

Khamenei's Nuclear Instructions: Public Versus Private

by [Mehdi Khalaji \(/experts/mehdi-khalaji\)](#)

May 26, 2015

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/tlymat-khamnyy-alnwwyt-allnyt-mqabl-alsryt\)](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Mehdi Khalaji \(/experts/mehdi-khalaji\)](#)

Mehdi Khalaji, a Qom-trained Shiite theologian, is the Libitzky Family Fellow at The Washington Institute.



Brief Analysis

Leaked statements indicate that the Supreme Leader's private views on nuclear compromise are more flexible than his tough public posture, so the negotiators may be able to ignore his stated redlines on inspections.

On May 23, Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his deputy Abbas Araqchi were questioned by members of parliament during an off-the-record session of the Majlis. Leaked statements from the session show that what Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei says in public about the ongoing nuclear talks with the P5+1 may differ from the private instructions he is giving to Iranian negotiators.

A day after the session, a website run by MP Hamid Rasaee, an outspoken critic of the negotiating team, published Araqchi's alleged statements before the Majlis. According to the site (<http://www.rasaee.ir> (<http://www.rasaee.ir>)), Araqchi said that the team will accept the enhanced verification measures called for under the International Atomic Energy Agency's Additional Protocol, including inspection of Iran's military facilities -- provided that these powers are not exploited by foreign agents. He told the Majlis that "since the beginning of the negotiation in Muscat, we were authorized to accept the Additional Protocol and proceed in the negotiations," strongly implying that Khamenei was the one who had provided the authorization. When MPs protested, he noted that "it is the Majlis's right to refuse to approve [the Additional Protocol]," but he also implied that doing so would make little difference to the negotiators because they had already been authorized to accept it.

The website leaked these statements after Araqchi denied another MP's claims that the team would accept IAEA access to military facilities. Despite Araqchi's denial, the Rasaee leak shows Zarif saying, "Even the Geneva Joint Plan of Action mentions the Additional Protocol, and under the Additional Protocol nonnuclear facilities including military facilities should be accessible...But their access would be controlled...If IAEA inspectors claim that there is a suspicious activity in a military facility...we take the inspectors there blindfolded until they get to the specific point

they want to see. We would cover the areas we don't want them to see...this is controlled access." This position is difficult to reconcile with Khamenei's repeated public statements that inspecting military facilities is a redline for the Islamic Republic.

Zarif's latest public statements are similarly at odds with Khamenei's public stance. On May 25, he told the Iranian Students' News Agency that IAEA interviews with Iranian nuclear scientists have nothing to do with the core of the negotiations: "This is a peripheral issue...Even under the previous government [of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad], our nuclear scientists were interviewed by IAEA agents several times." In contrast, Khamenei declared in a May 20 speech, "I will not allow foreigners to come and talk to the nation's dear scientists and children and interrogate them...Our rude and brazen enemy expects us to let them talk to our scholars and scientists about a fundamental national and domestic [achievement], but such permission will never be issued...This should be clear for the enemies of the Islamic Republic and all those who are waiting for the government's decision [on the nuclear deal]." Zarif's remarks indicate that this redline has been crossed in the past and is no big deal. And given the Supreme Leader's vast control over Iranian decisionmaking, it is highly unlikely that Zarif or other officials would express such views if Khamenei did not hold them himself behind closed doors.

In short, there seem to be considerable discrepancies between Khamenei's inflammatory public statements about the nuclear talks and the more practical and flexible instructions he is apparently giving Iranian officials in private. The optimistic reading of this gap is that a viable deal may be attainable and that Khamenei's declared redlines can be largely ignored. At the same time, it is not encouraging that Khamenei is unwilling to publicly acknowledge the compromises he is accepting in private. As usual, he does not want to take any firm position that would make him accountable for the outcome of the negotiations or the resultant deal.

Mehdi Khalaji is the Libitzky Family Fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis

Feb 14, 2022



Ben Fishman

(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven

Feb 14, 2022



Sana Quadri,
Hamdullah Baycar

(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)

TOPICS

Proliferation (/policy-
analysis/proliferation)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran (/policy-
analysis/iran)