The View from Tehran

Iranian Leaders’ Perspectives on the International Framework Agreement

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Summary

- In the wake of the release of the negotiated framework agreement, Iranian leaders have categorically denied the validity of that agreement as presented in the US State Department fact sheet outlining what was agreed by the sides. All of the most critical components of the framework agreement have subsequently been challenged in the statements of Iranian officials. In addition to disputing that the fact sheet represents what was agreed at the Lausanne talks, Iran’s most senior figures have also claimed that the framework agreement is not in any way binding upon Iran.

- It is apparent from the statements of the Iranian leadership that the regime regards the negotiations on the nuclear issue as a tactical step for advancing its national objectives, rather than as an opportunity for rapprochement with America and the West. In the regime’s narrative, Iranian negotiators have succeeded in forcing the international community to acquiesce and accept Iran’s nuclear programme. Indeed, Iranian leaders have presented their country’s gains in the negotiations as both a form of “resistance” against America, and as a victory over the West.

- The view of the nuclear negotiations expressed by Iranian leaders fits into a wider pattern of hostility to the West, with the advancement of the nuclear programme being a core element of Iranian ascendancy. Rather than moderating anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric during the negotiations period, several Iranian figures – including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei – have continued, and even intensified, their use of aggressively anti-American language.

- Despite continuing to deny that the regime seeks nuclear weapons, Iranian leaders have also consistently opposed those elements of an agreement that would allow for verification on this matter. As well as rejecting the principle of inspections of Iranian military facilities, Iran has also failed to comply with international requests that the regime explain evidence of activities pertaining to nuclear-weapons development.

- Hopes that a moderate element within the regime might open the way to reconciliation between Iran and the international community, as well as to reaching a satisfactory agreement on the nuclear issue, have been challenged by many of the statements put out since the release of the framework agreement. Even those identified as moderates have joined with hardliners in publicly disputing both the key components of the framework agreement, as well as its overall validity.

- The sentiments expressed by Iran’s leadership since the release of the framework agreement raise troubling questions about the likelihood of the sides being able to successfully reach an agreement that adequately fulfils the international community’s requirements. Furthermore, these statements put in doubt hopes that the talks will lead to a new era of rapprochement between Iran and the West.
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Introduction

This paper provides a study of the statements made, in Farsi, by Iranian leaders during the weeks following the release of the international framework agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme. Using reports from the Persian media as its source, the paper outlines the ways in which the Islamic Republic’s senior political figures have publicly reacted to the framework agreement, as well as the ways in which they have represented the nuclear negotiations to their people.

Under the terms of the Geneva interim agreement signed in October 2013, between Iran and the P5+1 world powers (America, Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany), international negotiators were obliged to reach a final agreement on the future of the Iranian nuclear programme by 20 July 2014. Unable to meet that initial date, the sides agreed to reach a final, conclusive deal by the end of June 2015, and that a framework outlining the parameters for a final agreement would be made public by the end of March 2015.

On 2 April 2015, negotiators announced that a framework agreement had been reached. However, Iranian and American leaders have publicly disputed its exact terms since then, casting doubt on one another’s claims regarding what was actually agreed.

The statements set out in this report give an indication of the Iranian regime’s thinking on its nuclear programme, the negotiation process so far, and Iran’s relations with America and the West more generally. Yet, as these statements also indicate, there is not total uniformity in the outlook of Iranian leaders. Observers have looked for signs of divisions and tensions between the regime’s conservatives and those who have been viewed as moderates or reformists. Generally, however, any such internal disagreements are rarely allowed to become publicly visible.

Nevertheless, evidence that such tensions do exist – and that they may have been exacerbated following the framework agreement – surfaced in late May 2015, when footage from a closed session of the Iranian parliament revealed a fraught argument taking place. In the course of the video, Iranian Member of Parliament Mahdi Kouchakzadeh claimed to represent the views of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, while also accusing Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif – who has been at the forefront of the negotiations – of being a traitor.

Incidents such as this have contributed to speculation that there is a moderate faction of reformers close to President Rouhani and his Foreign Minister, and a rival faction that sides with Supreme Leader Khamenei. These terms may be deceiving, however. If Iranian figures such as Rouhani and Zarif are to be described as moderates at all, then it is only in contrast to ultra-conservative hardliners within the regime; both Iran’s president and foreign minister have made clear their commitment to preserving continuity with the principles set down by Ayatollah Khomeini at the time of the Islamic Republic’s founding. As for the claim that these figures are to be described as reformers, this could only be said to be true in as far as they put a greater emphasis on reforming Iran’s relations with the international community, particularly with regard to economic ties. Yet, there is no suggestion that Rouhani intends his presidency to be one which heralds an era of domestic reform, nor that he has any intention of curtailing the regime’s ambitions to extend Iranian influence across the Middle East.
It is also important to recall that Rouhani was previously Iran’s chief negotiator on the nuclear issue, from 2003 to 2005. Crucially, he later boasted publicly that the nuclear programme was able to advance greatly during this time as chief negotiator, promoting what can essentially be described as his skills of deception; seeking to encourage divisions between the European and American positions on the nuclear issue. These admissions by Rouhani, coming as recently as they do, raise further questions about Iranian intentions and the regime’s agenda when participating in these negotiations. Critics of the international community’s current approach to negotiations with Iran have highlighted this aspect of Rouhani’s background and raised concerns about the question of Iranian goodwill.

Indeed, the statements examined here do not give the impression of overwhelming goodwill towards America and the West, and, in many cases, the sense of scepticism about the prospect of the negotiations being successful is highly evident. Iranian officials seem to have learned from previous slips regarding commenting on the possible military dimensions of the Iranian nuclear programme; as such, the regime’s leaders have primarily focused their arguments on asserting that Iran has a right to a peaceful nuclear-energy and research programme. However, as seen in the statements set out in this report, talk of Iranian military strength and Iranian readiness for a military confrontation are far from uncommon either.

Nor do Iranian reactions to the framework agreement give cause for a high level of confidence that the two sides will successfully reach a final accord that will meet all of the international community’s most pressing concerns. Common among the claims made by Iranian leaders has been the assertion that Iran has triumphed through these negotiations, forcing the West to the table and then compelling the world to accept and legitimise the regime’s nuclear programme. Other figures have accused America of having lied and cheated during the negotiations, and of fabricating the content of their fact sheet. Alternatively, and sometimes in addition to the previous claim, Iranian leaders have disputed that the framework agreement has any weight or significance at all.

