

Why Larijani's killing could prolong war

CNN ONLINE

As Iran's top national security official and de facto leader, Ali Larijani had emerged as the key architect of the country's military and diplomatic strategy since the start of the conflict with the US and Israel.

On Tuesday, Israel said it had killed him in a strike – a move that experts warned could prolong the fighting. According to Iran's Supreme National Security Council, he was killed alongside several others, including his son and security personnel.

At the age of 67, Larijani had become a visible emblem of the regime and its continuity. He even took part in a public rally in Tehran last week, despite being a prime target for Israel since the war began on February 28.

Throughout the first two weeks of the conflict, Larijani was also prolific on



social media, goading US President Donald Trump and on Monday warning Muslims across the Persian Gulf: "You know that America has no loyalty to you, and that Israel is your enemy. Stop for a moment and think about yourselves and the future of the region."

Larijani's death will deprive the Iranian leadership of one of its most astute and powerful voices – and may make any negotiations to end the war more difficult, analysts say. To many observers, Larijani had become the de facto leader of Iran amid the upheavals of recent weeks, especially in the days following Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's death.

He has been a "true insider who spent decades at the center of the system, which gave him credibility across different parts of the elite," according to Hamidreza Azizi, a visiting fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

In recent days, Larijani had been vocal and eloquent about Iran's readiness for sustained conflict. His death may make it longer. On Monday, media announced that a 71-year-old former IRGC commander, Mohsen Rezaei, had come out of retirement to become senior military adviser to Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei.



Israeli security forces and rescue workers gather at a Tel Aviv train station struck by shrapnel after an Iranian missile strike yesterday. Two people were killed in the barrage, Israeli medics said, as security services reported falling munitions hit multiple sites. PHOTO: AFP

US warship with Marines tracked off Singapore

The Wall Street Journal reported that additional troops would be ferried to the Middle East aboard the USS Tripoli

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A US Navy warship believed to be carrying Marines and sailors to the Middle East is nearing the Malacca Strait off Singapore as it makes its way to the region, maritime tracking data showed Tuesday.

The amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli was approaching Singapore, at the southwestern edge of the South China Sea, Tuesday morning, according to AIS tracking data seen by CNN.

US Navy ships often move with AIS transponders turned off. Revealing their positions while transiting areas with heavy maritime traffic, like the waters around Singapore, enables safer operations.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the additional Marines would be ferried by the Tripoli to the Middle East.

Those Marines are coming from the Okinawa-based 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), a rapid-response force of 2,200 personnel, after the Pentagon ordered the unit to deploy, according to three officials familiar with the plans.

US Central Command has said that roughly 50,000 US troops are already in the Middle East as part of the war with Iran. CNN has asked the US Navy's 7th Fleet and 5th Fleet for comment.

Officials told CNN the unit was being sent to the Middle East, without revealing exactly where

it would be deployed or what it would be used for.

An MEU consists of four elements: command, ground combat, air combat and logistics combat. MEUs typically have been used for missions like evacuations and amphibious operations that require ship-to-shore movements, like raids and assaults.

Tuesday morning at a speed of about 22 mph.

Based in Sasebo, Japan, the Tripoli, almost 850 feet long and displacing 45,000 tonnes, is essentially a small aircraft carrier and carries F-35 stealth fighters and MV-22 Osprey transports as well as landing craft to move troops ashore.



They also have ground and aviation combat components, and some units are trained for special operations.

Marinetraffic.com showed a track for an "unspecified US warship" departing Okinawa on March 11, through the South China Sea and nearing Singapore

It is the lead ship in an amphibious ready group, which would normally include the amphibious transport docks USS New Orleans and USS San Diego. CNN could not confirm the presence of those smaller ships with the Tripoli in maritime tracking sites Tuesday.

UK adviser attended US-Iran talks

Judged nuke deal was within reach

AGENCIES

Britain's national security adviser, Jonathan Powell, has attended the final round of US-Iran talks and judged that Tehran's offer on its nuclear programme was significant enough to prevent a rush to war, according to multiple sources and a report by The Guardian.

Powell believed progress had been made during discussions in Geneva in late February and described the Iranian proposal as "surprising," sources said. A further round of technical talks had been scheduled in Vienna, but never took place. Two days after the Geneva talks ended, the US and Israel launched their war on Iran.

Powell's presence at talks, held at Oman's ambassadorial residence in Cologne, was confirmed by three sources. He attended in an advisory role.

One source said his involvement reflected concerns over the level of technical expertise in the US delegation, which included Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and special envoy Steve Witkoff. A former official briefed on the talks said: "Witkoff and Kushner did not bring a US technical team with them."

Why convoys can't fully protect tankers from Iran attacks

AFP, Paris

The Israeli-US war on Iran has provoked a reaction from Tehran that has effectively choked a large chunk of the world's oil supply, and untangling the blockage will take a regional effort beyond what is currently being proposed, experts have told AFP.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly urged other global powers to send warships to escort convoys of tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway for the world's oil and liquefied natural gas supplies.

