

Stolen Nuclear Documents Confirm Iran Cheated on the JCPOA

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Screenshot of Prime Minister Netanyahu's April 30, 2018, presentation of the secret Iranian nuclear program documents stolen by Israeli intelligence. (Screenshot from Israeli Prime Minister's office video.)

Stolen Nuclear Documents Confirm Iran Cheated on the JCPOA

By Fred Fleitz

This paper is a chapter from a forthcoming book by Fred Fleitz on the Iranian nuclear program.

Israel's revelation in 2018 that Israeli intelligence agents stole a huge cache of documents on Iran's secret nuclear-weapons program, which became known as the Iran Nuclear Archive or the Iran Atomic Archive, provided rare clarity on the question of Iran's nuclear program and its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Although treated with skepticism at first by many arms-control experts, the mainstream media and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the cache was so massive and persuasive that by mid-2020, it was no longer possible to plausibly maintain that Iran had halted its nuclear program in 2003 and was not guilty of massive violations of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, the JCPOA. A 2019 Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center report summarized the archive's content:

The documents that the Belfer group were shown confirm that senior Iranian officials had decided in the late 1990s to actually manufacture nuclear weapons and carry out an underground nuclear test; that Iran's program to do so made more technical progress than had previously been understood; and that Iran had help from quite a number of foreign scientists, and access to several foreign nuclear weapon designs. The archive also leaves open a wide range of questions, including what plan, if any, Iran has had with respect to nuclear weapons in the nearly 16 years since Iran's government ordered a halt to most of the program in late 2003.¹

In February 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during a late March 2018 briefing that Israel pilfered half a ton of information from Iran, which included 55,000 pages and 183 CDs. The stolen documents contained detailed information on dozens of nuclear weapons-related projects, some previously unknown outside of Iran. The documents indicated Iran's nuclear weapons program was far more advanced than it had admitted to the IAEA, that Iran had misled and lied to the IAEA and the international community about its nuclear program in disclosures required by the JCPOA, and that the Iranian government had taken steps to deceive IAEA inspectors after the JCPOA was implemented. The documents also suggested some covert Iranian nuclear weapons activities were still under way.

The documents contained information about active Iranian nuclear sites that had not been disclosed to the IAEA in 2018, 2019, and 2020. The Iranian government destroyed several of these sites after the Archive documents revealed their locations.

The Iran Nuclear Archive documents indicated major Iranian violations of the JCPOA and the NPT. They verified, clarified, and augmented previous reports and allegations of a covert Iranian nuclear weapons program, including a December 2, 2015, IAEA report on its investigation of the possible military dimensions (PMD) of Iran's nuclear program, the "Laptop Documents" that were provided to the CIA in late 2004 by a walk-in source, and revelations about Iran's nuclear weapons program by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a controversial Iranian opposition group² that has been leaking information about covert Iranian nuclear activities since 2002. The Iran Nuclear Archive documents confirmed some of the NCRI's most important revelations on uranium enrichment in 2002 and 2003.

According to Netanyahu, the Archive documents proved four things: first, that Iran lied about never pursuing nuclear weapons; second, that Iran continued to preserve and expand its nuclear weapons know-how after the JCPOA was announced in July 2015; third, that Iran did not come clean about its nuclear weapons-related work in a declaration made to the IAEA in the fall of 2015; and fourth, that due to all of these factors, the Iran deal is based on lies.

Netanyahu added that after Iran agreed to the JCPOA in 2015, rather than meeting its commitments under this agreement to declare all of its nuclear activities to the IAEA, Iran instead accelerated its efforts to hide its nuclear files.

Netanyahu also claimed the Archive documents prove the JCPOA provided Iran with “a clear path to a nuclear arsenal” because Iran will be able to conduct unlimited enrichment of uranium in a few years; the JCPOA fails to address Iran’s missile program and the JCPOA fails to address Iran’s secret nuclear bomb program and advanced work on weaponization.

