

Israel now a true nuclear power

Welcome Israel as the world's most recent member of nuclear-armed powers. The Jewish state of 4.2 million has just joined the U.S., USSR, China, France and Britain in being able to deliver nuclear strikes against its foes.

Most important, Israel has now gone from regional to strategic power.

Last month eight Israeli F-16s, supported by F-15s, five tanker aircraft and electronic warfare planes, flew a 2,900 mile round-trip to demolish PLO headquarters in Tunis, Tunisia. This dazzling feat caught the military incompetent PLO unprepared — as usual. It also showed that the reach and power of the Israel Air Force (IAF) is mightily indeed.

When Israel bombed and destroyed Iraq's unfinished Osirak nuclear reactor outside of Baghdad, it should have been clear that the IAF could reach most Arab capitals. The PLO in Tunis failed to realize this obvious point until bombs began to fall on their heads. Now, anti-Israeli regimes from Libya to Teheran will be looking nervously skyward.

Recently I asked an American Air Force general and former fighter ace with 13 MiG's to his credit which nation had the world's best air force. Without hesitation, he replied, "Israel." And he added the interesting point that the IAF was so good because it never was involved in World War II. In other words, it had not become a hidebound bureaucracy like the USAF, ready to fight the last war's battles but unprepared for the next.

What the IAF showed in the Tunis attack was that it has the capability, using air-to-air refueling, to launch strikes out to between 3,000 and 3,500 miles from bases in Israel. Such missions are, of course, extremely haz-

ERIC MARGOLIS



ardous: Tanker aircraft and refueling strike aircraft are large, slow, vulnerable targets. In spite of this danger, surprise, low-level flight and electronic deception — all arts in which the IAF excels — could permit a devastating long-range strike against Israel's foes.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Israel possesses a considerable arsenal of nuclear weapons. Israeli artillery on the occupied Golan Heights has nuclear shells readily available; nuclear-armed medium-ranged missiles can hit every major Arab capital east of Tripoli. There are also some 30 air-delivered nuclear weapons that can be carried by Israel's F-4 Phantoms or F-16s.

Key elements in Israel's nuclear capability — which it has had for at least the past 14 years — have been U.S. nuclear technology and American bomb toss computers. These computers allow a plane to soar upward, release a nuclear bomb on a vertical path, and then head away at right angles. The bomb inscribes a slow parabolic curve away from the aircraft. By the time the weapon hits its target, the aircraft is safely distant. In this manner, attacking aircraft avoid being destroyed by their own bombs.

All of this means the superb pilots of the IAF are well capable of delivering nuclear weapons up to 3,500

miles, or perhaps even more, from Israel. Such a capability cannot be lost on the Kremlin leaders in Moscow whose offices lie about 1,800 miles north of Israeli air bases.

Also vulnerable to the IAF are the major Soviet industrial and military complexes at Odessa, Kiev, Kharkov and Volgograd (Stalingrad).

Israel's long arm can also reach deep into Asia. There are persistent reports — denied by all concerned — that Israel and India launched a joint attack two months ago on Pakistan's nuclear reactor at Kohuta. Sources claim the attack failed. One Indian aircraft was downed. Israeli planes heading eastward toward Pakistan were, it is claimed, spotted by AWACS radar planes, intercepted by Saudi fighters, and forced to turn back because evasive action caused too much fuel expenditure. Maybe it's true.

The world, including the exclusive nuclear big boys club, will have to take serious account of Israel. So will its enemies who are no longer protected by distance. And the besieged people of Israel can rest just that much easier, knowing they will never be pushed into the sea, that their nuclear shield and sword will guarantee the permanent security of the Jewish state. Israel's enemies should also be made plainly aware of its nuclear might so that even the most rabid will finally realize that Israel cannot — and will not — ever be removed from the map.

Israel's stunning technology and aeronautical skill must also make us wonder when we will be seeing the first Jewish astronauts. After all, the moon is not that much farther than Tunis or Moscow.