Taken as a whole, these statements indicate that the Iranian regime in no meaningful way supports the framework agreement as presented by the American government. If this is the case, then it is difficult to argue that an agreement on a framework was reached, and it therefore appears that the sides are much further apart than the interim agreement obliges them to be at this point in the negotiations timetable. Furthermore, if the American fact sheet is an accurate representation of commitments made by the sides, then the fact that Iran has disputed the terms of the framework immediately after its release does pose troubling questions about whether or not the same could happen in the wake of a final agreement too. Consequently, this not only raises concerns about whether Iran and the P5+1 group will be able to reach an adequate agreement by the end-of-June deadline, but, given the way in which the regime disputed the American fact sheet so forcefully, it also casts doubt on the prospects for the successful implementation of any deal that might be agreed.
1. Disputing the Framework Agreement

Since the framework agreement was released, one of the most noticeable themes to have arisen in the statements of senior regime figures has been the denial of its content. From the outset, there was confusion among observers regarding the precise nature of the framework that had emerged from the P5+1 talks. Rather than the sides simply releasing one document concisely explaining what had been negotiated, a number of statements were released in the days following the announcement of the agreement at Lausanne. First, there came a joint EU-Iranian statement, presented in English by the EU’s High Representative to the talks, Federica Mogherini, and then in Persian, directly after, by Iran’s Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif. While the joint statement went some way towards outlining how the Iranian nuclear programme would be curtailed, it was vague in places and left several concerns unanswered, specifically regarding the nature of inspections and the time frame for sanctions relief.

Shortly afterwards, President Obama presented a more detailed version of the agreement, from the White House lawn. The president’s statement on the framework did not in any way contradict the earlier EU-Iranian one; however, it did contain additional clarifications not found in the joint statement and, as such, conveyed a far more robust version of what had been agreed. In line with the president’s words, the US State Department released a fact sheet titled, “Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Nuclear Program”.

On 3 April, the Iranian Foreign Ministry released its own fact sheet detailing what had been negotiated in the Lausanne talks. Crucially, this fact sheet contradicted the American one in several key areas and, arguably, differed in spirit from the joint statement made with the European Union the day before. The media subsequently reported that French officials were in possession of an alternative version of the fact sheet that, in places, conflicted with both the American and Iranian accounts of what had been agreed. Later still, on 15 April, the Iranian parliament’s nuclear committee put out its own document of revisions to the Lausanne statement, which listed changes that it deemed necessary to bring the framework in line with guidelines from Supreme Leader Khamenei.

In addition to this, Iranian officials went to great lengths, in the weeks following the framework agreement, to stress that it was the American fact sheet that was incorrect, often directly accusing the United States of lying about what the two sides had agreed in the talks. One of the most senior figures to dispute the validity of the framework has been Iran’s own chief nuclear negotiator and deputy Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi. Given that Araghchi was himself responsible for directly negotiating the terms of the framework, his remarks on the subject are all the more extraordinary. Yet, speaking on 9 April, he is reported as saying that “[t]he fact sheet has no legal value and no importance should be ascribed to it”, adding that, after any event, each party voices its narrative and emphasises its own actions.1

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1 Mehr News Agency, 9 April 2015, available at: http://www.mehrnews.com/news/2329641/%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%A7-%DB%8C%DB%8A-%D9%85%D8%B3-%D9%86-%D8%A7-%D8%B1-%D9%85-%D8%AA-%D8%A7-%D9%86-%D8%B3-%D8%AA-%D9%85-%D9%86-%D8%A7-%D8%AA-%D9%85-%D8%AA-%D8%A7-%D8%AA-%D9%86-%D8%A7-%D8%AA-%D9%85-%D8%AA-%D8%A7-%D8%AA-%D9%86-%D8%A7-%D8%AA-%D9%85-%D8%AA-%D8%A7-%D8%AA-%D9%86-%D8%A7-%D8%AA-%D9%85-%D8%AA-%D8%A7-%D8%AA-%D9%86.
In taking this stance, Araghchi was simply reiterating the line already taken by the Iranian Foreign Ministry the day before – when spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham had stated that the American fact sheet was one “which Iran does not accept” because it is “a US version of the negotiations, which they presented from their own point of view.” Yet, Afkham went further still, insinuating that there had been wilful dishonesty on the part of the United States when it published a document “which does not completely and accurately illustrate what happened.” She also pointed out that “[a]fter the Geneva agreement [in October 2013], the USA also acted in such a way. That time, they prominently published fake contents which were not mentioned, and all the parties reacted to that. [...] The USA are well known for these methods around the whole world.”

This view of the American fact sheet has been widely retold by Iranian political figures, including a number of members of the Iranian parliament. For example, on 7 April, Ali Alilu suggested that, “[r]egarding the negotiations between Iran and P5+1, and the recent Swiss statement, one should not ascribe any importance to the US authorities’ bragging.” Alilu went on to say that the aforementioned statement had no legal or administrative weight, and that “the general public and authorities should not expend any more efforts [discussing] that statement than it actually deserves.”

Other officials have been still more aggressive in both denying the contents of the fact sheet and in accusing American negotiators of having acted deceitfully. At a press conference on 20 April, Behrouz Kamalvandi, deputy head and spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), insisted that the document which Washington had issued after the Lausanne talks included subjects that had not yet been finalised, and went on to state that “[t]he other side is cunning and untrustworthy”.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Reza Naqdi, Commander of Iran’s Basij (Volunteer) Force, accused the United States of deviousness and of having an anti-Iranian agenda. Expressing himself in even stronger terms than many of the other Iranian officials, Naqdi said:

The comments made after the Lausanne negotiations once again showed the United States’ strong grudge against the Iranians and proved that the US officials are liars and untrustworthy [...] After 9 days of breathtaking nuclear negotiations in Lausanne, the US president and other officials now deny the principal agreements and present opposing interpretations [...] They cite Iran’s undertakings, but fabricate and deny the commitments that they have made to the Iranian delegation.

