

Iran (April 21, 2021)

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1a)

The Biden Administration Will Find It Difficult to Contain Israel and Iran's Escalating Tensions

By Dalia Dassa Kaye

RAND Corporation

April 14, 2021

<https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/04/the-biden-administration-will-find-it-difficult-to.html>

„[...] Israel recognizes Iran as domestically vulnerable, facing a twin economic and pandemic crisis that may reduce Iran's capacity to retaliate. Indeed, Iran's retaliation to date for previous Israeli attacks, both within and outside the country, has been limited, probably increasing Israeli confidence that it can continue to strike Iran with manageable consequences. Israel may calculate that Iran's freedom of action is further constrained by the nuclear negotiations in Vienna, which hold out the prospects for critical economic relief. These Israeli attacks are part of a wider Israeli campaign, termed its “Octopus” doctrine by Israeli politician Naftali Bennett, to target Iran directly, not just Iranian proxies like Hezbollah. This has led to an expansion of Israel's “campaign between the wars,” originally designed to prevent an Iranian foothold in Syria but extending now to strikes on Iranian shipments in the Mediterranean and Red Sea. Israel has also shown that it's willing to strike directly within Iran itself. While sabotage of nuclear sites and assassinations of nuclear scientists are not new Israeli methods, today they are taking place in the context of this broader Israeli-Iranian escalation. This may make such attacks more frequent, as the opportunities and incentives for each side to attack the other in multiple domains and throughout the region increases. [...]“

1b)

60% enrichment carried important political messages, says parliament speaker

By Tehran Times

April 18, 2021

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/459988/60-enrichment-carried-important-political-messages-says-parliament>

„[...] The April 11 sabotage attack on the Natanz nuclear plant is an instance of war crime in terms of international law and the UN Charter. Calling the sabotage “nuclear terrorism”, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote a letter to the UN secretary general saying that this “war crime” must not go unpunished given its high risk of releasing dangerous materials. “The deliberate targeting of a highly sensitive safeguarded nuclear facility-with the high risk of potential release of radioactive material-constitutes reckless criminal nuclear terrorism. Considering the possible indiscriminate human and environmental consequences of this international crime, those who planned, ordered, participated and carried out this cowardly act committed a grave war crime; one that must not go unpunished. Any power with knowledge of, or acquiescence in, this act must also be held accountable as an accomplice to this war crime,” Zarif told the UN chief Antonio Guterres. [...]“

1c)

Iran and Israel's Undeclared War at Sea (Part 1): IRGC-Hezbollah Financing Schemes

By Matthew Levitt

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

April 6, 2021

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iran-and-israels-undeclared-war-sea-part-1-irgc-hezbollah-financing-schemes>

„[...] For years, Hezbollah has been actively involved in helping the IRGC-QF and its international network of merchants circumvent sanctions and ship oil products directly from Iran to Syria. Thus, Israel's efforts to disrupt such shipments should come as no surprise—especially after mid-2018, when these deliveries became Tehran's primary means of financing Hezbollah, and in some cases included arms as well. To be sure, Israel's maritime efforts are not nearly as extensive as its aerial campaign in Syria, which has substantially diminished Iran's ability to send Hezbollah weapons overland via Abu Kamal. The naval effort appears to be aimed at hindering, not crippling, Iranian oil shipments, perhaps due to the vulnerability of Israel's own shipping lanes through the Arabian Sea. Still, its maritime actions have caused delays that deprive the Syrian regime of gasoline imports and prevent hard cash, weapons, and missile production equipment from reaching Hezbollah. More than anything else, these incidents underscore the growing financial interdependency between Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah.“

1d)

Iran and Israel's Undeclared War at Sea (Part 2): The Potential for Military Escalation

By Farzin Nadimi

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

April 13, 2021

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iran-and-israels-undeclared-war-sea-part-2-potential-military-escalation>

