

Russia Warns U.S. Against Striking Iran

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Russia Warns U.S. Against Striking Iran

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV, Associated Press Writer *Thu Feb 16, 11:29 AM ET*

Russia's top military chief on Thursday warned the United States against launching a military strike against Iran and a top diplomat voiced hope that close cooperation with China could help resolve the Tehran nuclear crisis.

With tension mounting over Iran's nuclear programs, Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, the chief of Russia's general staff, warned the United States against attacking Iran.

"A military scenario can't be ruled out," Baluyevsky was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies.

He said that while Iran's military potential cannot compare to the United States', "it is hard to predict how the Muslim world will respond to the use of force against Iran."

"This may stir the whole world, and it is crucial to prevent anything like that," Baluyevsky was quoted as saying.

Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Alekseyev, meanwhile, said that cooperation with China could help push Iran toward accepting Moscow's offer to host Iran's uranium enrichment program.

The Russian proposal has become a centerpiece of international efforts to defuse tensions over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

"We are counting on the continuation of close contacts with our Chinese colleagues and other interested countries," Alekseyev was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency. He added, however, that the Iranian nuclear issue recently had become "sharper," and "it is too early to assess the effectiveness of our joint steps to resolve it."

Iran's ambassador to Moscow said Thursday that Tehran hoped Russia would be able to help resolve the international crisis surrounding the Iranian nuclear program.

"Taking into account the good relations between Russia and Iran, I hope that together we can overcome this crisis which has arisen recently," Gholamreza Ansari said at a meeting with Russian lawmakers.

Ansari confirmed that a delegation is expected to travel to Moscow on Monday to discuss the proposal. He would not say who will lead it, but the Interfax news agency quoted

Vyacheslav Moshkalo, a spokesman for the Russian embassy in Tehran, as saying that the team will be headed by Javad Vaeidi, Iran's deputy nuclear negotiator.

Konstantin Kosachev, the head of Russian parliament's foreign affairs committee, said after his discussions with the ambassador that he was satisfied that the Iranians would be coming in good faith.

"Iran understands the seriousness of the situation and is ready to continue discussions between experts to reach a compromise on the Russian proposal," he said. He said he had received assurances that "the delegation is getting ready for talks and will have all the necessary authority for conducting negotiations."

Kosachev also sharply criticized Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's remarks in which he called for Israel's destruction and questioned whether the Holocaust occurred.

"Such statements don't help strengthen Iran's international prestige," he said with Ansari standing at his side.

A Western diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the strong international consensus developed so far, including Russia, "is probably the strongest instrument we have going right now in trying to influence Iranian behavior."

Moscow is deeply concerned about the current Iranian regime's prospects for acquiring nuclear weapons, not only because Russia is geographically located close to Iran, but also because of the impact that could have on other Middle East players' nuclear aspirations, including Saudi Arabia's, the diplomat said.

The diplomat also noted that by aspiring to a central role in resolving the Iran crisis, Russia wanted to show that it could use the contacts it has built up over the years — including direct communications with the Iranians — to advance the concerns of the international community.

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