



By: TA | AP Insight

Open rivalry within Iran's leadership points to a struggle for control over the postwar future



With **escalating attacks** against U.S. bases and its allies over the past week, Iran's leaders are showing considerable unity over their war strategy: hanging tough, determined to show Iran can **endure more** than America and its allies can.

But within the leadership, there are sharp differences over what the endgame should be.

On one side, the ultra-hardliners who oppose any negotiations with the United States are pressing for total victory in the war.

Known as the “Paydari” movement – Persian for “stability” – they are hard-core ideologues who want to enforce the **Islamic Republic's control** over society.

On the other, those who support President Masoud Pezeshkian and powerful parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf – who doubles as Iran's chief negotiator – see military pressure as a way to win a negotiated deal with the United States.

This camp is also spurred by concern over the **economic toll** Iran is suffering from the war and the need to adapt to **social change** in the country.

“Negotiation is a political tool and a complement to military action to force the enemy to a point of compulsion and extract real concessions,” an adviser to Qalibaf, Mahdi Mohammadi, wrote on his Telegram channel Thursday.

The unusually open rivalry within the theocracy's leadership points to a struggle for control over Iran's postwar future.

A huge question mark is where the new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, stands.

Reportedly injured in the strike that **killed his father** in the opening minutes of the war on Feb. 28, Khamenei remains in hiding, and both sides have claimed his support.

Iran is determined to show strength

In a boost for Qalibaf and Pezeshkian, the ceasefire deal reached with the U.S. in April received strong backing in Iran's top leadership body, the Supreme National Security Council.

Twelve of its 13 members approved it, including senior figures in the Revolutionary Guard and the military.

The lone vote against the deal is widely believed to have come from Saeed Jalili, the most prominent figure in the Paydari movement.

But the ceasefire crumbled as the two sides trade strikes and as Iran presses for control over passage through the Strait of Hormuz which before the war carried a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas.

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Iran was also frustrated that financial promises under the deal – including the release of billions of frozen assets – didn't materialize, and now the American blockade is back in place.

With no benefits from the deal, “there's no serious division” in the leadership over how to respond, said Ali Vaez, Iran project director at the International Crisis Group.

They believe U.S. President Donald Trump “only understands the language of force, and therefore, they would have to gain the upper hand in order to compel him to deliver,” Vaez said.

The hard-liners are pressuring Iranians

The funeral for slain Iranian supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, earlier this month appeared to show the strength of the ultra-hardline Paydari.

Crowds called for revenge on the U.S. and Israel for the war. Videos showed mourners in Tehran welcoming Jalili, while Pezeshkian was greeted at one point with insults and cries of "Death to the compromiser!"

The ultra-hardliners have used nightly rallies and their control of state television, known by the acronym IRIB, to drum up opposition to negotiations.

At rallies and on TV, speakers have portrayed Iran as headed for total victory and denounced those who compromise with the Islamic Republic's archenemy, the United States.

State television cut off a June 30 live broadcast with Qalibaf as he discussed negotiations with Washington.

Earlier this month, it cut off broadcasting a speech by Pezeshkian to businessmen seconds after he said that the elder Khamenei had given permission for renewed U.S. talks before his death.

Pezeshkian and his camp have pushed back, portraying IRIB as dividing the country at the time of war.

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The president accused the broadcaster of making it like "the military are on one side, and the government is on another side."

Last month, the president's media office condemned state television for what it described as "censoring" the president and other government heads, signaling an open rift.

The hard-liners have sought to press their influence in other ways. In past weeks, authorities shut down cafes in central Tehran that were popular with residents during the ceasefire.

Videos on Iranian social media showed many women at the cafes flouting mandatory veiling laws, and crowds mixing freely.

The closures were brief but signaled that "religious extremist parties" were showing their influence, said Mohamad Ali Abtahi, a reformist cleric and an aide to former President Mohammad Khatami, who is still widely considered to be the leader of Iran's reformist groups.

While Jalili's supporters are a minority they are influential, said Vali Nasr, professor of International Affairs and Middle East Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

"They have a lot of money. They have a lot of power. They have put a lot of people in the bureaucracy" and developed connections in the Revolutionary Guard, Nasr said.

The pragmatists say the public must be heard

The more pragmatic camp argues that maintaining unity during the war requires addressing the public's unhappiness over the economy as well as **political and social repression**.

This, as Iran's currency continues to slide, inflation spirals, and unemployment rises. A final agreement with the U.S. could bring Iran a huge windfall with the lifting of sanctions and the return of billions in assets.

Small flashes of impatience with the war have emerged. In July, over 250 former lawmakers, clerics, professors and other public figures signed an anti-war petition warning of the costs of the conflict.

"We believe that the overwhelming majority of

the Iranian people want peace and the right to a decent life,” the statement read.



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Others have spoken out against stepped-up **executions of protesters** following wide-scale anti-government protests in January.

A top reformist party that assisted Pezeshkian's presidential campaign warned that the war's domestic toll was “undermining internal social cohesion.”

That brought a rebuke from Tasnim, a news agency close to the Revolutionary Guard, which said the statement amounted to blaming Iran for a war started by the United States.

In mid-July, the president's son and influential adviser, Youssef Pezeshkian, posted a series of messages about the need to balance realistic military aims with a weak economy.

Referring to the decades of sanctions and confrontation with the West, he said Iran has “been prevented from growing and has suffered greatly. It has become sick.”

Ultimately, both sides are jockeying for power after the war, given the unusual uncertainty brought on by the change in the supreme leadership.

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him to bring moderate change.

The supreme leader, because of the power invested in him, could act as a “brake” to restrain the more extremist factions, Abtahi said. But over time, the confrontation with more radical factions could grow more dangerous “if that brake isn't used.”