WARRICK SELECTIVELY EDITS AMANO REMARKS TO CFR

[youtube]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dfr8NQXmYKM[/youtube]

Yukiya Amano, Director General of the IAEA, appeared on the record yesterday at the Council on Foreign Relations. He presented a very brief statement and then the bulk of his time was spent in a wide-ranging question and answer session. The lineup of questioners included Barbara Slavin leading off, David Sanger near the middle and Gareth Porter getting in just before questioning was brought to a close.

Joby Warrick took advantage of Slavin's question to present Iran in the worst possible light:

> International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Yukiya Amano said the nuclear watchdog would try again next week to visit the Parchin military base, a sprawling complex where Iran is thought to have conducted tests on high-precision explosives used to detonate a nuclear bomb.
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> Iran has repeatedly refused to let IAEA inspectors visit the base, on the outskirts of Tehran. Instead, in the months since the agency requested access, satellite photos have revealed what appears to be extensive cleanup work around the building where tests are alleged to have occurred.
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> "We are concerned that our capacity to verify would have been severely undermined," Amano told a gathering of the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington. He noted Iran's "extensive" cleanup effort at the site, which has included demolishing buildings and stripping away topsoil.

> “We cannot say for sure that we would be able find something,” Amano said.

Notice the careful way in which Warrick has excerpted parts of what Amano said and inserted his own spin into the statements. If you listen carefully to what Amano says in response to Slavin’s question around the 27 minute mark of the video, you will see that Amano never characterizes the activities by Iran as sanitizing the site (as said in Warrick’s headline) or even that it was cleanup work, as Warrick says in the body of the article. Amano does mention removal of soil, demolition of buildings and extensive use of water, but maintains that access to the site is necessary in order to have a clear understanding of both past and current activities there.

Amano sits in a a position of high tension. He must deal with the Wikileaks disclosures showing that he is much more aligned with the US than his predecessor, Mohamed ElBaradei. Perhaps helping him to navigate this delicate position, the host of the CFR event, George Perkovich of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, provided some background comments and posed questions to Amano aimed at allowing Amano to voice his overall goal of resolving issues diplomatically. Despite this claim by Amano that his goal is diplomatic solutions, he must deal with the fact that the issues his organization has been raising are cited (often in an embellished way, as Warrick does above) as grounds for an attack on Iran. Perkovich also used these comments as a way to provide an endorsement of sorts for a second term for Amano.

One of the better questions posed by Perkovich related to whether it is possible to come to agreement with Iran regarding boundaries for future activities while leaving unresolved questions about what may have taken place in the past. This is key, because the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate prepared by the US came to the conclusion that Iran ceased all work related

to development of nuclear weapons in 2003. Amano quietly stated that intended to “keep asking those questions”. This means that the IAEA will continue to push for disclosure of work that occurred prior to the the 2003 decision to abandon a weapons program, even if there is a desire by Iran to provide full cooperation for future activities. That comes off to me as a fairly strange approach to a preference for diplomacy and perhaps serves as a more contemporary example of Amano remaining associated with US political positions.

Returning to the issue of Slavin’s question on Parchin, it is interesting that Amano first mentions satellite imagery and then adds a reference to satellite images that IAEA purchased from commercial suppliers. My endless ridicule of David Albright and his “analysis” of activities at the Parchin site is of course based on commercial images that Albright’s Institute for Science and International Studies has obtained. It should be kept in mind that Amano and IAEA are not limited solely to commercial images. It is likely that US surveillance has provided much more detailed information to IAEA than we have seen publicly. That is why it remains my position that Iran’s movement of soil at the site is meaningless. Even the commercial images provide good clues on where Iran deposited the first layers of soil it removed. Rest assured that a good map almost certainly exists telling the IAEA where it should sample soil to look for remnants of any radioactivity that Iran tried to remove from the site. Also, despite all the claims of cleansing and cleanup work, the building in question still stands and there is a very good chance that the blast chamber at the heart of the controversy is still there, awaiting analysis. It will be very interesting to see if Iran now agrees to grant access to the site during next week’s high level meetings in Tehran.

Tom Gjelten of NPR asked Amano about the recent hacking of an IAEA server, blaming the hack on Iran during his question. Amano was more

circumspect in his answer, stating first of all that the server hacked was very old and has since been removed from service and that no important information was obtained. He also was hesitant to blame Iran directly, choosing instead to say that the names that have turned up so far sound Iranian.

David Sanger focused on the “new” information that IAEA claimed to have obtained and referenced in its November 2011 report. He wanted to know specifically what IAEA is doing in followup to this information and especially whether and when IAEA would disclose to Iran how the information came into its possession and from whom they got it. Amano proceeded very carefully in his answer here, revising himself a couple of times, finally stating that the IAEA would disclose to Iran its information and sources “when appropriate”. He added that IAEA wants access to sites, information and people, but that no names of those people have been chosen as yet.

Gareth Porter asked Amano about the controversial “graph” published by George Jahn and whether the graph was from the group of documents cited as the new evidence in the November 2011 report. Porter also asked about the graph being altered. Amano dismissed the question entirely, saying he couldn’t discuss this specific information.