„[...] Thus far, the maritime conflict between Iran and Israel has remained at a low-intensity gray-zone level below the threshold of declared hostilities, with both sides seeking to avoid escalation that might disrupt their respective shipping lanes and economies. Yet both countries have substantial special naval warfare capabilities and experience, so neither is likely to settle for anything less than maritime superiority. The pace of their attacks has already increased and can be expected to accelerate further, while also expanding to a larger geographical area and potentially employing additional systems and tactics (e.g., submarines; motherships used as staging posts; longer-range drones and fast-attack vessels). The Saviz incident in particular showed the risk of escalation. By aiming below the waterline, the attack was seemingly designed to cripple or even sink the ship. And despite the vessel's technical classification as a civilian cargo ship, the attack represented the first operation against a de facto military target, which might compel Iran to retaliate in kind against Israeli naval forces. Moreover, the incident occurred less than a hundred miles from the passing USS Eisenhower carrier group, and afterward, Iran made unsubstantiated claims that other countries may have been involved, pointing to the risk of Washington being dragged into a fight. Ultimately, the extent of the damage to the Saviz might require substantial shoreside repairs and possible withdrawal to Iran. If so, Tehran may decide to maintain the station by deploying one of its new, more heavily armed floating sea bases such as the Shahid Roudaki (IRGC Navy) or Makran (Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, or IRIN). That would mean a substantial, formal Iranian military presence in the Red Sea—a scenario that Israel and other regional powers would find very hard to swallow.“

1e)

By sabotaging Iran's nuclear program, Israel sabotaged world peace

By Scott Ritter

April 12, 2021

<https://www.rt.com/op-ed/520848-iran-israel-sabotage-nuclear/>

„[...] Israel's alleged attack on Natanz is reprehensible on any number of levels. Had it taken place one day earlier, it could have killed a large number of senior technicians, nuclear scientists and politicians who were at the site celebrating "National Nuclear Technology Day". Even if Israel deliberately timed its attack to avoid such a scenario, the fact that Israel had the capacity to carry out such an attack is sobering. If any other nation in the world attacked a functioning uranium enrichment facility operating under IAEA safeguards, it would be rightly condemned, and harsh measures taken in retaliation. Israel, however, operates under the umbrella of diplomatic immunity provided by the US. As such, Israel is untouchable, no matter how egregious its actions – even when, as is the case here, they infringe on the diplomatic and national security imperatives and priorities of the US. [...]“

1f)

Full Text of FM Zarif's Letter to UN Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres, on the Sabotage at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant

April 12, 2021

<https://en.mfa.ir/portal/newsview/634433/Full-Text-of-FM-Zarifs-Letter-to-UN-Secretary-General-His-Excellency-Mr-Antonio-Guterres-on-the-Sabotage-at-the-Natanz-Fuel-Enrichment-Plant>

„I am writing to inform you that in the early morning hours of 11 April 2021, a dangerous, reckless sabotage at the electricity distribution network of the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant caused a blackout and the disruption of the operations of this sensitive nuclear facility which has been under IAEA safeguards and extensive monitoring. The timely and professional containment measures adopted by the highly dedicated management and staff of the NFEP and Iranian Atomic Energy Organization averted what could have become a human and environmental catastrophe. The deliberate targeting of a highly sensitive safeguarded nuclear facility—with the high risk of potential release of radioactive material—constitutes reckless criminal nuclear terrorism. Considering the possible indiscriminate human and environmental consequences of this international crime, those who planned, ordered, participated and carried out this cowardly act committed a grave war crime; one that must not go unpunished. Any power with knowledge of, or acquiescence in, this act must also be held accountable as an accomplice to this war crime. [...]“

1g)

Rising concerns over the US-Iran impasse: A European view

By Michel Duclos

Atlantic Council

March 23, 2021

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/rising-concerns-over-the-us-iran-impasse-a-european-view/C>

„Two months after the Joe Biden administration took office, concerns are growing about the lack of progress between the United States and Iran. No breakthrough on the two sides returning to compliance

with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has happened. Regional tensions are on the rise again. Rockets fired by Iran-backed militias are hitting on or near bases in Iraq that house American troops. The Houthi rebels in Yemen have launched repeated missile attacks against Saudi Arabia. An Israeli ship was the victim of an incident in the Persian Gulf and an oil slick has fouled Israeli beaches. [...]"

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2a)

China, With \$400 Billion Iran Deal, Could Deepen Influence in Mideast

The countries signed a sweeping pact on Saturday that calls for heavy Chinese investments in Iran over 25 years in exchange for oil — a step that could ease Iran's international isolation.

By Farnaz Fassihi and Steven Lee Myers

March 29, 2021

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/27/world/middleeast/china-iran-deal.html>

2b)

Strategic Partnership Ltd.: China-Iran Relations and their Significance for Israel

