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REACHING FOR THE STARS? 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF ISRAEL'S SHAVIT 2 ROCKET

Abstract

on July 5, 1961,Israel launched the **Shavit- 2** (Comet) rocket to a short flight to the edge of space. The purpose of the launch, as described by the prime minister's office was "to conduct scientific research".

Official technical data was not published by RAFAEL - the designer and contractor for the rocket - until now, 50 years later. A detailed video was declassified only in 2010. Amazing as it sounds, shavit 2 is still shrouded with mystery.

The purpose of the rocket, however, was more than pure scientific research and technical experiment: on the early 1960's there was a missile race in the Middle East - between Egypt and Israel. Shavit-2 was in fact a rocket that was envisioned and constructed upon urgent directive by the prime minister and minister of defense - as a mean to beat Egypt on the race to launch a sounding rocket.

After the successful launch of Shavit-2, Egypt canceled its planned sounding rocket launch. But instead, headed towards the development of long range ballistic missiles, with some help from German engineers, some of them veterans of the WW2 era V-2 program.

in the article the political, technical and strategic aspects of Shavit-2 will be portrayed, as well as earlier versions of the rocket and follow up rocketry related activities at RAFAEl will be discussed.

A common belief in the community of space historians is that the Shavit-2 is related to the much larger, space launch vehicle named Shavit, that launched Israeli satellites since 1988. The two programs are not related, and it will be presented that in the 1960's Israel was not involved with any space launcher activity. The legacy of Shavit-2, in retrospective, is a political stunt, and not a stepping stone in achieving indigenous launch capability.

Some archival material for the article and presentation was provided by the ministry of defense and RAFAEL, of which most was unpublished before.