As the previous nuclear agreement showed, U.S. officials don’t need to change the regime’s mind about America’s supposedly nefarious intentions in order to cut a deal.

In a recent public address, Supreme Leader Khamenei railed against the West and domestic “traitors” for blocking the Islamic Republic from blossoming into a global beacon of scientific progress and establishing an advanced “modern Islamic civilization.” Kafkaesque is the apt word here because Khamenei has engaged in rampant mismanagement resulting in a plethora of national crises, from brain drain to social discontent to environmental degradation. Yet, instead of honoring the work of intellectuals and other pioneers, the paranoid regime has persecuted, jailed, and sometimes even killed them, including those who were not open dissenters. Tehran’s behavior can be likened to an arsonist who sets fire to a house, kneecaps the firefighters, and then blames the residents...

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