

Iran Touts Missile Capability

- [Arms Control Today](#)

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In a July military ceremony broadcast on state-run television, Iran announced that the medium-range Shahab-3 ballistic missile is ready for service. If true, the missile, which has an estimated range of up to 1,300 kilometers, could target Israel.

Israel and the United States have long criticized and tried to stop Iran's ballistic missile programs. Mark Regev, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington, described the latest development as an "extremely grave concern."

Iran, which is also assessed by U.S. intelligence as pursuing nuclear weapons and exploring more powerful rockets than the Shahab-3, contends its ballistic missile programs are solely for defensive purposes.

The Shahab-3 is no surprise to Israel and the United States. In an April intelligence report on ballistic missile threats, the United States described the Shahab-3 as being in the "late stages" of development. Appearing July 11 on "John McLaughlin's One on One," Israeli Ambassador to the United States Daniel Ayalon said the Iranians "have not perfected the system yet, but they are working very hard on it."

Beginning in July 1998, the Shahab-3 has reportedly accrued a mixed record in several flight tests, the last of which took place just weeks before the July 20 ceremony. Tehran described the last test as a success.

Much ambiguity still shrouds the missile. The Shahab-3 is modeled in part on North Korea's Nodong missile, but U.S. government officials refused to comment on whether Iran could indigenously produce the missile. It is also not public how many Shahab-3s might be available for potential use. The Central Intelligence Agency reported in 1999 that Iran probably had a "limited number" of prototype Shahab-3s that could be deployed in an operational mode.

Israel says it is prepared to defend itself against an Iranian ballistic missile attack. Tel Aviv has deployed two batteries of Arrow anti-missile interceptors and is preparing to field another. Built in cooperation with the United States and designed to destroy short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, the Arrow has yet to be used in battle.

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