

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran is seeking \$2.5 billion investment to modernize its oil tankers fleet following the lifting of sanctions against Tehran, managing director of National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA on Saturday.

"To expand Iran's oil tanker activities, \$2.5 billion will be invested in it," said Ali Akbar Safaei, managing director of National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC). Safaei said that NITC was the first Iranian company that has managed to rent its ships to foreigners after the lifting of sanctions.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- Iran has gone beyond its commitments in fulfilling the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreed on as part of the deal with the P5+1 group of countries to roll back its nuclear program, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Yukiya Amano said on Friday.

"Iran is now subject to the strongest nuclear verification regime in the world. It is implementing not just its safeguards agreement with the Agency, but also its Additional Protocol. Transparency measures which go beyond Iran's obligations under its formal agreements with the IAEA have also been agreed," Amano said.

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Greece Seeks Explanation From IMF

ATHENS (AFP) -- Greece on Saturday demanded "explanations" from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after WikiLeaks said the lender sought a crisis "event" to push the indebted nation into concluding talks over its reforms.

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said he would write to IMF chief Christine Lagarde and reach out to European leaders after the website published what it said was a transcript of a teleconference in which IMF officials complained that Athens only moves decisively when faced with the peril of default.

An "event" was therefore needed to drive the threat of default and get the Greeks to act, the officials say in the document dated March 19, and released by the whistleblowing website Saturday. The nature of such an "event" is not specified.

The officials also express concern that Britain's referendum in June on EU membership will hold up the negotiations, predicting that the vote will halt the talks on Athens' latest massive international bailout "for a month".

The Greek government reacted strongly to the report, saying it wanted the IMF to clarify its position.

"The Greek government is demanding explanations from the IMF over whether seeking to create default conditions in Greece, shortly ahead of the referendum in Britain, is the fund's official position," spokeswoman Olga Gero-vassili said in a statement.

Tsipras' office added: "The Prime Minister will immediately send an official letter to Christine Lagarde over the issue."

Those taking part in the leaked discussion were Iva Petrova and Delia Velculescu, who have been representing the IMF in the negotiations with Greece, and Poul Thomsen, director of the Fund's European Department.

In it, Thomsen allegedly voices exasperation with the slow pace of talks on the economic reforms Athens has agreed to carry out in exchange for a new 84-billion-euro (\$95 billion) international bailout agreed in July after months of bruising negotiations that saw Greece teeter on the brink of a eurozone exit.

The IMF has yet to officially sign onto Greece's latest bailout and is making its participation conditional on the fact that no ground is yielded on the reforms needed by Athens, especially on pensions. "In the past there has been only one time when the decision has been made and then that was when (the Greeks) were about to run out of money seriously and to default," Thomson is quoted as saying in the transcript.

Later in the conversation, Velculescu reportedly replies: "I agree that we need an event, but I don't know what that will be."

She also says that Eurogroup chief Jeroen Dijsselboem is trying to "jump start" a discussion on debt but "not to generate an event."

Mission chiefs from Greece's international lenders -- the EU, IMF, European Central Bank and European rescue fund -- are due to resume an audit of the reforms on Monday.

But the institutions are believed to be clashing over their assessment

(Continued on Page 7)

U.S. Moves to Forestall Fall of Daesh



TEHRAN (Press TV) -- U.S. officials say Washington is considering to greatly increase the number of its special operations forces deployed to Syria, the Reuters news agency reports.

The U.S., they say, looks to "accelerate recent gains" against Daesh but Hillary Clinton's leaked emails last month revealed that the United States plotted to topple the Syrian government even before the group existed.

For their new plan, the officials declined to disclose the exact increase under consideration but one of them said it would leave the U.S. special operations contingent many times larger than "the around 50 troops" currently in Syria.

The proposal is among the military options being prepared for President Barack Obama, who is also weighing an increase in

the number of American troops in Iraq, Reuters said on Friday.

Daesh controls the cities of Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, but the Takfiri group has been on a losing streak lately as government forces in both the Arab countries have been making their biggest advances in recent years.

Curiously enough, the U.S. is committing more boots on the ground as the Iraqi army is closing in on Mosul and Syrian forces are shifting their attention to Raqqa after liberating Palmyra, Shaddadi and other towns.

The new plan is being peddled as a sign of "growing confidence in the ability of U.S.-backed forces inside Syria and Iraq to claw back territory" from Daesh but U.S. officials don't say why they didn't send troops when Takfiri terrorists were overrunning cities one after another.

Salafist Principality

Just to set the record straight, let's mention a U.S. intelligence report from August 2012, which stated that "the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria" was "exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime."

Fighting Daesh has now become a byword but those "supporting powers to the opposition" rooting for a "Salafist principality" in Syria were in fact Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Turkey, and their Western allies which allege to be bombing terrorists in the region under a U.S.-led coalition.

