

# Abbas Araghchi: Foreign Minister

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## Abbas Araghchi

Abbas Araghchi is a longtime regime [diplomat](#), having spent most of his career within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rising to key positions during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani. Araghchi's Western education, experience as a JCPOA negotiator, and service as an ambassador have all earned him plaudits for his supposed [apolitical professionalism](#), [pragmatism](#), "[moderate](#)" outlook. His proponents also frequently identify his public statements in [support](#) of talks and rapprochement with the U.S. as indicative of meaningful change in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. Based on these factors, some observers have characterized his appointment as a significant "[positive development](#)" in relations between Washington and Tehran. In spite of this, Araghchi has clearly demonstrated his hardline support for the regime, which is best illustrated by his service in the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) (IRGC) and its elite [Quds Force](#) unit (QF), which he remains affiliated with. Araghchi has indicated that he effectively takes orders from the paramilitary, [stating](#): "I say to my military friends, the same IRGC commander who dressed you in IRGC uniform and gave you a weapon has also given me a suit and collared shirt and given me a political mission."

Nevertheless, efforts to cultivate Araghchi's profile as a moderate closely parallel the [portrayal](#) of former Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, under whom Araghchi served during the Rouhani presidency. However, like Zarif, Araghchi's primary aim has been to bolster the Islamic Republic and strengthen its position vis-à-vis the U.S. However, he enjoys closer ties to key centers of power within the regime than Zarif, including the IRGC and the [Office](#) of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. These ties, a record of IRGC service, and a deep relationship with the Axis of Resistance all make Araghchi's background more akin to his predecessor, [Hossein Amir-Abdollahian](#).

Through Araghchi's appointment as foreign minister, Khamenei has tacitly confirmed that Masoud Pezeshkian was elevated to the presidency in order to deflect criticism from Western states, offer stylistic change, and seek sanctions relief – an agenda Araghchi is positioned to support as foreign minister. Simultaneously, the Araghchi furthers the IRGC's consolidation of the regime's bureaucratic institutions and control over the presidency.

## IRGC Service

Araghchi was [born](#) in Tehran in 1962 to an affluent [family](#) originally from Isfahan, and as a teenager [participated](#) in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Immediately thereafter, he joined the IRGC and served in the Iran-Iraq War. During the early years of Araghchi's service, the IRGC was responsible for [expanding Hezbollah](#), coordinating acts of [international terrorism](#), and escalating [conflicts](#) throughout the Middle East region. This experience formed the crux of

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Araghchi's worldview, forming a [revolutionary ideology](#) that remains closely associated with that of IRGC leadership, a fact he continues to [tout](#).

After nearly a decade of service in the IRGC, Araghchi became a [member](#) of the QF, a [branch](#) of the paramilitary formed by Khamenei in 1989, tasked with developing and coordinating with overseas militias now called the "Axis of Resistance." This has been [confirmed](#) by Javad Mansouri, a former IRGC commander and fellow [regime diplomat](#) who is familiar with Araghchi's career. In recent years, Iranian officials have sought to [deny](#) that he served in the QF, contradicting extensive media reporting. This is likely part of a broader effort to sanitize his record and present him as a moderate figure, ahead of the regime's efforts to pursue sanctions relief.



(Araghchi during his IRGC service [top right], *BBC*)

Shortly after joining the QF, Araghchi was [encouraged](#) by his superiors to enter the Islamic Republic's diplomatic service while maintaining his affiliation with the unit. According to Mansouri, Araghchi was [identified](#) as a strong candidate for representing the interests of the QF within the Foreign Ministry – an important function in the unit's broader [efforts](#) to influence the regime's foreign policy. Araghchi's entrance into the Foreign Ministry in this manner [coincided](#) with efforts by the IRGC to penetrate and operationalize ostensibly civilian

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institutions within the Islamic Republic. This was deemed a necessary step strengthening the paramilitary's power within the regime. Though Araghchi claims he was placed in the Foreign Ministry through the usual aptitude [exam](#), this placement was almost certainly due to his [ideological alignment](#) and willingness to follow the directives of his IRGC superiors. While [remaining](#) a member of the QF, Araghchi began his diplomatic career in 1989.

