

IRAN MOVES TOWARD OPENING PARCHIN TO IAEA; WARRICK SURPRISINGLY DISRUPTS ISRAEL'S "ZONE OF IMMUNITY" ARGUMENT

[youtube]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_dRPRTzacc[/youtube]

In a long interview with RT, Iran's envoy to the IAEA, Ali Asqar Soltaniyeh, explained yet again that Iran's position is that the team from the IAEA that visited Iran earlier this month was not the appropriate set of inspectors to visit the Parchin site. The IAEA has accused Iran of using this facility to develop technology for explosive triggers that could be used in a nuclear weapon. Iran was working under the impression that this group was meant for negotiations aimed setting ground rules for upcoming inspections.

Working along those lines, Soltaniyeh told RT that Iran has not ruled out a future IAEA visit to Parchin:

The IAEA delegation that visited Tehran recently was comprised of experts on legal, political and technical issues and not inspectors, Soltaniyeh said in an interview with Russian RT television.

The group visited Iran for negotiations on reality and framework of mutual cooperation, he said.

Iran does not rule out the access of IAEA to its military sites such as Parchin but this depends on some preconditions which IAEA should meet, Soltaniyeh said.

Weakening his own argument somewhat, Soltaniyeh went on to tell RT that Iran had offered to allow the IAEA team to inspect a different site at which the IAEA had accused Iran of carrying out high explosives work:

"I just want to tell you that last week, perhaps this is the first time I am telling you, we, in fact, offered the agency to go to another site which the director general in his report has referred to as a large scale high-explosive test. We offered, but the team was instructed by the director general to go back to Vienna. Therefore we don't have any hesitation that every activity we have has nothing to do with nuclear weapons."

In the video, Soltaniyeh also points out that IAEA inspectors did visit Parchin twice in 2005, as we were reminded earlier by Moon of Alabama.

In a somewhat related, but entirely unexpected move, Joby Warrick has moved off his role of transcribing only information that paints Iran in a bad light to provide information that removes one of the primary justifications Israel has been advancing as the basis for a unilateral attack on Iran. Earlier this month, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak introduced the concept of a "zone of immunity" that Iran could enter wherein their final progress toward a nuclear weapon could not be disrupted:

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said Thursday that time was running out for action against the Iranian nuclear program before it became immune to physical attack, and that dealing with a nuclear Iran would be more difficult than stopping what he called its drive to build an atomic bomb.

/snip/

"Today, as opposed to the past, the world has no doubt that the Iranian

military nuclear program is steadily approaching maturity and is about to enter the zone of immunity, after which the Iranian regime will be able to complete the program without effective interruption and at a time it finds convenient," Barak said.

"The dividing line may pass not where the Iranians decide to break out of the non-proliferation treaty and move toward a nuclear device or weapon, but at the place where the dispersal, protection and survivability efforts will cross a point that would make a physical strike impractical."

In his article today, Warrick destroys the concept of the zone of immunity by pointing out that the underground facility at Qom is likely to be more vulnerable to attack than is generally believed:

Western spy agencies for years have kept watch on a craggy peak in northwest Iran that houses one of the world's most unusual nuclear sites. Known as Fordow, the facility is built into mountain bunkers designed to withstand aerial attack. Iran's civil-defense chief has declared the site "impregnable."

But impregnable it is not, say U.S. military planners who are increasingly confident of their ability to deliver a serious blow against Fordow, should the president ever order an attack.

/snip/

Yet as a matter of physics, Fordow remains far more vulnerable than generally portrayed, said current and former military and intelligence analysts. Massive new "bunker buster" munitions recently added to the U.S. arsenal would not necessarily have to penetrate the deepest bunkers to cause

irreparable damage to infrastructure as well as highly sensitive nuclear equipment, likely setting back Iran's program by years, officials said.

In fact, being buried so deeply even makes the facility have a new sort of vulnerability:

"If you can target the one piece of critical equipment instead of the whole thing, isn't that just as good?" the official said. "Even by reducing the entrances to rubble, you've effectively entombed the site."

Should Iran follow through with allowing an inspection team to visit Parchin and should Israel get the message that if Iran does decide to move ahead with weapons development even the Qom site would be vulnerable to attack, there remains a chance that an attack later this spring or this summer can be averted. It will be very interesting to see how Israel reacts to having the "zone of immunity" concept challenged, especially from a source that is usually so reliable in beating the war drums.