

U.S. Intel: Iran Plans Nuclear Strike on U.S.

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By: Kenneth R. Timmerman

Iran has carried out missile tests for what could be a plan for a nuclear strike on the United States, the head of a national security panel has warned.

In testimony before the House Armed Services Committee and in remarks to a private conference on missile defense over the weekend hosted by the Claremont Institute, Dr. William Graham warned that the U.S. intelligence community "doesn't have a story" to explain the recent Iranian tests.

One group of tests that troubled Graham, the former White House science adviser under President Ronald Reagan, were successful efforts to launch a Scud missile from a platform in the Caspian Sea.

"They've got [test] ranges in Iran which are more than long enough to handle Scud launches and even Shahab-3 launches," Dr. Graham said. "Why would they be launching from the surface of the Caspian Sea? They obviously have not explained that to us."

Another troubling group of tests involved Shahab-3 launches where the Iranians "detonated the warhead near apogee, not over the target area where the thing would eventually land, but at altitude," Graham said. "Why would they do that?"

Graham chairs the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack, a blue-ribbon panel established by Congress in 2001.

The commission examined the Iranian tests "and without too much effort connected the dots," even though the U.S. intelligence community previously had failed to do so, Graham said.

"The only plausible explanation we can find is that the Iranians are figuring out how to launch a missile from a ship and get it up to altitude and then detonate it," he said. "And that's exactly what you would do if you had a nuclear weapon on a Scud or a Shahab-3 or other missile, and you wanted to explode it over the United States."

The commission warned in a report issued in April that the United States was at risk of a sneak nuclear attack by a rogue nation or a terrorist group designed to take out our nation's critical infrastructure.

"If even a crude nuclear weapon were detonated anywhere between 40 kilometers to 400 kilometers above the earth, in a split-second it would generate an electro-magnetic pulse [EMP] that would cripple military and civilian communications, power, transportation, water, food, and other infrastructure," the report warned.

While not causing immediate civilian casualties, the near-term impact on U.S. society would dwarf the damage of a direct nuclear strike on a U.S. city.

"The first indication [of such an attack] would be that the power would go out, and some, but not all, the telecommunications would go out. We would not physically feel anything in our bodies," Graham said.

As electric power, water and gas delivery systems failed, there would be "truly massive traffic jams," Graham added, since modern automobiles and signaling systems all depend on sophisticated electronics that would be disabled by the EMP wave.

"So you would be walking. You wouldn't be driving at that point," Graham said. "And it wouldn't do any good to call the maintenance or repair people because they wouldn't be able to get there, even if you could get through to

them.”

The food distribution system also would grind to a halt as cold-storage warehouses stockpiling perishables went offline. Even warehouses equipped with backup diesel generators would fail, because “we wouldn’t be able to pump the fuel into the trucks and get the trucks to the warehouses,” Graham said.

The United States “would quickly revert to an early 19th century type of country.” except that we would have 10 times as many people with ten times fewer resources, he said.

“Most of the things we depend upon would be gone, and we would literally be depending on our own assets and those we could reach by walking to them,” Graham said.

America would begin to resemble the 2002 TV series, “Jeremiah,” which depicts a world bereft of law, infrastructure, and memory.

In the TV series, an unspecified virus wipes out the entire adult population of the planet. In an EMP attack, the casualties would be caused by our almost total dependence on technology for everything from food and water, to hospital care.

Within a week or two of the attack, people would start dying, Graham says.

“People in hospitals would be dying faster than that, because they depend on power to stay alive. But then it would go to water, food, civil authority, emergency services. And we would end up with a country with many, many people not surviving the event.”

Asked just how many Americans would die if Iran were to launch the EMP attack it appears to be preparing, Graham gave a chilling reply.

“You have to go back into the 1800s to look at the size of population” that could survive in a nation deprived of mechanized agriculture, transportation, power, water, and communication.

“I’d have to say that 70 to 90 percent of the population would not be sustainable after this kind of attack,” he said.

America would be reduced to a core of around 30 million people — about the number that existed in the decades after America’s independence from Great Britain.

The modern electronic economy would shut down, and America would most likely revert to “an earlier economy based on barter,” the EMP commission’s report on Critical National Infrastructure concluded earlier this year.

In his recent congressional testimony, Graham revealed that Iranian military journals, translated by the CIA at his commission’s request, “explicitly discuss a nuclear EMP attack that would gravely harm the United States.”

