

Iran 'won't hit Gulf civilians'

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Iran 'won't hit Gulf civilians'

By Geoffrey BEW

IRAN yesterday reassured Gulf countries that it would not strike civilian targets if it retaliates against the US military bases in the region.

The country's top military commander gave the reassurance during an interview broadcast on the television channel Al Jazeera.

There are several US bases in the region, including the Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain and others in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Yemen.

Commander of the Revolutionary Guards General Mohammad Ali Jaafari yesterday said it was Iran's "natural right to respond" if attacked by land or air.

However, he played down fears that Bahrain and other countries would be affected by military action.

"We realise that there is worry among neighbouring Muslim countries whose lands host US military stations," he is quoted as saying by AFP.

"However, if the US launches a war against us and if it uses these stations to attack Iran with missiles, then through the strength and precision of our own missiles, we are capable of targeting only the US military forces who attack us."

Bahraini MP and chairman of parliament's foreign affairs, defence and national security committee, Adel Al Ma'awda, yesterday said he was encouraged by the comments - saying it should provide some reassurance to people in Bahrain. "This will do that, but in a time of war who sticks to their word?" he asked.

"We do not trust either one of them (the US or Iran), but I hope Gen Jaafari is telling the truth."

However, Mr Al Ma'awda did not think Bahrain would automatically become embroiled in any war between the countries, describing the US naval base here as another part of America.

"If a war happens it will be between them (Iran) and the US and it is nothing to do with us," he said.

“If Iran is hit from the US base in our country it will give Iran every right to hit back, although I would not like to see it happen.”

But Mr Al Ma’awda said he did not expect any US-Iran conflict in the near future, adding that American forces had been weakened by military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. During last month’s historic visit to the Gulf, US President George Bush branded Iran the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism and said “all options” against Tehran remain on the table. Officials from the US Navy and Bahrain Foreign Ministry were unavailable for comment yesterday geoff@gdn.com.bh

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