

Israel denies air force trains in Iraq for strike against Iran

By [Global Research](#)

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JERUSALEM (Agencies): Media re-ports about Israeli warplanes secretly training in US-controlled Iraq for possible attacks on neighbouring Iran are false, an Israeli military spokesman said on Friday. Issuing an official denial, the spokesman said: "Reports about putative Israeli air force activities in Iraq are utterly baseless." The Baghdad government and the Pentagon similarly played down a report, carried on the website of the Jerusalem Post and quoting a Iraqi news network, that Israeli jets were practising in Iraqi airspace and landing on US airbases in the country. Issuing an official denial, the Israeli military spokesman said: "Reports about putative Israeli air force (IAF) activities in Iraq are utterly baseless." Iraqi Defence Ministry spokesman Major-General Mohammad al-Askari said: "We haven't observed any IAF warplanes practising in Iraqi airspace."

Recent months have seen a flurry of high-level contacts between Israel and the United States, which accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons. Tehran denies the charge. The talks have stoked global speculation that the allies are planning preemptive military strikes, though both say they support continued UN Security Council sanctions designed to deny the Iranians atomic technology with bomb-making potential. Iran this week test-fired several missiles it said were capable of reaching Israel and US bases in the Middle East. The United States has reminded Tehran it was ready to defend its allies. The escalating tension helped to push oil prices to a new record high of near \$147 a barrel on Friday. Iran is the world's fourth-largest oil exporter and there are fears of supply disruptions in the event of conflict.

The Iraqi report carried by the Jerusalem Post referred to an airbase in western Anbar province near the town of Haditha. The airbase is controlled by the US military.

The Israeli newspaper said it could not confirm the veracity of the report.

Security for Anbar is still formally in the hands of the US military, although control is expected to be transferred to Iraqi security forces soon. Iraq has security control over nine of its 18 provinces.

While Iraq has a large army and police force, its airforce is still very small. The Pentagon dismissed the report.

"I find that report inconceivable, and clearly someone is either misinformed or intentionally trying to create mischief," Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said.

A senior Iranian cleric on Friday warned Israel and the United States that they would be

made to regret any attack against Iran, but denied any aggressive intent towards the Jewish state.

“You liar Israel and you liar the White House... if you want to make an invasion we will give you such a response that you will regret your move,” Ayatollah Mohammad Emami Kashani said in a Friday prayers sermon broadcast on state radio.

Tensions over the nuclear standoff have again surged in the past two days after Iran test-fired a broadside of missiles – including the Shahab-3 which it says puts Israel within range – in war games that provoked international concern.

The White House said Friday that Iranian missile tests did not change the US determination to resolve the crisis diplomatically.

Asked if the United States was more concerned after the tests, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said: “I would just characterize it as continued Iranian defiance of international obligations and further isolating its people, but I don’t think that we are anywhere off, that we are at all off the course that we have been on, which is trying to solve this diplomatically.”

“What it does, however, is restrengthen the resolve of the international community that strongly believes that Iran should not be allowed to have a nuclear weapon,” she added.

Cease

The United States Thursday cast doubt on the strength of Iran’s claims to have test-fired a whole barrage of missiles over two days, and urged Tehran to cease immediately all provocative acts.

Iran appeared to have fired only a single missile on Thursday, not a second round of missiles as Iranian media reported, and seven on Wednesday not nine as claimed, a senior defense official told AFP.

The United States had detected the launch of seven missiles on Wednesday, including a Shahab-3 missile said to be capable of striking Israel, the official said, asking to remain anonymous.

“There appears to have been one missile fired today, but that may well have been one that failed the day before, and they finally got operational and launched today,” the official said.

Amid heightened tensions, the administration of President George W. Bush again renewed its commitment to resolving the standoff with Iran over its contested nuclear program peacefully.

But Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warned Washington was ready to defend Israel and all its allies in the region and that it was stepping up deployments in the Gulf.

“We will defend American interests and the interests of our allies,” Rice said, answering a question on an Iranian threat to “set fire” to Israel.

“We take very strongly our obligation to defend our allies and we intend to do that,” she said at a news conference in Tbilisi.

The United States has been leading a push to impose a third round of sanctions on Iran for its refusal to end its uranium enrichment.

But White House spokesman Tony Fratto said: "What our goal is is to use diplomacy as best as possible to bring Iran to the table in a way that we can resolve this peacefully."

The missile "tests are in violation of, or the expansive use of ballistic missiles are in violation of UN Security Council resolutions," he added.

"We want to see them stop enriching uranium and we'd like to see them stop these provocative tests that only further isolate the Iranian people," Fratto added.

