

Iran video threatens missile strikes on UAE, Saudi Arabia

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The video tweeted and later deleted by the semi-official Fars news agency comes as Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei blamed Riyadh and Abu Dhabi for the attack in the city of Ahvaz on Saturday that killed at least 25 people and wounded over 60. (Photo: Reuters)

Tehran: An Iranian media outlet close to the country's hard-line Revolutionary Guard published a video Tuesday threatening the capitals of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with missile attacks, further raising regional tensions after a weekend militant attack on a military parade in Iran.

The video tweeted and later deleted by the semi-official Fars news agency comes as Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei blamed Riyadh and Abu Dhabi for the attack in the city of Ahvaz on Saturday that killed at least 25 people and wounded over 60.

The threat amplifies the unease felt across the greater Persian Gulf, which is seeing Iran's economy upended in the wake of America's withdrawal from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers and Saudi and Emirati forces bogged down in their yearslong war in Yemen.

The video shows file footage of previous ballistic missile attacks launched by the Guard, then a graphic of a sniper rifle scope homing in on Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. The video also threatened Israel.

“The era of the hit-and-run has expired,” Khamenei's voice is heard in the video, the segment taken from an April speech by the supreme leader.

“A heavy punishment is underway.” Iran has fired its ballistic missiles twice in anger in recent years. In 2017, responding to an Islamic State attack on Tehran, the Guard fired missiles striking targets in Syria. Then, earlier this month, it launched a strike on a meeting of Iranian Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq.

The Guard, a paramilitary force answerable only to Khamenei, has sole control over Iran's ballistic missile program.

Under Khamenei's orders, Iran now limits its ballistic missiles to a range of 2,000 kilometers, which gives Tehran the range to strike Israel, Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as well as regional American military bases.

Saturday's attack targeted one of many parades in Iran marking the start of the country's long 1980s war with Iraq, part of a commemoration known as “Sacred Defense Week.” Militants disguised as soldiers opened fire as rows of troops marched past officials in Ahvaz.

Arab separatists in the region claimed the attack and Iranian officials have blamed them for the assault. The separatists accuse Iran's Persian-dominated government of discriminating against its ethnic Arab minority. Iran's Khuzestan province, where Ahvaz is the provincial capital, also has seen recent protests over Iran's nationwide drought, as well as economic protests.

The Islamic State group also claimed Saturday's attack, initially offering incorrect information about it and later publishing a video of three men it identified as the attackers. The men in the video, however, did not pledge allegiance or otherwise identify themselves as IS followers.

State TV reported late Monday that authorities have detained 22 suspects linked to the group behind the attack and confiscated ammunition and communication equipment. Fars also reported that five militants took part in the assault, all of whom were killed. It said two of them were brothers and another one was their cousin.

On Monday, the Guard's acting commander, Gen. Hossein Salami, vowed revenge against the perpetrators and what he called the "triangle" of Saudi Arabia, Israel and the United States.

"You are responsible for these actions; you will face the repercussions," the general said. "We warn all of those behind the story, we will take revenge." Khamenei, who has final say on all state matters, said Monday that the attack showed Iran has "a lot of enemies," according to remarks posted on his website. He linked the attackers to the United States, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

"Definitely, we will harshly punish the operatives" behind the terror attack, he added.

- AP