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Israeli Officials: Attack on Iran Must Come ‘By Summer’

By [Jason Ditz](#)

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There is of course never really any discussion of whether or not an Israeli attack on Iran is justified on the basis of Iran’s legal civilian nuclear program. Rather, the questions center around just how bad the inevitable retaliation would be, and [how much damage Israel could theoretically do to the program](#).

The second of these questions appears to be coming to a head, as [Israeli officials are warning that by summer so much of Iran’s nuclear program will have been relocated underground](#) (a consequence of decades of Israeli threats) that such an attack will be entirely impossible to carry out.

Tel Aviv University’s Yiftah Shapir argues that the attack would require “a series of massive assaults for two to three weeks, a month, something like that” to destroy Iran’s existing enrichment facilities. Others argue that the facilities are so durable (again designed in an era when threats of attack are a form of punctuation in the West) even this might not work, and would only do superficial damage. The general agreement among them however is that if the attack doesn’t come by summer it won’t happen at all.

If such an attack does happen, it of course starts a massive regional war, one that is almost certain to suck the United States in. Retaliation against Israel would be significant, given that Iran has been stocking up on conventional missiles as a hedge against this threat since the Reagan Administration.

And of course, Iran's nuclear program is entirely civilian in nature. This may not matter rhetorically, but even the speculation about Iran having a weapons program alleges it is entirely separate from the IAEA-supervised civilian program, so attacking the known sites is of no real strategic value.

It is possible, then, that Israel's far-right government is using these constant threats to attack Iran to press the international community into imposing more and more sanctions against their key regional rival. Unfortunately, reasonableness has not been a key virtue of many of the top Israeli officials, and starting a war just for its own sake would not be unprecedented in the nation's history.