



Flawed Analysis by Robert Kelley in IHS Jane's 360

By Institute for Science and International Security

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Robert Kelley has written a misleading, inaccurate [report](#) in IHS Jane's 360 about a suspect site at the Parchin military complex and our institute's analysis of that site.

Kelley is wrong about the most obvious fact of this case. U.S. intelligence, subsequently confirmed by ISIS with satellite imagery, detected renewed activity at the site after many weeks of almost no activity there. This activity triggered concern that Iran may be trying to sanitize the site prior to the taking of environmental samples aimed at helping determine if Iran had conducted nuclear weapons related work at the site with high explosives. The suspect activity is alleged to have likely involved a specialized neutron initiator made from small quantities of deuterium and uranium.

Kelley tries to dispute that the site we have identified as the suspect building is the one of interest to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). If he, or the editors of Jane's, had asked, we would have told him that before we first published in 2012 on this site, we confirmed that the building we identified was the right one with a senior IAEA official. Subsequently, many government officials have also confirmed the site as the correct one. Does anyone believe that if we had identified the wrong site in early 2012 no one would have pointed out such a mistake by now? Kelley offers no proof for his implied claim. One has to wonder if Jane's reviews its work or is prone to accepting unsubstantiated, substandard analysis.

Kelley misrepresents a report in Bloomberg [that revealed](#) that the U.S. intelligence community had identified new activity at the Parchin site and was concerned about that activity. Members of Congress who were briefed on the matter by intelligence officials confirmed the activity and the concern publicly. This is all part of the public record that Kelley chooses to ignore, attributing it to a "leak."

The modifications at the Parchin site occurred after the IAEA asked to go there in early 2012. Kelley has asserted for several years that concern that this could be sanitization activity is unjustified. The IAEA certainly rejects his assertions and has regularly published its concern that Iran's activities at Parchin are undermining its ability to conduct verification at the site and

has repeatedly asked for access.¹ We reject Kelley's claims as unfounded and moreover find them motivated by a bias that permeates his work related to the IAEA.

Kelley also assumes that no matter what the Iranians do at this site, the IAEA can use environmental sampling to find traces of uranium, if any was used in nuclear weapons-related activities. But he knows from his experience at the IAEA that actual cases are not always so clear or definite. He sarcastically refers to the Syrian environmental sampling case, which by the way, he for years has cast doubt on the notion that it was a reactor. He must therefore believe that the environmental sampling was likely wrong in this case.

But Kelley mentions the certainty of environmental sampling for a bizarre reason. He asserts that Iran knows it cannot fool the IAEA and thus would never try, implying that all its modification activities must be innocent. But let's look at that claim. Kelley would have the reader believe that after the IAEA asked to visit the site, Iran decided to conduct extensive modifications to that site; a site by the way which had been unused for years. Iran then decided to refuse repeatedly the IAEA access. It had earlier allowed IAEA access to Parchin, but to a different part of the site, so the precedent of access was already established.

Moreover, Iran has sanitized other sites, such as at Kalaye Electric and Lavan-Shian. Only a mistake by Iran in its extensive sanitization activities at Kalaye Electric allowed the IAEA to detect enriched uranium at this site. And nothing was detected at Lavan because Iran took down the building and scraped the ground before building a sports facility there. Iran has not been afraid to try to deceive the IAEA and seek to, or actually defeat, environmental sampling in the past.

With regards to the activities at the site, Kelley tries to downplay them but we disagree with his satellite imagery analysis. So apparently do the U.S. intelligence officials who briefed the Hill on the Iran nuclear deal. For example, Kelley claims that two vehicles at the suspect site are probably a sedan and a Jeep, but even Iran has acknowledged that these vehicles are related to road construction. A sedan and Jeep do not fall into that category. Iran claims that the vehicles just happen to be at the suspect site but are needed for road work at a dam three kilometers north.

Given the large number of places between the suspect site and the dam where these vehicles could have been parked, we asked if Iran's claim makes sense. We provided an example of a parking lot with 20 vehicles midway between the dam and the suspect site that would have been just as suitable for parking the vehicles at the suspect site and would not have raised any suspicion. Jonathan Tirone at Bloomberg Business has [falsely claimed](#) that we called this parking lot north of the suspect site a site of concern. We did not. Tirone confused the suspect site with this parking lot. Kelley misrepresents the significance of this parking lot by implying that analysis of imagery of it is relevant to discussions of renewed activity at the suspect site.

¹ See for example the following four IAEA Director General Iran Safeguards Reports: GOV/2012/55, GOV/2013/6, GOV/2013/27, and GOV/2015/58. These reports are available on our website, www.isis-online.org.

Kelley also alleges that a U.S. intelligence leak was part of “co-ordinated attempt to undermine confidence that Iran will adhere to its commitments” under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. But we are neutral on the deal, and were not privy to any leak, only reporting on what we saw in images that corroborated with the intelligence briefing to Congress. Moreover, we have chosen to focus on strengthening weaknesses in the deal if it is adopted. The U.S. intelligence officials who briefed Congress on the part of the Obama administration can hardly be called opponents of the deal. Again, Kelley is guessing and guessing wrong.

Getting to the bottom of what happened at the Parchin site and other issues related to the possible military dimensions of Iran’s nuclear programs is a critical part of the implementation of the JCPOA. Kelley’s misguided and fumbled effort only spreads misinformation and complicates that implementation.