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Israeli War Games Called Precursor To Attack on Iran

Neo-Con War Planners Underestimate Iranian Resolve



By Richard Walker

Israel's massive military exercise in the Mediterranean, seen as a dry run for an attack on Iran, has generated frightening predictions that the United States would pay a terrible price in blood and treasure.

Iran responded July 9 by test-firing nine ballistic missiles that can strike targets within 1,250 miles. They can hit Israel and other American allies like Bahrain, Turkey, and Greece.

In Iran, there is a widely held belief that the U.S. would not only approve an Israeli strike, but also lead it. A senior Iranian general said U.S. involvement would lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of American soldiers. A leader of Iran's Republican Guard Corps warned that "martyrdom units" across the globe would strike at American and Israeli interests in a war of terror that could last years. Other threats included targeting the Israeli Dimona nuclear plant and causing havoc in the Straits of Hormuz that sees the flow of 20 million barrels of oil a day.

Some experts say the loss of that much oil for even a short period would drive the price to over \$10 a gallon.

Many Israeli experts who want the U.S. to go to war with Iran argue that Iran does not have the military capabilities to fend off sustained attacks from sea and air. That ignores the fact that Iran possesses the means to attack U.S. forces throughout the region, using its special units and surrogates such as Hezbollah, Hamas and Shiite sympathizers in Arab states. In Iraq, it could generate untold chaos with the backing of the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al Sadr who has already pledged that his militia would support Iran. Many Shiite elements within the Iraqi army might turn on U.S. troops that they now work closely with. Iran might even do a deal with the Taliban and al Qaeda, by supplying them with chemical or biological weapons to attack U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Iran also has the capability to strike Israeli cities with long-range missiles, carrying conventional or biological/ chemical warheads and to attack U.S. shipping in the gulf. While its air power and air defenses are superior to what Saddam Hussein had, they would of course be no match for the U.S. However, Israel is concerned that if Russia sells Iran a new air defense missile system, the deal could seriously hamper an air attack, especially if the Israeli air force acted alone.

Many pro-Israel figures in the United States have been lobbying for years for the U.S. to launch a sustained attack on Iran. In Israeli newspapers and in selected journals in the U.S. they continue to argue that Iran does not have the capability to retaliate in any significant way against the U.S. The argument was made recently by Patrick Clawson of the Near East Policy Institute in Washington. He claimed Iran was much too weak to respond to a massive U.S. assault. He was trying to convince policymakers that a strike against



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Iran would be easy. Behind his rhetoric is a shrewd recognition that Israel is not capable of delivering a knockout blow to Iran.

The Israeli air force would be restricted to one airborne assault and even with 100 aircraft, some of them providing fighter support and refueling, it would not be possible to take out all Iran's nuclear sites. For the Israelis it would mean a 2,500-mile trip and one they could not repeat without risking much of their aircraft .

Iran, with help from North Korea, has been creating dummy nuclear sites for years and may have as many as 100. Israeli and U.S. intelligence do not have an accurate list of all Iranian nuclear facilities. Some may be buried so deep in hardened mountain locations they may not be vulnerable to the latest bunker-busting bombs.

Men like Clawson believe in launching a sustained, possibly 10-day air and sea assault on Iran's industrial and military infrastructure, thereby damaging the country so much economically it would have to accept a UN-brokered ceasefire or the present Iranian regime would collapse. The U.S. could launch several thousand sea, air and land based cruise missiles and also deploy stealth bombers, using the island of Diego Garcia as a staging post. If there was no adequate response from Iran, the bombing could be extended for weeks. In the meantime, Israel would use the opportunity to invade Lebanon to finish off Hezbollah.

The problem with some of these calculations is that they are based on crude assumptions that Iran will capitulate and that it will jettison its nuclear ambitions. They ignore the fact Iran is a nation with almost 3,000 years of history and will not be easily intimidated. Israel's campaign in Lebanon in 2006, when it thought shock-and-awe tactics would force Hezbollah to back down, fell apart. In the end, Israel withdrew with a bloody nose. Hezbollah and the Iranian military are familiar with the fact that overwhelming force may win battles but may not end wars.

Israel would like the U.S. to attack Iran because it has the military might to set back the Iranian economy for a decade. That fails to take account of the effects such action would have on the Middle East, as well as U.S. troops and interests around the world. It could breed a new generation of terrorists and weaken some of the Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia that would feel the heat of a Muslim backlash if they allowed their air space to be used for an attack on Iran. There can be little doubt Pentagon analysts are familiar with the risks of a war with Iran.

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