Parchin Inspection Plan Won’t Work, IAEA’s Credibility On the Line, Says Ex-Deputy

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By Raphael Ahren

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The nuclear deal’s mechanism for inspecting Iran’s Parchin military complex appears to be unreasonably lax, the former number two official at the United Nations nuclear watchdog said this week.

In an interview with The Times of Israel, Olli Heinonen, who served as the International Atomic Energy Agency’s deputy director-general, called on the Vienna-based body to release the as-of-yet undisclosed side agreements with Iran, which are part of broader pact Tehran and six world powers struck in July.

It remains unclear how exactly the IAEA will conduct its inspections at Parchin, which are meant to provide definitive answers on Iran’s nuclear activity at the site prior to the deal. According to a leaked [draft of the agreement](http://bigstory.ap.org/article/bedd428e26924eed95c5ceaeec72d3a4/text-draft-agreement-between-iaea-iran), published last month by The Associated Press, Iran will provide the agency with photos, videos and environmental samples.

“The key question is: will the IAEA be present during the sample-taking or not?” Heinonen wondered. “It looks to me that they might be witnessing the sample-taking through some camera view, or from a distance. If that’s really the case I have a lot of reservations about the reasonability and credibility of the arrangements.”

Heinonen — who worked for the IAEA for nearly three decades and headed the agency’s Department of Safeguards — explained that taking samples at a site suspected of having hosted illicit nuclear activity is no simple feat.

“You need to know what you sample, how you sample, and if the sample is representative of the object you sample,” he said. It’s difficult to assess changes that might have been done to the facility — such as the installation of false walls or efforts to hide or sanitize equipment — by merely looking at photo or video material. “You need to be present and see physically the place. Therefore, for the IAEA to do a credible job they need to get to that chamber and take independently their samples.”

The IAEA’s mission in Parchin is not merely to take environmental samples but also to examine the site’s diagnostic equipment and technical arrangements, the Finnish-born Heinonen continued. “This is not only just to take swipe samples and then that thing gets resolved. This is much more wider thing the IAEA wants to investigate. Therefore, again, the camera view is not satisfying for that,” he said.

There are various ways to alter the surfaces of equipment at Parchin: the Iranians could add layers of paint or lacquer, scrap them, or both, Heinonen said. “I don’t think you can establish through the camera if that has been done. On the spot, you can see some places where [such alterations meant to hide nuclear activity] has been done in a imperfect way. These are the places you want to sample. You can’t see this from a camera. You have to look at things from various angles. Therefore it’s essential to be physically present.”

#### Publicize the side deals

Critics of the deal said the AP’s report shows that Iran was allowed to supervise itself, using this as another platform to attack the pact.

“One must welcome this global innovation and outside-the-box thinking,” Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz [said](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-fumes-at-secret-deal-that-lets-iran-inspect-its-own-suspect-nuke-site/) sarcastically at the time. “One can only wonder if the Iranian inspectors will also have to wait 24 days before being able to visit the site and look for incriminating evidence?”

The IAEA’s director-general, Yukiya Amano, said he was “disturbed” by suggestions that Iran is allowed to inspect its own facilities, saying such reports “misrepresent the way in which we will undertake this important verification work.” In [a statement](https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/statement-iaea-director-general-yukiya-amano), Amano asserted that the agreed arrangements “technically sound and consistent with our long-established practices.”

The agreement between the IAEA and Iran regarding the latter’s past military activity are confidential, Amano stated. The agency has a “legal obligation not to make them public,” just as it keeps secret “hundreds of such arrangements” made with other IAEA member states, he said.

Heinonen, a senior fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, called on the IAEA to release all its agreements with Iran.

“Why not make this public so we can see whether is this a good agreement or not? Put the facts on the table and then we can have a better understanding of what takes place,” he told The Times of Israel. “I don’t see any reason for secrecy here.”

Article five of the Safeguards Agreement between the IAEA and Iran speaks about the need for confidentiality regarding propriety information, commercially sensitive matters and safety and security related issues, Heinonen said. But if the AP report is correct and all that happens at Parchin is Iranians providing footage to IAEA inspectors, the aforementioned criteria hardly apply, he argued.

“There’s no need to keep secrecy around this approach. There’s no safety-related information that is compromised if this procedure is made public,” Heinonen said. Only if the entire extent of verification measures at Parchin are publicized can the public judge whether it can resolve outstanding questions satisfyingly or not, he said.

The IAEA is not owned by Amano but by its member states, Heinonen continued, and their credibility is at stake. Indeed, any of the 35 states on the agency’s board of governors can demand the secretariat disclose the secret agreements if they feel it is vital for their understanding of a certain verification process, he said. Canada has done so on various occasions, he noted.

Israel, which has been a member of the IAEA since its founding in 1957, has been adamant about the demand for all secret side agreements with Iran to be released. “In order for there to be a truly informed discussion of the deal with Iran it is crucial that all relevant documents be opened to scrutiny,” a senior Israeli official told The Times of Israel this week. The official refused to say, however, whether any efforts have been made to have board members states ask for the agreements to be published.

The six world powers who negotiated the deal — the US, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany — are currently on the IAEA board, but so are states ostensibly unhappy about the deal, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

“It’s up to the member states. They are in the driving seat here,” Heinonen said. If they are happy with [the current arrangements], then fine. But one should exercise good judgment how to proceed with that.”

Once the IAEA agrees to go along with the current arrangements and starts inspecting Parchin via video cameras, it will be difficult to go back and demand better access, he said, citing his vast experience in dealing with Iranian nuclear officials. “It would be very difficult to make another mission there after you’ve already agreed on certain technical arrangements,” he said. “This is the time to do a proper job.”