These allegations became a game changer for how the world perceived and dealt with Iran’s nuclear program. Although the IAEA tried to discount information about secret Iranian nuclear activities alleged in the Laptop Documents and by the NCRI, the Iran Nuclear Archive documents were too massive and detailed to be ignored. As a result, the IAEA was forced to ask the Iranian government to clarify some of the allegations based on the archive and to allow inspection of several alleged nuclear sites. Iran dragged its feet about answering these requests and by the spring of 2020 ceased cooperating with the IAEA. Iran’s destruction of nuclear sites mentioned in the archive was read by many nations as an admission of guilt.

Iran’s refusal to explain the archive’s alleged covert nuclear weapons work vindicated the insistence of American conservatives. President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu had long warned that Iran had lied about keeping its JCPOA commitments and that this agreement was too weak to detect Iranian cheating on it. The archive documents significantly strengthened the Trump administration’s hand to pressure European states to back its “maximum pressure” policy against Iran and to cease their efforts to salvage the JCPOA. The Archive documents also forced the IAEA to issue, in June 2020, unusually critical reports of Iranian noncompliance with its JCPOA commitments. These reports were quickly seized

upon by U.S. diplomats, who used them to turn the screws on their European counterparts and get them to support President Trump's approach to Iran.

Iran Nuclear Archive Revelations

The Archive documents contain extensive information about Iran's nuclear weapons program. Not all of this information has been released. Some of it will never be publicly released due to nuclear proliferation concerns such as nuclear weapon designs. This section is mostly drawn from detailed reports produced by Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) and Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD) analysts, who were given access to and briefings on the Archive documents by the Israeli government.

The Amad Plan

The archive includes a substantial amount of new information about the "Amad Plan," a comprehensive nuclear weapons research program led by Iranian physicist and senior member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in his role as head of Iran's Physics Research Center (PHRC). Iran's nuclear weapons program began under the PHRC but was consolidated under the Amad Plan by the late 1990s or early 2000s, according to the IAEA.³ This plan included a nuclear warhead design program, modification of a Shahab missile to carry a nuclear warhead, and aid to Iran's nuclear program from the A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network as well as from a former Russian nuclear scientist. The Archive documents indicate that an infrastructure was in place by 2003 for a comprehensive Iranian nuclear weapons program and that this program was converted by late 2003 into a scaled-back, secretive, and highly compartmented program.

New information about the Amad Plan in the Archive documents included the following.

Leadership of the Amad Plan. The Archive documents established that, in addition to Fakhrizadeh's leadership of the Amad Program and the post-Amad plan after 2003, several senior Iranian leaders were closely involved in these efforts before and after 2003. These include Hassan Rouhani, Iran's current president; Ali Shamkhani, the current national security advisor; and Amir Ami Hajizadeh, the current commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Force's aerospace force.

Details about Project 110. Iran's secret effort to produce a nuclear warhead capable of fitting inside the nose cone of a Shahab 3 missile is named Project 110. It included a plan to construct five 10-kiloton nuclear-missile warheads as an initial target. This project was first confirmed in 2004 by the Laptop Documents.

Details about Project 111. A program known as Project 111, also revealed by the Laptop Documents, aimed to integrate nuclear warheads into Shahab-3 ballistic missiles and construct warhead re-entry vehicles.

Nuclear weapon designs. Israeli officials told members of Harvard's Kennedy School Belfer Center that "the Archive indicates that Iran had managed to acquire several foreign weapons designs, had refined those designs to develop its own, and had settled on a single frozen design as the basis for its initial weapons production."⁴ This finding confirmed the belief of most experts that Iran's nuclear weapons work, especially information about constructing a missile warhead in the 2004 Laptop Documents, indicated that Iran had acquired a nuclear weapon design. In a 2011 report, the IAEA said it had learned in 2007 that Iran had acquired a nuclear weapon design, possibly a design more advanced than the Chinese design Libya obtained from A.Q. Khan.⁵ Khan provided a nuclear weapon design to Libya that was based on a Chinese design. Although he did not admit to providing North Korea with a nuclear weapons design, this cannot be ruled out.

