

The Israeli Attack on Iran May Sabotage the US Goal of a New Nuclear Deal

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On April 11, the Natanz uranium enrichment site was attacked. An explosion destroyed the internal power system for thousands of underground centrifuges, which form the main Iranian nuclear enrichment program. Israeli media attributed the attack to Israel's spy agency, Mossad, which is capable of cyber-sabotage.

The blast had created a crater so large that [Behrouz Kamalvandi](#), spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, had injured his head, back, leg and arm after falling into it.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman [Saeed Khatibzadeh](#) said the attack “could have led to a catastrophe that is a crime against humanity.” Tehran called the incident a terrorist attack.

The Biden administration is worried the Israeli act of [sabotage](#) may escalate tensions in the region and could be responsible for sabotaging the Iran nuclear talks in Vienna between the US and Iran.

Natanz is the latest in a long history of Israeli attacks on nuclear facilities through cyber means. [The Stuxnet attack](#) was conducted by Israel with the US and Dutch intelligence agencies and was the first cyberattack known to use a digital weapon.

Iran's Foreign Minister, [Mohammad Javad Zarif](#), threatened revenge for the attack and referenced the progress in talks toward lifting the US sanctions against Iran as the reason behind the Israeli attack.

Iran has always stressed the need for domestic energy development as the reason behind its peaceful nuclear program. Tehran denounces the use of nuclear weapons.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is aware that US President [Biden's primary foreign policy objective](#) is to bring Iran back into compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly referred to as the Iran nuclear deal of 2015.

The Natanz attack is a reminder of the diametrically opposing differences between Netanyahu and Biden and risks increasing the tension between Israel and the US, while Israel exaggerates the threat from Iran.

“We both agree that Iran must never possess nuclear weapons,” Mr. Netanyahu said Monday. “My policy as prime minister of Israel is clear. I will never allow Iran to obtain the nuclear capability to carry out its genocidal goal of eliminating Israel, and Israel will continue to defend itself against Iran’s aggression, and terrorism.”

In November, Israel assassinated a leading Iranian nuclear scientist in an ambush using a gun smuggled into the country and has assassinated others previously.

Over the past two years, Israel began attacking ships carrying Iranian fuel, and Iran retaliated by targeting several Israeli-owned cargo ships.

Israeli officials expressed concern that the ship Hyperion Ray could be targeted by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps following last week’s apparent mine attack by Israel on an Iranian military vessel in the Red Sea.

Israel has in recent weeks sabotaged Iranian ships at sea. Syria has accused Israel of airstrikes on its territory which are ongoing to the point of becoming routine.

In 2018, Mossad carried out a raid to steal nuclear secrets from a nuclear facility in Tehran in ongoing operations designed to oppose Iran’s progress.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said he traveled to Israel to advance US interests and further Biden’s goals for the region. At the same time, Israel attacked Iran, disregarding US goals in the region.

Austin was in Israel for meetings with Netanyahu and Defense Minister Benny Gantz. Monday’s joint press conference projected an image of friendship, even though behind the scenes the countries were following opposing agendas.

An Israeli official said that Austin and Gantz discussed Israel’s opposition to returning to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

“Our bilateral relationship with Israel, in particular, is central to regional stability and security in the Middle East,” said Austin, while adding the US is committed to “Israeli military edge” and advancing “strategic partnership” efforts with Tel Aviv.

[Maamoun Abu Nawwar](#), retired Jordanian air force general, said that the goal of the visit is to ensure that Israel does not escalate the situation in the Gulf.

“The fact that the first senior official from the Biden administration to visit Israel is a military man is a clear sign that they are hoping he will address the potential of a dangerous escalation ... between Israel and Iran,” he said.

“Israel views the United States as a full partner across all operational theatres, not the least Iran,” [Benny Gantz](#) said after meeting with Austin, but the partnership seemed fragile in light of the Natanz attack.

Israeli commentators have questioned whether the attack served a domestic purpose for

Netanyahu, rather than just a foreign policy objective.

Netanyahu is facing a corruption trial and is struggling to form a new coalition government after a general election last month that gave no party a majority. Analysts say they believe that a very public confrontation with Iran might help Netanyahu persuade critics that now is the time for an experienced prime minister.

Talks in Vienna are aimed at persuading Iran to impose limits on its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of US sanctions. The Natanz attack could damage efforts by the Biden administration to encourage Iran to return to the 2015 agreement negotiated by the Obama administration, where Tehran promised to limit its enrichment program.

In 2018, President Trump broke the deal and re-imposed US sanctions on Iran, while Iran later broke its commitments to limit its nuclear program.

Israel opposes returning to the 2015 deal, which it sees as not strong enough, or long enough in scope. Netanyahu has said Israel will not be bound by a new deal, which he describes as a temporary cap on Iranian nuclear capabilities.

[Heiko Maas](#), the German Foreign Minister, feared the Natanz attack would affect the Vienna negotiations for a new nuclear deal with Iran.

“What we are hearing currently out of Tehran is not a positive contribution, particularly the development in Natanz,” said Maas.

[Lamis Andoni](#), an analyst based in Amman, said that the Austin visit is aimed at helping the US return to the JCPOA.

“President Joe Biden is worried that Netanyahu would like to escalate the situation in the Gulf, with the aim of torpedoing the eventual return to the Iran nuclear deal,” she said.

Recent talks in Vienna between the US, Iran, and the other signatories got off to a slow start, with an apparent diplomatic stalemate. Outside influences such as the Natanz attack and retaliation may negatively affect later negotiations.

Since the 1960s, US foreign policy on the Middle East has been rumored to be written in Tel Aviv. However, the Biden administration is flying in the face of tradition, and putting US interests ahead of Israeli interests by attempting to renew the Iran nuclear deal. Biden has the support of western US allies, but Israel will try to thwart Biden’s success at every turn and may call on Israel’s new allies in the Arab Gulf monarchies to disrupt the US process.

Former [President Trump](#) is still seen as the leader of the Republican party, which is determined to stand in the way of Democratic President Biden achieving breakthroughs in the Iran nuclear deal renewal. Trump reneged on the deal to appease Israel and AIPAC, the US Zionist lobby. US party politics are influencing the Middle East region and may thwart the Biden goal of a new Iran nuclear deal.

Israeli officials have long threatened [military action against Iran](#), and the Republican party has its war-hawks who would support an attack on Iran.

[Martin Indyk](#), an American diplomat who has served as Ambassador to Israel, tweeted the day after the Natanz attack,

“BUT...the attack will also drive Iran’s nuclear program further underground which will then require anywhere/anytime inspections to detect and prevent it. And for that, there will need to be a nuclear agreement.”

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This article was originally published on [Mideast Discourse](#).

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Featured image: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivers a speech on Iran’s nuclear programme at the defence ministry in Tel Aviv on 30 April 2018 (Source: MEE)

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