



### [Israel is Blamed for Assassinating the Head of Iran's Nuclear Program](#)

Late last week, Iran's top nuclear scientist was assassinated in an attack widely attributed to Israel. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was killed while he was traveling outside of the capital Tehran and his convoy was ambushed. American and Israeli intelligence had long indicated that Fakhrizadeh was the man behind Iran's nuclear program and the lead engineer on a project that sought to design an atomic warhead. Fakhrizadeh was involved with Iran's formulative attempts to create a nuclear weapon, and despite these endeavors being halted in 2003, he had continued his work on what Iran described as peaceful nuclear development. Israel declined to take credit for the attack, but it came after a high-level meeting in Riyadh between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Mossad head Yossi Cohen, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Among other topics, it was reported that Iran was a focal point of the discussion. Analysts argue that the assassination of Fakhrizadeh was cynically intended to escalate hostilities with Iran prior to President-elect Biden taking office and be a significant setback for the incoming administration, which had made clear it was seeking to repair relations between the United States and Iran.

Predictably, Iran's response to the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh has been strong. Foreign Minister Javad Zarif called the plot a terrorist attack and said the perpetrators were desperately warmongering. The Chief of Staff for Iran's armed forces said that they would not rest until the people responsible for Fakhrizadeh's death had been served justice. The assassination is the second high-profile killing of a top Iranian leader in less than a year. Last January, an American drone strike killed Iranian Revolutionary Guards Commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad. Despite Iran vowing to strike back, the only repercussions for that attack was a rocket strike on an American base in Iraq that came with a forewarning.

Experts have warned that the timing of the attack on Fakhrizadeh could be linked with the impending change of presidential administration in the United States. President Trump was a vocal critic of the Obama-era nuclear deal with Iran, and pulled the U.S. out of the agreement. In contrast, President-elect Biden has expressed his desire to return the United States to the deal and cool tensions with Iran. The assassination of Fakhrizadeh is believed to have been an attempt to stir up hostilities with Iran in the lead up to Biden taking office. In November, it was reported in several media outlets that President Trump had asked advisors of the feasibility of striking Iran's primary nuclear facility in Natanz. The killing of Fakhrizadeh may have been an alternate way of agitating Iran prior to Trump exiting office.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been unambiguous in his demands that the United States not return to the nuclear deal with Iran under any circumstances. Netanyahu was one of several world leaders to congratulate President-elect Biden on his election victory, but the two have a contentious relationship dating back to the Obama administration. The future relationship between the United States and Israel under Biden will likely be heavily influenced by Biden's policy toward Iran and its nuclear program.