The Midan Project. Iran's Midan Project was a well-developed plan to conduct underground nuclear tests at three possible locations. It included building equipment to evaluate nuclear tests. The Institute for Science and International Security said in an April 2019 report that although the Archive documents referenced building an underground nuclear test site that was expected to be finished by 2004, satellite imagery could not confirm whether construction of a deep shaft for an underground test had been constructed.⁶ A deep shaft for an Iranian underground nuclear test was first revealed in the Laptop Documents. The sophistication and detail of this project suggests Iran's nuclear weapons program was much further along than was generally believed and could have been in violation of Iran's reporting requirements and commitments not to pursue nuclear weapons under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and JCPOA.

Details about nuclear weapons work at Parchin. It has been believed since this site was revealed in the mid-2000s that the Parchin Military base was the location of a variety of nuclear weapons-related activities, especially explosive testing to develop nuclear warheads. In 2012 and 2015, substantial efforts were made to sanitize this site to remove evidence of nuclear activities, including razing buildings and spreading a layer of earth on the complex. Iran allowed a limited inspection of Parchin in 2005 of a single building that uncovered no evidence of covert nuclear activity.

Iran refused numerous IAEA requests to inspect Parchin after 2005 until it agreed to an inspection in September 2015 as part of its commitments related to the JCPOA. However, Iranian leaders put strict restrictions on this inspection—it had to be conducted by Iranians on behalf of the IAEA and samples were taken from within only one building where alleged nuclear-related experiments took place. No collection was done outside this building, which the IAEA reported had been renovated and painted and from which equipment had been removed. These were extraordinary limitations since the IAEA would normally be permitted to send its own inspectors to freely examine a site and take samples from wherever they wished.

Despite the severe limitations of the 2015 Parchin inspection, the IAEA reported that it found what appeared to be two “chemically man-made particles of natural uranium” at the Parchin site, although the agency said this was not enough evidence to confirm the use of nuclear material. Although Obama officials did not comment on this finding when the IAEA report was released, *Wall Street Journal* writer Jay Solomon revealed in June 2016 that the Obama administration had concluded these particles were likely tied to Iran’s past covert nuclear weapons program.⁷

The Archive documents revealed why Iran went to such extensive lengths to sanitize the Parchin site and was so resistant to IAEA inspections: nuclear weapons-related activities at this site were far more extensive than IAEA or Western experts believed and produced substantial numbers of radioactive particles that were difficult to conceal. The Archive documents proved that Iran’s nuclear weapon work at Parchin went far beyond feasibility and scientific studies, as the IAEA had contended.