Araghchi remains closely affiliated with the QF and the broader IRGC apparatus. He continues to openly [consult](#) with QF commanders, including [Esmail Qaani](#), on both personal and professional matters. The QF's efforts to cultivate and coordinate terrorist proxies also formed the [foundation](#) for his approach to foreign policy later in his career.

## Early Diplomatic Career

Araghchi moved swiftly through his diplomatic training and became a [desk officer](#) within the Foreign Ministry. While working in this position, he [earned](#) a degree in politics, government, and foreign policy at the ministry's School of International Relations. In 1991, he [received](#) a master's degree in political science from Islamic Azad University in Tehran, a university with [close ties](#) to the IRGC. This enabled him to rise to Deputy Director of the ministry's Department of Islamic and Regional Organizations. He was simultaneously involved in the resumption of diplomatic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and [represented](#) Tehran in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Araghchi's rapid ascent through the Foreign Ministry and command of the English language enabled him to pursue doctoral research in the United Kingdom beginning in 1993. Under the supervision of Professor David McLellan, a British scholar of Marxism, Araghchi [attained](#) a PhD in politics from the University of Kent in 1996. This interlude in the UK provided credibility to Araghchi throughout his later career, with international media lauding his Western education – much like [Zarif](#). This has largely served to obfuscate his extensive and secretive service within the QF and has been seen in a positive light by Western diplomats.

Upon returning to his post at the Foreign Ministry, Araghchi was [promoted](#) to serve as the head of the Center for Persian Gulf Studies, honing his knowledge of Iran's neighboring Arab states. A year later, he was appointed Deputy Director General for Research within the Institute for International and Political Studies. Through his experience in these various low and mid-level research positions, Araghchi sharpened his understanding of the Foreign Ministry's role within regime politics. In his words, the ministry's primary role is to be the "[executor](#)" of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) – a body [dominated](#) by Khamenei and his appointees. It is the responsibility of the foreign minister to adopt the most effective approach for advancing the SNSC's agenda. Between 1998-1999, Araghchi was [appointed](#) as head of the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), which operates as the Iranian Foreign Ministry (MFA)'s "think-tank". IPIS has been at [center](#) of the creation, development, and deployment of various

Iranian regime influence operations, including the so-called [Iran Experts Initiative](#) that was established in 2014 to infiltrate Western institutions.

### [Ambassador and Deputy Foreign Minister](#)

Despite working in research positions, Araghchi was identified by his superiors as a strong candidate for foreign missions – a situation he [describes](#) as somewhat unusual. His mission experience enabled him to pivot into more senior positions, starting with his [appointment](#) as ambassador to Finland and Estonia in 1999. Building from his time in England, this appointment enabled Araghchi to gain valuable experience fostering personal relationships with European diplomats.

In 2003, Araghchi was recalled to Tehran and [promoted](#) to director of the Foreign Ministry's Western Europe Department. While he served in this role, the Islamic Republic and the European Union [brokered agreements](#) seeking to constrain the regime's nuclear program. This marked the beginning of Araghchi's primary career focus of securing sanctions relief, even as the regime fails to deliver on its [promises](#). Though these talks ultimately did not prevent the imposition of additional international sanctions, they provided a model for Araghchi's approach to the JCPOA a decade later.

Araghchi returned to the Foreign Ministry's School of International Relations in 2005, becoming its [director](#). In this capacity, he also delivered [lectures](#) to diplomats-in-training, seeking to directly shape their understanding of foreign policy. As an affiliate of the QF, Araghchi's [goal](#) was to develop a "school of thought" within international relations that centers support for the regime's terrorist proxies, and trains his students within this framework. Illustrating his philosophy toward training the regime's diplomats, he [stated](#) that though "the missions and appearance (of the IRGC and Foreign Ministry) may be different, their goal is the same."

Araghchi's time in this academic space enabled him to hone his approach into "[resistance diplomacy](#)," a doctrine emphasizing both the pursuit of sanctions relief and support for the regime's proxies. Araghchi's perspectives toward the regime's diplomacy differs from the more outwardly belligerent approach taken by hardliners like [Ebrahim Raisi](#) or [Saeed Jalili](#). In contrast with these figures, Araghchi has [stressed](#) the importance of dialogue, following diplomatic protocols, and developing personal relationships with Western officials, arguing that this approach is more effective at securing concessions for the regime. In recent statements, he has [indicated](#) that this doctrine will define his approach as foreign minister.

