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Israel plans nuclear strike on Iran over Turkey - paper

Print

Monday , 08 January 2007



Israel has drawn up secret plans to destroy Iran's uranium enrichment facilities with tactical nuclear weapons and three possible routes to Iran have been mapped out including one over Turkey, the Sunday Times said.

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Citing what it said were several Israeli military sources, the paper said two Israeli air force squadrons had been training to blow up an enrichment plant in Natanz using low-yield nuclear "bunker busters". Two other sites, a heavy water plant at Arak and a uranium conversion plant at Isfahan, would be targeted with conventional bombs, the Sunday Times said.

On the claim that one of the possible routes of Israeli attack will be over Turkey, there was no immediate reaction from the Turkish authorities on Sunday.

Turkey is the only majority-Muslim nation that has strategic political and military relations with Israel. Tel Aviv and Ankara signed two strategic agreements, on defense industry cooperation and military cooperation, in 1996, and they have been holding critical annual meetings, especially on regional threats analysis, since that date.

Turkish Deputy Chief of General Staff Gen. Ergin Saygun held key talks with Israeli officials in Tel Aviv late last month on the recent developments in Middle East and the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region.

Turkey also has close relations with neighboring Iran, and several high-level visits recently increased trust among Ankara and Tehran. But still Turkey expresses concern about Iran's Shahab missiles and their ranges as well as

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the possibility of Iran's using its nuclear capacity in weapons. Ankara says that Iran has the right to develop nuclear energy but opposes its acquisition of atomic weapons, saying this would spark an arms race across the region.

The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously last month to slap sanctions on Iran to try to stop uranium enrichment that Western powers fear could lead to making bombs. Tehran insists its plans are peaceful and says it will continue enrichment. Israel has refused to rule out pre-emptive military action against Iran along the lines of its 1981 air strike against an atomic reactor in Iraq, although many analysts believe Iran's nuclear facilities are too much for Israel to take on alone.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office said on Sunday it would not respond to the claim of the British newspaper. "We don't respond to publications in the Sunday Times," said Miri Eisin, Olmert's spokeswoman.

Israeli Minister of Strategic Threats Avigdor Lieberman also declined to comment on the report.

But Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said, "The focus of the Israeli activity today is to give full support to diplomatic actions and the expeditious and full implementation of Security Council resolution 1737. If diplomacy succeeds, the problem can be solved peaceably."

In Tehran, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini told a news conference that the newspaper report "will make clear to the world public opinion that the Zionist regime (Israel) is the main menace to global peace and the region". He said "any measure against Iran will not be left without a response and the invader will regret its act immediately."

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called for Israel to be "wiped off the map" and Israel has said it will not allow Iran to acquire a bomb. The Sunday Times quoted sources as saying a nuclear strike would only be used if a conventional attack was ruled out and if the United States declined to intervene. Disclosure of the plans could be intended to put pressure on Tehran to halt enrichment, the paper added.

It said the Israeli plan envisaged conventional laser-guided bombs opening "tunnels" into the targets. Nuclear warheads would then be used fired into the plant at Natanz, exploding deep underground to reduce radioactive fallout. Israeli pilots have flown to Gibraltar in recent weeks to train for the 2,000 mile (3,200 km) round-trip to the Iranian targets, the Sunday Times said, and three possible routes to Iran have been mapped out including one over Turkey.

Air force squadrons based at Hatzetim in the Negev desert and Tel Nof, south of Tel Aviv, have trained to use Israel's tactical nuclear weapons on the mission. The preparations have been overseen by Major General Eliezer

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Shkedi, commander of the Israeli air force. Sources close to the Pentagon told the British daily that the United States was highly unlikely to give approval for tactical nuclear weapons to be used. One source said Israel would have to seek approval "after the event", as it did when it crippled Iraq's nuclear reactor at Osirak with airstrikes in 1981.

Scientists have calculated that although contamination from the bunker-busters could be limited, tons of radioactive uranium compounds would be released.

The Israelis believe that Iran's retaliation would be constrained by fear of a second strike if it were to launch its Shehab-3 ballistic missiles at Israel.

However, American experts warned of repercussions, including widespread protests that could destabilize parts of the Islamic world friendly to the West.

Colonel Sam Gardiner, a Pentagon adviser, said Iran could try to close the Strait of Hormuz, the route for 20% of the world's oil.

Some sources in Washington said they doubted if Israel would have the nerve to attack Iran. However, Dr Ephraim Sneh, the deputy Israeli defense minister, said last month: "The time is approaching when Israel and the international community will have to decide whether to take military action against Iran."

08 January 2007

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



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