By Assaf Orion

The Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University

April 18, 2021

https://www.inss.org.il/publication/iran-china-cooperation/#_ednref1

„Israel's policy on its relations with China aims mainly to maximize benefits for the Israeli economy without harming the strategic relationship with the United States. In recent years, given the intensifying competition between the two powers, Washington has stepped up its demands from Jerusalem for more caution in relations with China, and Israel's awareness of American sensitivity in this matter, as an indirect but grave risk, has unquestionably increased. Israel's defense exports to China were already banned by 2005, and an advisory mechanism for the state regulators was instituted in 2020 to allow somewhat improved oversight of foreign investments. China's relations with Iran, particularly the emerging trend toward stronger military, defense, and intelligence cooperation between them, highlight the direct risks that these relations pose to Israel. This requires that Israel be more alert, exercise greater caution, and reconsider the balance in its policy between benefit and risk. In the framework of this trend, Chinese technologies will likely contribute increasingly to intensification of the military threat posed to Israel by Iran and its proxies. Information, intelligence, and technologies obtained by China, including from Israel, are increasingly likely to find their way into Iranian hands. Israel should adapt its risk management to a reality in which an important economic partner is working closely with Israel's main enemy, and is increasingly likely to share intelligence, military technologies, weapon systems, and military and operational knowledge with it. At the same time, Israel should adapt its dialogue with the United States to Washington's new priorities landscape, whose summit is China, while the Middle East is receding into the background. China-Iran relations are the convergence of the number one threats to the United States and Israel, respectively. This calls for joint monitoring; discussion of policy challenges, linkages, trade-offs, and tensions; design and planning of relevant responses; and coordination of efforts. Israel's new partnerships in the region make it possible to expand this circle to the Abraham Accords signatories and to additional countries.“

2c)

China-Iran's 25 Year deal not aimed at Any Country: Iranian Envoy

By Belt & Road News

April 17, 2021

<https://www.beltandroad.news/china-irans-25-year-deal-not-aimed-at-any-country-iranian-envoy/>

„China and Iran recently signed a major 25 year agreement to enhance comprehensive cooperation in a range of fields including trade. After the signing of the agreement, some Western Media Outlets tried to depict the agreement negatively. Some claimed that this agreement met with backlash in Iran. What is the actual situation? Will the agreement implementation be influenced by US sanctions? How does Iran evaluate its cooperation with China? Iranian Ambassador to China, Mohammad Keshavarzzadeh shared his views on these issues. [...]“

2d)

Iran-China deal amid the Global Power Transition

By Dr. Ezgi Uzun

Belt & Road News

April 15, 2021

<https://www.beltandroad.news/iran-china-deal-amid-the-global-power-transition/>

„[...] International experts view the China-Iran agreement, based on its content and timing, as a political maneuver against the nuclear deal, which has been going back and forth between the Biden and Tehran administrations. While some claim that the indecisiveness of the Biden administration in returning to the nuclear deal with Iran is moving Iran increasingly closer to China, others see the deal as a “game changer” for Iran. On the other hand, given Iran’s recent experience with both China and the US, we can argue that the agreement is not a “game changer” for Iran’s foreign policy in the international arena, but rather “a part of the current plan”. This is because this issue is essentially a global one that transcends Iran’s bilateral relations with the two countries, is intertwined with the global rivalry between the US and China, and moves in cycles at the regional level. In this context, three points must be considered in order to thoroughly assess the agreement’s impact on bilateral relations: the dynamics of the global power transition between China and the US, China’s general Middle East policy, which has been gradually taking shape since 2016 as an extension of its power transition project, and the “multilateralism” policy followed by Iran at a global level. [...]“

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3)

Minister Sergey Lavrov’s statement and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif, Tehran, April 13, 2021

https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4682255

„Last month, we marked the 20th anniversary of signing the Treaty on the Basis for Mutual Relations and Principles of Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Treaty laid the foundation for bilateral interstate communications under the

principles of international law and mutual respect. Our relations fully meet the high standards set forth in this extremely important document. We have noted the intensive nature of bilateral political dialogue, including at the highest level. We have agreed to continue implementing trade, economic, energy, agricultural, transport, industrial and nuclear-sector agreements, reached by our leaders. We have praised the close coordination between various agencies in key areas of the diverse Russian-Iranian partnership. We have positively assessed contacts between the secret services, military agencies, humanitarian institutions and overall human contacts. We have separately discussed expanding cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and Iran. In December 2020, it was decided to launch talks on signing a permanent free trade agreement that would replace the 2018 temporary agreement which is now being successfully implemented. We have agreed that full-fledged trade liberalisation will help boost mutual trade still further.[...]"

