

Nuclear Brinkmanship in the Persian Gulf

Two recent events require commentary. First, Iran has apparently tested a nuclear capable ballistic missile with an estimated range of 2,000 kilometers. Second, Prince Turki bin Faisal has stated that if Iran develops nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia will also obtain nuclear weapons.

From Agence France Press via Google (http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hnl-YPuDmONcoBmmS8_G91LxdryA?docId=CNG.041943dc452c61a507ee986061b49f2d.f21).

LONDON — Iran has carried out secret tests of ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear payload in breach of UN resolutions, British Foreign Secretary William Hague said Wednesday. Hague's comments came a day after Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards said they had fired 14 missiles in an exercise, one of them a medium-range weapon capable of striking Israel or US targets in the Gulf.

In a statement to lawmakers, Hague said: "Iran has also been carrying out covert ballistic missile tests and rocket launches, including testing missiles capable of delivering a nuclear payload in contravention of UN resolution 1929." He said Iran had also announced plans to triple its capacity to produce 20 percent enriched uranium, adding: "These are enrichment levels far greater than is needed for peaceful nuclear energy."

Debka amplifies (<http://www.debka.com/article/21075/>).

Debkafile's military and intelligence sources note that the Foreign Secretary's words follow the concentration of large-scale American naval, air and marine forces in the Mediterranean, the Aden and Oman straits, the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. This seaborne army is positioned for strikes against targets in Iran, Syria and Libya at 12 hours' notice. It may be safely assumed that Hague's ominous disclosure was pre-arranged with Washington.

In the past month, our sources have also quoted several Saudi royal princes as warning that if Iran attained a nuclear capability, it would not be the only Persian Gulf nation to be armed with a nuclear weapon and missiles for its delivery.

And finally this from the UK Guardian (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/29/saudi-build-nuclear-weapons-iran>)

Prince Turki al-Faisal, a former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to Washington, warned senior Nato military officials that the existence of such a device "would compel [Saudi Arabia](#) ... to pursue policies which could lead to untold and possibly dramatic consequences".

He did not state explicitly what these policies would be, but a senior official in Riyadh who is close to the prince said yesterday his message was clear.

"We cannot live in a situation where Iran has [nuclear weapons](#) and we don't. It's as simple as that," the official said. "If Iran develops a nuclear weapon, that will be unacceptable to us and we will have to follow suit."

Officials in Riyadh said that Saudi Arabia would reluctantly push ahead with its own civilian nuclear programme. Peaceful use of nuclear power, Turki said, was the right of all nations.

Please read all of the cited articles for more important information.

Analysis. So far Iran has demonstrated to a greater or lesser extent almost all of the elements required for a credible nuclear deterrent or a credible first strike capability. They have fired missiles with sufficient range to reach their intended targets. They have demonstrated that those missiles have sufficient throw weight to get a nuclear weapon to its intended target. They have taken delivery of nuclear weapons capable warheads. The last thing that they must do is test a weaponized (i. e. miniaturized) nuclear device. They have followed the practice of the United States and Russia and put these missiles in hardened silos.

I had expected that North Korea would have conducted a test of a miniaturized device by now. Wrong again. However, both the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs are dependent upon the successful test of a miniaturized warhead. North Korea may be waiting for a more politically opportune time to do their test. I do not know how much pressure Iran can exert on North Korea to test their joint warhead.

The Saudis are obviously nervous. And very blunt for Arabs in this case. Presuming that there is truth to the rumor that the Saudis paid for a major part of the Pakistani nuclear program, it is not a case of the Saudis building an independent nuclear program but merely taking delivery of what is owed to them. The Saudis fly the Panavia Tornado and the F-15S. Both are fully capable nuclear penetrating aircraft. I know of nothing that the Iranians possess that can stop a sufficient number of either of these aircraft. Enough will get through, especially in a night attack, to destroy Iran as a civilized country.

The Iranians, I believe, concentrated on missiles for offensive purposes for some really good reasons. Ballistic missiles are practically unstoppable. Even with the Shipboard Aegis systems, the Arrow and the PAC-3 all of which are capable of intercepting ballistic missiles at some stage of their flight, those systems can be overwhelmed by enough nose cones, warheads and decoys.

Ballistic missiles are relatively less expensive to build than penetrating bombers or attack bombers. They require less of a supporting industrial base than the construction of an F-35 or a B-2. They are less expensive to build after the supporting industrial is constructed and require fewer exotic materials.

Ballistic missiles have one major shortcoming. Once launched there is no way to recall them. Nor would a self destruct be installed for fear that such a system might be compromised allowing an enemy to activate the self destruct and prevent the warheads from arriving. The decision to launch is irrevocable.

This is why the United States maintains a manned bomber capability. They can be recalled. The United States can show intent while retaining the ability to escalate or deescalate a crisis by the number of manned bombers sent to an area and how close to an area they get. Then there is the really scary B-2 which could be orbiting over Iran right now and they would never know it.

Racallability may not be a concern to the Iranians depending upon which faction is in control. If the Yazdi faction is in charge, having an unstoppable nuclear weapon is one of their dreams. What better way to start the conflict that will bring forth the Mahdi than nuking Israel?!

It is also important to note that it appears that the time between each of the succeeding steps towards a ballistic missile nuclear strike capability is shrinking. The revolution in Syria and the possibility of war between Syria and Turkey may well have accelerated both the programs and the revelation of the programs. I suspect that Great Prophet Six was a short notice test of the Iranian deployment plans and not a purpose designed exercise. Both sides have undoubtedly learned a lot from watching this exercise.

At the moment I am unable to find any articles on the situation on the Turkey-Syrian border. Presumably that means that the situation is static. How long this situation can be maintained in stasis is up for conjecture. I suspect that it depends on how many refugees are entering Turkey and whether or

not the daily number is increasing or decreasing. If Turkey's ability to support these refugees becomes strained enough, Turkey may still attempt to create a buffer zone in northern Syria to allow the refugees to return to whatever remains of home. Fight's on.

I hate to be the bearer of ugly facts. However, it is time that we faced some reality about Iran. The solution to an aggressive Iran is a change of government. It is obvious that this will not come from the Iranian people without outside intervention. So far, Iran's enemies have been either unwilling or unable to generate a real revolution in Iran. The Iranian people want the mullahs gone. They just need some help.

It makes no difference when war breaks out with Iran. They will still try to close the Straits of Hormuz and keep them closed. Cutting off forty percent of the World's oil supply will destroy the World's economy. Until a way can be found to bypass the Straits, we all walk on egg shells where Iran is concerned.

The Saudis are supposedly building a major pipeline complex that will route their oil, and that of the other Persian Gulf states to the Arabian Sea and ports in Oman. The Saudis are also building a pipeline from their oil fields to the Red Sea. The last information I saw said that those lines would be ready sometime in 2012. Depending on the amount of oil these pipelines and the associated terminals can handle, the Iranians may only hurt themselves by closing the Straits. But the terminals and pipeline facilities in Oman become targets for the Iranian forces stationed right across the way in Bandar Abbas, Jask and Chah Bahar.

Mark Twain reminded us that while history does not repeat itself, it rhymes. What I am seeing today in the Middle East rhymes a lot with the beginning of the First World War. All the major countries in Europe were primed for war. All it took was the spark: the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Only this time we are poised to skip the mobilization phase. We are already pretty well mobilized and in place.

Right now the tinderbox is the Turkey-Syria border. How long Turks and Syrians can stare at each other over tank main guns is anyone's guess. Or does the flash point move back to Bahrain? Or both? Right now we stand by to stand by and throw darts at the dartboard to see where the spark is lit.