

NATO, Israel, and the Tactical Missile Challenge

May 1, 1987



In-Depth Reports

Notwithstanding the current INF negotiations, the threat posed by tactical ballistic missiles to NATO and Israel will not diminish in coming years. In fact, many military experts feel that the threat will grow. The new generation of missiles, typified by the Soviet SS-21 and SS-23, are about ten times more accurate than their predecessors. They also carry more lethal warheads and according to the U.S. Department of Defense, are armed with improved conventional munitions (bomblets), chemicals, and mines. Fuel air explosives and air base attack warheads have also been developed.

The new generation of missiles are considered especially suitable for use against air bases, radar stations, surface-to-air missile sites, equipment storage depots and supply dumps, and thus constitute a serious danger in the opening stages of a war. It has been calculated for example, that only three SS-23 missiles would be needed to temporarily knock out an American air base in Germany.

Most existing surface-to-air missiles cannot be used against tactical ballistic missiles. Advances in technology, however, have recently made it practical to consider the development of anti-tactical ballistic missile weapons (ATBM). Israel seems to have made considerable advances in this field that are of growing interest to the west. The increased proliferation of these missiles, particularly in the Middle East and Europe, has made ATBM technology a strategic imperative.



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