

The IAEA inspection at Parchin – a farce in three acts

By Ephraim Asculai / Sep. 29, 2015

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On Monday, September 21, 2015, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director general proudly announced that “certain IAEA safeguards activities were carried out at the particular location at the [Iranian] Parchin site. These included the taking of environmental samples.”

He then added that he himself with his deputy visited the site but saw an empty building with evidence of recent renovation work. This was the culmination of an effort that began in 2012 when the IAEA requested access to this site and to this particular building, which was suspected of hosting activities related to development by Iran of a nuclear explosive device.

This request was probably based on intelligence information supplied to the IAEA by member states, since no information was openly available on which such a request could be based.

According to subsequent information, mainly from satellite observations, the Iranians immediately began clearing the site, removing earth layers and probably removing all equipment, resurfacing all walls, floors and even ceilings – in short removing all possible traces of previous activities. Although this should have been a warning sign, the IAEA did not heed suggestions not to go there (e.g., The Jerusalem Post, June 4, 2012) because it would probably find nothing, resulting in a victory for Iran, and persisted in its request to inspect this particular building at Parchin. This is the synopsis of Act I of the farce.

Act II begins with the negotiations on the peculiar method by which the IAEA would conduct its inspection of the building, the major part of which would be carried out by the Iranians themselves, thus assuring that the results would not contradict their declarations that no improper activities took place in that building.

In spite of the probable futility of the inspections, they were carried out in September 2015, and were described thus by the director general: “The Iranian side played a part in the sample-taking process by swiping samples. The Agency can confirm the integrity of the sampling process and the authenticity of the samples....”

The Act III script is as yet uncertain since the results of the sample analyses are not yet in. The probable scenario runs like this: the IAEA will announce that “the inspection at Parchin did not produce any evidence of wrongdoing at the site. At the same time, it must be remembered that it is possible that in the past some undeclared activities did take place at the site.” The Iranians will be overjoyed, and will capitalize on this result to the hilt. The P5+1 will commend the IAEA for its meticulous activities and professional behavior. Case closed. Exeunt.

However, there is still the slight possibility that the analyses will turn up a significant result, indicating that some aspect of nuclear weapons development did indeed take place at the site, and that efforts to eradicate the evidence did not succeed. The IAEA would glow at first, citing this as an achievement and a demonstration of its professionalism, but later would be accused by Iran of manipulating results, etc. Iran would use such a result to limit the freedom of inspectors and on the whole reduce co-operation with the IAEA.

The fate of the Iranian staff who were supposed to clean up the facility is not hard to imagine.

And there are more far-reaching ramifications to the conclusion of the Parchin case. Parchin would be the last undeclared site to be inspected under the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Requests to inspect such sites in the future would have to be based on information presented to the P5+1, the EU and Iran. It is hard to envisage any country divulging the source of its intelligence information to Iran (and Russia and China).

Parchin and Fordow, the Iranian underground enrichment facility, would probably not have been inspected under these conditions, and these are but two examples.

It is most unfortunate that the politicians, in their haste to conclude an agreement, gave up on the most basic of professional principles, thus paving the road for shortcuts that would provide the wrong answers and put in doubt the assurances that the world so needs. The Parchin case is but one sad farce that presages others.

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