

One Israeli General Who is Unworried by the F-35 Sale to the UAE (Part 1)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Opposition by Israeli military men to the sale of the state-of-the-art F-35 Stealth fighter jet to the UAE has been nearly unanimous. However, one important retired general thinks that even with that sale, there are other ways to preserve Israel's "qualitative military edge" (QME). That story is [here](#).

A historic normalization deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates seemed to disappear from the headlines as soon as it was announced. Instead, the fear that the Gulf state may procure the world's most advanced jet, rendering Israel's qualitative military edge ineffective, has been the headline of the week.

Though Washington has been selling Abu Dhabi millions in military deals, it has been bound to preserve Israel's

qualitative military edge (QME) in the Middle East before selling any advanced weaponry to regional states.

US President Donald Trump's administration has said that the normalization agreement between the UAE and Israel could allow the Gulf state to clinch unspecified new US arms sales, and the UAE, which is among the world's biggest defense spenders, is currently in the process of building up its armed forces.

Abu Dhabi has made no secret that it is interested in purchasing the fifth-generation fighter jet. But Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Benny Gantz, have drawn a hard line against the sale...

The UAE, some 2,648 kilometers away, has never actually been at war with Israel. The two countries – according to foreign reports – have been signing security and defense deals worth billions over recent years.

It's true that the UAE "has never actually been at war with Israel." But neither have Iran or Turkey, both states that were once firm allies of Israel and then became, with the overthrow of the Shah, and the political ascension of Erdogan, mortal enemies of the Jewish state.

Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Giora Eiland, former head of the National Security Council and the IDF Planning Directorate, told The Jerusalem Post that there is no deal in which one side gets everything that it wants.

"It's like any other deal. You give up something and get something in return," he said. "There is always some kind of price to pay."...

But Maj.-Gen.(ret.) Giora Eiland should remember that Israel did "give up something" when it agreed to suspend the

extension of Israeli sovereignty to part of the West Bank. That was a considerable concession by Prime Minister Netanyahu, one that infuriated the settlers' movement. It should not be forgotten.

According to him, Netanyahu "did not have to pretend" that the clause was not part of the deal; rather, "he could have said that certain concessions were made. It is still something where the advantages of signing are much better than not."

The F-35i Adir is heavily tailor-made to fit Israel's own specifications and is embedded with Israeli-made electronic warfare pods as well as Israeli weaponry, all installed once the planes have landed in Israel.

Not all F-35s are created, or remain, equal. Israel's F-35s are state-of-the-art plus, with Israel's own modifications – electronic warfare pods and weaponry – installed once the planes are in Israel. As modified, they will remain much superior to the F-35s the UAE may someday receive.

Israel is also one of the few to be allowed to modify the advanced fighter, and at the beginning of the month received an experimental F-35 which will act as a test bed for the country's planned modifications...

The ability to modify the jet might be one way to keep Israel's QME. And purchasing other, more advanced, platforms from the US may also be an option...

In other words, Israel's modified F-35s would be far more advanced than those that, after several years, end up being delivered to the Emirates. Is that enough to satisfy the need to protect Israel's "qualitative military edge"? General Eiland seems to think so. Many other Israeli military men disagree.

Would more funds to Israel from Washington to pay for more American F-35s be enough to preserve Israel's QME? Possibly.

The timing would be perfect, ahead of the US elections, which may remove Trump – viewed by Netanyahu as the president who has been the strongest supporter of Israel in years – from office.

Is Bibi in a rush to sign deals before he is gone? If so, one such option that would without a doubt maintain Israel's superiority in the Middle East would be the F-22 Raptor, which is currently flown only by the US Air Force.³

The F-22 is an advanced tactical fighter aircraft developed for the USAF and is considered the first fifth-generation fighter after it entered service with the USAF in 2005.

Using low observable technologies and modern avionics, the F-22 has been designed to rapidly project air dominance with stealth and range. The supersonic jet can be armed with an M61A2 cannon, six AIM-120 AMRAAMs, two AIM-9 Sidewinders, two 1,000-pound GBU-32 Joint Direct Attack Munitions and two AIM-120s.

Giora Eiland suggests that one way to preserve Israel's QME is for the U.S. to allow Jerusalem to buy the F-22 Raptors that, until now, have only been available to the U.S. Air Force. But are more of these advanced aircraft what Israel most needs *right now*, given Iran's nuclear project?

But maybe Israel doesn't need aircraft to keep its QME. What about advanced heavy weaponry like the GBU-57A/B Massive Ordnance Penetrator or the GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB)?

The MOAB, nicknamed "Mother of All Bombs," is considered the largest nonnuclear bomb in the USAF's inventory and was used only once, against Islamic State terrorists, dropped on a

deep tunnel complex in eastern Nangarhar province in Afghanistan.

Both bunker busters are in use only by the United States and would provide Israel with the ability to effectively destroy Iranian infrastructure deep underground.

This is perhaps General Eiland's most persuasive suggestion as to how to preserve Israel's QME. Both bunker busters are useful, but MOAB is exactly what the IAF needs to penetrate deep below the surface and destroy not only Iran's huge weapons storehouses, but more importantly, that nuclear project that Iran is busily working on deep underground.

First published in