

Revolutionary Guard leader: We can hit Israel's nuclear facilities

* Story Highlights

- * If the Zionist regime attacks Iran, we will surely strike," general reportedly says
- * Mohammed Ali Jaafari calls critiques of Iran's nuclear program "psychological war"
- * Iran says its program will be used to fuel civilian nuclear power plants
- * Israel regards Iran's nuclear program to be a considerable threat

updated 3 hours, 27 minutes ago

TEHRAN, Iran (CNN) -- The head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard said Saturday that Iran will strike Israel's nuclear facilities if the Jewish state attacks Iran, a semi-official news agency reported.



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad tours the nuclear fuel processing plant in Isfahan in April.

"If the Zionist regime attacks Iran, we will surely strike its nuclear facilities with our missile capabilities," said Gen. Mohammed Ali Jaafari, according to the Iranian Labor News Agency, referring to Israel.

"Our missile capability puts all of the Zionist regime within Iran's reach to attack," Jaafari said, according to ILNA.

The military chief said calls against Iran's nuclear program, which Tehran maintains is for peaceful purposes, are part of the "psychological war that the West has launched against Iran."

Iran has refused international calls to suspend its production of enriched uranium, which it insists will be used to fuel civilian nuclear power plants.

Jaafari has said in the past that any strike against Iran's nuclear facilities would be regarded as the beginning of war.

"We have no illusions whatsoever as to the hostile intentions of the theocratic radical regime in Iran," said Mark Regev, the spokesman for the Israeli Prime Minister, about Iran's threat.

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Israel, which regards Iran's nuclear program to be a considerable threat, is widely believed to have nuclear weapons itself.

Last month, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said a nuclear-armed Iran would destabilize the Middle East and threaten the entire world by triggering an arms race and supplying catastrophic weapons to terrorists.

"The goal is to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons," Netanyahu said, adding that most governments in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere agreed.

"It's not merely an interest of Israel," he said.

Pressed on whether Israel would launch a unilateral attack against Iranian nuclear facilities, Netanyahu said Israel "always reserves the right to defend itself."

He said, "We are threatened as no other people are threatened," he said.

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'No green light' for Iran attack

Mr Obama in Moscow, 7 July

Mr Obama took time out from a visit to Moscow to calm concerns over Iran

The US has "absolutely not" given Israel a green light to attack Iran over its nuclear programme, President Barack Obama has said.

His remarks followed weekend comments by Vice-President Joe Biden that the US would not stand in the way of Israel's response to Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Meanwhile, US military chief Adm Mike Mullen said Washington should keep military options on the table.

But he said he hoped dialogue with Tehran would prove productive.

Clarification

Speaking to CNN while on a visit to Russia, President Obama said the US would try to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue "in a peaceful way through diplomatic channels."

Vice-President Joe Biden had said in an interview with ABC TV on Sunday that

"Israel can determine for itself... what's in their interest and what they decide to do relative to Iran and anyone else".

Asked whether the comment meant that Washington had given Israel the go-ahead for an attack, Mr Obama said: "Absolutely not."

I worry a great deal about the response of a country that gets struck. It is a really important place to not go, if we can not go there in any way, shape or form

Adm Mike Mullen

Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

However, he did defend his deputy, who was accused of being gaffe-prone by rivals during the 2008 presidential election campaign.

"I think Vice-President Biden stated a categorical fact which is we can't dictate to other countries what their security interests are," Mr Obama added.

He added that the US also reserved the right to take "whatever actions" were necessary to protect itself, without elaborating what those were.

At an event in Washington Adm Mullen, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, echoed the president's comments.

"There is a great deal that certainly depends on the dialogue and the engagement, and I think we need to do that with all options remaining on the table, including certainly military options," he said.

The US military chief said Tehran could have an atomic bomb within one to three years, which "would be potentially very destabilising" to the Middle East.

But he said the potential consequences of an attack on Iran were of great concern and weighed heavily against launching any strike.

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"It is a really important place to not go, if we can not go there in any way, shape or form."

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Biden strikes tough note on Iran

US Vice-President Joe Biden in Baghdad, 4-7-09

Joe Biden has just returned from a visit to the Middle East

US Vice-President Joe Biden has hinted the administration will not restrain Israel if it decides on military action to remove any Iranian nuclear threat.

Mr Biden told ABC television the US could not "dictate to another sovereign nation what they can and cannot do".

Mr Biden also said President Obama's offer of dialogue with Iran remained.

Mr Obama has given Iran until the end of the year to talk about its nuclear programme, which Iran insists is for energy purposes only.

Western countries are concerned Tehran is working to acquire a nuclear weapons capability.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has indicated Israel would take matters into its own hands if Iran did not show a willingness to negotiate.

No hypotheticals

Appearing on ABC's current affairs programme This Week, host George Stephanopoulos asked Mr Biden whether the Israeli position was the right approach.

The vice-president replied: "Israel can determine for itself - it's a sovereign nation - what's in their interest and what they decide to do relative to Iran and anyone else."

He added that this was the case, "whether we agree or not" with the Israeli view.

Asked whether the US would stand in the way if the Israelis decided to launch a military attack against Iranian nuclear facilities, Mr Biden said Israel, like the US, had a right to "determine what is in its interests".

White House spokesman Tommy Vietor said Mr Biden was not signalling any change of approach on Iran or Israel.

"The vice president refused to engage [in] hypotheticals, and he made clear that our policy has not changed," he was quoted as saying by the Associated Press news agency.