

# Israeli nukes ring alarms in Moscow

Last month the Soviets issued three stern warnings to Israel to stop developing medium-range, nuclear-armed missiles. These, Moscow claimed, threatened economic and strategic centres like the Baku oil fields and Black Sea naval bases. Welcome Israel as a junior member in the world's nuclear club.

The missiles that so alarmed Moscow were an improved version of the Jericho system that was secretly developed for Israel by the French aerospace company Dassault during the mid-1960s. Initial deployment of the Jericho coincided, by no coincidence, with the production of Israel's first nuclear warheads. Mated together, the Jericho I system was able to threaten Cairo, Alexandria and Damascus.

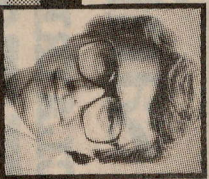
However, its short range, dirty, highly radioactive warheads and the danger of radiation blowback from unpredictable winds made the 300-mile range Jericho I a threat to Israel as well as the Arabs.

These problems have all been solved by current deployment of the Jericho II system. According to the authoritative *International Defence Review*, Israel recently test-fired a Jericho II 500 miles into the eastern Mediterranean. Other reliable sources credit the Jericho II with a 900-mile range.

Israel has by now perfected high-blast, low-radiation yield 150-500 kiloton warheads for the new missiles.

A 900-mile range means that the Jericho II can strike Cairo, Alexandria and the Aswan Dam, the destruction of which would flood most of the Nile Valley and kill at least 50% of Egypt's people. The Jericho II can also reach other Arab capitals like Riyadh, Baghdad and as far west as Benghazi, Libya.

## Eric ARGOLIS



All of the Soviet Union's important Black Sea military bases, from which it would project power into the Mideast and Mediterranean in wartime, are also within the Jericho II's striking range.

Backing up the Jericho II are Israeli fighter-bombers armed with nuclear gravity bombs, 155 mm and perhaps 175 or 203 mm nuclear capable artillery, and probably the shorter-ranged Lance missile with a nuclear warhead. Right now, Israeli guns on the Golan Heights could drop a nuclear shell into Damascus. More important, such tactical nuclear weapons are extremely effective in preventing Israel's Arab foes from massing heavy formations of armor and infantry.

Using new low-radiation nuclear warheads, Israel aircraft, guns or missiles could neatly take out an entire advancing Syrian or Iraqi armored brigade with one shot. Or Cairo airport without damaging downtown Cairo. And any oncoming horde of Iranians bent on "liberating" Jerusalem.

Israel's tactical nuclear arsenal eliminates one of its greatest fears: The spectre of numerically superior Arab armies concentrating on its borders and then attacking. Pakistan has also sought such tactical weapons in order to prevent the much larger Indian army from swamping its defences.

Moscow has noted this and issued warnings to Pakistan. But the Pakistani program in no way threatens the Soviet Union. The Israeli "force de frappe" of some 200 or more warheads, by contrast, gives Israel a limited but still potent method of countering any Soviet attack.

It also means that should the Soviets ever invade the Mideast, they will have to approach Israel's well-defended borders with extreme caution—or not at all. And, as I have said before, those Arabs who still dream about pushing Israel into the sea will have to wake up and face nuclear reality.

Will the Arabs get missiles and nuclear warheads? Missiles, like the 300-mile range Soviet SS-23 perhaps. Yet no less an authority than Libya's Moammar Khadafi told me that the Arabs would not get nuclear weapons for "at least another 10 years."

But without nuclear warheads these missiles, and the shorter-ranged SS-21 and Scud-B now in Arab hands, cannot mortally threaten Israel unless they are armed with chemical warheads and available in great numbers. A massive chemical attack would disrupt the mobilization program, logistics train and airfields upon which Israeli defence depends. Such an attack would most likely be met by Israel with swift and terrible nuclear retaliation.

Given Israel's ability to deliver nuclear strikes against the strategic underbelly of the Soviet Union as well as against the Arabs, one must wonder if Moscow might not demand that the Israeli arsenal be removed as part of any agreement with Washington on medium-range missiles.

Even so, I don't think the Soviet Goliath is going to get Israel to bargain away its nuclear sling.