

Arming an Israeli Attack on Iran: Why the US should cancel "Bunker Buster" Bombs for Israel

Faulty Intelligence, WMD Hype and a New Trigger for War

On April 28, 2005 the Defense Security Cooperation Agency notified Congress of the sale of 100 GBU-28 "bunker buster" guided bombs to Israel. Designed to penetrate hardened command centers located deep underground, the GBU-28 is a 5,000-pound laser-guided bomb that uses a 4,400-pound penetrating warhead and contains 630 pounds of high explosives.

The Israeli target for the GBU is no secret. For months Israeli intelligence, political and policy operatives in the US have been presenting a case that Iran is secretly developing nuclear weapons that threaten Tel Aviv and other Israeli population centers.

*American skeptics will recall similar statements by Ariel Sharon who made claims along with a network of American pundits that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction had been shipped into Syria at the start of the US invasion of Iraq. Although the 1,700-member Iraq Survey Team responsible for hunting WMD in Iraq officially announced on April 23, 2005 it found no evidence of any weapons of mass destruction or transfer to Syria, proponents of conflict with Syria and Iran continue to push their case forward. **Like misleading intelligence claims about Iraq, a GBU-28 sale could trigger an immediate, needless and bloody conflict, only this time between the US and Iran** (see Exhibit 1).*

Exhibit 1: GBU-28 "Bunker Buster"

(Source: Federation of American Scientists – April, 2005)



The Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy Research (IRMEP) Policy Brief is published for the sole use of IRMEP members and the foreign policy community. It may not be duplicated, reproduced, or retransmitted in whole or in part without the express permission of the IRMEP, <http://www.irmep.org> Phone (202) 342-7325, Fax (202)318-8009. The IRMEP can be reached by e-mail at: info@irmep.org. For more information, contact the IRMEP. All rights reserved.

Busting Progress on the Iranian Nuclear Program

Delivery of the GBU-28 to Israel would boil over the simmering question over Iran's nuclear program. European negotiators have announced progress with Iran. Vladimir Putin pledged increased vigilance of expended uranium and the fuel cycle as part of Russian assistance in the construction and operation of Iranian reactors. President Bush mentioned this progress in Iran and even empathy for their development goals during his April 28, 2005 press conference:

"As to Iran, what Russia has agreed to do is to send highly enriched uranium to a nuclear civilian power plant and then collect that uranium after it's used for electricity, power purposes. That's what they've decided to do.

And I appreciate that gesture.

See, what they recognize is that what America recognizes and what Great Britain, France and Germany recognize, is that we can't trust the Iranians when it comes to enriching uranium; that they should not be allowed to enrich uranium.

And what the Iranians have said is, 'Don't we deserve to have a nuclear power industry just like you do?'

I'm, kind of, wondering why they need one, since they've got all the oil. But nevertheless, others in the world say, well, maybe that's their right to have their own civilian nuclear power industry.

And what Russia said: Fine, we'll provide you the uranium. We'll enrich it for you and provide it to you and then we'll collect it.

And I appreciate that gesture. So I think Vladimir was trying to help there. I know Vladimir Putin understands the dangers of an Iran with a nuclear weapon. And most of the world understands that as well."

Israel may be upset that the US is willing to work internationally on the Iranian nuclear issue. They also have reason to fear imminent regulation of their own arsenal of nuclear weapons as American officials break the taboo of silence surrounding Israeli nukes. In the run-up to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in May, 2005, Jackie Wolcott Sanders, who is the ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament and the special representative of the president for the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), wrote that the goal of universal NPT ought to be in the spotlight. Sanders stated it should be "reaffirmed that India, Israel and Pakistan may join the NPT only as non-nuclear-weapon states... Just as South Africa and Ukraine did in the early 1990s, these states should forswear nuclear weapons and accept IAEA safeguards on all nuclear activities to join the treaty." Another State Department official, Mark Fitzpatrick made similar comments. Israel's nuclear weapons are under the spotlight and may pressure it to act. They are one of the reasons that if GBU-28's are sold to Israel, they could be immediately used to attack Iran.

Motivation for an Immediate Israeli Attack on Iran

There are many factors motivating Israel to strike Iran immediately upon receipt of GBU-28's. Its current status as a nation under pressure to conform with the quartet's road-map for to peace is causing an internal situation close to civil war and leave Israel's Likud leadership looking for a way to solidify its hold on occupied territories. The US presence in Iraq will at some point wind down, leading to troop withdrawal and a diminished possibility of drawing the US into a costly "regime change" exercise in Iran. **The Israeli option of disrupting the road map for peace while drawing the US into a conflict with Iran by conventional means more likely with bunker busters.**

Exhibit 2: Provoking a US-Iran Regime Change War: The Israeli Perspective
(Source: IRmep 2005)

Driver	Outcome
Permanent disruption of the 'Roadmap for Peace' plan	By triggering a US-Israeli conflict against Iran, Israel can permanently disrupt the road map and seize territory in the name of fighting an expanded "war on terror".
Waning Support for Israel in the US – AIPAC espionage prosecution	Triggering a US-Israeli conflict against "terrorists" in Iran could reinvigorate American-Israeli unity, now under strain as Americans consider the true costs of supporting Israel and the AIPAC espionage allegations.
Uncertainty and Lack of Intelligence	The lack of any hard evidence that Iran possesses nuclear weapons is problematic. By immediately attacking Iran and provoking retaliation, Israel "transcends" the need to "prove" Iran is engaged in nuclear weapons development. The current climate of skepticism surrounding pre-war intelligence about WMD in Iraq makes attack a more reliable catalyst than intelligence.
Growing US Pressure on Israeli Nuclear Weapons	As US officials publicly recognize Israel's covert status as a nuclear power, the pressure to protect that status and prevent challengers from achieving nuclear weapons intensifies.

Israel has many motivations to immediately use the GBU-28. Tactically, it is not in the US interest to enable any catalyst of a three way conventional war with Iran. Strategically, the US will have to deal with Israeli nuclear weapons if it hopes to encourage regional players to enter the NPT and disavow nuclear weapons.

Recommendations:

The US must take a number of steps to defuse the budding crisis in the region. The US must:

1. **Not sell Israel the GBU-28.** To sell them is to all but guarantee their use, creating an unnecessary human and environmental disaster in Iran and the region;
2. **Caution Israel not to engage in a nuclear first strike against Iran.** Although Israel is capable of strategic submarine and air attacks against Iran, it should be sternly warned not to do so;
3. **Bring Israel into the Non-Proliferation Treaty.** If Iran sets out to build a nuclear capability, it will largely be to counter Israeli nuclear weapons. By moving Israel into the NPT and eliminating its stockpile of nuclear weapons, one of the major drivers of instability in the region would be eliminated.

The US Congress has 30 days to object to this sale. IRmep strongly encourages members of Congress to consider the factors outlined in this policy research note and reject the destabilizing sale of GBU-28s to Israel.

Distribution

President

√ House of Representatives

√ Senate

√ State Department

Department of Defense

Department of Justice

√ Public

√ Foreign Diplomatic Representatives

√ UN

√ Congress Watch level supporters