Iran has effectively closed the strait since the United States and Israel began a war on the Islamic republic last month, sending global oil prices up by more than 40 percent.

Trump has acknowledged the dangers of this kind of attack, at least in the strait.

But strategic planners need to look at a much bigger geographical area and consider a much wider array of tools if they are serious about protecting oil tankers, experts have told AFP.

"Treating 'Hormuz security' as a chokepoint-only problem is analytically incomplete," naval analyst Tayfun Ozberk told AFP.

The strait is labelled a "chokepoint" because it narrows to around 24 miles as it snakes between the southern Iranian coastline and the Arabian Peninsula's eastern tip, a jutting piece of land shared between UAE and Oman.

"The effective threat envelope Iran can generate already extends well beyond the narrows," said Ozberk. "That matters because traffic is exposed not only during the brief transit of the strait, but during the longer 'funneling' phase where routes, speed constraints, and predictable lanes increase vulnerability."

'LIMITED PROTECTION'

Iran has carried out attacks on shipping hundreds of miles from the strait since the war began, towards the Iraqi coast on one side and well into the Gulf of Oman on the other.

"Outside the strait, there are risks as long as you're within missile range," said a European military source who requested not to be named. And even within the strait, there are particular challenges that convoys could struggle with – for one, the narrowness of the channel drastically reduces the time a warship might have to stop an attack.

'RAISE UNCERTAINTY'

One of the thorniest problems a convoy could face is the possibility of sea mines. Turkish expert Ozberk said mines remained Iran's "most strategically efficient lever" because they "raise uncertainty and cost even when they don't sink ships".

"You can't 'convoy' your way around a credible mine threat without some degree of mine countermeasures," he said. Putting these measures in place slows convoys, as specialist vessels take time to clear any devices and they themselves need further protection.

The European military source told AFP if an area is mined "you first have to create safe routes with mine countermeasure vessels, which are very vulnerable and therefore must be protected, and which advance at four kilometres an hour to clear a strip a few hundred metres wide".

The overall complexity of protecting tankers in the wider region means any operation would probably not resemble a traditional convoy at all, Sidharth Kaushal, of the UK-based RUSI think tank argued. "Instead, destroyers and aircraft would likely attempt to provide an air-defence network over routes as a whole," he said. "The tempo of activity needed to make this shield persistent while also prosecuting targets on the Iranian mainland will likely prove highly resource intensive, however," he added.



Head of victorious Nepal party hails 'win for the country'

AFP, Kathmandu

The head of the victorious party in Nepal's election hailed its landslide triumph as a "win for the country" yesterday, urging new lawmakers to deliver for people who "sacrificed their blood" in last year's protests.

The March 5 polls elected a new 275-seat lower house of parliament, with 165 members chosen directly and 110 through proportional representation.

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) won a commanding mandate, taking 125 constituency seats and 57 proportional seats, falling just two short of a two-thirds majority. "This is not a win for RSP, this is a win for the country. We have to prove that," party founder and president Rabi Lamichhane told newly appointed lawmakers at an orientation programme, in his first public remarks since the election.

"The common people have voted for RSP so that the country can win... It is now in your hands what kind of future we write," the 51-year-old said.

The vote was the first since youth-led anti-corruption protests in September toppled the government.

The demonstrations began over a brief social media ban but tapped into longstanding fury over corruption and economic hardship.

At least 77 people were killed over two days of unrest. "This (change) has not come about through a normal situation," Lamichhane said. "(Our) brothers and sisters have sacrificed their blood for this change, we have to institutionalise it." Lamichhane vaulted to prominence in 2022 by channelling public frustration with Nepal's ageing political class, serving briefly as deputy prime minister and interior minister.



People queue with scooters outside a fuel station in Colombo, Sri Lanka, yesterday, after the government declared a weekly Wednesday holiday for public officials to conserve fuel amid concerns over supplies during the US-Israeli conflict with Iran. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake also urged electric vehicle owners to avoid charging their cars at night. PHOTO: AFP

UNICEF AID Israel to end Gaza-bound shipments from Egypt

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel said it would halt UN children's fund shipments to Gaza from Egypt after it said it had foiled an attempt to smuggle tobacco and nicotine in Unicef-coordinated shipments Tuesday.

Israel "informed the head of Unicef of the suspension of aid shipments to the Gaza Strip originating from Egypt and coordinated by the agency, following the thwarting of an attempted smuggling of tobacco and nicotine products detected today at the Kerem Shalom Crossing within humanitarian aid shipments coordinated by the agency," said COGAT, the Israeli body in charge of civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories.

COGAT added that the suspension would remain in place "until the agency provides the findings of a full investigation".