Such comments arose again in relation to several specific matters. One issue which proved contentious from the outset was the extent to which Iranian enrichment would be permitted; in

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
particular, there has been considerable disagreement about what level of centrifuges Iran will be allowed to use. Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the AEOI, has insisted that Iran “will start working with IR8 devices”; yet, the American fact sheet states that the country will not be permitted to carry out enrichment with centrifuges any more advanced than the IR1 model. The AEOI head explained this discrepancy by saying:

The fact sheet issued by the USA contains accurate and inaccurate statements, based on their own narrative. Their action [of releasing their fact sheet] is not so surprising for us because they have a record of making such moves. Our fact sheet is definitely different from the US one because our fact sheet represents the truth of what happened in the negotiations.\(^9\)

Such a response is typical of the way in which the Iranian leadership has presented the framework agreement: denying key aspects of the US fact sheet and suggesting a pattern of American dishonesty.

Another point that has proven particularly difficult for negotiators on both sides to work around is the matter of Iran’s underground nuclear facility at Fordow, which had been kept secret from the international community until 2009. Given that it is located in a bunker deep underground and at the site of a former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps base, news of its existence caused considerable alarm in the West, not least because Iran’s move to place nuclear facilities beneath the mountains at Fordow appeared to be an intentional attempt to set the Iranian nuclear programme beyond the reach of outside intervention. Similarly, as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) pointed out, Iran’s failure to declare the existence of the site at Fordow was in breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that the country had signed up to in 2003.

Since Fordow’s existence became public, there have been calls for the nuclear facility there to be shut down; dismantled; and rendered beyond use. Under the terms of the framework agreement set out in the US fact sheet, enrichment is to be ended at Fordow, although the facility is permitted to remain in existence as a research and development project under an international inspections regime. This specification has been taken, by some in Iran, as a move to close Fordow completely – for which Western governments had initially pushed. The Chief of the Iranian Judiciary’s Human Rights Council, Mohammad Javad Larijani, for one, has vehemently opposed any idea of reducing the site’s operations, proclaiming that “our facilities will not only remain underground, but will go deeper in the ground” – and suggesting that five more subterranean facilities should be constructed – as long as the US “consider[s] military option[s] against Iran and [its] brazen lackey’s [Israel’s] continuous saber-rattling is in place”.\(^11\)

\(^9\) Mehr News Agency, 10 April 2015, available at: http://www.mehrnews.com/news/2529966/%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%8C-%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1-%D9%87%D9%A8%D8%B1.

\(^10\) Ibid.

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The suggestion of intrusive inspections and surveillance – particularly at military sites – has been the issue most fiercely contested by Iranian officials. According to the fact sheet released by the US State Department, Iran agreed to both take steps to answer IAEA concerns regarding the possible military dimensions of its nuclear programme, and implement the Additional Protocol of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (which would potentially include inspections of Iran’s military sites). Additionally, the American government has also referred to ‘anytime, anywhere’ inspections being part of a final agreement with Iran. Nevertheless, Iranian officials have been quite consistent in challenging the suggestion that Iran has accepted the principle of inspections of military sites. Indeed, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has explicitly opposed military inspections and so it would be extremely unusual to see Iranian officials taking a line contradicting that policy.

Iran’s Defence Minister, Hoseyn Dehqan, reacted particularly strongly to reports from Western media outlets that inspections of military sites had been agreed upon, and specifically reiterated that negotiations are being conducted in line with the parameters set out by Ayatollah Khamenei. As the Fars News Agency reported:

Iran’s Defence Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan categorically rejected as a “lie” a Guardian report alleging that Tehran has granted access to its military facilities under the recent framework agreement with the world powers.

“No such agreement has been made; principally speaking, visit to military centers is among our redlines and no such visit will be accepted,” Gen. Dehqan stressed on Wednesday, rejecting “the report by foreign media outlets, such as the Guardian” as “untruthful allegations”. The Iranian defence minister reiterated that the Supreme Leader’s guidelines, government’s strategy and the negotiating team’s resolve have placed the Iranian diplomacy on a path that it would never allow the opposite parties to the talks impose their will on the Iranian nation.”

Similarly, Ali Saeedi, the Supreme Leader’s representative at the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), also stressed that there is “no possibility” of inspections occurring at military sites, pointing out that “neither the Supreme Leader nor the parliament will allow this to happen.” These views have also been conveyed by Iran’s military establishment to the Iranian negotiating team. It has been reported in the Iranian media that the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Major General Hassan Firouzabadi, wrote to Iran’s negotiators insisting that inspections of military sites would be a national-security breach for Iran and were not an option. As the Tasnim News Agency reported in early May:

The Iranian military authorities will never allow the aliens to get access to the country’s security-defence sphere, Major General Hassan Firouzabadi wrote in [a...] letter to the Iranian team of nuclear negotiators, engaged in talks with the Group 5+1 (Russia, China, the US, Britain, France and Germany). The senior officer also made it clear that Iran’s defence progress would never come to a halt under the pretext of monitoring and inspection. Making a reference to a US fact sheet published [...] in early April,

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13 Ibid.
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Firouzabadi said such American interpretation signifies a ploy against Iran’s national security.

The timing of this letter, coming after the release of the framework agreement, might suggest that the Iranian negotiating team had gone further in making concessions than the Iranian military would accept, and, as such, there may now be a push back against what was agreed. Yet, at the same time, other senior military figures have claimed that “no such agreement has been made” by Iran’s negotiators. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that the letter was partly a move made to bolster the Iranian delegation’s negotiating position. Indeed, for the most part, senior Iranian military figures have maintained the line that negotiators conceded nothing, in terms of inspections at military sites, and that conflicting American claims are either a misunderstanding or an outright distortion. As Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces stated:

During the previous negotiations, the Iranian officials [...] have explicitly and unequivocally expressed the prohibition of any inspection of [Iran’s] military and defence centers and facilities [...] The American side’s insistence on attending Iran’s military centers can be evaluated with regard to the repressed and unattainable wishes of the White House officials [...].

Responding to US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter’s claims that the inspection of Iran’s military facilities would be part of any final nuclear agreement between Tehran and the six world powers, Jazayeri said, “Such remarks either show the low understanding of the speaker or stem from the overwhelming bias of the American negotiating side”.

