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US warships to steel Israel for new war

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Israel is set on the road to expand its naval fleet with advanced US warships amid speculation that it plans to take out Iran after Gaza.

As part of its massive, \$60 billion military buildup project for a period of five years between 2008 and 2012, Israel is working to receive two US-made, multi-mission Littoral Combat Ships (LCS).



With Lockheed Martin having finished work on a Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), Israel is set to steel its fleet for opening a new front.

The two LCS battleships are expected to replace Israel's Sa'ar-class corvettes currently considered the Israeli fleet's most advanced surface ships.

The Littoral Combat Ships, under development by the American Lockheed Martin Corp. and General Dynamics, are designed for speed, maneuverability and amphibious operations.

Anti-air, anti-submarine, anti-surface and anti-missile warfare missions, as well as special operations are among the other military capabilities of the battleship.

The LCS is also built as a "brown water" ship intended to carry out military operations in rivers, shallow waters of littoral environments and in depths where there are combined threats from land and sea.

According to a report by the *Jerusalem Post*, top officers from the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) were dispatched to the United States two weeks ago to sail on the LCS and test the advanced warship's capabilities.

The Israeli navy is expected to be equipped with the LCS by the end of the year, the report adds.

Naval sources, however, have claimed that Israel might have to wait for the \$500 million price of the LCS to drop.

"There are a number of possibilities and they are under review," said a source. "There are other possibilities such as more Sa'ar 5s, an upgraded Sa'ar 5 that would be called Sa'ar 5.5, or to wait for the LCS's price to go down."

Lockheed Martin was reportedly asked by the Israeli Navy in February 2006 to perform a feasibility study for a multi-mission LCS variant.

Following the successful completion of the study in April 2007, Israel made a decision to approve the initial funding of two LCS multi-mission ships.

"If acquired by the navy, the LCS would enhance Israel's long-arm capabilities and could be potentially used in a conflict with Iran," the *JPost* report claimed.

The report comes amid widespread speculations that an Israeli go-it-alone strike on Iran is in the offing. Analysts maintain that the conflict in the Palestinian territory could spill over to other parts of the Middle East.

On the opening days of the war on Gaza, Former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton confirmed the assumption about the possibility of a new war, saying the Israeli offensive on Gaza could lead to a US attack on Iran.

"So while our focus obviously is on Gaza right now, this could turn out to be a much larger conflict," the hawkish US official told FOXNews, adding, "We're looking at potentially a multi-front war."

Bolton added that there is "the possibility of the use of military force possibly by the United States, possibly by Israel," on Iran after the current war.

Before the launch of Israeli ground offensive into Gaza, a top Israeli military adviser said the ground assault was intended to send a message to the enemy in Iran and Lebanon.

"The army has to change its image among its enemies -- Iran and Hezbollah -- that it is afraid to use ground forces," said Israeli military analyst Efraim Inbar.

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