

The Growing Iranian Military Behemoth?

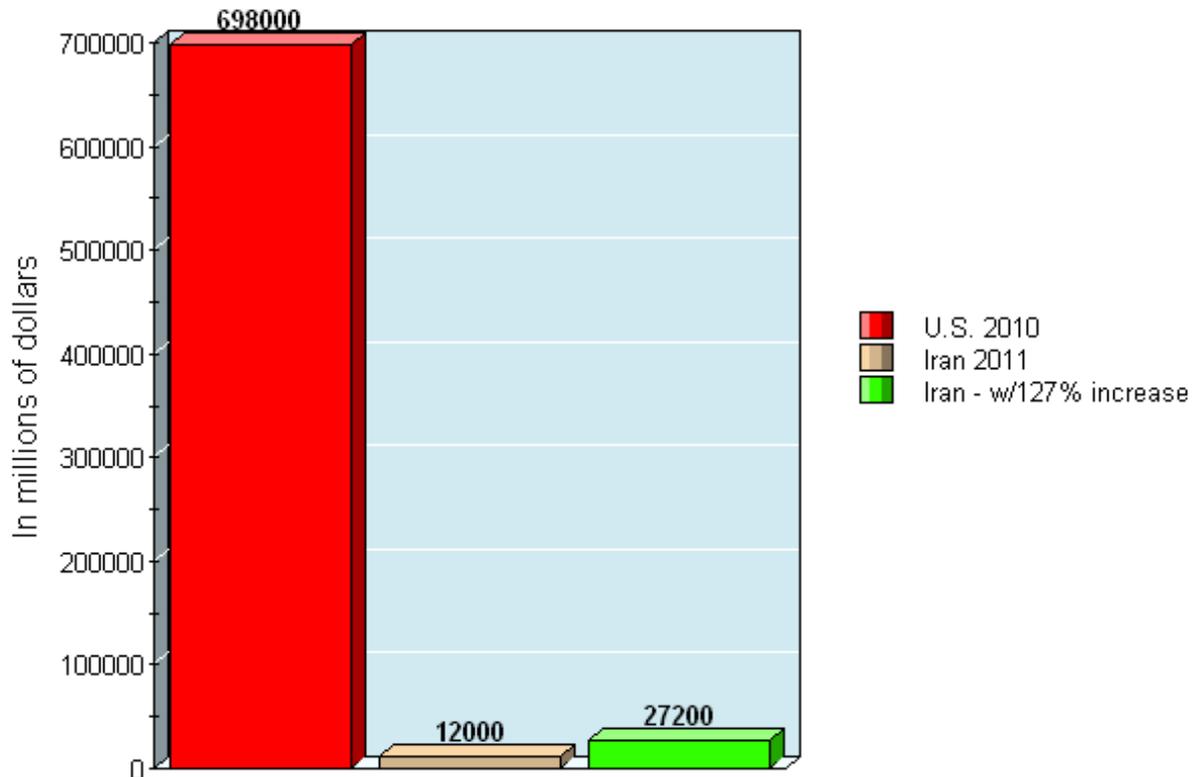
By Glenn Greenwald

February 04, 2012 "Salon" -- - The tranquility of my Saturday morning was disrupted — and that's putting it mildly — when I read on Glenn Reynolds' popular right-wing "Instapundit" blog that we can learn important "Lessons About Iran From Hitler." To know that we have yet another New Hitler in our midst is alarming indeed. Reynolds' link takes one to an even more jarring warning about the Persian menace, by David Goldman, that extensively compares the fallen Nazi leader to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and argues that because both figures are maniacal monsters presiding over a dying nation, only a full-scale military attack can stop them. **"However much it costs in Iranian blood and well-being, it's still worth it,"** Goldman casually decrees.

Sociopathic calls for aggressive attacks on other nations and cheap invocations of Hitler are not worth commenting on: neocons churn those out reflexively. But what is worth noting is the event Goldman is flagging as proof of Iran's aggressive intentions: "Iran is planning to double its defense budget even though its currency is collapsing," he warns. A *doubling* of its defense budget! Who among us can remain calm in the face of such naked militarism?

That Ahmadinejad claims that Iran will increase its military budget for next year by 127% was widely reported this week. For a variety of reasons relating to Iran's economic difficulties, that plan is quite infeasible — typical Ahmadinejad blustering — but let's assume for the moment that it will actually happen. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database, Iran's total annual military spending is \$7 billion; an increase of 127% would take it to \$15.8 billion — also known as: *less than 2% of total U.S. military spending* (which was \$698 billion for fiscal year 2010). According to *Defense News*, Iran's official military budget for 2011 is actually \$12 billion; an increase of 127% would bring it to \$27.2 billion, also known as: *less than 4% of U.S. military spending*. Taking the largest number possible for Iranian military spending (the one provided by *Defense News*), behold the frightening, Nazi-like military threat Iran poses:

Military Spending: Iran v. U.S.



These kinds of scary claims about Iran’s military might have been issuing for years. Back in 2006, Gen. John Abizaid, chief of the U.S. Central Command, announced that Iran has the most powerful military in the Middle East, even though Israel has a large stockpile of nuclear weapons, as many as 200, while Saudi Arabia annually spends almost \$60 billion on its military (more than 5 times Iran’s current spending) or “10% of GDP on defence, more than double the proportion spent by America.” Both of those Iranian rivals (Israel and Saudi Arabia), and many others in that region, are recipients of vast amounts of sophisticated military weaponry from the U.S. Here is a list of 11 extremely sophisticated weapons that the U.S. — and it alone in the world — possesses. And then there’s the fact that the U.S. basically has Iran completely encircled, as demonstrated by this graph from Juan Cole’s blog, showing U.S. military bases near Iran:



As Cole put it: “Each star is a US base. But just to be clear, Iran is the one that is threatening us.” Indeed: imagine if the blue in that map were the U.S. (rather than Iran), and the large red areas were Mexico and Canada (rather than Iran’s neighbors), and the stars represented Iranian military bases. Then further imagine that Iranian political leaders and media figures routinely told their population that it was the U.S. that was an aggressive, threatening power that had to be stopped: the mocking condemnations of that level of propaganda would be endless. Yet American political officials and commentators feel free to insist, with a straight face, that Iran is an aggressor nation posing a serious threat to the U.S.: such a serious threat, in fact, that war may be necessary to stop it. And there is, tragically, little doubt that if there is an attack on Iran by Israel — with direct U.S. involvement or, more likely, U.S. support and approval — there will be little opposition in either American political party, and even less challenge to the ludicrous claims about the Grave Iranian Threat that will be invoked to justify it.

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