Iran’s Uranium Processing Site Bombed by Israel?

By Bob Mayberry

On April 11, 2021, an explosion at Iran’s Natanz uranium enrichment site destroyed the power supply to its underground uranium processing centrifuges. Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization, called the attack an attack on “nuclear terrorism,” and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif condemned the bombing as a “war crime.” Iran said there were no fatalities.

Prior to the April attack, Iran began using new advanced centrifuges for enriching uranium-235 to 20 percent. Enriched uranium is produced by feeding uranium hexafluoride gas into centrifuges that separate the uranium-235, the most suitable isotope for nuclear fission. Uranium enriched to 90% or more can be used to make nuclear weapons. BBC reported. Shortly after the attack, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani announced that Iran would begin enriching uranium to 60%. Although Rouhani repeated that Iran’s nuclear activities remained “exclusively peaceful,” France, Germany and the UK all expressed “grave concern” since there is no civilian atomic reactor in the world using uranium enriched to 60%. White House spokesperson Jen Psaki described Iran’s decision — the lambasting of a nuclear processing complex — as “outrageous.”

On April 9, Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen said, “Israel will not allow Iran to attain nuclear arms…Our planes reach everywhere in the Middle East, and certainly Iran.” Meanwhile, White House officials met with Israeli delegates and agreed only on the “significant threat” posed by Iran. The Israeli ambassador to the US announced that he would consult with Israel about any renewal of the anti-nuclear deal with Iran known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 between Iran, China, France, Russia, the UK, the US and Germany — together with the European Union. What Israel’s act of war provokes from Iran remains to be seen.

— Reuters, “Our warplanes can reach Iran, Israeli minister warns amid nuclear talks,” April 29; Reuters, “Iran to begin 60% uranium enrichment after nuclear site incident,” April 13; Associated Press, “Iran blames Israel for sabotage at Natanz nuclear site,” April 12; and New York Times, “Blackout Hits Iran Nuclear Site in What Appears to Be Israeli Sabotage,” April 11, 2021

More Leaking from Hanford Red Waste Tanks

By Kelly Lundeen

In the 1980s, when highly radioactive liquid wastes were found to be leaking from old, corroded underground tanks at the Hanford Reservation in Eastern Washington State, the Department of Energy announced that double-walled tanks were the answer. Now a second double-shell radioactive waste tank has been found to be leaking at the superfund site, which holds the distinction of being the most radiactively contaminated site in the US. There are additional confirmed leaks in 67 single-shell tanks out of 177.

One thousand, seven hundred gallons of radioactive waste have leaked into the soil from Tank B-109 since it was first suspected of leaking in March 2019, but the Department of Energy (DOE) waited over a year before launching an investigation. The leaking 125,000-gallon tank is loaded with liquid and solid waste from plutonium production done there from 1946-1976, and there are no plans to stop the leak.

The Hanford site is responsible for producing two-thirds of the plutonium used for the United States’ cold war nuclear weapons. DOE spokesperson Geoff Tyree assured the public that, “Contamination in this area is not new and mitigation actions have been in place for decades.”

“The tanks hold half a century’s worth of highly radioactive and poisonous-by-products of nuclear weapons production,” and “about a million gallons of liquids has leaked,” the New York Times reported in 1997. If contaminated ground water reaches the Columbia River which borders the Hanford site, radioactive material could enter the food chain, “and could expose people to radiation for centuries,” the Times predicted back then.

At the last five-year review of the decades-long cleanup and waste treatment operations in 2017, the US Environmental Protection Agency Project Manager Dennis Faulk reported, “Contaminated in-area groundwater is still flowing freely into the Columbia” [River]. Ken Niles, retired head of the Oregon Department of Energy’s Hanford program admitted of the cleanup effort, “Its cost overruns and schedule delays are legendary.” Niles went on to say, “Some scenarios show treatment continuing well past the year 2100, and all scenarios show cost estimates in the hundreds of billions of dollars. The citizen’s watchdog group Hanford Challenge paints a sobering picture for those who work around the tanks. “Since March 2014, over 100 workers suffered vapor exposures serious enough to seek medical evaluation,” the group reported in April.


Wielding the Ban on Nuclear Weapons

By Felice & Jack Cohen-Joppa

January 22 was a day of celebration for nuclear disarmament activists around the world: the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entered into force! The historic day saw hundreds of actions in many countries — from the remote Trinity and Nevada test sites to the Golden Rule geeseboat sailing off the coast of Hawaii, banners were unfurled declaring “Nuclear Weapons are Illegal.” Check out an inspiring five minute video we produced showing photos of dozens of US actions at: vimeo.com/515883787.

Building on the organizing for public actions on January 22 that was initiated by Nukewatch, the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, the Nuclear Resister Network and ICAN for Nuclear Accountability, there are now six US working groups that are meeting with this common mission: “Collaborating to fulfill the promise of the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and to press the United States to sign and ratify the Treaty.”

The working groups are:
• Affected Communities & Allies (downwinders, atomic miners, atomic veterans, hibakusha)
• Days of Action
• Divest from nuclear weapons/Don’t Bank on the Bomb
• Localities and legislators
• Policy/Advocacy work
• Schools of Mass Destruction/Ending nuclear weapons research at universities
• Affected Communities & Allies (downwinders, atomic miners, atomic veterans, hibakusha)

If you are interested in actively participating in a working group, contact Ralph Hutchinson at: orep@earthlink.net.

You can find detailed information about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the website of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) at icanw.org.

— Felice & Jack Cohen-Joppa are the editors of The Nuclear Resister in Tucson, Arizona.