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IRAN BOOSTS QODS SHOCK TROOPS IN VENEZUELA

April 21, 2010 The Washington Times reported: "Iran is increasing its paramilitary Qods force operatives in Venezuela while covertly continuing supplies of weapons and explosives to Taliban and other insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, according to the Pentagon's first report to Congress on Tehran's military.

The report on Iranian military power provides new details on the group known formally as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), the Islamist shock troops deployed around the world to advance Iranian interests. The unit is aligned with terrorists in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, North Africa and Latin America, and the report warns that U.S. forces are likely to battle the Iranian paramilitaries in the future.

The Qods force "maintains operational capabilities around the world," the report says, adding that "it is well established in the Middle East and North Africa and recent years have witnessed an increased presence in Latin America, particularly Venezuela."

"If U.S. involvement in conflict in these regions deepens, contact with the IRGC-QF, directly or through extremist groups it supports, will be more frequent and consequential," the report says. The report provides the first warning in an official U.S. government report about Iranian paramilitary activities in the Western Hemisphere. It also highlights links between Iran and the anti-U.S. government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who has been accused of backing Marxist terrorists in Colombia.

The report gives no details on the activities of the Iranians in Venezuela and Latin America. Iranian-backed terrorists have conducted few attacks in the region. However, U.S. intelligence officials say Qods operatives are developing networks of terrorists in the region who could be called to attack the United States in the event of a conflict over Iran's nuclear program."..." (Deuteronomy 28:43-48)

ASSAD DUE IN EGYPT TO DISCUSS FEAR OF ISRAEL-SYRIA WAR

April 21, 2010 Haaretz reports: "Syrian President Bashar Assad was due Tuesday night to land in Egypt 'within hours,' his first visit in four years, several Arab media outlets reported. The urgency of the surprise trip stems from a fear of war between Israel and Syria.

A Syrian commentator noted that Assad, who last week denied that Syria had delivered Scud missiles to Hezbollah, would seek to make clear that this information was false. He believes that the accusations are 'an Israeli excuse for warmongering,' according to the media reports. In their meeting, Assad and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak would also discuss the Palestinian reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas.

Assad's visit to Egypt would be his first since the Second Lebanon War, when he called Arab leaders who did not back Hezbollah 'half men.' Saudi Arabia and Egypt responded by refusing to meet with Assad and by launching a media attack on Hezbollah. This included Egyptian accusations that the Lebanese group was targeting sites in Egypt.

Saudi Arabia had already cooled relations with Syria before the war, following suspicions that it might have been involved in the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri. But the Saudis thawed relations last year, largely due to Lebanon's parliamentary elections and Syria's desire to support Hariri's son Saad, who became prime minister. In October, the Saudi king arrived for a historic visit to Damascus, but Syrian efforts to persuade Mubarak to do the same failed; the Egyptian president refused to talk to Assad.

Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt seek to minimize Iranian influence among Arab countries in the Middle East and see embracing Syria as a step that might make it easier for Assad to pick a side."...

In the meantime, Egypt is pushing for a special conference to discuss the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with all Middle Eastern countries attending, including Israel. The conference would aim to persuade Israel to sign the treaty."..." (Luke 21:20)



EARTHQUAKE STRIKES NEAR PACIFIC ISLAND OF TONGA

April 21, 2010 The AP reported: "A 5.9-magnitude earthquake hit near the Pacific island of Tonga on Thursday, but no casualties or damage were reported and no tsunami warning was issued. The quake struck 65 miles (135 kilometers) northeast of Hihifo, Tonga, at a depth of 21 miles (35 kilometers). Many residents of American Samoa felt the quake and went out to look at the ocean while listening to radio broadcasts.

"Nothing is registered on our sensors for tsunami waves," according to Carol Baqui, a forecaster with the American Samoa weather service. No tsunami warning was issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii."...Preliminary estimates put the quake at 6.2, but that was later downgraded to 5.9.

A magnitude 8.0 earthquake close to neighboring Samoa last Sept. 29 killed 34 people in American Samoa, 183 in Samoa and nine in Tonga, when tsunami waves up to 46 feet (14 meters) high crashed ashore. It also created a sea floor fault up to 190 miles (300 kilometers) long and 23 feet (7 meters) deep."..." (Matthew 24:7, Mark 13:8, Luke 21:11)

GREECE TAKES A BATTERING ON EU DEFICIT REVISION

April 23, 2010 AFP reported: "Debt-stricken Greece took a battering on Thursday when the EU sharply increased Athens' 2009 public deficit

estimate, with other weak eurozone nations also punished in the money markets. Brussels said Greece's 2009 public deficit was much bigger than previously thought and warned that it is likely to rise further given poor data reporting from Athens.

