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World

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Iran: Just-tested missile can avoid radar

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Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran - Iran successfully test-fired a missile that can avoid radar and hit several targets simultaneously using multiple warheads, the military said Friday.

Gen. Hossein Salami, the air force chief of the elite Revolutionary Guards, did not specify the missile's range, saying it depends on the weight of its warheads.

But state-run television described the weapon as "ballistic" - suggesting it's of comparable range to Iran's existing ballistic rocket, which can travel 1,250 miles and reach arch-foe Israel and U.S. bases in the Middle East.

"Today, a remarkable goal of the Islamic Republic of Iran's defense forces was realized with the successful test-firing of a new missile with greater technical and tactical capabilities than those previously produced," Salami said on state-run television.

It showed a clip of the launch of what it called the Fajr-3, with "fajr" meaning "victory" in Farsi.

"It can avoid anti-missile missiles and strike the target," Salami said.

He said the missile would carry a multiple warhead, and each warhead would be capable of hitting its target precisely.

"This news causes much concern, and that concern is shared by many countries in the international community, about Iran's aggressive nuclear weapons program and her parallel efforts to develop delivery systems, both in the field of ballistic missiles and cruise missiles," said Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev.

"The combination of extremist jihadist ideology, together with nuclear weapons and delivery systems, is a combination that no one in the international community can be complacent about," he said.

Yossi Alpher, an Israeli consultant on the peace process, said the news "escalates the arms race between Iran and all those who are concerned about Iran's aggressive intentions and nuclear potential."

"Clearly it's escalation, and also an attempt by Iran to flex its muscles as it goes into a new phase of the diplomatic struggle with the U.N. Security Council," Alpher said.

Andy Oppenheimer, a weapons expert at Jane's Information Group, said the missile test could be an indication that Iran has MIRV capability. MIRV refers to multiple

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independently targetable re-entry vehicles, which are intercontinental ballistic missiles with several warheads, each of which could be directed to a different target.

"From the description, it could be a MIRV. If you are saying that from a single missile, separate warheads can be independently targeted then yes, this is significant," he said.

"But we don't know how accurate the Iranians are able to make their missiles yet, and this is a crucial point," Oppenheimer said.

"If the missile is adaptable for nuclear warheads, then they are well on the way," he added. "But they have not made a nuclear warhead yet. The current estimates are it could take five years."

The existing rocket is the Shahab-3, which means "shooting star," and also is capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.

Israel and the United States have jointly developed the Arrow anti-ballistic missile system in response to the Shahab-3.

Iran launched an arms development program during its 1980-88 war with Iraq to compensate for a U.S. weapons embargo. Since 1992, Iran has produced its own tanks, armored personnel carriers, missiles and a fighter plane.

Last year, former Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani said Tehran had successfully tested a solid fuel motor for the Shahab-3, a technological breakthrough in Iran's military.

Salami said Friday the Iranian-made missile was test-fired as large military maneuvers began in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. The maneuvers are scheduled to last a week and will involve 17,000 Revolutionary Guards as well as boats, fighter jets and helicopter gunships.

The tests come amid growing concern over Iran's nuclear program. The United States and its allies believe Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons, but Tehran denies that, saying its program is for generating electricity.

The U.N. Security Council is demanding that Iran halt its uranium enrichment activities. But an Iranian envoy said its activities are "not reversible."
