

Will Israel attack Iran's nuclear plants?

Peter Symonds
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The Middle East stands on the brink of a wider war following Iran's retaliation against Israel for the attack on its consulate in Damascus on April 1 that killed seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC), including three top generals.

The howls of condemnation of Iran from Israel, the US and their allies stand in stark contrast to their tacit support for Israel's act of war and blatant violation of international law. The air strike not only violated Syrian sovereignty, as Israel has done repeatedly, but also constituted an attack on Iranian soil, as embassies are regarded by international convention.

The April 1 attack was not the first. Israel has been deliberately goading Iran into retaliation through a series of targeted strikes. In the past six months, while waging its genocidal war on Palestinians in Gaza, Israeli air strikes have killed at least 18 IRGC members, including key figures in Iranian relations in the Middle East. These include General Sayyed Razi Mousavi, who was regarded as Iran's top commander in Syria.

Tehran has repeatedly declared that it does not want war in the Middle East. Its retaliation on Saturday was calibrated more to assuage public anger at home, than to inflict serious damage on the Israeli airbase that it targeted. The ability of the militaries of Israel, the US, Britain, France and other countries to shoot down virtually all of the missiles and drones launched by Iran stems above all from the fact that Tehran telegraphed details of its plans to several Middle Eastern governments knowing the information would be passed on to Washington.

Having established a pretext, Israel will undoubtedly strike back. Israeli chief of staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi said as much on Monday and the Israeli war cabinet has been in virtually constant session since Saturday. When and how will be determined by a multitude of political and tactical considerations and is

the subject of widespread speculation in the Western media and think tanks.

What is not in doubt is that one of the prime targets of the fascistic Israeli regime is Iran's nuclear program and its capacity to build nuclear weapons if it chooses to do so. It is an open secret that Israel has an arsenal of nuclear bombs, variously estimated at between 100 and 400, along with sophisticated delivery systems. It will stop at nothing to maintain its monopoly of nuclear arms in the Middle East, especially over Iran.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly declared that Israel will not permit Iran to develop a nuclear arsenal and is an open advocate of using military means to achieve that end. As such, Netanyahu has been a bitter opponent of the deal struck in 2015 between the major powers and Tehran, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which imposed severe limits on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for an easing of crippling sanctions imposed by the UN, US and EU. Trump unilaterally abandoned the JCPOA and Biden's claims to resurrect the deal have foundered on his refusal to offer the slightest concession to Iran.

In an interview a year ago with CNN's Fareed Zakaria, Netanyahu poured scorn on the nuclear deal with Iran, declaring "it would have paved their way with gold" towards achieving Tehran's objectives. He then stated:

"If you want to stop Iran from becoming... military nuclear power, the only way that you can stop them is with a credible military threat. This is what worked against Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapon program in Iraq. That was done by us. This is what worked against Bashar al-Assad's nuclear military plans in Syria. That was done by us."

The references to Iraq and Syria make absolutely clear that what Netanyahu means by "threat" is a military attack. On June 7, 1981, Israeli war planes

bombed and partially destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear research reactor, killing 10 Iraqi soldiers and a French engineer. On September 2007, Israeli F-16 fighters bombed the partially completed al-Kubar nuclear facility near Deir ez-Zor in Syria.

The Israeli regime has now openly stated its determination to end Iran's nuclear programs and that military strikes are the only means for achieving that end. It has already been engaged in a criminal war of assassination and sabotage inside Iran aimed at interrupting and slowing Iran's progress.

Speaking to CNN, Netanyahu obliquely referred to Israel's covert activities, saying that Iran lags behind its original plans because of "efforts that we made, which are many folds, some in the operational side, some in the economic and the political side... we were able to slow them down. But not able to stop them completely."

There is a long list of murders, bombings and cyber-attacks inside Iran, never publicly acknowledged by Israel, but almost certainly carried out either directly by Mossad or its proxies—some in collaboration or by the US. To cite just a couple:

- In November 2020, a team of assassins ambushed and killed Iran's top nuclear physicist Moshen Fakhrizadeh in a brutal attack in Tehran in broad daylight. His car was raked by automatic weapons fire and a pickup truck loaded with explosives was blown up next to it. A year later, the *New York Times*, based on inside sources, acknowledged the murder was carried out by Israel and reveled in its ability in "methodically picking off" Iranian nuclear experts. Five had been killed to that point in targeted Israeli assassinations since 2007, and another wounded.

- Of the many cyber-attacks on Iran, one of the most damaging involved the infection of 30,000 computers across at least 14 facilities with the Stuxnet virus in 2010. Initially uncovered at Iran's nuclear power plant at Bushehr, it spread, including to Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment facility, where, according to one estimate, it destroyed as many as 1,000 of the 9,000 centrifuges by causing them to spin out of control. Two years later, a detailed article in the *New York Times* reported the US and Israel were responsible for the sabotage.

Israel certainly has the stated determination to halt Iran's nuclear programs and the means of carrying out

a reckless and inflammatory attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. To do so, however, would be tantamount to a declaration of war that would likely rapidly spiral out of control. To inflict permanent damage, a massive strike would be required as Iran's nuclear facilities are far more extensive than those of Iraq or Syria, and the most sensitive are buried deep underground.

While for political and tactical reasons Israel may decide to hold back at least in the short term, it is widely understood that the possibility of an attack exists. On Monday, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi expressed concerns that Israel would strike Iranian nuclear plants where its inspectors were working. Grossi said Iran closed its nuclear facilities on Sunday over "security considerations" and that, while they reopened on Monday, he kept IAEA inspectors away "until we see that the situation is completely calm."

Whatever Israel's immediate response to Iran's retaliatory strikes on Saturday, it will not be cosmetic. Having goaded Iran into striking back, and knowing that it has the "rock solid" support of US imperialism and its allies, it is likely that Israel will exploit the situation to inflict a serious blow against Iran or its regional allies—further escalating the widening regional conflict.



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