As it negotiates with its euro currency partners and the International Monetary Fund a package of emergency loans worth up to 45 billion euros (60 billion dollars) in a first year, market pressures on Athens soared. Greek 10-year government bond yields -- the rate demanded by investors to hold the debt -- spiraled up to almost 8.8 percent, unprecedented and unsustainable levels.

Just as worrying for Brussels, public finances from across Europe were also dismal, with yields on debt issued by those states seen as weaker eurozone members such as Portugal, Ireland and Spain also rising sharply.

"Greece is running out of time with the next (debt) rollover due in May and Greek workers beginning new waves of strikes," warned Michael Hewson, an analyst at CMC Markets.

"Portuguese and Spanish yields are also now coming under pressure as the debt crisis looks to enter its next phase," he added. "With the EU-IMF meeting in Athens set to continue over the next few days, the fear of contagion remains."

Portugal's benchmark 10-year bond yield rose to 4.879 percent from 4.711 percent on Wednesday, Ireland's moved to 4.744 percent from 4.6 percent and Spain, while much lower at 3.931 percent, reflecting its economic weight, was also up. The euro meanwhile tumbled to its lowest point in almost a year, diving as low as 1.3261 dollars before recovering slightly.



Greece

Capital Economics analyst Ben May said the "mammoth task" already facing Athens became dramatically tougher after Moody's credit rating agency downgraded Athens' status once again. "...However, obstacles remain there -- not least uncertainty if a challenge is made in Germany's constitutional court over Berlin's involvement, as well as Athens agreeing to tough new conditions accelerating a painful economic revamp.

Greece's public deficit for 2009 shot up to 13.6 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with yet another half percentage point rise likely, the EU's data agency said on Thursday. That marked a sharp increase from the most recent upwards revision to 12.9 percent."...

Taken together, the combined deficit for all 16 euro countries more than trebled in 2009 to 6.3 percent of GDP from 2.0 percent in 2008, hitting more than twice the level permitted under the bloc's budgetary rules.

Ireland was the worst offender, at 14.1 percent, followed by Greece, Spain on 11.1 percent and Portugal with 9.4 percent. France's deficit shot up from 3.3 percent in 2008 to 7.5 percent last year. Outside the eurozone, Britain's deficit hit 11.5 percent and Poland's topped 7.1 percent. None of the 27 European Union member states recorded a government surplus in 2009..." (*Revelation 17:12-14*)

NATO CHIEF: MISSILE DEFENSE NEEDED AGAINST IRRATIONAL PLAYERS

April 22, 2010 VOANews.com reported: "NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen says NATO must work toward nuclear disarmament, but must also have missile defense against irrational countries and players with nuclear weapons. NATO foreign ministers meeting is being held in Tallinn, Estonia.

Secretary General Anders Rasmussen says the allies must discuss the issue of whether tactical nuclear weapons can serve as a credible deterrent against terrorists who may obtain a nuclear device. Turkey and former Soviet satellite countries want to keep such weapons. Several older members want them removed. He said in his personal opinion, U.S. tactical arms in Europe do serve as a deterrent.

Rasmussen says NATO members must also review their overall nuclear posture. He gives credit to President Obama for putting "new wind in the sails of reducing nuclear weapons and risk." He says the alliance must do what it can to support arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation. At the same time, Secretary General Rasmussen says NATO's reason for existence is to protect the 900-million people among its members.

"Missile defense is no replacement for an effective deterrent, but can compliment it, because there are states or other actors who might not be rational enough to be deterred by our nuclear weapons," said Anders Rasmussen."..." (*Ezekiel 5:4, 12 Will the U.S.A. be considered irrational by the coming Beast power someday soon?*)

POTENTIALLY DEADLY FUNGUS SPREADING IN US, CANADA

April 22, 2010 Reuters reported: "A potentially deadly strain of fungus is spreading among animals and people in the northwestern United States and the Canadian province of British Columbia, researchers reported on Thursday. The airborne fungus, called *Cryptococcus gattii*, usually only infects transplant and AIDS patients and people with otherwise compromised immune systems, but the new strain is genetically different, the researchers said.

"This novel fungus is worrisome because it appears to be a threat to otherwise healthy people," said Edmond Byrnes of Duke University in North Carolina, who led the study."..."Our findings suggest further expansion into neighboring regions is likely to occur and aim to increase disease awareness in the region."

The new strain appears to be unusually deadly, with a mortality rate of about 25 percent among the 21 U.S. cases analyzed, they said."..." (*Matthew 24:7, Deuteronomy 28:59-62*)

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