

Israel's Peres coaches AIPAC on Obama's Iran policy

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In an address before 'the most important' lobby affecting America's relations with Israel, President Shimon Peres accuses Iran of posing an international "threat".

On the eve of talks with US President Barack Obama in Washington, President Peres won strong applause from the powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

"Unfortunately the Middle East finds itself in the shadow of a nuclear threat. We shall not give up. We shall not surrender," Peres told around 6,000 people attending AIPAC's annual policy conference, AFP reported.

Tehran says its nuclear program is directed at acquiring the civilian applications of the technology. Tel Aviv, however, charges that the country is seeking to obtain nuclear weaponry to wipe Israel "off the map".

"Let me be clear. The fanatic words of Iran are on the wrong side of history. Actually they are out of history, they are against history," the veteran Israeli leader said, referring to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's frequent criticism of atrocities committed against Palestinians in the occupied lands.

"Historically Iran sought to enrich mankind. Today, alas, Iran's rulers want to enrich uranium. What for?" Peres added, while failing to mention Israel's own nuclear warheads or its own clandestine nuclear program.

Uranium, the fuel for a nuclear power plant, can serve military purposes only if enriched to high levels of above 90 percent.

According to the latest International Atomic Energy Agency figures, Iran has produced nearly 1,010 kg (2,225 lb) of low enriched uranium (LEU) — a level "less than 5 percent."

Tehran is a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and, according to the UN nuclear watchdog, has not opted to violate the treaty.

Israeli leaders, however, repeatedly attack Tehran's nuclear program and strive to portray Iran as a regime hell-bent on imminent nuclear war.

Under the claim and a warning that Iran could gain nuclear weapons within "months", Israel regularly threatens to militarily wipe out Iranian nuclear infrastructure.

A recent report by Israel's *Jerusalem Post* revealed that Israeli missile operators have begun weekly drills to hone their skills to prepare for a possible conflict with Iran.

Despite Israeli preparations and eagerness to stop Iran's nuclear program militarily, the White House — which would ultimately be engaged in a military conflict with Tehran — has yet to give the green light for such an operation.

On May 3, Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned that using military might against Iran would yield only temporary results, obliquely warning Israel against launching a unilateral attack on the country.

The administration of President Obama, while promoting negotiations with the Tehran government over the disputed nuclear case, seems to be satisfied with Congress efforts to pass further sanctions against the Middle Eastern country.

The US Congress has launched an initiative to give Obama unprecedented powers to punish firms that export gasoline to Iran.

A legislation unveiled last week, supported by AIPAC, looks to tighten screws on the Ahmadinejad government, which imports about 40 percent of its gasoline demand.

"You can affect Israel's future and promote America's interests in the Middle East by urging your members of Congress to support these important initiatives," AIPAC said on its website.

This is while under the reign of a right-leaning government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel seems to be moving down a collision course with the Obama White House.

Robert Satloff, an analyst who joined an AIPAC panel on Sunday, warned of "the potential for a deep disagreement between the US and Israel governments over how to really deal with a nuclear Iran," according to a video on the AIPAC website.

The Netanyahu government also has differences with Washington over the Middle East peace process and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

President Peres, meanwhile, urged the influential lobby to see to the passage of the bill by pushing members of Congress.

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