

EMP: The Next Iranian strategic threat to the US Mainland?

Contributed by Walid Phares
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Over the past seven months I have been interacting with US Homeland Security and European defense officials and experts on a the potential next threat to the West, more particularly against mainland America. The signature of that strategic menace is EMP: Electro Magnetic Pulse; a weapon of the future, already available in design, construction and possible deployment. As eyes are focused on the Iranian nuclear threat, and as we began recently to understand that the missile advances are as important then the fissile material development, attention is now being drawn by private sector projects and some in the defense world to what can cause a wider circle of damages and thus more deterrence against US national security.

In short, and I borrow from the Project "Shield America.org," an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack could be triggered by a nuclear warhead detonated at high altitude over America. The resulting blast would create an EMP, a shockwave that could "cripple military and civilian communications, power, transportation, water, food, and other infrastructure." Even if a high-altitude EMP kills nobody at first, it would paralyze a large section of the United States. The lingering practical and economic effects would take anywhere from hours to years to resolve: when secondary effects are considered, an EMP could be even deadlier than a direct nuclear strike against the mainland. Indeed, Rep. Roscoe Bartlett has written: "Where the terrorist airliner attacks of 9/11 killed thousands, a terrorist EMP attack could indirectly kill millions and conceivably cause the permanent collapse of our entire society."

By realizing how fundamental and irreversible is the reliance of the United States on electronics for every aspect of its citizens' lives, we can also realize how this makes the U.S. vulnerable to an emerging threat. Which brings about the issue of identifying the origination point of such a menace. Many indicators direct us to Iran. In previous articles on CTB and other outlets I have focused on the "missiles threat" as a dossier by itself independently from the "Nuclear" file for a rational consideration: Missiles can be used to deliver nuclear weapons, but also "other weapons" including chemical and biological. In the case of Hezbollah's mini war of July 2006 with Israel, large rockets and small missiles were conceived as classical but were strategically aimed at chemical sites as well. Hence the missile threat is diverse. In the case of the EMP weapon system, we need to look at Iran's missiles capability also from the perspective of delivering a blow, not just to Israel or US and Western targets in the region, but also across large bodies of water.

Geopolitical projections, including developments which may take place in Iraq and Afghanistan, tell us that Iran may find itself free from constraints to equip itself with long range missiles able to reach US mainland at some point in the near future, not only from mainland Iran, but also from other locations closer to America, including at the hands of terrorist forces.

As a result of these geopolitical consideration I believe it is pressing for the defense and counter terrorism community to increase the level of efforts in this emerging field of threat and begin a public awareness campaign to educate citizens in this regard.

I would like to draw the attention of our readers to a recently developed project in the private sector, (www.shieldamerica.org) as a platform for discussion and analysis.

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