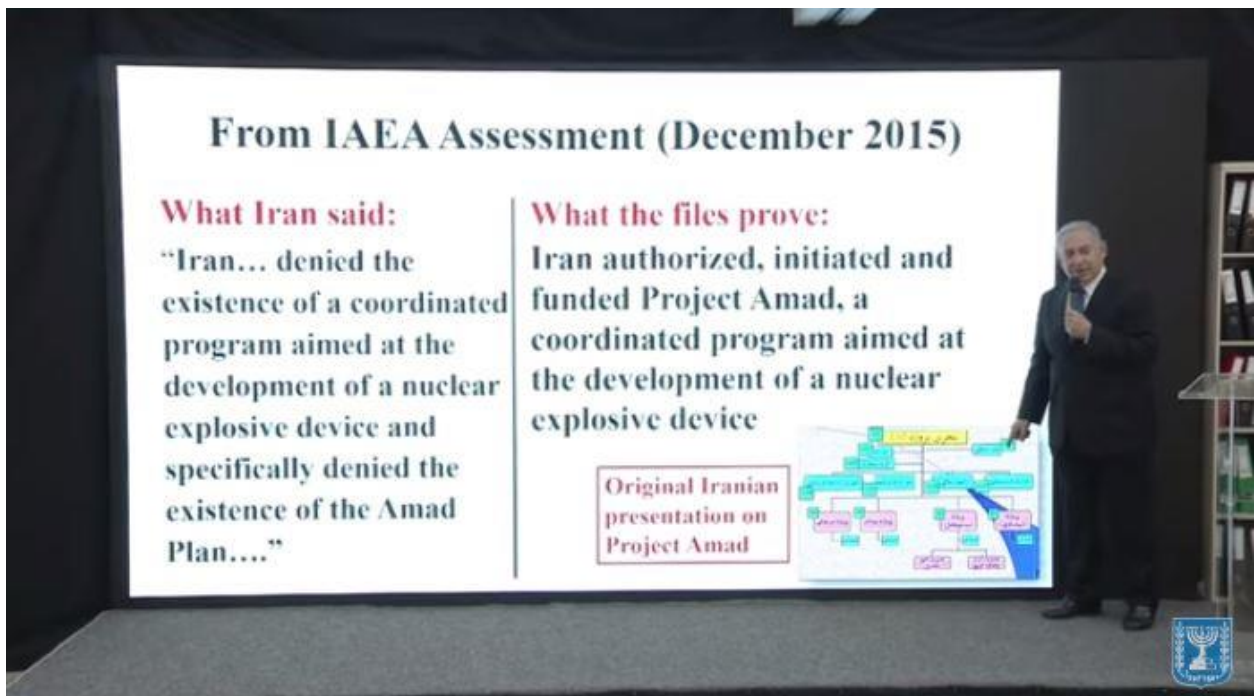
The Shahid Boroujerdi Project. The most stunning revelation was a previously unknown plan for a secret underground facility at the Parchin military base, the

Shahid Boroujerdi Project. It aimed to build HEU cores for nuclear warheads by converting UF_6 into metallic uranium and then into hemispheres for warhead cores. This was essentially a production-scale plant to produce nuclear warhead cores. The project is believed to have been codenamed Subproject 3.14, a project focused on metallurgy under Project 110. This information is consistent with an Iranian document that was accidentally turned over to the IAEA in October 2003. That document referred to the construction of HEU hemispheres for warhead cores and caused international controversy at the time.

Taleghan-1. The Nuclear Archive documents provided information on nuclear activities a Parchin facility known as Taleghan-1, which contained a huge cylindrical steel cell used for explosives testing that started in February 2003. According to the documents, it was also the site of experiments to develop neutron triggers. There were photos of two types of these devices in this building. Neutron triggers produce a stream of neutrons to initiate a nuclear chain reaction. According to the Archive documents, Iran was developing uranium-deuteride neutron triggers at this facility, a more sophisticated type of neutron source for a nuclear weapon that would not have the short lifespan of other designs due to nuclear decay. The Archive documents indicate neutron trigger work was codenamed Subproject 3.20 or 3.21 under Project 110.

Taleghan-2. Also on the Parchin base was a building known as Taleghan-2. According to the Archive documents, a small cylindrical tank in this building was installed to conduct “cold tests” of explosive compression of non-fissile uranium to image the compression of a model nuclear-grade uranium core. To accomplish this, the building also had an extremely fast flash x-ray camera, to capture images of nuclear reactions.

The Sanjarian facility. A site near Tehran, reported in 2009 by the NCRI, where sophisticated nuclear weapons experiments were conducted, is known as the Sanjarian facility. Some of the experiments cannot be discussed publicly for proliferation reasons. The ISIS Institute said in a May 2019 report that this site made high-explosive parts for shock wave generators and conducted a range of tests for its development. In addition, under the Amad Plan, Sanjarian was a center for testing exploding bridgewires, which are necessary for shock wave generators.⁸ The facility also contained a blast chamber and a high-speed camera to image explosions in the chambers. According to the archive, the dangerous high explosive PETN (pentaerythritol tetranitrate) was also produced at Sanjarian for use in the warhead explosive system.