After spending two years as director of the School of International Relations, Araghchi was appointed deputy foreign minister for International and Legal Affairs during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In 2007, Jalili was appointed as head nuclear negotiator. Though Araghchi and Jalili had a personal relationship (even travelling on a [pilgrimage](#) together),

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Araghchi disapproved of Jalili's approach as a negotiator, at times writing [reports](#) to Khamenei's advisors detailing his poor performance – as revealed during the 2013 election.

Failing to work well with Ahmadinejad's appointees, Araghchi was [sidelined](#) within the Foreign Ministry. Shortly after Jalili's appointment, Araghchi was [sent](#) to Tokyo as the regime's ambassador to Japan. While there, he sought to be an effective apologist for the Islamic Republic, [frequently appearing](#) in Japanese media and presenting himself as an apolitical pragmatist. He also [lectured](#) at Japanese universities, including the University of Tokyo. Upon his return to Tehran in 2013, he was [named](#) deputy foreign minister for Asia-Pacific and Central Asian Affairs.

## Nuclear Negotiator to Unexpected Foreign Minister

Though he was spokesperson for the ministry during the final months of Ahmadinejad's presidency, Araghchi's focus on Asian affairs afforded him the appearance of [distance](#) from ongoing diplomatic failures and domestic political turmoil. This enabled him to become a [central figure](#) in the ostensibly "moderate" administration of Hassan Rouhani, as Zarif [tapped](#) him as his deputy in the negotiations that culminated in the JCPOA in 2015. Some U.S. diplomats [described](#) Araghchi as a steely yet calm negotiator, with a clear expertise over the issues being discussed. Within the Foreign Ministry, Araghchi emerged as a staunch defender of the agreement, and a proponent of securing sanctions relief for the regime.

While serving as Zarif's deputy, Araghchi also worked to shore up the Islamic Republic's relationship with the Axis of Resistance. He vocally [defended](#) the regime's support for Bashar al-Assad in international media, and [voiced support](#) for Hezbollah. Furthermore, he [sought](#) to convince Western officials that Assad and other regime proxies benefit Europe by combatting Sunni terrorism – an approach which [failed](#) in the short term.

When the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, Araghchi became heavily [involved](#) in the talks in Vienna seeking to salvage the deal. He supported the concept of dividing the West by seeking a separate agreement with [Europe](#), and worked to [cultivate](#) personal ties to leaders within the European Union, such as [Enrique Mora](#). UANI can reveal that in 2018 during a trip to the UK as part of these efforts, Araghchi met with members of the UK parliament – including MPs and members of the House of Lords. During this briefing, Araghchi asserted that when the sunset clauses expire in the JCPOA, the Islamic Republic will have a "full-scale nuclear enrichment program" – an assertion that received some backlash in the meeting. As talks [collapsed](#) following the [rejection](#) of a draft agreement by the supreme leader and Ebrahim Raisi after he was anointed as president, Araghchi was removed from his post at the Foreign Ministry.

After his removal, Araghchi appeared likely to enter political [isolation](#). He became involved in the Iranian bodybuilding federation and was unable to return to a significant role in

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government. However, this changed a few weeks of his removal, as Khamenei made the surprising decision to [appoint](#) him as secretary of the Strategic Council of Foreign Relations, a body [tasked](#) with advising the Office of the Supreme Leader on foreign policy. This move provided Araghchi with a new political platform.

Though this appointment [upset](#) hardliners within the regime, it brought Araghchi into Khamenei's close orbit and ensured he could be retained until he proved useful for his agenda at a later date. While moving closer to Khamenei, Araghchi also sharpened some of his foreign policy perspectives. For instance, he appeared to openly [indicate](#) that the regime was willing to pursue the development of nuclear weapons and [suggested](#) he is supportive of escalating hostilities with the U.S., particularly if the regime fails to secure sanctions relief.

