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## Flap in Jerusalem over Aug. 21 activation of Iran's first reactor

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Iran's first nuclear reactor at Bushehr

The sudden announcement in Moscow and Tehran on Aug. 11 that Russia is set to activate Iran's first nuclear power reactor by loading the fuel on Aug. 21 has caused a major flap in Israel in view of the military aspects of the plant. **DEBKAfile's** military sources report that only last week, high Israeli officials asked Washington for clarifications on the latest intelligence information that Moscow had decided to finally activate the Bushehr reactor after innumerable delays.

The White House called the Kremlin and was assured that President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stood by their pledge to President Barack Obama that the Russian-built nuclear plant would not go on line this year.

This pledge now proves worthless. Indeed, Rostratom director Sergei Kiryenko will attend the Bushehr launching ceremony.

Jerusalem is also worried by the news that Russia has stationed S-300 anti-missile batteries in Abkhazia on the Black Sea because it ties in with the imminent activation of the Bushehr reactor. It is taken as a signal that Israel's air route to Iran is hereby closed and Moscow will do its utmost to thwart an Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.

John Bolton, former US ambassador to the United Nations and adviser to the Bush administration, defined Moscow's date for loading nuclear fuel rods into the Iranian reactor as touching off a point of no return. Talking to Fox News Friday, Aug. 11, he said Aug. 21 is a deadline "by which Israel would have to launch an attack on Iran's Bushehr reactor before it becomes effectively 'immune' to assault."

Once they are loaded, he warned, "an attack risks spreading radiation in the air and perhaps in the water of the Persian Gulf."

Bolton gave Israel no more than a week to destroy Iran's nuclear program. "If they're going to do it, that's all the window they have," he said, noting that Israel attacked the Iraqi Osirak reactor in 1981 and the nuclear plant Syria was building in 2007, before the fuel rods were in place.

The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Ali Akbar Salehi said Friday, Aug. 13, "The process of loading fresh fuel into the reactor building would begin on Aug. 21. Then the reactor will be officially classified as a nuclear energy installation. The testing phase will be complete and the physical launch begin."

According to **DEBKAfile's** military sources, the Bushehr reactor billed as a peaceful project is in fact integral to Iran's military program because the fuel rods powering it can also produce weapons-grade plutonium. Attached to the main plant too are a number of smaller facilities connected to the weapons program.

An earlier report in the Atlantic magazine estimated that the chances of a military strike against Iran in the next 12 months are "better than 50%." It is the result of extensive research for the magazine by Middle East expert Jeffrey Goldberg. After interviewing some 40 current and past Israeli decision makers and as many American and Arab officials, Goldberg expects Israel to launch an attack with the next few months, possibly supported by the US and UK.

But that was before the rescheduled Bushehr launching. Bolton has since made a point of

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