2. How the Regime Views the Negotiations

The launching of negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States and other Western powers has been widely hailed as an unprecedented achievement. In previous decades, this kind of diplomatic engagement between America and Iran would have been all but unthinkable. As such, there have been suggestions by both the Obama administration and European politicians that these talks represent a profound shift in Iran’s relationship with the international community in general, and with the West in particular. Indeed, the election of President Rouhani, whom many view as a moderate, has added to hopes that these talks can have a fundamentally transformative effect on wider diplomatic relations.

Yet, while some Western leaders have presented the nuclear negotiations as an opportunity for moving towards rapprochement with Iran, the Iranian leadership has not necessarily ascribed the same meaning to these talks. From the statements made by senior figures within the regime, it appears that Tehran does not view the negotiations as being transformative in the way that the

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14 Ibid.
Obama administration has suggested they could potentially be; rather, the Iranian view tends to be that these talks are essentially transactional. That is to say, the Iranians understand the talks not in terms of a broader move toward reconciliation, but strictly in terms of the limited areas of discussion officially covered by the P5+1 negotiations. In that sense, the regime could be described as viewing the negotiations as simply being transactional, with Iran trading limitations to its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.

As is evident in the comments made by the country’s leaders, the attitude that Tehran takes towards the nuclear negotiations is largely shaped by the way in which the regime views its own nuclear programme and its relationship with the United States. In particular, it is important to emphasise how crucial the issue of having a nuclear programme has become for the regime.

While the Islamic Republic has been explicitly hostile to the cultural influences of the West, technological advancement is prized as a matter of national prestige and has been presented, by the regime, as being in line with the goals of the Islamic revolution. When speaking to their public, Iranian officials present nuclear enrichment as being both a national priority and a fundamental right, framing as unjust any attempts by the West to limit Iran’s ability to enrich. Accordingly, Iran’s leadership has presented claims that its right to nuclear enrichment has been recognised via the negotiation process as being a great victory for Iran on the world stage.

What remains unclear is precisely what the Iranian understanding of the term ‘nuclear rights’ encompasses. The regime’s senior figures both laud the accomplishment of having become a nuclear power and, at the same time, praise their own ambiguity on this subject. The question then remains one of whether the Iranians view nuclear-power status as being limited to an exclusively civilian programme, or whether they, in fact, consider it to include achieving nuclear-weapons capabilities.

When speaking to their own public, Iranian leaders do not present the West as being explicitly opposed to Iran gaining nuclear weapons capabilities. Rather they frame Western policy in terms of an unreasonable and belligerent attitude that seeks to unjustly target Iran and deny Iranians the right to a peaceful nuclear programme. Consequently, a recurring theme in the remarks made by the Iranian leadership has been the insistence that they have an innate right to a nuclear enrichment programme, and that the West must be made to accept this. Accordingly, Iranian leaders regularly praise their own negotiators for their steadfastness and refusal to back down on this point; in the narrative spun by the Iranian leadership, not only did these negotiators stand up to Western pressure, but, in their telling, it was Iran that forced the West to the negotiating table. Once there, the Iranian account claims that it was their delegation’s strength and resilience that succeeded in compelling the international community to recognise and accept Iran’s nuclear programme and fundamental right to carry out nuclear enrichment.

This attitude was explicitly expressed by president Rouhani on the 15th of April when addressing the first meeting of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution since the release of the framework agreement. As was reported by the Fars News Agency Rouhani stated that:

“The world public opinion, analysts, friends and even foes don’t interpret the recent understanding (between Tehran and the Group 5+1) as a failure for the Islamic Republic.” Reiterating the need for safeguarding the country’s nuclear-related scientific and technological capabilities in all fields, he said, “The negotiators have and will never
forget the Iranian nation’s rights and will continue this path mightily based on the guidelines of Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution (Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei) and within the framework of the major lines of policy.”

The argument that the negotiations and framework agreement involved Iran compelling the West to accept the regime’s nuclear programme can also be heard in the words of the speaker of the Iranian parliament Ali Larijani. Addressing a ceremony in Tehran shortly after the framework had been announced Larijani has remarked that Westerners “have observed Iran's resistance and were forced to accept enrichment on Iran's soil, but if you intend to utter equivocal words and show dishonesty, we will return and continue our previous course of action.”

Hamid Reza Moghadam Far, a senior advisor to the commander of the IRGC, has expressed these sentiments even more strongly. As reported by the Tasnim News Agency Moghadam Far explained that:

Iran’s right to enrich uranium has been recognised and the enemy has withdrawn from its previous red lines [sic], meaning that [the] Fordow nuclear facility will remain in place, the country will keep its centrifuge machines, carry out research and development, and the Arak reactor will be somehow preserved.

Elsewhere in the interview, Moghadam Far said that this ‘success’ in forcing the enemy to step back from its redlines was a result of Ayatollah Khamenei’s guidance on the talks and the resistance shown by the nation and the negotiators. He also referred to Iran’s “considerable spiritual influence” in the region and some other parts of the world and the country’s remarkable progress in different areas as reasons behind the world powers’ acknowledgement of Iran’s nuclear rights.

Moghadam Far’s outlook cannot easily be dismissed as simply being the view of an advisor, as it appears to also be a view shared by the man he advises. Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, the commander of the IRGC has similarly described the negotiating process that led to the framework in terms of Iranian diplomats facing down Western pressure and upholding Iran’s “rights” in the nuclear field. At a meeting of IRGC commanders, he expressed the opinion that “[t]he Iranian nation’s resistance to the US thwarted Washington’s robust options for imposing its political will on the Islamic Republic of Iran”.

Similarly, the chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), Ali Akbar Salehi, was reported as having told a closed session of the Iranian parliament that “[t]he Islamic Republic of Iran has acquired such a (high level of) power in the nuclear technology that this very power has forced the western side to see no way out but sitting to the negotiating table with Iran”.

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* Ibid.
* Ibid.
Just one day after the framework had been announced, Iran’s chief negotiator, Abbas Araghchi, was also promoting the line that Iran had succeeded in obliging the international community to recognise Iran’s nuclear programme. In a telephone interview with Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), given on 3 April, Araghchi claimed that “the Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear program will be credited and recognised internationally, and this is our greatest achievement”.

