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Unusually Large U.S. Weapons Shipment to Israel: Are the US and Israel Planning a Broader Middle East War?

by Michel Chossudovsky



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A very large delivery of US weaponry to Israel consisting of 3,000 tons of "ammunition" is scheduled to sail to Israel. The size and nature of the shipments are described as "unusual":

"Shipping 3,000-odd tons of ammunition in one go is a lot," one broker said, on condition of anonymity.

"This (kind of request) is pretty rare and we haven't seen much of it quoted in the market over the years," he added.

"Shipping brokers in London who have specialized in moving arms for the British and U.S. military in the past said such ship charters to Israel were rare. (Reuters, Jan 10, 2009)

The Pentagon has entrusted a Greek merchant shipping company to deliver the weapons to Israel:

"The U.S. is seeking to hire a merchant ship to deliver hundreds of tons of arms to Israel from

Greece later this month, tender documents seen by Reuters show.

The U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command (MSC) said the ship was to carry 325 standard 20-foot containers of what is listed as "ammunition" on two separate journeys from the Greek port of Astakos to the Israeli port of Ashdod in mid-to-late January.

A "hazardous material" designation on the manifest mentions explosive substances and detonators, but no other details were given.(Ibid)

It is worth noting that a similar unusually large shipment of US ordinance to Israel was scheduled in early December:

"Tender documents indicate that the German ship hired by the US in early December also carried a massive cargo of weapons that weighed over 2.6 million kg [2600 tons] and filled up to 989 standard 20-foot containers to Ashdod from North Carolina." (Press TV, 10 Jan 2009)

Are These Large Shipments of Ordinance Connected to the Invasion of Gaza?

The request by the Pentagon to transport ordinance in a commercial vessel, according to Reuters, was made on December 31, 4 days after the commencement of the aerial bombings of Gaza by F16 Fighter jets.

Analysts have hastily concluded, without evidence, that the 2 shipments of "ammunition" were intended to supply Israel's armed forces in support of its military invasion of Gaza.

"A senior military analyst in London who declined to be named said that, because of the timing, the shipments could be "irregular" and linked to the Gaza offensive." (Reuters, January 10, 2009)

These reports are mistaken. Delivery of ordinance always precedes the onslaught of a military operation. The ordinance required under "Operation Cast Lead" was decided upon in June 2008. Further to Tel Aviv's request under the US military aid program to Israel, the U.S. Congress approved in September 2008 the transfer of 1,000 bunker-buster high precision GPS-guided Small Diameter **Guided Bomb Units 39** (GBU-39).

The GBU 39 smart bombs produced by Boeing were delivered to Israel in November. They were used in the initial air raids on Gaza:

"...The Israel Air Force has used the new lightweight GBU-39 Small Diameter Bomb acquired from the USA, in the recent attacks in Gaza. The [Jerusalem] Post mentioned the new weapons ordered last September having arrived last month [November], and already put to action with the IAF fighters. These weapons could have been deployed by the Boeing/IAF F-15Is, since so far SDB is cleared for use only with this type of aircraft.

It is highly unlikely that the bulk of the weaponry included in these two large shipments, scheduled to arrive in Israel in late January, is intended to be used in Israel's military operation in Gaza. The GBU-39 is lightweight (130 kg). The entire shipment of GBU 39s (1000 units) would be of the order of a modest 130 tons. In other words, the specifications of the GBU 39 do not match the description of the "unusually large" and "heavy" shipment of ordinance.



GBU-39

Escalation Scenario

The shipment ordered on December 31 is of the order of 3000 tons, an unusually large and heavy cargo of "ammunition" pointing to the transfer of heavy weaponry to Israel.

According to US military statements, the ordinance is for stockpiling, to be used "at short notice" in the eventuality of a conflict:

"This previously scheduled shipment is routine and not in support of the current situation in Gaza. ...The U.S. military pre-positions stockpiles in some countries **in case it needs supplies at short notice.**" (Reuters, 10 Jan 2009, emphasis added)

Whatever the nature of these large weapons shipments, they are intended for use in a future military operation in the Middle East.

Since the launching of the Theater Iran Near Term Operation Operation (TIRANNT) in May 2003, an escalation scenario involving military action directed against Iran and Syria has been envisaged. TIRANNT was followed by a series of military plans pertaining to Iran. Numerous official statements and US military documents have pointed to an expanded Middle East war.

What these shipments suggest is that the "**escalation scenario**" not only prevails, but has reached a more active stage in the process of US-Israeli military planning.