Screenshot of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s April 30, 2018, presentation of the Iran Archive documents, in which he discusses the documents’ proof that Iran lied about developing explosive devices for nuclear warheads. (Screenshot from Israeli Prime Minister’s office video.)

The Fordow enrichment plant. The Fordow uranium enrichment facility (which was part of what Iran also called the al Ghadir Project) was constructed deep within a mountain near the city of Qom. It was long assumed this facility was designed to produce weapons-grade uranium and be difficult for Iran’s enemies to disable or destroy with air or missile attacks. According to Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Archive documents prove Fordow “was designed from the get-go for nuclear weapons as part of Project Amad,” and he displayed a copy of a blueprint of this facility during an April 20, 2018, briefing. The Archive documents indicate the al Ghadir Project had extensive support facilities and was designed to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for one to two weapons per year. The Fordow plant was designed to enrich starting with low-enriched uranium (3% to 5% U-235), and not natural uranium. This would substantially reduce the time needed to produce weapons-grade uranium and the number of centrifuges needed to enrich it.

After 2003, the Iranian military transferred control of the Fordow enrichment plant to the AEOI (Iran’s civilian nuclear agency). However, Iran still did not declare this site to the IAEA. In September 2009, U.S., French, and British officials

publicly revealed that Iran was constructing a secret uranium enrichment plant (the Fordow facility) inside a mountain. Although Western nations could not prove the purpose of the facility, they believed it was suspicious to build a deeply buried enrichment plant and that it was likely constructed to covertly produce nuclear weapons fuel. By 2014, Fordow had 2,700 IR-1 centrifuges, 696 of which were in operation to produce 20% enriched uranium, supposedly to fuel the Tehran Research Reactor. There were also plans to construct more advanced centrifuges at the plant. Fordow was allowed to continue operating after 2015 under the JCPOA as a nuclear, physics, and technology research center. Iran was allowed to keep 1,044 of the 2,710 centrifuges at Fordow operational. Removed centrifuges were placed in storage; remaining centrifuges were to be used only to enrich materials other than uranium for use as medical isotopes. Iran agreed not to enrich uranium or conduct research and development associated with uranium enrichment at Fordow for 15 years.

As part of a series of steps Iran began in mid-2019 to cease its JCPOA commitments, Iranian leaders announced in November 2019 that enrichment of uranium had resumed at Fordow with 696 centrifuges to the 5% U-235 level.

Uranium conversion. According to an ISIS Institute report, the Archive documents include information about plans to construct a secret facility to produce UF₆ for uranium enrichment at Fordow. The documents included a May 24, 2003, letter about the design of the plant, which was called the “New Tehran Site.” Israeli intelligence experts believed the plant was never built and would have produced substantial amounts of UF₆.⁹

Uranium mining and milling: Gchine mine and yellowcake plant (Bandar Project). Iran declared its previously secret Gchine uranium mine and a nearby yellowcake plant in a 2004 Additional Protocol declaration and claimed these facilities had always belonged to the AEOI and were part of Iran’s civilian nuclear program. IAEA officials and other experts found this explanation dubious because the Gchine mine was capable of producing only about 21 tons of fordowreactor. This output was, however, more than enough for a nuclear weapons program. The Archive documents prove that the mine was part of the Amad Plan and that Tehran transferred its ownership in 2003 from the military to AEOI as part of a post-Amad Plan effort to conceal the nuclear weapons-purpose of this facility and to and maintain this capability.

The Marivan implosion site. The Archive indicates implosion testing and shockwave generator research was conducted at this site. Its location has not been publicly released.