The language that Araghchi uses underlines how the Iranian expectations of the negotiations differ from those of the West. By calling recognition of his country’s nuclear programme “our greatest achievement”, Araghchi hints that one of the primary objectives of the negotiations is to win acceptance for Iran’s right to carry out uranium enrichment and to gain sanctions relief, rather than open a new era in Iranian-Western relations. Other comments, meanwhile, have attempted to portray the negotiations as a tool for winning the country international prestige. Speaking in April 2015, AEOI head Ali Akbar Salehi emphasised the belief that Iran’s nuclear programme has won it “recognition beyond its potential”. His deputy, Behrouz Kamalvandi, made a similar assertion: that Iran’s ‘capability’ brought it “dignity [and] power”. Kamalvandi made it plain that this ‘capability’ was nuclear - as, to attain international standing, a country had to “possess technology and industry, with the nuclear ones coming at the top of them” - however, he remained vague as to whether it was civilian or military in nature. As the Islamic Republic News Agency related, the AEOI deputy merely spoke of Iran’s “power and potential” not being “the capability many own”, but “exclusive to [a select] few in the world”, adding that “[s]uch a capability […] brings […] might to a country.”

This policy of ambiguity is typical of Iranian officials’ approach to talking about the nuclear issue. In fact, Salehi referenced it explicitly, alongside the question of Iran producing nuclear weapons, moments after praising the country’s new-found recognition on the world stage. Explicitly, Salehi explained “over the years, people have asked me on various occasions: Mr Salehi, tell me how many nuclear bombs you have, we won’t tell anyone. This policy of ambiguity in our country is very good […] we have gained the position of a nuclear power.” This association implies the belief that an internationally recognised nuclear-power status might include possessing nuclear weapons. If the Iranian understanding of what constitutes being a nuclear power does include weapons capabilities (and the tone of Kamalvandi’s comments would also suggest that this is the case), then this would further indicate that Iran indeed seeks a military dimension to its nuclear programme.

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26 Ibid.
27 Mehr News Agency, 27 April 2015, available at: http://www.mehrnews.com/news/2563618/%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%87-%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D9%86%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7-
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Mehr News Agency, 27 April 2015, available at: http://www.mehrnews.com/news/2563618/%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%87-%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D9%86%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82.
Concurrent with this kind of rhetoric are statements from other figures within the regime who have expressed a more positive attitude toward the negotiations and have explicitly emphasised that Iran’s nuclear programme is exclusively for civilian purposes. Most significant among these voices has been that of President Rouhani, whose language and tone has differed markedly from that of his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Speaking on 22 April, the incumbent president said:

Everyone should know the fact that threat, humiliation and sanctions don’t create peace and security, the Group 5+1 [...] opted for negotiation with the Islamic Republic of Iran; intensive, complicated and long negotiations. Now I am pleased to announce that the talks are on the path of constructive interactions which can result in a final agreement [...] The final agreement should guarantee Iran the right of the peaceful use of the nuclear energy and the annulment of all economic sanctions.\[32\]

Nevertheless, despite the change in words – even if the current president’s statements do convey a more moderate impression – the regime’s actual policies and actions have not changed noticeably. In addition, Rouhani’s insistence on the peaceful nature of Iran’s intentions is also generally accompanied by statements reinforcing the claim that his country has certain rights pertaining to its nuclear programme. So, for instance, speaking on 5 April, days after the release of the framework agreement, Rouhani stated, “The Islamic Republic of Iran has not and is not after aggression against another country and our contemporary history shows this reality, but we will defend our rights against anyone who seeks to violate the people’s rights.”

In contrast to the tone generally used by President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif, others in the regime have made no such effort to moderate their tone; rather, they have continued to engage in overtly anti-Western rhetoric. Consistent with Islamist ideology across the Islamic world, figures within the regime often expresses their antipathy for the United States and Israel, through the ‘Great Satan–Little Satan’ metaphor. Employing such a reference to the United States as the “Great Satan”, Brigadier General Farzad Esmaili, commander of Iran’s Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defence Base, explicitly rejected the notion that there could ever be reconciliation between Iran and America, insisting that Iran is only participating in negotiations to achieve certain limited objectives; (which he expresses simply as Iran’s “rights”). In late April, the Iranian Students’ News Agency reported Esmaili as saying:

The USA, as the foreign enemy, is always the Great Satan. There will never be any reconciliation with this Satan because the USA’s goals are not compatible with ours. The USA is always pursuing Islamophobia. The only purpose of the nuclear negotiations is to obtain our rights; it is not that we want to compromise with them. Reconciliation is not possible because our goals differ from those of the USA.\[35\]


\[34\] Iranian Students’ News Agency, 28 April 2015, available at: http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/94020804663/%D9%BE%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%B3-%D9%87-300-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%8C-%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%B3-%D9%87.

\[35\] Ibid.
Others, such as Member of Parliament Hamid Rasaei, have gone further and challenged the very principle of negotiating with the West and cast doubt on the commonly heard rationalisation that negotiations can at least be used to achieve the regime’s goals. Rasaei specifically used arguments based on religious scripture, to advance his point:

It says in the Qur’an that “the Jews and the Christians will never get enough from you”. Indeed, these two religions have been distorted and, currently, they have turned into two hegemonic systems. One is the Zionists, who lie and consider themselves to be the symbol of Judaism, and on the other hand, the USA, who lie and consider themselves to be the symbol of Christianity.36

Ahmad Bakhshayesh, another member of Iran’s parliament, also challenged the notion of negotiating with the US and disputed suggestions that there could be more substantial ties between the two countries. Again, Bakhshayesh cites the claim that America is inherently untrustworthy, stating:

Iran does not trust the USA, there is no doubt that the other party generated confusion by creating an atmosphere full of lies and pessimism. Moreover, Iran’s experience of ties with the USA shows even greater distrust and dictates that one should not trust a government that does not keep its word.37

3. The Supreme Leader’s View

As the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is both the head of state and the highest political and religious authority in Iran. The influence of the Supreme Leader over Iran’s political system is such that it is not conceivable that the Iranian state could pursue any significant policy direction than ran counter to the wishes of the Supreme Leader. Under the terms of the Islamic Republic’s constitution all three branches of government are in effect subject to his authority. In addition Iran’s Supreme Leader also heads the military and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), with the power to declare war and agree peace treaties. Beyond that, Iran’s Supreme Leader is responsible for setting out and overseeing the general direction of government policy.

