of a new wave of African refugees that will be bigger and more dangerous than the current one. This wave, from Algeria, will be covered in the another article.

[Top of the Document](#)

IS:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):Netanyahu's Bid for a Moderate Coalition Partner Misfires

Debka 20-May-16



Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu's** first choice as new partner to shore up the wafer-thin majority of his coalition government was the moderate opposition leader **Yitzhak Herzog**, the leader of the left of-center Zionist Camp. He is a persona grata in the West, especially Washington.

Netanyahu fears that Obama will try to retaliate for the prime minister's unrelenting struggle last year against the Iranian nuclear deal, including his speech before a joint session of Congress on March 3. It was an unprecedented speech by a foreign leader on Capitol Hill against a sitting president.

He therefore set out to build two "defensive walls". One is a Middle Eastern "wall" consisting of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt, and the other, domestic Israeli "wall" with Herzog.

But **DEBKA Weekly's** sources in Jerusalem point out that Obama has six motives for getting back at Netanyahu:

1. Poor relationship between Netanyahu and the White House staff, especially senior officials such as Secretary of State **John Kerry** and National Security Advisor **Susan Rice**.
2. Obama considers Netanyahu to be the prime mover behind the opposition raised by the Saudi royal family, especially King Abdullah who died in January, and Egyptian President **Abdel Fattah al-Sisi** to his Middle East policy. The US president believes the prime minister acted behind the scenes to set up a new Middle Eastern bloc, which the administration considers anti-American, consisting of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel.
3. Obama is not ready to forgive Netanyahu for not supporting his position on the March 2014 invasion of the Crimean Peninsula and the Russian military involvement in eastern Ukraine. In Obama's view, by refusing to supply weapons to the Ukrainian army he gave direct political support to Russian President **Vladimir Putin**.
4. Netanyahu's pro-Russian policy and frequent meetings with Putin, while avoiding coming to Washington to meet with Obama, have sparked anger in the White House.
5. Netanyahu thwarted every initiative by the administration for talks with the Palestinians, and rejected all of its efforts to that end.
6. Netanyahu's open support for Republican candidate **Mitt Romney** who ran against Obama in the 2012 election. The prime minister took action and spoke openly against the election of Obama to a second term, and even made sure that his confidante and close friend **Sheldon Adelson** provided Romney's campaign with unprecedented massive support.

This week Netanyahu tried to connect the two defensive walls that he is building.

On Tuesday, May 17, the Egyptian president promised closer ties with Israel in exchange for its resumption of peace talks with the Palestinians, and offered to mediate a reconciliation between Palestinian factions ahead of peace with Israel.

"If we are able to solve the issue of our Palestinian brothers it will achieve warmer peace ... I ask that the Israeli leadership allow this speech to be broadcast in Israeli one or two times as this is a genuine opportunity," he said.

"I say to our Palestinian brothers, you must unite the different factions in order to achieve reconciliation and quickly. We as Egypt are prepared to take on this role. It is a real opportunity to find a long-awaited solution."

The Egyptian President's speech would have supported the appointment of Herzog as Foreign Minister to lead Israel at a regional peace conference. But coalition negotiation with him crashed Wednesday night. Netanyahu reacted with a ploy to shore up his government by offering the defense portfolio to the hawkish Avigdor Lieberman. Unfortunately Lieberman is the last Israeli official that Obama wants to see in Washington or Jerusalem.

[Top of the Document](#)

MIN:160520:(20-MAY-16 D):Iran Becomes World's 6th Largest Cyber Warfare Power

Debka 20-May-16



One of the clearest examples of Iran's integration of cyberattacks into its war against the West was an event during a large-scale naval exercise that the US Fifth Fleet held in the Persian Gulf in the last week of April.

During the International Mine Countermeasure Exercise, involving representatives and ships from 30 countries, Iranian cyber warfare specialists succeeded in taking partial control of the GPS-supported navigation computers of a British destroyer, the HMS Defender, and disrupted its route.

The hierarchy in Tehran, which has understood for some time that besides its nuclear program it needs to acquire additional secret strategic abilities that can help resolve crises, even internal ones, decided to set up a cyber warfare network whose growth is now the fastest of its kind in the world.

The Iranians learned the most important lesson in cyber warfare from the Stuxnet malware developed by the US and Israel that inflicted major damage to centrifuge control systems of Iran's nuclear program in 2009, and was not discovered until almost two years later.

The Iranians learned the price of the damage to the heart of the country's highly-protected nuclear industry, the scope of direct and indirect damage to the country, the vulnerability of computer systems, and how the heart of the national interest was vulnerable. No less importantly, they became aware of the need for information security.

Another lesson that the Iranians learned from the cyber attacks was organizational. The cyber command of the Revolutionary Guard Corps grasped even before the US military and the IDF that the combination of offensive and defensive cyber operations was established. Those dealing in attacks on overseas computer systems can learn from those protecting the computer systems of critical Iranian infrastructure, and vice versa: those dealing in protection of computer infrastructure in Iran are receiving a stream of technical, operational and engineering intelligence supplied by those attacking them.

It was not by chance that a number of the world's leading information security companies declared that Iran is the world's sixth-ranked cyber warfare power, after the US, Britain, Israel, Russia and China. It was among the first to discover the latent power of social networks in 2009, when the Green Movement tried to become an active opposition. Users of social networks linked to the movement were located at record speed and arrested, demonstrations were broken up before they even took place, and the regime apparently knew about every assembly, gathering or organization being planned.

Iranian hackers are now making wide use of social networks like Facebook, microblogs like Twitter, picture-sharing sites like Instagram and Flickr, video sharing sites like Youtube, and much more. The use is mainly for collecting intelligence on Western targets and building entire social profiles including modus operandi, but also for psychological warfare and disinformation.

Iran's cyber warfare is conducted by three main bodies: one under the Revolutionary Guard Corps, one under the army and the third under the Basij militia. They all use civilian straw companies in Iran and throughout the world, or proxies such as Hizballah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen that benefit from transfers of computer infrastructure, knowledge and cyber skills.

The Iranian cyber warfare budget is estimated at about \$1 billion a year (compared to \$2 billion annually for the signal intelligence branch of Britain's GCHQ). Another part of its cyber warfare is conducted by "hacktivists", namely students and

occasional hackers who operate independently against Western targets for ideological reasons.

DEBKA Weekly's cyber warfare experts point out that one of the main characteristics of Iranian cyber warfare is that the motivation to cause damage is much stronger than the intent to collect intelligence.

That was the conclusion from an analysis of 1,842 targets of Iran's "Rocket Kitten" cyber warfare group by the Check Point information security company, whose research center is in Israel. Another interesting detail was Tehran's focus on Saudi Arabia. Eighteen percent of the targets were Saudi, 16% were American and only 5% were Israeli.

[Top of the Document](#)