

Iran Nuclear Deal: Forestalling Spillover of Ukraine War in Gulf

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Amidst much fanfare and eager anticipation for imminent restoration of Iran nuclear pact, unilaterally annulled by Washington in May 2018, International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi arrived in Tehran late on Friday. But the much-hyped visit was nothing more than a formality as he would hold talks only with Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian before returning to Vienna in the afternoon.

Before embarking on the futile visit, though, the figurehead chief of the nuclear watchdog told reporters the Iran nuclear deal was a “fait accompli.” Though he likely used the Latin phrase in a positive sense, implying a “done deal,” in order to deliberately raise expectations, fait accompli in legal jargon typically has negative connotations, implying a “past and closed transaction” requiring no further litigation, though the gaffe could also be construed as a Freudian slip spilling out subconsciously held belief.

Restoring Iran nuclear deal doesn’t require a Manhattan Project to hammer out all the intricate details with diplomatic finesse and suave statesmanship. Had Biden been sincere in reviving the pact, he would’ve immediately restored JCPOA within first few months of the presidency.

In fact, all the media hype surrounding imminent restoration of Iran nuclear pact should be viewed in the broader backdrop of escalation of hostilities between the US and Russia following the latter’s military intervention in Ukraine in order to scuttle the steadfast regional alliance Iran has forged with Russia in recent years.

In January, following Russia’s troop build-up along Ukraine’s borders portending imminent invasion, Houthi rebels in Yemen backed by Iran, which is Russia’s most dependable

regional ally in the decade-long Syrian conflict, significantly escalated missile strikes on the oil-rich Gulf States in order to take pressure off Russia in the Ukraine stand-off by opening a second front in the veritable Achilles' heel of the energy-dependent industrialized world.

To buttress the defenses in the Gulf, US F-22 fighter jets arrived in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Feb. 12, as part of an American defense response to missile attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeting the country. The Raptors landed at Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi, which hosts 2,000 US troops. American soldiers there launched Patriot interceptor missiles and briefly had to take shelter after the missiles exploded in the airspace above the military base on Jan. 24.

The deployment came after the Houthi rebels launched three successive attacks targeting Abu Dhabi in January, including one on Jan. 17 targeting a fuel depot that killed three people and wounded six. The attacks coincided with visits by presidents from South Korea and Israel to the UAE. Though overshadowed by the Ukraine crisis, the missile strikes targeting the Emirates sparked a major US response. The American military sent the USS Cole on a mission to Abu Dhabi.

Last June, the [Associated Press reported](#) [1] the largest warship in the Iranian navy caught fire and later sank in the Gulf of Oman under unclear circumstances. The blaze began around midnight and firefighters tried to contain it, but their efforts failed to save the 207-meter Kharg, which was used to resupply other ships in the fleet at sea and conduct training exercises. The Fars News Agency reported 400 sailors and trainee cadets on board fled the vessel, with 33 suffering injuries.

The ship sank near the Iranian port of Jask, some 1,270 kilometers southeast of Tehran on the Gulf of Oman near the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf. Photos circulated on Iranian social media showed sailors wearing life jackets evacuating the vessel as a fire burned behind them.

Meanwhile, a massive fire broke out at the oil refinery serving Iran's capital, sending thick plumes of black smoke over Tehran. Similarly, last April, an Iranian ship MV Saviz believed to be an Iranian Revolutionary Guard base and anchored for years in the Red Sea off Yemen was targeted in an attack suspected to have been carried out by Israel.

Among the major attacks to target Iran, none have struck deeper than two explosions in July 2020 and then again in April last year at its Natanz nuclear facility. Former chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence service Yossi Cohen offered the closest acknowledgment yet that his country was behind the attacks targeting Iran's nuclear program and the assassination of a military scientist.

While Cohen was being interviewed in investigative program Uvda of Israel's Channel 12 in a segment aired last June, the interviewer, journalist Ilana Dayan, offered a detailed description of how Israel snuck the explosives into Natanz's underground halls.

The man who was responsible for these explosions, it became clear, made sure to supply to the Iranians the marble foundation on which the centrifuges were placed, Dayan said. "As they install this foundation within the Natanz facility, they have no idea that it already includes an enormous amount of explosives."

They also discussed the November 2020 killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, an Iranian scientist

who began Tehran's military nuclear program decades ago. While Cohen on camera didn't claim the killing, Dayan in the segment described Cohen as having "personally signed off on the entire campaign." Dayan also described how a remotely operated machinegun fixed to a pickup truck killed Fakhrizadeh and later self-destructed.

A [joint American-Israeli program](#) [2], involving a series of short-of-war clandestine strikes, aimed at taking out the most prominent generals of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and targeting Iran's power stations, industrial infrastructure, and missile and nuclear facilities has been going on since early 2020 after the commander of IRGC's Quds Force General Qassem Soleimani was assassinated in an American airstrike at the Baghdad airport on January 3, 2020.

