



## Just What is Going on at Sanjarian?

By David Albright and Sarah Burkhard

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Some are spreading falsehoods aimed at covering up the Islamic Republic of Iran's deception about its past and possibly on-going nuclear weapons work, trying to capitalize on a misinterpretation made in analysis produced by The Intel Lab with support from one of the Institute's key consultants.

In a tweet by Shahrokh Nazemi, Head of Media Office at the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations, he stated (as translated by the *Tehran Times*) "A few days ago, Fox News published a special report with satellite images of suspicious developments around the Sanjarian site in Jajroud, but actually, the images were related to the vehicles and equipment of the filming location of the TV series, *Nun Kh* and its crew."<sup>1</sup>

What is the Sanjarian site mentioned by Nazemi? Omitted in his statement and mentioned as a U.S. allegation in the *Tehran Times* is that the TV filming set takes place against the backdrop of a former nuclear weapons development site that figures prominently in the Nuclear Archive, known as the Sanjarian site. While the media is able to dismiss reports of camouflaging activities in 2020/2021 across from the site, it is unable to dismiss the Sanjarian site itself. Based on Iran's own information in the Nuclear Archive, this site was an important nuclear weapons development site during the Amad project. It conducted 136 tests in a seven-month period from September 2002 to April 2003 alone, all documented in the archive as related to the development of key components of nuclear weapons. Iran is hiding the key fact, in essence the underlying point of the entire Fox News report--Sanjarian is an important former nuclear weapons site that deserves far greater scrutiny by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and concerned publics.

Documents in the archive laid out the Iranian plan in 2003 to either keep Sanjarian going or move its assets and workforce to other sites. Both strategies were to have new cover stories involving performing non-nuclear military and non-military explosive tests. The nuclear weapons capabilities at Sanjarian were a unique asset, according to Iran's Nuclear Archive, nonexistent at other Iranian defense sites. Preserving these capabilities and the workforce was a priority for the post-Amad reorientation plan. Iran had no intention to lose the nuclear weapons capabilities at Sanjarian, which it viewed as unique to this site. For those interested in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/461948/Fox-News-confuses-TV-series-filming-set-with-other-activities>

more details of this site or the broader Amad Plan, please see our new book *Iran's Perilous Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons*.

The nuclear weapons related activity at Sanjarian may have continued until 2009, when it was first exposed publicly. Any work being done at Sanjarian is a legitimate concern of the IAEA and anyone concerned by Iran's incessant deceptions about its nuclear weapons work.

Significantly, the Sanjarian site has not been inspected by the IAEA, although it should be, which brings us to the recent report in Fox News. While we at the center of the Institute did not vet this report as well as we should have, and appreciate the additional information provided by others and Fox News' interest in updating its story, the motivation of the two analysts who developed this original claim was sound. Both were looking for suspicious, possibly nuclear-related activity that warrants further IAEA and outside scrutiny. While the Institute believes that the part of the story about possible camouflaging was incorrect and needs correcting, we do not fault the motivation of those who performed the work. The reason is that the Islamic Republic has been highly deceptive about the Sanjarian site, as established conclusively in the archive. Moreover, the Iranian regime's continual lying to the IAEA about its undeclared nuclear material, activities and equipment, as demonstrated in multiple IAEA reports, feeds justified suspicion about activities at the Sanjarian site as well as other locations.

The analyzed area at issue, later revealed as a filming location, is 100 meters across a dry riverbed from the Sanjarian site. A covering over an excavated area, perceived incorrectly in satellite imagery dating to January 18, 2021, as concealment, was used during the filming. The cars witnessed at the site were related to the filming as well. After the filming, trenches remained visible in satellite imagery dated March 28, 2021. The trenches had been used in at least one episode as part of the show's narrative. We do not know if the trenches were actually former tunnels simply opened up for the filming, based on excavated concrete and other debris seen in the video of the filming (see Figure 1). As seen in satellite imagery, they feature a zig zag pattern; while a map showing the zig zag was used in the TV series, the layout is unexplained in the story line as far as we know. Often, zig zag patterns are used in the handling and storing of explosives. Further, based on the ground images gained from the filming (see Figure 1), stone, wood, and concrete materials appear to have been used, indicating the trenches (or possibly former tunnels) were more strengthened than they appeared in satellite images. That said, we have so far not been able to determine when the trenches/possibly former tunnel were built and whether any storage or usage of explosives had taken place, and whether this would have been related to Iran's nuclear weapons work or conventional military efforts.

Figure 1 further shows that the filming took place close enough to the Sanjarian site to show in some scenes the secured area hosting the key nuclear weapons development building in the background. In another scene in the video, the site in the background appears to have been uniquely blurred out.

Was this filming part of a coverup? Was it as innocent as portrayed by the Iranian government? We do not know, but it certainly does not take away from the need to inspect Sanjarian.

The episode reminds us of the scene in the 1987 movie *The Untouchables*, when Eliot Ness' first raid to find illegal alcohol during the Prohibition era ends in failure, leading Al Capone, Chicago's crime boss, to gloat. But Ness persisted and Capone ended up in jail, sent to prison based on the crime boss' own documentation of his operations.

Those who seek to use our mistake to attack the U.S. government's or the IAEA's work demonstrate just how corrupt and desperate the Iranian regime and its government-controlled media have become. In recent years, the IAEA has shown the existence of undeclared uranium or contaminated equipment at up to five Iranian sites and has reported Iran's refusal to cooperate. We are confident that most will see through the Islamic Republic's ploy and support the IAEA as it seeks to obtain Iran's complete and correct declaration.

We will continue to look for suspicious nuclear activities and report them publicly.



**Figure 1.** Screenshots from the TV series show the walls of the trenches / possible tunnel strengthened with stone (top), and above-ground broken up concrete slabs (bottom). The bottom also shows the security wall of the Sanjarian site in the background. Credit for annotations: Frank Pabian.