

Gotterdammerung device

NEW YORK — Reports last week that Israel was helping South Africa develop a nuclear-armed, medium-range missile have caused a flurry of embarrassment and concern in both Washington and Ottawa.

NBC broke the story with much fanfare, though details on Israeli-South African military and nuclear co-operation have been available for quite some time. This column, for one, has noted the two nations' nuclear missile development for at least three years.

What provoked the latest news stories was a leak from the Pentagon. On July 5, South Africa tested a "civilian" missile that, it claimed, was designed to put a satellite into orbit. According to Pentagon sources, the characteristics of the South African missile, particularly the tell-tale plume of the rocket motor, were identical to those of Israel's top-secret military missile, the Jericho II — which has a reported range of 1,500 km.

Both Israel and South Africa deny the charges.

Even so, it appears the two nations have been working closely for at least a decade to produce medium-range missiles and nuclear warheads. Israel has supplied the technical expertise and missile hardware, while South Africa has provided enriched uranium to produce nuclear weapons and space in which to test the missiles.

U.S. intelligence sources claim at least one warhead was tested by Israel and South Africa over the South Atlantic.

All this comes at a time when Israel wants to buy super high-speed computers from the U.S. and is discussing purchase of a Candu reactor from Canada. The computers would very likely be used in nuclear weapons development. Whether the Candu reactor could have a military application is uncertain. Israel is increasingly short of power and needs new civilian reactors.

Yet this is also the story India told Ottawa when it got a Candu — which was then used to produce India's first nuclear weapon.

The U.S. Congress has long turned a blind eye to Israel's secret nuclear weapons program, while

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lambasting other nations for their nuclear efforts. Israel has refused to sign non-proliferation agreements or to allow international inspection of its nuclear plants. American attempts to bully Pakistan, India and Argentina out of their own nuclear programs look most hypocritical in the face of inaction over the Israeli program.

So has Congressional silence over Israel's violation of the UN arms boycott of South Africa.

It's hardly a secret that Israel has a powerful nuclear arsenal and the means to deliver it. Even the Soviets, whose southern regions are now in range of Israeli missiles, have protested.

For me, Israel's nuclear force is the ultimate form of life insurance — a policy that ensures that there will be no second Holocaust. As noted in this column, more supporters of Israel should be aware of its strength. The notion, promoted by Israeli hard-liners, that Israel is hanging on to life by its fingernails is totally false. Any Arab armies that consider attacking Israel must face the possibility of being hit by nuclear strikes.

But what, I often ask myself, will South Africa do with nuclear weapons? There are simply no good nuclear targets in Southern Africa. Nuking Lusaka or Dar es-Salaam is not going to solve South Africa's internal problems. Missiles would save South Africa's irreplaceable aircraft, but conventional warheads could do a good job of scaring South Africa's unfriendly neighbors.

Which brings me to a grim observation made by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of Inkatha, South Africa's largest political movement.

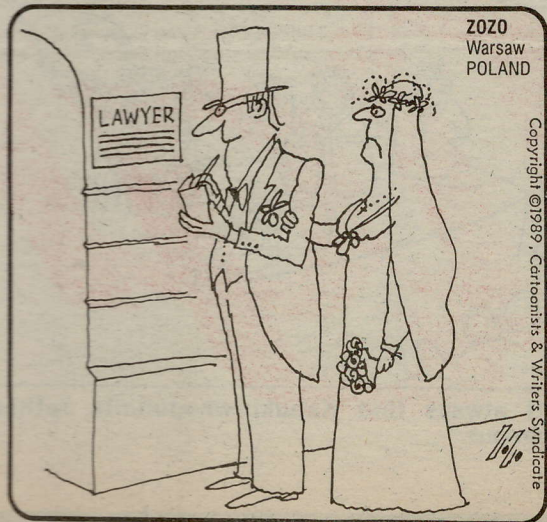
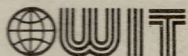
"Outsiders," he told me, "don't understand the Boers (white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans). Buthelezi should know: Last century, his Zulu warrior ancestors fought bloody battles against the Boers.

"They will never give up their land or power ... if they are pushed to the wall, I assure you the Boers will burn this country to the ground."

Chief Buthelezi's words could be terrifyingly prophetic. Unless some viable form of political compromise is found in South Africa that will guarantee minority white rights, die-hard Boers might very well decide on a nuclear Gotterdammerung rather than surrender.

Boers are among the world's toughest people. During my trips to South Africa I was told by them repeatedly that they would never share the fate of Africa's other whites — expropriation, slaughter, rape or eviction. Many Boers, whose roots in South Africa go back 400 years, are going to fight to the death on their farms — and could, for good measure, turn Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban and the nation's mines into smoking, nuclear ruins.

Those who urge tightening the screws on South Africa ought to stop and think about this.



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POLAND

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