In his position as Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei has been a vocal advocate of Iran’s nuclear programme and while he has permitted Rouhani’s government to engage in negotiations with the West over this issue, Iran’s Supreme Leader has also issued Iranian diplomats with strict guidelines outlining the parameters of what can and cannot be agreed to. Additionally, the Supreme Leader’s public statements on this subject, and indeed all subjects, constitute the framework within which other Iranian officials must present their views.

Even by the standards of the regime, Khamenei’s world view can be regarded as particularly hardline and conservative. Along with the Marxist-Shia writings of the Iranian revolutionary

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thinker Ali Shariati, Khamenei’s ideology was also undoubtedly shaped by the thinking of one of the founders of Islamism: Sayyid Qutb (Khamenei translated some of Qutb’s writings into Persian, during the 1960s and 1970s). Yet, perhaps the most significant influence on Khamenei’s religious-political outlook was the Iranian regime’s own founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Working closely with Ayatollah Khomeini, Khamenei was himself a prominent figure in the newly formed Islamic Republic, following the 1979 revolution. Indeed, by 1981, Khamenei had already become the republic’s president, and, in 1989, he went on to succeed Khomeini as Supreme Leader. In this latter role, Ayatollah Khamenei has, first and foremost, served as a continuity figure, preserving the principles established by the Islamic Revolution and, if anything, hardening much of his anti-American rhetoric.

To what extent there is any significant underlying disagreement on political views between Khamenei and other hardliners, on the one hand, and Rouhani’s government, on the other, is not easy to ascertain. The same is also true when looking for signs of disagreement over Iran’s current negotiations strategy. It is, however, noteworthy that when it came to the question of whether Iran should release its own fact sheet in response to the American one, Rouhani’s government responded to the more extreme elements calling for publication of such a document by retorting that if the Supreme Leader had instructed it to do so, it would have published one already. Such incidents are just a very small indication of the need of all Iranian political figures to legitimise their actions with reference to the views of the Supreme Leader.

The Iranian government did go on to publish its own fact sheet on the framework agreement, to counter the American one. It can be assumed that this version broadly reflects the Supreme Leader’s views of what is permissible, even if not what was agreed during the P5+1 framework talks; several of Khamenei’s public statements directly correspond to the Iranian fact sheet and the negotiating positions promoted by other Iranian officials. For example, demands that sanctions must be lifted from the outset of the signing of any agreement, or the objection to the inspection of military sites, are positions that Khamenei has publicly insisted upon and that other regime officials have subsequently reiterated.

On 9 April, Khamenei gave a lengthy and in-depth address to a gathering of clerics, to mark the anniversary of the birth of Hazrat Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed. The speech was also broadcast over Iranian state television. In addition to touching on various theological subjects, Khamenei’s remarks also covered events in Yemen and the ongoing nuclear negotiations. During the speech, Khamenei reiterated many of his guidelines for the negotiations with the P5+1 powers, as well as giving his reaction to events surrounding the release of the framework agreement. As many other Iranian officials have done, Khamenei began his comments on the negotiations by refuting the notion that the framework agreement is in anyway binding on Iran, stating:

Some people have asked, and still ask, why I have taken no position on the nuclear issue? The answer is that there is no ground for taking a position. Our officials, nuclear officials, and consultants are telling me that nothing has been done yet; nothing binding has taken place between the two sides. [...] We have still nothing; no obligation has been accepted yet. [...] What has been done so far can neither guarantee an agreement and the
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negotiation that may lead to an agreement, nor [can it] guarantee the content [of such agreement]; nothing. [It] does not even guarantee that these negotiations may reach their end and result in an agreement."

Khamenei subsequently went on to explain that he was not hopeful about the chances of the current negotiations yielding success, although Iran's Supreme Leader also made clear that he did not oppose the negotiations and would welcome an outcome that advanced Iranian national interests. However, he stressed that it would be better not to reach an agreement if the deal disadvantaged Iran's national objectives. Such remarks further contribute to the impression that the regime does not view reaching accord as either a priority or a particularly pressing matter. It is also noteworthy that Khamenei explicitly framed an unfavourable deal as something that would damage Iran's national dignity, striking an essentially ambivalent tone about the entire undertaking:

Of course, I have never been optimistic about negotiations with the United States. [...] However, despite [that...], I did not oppose this case of negotiations. I agreed to it. [...] I give my full support to and welcome an agreement, which would meet the interests of the Iranian nation and maintain the dignity of the Iranian nation; everybody should know this. [...] If an agreement is reached and this agreement is the one that would meet the interests of the nation, the interests of the country, I will totally agree with that. Of course, I also said that not reaching an agreement is better than a bad agreement [...] Not reaching an agreement is better than an agreement in which the interests of the nation are downtrodden, the dignity of the nation is undermined, [and] the Iranian nation with all its grandeur is humiliated. Not reaching an agreement is much more preferable to reaching such an agreement."

Speaking more specifically about the contents of the framework agreement, Khamenei then proceeded to accuse the United States of having engaged in fabrication when drawing up its fact sheet. In particular, Khamenei alleges that while the Americans were working on one framework with their Iranian counterparts, they were also secretly compiling a contradictory fact sheet at the same time:

A few hours after our negotiators finished their talks, a statement was released by the White House on the details of the negotiations. This statement that they published, which they call [a] “fact sheet,” is mostly incorrect. That is, the story that they tell about negotiations and agreements that have been made, is a manipulated and erroneous story, which is devoid of truth. They [Iranian officials] brought this statement and I saw it; it is four or five pages; [these] four, five pages have not been prepared within these two or three hours [after the Lausanne statement was read out], [but] at the same time that they were engaged in negotiations, they [had] sat down and prepared this statement. See, the other side is like this. They are talking to you, understanding is reached over an issue [and] at the same time that they are talking to you, they are preparing a statement, which is contrary to what is going on between you and them, and they publish that statement as
soon as your negotiations are over! The other side is like this; the [other] side is the side that does not keep its word; [it] is a cheating side."