Whether these weapons will be used or not is not known. The central question, in this regard, is whether the Gaza invasion is part of a broader military adventure directed against Lebanon, Syria and Iran, in which heavier weaponry including US made bunker buster bombs will be used.

History of US Weapons Shipments to Israel

The stockpiling of US made bunker buster bombs by Israel has been ongoing since 2005:

"The United States will sell Israel nearly 5,000 smart bombs in one of the largest weapons deals between the allies in years.

Among the bombs the [Israeli] air force will get are **500 one-ton bunker busters that can penetrate two-meter-thick cement walls**; 2,500 regular one-ton bombs; 1,000 half-ton

bombs; and 500 quarter-ton bombs. The bombs Israel is acquiring include airborne versions, guidance units, training bombs and detonators. They are guided by an existing Israeli satellite used by the military.

The sale will augment existing Israeli supplies of smart bombs. The Pentagon told Congress that the bombs **are meant to maintain Israel's qualitative advantage [against Iran], and advance U.S. strategic and tactical interests.**" (Jewish Virtual Library: September 21-22, 2004, Haaretz / Jerusalem Post.)

The actual shipments of US made bunker buster bombs started in 2005. The US approved in April 2005, the delivery of:

some 5,000 "smart air launched weapons" including some 500 BLU 109 'bunker-buster bombs. The (uranium coated) munitions are said to be more than 'adequate to address the full range of Iranian targets, with the possible exception of the buried facility at Natanz, which may require the [more powerful] BLU-113 bunker buster [a variant of the GBU 28]" (See Michel Chossudovsky, Planned US-Israeli Nuclear Attack on Iran, Global Research, May 1, 2005)

The BLU-109 is smaller than the GBU 28. "It is a 2,000lbs warhead that can be used in combination with a GPS guidance kit [...], and can penetrate up to 15 feet of fortified concrete." (See F16.net)

In 2006 at the height of the Lebanon War in August 2006, a major shipment of the 2.2 ton GBU 28 bombs, according to the New York Times, was dispatched to Israel.

The GBU 28 is produced by Raytheon. It was used against Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War, has the capability of penetrating some 20 feet of reinforced concrete. (Haaretz, 9 Nov 2008) In contrast to the GBU 39 smart bombs (130 kg) used against Gaza, each GBU-28 weighs a hefty 2.2 tons.

"The Guided Bomb Unit-28 (GBU-28) is a special weapon developed for penetrating hardened Iraqi command centers located deep underground. The GBU-28 is a 5,000-pound laser-guided conventional munition that uses a 4,400-pound penetrating warhead." Federation of American Scientists,

(For a visual depiction see "Bob Sherman, How the GBU-28 works", USA Today on-line.).



GBU-28

Video of GBU 28 on UTube

The recent unusually large shipments of weaponry to Israel are part of the 2004 agreement between Washington and Tel Aviv, financed by US military aid to Israel.

As mentioned above, there is a history of delivery of bunker buster bombs (including the GBU 28), going back to 2005. While the nature and composition of these recent weapons shipments to Israel are not known, one suspects that they include the heavier version of the bunker buster bombs including the GBU-28.

In this regard, it is worth noting that last Summer, Israel requested the Pentagon to deliver GBU-28 bunker buster bombs. The stated purpose was to use them in the eventuality of a military operation directed against Iran.

In September 2008, according to US and Israeli press reports quoting Pentagon officials, Tel Aviv's request was turned down. According to the reports, Washington categorically refused to deliver the shipment of GBU 28 bunker buster bombs, to be used to attack Iran's nuclear facilities. "Instead" Washington accepted to deliver the lightweight GBU-39 for use against Gaza.

The U.S. had "rejected an Israeli request for military equipment and support that would improve Israel's ability to attack Iran's nuclear facilities."

The Americans viewed [Israel's] request, which was transmitted (and rejected) at the highest level, as a sign that Israel is in the advanced stages of preparations to attack Iran. They therefore warned Israel against attacking, saying such a strike would undermine American interests. **They also demanded that Israel give them prior notice** if it nevertheless decided to strike Iran. In early September, Haaretz reported that the request had included GBU-28 "bunker-buster" bombs.

In mid-September, the U.S. agreed instead to sell Israel 1000 GBU-39 "bunker buster" bombs which Israeli military experts said "could provide a powerful new weapon" in Gaza, AP reported.

