

# Reports Say the Explosion at Iranian Nuclear Plant Had a Criminal Cause

By [Lucas Leiroz de Almeida](#)

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*A new focus of tensions and uncertainties appears to be emerging in Iran. Recent reports from the Iranian authorities have concluded that the explosion at the Natanz nuclear plant had a criminal cause, most likely caused by a sabotage operation. Not many details have yet been provided about the completion of the investigations. The Iranian government has announced that more information about the case will be released soon but made clear the authorities' certainty about the criminal nature of the plant's fire.*

In July, a major explosion hit the Iranian nuclear power plant at Natanz, used especially for enriching uranium – an essential activity for the development of nuclear technology. The explosion sparked a huge fire that caught the attention of the media around the world at the time. After the incident, no fatalities or leaks of radioactive materials were reported in the region, so the damage was considered low.

Immediately after the explosion, several rumors were spread about the real nature of the event, as it is common on such occasions. Some of the rumors claimed that Israel had triggered the explosion with the intention of damaging Iran in its nuclear development plans. At the time, all rumors were denied and no “conspiracy theory” was highlighted. Now, after the result of the investigations, such rumors have surfaced, but the Iranian government remains silent about them, stating that the investigations' data will be revealed later.

Despite the uncertainties surrounding the case, the proximity of the date of the explosion in Natanz with other similar events in Iran brings us intriguing reflections and leaves many questions unanswered. In fact, since June, a series of repeated explosions at Iranian plants has been reported. In June, there was a major explosion at the nuclear power plant at Parchin's military base in Tehran. This plant is the largest explosive factory for Iranian forces and is therefore a place of great strategic value for the country. Shortly thereafter, there was the event in Natanz, after which, in July, another major explosion occurred at the Isfahan power plant in central Iran. Still, not only plants have been victimized by mysterious explosions in Iran, but also several other facilities: on June 30, an explosion at a clinic in Tehran left 19 dead; in July, two people died in an explosion at a factory also in Tehran; also in July, a major fire in the port of Bouchehr destroyed several vessels, but left no victims. All these incidents have had no well-defined explanation and are therefore the subject of rumors.

The most curious thing is to note that the explosions occurred shortly after Iran intensified its uranium enrichment project. The withdrawal of the US from the 2015 nuclear agreement led Tehran to reconsider the national nuclear plan and to announce the resumption of the

uranium enrichment program in the first half of June, on a date coincidentally close to the beginning of the series of explosions. Whether or not there is a causal relationship between both facts, the proximity of the dates is minimally interesting and justifies the suspicions and hypotheses raised by several experts. This is not a mere “conspiracy theory”: the possibility that foreign powers are sabotaging Iran’s nuclear program through some secret operations is quite plausible, regardless of whether it is factual or not.

Since the resumption of the uranium enrichment program, Iran has received several accusations from other countries, mainly from Israel, that it is planning to acquire an atomic bomb. Tehran vehemently denies such accusation, as it has done on many other occasions – according to various statements by Shiite religious leaders, the building of a nuclear bomb is condemnable according to the Islamic religion, so Iran, as an Islamic Republic, could not undertake such project. However, Iranian military progress remains intense and the results are visible. The country recently announced the development of a new long-range ballistic missile, causing even more negative reactions in the West and Israel, where the speech about a possible Iranian nuclear bomb is gaining strength.

In fact, we should expect the Iranian authorities to provide more information about the case and only then express opinions about it. For the time being, the most interesting thing to note is the war of narratives around Iran: even with several pronouncements denying the accusations, the United States and Israel maintain the claim that Tehran is building an atomic bomb as an official state discourse; on the other hand, the opinion of experts on possible sabotage against strategic installations of the Iranian government is classified as a “conspiracy theory” or “false rumor” and is immediately rejected.

There is, of course, an information war around the case. We do not know if it was foreign sabotage – and we may never know – but we do know that such subversive activities really exist and often happen.

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**Lucas Leiroz** is a research fellow in international law at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

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Articles by: **Lucas Leiroz de Almeida**

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