

LUDWIGSHAFEN, Germany (Dispatches) -- BASF SE is exploring options for tapping Iran's recently opened energy market, making it the latest in a long line of German firms looking to expand into the Islamic Republic. Chief Executive Kurt Bock said Friday that the company -- through its fully-owned oil and gas subsidiary Wintershall AG -- is currently examining business opportunities in Iran after being courted by Iranian authorities. "We are trying to see whether there is an opportunity in the oil and gas business in Iran to gain a foot hold there," Bock said. "We were invited by the national authorities and we will take a look at it."

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Friday incorrect policies in the region have led to environmental problems, including desertification, dust pollution and water shortage crises. Addressing the opening ceremony of the 16th Iran International Environment Exhibition here, Zarif invited all neighboring countries to engage in close environmental cooperation with Iran. "I invite all neighbors of the Islamic Republic to launch a joint project to counter the environmental," he said.

**Viewpoint**

By Kayhan Int'l Staff Writer

**CIA's 1986 Plan for Syria**

## CIA Spies Quitting in Opposition to Trump

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The CIA is facing a potentially crippling loss of human intelligence from foreign militant groups because some of its best spies in the field are unwilling to work for U.S. President Donald Trump's administration, Middle East Eye has learned.

Contracted agents, some of whom run networks of sources within Al-Qaeda and the Daesh group have either quit or threatened to quit amid frustration in the intelligence services since Trump took office last month.

These operatives are known as "terrorist hunters" and are both American and other nationalities. They are mostly Muslim and some are allowed to develop their own assets and run their own big budgets.

This is going to be the largest loss in intelligence history in the fight against terrorism.

Some were recruited almost a decade ago for their strength and motivation and have track records of providing genuine plot-busting intelligence.

"This was the generation of operatives who came about after the restructuring after George W Bush, to reclaim their credibility, to focus on the facts and not to massage them. Now they believe they are going to go back to square one," a source with knowledge of the resignations told MEE. "The ramifications on society in the U.S. and Europe will be substantial. These are people who know the terrain and who blend in. Some of them have been undercover for years. Now they all sent a message to Washington: 'We are quitting'."

The threatened resignation of two "terrorist hunters" in particular is a source of concern at the CIA's Langley headquarters, the source added.

"They are irreplaceable. Them quitting the business will harm the interests of the US. These two guys are responsible for 50 to 60 percent of the pre-emption of terrorist attacks you never hear about," the source said.

According to the source, the two agents were quitting for two main reasons.

As loyal Americans, they are disgusted by the low intellectual caliber of the leaders they now have to serve as well as their ideological bias against, and suspicion of Muslims in general.

They are frustrated by the new intelligence chiefs' ignorance of Islam, their inability to differentiate between different groups of Salafi-Takfiris, and their propensity to lump all groups, both violent and non-violent, into one pot.

But as intelligence operatives, they are also concerned about a

shift in priorities away from Daesh and Al-Qaeda, to focus instead on ideological issues which are irrelevant to, or actively hamper, counter-intelligence.

They are "extremely concerned" that the leadership of the intelligence community has been put in the hands of former military generals, and their primary concern is to protect their intelligence assets and prevent them from being used to serve political purposes.

The ramifications will be substantial. These are people who know the terrain and blend in. Some have been undercover for years.

They also are worried that Trump's comments about wanting to see a return of waterboarding will become a huge recruiting tool for Daesh.

Mike Pompeo, who was confirmed as the CIA's new director by Congress, had said he would consider bringing back waterboarding and other "enhanced interrogation techniques" under certain circumstances.

But during his Senate confirmation hearing, he dismissed the idea he would bring back torture as CIA chief.

In 2013 Pompeo claimed Muslim American leaders did not speak out enough against terror attacks and could, therefore be "potentially complicit" in those attacks.

An expert with a close working knowledge of radical groups" in the region told MEE: "This is going to be the largest loss in intelligence history in the fight against terrorism. It will take years to rebuild the network and the people and the new assets.

"The only way to stop this is by appointing people who are known to be knowledgeable, rational, and non-political."

There has been a rising chorus of corroboration of the strains developing within the U.S. intelligence community.

Edward Price who worked at the CIA from 2006 revealed in the Washington Post newspaper earlier this week that he had quit because of growing demoralization within the organization over Trump.

Price wrote that Trump's actions in office had been even more disturbing than his trashing of the "high confidence" conclusion of 17 intelligence agencies that Russia was behind the hacking and release of election-related emails.

Trump's visit to the CIA, where he continued to brag about his election victory rather than address the audience, was another cause for concern.

"Whether delusional or deceitful, these were not the remarks many of my colleagues and I wanted to

**Poetry Can Be Used to Fight Oppressors: Leader**



**Romania to Play Friendlies With Iran Football Team: Official**



**Over 12,000 Civilians Killed in Saudi war**



**Nearly 70 People Killed Near Syria's al-Bab:**

## Daesh Wreaks Havoc Where Turkey Operates



*At least 45 civilians have been killed in a bombing by Daesh terrorists near the Syrian city of al-Bab.*

BEIRUT/ISTANBUL (Dispatches) -- A Daesh car bomb killed about 70 people on Friday in a Syrian village held by Takfiris, a war monitor said, a day after the terrorist group was driven from its last stronghold in the area.

