

Austere Challenge Anti-Missile Exercise Canceled

A large United States-Israel exercise to test the interoperability and efficiency of their combined anti-missile system for defeating incoming Iranian ballistic missiles has been abruptly canceled.

debkafile's sources disclose exclusively that, contrary to recent reports published in Washington, Jerusalem - and this site too - it was Israel Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, not the Obama administration, who decided to call off the biggest ever joint US-Israeli military exercise Austere Challenge 12 scheduled for April 2012. (<http://www.debka.com/article/21656/>)

Please read the entire article for more important information.

Analysis. Debka postulates four reasons for the cancellation by Israel of this exercise.

Washington has taken no action against Iran's capture of the RQ-170 stealth drone on Dec. 4 more than a month after the event, and not even pressed President Obama's demand of Dec. 12 for the drone's return.

In war one loses things. This is a case of one of our drones being captured by the enemy. They are not likely to give it back just because we ask. We find out why this particular drone was brought down in Iranian territory and fix the problem so it doesn't happen again.

Silence from Washington also greeted the start of 20-percent grade uranium enrichment at the underground Fordo facility near Qom when it was announced Jan. 9. Last November, Defense Minister Ehud Barak warned in two US TV interviews (Nov. 17 and 22) that as soon as the Fordo facility went on stream, Iran would start whisking the rest of its nuclear facilities into underground bunkers, out of reach and sight of US and Israeli surveillance.

Iran is perfectly within its rights to stick its sites underground. It complicates the problem of destroying those facilities. Such is the nature of war.

Exactly three weeks ago, on Jan. 3 Lt. Gen. Ataollah Salehi, Iran's Army chief, announced that the aircraft carrier USS Stennis and other "enemy ships" would henceforth be barred from entering the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz. Yet since then, no US carrier has put this threat to the test by attempting a crossing. Tehran has been left to crow.

This is a little bit more serious. However, since Jan. 3rd, the Carl Vinson Strike Group has joined the Stennis Strike Group and the Abraham Lincoln Strike Group is rumored to be on its way. Perhaps the next time we venture into the Persian Gulf it will be with two carriers up front, one in reserve and a whole lot of land based air available just in case the Iranians go nuts.

Even after approving sanctions on Iran's central bank and energy industry, the White House announced they would be introduced in stages in the course of the year. According to Israeli's calculus, another six months free of stiff penalties will give Iran respite for bringing its nuclear weapon program to a dangerous and irreversible level. (All quotes from the above article)

Herein lies the gist of the issue. Prime Minister Netanyahu has one overriding consideration: the safety of Israel. That is his primary job. In the end nothing else matters. When the Jews say "never Again",

they mean it. They may lose the war but they will fight it to the death. They will not walk into the ovens again.

For the United States more than the safety of Israel is at stake. The economy of Europe is in trouble. Greece buys about a quarter of its oil from Iran because the Iranians will sell to Greece on credit. A few other European countries buy significant amounts of oil from Iran. They must be given the opportunity to find other suppliers.

The People's Republic of China has threatened war if oil from Iran is embargoed. Russia has recently hinted that Iran is a significant factor in its national security. Russia has already displayed its willingness to support Iran indirectly by sending naval units to Syria. These are things that President Obama must consider that Prime Minister Netanyahu does not. Hence the difference in positions vis a vis Iran.

For Israel, the biggest factor in the cancellation was to stop US command and control cells being located in Israel's main headquarters and probably a couple of secondary ones as well. These command cells would be able to notify the National Command Authority that Israel was about to attack Iran. This would give President Obama sufficient warning to try and stop such an attack unless it had been pre coordinated. Israel does not want Obama to have this capability and is willing to shed some significant air defense integration to be able to operate in reasonable secrecy.

It is also likely that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states on the Persian Gulf are not happy. They are well aware that the Iranians are significantly emboldened by our lack of response to their prohibiting us from entering the Persian Gulf. Failing to re-enter the Gulf may well have pushed up their own plans to strike Iran.

Another Debka article carries the title: *Iran is winning Hormuz faceoff. Israel, Saudis break away from US Iran policy.* This highlights what is a significant problem for the GCC. Right now the Iranians are consolidating their control of at least the Shiite areas of Iraq under Ayatollah Shahroudi while they wait for King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to die. This will complete the last requirement, other than the reconquest of Jerusalem for Islam, to bring forth the Hidden Imam. While the Sunnis don't believe in the Hidden Imam, they know that they are faced with sectarian civil war because the Shiites believe devoutly in the return of the Hidden Imam.

Netanyahu also knows, I believe, that when Abdullah of Saudi Arabia dies, it will be the signal for an attack on Israel to retake Jerusalem. Khaled Mashaal of Hamas has already called for El Qods (Jerusalem) brigades to be formed in the countries bordering Israel to retake Jerusalem. This is not likely to happen except in Syria and Lebanon for the time being. It may happen in Iraq as Iran consolidates its position there.

We must presume that Iran will give some kind of signal for the El Qods brigades to attack Israel. That signal may well be incoming missiles from Iran. If one of those missiles is equipped with a nuclear warhead with a yield equivalent to the bomb that destroyed Nagasaki, Tel Aviv is gone. If one were also to hit near Gaza, Israel no longer exists as a country. Without firm action from the United States to destroy the ability of the Iranians to develop nuclear warheads, launch such missiles or change the government in Tehran, Netanyahu will proceed to attack Iran on his own or in cooperation with the GCC states.

Yet our final constraint in the United States is the significant possibility of thermonuclear war with

either Russia, the People's Republic of China or both. The Cold War all over again with an even more capable PRC than in 1973.

In the end we cannot prevent the Sunni-Shiite religious civil war. We have obviously chosen our side. All we can hope to do is to effect the timing of the war and support our allies to assure the best possible outcome.

Addendum: This from the Israeli Ambassador to the United states.

Israeli Ambassador to the US Michael Oren addressed a recent decision by Israel and the US to [postpone a missile defense drill](#) originally scheduled for April, saying that it "stemmed solely from technical issues," early Wednesday morning.

"Such postponements are routine and do not reflect political or strategic concerns," he said. "The United States and Israel remain committed to holding the exercise - code-named Austere Challenge 12 - the largest and most robust in their historic alliance."

(www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=254092)

I do believe the technical issues are the connection of Israeli and American command and control systems.