

Lavrov Warns Against Military Strike on Iran

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Russia and Iran warned the West against a military strike on the Islamic Republic on Monday, saying an attack targeting its nuclear program would lead to civilian casualties and create new threats to global security.

The separate remarks by Foreign Ministers Sergei Lavrov and Ali Akbar Salehi of Iran coincided with speculation about a potential Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear sites ahead of the release of a UN watchdog report expected to cast more light on suspected military aspects to Iran's nuclear activity.

"This would be a very serious mistake fraught with unpredictable consequences," Lavrov told a news conference in Moscow with his Irish counterpart when asked about reports that Israel was preparing for a possible pre-emptive military strike.

In St. Petersburg, Salehi said Iran "condemns any threat of military attack on independent states."

Salehi spoke alongside Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and other ministers from nations in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a regional grouping dominated by Russia and China in which Iran has observer status.

A report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, due out this week, may strengthen suspicions that Tehran is seeking to develop the capability to make atomic bombs and lead to Western calls for further UN sanctions on Iran.

Russia and China grudgingly supported four previous rounds of sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program. But the two veto-wielding UN Security Council members have made clear that any new sanctions would be an extremely tough sell.

Moscow is calling for a step-by-step process under which the existing sanctions would be eased in return for steps by Iran to dispel concerns over its nuclear program, which Tehran says is purely peaceful.

Russia, which has built Iran's first nuclear power station, has vociferously opposed any military action.

"There is no military solution to the Iranian nuclear problem as there is no military solution to any other problem in the modern world," Lavrov said.

"This is confirmed to us every day when we see how the problems of the conflicts around Iran are being resolved — whether Iraq or Afghanistan or what is happening in other countries in the region. Military intervention only leads to many times more deaths and human suffering."

Salehi echoed Lavrov's words hours later.

"Past experience has shown that wilful, unilateral military actions by certain countries have led to instability, to the murder of innocent people and to the emergence of new threats to the world," he said at the SCO meeting.

Putin mixed warm words for Iran with thinly veiled criticism of the United States on Monday.

He said the recent launch of the Russian-built Bushehr nuclear power plant would help Iran generate energy and made no mention of any concerns about Tehran's nuclear program.

Putin also said Salehi was right to criticize "arrogant world powers" that "supported previous regimes in North Africa, but then — and this is curious — also supported revolutions that toppled previous regimes in North Africa."

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