

The First Step Toward an Iran Deal: No New Nuclear Concessions

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To build pressure toward a viable agreement, Washington and its negotiating partners should refrain from further extensions of the JPOA, warn Iran that sanctions will be reimposed if no deal is reached by a date certain, and counter destabilizing Iranian regional activities.

If only the United States negotiated as ruthlessly with Iran as it does with itself. The interim nuclear accord -- formally the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) -- between Iran and the United States and its five negotiating partners (known as the P5+1) offers moderate benefits to both sides: It limits Iran's nuclear activities in certain respects, while giving Iran time and space for economic recovery. Given these benefits, both sides appear to view the JPOA as essentially their second-best option -- not as good as a final accord on terms they prefer but better than the escalating crisis it replaced.

Perversely, however, this makes a final accord less likely. Achieving one will require painful compromises, particularly for Iranian hard-liners who view any accommodation with the United States as contrary to the Islamic Republic's core ideology. One might make those compromises if the alternative was dire. But the prospect of further extensions of the talks means that it is not. This is the crux of the debate between the White House and Congress over sanctions legislation under consideration on Capitol Hill...

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