Ayatollah Khamenei picked up this same theme elsewhere in his remarks, when describing how he had explicitly instructed the Iranian negotiators “not to trust the opposite side”. As well as reiterating that the framework agreement is not considered binding by the regime, Khamenei also depicted the American side as mocking the Iranians. Recounting his instructions to Iranian diplomats Khamenei stated:

My next demand from officials was that I told them not to trust the opposite side. Fortunately, one of the officials recently said explicitly that we have no trust in the opposite side and this was very good. I told them not to trust the opposite side, do not be deceived by their smile, do not trust the promise that they give you - which is just promise and no action - because, as soon as they get what they want, they will start laughing at you! They are so outrageous. Today [...] a preliminary agreement has been released in the form of a note and a statement and nothing has been done yet and both sides say nothing is binding yet; even now that they have just made this move, you saw [that] the US president appeared on TV screens with what gesture[s] and what [a] grimace!"

Among Khamenei’s many remarks on the negotiations, it is particularly noteworthy that Iran’s Supreme Leader went to considerable lengths to stress to his audience that the current talks are strictly only concerned with the nuclear issue. Despite initially appearing to oppose the principle of wider negotiations with the United States, Khamenei did go on to suggest that American conduct in these talks might be used as a way of making a judgement about the possibility of future, more far reaching, talks - although, as long as “the other side gives up its usual diversionary tactics”. For now, however, Iran’s Supreme Leader is unequivocal that the current round of talks has no further remit:

The next point is that these negotiations that are under way, part of which is negotiation with the American sides, [are] only about the nuclear issue; only. At present, we do not negotiate with America on any other issue; nothing. Everybody should know this. Neither on regional issues, nor on various domestic issues, nor on international issues. Today, the only topic for discussion and negotiations is the nuclear issue. Now, this will become an experience. If the other side gives up its usual diversionary tactics, this will become an experience for us that, very well, we can negotiate with them on other issues."

With Iranian involvement in the negotiation process being driven by certain pragmatic objectives, Khamenei’s remarks reiterated that winning sanctions relief is chief among those objectives. Indeed, a particularly problematic point for negotiators has been the procedures surrounding the lifting of sanctions. From the American and European side, there has been a push for sanctions relief to be gradual and made dependent upon Iranian compliance; yet, the Iranian position has been that sanctions relief should occur immediately following the signing of an agreement. Khamenei reinforced that perspective, telling his audience that the:

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sanctions should be removed totally and all at once. [The fact] that one [Western negotiator] says sanctions will be lifted six months later, the other one says no, it may take a year, [and] yet another one says it may take more than a year, these are their conventional games. None of these remarks should be taken seriously and are not acceptable. If it is the will of the Almighty God and they manage to achieve an agreement, sanctions must [sic] be removed totally on the very day of the agreement; this must happen.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

Another crucial point covered by Ayatollah Khamenei during his remarks concerned the question of the nature of Iran’s nuclear programme. Once again, Khamenei insisted that the programme is not part of an effort to seek nuclear weapons, but rather, an important step towards technological advancement for Iranian industry. Khamenei also rejected the notion that the reason that Iran will not pursue weaponisation has anything to do with Western pressure:

We are not seeking nuclear explosion, \[\text{do not want}\] to [conduct] nuclear test[s]. We do not seek nuclear weapons, not because they say so, but because of ourselves, because of our religion and our wisdom. This is both our religious fatwa and rational fatwa. It is our rational fatwa that we don’t need nuclear weapons, today and tomorrow and not any other time [in the future]. For a country like ours, nuclear weapons are nothing but trouble \[\ldots\].\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

Following from this point, Iran’s Supreme Leader repeated another key Iranian position: the opposition to inspections of military sites. Indeed, Khamenei went further still, asserting that he did not wish to see Iran singled out for inspection or surveillance measures to which no other country was subject. This may be a reference to opposing IAEA inspectors from carrying out surprise or unannounced inspections. Equally, it could be a rejection of the proposal that Iran would be obliged to install surveillance cameras in its nuclear facilities, something the Iranians have at various stages said they will not allow. Stressing that he will not permit inspections of military sites Khamenei explains:

Another point that I told esteemed officials and I tell you as well is that no permission should be given [to the opposite side] to get into [the] security and defence sphere of the country under the pretext of supervision [over the nuclear program]. [I] absolutely [forbid this]. Military officials of the country are by no means permitted to let foreigners into [the] security and defence sanctuaries and sphere of the country, or to stop [the] development of defence [capacities] of the country under the pretext of supervision and under the pretext of inspection and things like that. Development of [\ldots the] defence capability of the country, is the nation’s powerful fist in the military sphere. This should remain strong and become stronger. [\ldots] These [issues] should not absolutely be touched upon in the negotiations. The next point is that any unconventional supervisory method, which would make the Islamic Republic a specific country in terms of supervision, must be rejected.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}
Towards the end of Ayatollah Khamenei’s statements on the nuclear negotiations, he stressed that, while he would allow negotiators to agree to certain restrictions on the programme, he would also make it clear that technical development must continue unabated:

Nuclear scientific and technical development in its various dimensions should by no means be stopped. Development must continue; technical development. Now, they [Iranian negotiators] may deem certain restrictions necessary and accept them; I have no objection [to that]. They [can] accept some restrictions. But technical development must certainly continue and go on with strength and force."

When addressing this subject on other occasions, Iran’s Supreme Leader has spoken out particularly strongly against Iran being obliged to negotiate under threat from the international community, and from the United States in particular. At various times, Western leaders have stated that all options are ‘on the table’ when it comes to confronting the Iranian nuclear programme. This, of course, carries the insinuation that a military operation might be employed as part of an effort to neutralise Iran’s military infrastructure. Speaking on 20 April, Ayatollah Khamenei fiercely opposed such threats, stating:

After a [short] period of silence by the opposite side, one of their officials recently spoke once more of options on the table. One the one hand, they bluff this way and on the other, they say the Islamic Republic of Iran should stop its defence progress, which is an idiotic remark. [...] The Islamic Republic of Iran will never accept this idiotic remark and the Iranian nation has proven that, if invaded, it will defend itself strongly and will stand up to the unreasonable invader like a clenched fist [...] All organs, including the Ministry of Defence, the Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, should boost their military and defence preparedness as well as their combat readiness and spirit day by day and that is an official instruction [...]"

