



Previously Identified: Iran's New Centrifuge Assembly Workshop

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On June 5, 2018, Iran's Atomic Energy Organization (AEOI) head Ali Akbar Salehi [told](#) Fars News Agency that Iran would soon start new centrifuge production at a site in the Natanz enrichment complex. A *New York Times* [piece](#) from June 5th, with a somewhat misleading headline, also discusses the implications of the centrifuge facility. The Institute [identified](#) in March 2017 the location of this centrifuge assembly facility using commercial satellite imagery.

We learned that in the summer of 2016, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had visited on short notice at least two sites at the Natanz site related to centrifuge rotor assembly. One was a new workshop near the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant being built by TESA and dedicated to assembling advanced centrifuge rotors and other key subcomponents. The inspectors found at the time of the visit that the workshop was not yet operational; much of the equipment was still in boxes. We assessed that the existence of the facility was consistent with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), but worth monitoring because of the sensitive work that can be done in this workshop, if finished. The figures below show Google Earth images from October 2016 of the workshop containing the new centrifuge rotor assembly facility and an image from July 2012 showing it under construction.

If it has not done so recently, the IAEA will surely want to visit this site in light of Salehi's announcement and Iran's recent letter to the IAEA and ascertain its status, activities, and plans. It is important to note that the existence of this facility has been known and it has been visited under complementary access by the IAEA; its start is also not against Iran's JCPOA obligations. Recent Iranian announcements, however, could mark a return to pushing against the JCPOA provisions and signal that Iran is increasing pressure on the parties to the JCPOA to maintain the accord in the face of U.S. withdrawal.

Figures 1-3: The Natanz enrichment site showing a reported new centrifuge rotor assembly workshop near the pilot enrichment plant. Early construction activities of this workshop can be seen in a 2012 image. The underground cascade halls of the Fuel Enrichment Plant are also nearby. Images courtesy Google Earth.



