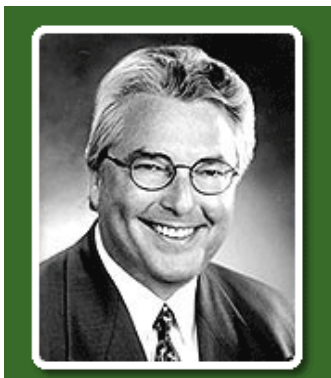


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PLAIN FACTS ABOUT IRAN'S MILITARY

The intensifying saber rattling and war of words between the US and Israel, on one hand, and Iran have generated a great deal of hysteria, war fever and confusion.

Senior Israeli cabinet members have threatened nuclear war against Iran. The western media has given the erroneous impression that Iran is poised to wipe Israel off the map. Some understanding of the military issues involved is badly needed.

First, missiles. Iran announced its Shahab-III missile is ready to retaliate against any Israeli attack on its nuclear facilities. This missile is not long-ranged, as media wrongly claims, but a medium-ranged. Iran says it can deliver a two ton warhead over 2,000 km. But Israeli and US sources say Shahab's maximum range is around 1,200 km, which puts much of Israel out of its range.

This obsolescent missile is highly inaccurate, particularly at maximum range. It is liquid fueled, meaning it is very vulnerable to air and missile strikes while being prepared to fire. Israel has developed tactics using aircraft, missiles and drones to attack enemy missiles in pre-launch phase. Iran has an estimated 24 Shabab-III's.

The other missiles Iran fired this week were short ranged models of no strategic value. Tehran was even caught doctoring the pictures it issued of the multiple missile launch to cover up the failure of one of the missiles to fly. This embarrassment reinforced the view that Tehran is trying to hide its military weakness behind a lot of chest-pounding and missile theatrics.

Israel, by contrast, has around 50 Jericho-II nuclear-armed missiles with a range from 900-2,700 miles, putting every Mideast capital and parts of Russia, Pakistan, and Europe within range. Each Jericho-II carries a warhead that can destroy a major city.

Medium-ranged missiles are almost useless without nuclear warheads. Iran has no nuclear weapons, and even if it did manage to develop them, it would be many years before a compact warhead could be developed that could be carried atop a missile and withstand heavy G-forces. Until Iran has nuclear warheads, Iran's Shabab's will be more for show than military utility.

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*Other systems - Israel has an indestructible nuclear triad. In addition to the Jerichos, which are housed in caves and mobile, Israel has one of the world's top air forces with long-ranged US-supplied F-15I's and F-16's that can deliver nuclear weapons to Iran. Germany provided Israel with three Dolphin-class sub that are said to be armed with nuclear cruise missiles. At least one sub is always on station off Iran's coast. In addition, Israel new Ofek-3 military satellite provides full coverage of Iran and surrounding region. Israel also shares US satellite and other sensor data in real time.

Israel has probably the world's second or third most potent air force, with around 400 state of the art, US-supplied combat aircraft and among the world's most skilled pilots. The IAF is supported by a galaxy of electronic warfare systems, drones, and long-range recon. Israel's Arrow is the world's most advanced operational anti-ballistic missiles system and is expected to down over 85% of any incoming missiles.

Iran's Air Force has only about 165 airworthy combat aircraft, mostly of 1960's and 70's vintage. The only aircraft it has that can reach Israel are 18-20 Soviet-era SU-24's, and a handful of decrepit 40-year old, US-supplied F-4 Phantoms and F-14's dating from the Shah's day.

Thanks to unlimited US support, Israel is two full military generations ahead of its enemies, and even further advanced in electronic warfare and command and control.

A single nuclear weapon would destroy Israel, as its partisans warn. But this is also true of Egypt, where a single nuke on the Aswan Dam would inundate the nation and kill millions. It also applies to the Syria, Lebanon, the Gulf Emirates, Jordan, and Iraq. Only Saudi Arabia and Iran have strategic space. Even so, one nuclear strike on Tehran would cripple Iran for years.

Thanks to its strategic triad, Israel's nuclear forces are indestructible, hence capable of devastating retaliation against any enemy nuclear strike. The Bush administration has vowed nuclear retaliation against any nation that attacks Israel with nuclear weapons.

Given these facts, we can see how false are claims trumpeted by the west that Iran is a dangerous military power that is about to eradicate Israel. The facts are quite the reverse.

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Posted by Eric Margolis on July 15, 2008 05:14 PM