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The Seizure of the *Klos C*: Significance and Implications

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The March 5, 2014 seizure of the *Klos C* is a blow to Iran, which clearly invested considerable effort and resources in organizing the weapons shipment and attempting to conceal the ship's course and cargo. This was not the first time that Israel succeeded in intercepting such shipments, and it thus proved again that it has significant intelligence capability to penetrate the Iranian system, as well as the operational capacity to take targets by surprise and act hundreds of kilometers from Israel's borders. Yet while the *Klos C* interception might presumably prompt Tehran to question whether it is prepared to risk such failures in the future, it is likely that Iran will again attempt to ship weaponry to both Lebanon and the Gaza Strip by sea and will try to improve the camouflaging of the shipments. Indeed, in the overall balance of weapons smuggled to advance the struggle against Israel, Iran has also had successes – apparently more often than failures – and in the final analysis, it has successfully shipped many weapons to both Hizbollah and the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip.

Iran has varied its smuggling routes, sending weapons to its allies and proxies by land, by air, and by sea. Shipments by sea have an advantage because they enable especially large quantities of arms to be shipped and because air and land shipments leave a large footprint. On the other hand, when the intelligence services succeed in exposing a shipment by sea, Iran has limited ability to protect the shipment at a distance of thousands of kilometers from its territory, and the risk of operational failure is great. Nonetheless, Iran is unlikely to give up the maritime option and will continue to use it for transporting weapons.

Sudan is a preferred way station for arms shipments from Iran to Egypt and from there to Sinai and the Gaza Strip because of its weak regime and its close relations with Iran. However, the northern part of this route, in Sinai and the passage to the Gaza Strip, has become problematic. The current government in Egypt is working intensively to strengthen its control in Sinai and block the smuggling routes to the Gaza Strip while

systematically destroying the tunnels that connect Sinai with Gaza. It is therefore unclear how the Iranians planned to get the shipment into Gaza, especially the heavy rockets.

At this stage, the identity of the shipment's intended recipient is still not clear. Was it Hamas, even though its relations with Iran have chilled since 2012, or Islamic Jihad, which was always the Palestinian organization closest to Iran? If the shipment was intended mainly for Hamas, this may signal reconciliation with Iran. Alternatively, it is possible that the shipment was intended to be divided between Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The two organizations cooperate with each other in acquisition of long range weapons for use against Israel, and formulate understandings on the use of force or restraint, in accordance with the changing circumstances.

The key component of the shipment was forty 302-mm heavy rockets, manufactured by Syria and similar to the Chinese WS-1 rocket, which has a warhead weighing 150 kilograms and a range of some 100 kilometers. A number of other models of the rocket have been developed in Syria with ranges up to 200 kilometers and weights from 125 to 175 kilograms. According to the IDF spokesman, the *Klos C* carried rockets with ranges of 90-160 kilometers. The rocket is used by Hizbollah and was employed during the Second Lebanon War. It is not accurate, and at best, its accuracy is some 1 percent of the range (1,000-1,600 meters at the edge of the range). These rockets would be an important addition to the Hamas and Islamic Jihad arsenals, and escalate the threat these organizations pose to the Israeli population. At the same time, this would not have constituted a dramatic change, since Hamas already possesses Iranian-made Fajr-5 rockets with a range of 75 kilometers and a 175-kilogram warhead. (There is also a model of the Fajr-5 with a range of 180 kilometers.) It is not clear why the Iranians chose to send Syrian-made rockets. The explanation that this was intended to conceal Iran's role in the shipment is not consistent with the presence of Iranian-made mortar shells in the shipment.

Why did the shipment set sail from Syria and not Iran, which it passed along the way? Most likely, the need to camouflage the smuggling route, even if there were Iranian-made items in the shipment, was the important consideration here. In any event, the affair demonstrates once again that Syria has become a major hothouse for global terror and an important exporter of sophisticated arms for terrorist organizations, even while the Assad regime is engaged in a struggle for its future. It is also prepared to serve as a base to assist Iran in distributing weapons not only to Hizbollah but also to terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, while Assad's current weakness enables Iran to increase its influence over Syrian policy.

The exposure of the arms shipment occurred at an inconvenient time for Iran, which is laboring to appear moderate and present a positive image in the eyes of Western

governments while engaged in talks to achieve a final agreement on the nuclear issue. For this reason, Iran hastened to deny involvement and did not get dragged into a discussion about the source of the shipment. Iran has been helped by the media focus on the Ukrainian crisis and the disappearance of the Malaysian plane, as there has consequently been less attention to the capture of the ship. In any case, it is clear that the seizure of the shipment will not have much effect on the nuclear talks because the Western governments are eager to reach a final agreement on the issue. In fact, Israel's efforts to focus attention on the *Klos C* could be perceived as an attempt to sabotage the nuclear talks.

The incident has remained – and at this point, will apparently remain – largely between Iran and Israel, and Israel appears to have little ability to leverage it further. There is likewise an understanding between the parties to the nuclear talks that they will focus on the nuclear issue and not expand them to other matters, such as regional issues or domestic Iranian issues. If in the future the talks extend to other issues, then Western governments are likely to raise the subject of Iranian involvement in terror, including arms shipments to terrorist organizations.

The Iranian attempt to smuggle the shipment to the Gaza Strip is likely also worrisome to the Egyptian government, which today is stepping up its efforts to improve its control over the Sinai, prevent weapons smuggling into the Gaza Strip, and reduce the terrorist attacks in Egypt. Moreover, the Egyptian regime now sees Hamas as an enemy helping the Muslim Brotherhood carry out terrorist attacks in Sinai and in the heart of Egypt. Therefore, the episode could help promote security cooperation between Egypt and Israel and prevent weapons smuggling through Egypt and Sinai to Gaza. It could also strengthen the common interest of Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia in stopping the transfer of weapons from Iran and Syria to other countries.

Finally, Iran believes it has a longstanding account to settle with Israel – for previous seizures of arms ships, assassinations of Iranian scientists, viruses introduced into the Iranian computer system, and the assassination of Hizbollah's military commander, Imad Mughniyeh. It is important to Iran to deter Israel from continuing to take steps of this kind. Therefore, Iran may respond to these incidents with a revenge operation against Israel, perhaps by means of Hizbollah.

Heavy Rockets in the Middle East: Comparative Table

Rocket Name	Country of Manufacture	Diameter	Length	Minimum Range	Maximum Range	Rocket Weight	Warhead Weight	Comments
M302 Khyber	Syria	302 mm			90 km		170 kg	According recent media reports.
M-302B		302 mm			100 km		175 kg	
M-302C		302 mm			140 km		140 kg	
M-302D		302 mm			160 km		144 kg	
M-302E		302 mm			200 km		125 kg	
WS-1/ Kasirga	China/Turkey	302 mm	4.70 m	40 km	80-100 km	524 kg	150 kg	Accuracy 1 percent of range. The range of 100 km is achieved by removing the rocket's tow ring.
WS-1B	China	302 mm	6.37 m		160-180 km	725 kg	150 kg	
Fajr-5	Iran	333 mm	6.6 m		75 km	915 kg	175 kg (90 kg explosive material)	