

**DEBKAFfile** Exclusive: Italy to sell Lebanon sophisticated ground-to-air Aster 15 missiles to stop Israel's aerial surveillance of hostile movements

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Israeli aircraft monitor illegal Hizballah movements and arms smuggling - in the absence of any Lebanese army and UNIFIL preventive action to implement UN Resolution 1701.

According to **DEBKAFfile**'s Rome sources, prime minister Romano Prodi has instructed his defense ministry to negotiate with the Fouad Siniora government the quick sale of an Aster 15 battery, the only Western surface-to-air missile with an active guidance system capable of last-minute corrections of targeting at the moment of interception.

As a joint Franco-Italian product, the sale also needed - and obtained - approval from French president Jacques Chirac.

Our sources report the Aster 15 will be accompanied by Italian instructors to guide Lebanese troops in their use. Since 50% of those officers are Shiites loyal to Hizballah or Amal, the Shiite terrorists are looking forward to gaining access for the first time to top-of-the-line Western anti-air missile technology.

On Oct. 13, Lebanese chief of staff General Michel Suleiman informed his officers posted on the Lebanese-Israeli border of the Beirut government's "indefatigable efforts" to obtain anti-air missiles to hit patrolling Israeli aircraft. He added that very soon, Lebanon would also acquire long-range anti-tank rockets to prevent Israeli tanks again crossing the border.

Commanders of the French UNIFIL contingent have threatened to fire on Israeli warplanes in Lebanese skies, according to Israel defense minister Amir Peretz in a briefing to a Knesset panel Monday, Oct. 16.

Israel has so far refrained from protesting to Rome against the Aster 15 sale - any more than it has to Washington, the UN Security Council or UNIFIL over illegal Hizballah movements and arms-smuggling.

The Aster 15 is manufactured by France's Aerospatiale and Thompson-CSF; its guidance system by the Alenia/Finmeccanica of Italy. Launched from seaborne or land bases, it is designed to hit "maneuverable targets" - aircraft, helicopters, drones or missiles. With a warhead of 3.20 kilos of explosives, the missile has a range of up to 30 km and a maximum speed of 3,600 kph. Aster 15's two stages are a solid propellant booster and a "dart" equipped with a seeker, a sustainer motor, a proximity fuse and a blast fragmentation warhead.

**Most significantly, the French-Italian projectile is the only Western surface-to-air missile with an active guidance system capable of last-minute corrections of targeting at the moment of interception. In the hands of the Lebanese army (and its Hizballah component), the Aster 15 will directly jeopardize Israel's aerial surveillance of Hizballah and other hostile movements in Lebanon.**

**DEBKAFfile**'s political sources once again note the Olmert government's virtual concealment of the impending threat, its blind eye to UNIFIL's impotence and its failure to raise an outcry against the missile's impending delivery to Beirut. Israel's leaders are strongly motivated by their need to stick to the empty boast of military gains in the Lebanon War and the portrayal of the international force's deployment in the South as a diplomatic triumph.

In contrast, the teams investigating the IDF's performance in the war are coming up daily with findings of gross mismanagement. The Israeli missile ship hit by an Iranian anti-ship C-208 cruise missile July 14 - for the loss of four

men - was found in the latest report to have omitted to activate the ship's four missile defense systems, including the Barak anti-missile missile. The ship sailed dangerously close to the Beirut coast with none of the 80 officers and crew manning lookout or attack positions. The panel concluded that there was nothing to stop Hizballah sinking the frigate by ramming it with an explosives-laden boat



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