The Shahab-3 is advertised as having a 2,000 kilometer range (1,250 miles), which would put Israel, Saudi Arabia, and US military installations throughout the Middle East within striking distance.

But there were mounting doubts Thursday about the veracity of the Iranian claims of how many missiles it had launched.

One defense analyst in London told AFP that Iran had apparently doctored photographs of the missile test-firings and exaggerated the capabilities of the weapons.

Photographs published on the Iranian Revolutionary Guards website showed four missiles taking off from a desert launchpad.

But one of the missiles had apparently been added to the photograph using elements from the smoke trail and dust clouds from two of the other missiles.

Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak and armed forces chief Lieutenant-General Gabi Ashkenazi will separately visit Washington this month for discussions on Iran's nuclear programme, diplomatic sources said on Friday.

They said Barak, who was last in the US capital in October, would fly out on Monday and hold three days of talks with senior Bush administration officials including Vice-President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Ashkenazi was provisionally scheduled to begin his first working visit to Washington around July 25, diplomatic sources said. They had no further details on the general's itinerary.

"Such trips are routine, given our alliance, but of course Iran will top the agenda," an Israeli diplomatic source said.

Missile

Russia said on Friday Iran's missile tests showed there is no military justification for US plans to deploy missile defences in eastern Europe because Tehran's rockets cannot travel that far.

Iran this week test-fired missiles which it said were capable of reaching Israel and US bases in the Middle East.

Washington says the shield in Europe is needed to defend against any missile attacks from countries such as Iran. Russia says the US plans are a direct threat to its security.

"The tests in Iran have only confirmed that Iran at the moment has rockets with a range of up to 2,000 kms (1,243 miles). That confirms what we have said before," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told a news briefing.

“That is that the current idea of deploying a US ... missile shield in Europe, with its parameters, is not needed to monitor and react to these particular rockets with this range.”

Iran said on Friday that its top nuclear negotiator and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana will hold their next talks on ending the nuclear standoff on July 19, despite Western concern over the test-firing of several missiles by Tehran. “They are to continue their negotiations about the package on Saturday, July 19” in Geneva, said Ahmad Khadem al-Melleh, spokesman for the secretariat of Iran’s supreme national security council, according to the state-run IRNA agency. World powers — Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States — last month presented Iran with a package aimed at ending the five-year-old nuclear crisis, notably offering Tehran technological incentives in exchange for suspending the sensitive process of uranium enrichment.

“The trip of Dr Jalili to Geneva is taking place after the world powers welcomed the continuation of the talks on common points in the two packages that have been proposed,” the spokesman added.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon issued a fresh appeal for Iran to suspend nuclear enrichment work as Washington warned Tehran to cease its “provocative” missile tests. “I have been calling on Iranian authorities to fully comply with all relevant Security Council resolutions and continue their negotiations with European Union and concerned parties,” Ban said Thursday on his return from a two-week, three-nation Asian tour. Ban’s call came after Tehran tested over two days several missiles, including the Shahab-3 said to be capable of striking Israel. While challenging Tehran’s reports on the extent of tests, Washington called them provocative and said they violated UN Security Council resolutions.

Network

Spanish police said Friday they have broken up a network suspected of smuggling spare parts for military aircraft to a country in the Middle East which Spanish media identified as Iran. Six people were arrested in the crackdown on the network, which was involved in the “illegal trade of spare parts of military aeronautical equipment for fighter planes,” police said in a statement. It said the equipment was sent to a Middle East country which it did not specify but which it was “under sanctions” imposed by the UN Security Council. Sources close to the investigation quoted by the Spanish news agency Europa Press said the equipment was sent to a company linked to the Iranian government, something police refused to confirm. The investigation was launched when police learnt of the existence of a “company in Madrid suspected of exporting military equipment in violation of the rules of national and international trade,” the statement said. Police raided the headquarters of several companies and seized a large quantity of aeronautical equipment valued at around 2.0 million euros (\$3.2 million).

The six people arrested are accused of “smuggling and crimes against industrial property,” the statement said. The parts were manufactured in a “complex copying process” using special alloys and high-quality steel, the statement said. Europa Press said the parts were for F4 and F14 fighters jets, Hercules transport planes and helicopters. The United Nations imposed sanctions against Iran in 2006 aimed at persuading it to suspend its uranium enrichment activities, which the international community fears are part of a nuclear weapons building programme, something Tehran denies. The Spanish police crackdown came amid heightened tensions after Iran on Wednesday test-fired its Shahab-3 long-range missile, which the Islamic republic says can reach Israel and US bases in the Gulf, and eight

other more medium-range missiles. The move sparked major concern in Western governments.

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