However, following these statements, Khamenei proceeded to insist that “Iran will never pose a threat to regional and neighbouring countries.”" This is a common juxtaposition found in the rhetoric associated with the Iranian regime, designed to, in one moment, boast of military prowess, but, in the next, claim passivity and even victimhood.

Speaking in early May, Ayatollah Khamenei once again addressed the issue of Iran being compelled to negotiate under threats from the United States. As well as asserting that he rejects the principle of negotiating while being threatened, Khamenei went on to issue his own counter-threat, should the United States be considering any military action. As the Supreme Leader’s website reported:

He also referred to recent threats by US officials at a time when nuclear talks are underway between Iran and global powers, saying: “I don’t agree with negotiations under the specter of threat. Foreign policy officials and negotiators should respect the red lines [sic] and principles carefully and they should also defend the grandeur and splendour of the Iranian nation while they continue talks without bowing to any imposition, force,

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" Ibid.  
" Ibid.
humiliation and threat.” [...] He [later] touched on remarks by US officials that the US would launch a military campaign against Iran if need be, saying: “First of all, how dare you! Secondly, as I said during the tenure of the former US president, gone is the hit-and-run era and the Iranian nation would not [leave] anyone planning to invade it alone.”

While denying then denying that Iran poses a threat to the region, Khamenei proceeded to also deny that Iran is attempting to develop nuclear weapons capabilities. The Supreme Leader made the counter accusation against America and Israel, stating:

The Americans, Europeans and some of their followers have fabricated the story that Iran seeks to acquire nuclear weapons, and that they portray the Islamic Republic as a threat. Today, the biggest threats to the world and to the region are the US and the Zionist regime, which intervene in any spot they deem necessary and trigger killings, without any consideration and without conforming to religious and conscientious obligations and criteria.

Since the release of the framework agreement, Ayatollah Khamenei has made a number of statements in which he has portrayed the United States as utterly untrustworthy, as Iranian officials commonly do when discussing the nuclear negotiations. However, Khamenei’s remarks are particularly fierce and considerably more strongly worded than those of many other senior figures. On the 9th of April Khamenei delivered a lengthy speech addressing a range of subjects relating to the nuclear negotiations. During his address Iran’s Supreme Leader asserted:

It is possible for the opposite side [...] is obstinate, untrustworthy, treacherous, looking for excuses, is apt for haggling, is apt to stab [us] in the back, and is apt to do such evil things, to try to encircle our country, our nation, [and] our negotiators when it comes to details.

Later, in the same address, Khamenei repeated this charge again, this time stating:

I have [a] serious concern. This concern is due to the fact that the other side is seriously given to deceit and lying and breaching its promises and moving in the opposite of [the] correct direction; the opposite side is like this.

Khamenei has also used his remarks on the nuclear negotiations as an opportunity to air other grievances against the United States, particularly regarding topical matters of foreign policy. For instance, in early May, as part of an angry diatribe regarding the negotiations, Khamenei’s official website reported him rebuking America for its alleged backing of Saudi policies in Yemen: “Ayatollah Khamenei said the US government is the most disgraced government in the world, adding that one reason is the US’s open support for Al Saud’s crimes in Yemen.”

52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
Conclusion

In the weeks following the release of the framework agreement, Iranian leaders have expressed a range of opinions in response; but, crucially, none have endorsed the American version of that agreement. Observers are left to speculate as to what was actually agreed between the sides during the final days of framework negotiations at Lausanne. The versions of the framework released by the United States and the Iranians radically diverge on so many key issues that it is difficult to conceive of a scenario in which the two sides simply miscommunicated on multiple specific points.

It is, of course, possible that having already missed the deadline for reaching a framework agreement by several days, the two sides had only been able to reach an understanding on a limited number of broad points. We might conjecture that, having failed to draw up a full framework agreement, the sides agreed that, in addition to the joint Iranian-European statement, the US government would release its own statement outlining its vision for a final agreement. Alternatively, it may be the case that the fact sheet released by the State Department is indeed a full and entirely accurate representation of what was agreed at Lausanne, and that the Iranians simply reneged on assurances which they had given shortly after the release of the framework.

Another way for accounting for the discrepancies might be by pointing to divisions and disagreements within the Iranian regime itself. We already know of the incident that took place during the closed session of the Iranian parliament, in which hardliners such as Mahdi Kouchakzadeh lambasted Foreign Minister Javad Zarif as a traitor – and did so while claiming to speak in the name of the Supreme Leader. It is possible that President Rouhani, Foreign Minister Zarif, and chief negotiator Abbas Araghchi privately take a more conciliatory view of what Iran should agree to, whereas the Supreme Leader and others favour a more hard-line position.

Part of the Iranian response witnessed following the framework agreement might be understood as a pushback from conservatives against what less extreme elements within the regime had already agreed to. Yet, even Araghchi, a supposed moderate, has been among those talking down the framework agreement (albeit, primarily to dispute the framework’s significance, as opposed to its contents). Overall, what is apparent from the many public statements made by Iranian leaders is that, among both hard-line and more moderate figures, there is a correlation of agreement that consistently rejects the American fact sheet in one form or another.

The explanation that most Iranian leaders have favoured when addressing the discrepancies between the Iranian and US fact sheets is to allege that the American side willfully misled and deceived their Iranian counterparts. As such, along with the claim that the framework agreement is non-binding and of no significance, leading Iranian figures have repeatedly accused that the contents of the American fact sheet are a fabrication. The allegation of American deceit fits into wider anti-Western and anti-American themes that many Iranian leaders have promoted in their public statements. However, this attitude, in turn, raises serious questions about the problem of Iranian goodwill and its apparent absence during the negotiation process.

Such attitudes, coupled with the general Iranian refutation of the framework agreement, must raise concerns about whether the sides will be able to reach an agreement by the 30 June
deadline, and whether that agreement will be adequate to meet Western concerns about Iran’s nuclear programme. With senior Iranian officials having apparently already walked back a number of commitments which American negotiators claim that they made, should a final agreement be signed, troubling questions are still likely to remain about what might happen during the implementation phase - particularly regarding the reliability of any assurances that the Iranians have made. With Iran and the international community having such overtly different objectives here, it is not surprising that negotiators have struggled to find points of consensus on the key issues. The fact that the two sides remained so far apart even when announcing the release of what was supposed to be a framework agreement illustrates the enormity of the task before diplomats.
About the Author

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