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MUST READS

1. [Russia sends arms to Syria as it tries to reassert its role in region](#)

Washington Post, Karen DeYoung, 5/30

BLUF: The Syrian army's March weapons request to its Russian supplier was the stuff of everyday battles in a long and grueling conflict. -Twenty-thousand Kalashnikov assault rifles and 20 million rounds of ammunition. Machine guns. Grenade launchers and grenades. Sniper rifles with night-vision sights.

- The Syrian army general asked for a price quote "in the shortest possible time." He closed with kind regards to Rosoboronexport, Russia's state arms exporter.
- The flow of arms to Syria, including the advanced S-300 missile defense batteries that Moscow said this week it would supply, continues amid hopes that an international conference, jointly proposed by the United States and Russia, will lead to a negotiated political settlement of Syria's civil war.

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GERMANY:

2. [Hollande reform defiance sparks German anger](#)

Reuters, Mark John, 5/30

BLUF: President Francois Hollande's insistence that the EU executive can't "dictate" reforms to France has outraged Angela Merkel's conservatives, hours before the German leader was due in Paris for talks.

- Unveiling reform recommendations for the 27-nation European Union on Wednesday, the European Commission urged Hollande to rein in public spending, revamp pensions and cut labor costs in return for a two-year reprieve on budget deficit cuts.
- French officials broadly welcomed the recommendations as being in line with reform plans already sent to Brussels. But Hollande, who was on a trip through rural France with reporters, warned the Commission not to overstep itself.
- "The European Commission cannot dictate what we should do, it can only say that France must balance its public finances," said Hollande, who later returned to Paris to prepare for Merkel's visit to the French capital on Thursday.

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3. [Italians pay migrants to go to Germany](#)

German Herald, 5/30

BLUF: Hundreds of African migrants were paid almost NZ\$933 to leave Italy and go to Germany.

- The Italian authorities offered the refugees from Libya, Ghana and Togo the money as an inducement to leave, according to the interior ministry in Berlin. "Refugees were slipped the money under the advice that they would go to Germany," it said in a letter leaked to a newspaper.
- Thousands of asylum seekers have arrived on the Italian island of Lampedusa since the beginning of the Arab Spring and the cash handout was introduced as an incentive for them to move on.

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4. [Germany sticks plan to buy armed drones](#)

The Local, 5/30

BLUF: Germany is sticking with a plan to buy 16 combat drones, despite a controversy embroiling its defence minister over a scrapped surveillance drone project.

- Thomas de Maiziere has drawn fire for two weeks over the abandoned "Euro Hawk" project, putting pressure on Chancellor Angela Merkel's government four months ahead of elections.

- The Euro Hawk project had already swallowed €508 million (\$657 million) before the Defence Ministry said on May 14 it would "pull the rip-chord" on the plan to buy four more of the unmanned surveillance aircraft.
- Germany feared aviation authorities would not certify the Euro Hawk -- a version of US-based Northrop Grumman's Global Hawk re-modelled by Europe's EADS -- because it lacks an anti-collision system.

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FRANCE:

5. [France says 3,000-4,000 Hezbollah are fighting in Syria](#)

Reuters, 5/30

BLUF: France said on Wednesday its intelligence services believed 3-4,000 guerillas from Lebanon's Hezbollah militia fighting alongside President Bashar al-Assad's army in Syria's civil war.

- "As far as Hezbollah militants present in the battlefield, the figures range from 3,000 to 10,000, our estimates are between 3,000 and 4,000," Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told lawmakers.
- The United Nations' human rights chief Navi Pillay said on Wednesday a dramatic increase in the role of Iran-backed Hezbollah militants backing Syrian government forces was inflaming regional tensions, without giving numbers.
- Fabius pointed the finger at Iran for pushing Hezbollah into the Syrian conflict.

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RUSSIA:

6. [Russia faults U.S. over 'odious' Syria rights resolution](#)

Reuters, Steve Gutterman, 5/30

BLUF: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov denounced as "odious" a U.S.-backed draft resolution condemning the Syrian government before a debate at the U.N. Human Rights Council on Wednesday and said it would undermine peace efforts.

- Lavrov said U.S. support for the draft resolution, which would condemn "widespread and systematic gross violations of human rights" by Syrian authorities and affiliated militias, ran counter to U.S.-Russian efforts to convene a peace conference.
- "The U.S. delegation (at the council in Geneva) is very actively promoting this extremely unwholesome initiative," Lavrov told a news conference after talks with Latin American counterparts in Moscow.