Foreign assistance to Iran's nuclear weapons program. The Kennedy School Belfer Center said in a 2019 report that the Archive indicates Iran's nuclear program benefited from far more foreign assistance that was previously believed, although not from foreign governments. The Archive confirmed known assistance from A.Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and the A.Q. Khan Network, his covert nuclear proliferation network, and from Ukrainian Vyacheslav Danilenko who worked for the Soviet nuclear weapons program and assisted Iran with explosive testing at Parchin. According to the report, "the archive reveals that Iran managed to recruit many more foreign scientists. According to Israeli officials, over a dozen individuals, from various areas of expertise and from multiple countries, played a role in helping Iran's program move forward."¹⁰

Intent to purchase highly enriched uranium. A footnote in one Archive document indicates Iran allocated funds to buy highly enriched uranium (weapons-grade) from abroad. No further information on this issue appeared in the Archive.^{11,12} The Kennedy School Belfer Center speculated that Iran might have purchased HEU through A.Q. Khan from Pakistan and noted that language in a controversial 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program that the U.S. Intelligence Community had "low confidence" that "Iran probably has imported at least some weapons-usable fissile material" and a "moderate-to-high confidence" judgment that Iran had "not obtained enough for a nuclear weapon," which left open the possibility that Iran had imported HEU.¹³

Restructuring of the Amad Plan in 2003

The Archive documents proved that, contrary to the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that found Iran's nuclear program was halted in 2003, it in fact continued as a scaled-back, highly compartmented program. This included reassigning nuclear-related projects from the military to Iran's civilian nuclear agency, the AEOL, so these activities would appear to be part of a peaceful nuclear program. There were also extensive efforts to conceal other parts of Iran's nuclear weapons program and to deceive IAEA inspectors and the world about Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons after 2003. Israel discovered

“deception folders” in the Archive documents that recorded the lies Iran told to IAEA inspectors and helped Iranian officials keep their stories straight.

Although the IAEA and Western governments in Israel had acquired substantial evidence before the revelation of the Archive documents in 2018, these documents provided a wealth of information that confirmed the earlier evidence and established that Iran’s post-2003 weapons program was far more extensive than believed.

An ISIS/FDD report assessed the Archive documents as indicating that the purpose of the post-2003 changes to its nuclear program was not to convert it into a strictly peaceful program, but to preserve its nuclear weapons capabilities for the future. The report added, “Unanswered remains the question of these activities’ status today.”¹⁴ I similarly observed in a 2015 *National Review Online* article that a December 2, 2015, IAEA report¹⁵ on the possible military dimensions of Iran’s nuclear program was ambiguous as to whether Iran’s nuclear weapons-related activities continued after 2009:

The IAEA’s contention that there are no “credible indications” of nuclear-weapons related activities in Iran after 2009 is suspicious since it is possible that the United States stopped providing intelligence to the IAEA on Iran’s nuclear weapons work after Barack Obama became president. Congress must press for answers about this and determine whether the IAEA has what it considers “less than credible” indications that Iranian nuclear weapons work continued after 2009. I find it hard to believe that Iran stopped all nuclear weapons related-work the year Mr. Obama assumed the Oval Office.¹⁶

The Archive documents contained several other important details about the post-2003 nuclear program.

- The Amad Program would be broken into overt and covert parts. Overt work with plausible civilian applications, which could be justified as part of a peaceful civilian program would be done openly at universities and research institutes. Nuclear activities that could not be defended as peaceful in nature would remain covert.
- Weaponization work was done in a more research-oriented fashion after 2003, aimed at solving technical problems in weaponization.

- Whether a program was overt or covert depended on whether it involved “contaminating work” that produced radioactive traces that could be detected by IAEA inspectors. This was a serious concern for Iran since the IAEA and Western governments had shown an extraordinary capability to detect extremely minute nuclear samples suggesting covert nuclear work.
- “Neutron activities” – research and development of neutron triggers for nuclear warheads – were kept covert because they could not be justified as part of a peaceful program.
- The Amad program remained at the SPND (*Sazman-e Pazhouhesh-haye Novin-e Defa’ei*), or Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research. Prime Minister Netanyahu stated in an April 30 press briefing that Amad Director Mohsen Fakhrizadeh heads the SPND program and that many Amad staff members continue to work for SPND under him.
- In a 2019 report, the Kennedy School Belfer Center report found that the Archive indicates Iran’s post-Amad Plan efforts put it in a strong position to reconstitute its nuclear weapons. According to the report,

