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Report: Iran deploys missiles in Persian Gulf

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The Media Line News Agency , THE JERUSALEM POST

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have begun deploying mobile launchers for surface-to-air and surface-to-sea missiles in the Strait of Hormuz and other areas in the Gulf, it has been revealed.

An Iranian official, quoted anonymously in the Saudi daily *Al-Watan*, said Iranian forces deployed the missile bases following secret reports that the United States and Israel were working on a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Iran's preparations for a potential military strike are not new. The republic has conducted several military exercises over the past few years, some with the explicit intention of preparing the armed forces for a possible confrontation with the West.

The source said the missiles were deployed a few weeks ago. Iran is said to have informed Arab countries in the region of its activities and reassured its neighbors that the missiles were not aimed at states in the region, a reference to Sunni Arab states such as Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, which has a Shi'ite majority but Sunni government.

Sunni Muslim Gulf states are allied with the US in and share Western concerns over Shi'ite Iran's nuclear plans.

Bahrain, for example, is closer to Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant than the Iranian capital Teheran. Any strike on the facility will affect Bahrainis more than Iran's center of power.

Hady 'Amr, Director of the Brookings Doha Center, said there were too many variables at play in the region to draw conclusions as to the deployment's underlying meaning. 'Amr spoke of the Obama administration's disposition towards dialogue with Iran, shifting alliances in the US dialogue with Syria, the Iranian presidential elections and the global financial crisis which has made both Iran and the Gulf states less secure.

On several occasions Iran has expressed its displeasure over potential US bases in its Arab neighbors' territories. "This may be part of their muscle-flexing in that regard," 'Amr told The Media Line, "to make sure that the Gulf states hosting American and French bases understand that there will be a price to pay."

The reports of missile deployments coincide with the US's declared intentions to bridge the rift with Iran.

US President Barack Obama is attempting a dialogue with Teheran to defuse tensions built up during the Bush Administration over Iran's controversial nuclear program.

The release of Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi from Teheran's Evin prison on Monday could be a response to US overtures.

Saberi, 31, was originally sentenced to eight years in prison on charges of espionage and had been held in prison since January, 2009. An appeals court in Iran reduced her sentence to a two-year suspended term and a five-year ban on reporting in Iran.

Iran has been under international pressure to abandon its nuclear program and uranium enrichment activities since 2002. The US, Israel and other countries are concerned that Iran is secretly pursuing nuclear weapons, although Teheran vociferously denies these accusations and claims its program is for peaceful purposes.

The US has not ruled out the possibility of a military strike on Iran.

Iran has threatened to retaliate to any aggression on its soil by closing down the strategic Strait of Hormuz, which will disrupt global oil supplies.

Last year Iran opened a new naval facility in Jask, in the entrance to the Gulf, the declared aim of which was to enable Iran to block the enemy from entering Iran in the event that the country were attacked.

Gulf countries, including Iran, hold more than half of the world's crude oil reserves and more than 40 percent of the world's proven gas reserves.

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