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AP News

Israel says it's better prepared for war with Iran

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Israel's deputy premier said Monday that Israel's air force has improved its capabilities and is better prepared for a war with Iran, considered a dangerous enemy because of its nuclear program.

Moshe Yaalon, a former military chief, says the air force now has better refueling and range, and has made "a massive improvement in the accuracy of ordnance and intelligence."

He told an air power conference Monday that the same sort of airstrikes Israel has used against terrorists along its borders also "can be used ... for war against the conventional Syrian army, and also for war on a peripheral state like Iran."

Yaalon serves as a Cabinet minister for strategic affairs as well as deputy premier. As a lieutenant-general, he served as chief of staff of the Israeli military from 2002-2005.

Israel considers Iran a serious threat because of its nuclear program, missiles and references by its leaders to Israel's destruction. Israel also views Iran as a threat because of its continued material support to Hezbollah and Hamas militants who have struck Israel.

Iran says its nuclear program is peaceful, but Israel insists Iran is building weapons. Israel says it prefers diplomacy but has not ruled out a military strike on Iran.

In past years, Israel has launched a limited number of pre-emptive attacks against strategic military targets, including a strike on Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981.

Yaalon's comments came as diplomats from 189 nations were gathered in New York for a five-year review of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, of which Iran is a member, while Israel is not. The treaty regulates the spread of atomic technology with the aim of keeping nuclear weapons out of the hands of nations that do not possess them already.

The U.S. and its allies are pushing for a new round of sanctions on Iran, as punishment for refusing U.N. Security Council demands to curb parts of its nuclear program that give Tehran a possible pathway to weapons.

Israel is widely believed to have nuclear weapons but employs a policy of "ambiguity," neither confirming nor denying that. Israel insists it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East, but pictures leaked by a former technician at Israel's main reactor in 1986 led experts to estimate that Israel has world's sixth-largest nuclear arsenal.

The International Atomic Energy Agency is expected to make Israel's secret weapons arsenal the subject of its June summit, marking the first time the international body charged with enforcing the NPT addresses the subject.