

Could Sanctions Work against Tehran?

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As Western diplomats debate ways to counter Iran's nuclear program, the strategies they devise must take Iranian motives into account. If Iranian leaders see their nuclear program as essential to defending Iran's existence—as the Israeli and Pakistani governments view their nuclear programs—then economic considerations would make little difference to Iran's calculations. But defense is not the principal factor behind the Iranian nuclear program. Rather, Tehran seeks prestige and influence. Iranian leaders consistently present the nuclear program as an accomplishment of Iranian science and as evidence that Iran is an advanced industrial power. They also argue that international opposition to Iran's nuclear ambitions is motivated by a Western effort to prevent the country from assuming its rightful place as a regional leader. They play to Iranian national pride, not to the idea that Iran is so threatened that it must take desperate measures to defend itself. If the West is to convince the Iranian leadership to change course, therefore, it is necessary to persuade the Iranian leadership that its nuclear program will not advance Iranian influence. Economic instruments can play a role in this regard though they are by themselves unlikely to be sufficient.

Read (<http://www.meforum.org/article/1068>) this article in its entirety at www.meforum.org (<http://www.meforum.org/article/1068>).

Patrick Clawson, senior editor of Middle East Quarterly, is director for research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. This article draws upon May 17, 2006 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations and his June 8, 2006 testimony before the House Armed Services Committees. ❖

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