Furthermore, if Iran launched its attack from a cargo ship plying the commercial sea lanes off the East coast — a scenario that appears to have been tested during the Caspian Sea tests — U.S. investigators might never determine who was behind the attack. Because of the limits of nuclear forensic technology, it could take months. And to disguise their traces, the Iranians could simply decide to sink the ship that had been used to launch it, Graham said.

Several participants in last weekend’s conference in Dearborn, Mich., hosted by the conservative Claremont Institute argued that Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was thinking about an EMP attack when he opined that “a world without America is conceivable.”

In May 2007, then Undersecretary of State John Rood told Congress that the U.S. intelligence community

estimates that Iran could develop an ICBM capable of hitting the continental United States by 2015.

But Iran could put a Scud missile on board a cargo ship and launch from the commercial sea lanes off America's coasts well before then.

The only thing Iran is lacking for an effective EMP attack is a nuclear warhead, and no one knows with any certainty when that will occur. The latest U.S. intelligence estimate states that Iran could acquire the fissile material for a nuclear weapon as early as 2009, or as late as 2015, or possibly later.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld first detailed the "Scud-in-a-bucket" threat during a briefing in Huntsville, Ala., on Aug. 18, 2004.

While not explicitly naming Iran, Rumsfeld revealed that "one of the nations in the Middle East had launched a ballistic missile from a cargo vessel. They had taken a short-range, probably Scud missile, put it on a transporter-erector launcher, lowered it in, taken the vessel out into the water, peeled back the top, erected it, fired it, lowered it, and covered it up. And the ship that they used was using a radar and electronic equipment that was no different than 50, 60, 100 other ships operating in the immediate area."

Iran's first test of a ship-launched Scud missile occurred in spring 1998, and was mentioned several months later in veiled terms by the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, a blue-ribbon panel also known as the Rumsfeld Commission.

I was the first reporter to mention the Iran sea-launched missile test in an article appearing in the Washington Times in May 1999.

Intelligence reports on the launch were "well known to the White House but have not been disseminated to the appropriate congressional committees," I wrote. Such a missile "could be used in a devastating stealth attack against the United States or Israel for which the United States has no known or planned defense."

Few experts believe that Iran can be deterred from launching such an attack by the threat of massive retaliation against Iran. They point to a December 2001 statement by former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, who mulled the possibility of Israeli retaliation after an Iranian nuclear strike.

"The use of an atomic bomb against Israel would destroy Israel completely, while [the same] against the Islamic only would cause damages. Such a scenario is not inconceivable," Rafsanjani said at the time.

Rep. Trent Franks, R, Ariz., plans to introduce legislation next week that would require the Pentagon to lay the groundwork for an eventual military strike against Iran, to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and EMP capability.

"An EMP attack on America would send us back to the horse and buggy era — without the horse and buggy," he told the Claremont Institute conference on Saturday. "If you're a terrorist, this is your ultimate goal, your ultimate asymmetric weapon."

Noting Iran's recent sea-launched and mid-flight warhead detonation tests, Rep. Franks concluded, "They could do it — either directly or anonymously by putting some freighter out there on the ocean."

The only possible deterrent against Iran is the prospect of failure, Dr. Graham and other experts agreed. And the only way the United States could credibly threaten an Iranian missile strike would be to deploy effective national missile defenses.

"It's well known that people don't go on a diet until they've had a heart attack," said Claremont Institute president Brian T. Kennedy. "And we as a nation are having a heart attack" when it comes to the threat of an EMP attack

from Iran.

“As of today, we have no defense against such an attack. We need space-based missile defenses to protect against an EMP attack,” he told Newsmax.

Rep. Franks said he remains surprised at how partisan the subject of space-based missile defenses remain. “Nuclear missiles don’t discriminate on party lines when they land,” he said.

Arizona Republican Sen. Jon Kyl, a long-standing champion of missile defense, told the Claremont conference on Friday that Sen. Obama has opposed missile defense tooth and nail and as president would cut funding for these programs dramatically.

“Senator Obama has been quoted as saying, ‘I don’t agree with a missile defense system,’ and that we can cut \$10 billion of the research out — never mind, as I say, that the entire budget is \$9.6 billion, or \$9.3 billion,” Kyl said.

Like Franks, Kyl believes that the only way to eventually deter Iran from launching an EMP attack on the United States is to deploy robust missile defense systems, including space-based interceptors.

The United States “needs a missile defense that is so strong, in all the different phases we need to defend against . . . that countries will decide it’s not worth coming up against us,” Kyl said.

“That’s one of the things that defeated the Soviet Union. That’s one of the ways we can deal with these rogue states . . . and also the way that we can keep countries that are not enemies today, but are potential enemies, from developing capabilities to challenge us. “

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