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7. [Russia sends more humanitarian aid to Syria, evacuates citizens](#)

BBC News, 5/30

BLUF: Russia has delivered another humanitarian consignment to Syria, the Foreign Ministry said Wednesday.

- "Two planes of the Emergency Situations Ministry have completed the humanitarian mission to Syria. Twenty-two tonnes of humanitarian cargo have been delivered to the city of Latakia," the ministry said in a statement.
- Food and other staple goods were among the consignment, and Syrian authorities have guaranteed security of the mission, it said.

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GREECE:

8. [EU may give Greece more time to meet fiscal targets](#)

Reuters, 5/30

BLUF: Eurogroup chairman Jeroen Dijsselbloem says the European Commission's approach regarding fiscal consolidation is 'more flexible', giving certain countries more time to meet their targets. 'I believe that this will be the case for Greece if needed,' he added.

- "The European Commission's approach regarding fiscal consolidation is more flexible, giving certain countries more time to meet their targets. I believe that this will be the case for Greece if needed," Jeroen Dijsselbloem said.
- Greece's European partners agreed last year to extend the maturities and reduce the interest on the nation's bailout funds to help cut its debt mountain to a more sustainable level of 124% of GDP in 2020, from an estimated 173% this year.

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9. [Recession of 4.6% and unemployment of 28% this year, says Bank of Greece](#)

Greek Reporter, 5/30

BLUF: In its annual report on monetary policy, the Bank of Greece, the country's central bank, predicts the economy will contract by 4.6% in its sixth year of recession and that unemployment will reach a ceiling of 28%.

- The economy is likely to contract by around 4.6% this year with unemployment set to stabilise at around 28%, the Bank of Greece said on Wednesday.
- The central bank's estimate, issued in its annual report on monetary policy, is worse than the 4.2% contraction predicted by the government and the troika.
- The economy shrank 6.4% in 2012. The bank says it expects a return to positive growth in 2014, a perspective shared by the European Commission.

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TURKEY:

10. [Turkey builds wall at Syrian border after deadly bombings](#)

ABC News, Jonathon Burch, 5/30

BLUF: Turkey is constructing 1.5-mile twin walls at a border crossing with Syria to increase security at the frontier following three deadly bombings this year.

- The concrete walls will be built on either side of the road leading from the Turkish side of the crossing at Cilvegozu to the Syrian border gate and will be topped with barbed wire, the Turkish Customs Ministry said in a statement.
- Cilvegozu was the scene of a bombing in February which killed 14 people and this month 51 people died when twin car bombs ripped through the nearby town of Reyhanli.

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11. [Turkey's military returns fire after shots fired from Syria](#)

The Washington Post, 5/30

BLUF: Turkey's military on Thursday returned fire after shots were fired at an armored personnel carrier from across the border with Syria.

- A military statement said a group of around three to five people from across the border fired up to 15 shots toward the vehicle that was patrolling an area near the Orontes river, on the frontier. Turkish state-run TRT television said no one was wounded and the military said the group escaped and "disappeared from view" when it fired back.
- Turkey has repeatedly struck back at the Syrian military in response to shelling and mortar rounds that landed on its territory since shells from Syria struck a Turkish village in October, killing five people. The incident prompted NATO to send anti-aircraft batteries to the area to protect Turkey.

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12. [Turkey ready to deliver Turkmen natural gas to Europe](#)

Reuters, Marat Gurt, 5/30

BLUF: Turkey is ready to deliver Turkmenistan's natural gas to consumers in Europe, Turkish President Abdullah Gul said on Thursday, supporting the Central Asian nation's plans to build alternative pipelines and ease dependence on exports to Russia.

- Turkmenistan, a Turkic Muslim nation of 5.5 million, pins hopes of future propriety on its giant natural gas reserves, the world's fourth largest.

- As Turkmenistan plans to start production at the Galkynysh natural gas deposit, the world's second largest, by June 30, its current export outlets are limited by former imperial master Russia, China and neighbouring Iran.

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ITALY:

13. EU seen lifting budget procedure against Italy this week

Reuters, Francesco Guarascio, 5/30

BLUF: The European Commission will recommend lifting tight controls on Italy's public spending imposed in 2009 when Rome breached the European Union's deficit ceiling of 3 percent of gross domestic product, an EU source said on Monday

- The decision on ending the so-called excessive deficit procedure is being closely watched in Italy, which has imposed a series of painful budget cuts while fighting the longest recession in its postwar history.
- Prime Minister Enrico Letta, who has pressed the EU to focus on boosting economic growth as well as controlling public finances, said exiting the excessive deficit procedure would not have an immediate impact on public finances but would leave more room next year.

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