For one thing, it would be starting from a more advanced base of knowledge and progress than was previously understood. Second, the record of its past efforts was gathered, preserved and curated in the archive itself. Third, as already noted, when Iran’s large-scale nuclear weapons program was halted in 2003, some of the scientific and technical explorations potentially related to a weapons program continued in a coordinated fashion. Fourth, Israeli officials report—separately from the information contained in the archive itself—that many of the personnel and the teams that were involved in Iran’s weapons effort have remained intact, and some have continued to work on nuclear-related activities. Israeli officials estimate that about 70 percent of the staff who once worked in Project AMAD transferred to SPND, the current defense organization headed by Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who led Iran’s nuclear weapons effort. Finally, while Iran’s activities involving fissile material are well-known and subject to IAEA scrutiny, the current location of equipment relevant to weaponization remains

unknown, and the modest scale required for weaponization efforts means that overall confidence that such activities are not occurring at secret locations is lower. In short, Iran seems likely to be in a strong position to launch a reconstituted weapons program, should it ever choose to do so, and should it have a plausible path to acquiring fissile material without being detected and stopped.¹⁷

Recent and Ongoing Covert Iranian Nuclear Weapons-Related Activities

According to Israeli officials, the Iran Nuclear Archive contains information about covert Iranian nuclear weapons activities from the last few years that were not declared to the IAEA, in violation of Tehran's JCPOA commitments. The first of these sites was made public at the U.N. General Assembly in September 2018, when Netanyahu revealed that the Archive documents included details of a secret atomic warehouse in the Turqzabad district of Tehran that may have contained 300 tons of equipment and 15 kilograms of radioactive material. The Iranian regime denied Netanyahu's claim and said this building was a carpet factory. Although the Israeli government had informed the IAEA about the warehouse in the spring of 2018, IAEA inspectors did not gain access to it until March 2019. By that time, the "carpet factory" had been emptied. There had also been an attempt to "sanitize" the facility to remove traces of nuclear materials. However, as IAEA officials announced last fall, its inspectors detected particles of natural and manmade uranium in the building, proving that the Iranian government had been storing uranium there without informing the IAEA, in violation of the JCPOA. Bloomberg News reported these particles included uranium hexafluoride, the feed product for uranium enrichment.¹⁸

According to a June 10, 2020, report by the Institute for Science and International Security, the Archive documents revealed three similar sites where Iran was recently engaged in covert nuclear weapons work: Lavizan-Shian, a razed uranium conversion facility at a location not publicly disclosed, and a possible site near the town of Abadeh.¹⁹

Lavizan-Shian. The Lavizan-Shian Technological Research Center housed Iran's Physics Research Center and the Institute of Applied Physics, the origin of Iran's nuclear weapons program in the 1990s that was later downgraded and made part of the Amad plan in the early 2000s. The Physics Research Center reportedly included nuclear-related work on uranium enrichment centrifuges, laser enrichment, uranium conversion, uranium exploration, and heavy water.

Centrifuge-related research at this facility was probably used at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility, which is still operational. There was also missile-related research and development of solid- and liquid-fueled missiles.²⁰

Before Iran allowed IAEA inspectors to visit Lavizan-Shian in 2004, it razed the buildings on the site and removed a layer of earth, measures that experts believe were an effort to prevent the IAEA from obtaining environmental samples indicating undeclared nuclear activities.

On November 17, 2004, the NCRI revealed the Laser Enrichment Center for Readiness and New Defense Technology, also known as Lavizan 2. According to the NCRI, Iran moved equipment from the razed Lavizan site to Lavizan 2. This site has been off-limits to IAEA inspectors since it was disclosed by the NCRI.

