

September 17, 2009

Israel Defence Chief: Iran Not An Existential Threat

By REUTERS

Filed at 2:58 a.m. ET

JERUSALEM (Reuters) - Israeli Defence Minister [Ehud Barak](#) was quoted Thursday as saying he does not view Iran as a threat to the existence of the Jewish state, a view that would seem to depart from Israeli statements of the recent past.

Israel's mass-circulation Yedioth Ahronoth daily quoted Barak, the head of Israel's centre-left Labour party, as saying "Iran does not constitute an existential threat against Israel."

In response to a question about Tehran's nuclear program which Israel has said it sees as destined to produce atomic weapons that could put its existence at risk, Barak said in an interview with the paper:

"I am not among those who believe Iran is an existential issue for Israel."

Barak said "Israel is strong, I don't see anyone who could pose an existential threat," although he did add that he viewed Iran as a challenge to the whole world.

Israeli leaders have repeatedly said they view Iran's atomic development as a threat, pointing at President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's](#) calls for the Jewish state to be wiped off the map, and support for groups seeking Israel's destruction.

Iran insists its nuclear program is solely intended for energy production.

Western countries have sought to toughen sanctions against Iran, alongside efforts at dialogue by U.S. President [Barack Obama](#), in an attempt to pressure Iran to halt its nuclear development.

Israel is assumed to possess the only atomic arsenal in the Middle East.

(Writing by Allyn Fisher-Ilan; Editing by Charles Dick)

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