

ISIS Note: Why Access to Iranian Military Sites Matters in a Long-Term Deal

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April 13, 2015

We have heard many assertions by Iranian officials since the P5+1/Iran framework was reached that International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors will not be allowed into military sites in Iran. The blanket assertion seems to suggest that this could be the case even when the IAEA has evidence of undeclared nuclear activities at these sites. Some Iranian officials have even asserted that no country would ever let inspectors into their military sites. But what kind of agreement would that be? What better place to hide a covert centrifuge plant or a plant to develop the nuclear weapon itself?

Iran has been caught building secret nuclear sites on military bases. That is indeed what Iran did with the deeply buried Fordow centrifuge site that it started building in secret in the mid-2000s. Former Director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency Ronald Burgess, in a prepared statement for a Senate Committee on Armed Services hearing in April 2010, described the “construction of the secret enrichment facility located on an IRGC [Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps] military base near Qom that was revealed in the fall 2009.”¹ When the IRGC and Supreme Leader state that inspectors under a long-term deal will not have access to military sites, we should all think of Fordow.

If Iran is allowed to create such an exception in a long term deal, next time it may just deny access to a site the IAEA thinks is involved in secret work related to making nuclear weapons. It is currently doing that with the Parchin military site, which the IAEA has linked to past work related to nuclear weapons development. Iran would like to keep the IAEA out of Parchin.

¹ U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services. *U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Hearing, April 14, 2010 (S. Hrg. 111-746). Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010.

In fact, the real question is: Why would anyone be as foolish as to sign a deal that would exclude inspectors from accessing any military site in Iran if the IAEA had evidence of cheating on the nuclear accord?