

The Political Power Battle in Tehran

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As Iran [signals](#) its willingness to pursue fighting, one of the most important power struggles to watch in the Middle East today is not between Iran and the United States, nor between Iran and Israel. It is unfolding inside the Iranian state itself if emerging reports concerning the growing [divide](#) between the government and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are even partially accurate. Assessments suggest significant differences between elements of the IRGC and President Masoud Pezeshkian's government regarding the management of [war](#), negotiations, economic recovery, and relations with neighboring Gulf states. Reports said Pezeshkian has criticized military escalation actions not coordinated by the government and supported diplomacy and economic stability, in contrast to the more confrontational stance of influential security hardliners in the IRGC.

For many years, Iran has tried to frame itself as a highly centralized and unified actor. The supreme leadership, presidency, parliament, clerical bodies, Supreme National Security Council, Basij forces, official army, and IRGC all play roles in shaping Iranian policy, including the current course of the war. What is likely to change is not the existence of disagreements, but their intensity and growing visibility. Pezeshkian's [statement](#) that decisions on the war and negotiations with the United States rest with Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei and the Supreme National Security Council further suggests the limited role of Iran's president.

At the core of the [tensions](#) between the government and the IRGC are two competing assumptions about Iran's current strategic environment. The first is that Iran's long-term strength depends on economic recovery, sanctions relief, and reducing regional tensions. Supporters of this view recognize that Iran has demonstrated resilience under pressure, but they also understand that resilience alone is not enough for economic growth or relief felt by citizens. Years of sanctions, inflation, and currency depreciation have created structural challenges that cannot be solved through military actions alone.

The second assumption is aligned with the strategic thinking traditionally associated with the IRGC and hardline security circles within the Supreme National Security Council. Under this view, Iran remains an ongoing target of military pressure, sanctions, intelligence operations, and efforts to limit its regional influence. The IRGC believes that any compromise carries risks. This approach reflects a key element of the IRGC doctrine: security must come before prosperity. The IRGC spokesperson similarly [emphasized](#) readiness for confrontation and warned that the types of weaponry utilized would be "completely different."

Understanding these distinctions is essential for anticipating how Iran is likely to act. Too often, analyses reduce Iranian actions to ideology alone. However, even policies that appear hostile from abroad are usually [justified](#) internally through an intertwined framework of deterrence and strategic depth aimed at regime survival following the campaign to counter the Iranian threat. Even if reports of internal political tensions are inaccurate, they still show the limited ability of elected government institutions to shape strategic decisions against the IRGC.

The implications of this internal power struggle extend well beyond Tehran. For the United States and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, a visible divide inside Iran presents both opportunities and challenges. Pragmatic voices [within](#) the Iranian government indicate an interest in diplomatic normalization, economic engagement, and regional stability. These potentially allow for confidence-building measures and dialogue on their nuclear and ballistic missile programs and facilitate a full opening of the Hormuz Strait. However, this remains highly unlikely given that power and control lie with hardliners in the IRGC.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to assume that internal debates lead to moderation. The IRGC and Basij continue to wield significant influence, especially in times of crisis. The Basij's ability to suppress civilian protests remains critical to the regime's survival. Recent conflicts have further reinforced the importance of deterrence in Iran's strategic thinking, and there are no indications that the IRGC [intends](#) to retreat from its central role in Iran's national security affairs and external security agenda.

For the United States and GCC policymakers, the takeaway is not to choose between diplomatic engagement and deterrence, but to pursue both while emphasizing a continuous military deterrence posture given Iran's history of hostile and regionally destabilizing actions. This is particularly important because negotiations over the Hormuz Strait, nuclear program, and ballistic missile capabilities remain unsettled.

Regardless of any growing divide in Iran's internal power structure, the main question now is what these developments tell us about the future trajectory of military and diplomatic engagement with Iran. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has sought to balance overarching clerical power, revolutionary institutions, and elected bodies. But this balance has never been firmly established, and the ongoing conflict shows the [IRGC](#) playing a more visible role than before. Whether this is a temporary wartime adjustment or a deeper structural consolidation of power remains to be seen. This is why the current debate inside Iran deserves close attention.

Will economic recovery and regional integration become the primary pillars of Iran's national power and ongoing negotiations following the end of the current 60-day ceasefire? Or will security considerations and regional hegemony ambitions embedded in the IRGC doctrine continue to dominate decision-making at the highest levels of the state? The answer will shape not only Iran's future but also the future security landscape of the region.

For military strategists, the growing differences between Iran's civilian leadership and the IRGC reinforce an enduring lesson: degrading military capabilities does not immediately produce political outcomes. If the IRGC [continues](#) to expand its influence over strategic decision-making, the United States would have to confront a more centralized, security-driven adversary that will likely be less responsive to economic incentives and more willing to absorb costs in pursuit of regime survival.

Military campaigns against Iran must therefore be reassessed not just in terms of their operational outcome, but in terms of how they impact and reshape internal power dynamics within the Iranian state. Tactical gains that empower hardline actors may ultimately undermine broader Western strategic objectives.

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