The blast in the village of Sousian hit a security checkpoint controlled by Turkish-backed militants.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitor of the war based in Britain, said more than 60 people died including over 45 civilians.

A militant with the Sultan Murad

Brigade near al-Bab, said: "It was done on a checkpoint but there were a lot of families there gathered and waiting to get back to al-Bab. Therefore we have many civilian casualties."

Turkey claimed to have driven Daesh from the town of al-Bab on Thursday, following weeks of street battles near where Ankara wants to establish a "safe zone".

Turkey's military said on Friday that it had taken full control of all of al-Bab, and that work to clear mines and unexploded ordnance was under way.

Sousian is behind militant lines about 8 km (5 miles) northwest of al-Bab, around which Ankara has long supported the formation of a zone it claims would help to stem a wave of migration via Turkey into Europe.

A second blast took place 2 km south of Sousian later on Friday, but it was unclear whether it was from a vehicle bomb or a planted device such as a mine. There were reports of casualties but no immediate details, the observatory said.

Daesh said in a social media posting that it was behind the Sousian

attack, having acknowledged on Thursday it had lost control of al-Bab.

Syria's main conflict pits President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russia, Iran and volunteer militias, against militants that include groups supported by Turkey, the United States and Persian Gulf monarchies.

As mines laid in and around al-Bab claimed lives for a second day, the Sultan Murad Brigade fighter said many Daesh cells were still operating there.

"It is very dangerous. Our search and clear operation is still under way," he said.

Two Turkish soldiers were killed on Friday while clearing mines in the town of Tedef south of al-Bab, Turkey's military said in a statement. On Thursday, several Turkey-backed militants were killed by a mine in al-Bab, the observatory said.

Turkey directly intervened in Syria in August, with support from rebel factions under the FSA banner. It also wants to stop Kurdish groups gaining control of the region.

After taking al-Bab on Thursday, Turkish forces shelled Daesh in Tedef, the observatory reported.

The area immediately to the south of Tedef is held by the Syrian army and its allies, which have in recent weeks pushed into Daesh territory in that area from Aleppo and advanced towards the Euphrates river.

## Saudi Hajj Minister Meets Iranian Delegation

RIYADH (Dispatches) -- A Saudi minister held talks with an Iranian delegation about the possibility of Iranian pilgrims rejoining the annual Hajj despite ruptured ties between the two countries, state media reported late Thursday.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have had no diplomatic ties since early last year.

The kingdom's minister in charge of pilgrimages, Muhammad Bentin, discussed with the Iranians "arrangements concerning participation of the Iranian faithful in this year's hajj," the official Saudi Press Agency said.

It did not give more details but said the meeting took place Thursday in the Red Sea city of Jeddah.

SPA said the talks occurred in the context of meetings organized by the pilgrimage ministry with various countries about accommodation and other logistics for the Hajj, which will take place around early September.

For the first time in nearly three decades, Iran's 64,000 pilgrims did not attend last year's Hajj after

the regional powers failed to agree on security and logistics.

But Saudi media reported in December that Bentin had invited Iran to discuss arrangements for this year's pilgrimage.

"Iran's policy is to send pilgrims to the Hajj (this year), of course, if Saudi Arabia accepts our conditions," Iran's Culture Minister Reza Salehi Amiri told state television Wednesday, when he confirmed Iran had sent a team to Saudi Arabia.

"In a letter I've written to the Saudi Hajj minister I have specified our conditions," he said.

"If they accept our conditions, we will definitely send pilgrims (this) year, otherwise the responsibility" will be on Saudi Arabia.

More than 1.8 million faithful took part in last year's Hajj. The pilgrimage is one of the pillars of Islam and all Muslims who can must perform it at least once in their lives.

Iran decided to stop sending pilgrims to Hajj over security concerns

## Trump Vows to Expand U.S. Nuclear Arsenal

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- President Donald Trump said on Thursday he wants to ensure the U.S. nuclear arsenal is at the "top of the pack," saying the United States has fallen behind in its weapons capacity.

In a Reuters interview, Trump also said China could solve the national security challenge posed by North Korea "very easily if they want to," ratcheting up pressure on Beijing to exert more influence to rein in Pyongyang.

Trump also predicted his efforts to pressure NATO allies to pay more for their own defense and ease the burden on the U.S. budget would reap dividends. "They owe a lot of money," he said.

In his first comments about the U.S. nuclear arsenal since taking office on Jan. 20, Trump was asked about a December tweet in which he said the United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capacity "until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes."

Trump said in the interview that

the United States has "fallen behind on nuclear weapon capacity."

"I am the first one that would like to see ... nobody have nukes, but we're never going to fall behind any country even if it's a friendly country, we're never going to fall behind on nuclear power.

"It would be wonderful, a dream would be that no country would have nukes, but if countries are going to have nukes, we're going to be at the top of the pack," Trump said.

Russia has 7,000 warheads and the United States, 6,800, according to the Ploughshares Fund, an anti-nuclear group.

"Russia and the United States have far more weapons than is necessary to deter nuclear attack by the other or by another nuclear-armed country," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the independent Arms Control Association non-profit group.

The new strategic arms limitation treaty, known as New START, between the United States and Russia

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