Clinton Email Leaks and Media Blackout

Last month, Hillary Clinton's leaked emails revealed that the U.S. State Department, Google, and Qatar's Al Jazeera media network collaborated in supporting Syrian "rebels" to bring down the Assad government.

WikiLeaks published and indexed thousands of Clinton's personal emails, some revealing interesting details about the relationship between the State Department and major corporations.

Western media largely ignored the story, with Britain's The Independent and Daily Mail being the only few mainstream sites which covered it.

According to WikiLeaks' archive of Clinton's emails, Google developed an interactive online tool called Google Ideas to encourage defections in Syria.

Al Jazeera, which funded and owned the tracker, published it in English and Arabic.

Clinton was informed of the plan in a July 25, 2012 email

sent to her deputy Jacob J. Sullivan by the founder and director of Google Ideas, Jared Cohen.

"Please keep close hold, but my team is planning to launch a tool on Sunday that will publicly track and map the defections in Syria and which parts of the government they are coming from," Cohen wrote in the email.

Sullivan forwarded the email onto Clinton, adding, "This is a pretty cool idea." Clinton, in turn, sent it to an assistant with instructions for the email to be printed.

An internal analysis by Google called it "one of the most viewed visualizations on their site" and the tool later won an Online Media Award for the Doha-based Al Jazeera.

Google, Social Networks and Colonialism

Google Ideas is a think tank which maintains close ties to the State Department, according to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in his 2014 book "When Google Met WikiLeaks."

In his book, Assange describes the special relationship between Google, Hillary Clinton and the State Department and what that means for the future of the internet.

Before leading Google Ideas, Cohen served at the State Department from 2006 to 2010 under Secretaries of State Clinton and Condoleezza Rice who famously spoke of "creative chaos" and the "birth pangs of a new Middle East."

According to Assange, "it was Cohen who, while he was still at the Department of State, was said to have emailed Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey to delay scheduled maintenance in order to assist the aborted 2009 uprising in Iran."

Cohen reportedly co-wrote a policy piece, praising the potential of Silicon Valley technologies as an instrument of US foreign policy.

"Democratic states that have built coalitions of their militaries have the capacity to do the same with their connection technologies," the piece read.

Shortly afterwards, the Middle East erupted in unrest in what was branded as "Twitter revolutions" by Western news media to rationalize uprisings against US-backed dictatorships.

U.S. Plans to Topple Assad

According to Assange, the U.S. government is working on the fall of President Bashar al-Assad since 2006.

The "depopulation of Syria" is

(Continued on Page 7)

Philippines, U.S. Plan Drills to Face China

MANILA (AFP) -- Thousands of U.S. and Filipino soldiers will on Monday launch annual war games that this year are being seen as a show of strength in the face of China's increasing assertiveness in the region.

The 11-day Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises are expected to show how the Philippines, though severely outgunned, can counter China with the help of the United States, its longest-standing ally.

China has in recent months built massive structures including radar systems and an airstrip over reefs and outcrops in the contested South China Sea, sparking international concern.

Beijing lays claim to almost all of the waters, which are important for international shipping and believed to hold valuable mineral and energy deposits, and neighboring countries fear China could impose military controls over the entire sea.

The joint maneuvers come ahead of a decision this year by a United Nations-backed tribunal on a legal challenge by Manila to China's territorial claims.

Adding to the tensions, the Philippines is preparing to host U.S. troops in five bases under a defense pact born out of U.S. President Barack Obama's plan to reassert American influence in the Pacific.

Balikatan has evolved from counter-terrorism maneuvers against extremists like the Philippines' Abu Sayyaf, to simulations of retaking and protecting territory as disputes with Beijing have escalated.

However, Filipino and U.S. officials insist the exercises are not explicitly aimed at China.

Balikatan spokesman Captain Celeste Frank Sayson said 55 U.S. aircraft would take part in the drills, while the Philippines will deploy fighter jets it has recently acquired.

While no specific staging areas have been disclosed, the two allies have in recent years held war games at air bases just 230 kilometers (140 miles) from the disputed areas in the South China Sea.

Rene de Castro, an international studies professor at the De La Salle University in Manila, told AFP the drills appeared to have China's expansion in the South China Sea in mind.

"Looking at the features of Balikatan -- the mobile missile-launchers, the fighter planes -- that is an indication that the alliance is being geared for territorial defense," he said.

Richard Javad Heydarian, a political science professor at the De La Salle University in Manila, added that the exercises "aim to enhance interoperability among allies nations and signal their preparedness to confront China if necessary".

The Philippine military said the U.S. High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), designed to shoot down aircraft, will be sent to Palawan, the Philippines' westernmost island on the South China Sea, during the war games.

The Philippines operates one airstrip in the South China Sea, on Thitu island, where there are around 350 civilian residents.

It also keeps small military contingents in smaller outcrops, including Second Thomas Shoal, where Marines are stationed on a decaying World War II ship.

The Philippines, which has one of the weakest militaries in the region, has sought to counter

(Continued on Page 7)