In the spring of 2020, the IAEA apparently decided to reopen the case of the razed Lavizan-Shian to obtain an explanation for and the location of a possible uranium disk that had been used for “drilling and hydriding.” According to the June ISIS Institute report, this description appeared to refer to the production of uranium deuteride (UD₃) for use in a neutron initiator (also known as a neutron trigger) for a nuclear warhead.²¹

Razed pilot uranium conversion facility, location undisclosed. According to a June 5, 2020, IAEA report, this facility was used for “the possible use or storage of nuclear material and/or conducting of nuclear-related activities, including research and development activities related to the nuclear fuel cycle, at a location in Iran specified by the Agency.” The IAEA added that “this location may have been used for the processing and conversion of uranium ore including fluorination in 2003” and that “this location also underwent significant changes in 2004, including the demolition of most buildings.”²²

The ISIS Institute assessed in its June 2020 report that the IAEA’s interest in this site suggests it is questioning a 2003 Iranian declaration that it never had a pilot uranium hexafluoride or hexafluoride plant. The institute also believes it was significant that Iran razed this site in 2004 after the IAEA asked about the existence of these plants in 2003.²³

The Abadeh site. This site, which the ISIS Institute believes is near the town of Abadeh, a remote location in central Iran, is where the June 2020 IAEA report says there was the “possible storage of nuclear material, [and] where outdoor,

conventional explosive testing may have taken place in 2003, including in relation to testing of shielding in preparation for the use of neutron detectors.”²⁴

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu revealed an undeclared Iranian nuclear site near Abadeh based on the Iran Nuclear Archive documents in a September 9, 2019, briefing but did not specify what nuclear projects were conducted there. He said this site was razed in July 2019 after Iran learned that Israel knew about it. The IAEA report says, “From July 2019 onwards, the Agency observed activities [at this site] consistent with efforts to sanitize part of the location.” According to the *Wall Street Journal*, diplomats said this site “might have been related to Iran’s search for uranium that it could use in an undeclared uranium enrichment program.”²⁵

Conclusion

The Iran nuclear archive documents had a profound effect on the international debate about Iran’s nuclear program. Their revelation led the IAEA to raise questions about alleged covert Iranian nuclear activities that Iranian officials refused to explain. In some cases, the Iranian government destroyed suspected nuclear sites mentioned in the documents to prevent them from being inspected by the IAEA. The archive, coupled with Iran’s decision in mid-2019 to begin withdrawing from its JCPOA obligations, caused the IAEA and European states, starting in early 2020, to cease their earlier practices of ignoring and explaining away Iranian violations of the nuclear deal and demand that Tehran provide explanations for covert nuclear sites identified in the Archive documents and permit IAEA inspections of them.

Iran’s stubborn refusal to comply with these demands has led to its increased isolation from Europe and has actually moved European states, albeit reluctantly, toward the maximum pressure policy on Iran espoused by President Donald Trump. Moreover, Iran’s gross violations of its JCPOA and NPT obligations as documented in the Nuclear Archive—which Iran refuses to explain—may make it impossible to salvage the JCPOA even under a future Democratic president who supports this agreement.

The Trump administration recently has responded to this clear evidence of covert Iranian efforts to pursue nuclear weapons in violation of its NPT and JCPOA commitments by attempting to indefinitely extending a UN conventional

embargo against Iran and announcing that it will soon seek to “snapback” all UN sanctions lifted in 2015 in conjunction with the JCPOA.

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2. The MEK is an exiled Iranian opposition group that worked with pro-Khomeini forces during Iran’s 1979 revolution to overthrow the Shah. After Khomeini drove the MEK into exile in Iraq, it joined forces with the Saddam Hussein regime against Iran and also helped Saddam suppress his enemies in Iraq. The Clinton administration declared the MEK a terrorist group in 1997 as part of its diplomatic efforts to build better ties to Tehran. The MEK reformed in the 2000s and built strong ties to Western countries and experts as an opposition group determined to bring down the Iranian regime and institute democracy. Many prominent Americans, including John Bolton, became MEK supporters. On September 24, 2012, the Obama administration removed the MEK from the U.S. state sponsor of terror list.
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