So: when Israel requested weapons that the U.S. expected would be used for bombing Iran, the U.S. said no, and added explicitly that it did not want to see an Israeli attack on Iran. And there was no Israeli attack on Iran. (Defense Update.com, December 2008)

Media Disinformation

The official statements and press reports are bogus. Israel and the US have always acted in close coordination. Washington does not "demand that Israel give them prior notice" of a military operation:

The report in Haaretz suggests that the Bush Administration was adamant and did not want the Israelis to attack Iran. In fact, the reports suggested that the US would shoot down Israeli planes, if they tried to attack Iran:

"Air-space authorization: An attack on Iran would apparently require passage through Iraqi air space. For this to occur, an air corridor would be needed that **Israeli fighter jets could cross without being targeted by American planes or anti-aircraft missiles**. The Americans also turned down this request. According to one account, to avoid the issue, the Americans told the

Israelis to ask Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for permission, along the lines of "If you want, coordinate with him." (Haaretz Nov 9, 2008)

This Israeli report is misleading. Israel is America's ally. Military operations are closely coordinated. Israel does not act without Washington's approval and the US does not shoot down the planes of its closest ally.

The Nature and Composition of the Recent US Weapons Shipments to Israel

These unusually large shipments of ordinance would normally require Congressional approval. To our knowledge, there is no public record of approval of the unusually large shipments of heavy "ammunition" to Israel.

The nature and composition of the shipments are not known. Was Israel's request for the delivery of the 2.2 ton GBU 28 accepted by Washington, bypassing the US Congress? Are GBU 28 bombs, each of which weighs 2.2 tons part of the 3000 ton shipments to Israel. Are tactical bunker buster mini-nuclear bombs included in Israel's arsenal? **These are questions to be raised in the US Congress.**

The two shipments of "ammunition" are slated to arrive in Israel, respectively no later than the 25th and 31st of January.

Secretary Robert Gates who remains at the helm of the Department of Defense ensures continuity in the military agenda.

Preparing for a Confrontation with Iran: Beefing Up Israel's Missile Defense System

In early January, the Pentagon dispatched some 100 military personnel to Israel from US European Command (EUCOM) to assist Israel in setting up a new sophisticated X-band early warning radar system. This project is part of the military aid package to Israel approved by the Pentagon in September 2008:

"The Israeli government requested the system to help defend against a potential missile attack from Iran. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates signed off on the deployment order in mid-September.

Once fully operational, the system will be capable of tracking and identifying small objects at long distance and at very high altitude, including space, according to U.S. Missile Defense Agency officials. **It also will integrate Israel's missile defenses with the U.S. global missile detection network.**

"This will enable the Israelis to track medium- and long-range ballistic missiles multiple times better than their current radar allows them to," Morrell said. "It will ... more than double the range of Israel's missile defense radars and increase its available engagement time."

This, he said, will greatly enhance Israel's defensive capabilities. **"There is a growing ballistic missile threat in the region, particularly from Iran,"** Morrell said. "And no one in the region should feel more nervous about that threat than the Israelis. And they clearly do, and they have asked for our assistance." (Defense Talk.com, January 6, 2009, emphasis added.)

The new X-band radar system 'permits an intercept soon after launch over enemy instead of friendly territory' (Sen. Joseph Azzolina, Protecting Israel from Iran's missiles, Bayshore News, December 26, 2008).

The X-band radar would "integrate Israel's missile defenses with the U.S. global missile detection network, which includes satellites, Aegis ships on the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf and Red Sea, and land-based Patriot radars and interceptors." (Ibid)

What this means is that Washington calls the shots. The US rather than Israel would control the Air Defense system: "This is and will remain a U.S. radar system,' Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell said. 'So this is not something we are giving or selling to the Israelis and it is something that will likely require **U.S. personnel on-site to operate.**'" (Quoted in Israel National News, January 9, 2009, emphasis added).

In other words, the US military controls Israel's Air Defense system, which is integrated into the US global missile defense system. Under these circumstances, Israel cannot launch a war against Iran without the consent of the US High Command.

The large shipments of US ordinance, slated to arrive in Israel after the inauguration of Barack Obama as President of the United States and Commander in Chief are part of the broader program of US-Israeli military cooperation in relation to Iran.

The reinforcement of Israel's missile defenses combined with the large shipments of US weapons are part of an escalation scenario, which could lead the World under an Obama Administration into a broader Middle East war.

New Cold War?

There has been a military build on both sides. Iran has responded to the Israeli-US initiative, by beefing up its own missile defense system with the support of Russia. According to reports (December 21), Moscow and Tehran have been holding talks on the supply by Russia of "medium-range air defense systems - specifically, S-300 surface-to-air missile systems" (Asian Times, January 9, 2009)