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4a)

Why a quick return to the Iran nuclear deal is needed to avoid a real nuclear crisis

By Seyed Hossein Mousavian

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

April 11, 2021

<https://thebulletin.org/2021/04/why-a-quick-return-to-the-iran-nuclear-deal-is-needed-to-avoid-a-real-nuclear-crisis/>

„[...] First, the administration is divided. According to Foreign Policy magazine, the Biden administration’s negotiator with Iran, Robert Malley, and Deputy National Security Advisor Jonathan Finer are in favor of rejoining, but Secretary of State Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan favor a harder line. Second, the powerful pro-Israel lobby has joined in pressing the Biden administration not to rejoin the JCPOA. Third, congressional Democrats are divided. In two separate letters to Blinken, bipartisan groups of about 160 members of the House have called for continued pressure on Iran. The chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey, opposes revival of the JCPOA in its current form. In a statement, Republican Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma warned, “As a reminder: Members of Congress rejected the JCPOA on a bipartisan basis in 2015. If you (Biden) repeat history next week by restoring that failed agreement, we will work to reject it once again.” [...]"

4b)

Why Israel would attack Iran’s nuclear facility

By John Ghazvinian

April 12, 2021

<https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/04/12/why-israel-would-attack-irans-nuclear-facility/>

„[...] In effect, if Israel was behind the attack it has assumed for itself a unique kind of leverage. Although officially, Israel is not a member of the P5+1 negotiating group, it has shown that it is, for all practical purposes, able to veto or at least complicate the decisions of the other members. And this, perhaps, is the most powerful impact of its actions. By taking aggressive steps against Iran that Washington is unable or unwilling to prevent, Israel effectively buys itself a seat at the table at the P5+1 it would otherwise be denied. All of this would be a brilliant move, if there was anything new about it. But it has been the Israeli playbook since at least the turn of the century.“

4c)

A Return to the Nuclear Agreement? Contacts between the United States and Iran

The first round of indirect talks between Washington and Tehran ended on an optimistic note, but a return to the 2015 agreement is still a long way off. What obstacles confront the two sides? How might Israel influence the negotiations? And will the “power failure” at Natanz influence the deliberations?

By Eldad Shavit, Sima Shine

The Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University

April 13, 2021

<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/vienna-talks/>

4d)

Iran Says It Began Enriching Uranium to 60 Percent. How Important Is That?

A highly purified form of uranium is needed to make an atomic bomb, but the main point of Tehran’s action may be to give it leverage in nuclear talks.

By Rick Gladstone, William J. Broad and Michael Crowley

April 16, 2021

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-talks-uranium-explainer.html?searchResultPosition=4>

„Iran has started enriching its uranium supply to 60 percent purity — the closest the country has ever come to the level needed for a weapon — in response to the sabotage of an Iranian nuclear site last weekend linked to Israel. The move by Iran, reported Friday on state media, made good on threats Iranian officials had announced after the sabotage, which have cast a new cloud over talks to save the 2015 deal limiting Iran’s nuclear abilities in exchange for sanctions relief. President Hassan Rouhani of Iran has gone further, boasting as those talks resumed in Vienna that his scientists could easily enrich uranium to 90 percent purity — weapons-grade fuel — although he insisted, as Iranian leaders have repeatedly, that Iran “is never seeking to make an atomic bomb.” [...]

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5a)

Why Biden should not treat humanitarian trade as a concession to Iran

The Biden administration has boxed itself into a maximalist position that jeopardises efforts to make the Iran sanctions programme more humane. European governments should be pushed to change course.

By Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj

The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)

March 25, 2021

<https://ecfr.eu/article/why-biden-should-not-treat-humanitarian-trade-as-a-concession-to-iran/>

5b)

US Sanctions Against Iran and the Future of the JCPOA: A View From Tehran and Moscow

By Ivan Timofeev

April 7, 2021

The Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)

<https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/us-sanctions-against-iran-and-the-future-of-the-jcpoa-a-view-from-tehran-and-moscow/>

„[...] The Russian position on the JCPOA suggests the following. First, Moscow welcomes the very fact of a return to negotiations. Second, Russia insists on the need to separate nuclear issues from other topics. Otherwise, the possibility of reaching any compromises becomes extremely doubtful. Third, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs offers a "synchronised approach". That is, Washington and Tehran must synchronise their concessions: the former unfreezes Iranian assets and lifts sanctions, the latter is gradually returning to the terms of the deal. At the same time, much will depend on what exactly the "synchronised approach" will consist of. For example, the United States could reverse Trump's 2019 and 2020 executive orders, but keep in effect all sanctions renewed in 2018. Under these conditions, Iran is also unlikely to return to full compliance with its obligations. Timing is also important. The process of returning to the JCPOA could be almost endless. External factors must also be taken into account. Even if it is possible to separate the JCPOA from other issues, they will still have a background influence on the negotiations. The situation in Syria, Yemen and other points of contention that underscore the US-Iranian conflict remain unstable. [...]"