



## Iran's Natanz Nuclear Site is Attacked Amid Multilateral Diplomacy Efforts to Revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

Israel has been attributed with an attack on Iran's Natanz nuclear site amid multilateral global diplomacy efforts to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In an attempt to sabotage ongoing negotiations, a deliberately planned explosion instigated a power failure at the Natanz facility over the weekend which resulted in the destruction of the internal power system which supplies the uranium-enriching centrifuges at the site. Per their policy, Israel neither confirmed nor denied responsibility for the attack, but unnamed American, Iranian, and Israeli sources verified that they were the perpetrators behind the incident. In recent weeks, momentum has grown toward reinitiating the JCPOA that regulated Iran's nuclear activity. However, Israel has always been opposed to the nuclear deal and maintains that Iran was violating the terms of the agreement. President Biden is known to be an advocate of the JCPOA, and Israel has attempted to lobby him into a more aggressive stance regarding Iran. These efforts have largely been unsuccessful, as Biden seeks to re-engage the Iranian regime through diplomatic outreach. The Natanz attack was aimed at weakening Iran's leverage while negotiating a return to the JCPOA, and it adds to a growing catalogue of Israeli aggression against Iran when diplomatic solutions are being discussed.

Late last week, diplomats from the United States, United Kingdom, China, France, Germany, Russia, Iran, and the European Union engaged in indirect talks in Vienna to bring the United States and Iran back into compliance with the JCPOA. While representatives of Iran and the U.S. didn't directly meet, the other signatories of the JCPOA engaged in shuttle diplomacy to facilitate negotiations. The major points of the negotiations were lifting American sanctions on Iran, and returning Iran to the limits of uranium enrichment agreed upon under the JCPOA.

The attack on Natanz is not the first example of Israel escalating tensions with Iran by targeting its nuclear program. In December of last year, top Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh was assassinated outside Tehran in a plot that has been widely attributed to Israel. Additionally, several blasts hit the Natanz facility in July of 2020 which Iran suspects were perpetrated by Israel. Iran has vowed to take revenge for both the Natanz attacks and Fakhri-zadeh assassination, but experts have warned that Tehran must toe a fine line in doing so. Simultaneously, the Iranian regime must show force to indicate that Israeli attacks will not go unpunished, while not harming the prospects for returning to the JCPOA, which it needs to do in order for sanctions to be lifted.

In recent weeks, tension between Iran and Israel has increased at the same time that negotiations have begun to restore the JCPOA. Tit-for-tat attacks on maritime vessels have increased, with Israeli and Iranian ships both being targeted by the other side. For Israel, the continued antagonization of Iran while diplomatic outreach is ongoing indicates a lack of interest in procuring a peaceful solution. Additionally, striking the Natanz facility in this moment severely impedes Iran's leverage in negotiating a return to the JCPOA. Iran has vowed to replace the damaged infrastructure at Natanz with technological upgrades, but experts have indicated that this is a process that will take time. In the interim, negotiations to return to the JCPOA will continue.