



Written by on September 28, 2009

Iran Tests Long-range Missiles

Iran's state-sponsored Press TV news channel announced on September 28 that the nation's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) had test-fired two long-range missiles.

The Iranian news organ said that the launches of the Shahab-3 and Sejil missiles were part of an advanced military exercise named The Great Prophet IV that was carried out by the IRGC. The newly modified Shahab-3 has a range of 1,300 to 2,000 kilometers, or about 800 to 1,240 miles.

The Sejil, which is a two-stage, solid fuel missile, was tested by the IRGC for the first time in the maneuver.



The Press TV announcement stated that the IRGC had also successfully test-fired several models of medium-range Shahab-1 and Shahab-2 missiles during the first and second stages of a military drill in central Iran on the night of September 27. The drill also included launches that morning of a number of other missiles, including the Iranian-made Fateh-110, a short-range ground-to-ground missile, and the Tondar-69, a short-range naval missile, which were directed at mock targets across the country.

The Middle East-based Al Jazeera network reported on September 28 that Britain, France, and the European Union had all expressed their "concern" following the missile tests, which occurred just days before Iranian nuclear representatives are due to meet the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany, in Geneva on October 1 to discuss Iran's nuclear-fuel enrichment program. "We call on Iran to choose the path of co-operation rather than confrontation, by immediately ceasing these deeply destabilizing activities," read a statement from the French foreign ministry office.

However, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Hassan Qashqavi said the missile tests were part of its annual Sacred Defense Week military exercises, held in commemoration of the nation's war with Iraq in the 1980s, and had not been conducted as a reaction to a nuclear crisis. The missile tests came at a time of already heightened tensions between Iran and major international powers, following the Middle Eastern nation's disclosure on September 21 to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna of the existence of a uranium enrichment facility near the Iranian city of Qom.

"Many countries have these [displays] and it has nothing to do with Iran's peaceful nuclear technology," Qashqavi stated at a news conference.

A Russian foreign ministry source, however, urged calm in a statement quoted by the Interfax news agency: "Now is not the time to succumb to emotions. It is necessary to calm down and, above all, to start up an effective negotiation process."

The Russian government has consistently opposed attempts to increase sanctions against Iran over its nuclear enrichment program.

Reporting from Teheran, BBC correspondent Jon Leyne observed:



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The big fear [among Western nations] is that ultimately Iran will have a fully-fledged inter-continental ballistic missile. These missiles already cover pretty much the whole of the Middle East and a good chunk of Turkey as well, and maybe the fringes of Europe.

I think Iran would say with some justice its missile program is the strongest deterrent it has got.

It probably cannot prevent Western jets getting through and Western missiles getting through.

But it could — and I think Israel knows for example — that if it did strike Iran, it would have to take into account the possibility of really substantial casualties if Iran did unleash its long-range missile pack.

As for the Iranians' explanations for staging the missile launchings at this time, a *Washington Post* report cited a statement by Gen. Hossein Salami, commander of the Revolutionary Guard Air Force, who said the test-firings were part of exercises to practice "preventive and defensive operations." They are "in no way a threat to neighboring countries," the Iranian news media quoted Salami. Rather, the tests send "a message for certain greedy nations that seek to create fear, to show that we are able to give a swift and suitable answer to our enemies."

"The armed forces of the Islamic Republic are now more powerful than ever and fully prepared to foil foreign threats," stated Maj. Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi, military adviser to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The *Post* said that Iran's Foreign Ministry denied any connection between the missile tests and its dispute with the United States and other nations over the newly disclosed uranium enrichment plant in Qom. An Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman described the exercises as routine and said they were planned long before the latest controversy.

Speaking about the "secret" Qom nuclear facility with John King on CNN's *State of the Union* program on September 27, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said: "We've been watching the construction of this facility for quite some time and one of the reasons that we've waited to make it public was to ensure that our conclusions about its purpose were right."

Intelligence officials have been monitoring activities around Qom "at least a couple of years," Gates told King, continuing: "And, I think that certainly the intelligence people have no doubt that this is an illicit nuclear facility, if only because the Iranians kept it a secret. If they wanted it for peaceful nuclear purposes there is no reason to put it so deep underground; no reason to be deceptive about it and keep it a secret for a protracted period of time."

When King asked Gates about possible military options against Iran, in view of Iran's apparent determination to acquire nuclear arms despite UN sanctions already in place to persuade it not to do so.

While the military option isn't off the table, Gates said, the reality is "there is no military option that does anything more than buy time — the estimates are one-to-three years, or so" before Iran develops a nuclear weapon.

And, "the only way you end up not having a nuclear-capable Iran," Gates said, "is for the Iranian government to decide that their security is diminished by having those weapons, as opposed to [being] strengthened."

A Defense Department website article noted that President Barack Obama said on September 26 in his weekly address that intelligence data has convinced the United States, the United Kingdom, and France "that Iran has been building a secret nuclear facility to enrich uranium."



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Iran's actions, said Obama, present "a serious challenge to the global nonproliferation regime, and continues a disturbing pattern of Iranian evasion."

As for the most intelligent U.S. response to these latest developments in Iran, consider what U.S. strategy was for years in response to the growth of the Soviet Union's military capabilities. Rather than threaten the Soviet Union with "sanctions," or with being brought before one UN tribunal or another, the U.S. military simply outpaced the Soviets and developed better weapons technology than our adversary. That is the purpose of our military, after all, defend the United States (each of them, according to Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution) from invasion.

Needless to say, since Iraq, Afghanistan, and other nations in the region are not U.S. states, our military has no mandate to protect them from invasion, whether from Iran or from anyone else.

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