Moreover, while serving in the Strategic Council of Foreign Relations, Araghchi also sought to deepen his existing ties to the Axis of Resistance. For example, in 2022, he [traveled](#) to Syria to meet with Assad and other regime officials to discuss shared foreign policy interests. Additionally, Araghchi [visited](#) Lebanon in 2023 along with other Council leaders. There, he [met](#) with Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Hezbollah. Given his QF service, it is likely that Araghchi had an existing relationship with both Nasrallah and other senior officials within Hezbollah. Khamenei's efforts to salvage Araghchi's career, sharpen his ideological alignment, and shore up his relationship with the Axis of Resistance reflects a trend within the regime. Other figures have entered a similar patron-client relationship prior to receiving promotions to higher political office – including former president [Ebrahim Raisi](#).





(Araghchi and Nasrallah meeting in 2023, *TABNAK*)

Araghchi also used his position to support the regime’s use of violence to curtail dissent. In February of 2023, following the rise of the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement, he [argued](#) that the regime must take action against international protests. He stated, “We should not allow regular demonstrations against us [abroad] to be organized, nor messaging against us.” It is worth noting that following Araghchi’s comments, there was a significant rise in actions orchestrated by the regime to foment discord among the Iranian diaspora. These include targeting its political opponents through coordinated disinformation, [doxing](#) campaigns, [cyberattacks](#), and acts of [violence](#).

During the 2024 presidential election Araghchi received an opportunity to again become a central figure in the regime. Araghchi, along with other members of the JCPOA negotiating team, like Zarif, threw his [support](#) behind Masoud Pezeshkian. This was not motivated by a genuine desire for reform – rather, it was rooted in the perception that he can act as a vehicle to pursue sanctions relief for the regime. Though Araghchi did not campaign with Pezeshkian, regime-aligned media [indicates](#) that he provided his advice and support behind the scenes. This includes fostering connections within the Axis of Resistance and serving as an [intermediary](#) with individuals like Nasrallah. Ultimately, Khamenei himself [appeared](#) to prioritize sanctions relief

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for the regime as he enabled Pezeshkian's surprise ascension to the presidency, along with other goals such as stylistic change and deflecting Western criticism.

This agenda made Araghchi a clear option for foreign minister, prompting [media speculation](#) shortly after it became clear Pezeshkian would be the next president. His proven negotiating skills, positive relationship with European and U.S. diplomats, connections within the Axis of Resistance, and his lack of baggage relative to Zarif all place him in a strong position to pursue Khamenei's agenda. For this reason, Khamenei's earlier decision to offer a political lifeline after Raisi's election appears to have been a calculated move.

Since being designated as the regime's next foreign minister, Araghchi has [articulated](#) his agenda, based on the school of "resistance diplomacy" honed earlier in his career. Dispelling the notion that he may attempt to change the regime's existing posture, he has [pledged](#) to continue supporting the Islamic Republic's terrorist proxies, including the Houthis and Hezbollah. Furthermore, he has [indicated](#) that he will seek to divide the U.S. and Europe to undermine their deterrence efforts, pursue sanctions relief, seek closer relations with China and Russia, expand influence in developing countries, engage in "conflict management" with the United States where necessary, and continue challenging Israel's right to exist. Though he may offer a new stylistic approach as he executes Khamenei's agenda, Araghchi's ascension does not auger positive change.

## Conclusion

Though Araghchi has been described as a "pragmatist" and a "moderate" since his appointment as foreign minister, these traits are superficial in nature. Despite his polished style, UK education, and personal relationship with European diplomats, Araghchi is a QF affiliate, and a beneficiary of Khamenei's patronage – much like his supposed political rivals in the hardline camp. This combination of factors positions him to seek sanctions relief and divide the U.S. and Europe on the issue of nuclear negotiations (both [policies](#) he intends to pursue) without the eccentricity of figures like Zarif. The appointment of Araghchi in Pezeshkian's administration also indicates Khamenei's intent to expand his dual foreign policy approach, simultaneously using militancy and diplomacy to secure the regime's interests. This is something Araghchi himself has openly confirmed, stating that during his tenure there will be "full coordination with the armed forces because the battlefield is complementary to diplomacy [and vice versa] in order to secure the regime's "full interests." Therefore, Western policymakers must approach Araghchi with caution – especially due his deep ties to the IRGC and continued QF affiliation.