Besides pandering to Zionist lobbies in Washington, another purpose of these subversive attacks has been to avenge a string of audacious attacks mounted by the Iran-backed forces against the US strategic interests in the Persian Gulf that brought the US and Iran to the brink of a full-scale war in September 2019.

In addition to planting limpet mines on oil tankers off the coast of UAE in May 2019 and the subsequent downing of the American Global Hawk surveillance drone in the Persian Gulf by Iran, the brazen attack on the Abqaiq petroleum facility and the Khurais oil field in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia on September 14, 2019, was the third major attack in the Persian Gulf against the assets of Washington and its regional allies.

The September 14, 2019, attack on the Abqaiq petroleum facility in eastern Saudi Arabia was an apocalypse for the global oil industry because it processed five million barrels crude oil per day, almost half of Saudi Arabia's total oil production.

The subversive attack sent jitters across the global markets and the oil price surged 15%, the largest spike witnessed in three decades since the First Gulf War after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, though the oil price was eased within weeks after industrialized nations released their strategic oil reserves.

Alongside deploying several thousand American troops, additional aircraft squadrons and Patriot missile batteries in Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the Abqaiq attack, several interventionist hawks in Washington invoked the Carter Doctrine of 1980 as a ground for mounting retaliatory strikes against Iran, which states:

"Let our position be absolutely clear: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."

Although the Houthi rebels based in Yemen claimed the responsibility for the September 2019 complex attack involving drones and cruise missiles on the Abqaiq petroleum facility and the Khurais oil field in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, Washington dismissed the possibility. Instead, it accused Tehran of mounting the complex attack from Iran's territory.

Nevertheless, puerile pranks like planting limpet mines on oil tankers and downing a \$200-million surveillance aircraft can be overlooked but the major provocation of mounting a drone and missile attack on the Abqaiq petroleum facility that crippled its oil-processing functions for weeks was nothing short of waving red rag to the bull.

Considering the nature of steadfast alliance between Iran and Russia, what if Iran, too, flexed its muscles in the critically important volatile region in order to disrupt the global oil supply and put pressure on the energy-dependent industrialized powers to carefully consider their retaliatory measures against Russia amidst the Ukraine War.

The Persian Gulf holds 800 billion barrels, over half of world's total 1,500 billion barrels crude oil reserves. If Iran decided to open a second front in the Gulf by mounting subversive attacks on oil installations in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait amidst the Ukraine War, forget about sanctioning Russia's oligarchs, the oil price would skyrocket, the dollar would take a nosedive, crippling energy shortages would bring industrial production to a standstill and Washington would find it hard maintaining its grip over neocolonial world order.

In fact, this was the precise message conveyed to Washington's military strategists by the audacious Houthi attacks on strategic targets in UAE in January, specifically the one targeting al-Dhafra airbase in Abu Dhabi hosting US forces.

In order to mend fences with Iran at a critical time, however, Washington has promptly dispatched IAEA's chief as a "goodwill ambassador" to Tehran to dangle the carrot of imminent restoration of the Iran nuclear deal to wean Iran off Russia's orbit, at least, until the gathering storm over the horizon following the Ukraine intervention clears out.

Notwithstanding, the acts of subversion in the Persian Gulf in 2019 culminating in the "sacrilegious assault" on the veritable mecca of the oil production industry in Sept. 2019 should be viewed in the broader backdrop of the New Cold War that has begun following the Ukraine crisis in 2014 after Russia occupied the Crimean peninsula and Washington imposed sanctions on Russia.

The Kremlin's immediate response to the escalation by Washington was that it jumped into the fray in Syria in September 2015, after a clandestine visit to Moscow by General Qassem Soleimani, the slain commander of the IRGC's Quds Force.

When Russia deployed its forces and military hardware to Syria in September 2015, the militant proxies of Washington and its regional clients were on the verge of driving a wedge between Damascus and the Alawite heartland of coastal Latakia, which could have led to the imminent downfall of the Bashar al-Assad government.

With the help of Russia's air power, the Syrian government has since reclaimed most of Syria's territory from the insurgents, excluding Idlib in the northwest occupied by the Turkish-backed militants and Deir al-Zor and the Kurdish-held areas in the east, thus inflicting a humiliating defeat on Washington and its regional allies.

Thus, Iran is under moral obligation to pay its debt to the patron in the latter's moment of crisis. Let me clarify, however, I'm not inciting anybody to jump off the cliff. But in its blind rage, if Washington goes all out in resorting to economic warfare against Russia, then a limited and calculated response to give the self-styled global hegemon a taste of its own medicine would certainly deter it from resorting to extreme measures.

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Notes

[1] [Iran's largest warship catches fire, sinks in Gulf of Oman](#)

[2] [Long-Planned and Bigger Than Thought: Strike on Iran's Nuclear Program](#)

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