



EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Security in the Post-Soviet Space

Eurasia Security Watch: No. 338

May 17, 2015

CRACKS IN ASSAD'S INNER CIRCLE

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has placed his intelligence chief, Ali Mamlouk, under house arrest over allegations he conspired to plot a coup. Mamlouk, the head of Syria's National Security Bureau and an Assad confidant, was accused of engaging in back-channel talks with rebel group sponsor countries and exiled members of the regime. A senior regime source with direct knowledge of the plan said Mamlouk had been communicating with Turkish intelligence and Rifaat al-Assad, Bashar's exiled uncle. Mamlouk's betrayal is said to be a result of his discontent with Iran's growing influence in the country's affairs. "Most of the advisers at the presidential palace are now Iranian," said the same regime source. "Mamlouk hated that Syria was giving her sovereignty up to Iran. He thought there needed to be a change." The regime shake-up comes amid a series of strategic battlefield losses, mounting civilian casualties, and a shrinking Syrian Army. (*The Telegraph*, May 11, 2015)

SUNNI TRIBESMEN TO JOIN ANBAR OFFENSIVE

Iraqi security forces are beginning to train and equip Sunni tribal volunteers to take part in the upcoming offensive to tackle Islamic State militants who control most of the predominantly-Sunni Anbar province. The first 1,000 recruits for a force government officials hope will eventually exceed 6,000 graduated at a ceremony in the town of Ameriyat al-Falluja last Friday. They will fall under the authority of what are known as "popular mobilization units" (PMU), an umbrella group comprised of mostly Shiite militias controlled by the government. If successful, the mobilization of Sunni tribesmen, a result of an agreement between local Sunni leaders and the Shiite-dominated authority in Baghdad, will represent a positive step toward achieving the larger goals of bridging the Sunni-Shiite divide and fostering Iraqi national unity and solidarity. (*Washington Post*, May 9, 2015)

HOUTHIS AGREE TO TEMPORARY CEASEFIRE

Houthi rebels in Yemen made a statement accepting a Saudi-proposed five-day ceasefire, but threatened retaliation in the event of any violation of the truce by "Al Qaeda or those who stand with them." The ceasefire allowed much-needed humanitarian relief supplies to be delivered to the country. Just hours before the announcement of the limited truce, Saudi coalition aircraft bombed the house of Yemen's former President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, now a Houthi ally. Saleh was uninjured, and stated later in an address to the nation, "With rockets and warplanes, you do not achieve any of the goals you seek. You are welcome on the ground: Move and we will meet you with a wonderful welcome." (*New York Times*, May 10, 2015)

LIBYA TARGETS TURKISH CARGO VESSEL

The Libyan military shelled a Turkish cargo ship ten miles off the coastal city of Derna after reportedly warning it not to approach. One crew member died, and three others were wounded. In a statement released after the incident, Turkish officials said, "We condemn strongly this contemptible attack which targeted a civilian ship in international waters and curse those who carried it out." Libya's internationally-recognized government, led by Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni, recently cut off relations with Turkey over allegations it was sending weapons to a rival group in Tripoli. The Libyan government had also repeatedly publicized its intention to destroy any vessels attempting to dock at Derna. (Reuters, May 11, 2015)

ANOTHER ARAB-LED INTERVENTION?

Arab chiefs of staff will meet in Cairo on May 18 to coordinate plans for a Libyan intervention, according to an Arab League source. The meeting will include military personnel from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Sudan and Libya. Officials from France and Italy have also been invited, as "France has been asked to supply support with logistics and special forces while Italy has been called to provide naval support," the source said. In the weeks following the meeting, Egypt will host a forum for Libyan tribal leaders in an effort to coordinate operations and secure safe passage for the Arab ground troops. (*Defense News*, May 10, 2015)