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SAUDI GROUND TROOPS IN YEMEN?

Speculation that Saudi Arabia had deployed ground troops in Yemen swirled last week after reports of the emergence of a "shadowy new pro-government force" fighting alongside the anti-Houthi armed group known as the Southern Resistance Committees. The new force reportedly consists of no more than 50 fighters, including special forces operatives. A spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition, Brig. Gen. Ahmed Asiri, denied the reports, saying "There are no foreign forces in Aden." In a separate incident earlier in the week, the Saudi Press Agency reported that Saudi troops repelled a major Houthi border attack near the town of Najran. The assault, which Saudi officials say is the Houthis boldest attempt to penetrate the southern border since the start of the air campaign in March, resulted in the deaths of three Saudi troops and dozens of Houthi rebels. (The *Los Angeles Times* May 3, 2015; BBC News May 1, 2015)

NEW SAUDI LINE OF SUCCESSION

Saudi Arabia's King Salman has made a historic announcement aimed at calming the firestorm of speculation around the issue of royal succession. Prince Mohammed bin Nayaf, the interior minister and head of the kingdom's counterterrorism efforts, was installed as crown prince. Second, the young defense minister, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was named deputy crown prince. Finally, the Saudi ambassador to the U.S., Adel al-Jubeir, replaced the long-serving Prince Saud al-Faisal as foreign minister. All three have called for the strengthening of U.S.-Saudi relations and demonstrated security-oriented views of the region aimed at combatting terrorism. (The *New York Times* April 29, 2015)

ISIS CONTINUES TO PREY ON YAZIDIS

In yet another act of brutality, ISIS militants reportedly killed several hundred Yazidi captives in the Tal Afar district of Mosul, Iraq. According to an Iraqi lawmaker, Habib al-Tarfi, at least 200 adherents of the pre-Islamic sect were killed last week, although the Yazidi Progress party put the figure at more than 300. ISIS captured large swaths of Iraqi territory last summer, including the Yazidi-populated Sinjar district in Nineveh province. The militants were subsequently evicted from the region by Kurdish Peshmerga forces last December, though some Yazidi villages remain under ISIS control. Paradoxically, the most recent slaughter comes after ISIS released some 200 Yazidis into the hands of Kurdish officials in January. Al-Tarfi expressed his disgust and reiterated the government's pledge of Iraqi solidarity, saying, "We condemn this heinous act against this Iraqi component of our society, our Yazidi brothers." (BBC News May 2, 2015; CNN May 3, 2015)

U.S. TO TRAIN SYRIAN OPPOSITION IN TURKEY

After months of delays, the U.S. will finally begin training Syrian rebels in Turkey on May 9, according to Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. "There isn't any political or other issue. At first, 300 people will be trained, followed by the next 300 and, at the end of the year, the number of trained and equipped fighters will reach 2,000," he said. The 300 that will travel to Turkey in the days ahead will be among the first to be trained and armed for a force that will eventually exceed 15,000 troops. Cavusoglu went on to say that the U.S. and Turkey share the goal of toppling Assad's regime. While the CIA has been quietly supporting Syrian rebel groups for months, this new program falls under the direction of the U.S. Defense Department. (Reuters May 2, 2015)