

# Iran's Internal Messaging on the Nuclear Talks

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Brief Analysis

## By issuing blanket calls for the lifting of all sanctions, Tehran may undermine efforts to forge, implement, and enforce a viable nuclear deal.

**O**n March 31, senior Iranian nuclear negotiator Abbas Araqchi told state television that "there will be no agreement without sanctions relief." He expanded on this argument at length:

"All sanctions should be lifted...We insist that in the first phase of the agreement, all economic sanctions, oil sanctions, and sanctions on the banking system...should be lifted. And also for other sanctions, there should be a specific framework [for lifting them] in order to make clear [when they will end]. Without a clear and precise prospect for sanctions relief, we will not accept the agreement...We made progress in the negotiation on the sanctions relief, but it is not completed yet."

This message -- directed at a domestic Farsi-language audience rather than at Washington or the international community -- suggests that the regime is presenting the Iranian people with an unrealistic image of the nuclear talks and their potential outcome. Perhaps more important, by preemptively putting the onus on the United States, such messages may give Tehran a means of minimizing political fallout at home if the negotiations fail. Whatever the case, these and similar statements could affect the ongoing dealmaking efforts.

Araqchi's call for lifting all sanctions also indicates that the regime is negotiating beyond just the nuclear program, or at least portraying itself as doing so. After Iran was designated as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1984, Congress enacted a series of economic and political sanctions against the regime. Today, the Obama administration has repeatedly insisted that the current negotiations are confined to the nuclear program and will not address other issues or sanctions, including measures related to Tehran's support for terrorist groups, its disruptive regional policies, or its human rights violations at home. Yet statements by Araqchi and other officials suggest that Iran has been trying to bring these issues up during the talks, perhaps using the nuclear program as leverage to end all of the

economic and political sanctions imposed on it since 1979.

Given the intertwining nature of the sanctions, lifting any of them -- let alone all of them -- will be complicated. For example, some of the nuclear-related sanctions imposed by the 2010 Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA) also target "transactions related to Iran's support for terrorism." Lifting certain sanctions may therefore require the U.S. government to determine that Tehran or specific Iranian officials/entities have ceased their support for acts of international terrorism. The regime is also under a series of sanctions for violating human rights. Lifting these would require strong guarantees that Iran will reform its legal system and adopt principles such as freedom of speech and political liberty. Tehran does not seem remotely prepared to countenance such a fundamental political transformation, so issuing blanket calls for the lifting of all sanctions could undermine efforts to forge, implement, and enforce a viable nuclear deal.

*Mehdi Khalaji is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute.*



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