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AP News

Iran to 'blow up the heart of Israel' if attacked

Iran's Revolutionary Guard official warns Iran will 'blow up the heart of Israel' if attacked

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Iran will "blow up the heart of Israel" if the United States or the Jewish state attacked it first, a top official with Iran's most powerful military force — the Revolutionary Guard — warned Friday.

Cleric Mojtaba Zolnour, who is the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's representative in the Guard, said that if a U.S. or Israeli missile lands in Iran, Iranian missiles will hit Israel in retaliation.

"Should a single American or Zionist missile land in our country, before the dust settles, Iranian missiles will blow up the heart of Israel," Zolnour was quoted as saying by the state IRNA news agency.

Iran and Israel are archenemies and anti-Israeli stance is a trademark for the hardline Guard. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has since 2005 often called for Israel's destruction and predicted demise for the Jewish state.

Though common, Zolnour's remarks appear to be ratcheting up the rhetoric ahead of the next round of talks between Iran and the West later this month over Iran's controversial uranium enrichment program.

The U.S. and Israel have accused Iran of seeking nuclear weapons but Iran denies the charge, saying its nuclear program is geared toward generating power, not a bomb. Israel

has said it favors a diplomatic solution to the nuclear standoff but has not ruled out a military strike over fears that Iran may develop nuclear weapons.

Israel maintains a doctrine of "nuclear ambiguity" and has never confirmed nor denied having its own nuclear weapons program. It considers Iran a serious threat not only because of Tehran's nuclear program but also because of Iran's arsenal of long-range missiles, which can be fitted with nuclear warheads and are capable of striking the Jewish state.

Tehran is equipped with Shahab-3 missiles which have a range of up to 1,250 miles (2,000 kilometers). Israel is about 625 miles (1,000 kilometers) west of Iran.

Iran's missile program and its nuclear work — much of it carried out in secrecy — have long been a concern for the West, which fears Tehran is intent on developing an atomic weapons capability and the missiles to deploy such warheads.

In September, the revelation of a secret uranium enrichment facility near the Iranian holy city of Qom, represented a coup for Western intelligence and put Iran on defense. Within days of intense diplomatic activity, Tehran entered landmark nuclear negotiations with the U.S. and other world powers — talks that have since somewhat eased tensions between the two sides.

Oct. 25 has been set as a date for an inspection of the Qom site by the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency. Separately, a meeting is slated for Oct. 19 in Vienna with Iran, the U.S., France and Russia to discuss details of a deal that would lead to more cooperation from Iran on the enrichment process.