

Iran Update



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The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) publish the Iran Update, which provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. CTP-ISW publishes the Iran Update daily.

Key Takeaways

- Former President Hassan Rouhani is likely attempting to reenter Iran's political scene by presenting the post-war crisis as a chance to reform governance, restore public trust, and recalibrate the regime's trajectory. Rouhani's efforts appear to have triggered concern among his longstanding hardline rivals. Rouhani may seek to work with members of the regime who have larger power bases than himself to reassert his political influence.
- Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reportedly appointed Ali Abdollahi Ali Abadi as the new Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander. Ali Abadi has held leadership roles in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and several internal security positions throughout his career. Ali Abadi had most recently served as the Armed Forces General Staff coordination deputy since 2016. Coordination deputies in Iran serve in a capacity similar to a chief of staff in the US military.
- Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi cast doubt on the possibility of European involvement in future nuclear negotiations. European Union Foreign Policy Chief Kaja Kallas and Araghchi held a phone call on July 1 to discuss future nuclear negotiations. Araghchi posted on X following his call with Kallas that the European Union and the United Kingdom's participation in any future negotiations is "irrelevant and therefore meaningless."

Former President Hassan Rouhani is likely attempting to reenter Iran's political scene by presenting the post-war crisis as a chance to reform governance, restore public trust, and recalibrate the regime's trajectory.^[1] Rouhani has publicly framed the crisis as an opportunity for internal reform and previously lobbied senior clerics in Qom to pressure Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to accept a ceasefire.^[2] Rouhani issued a statement on June 24 in which he described the crisis as an opportunity to "rebuild the foundations of governance."^[3] Rouhani called for rebuilding both Iran's deterrent capabilities and its relationship with the public.^[4] Rouhani also emphasized that military strength alone is not sufficient, and that national security also depends on a "resilient economy, wise diplomacy, and mutual trust between state and society."^[5] Rouhani's messaging echoes past moderate themes, and he is likely positioning himself as a voice of pragmatism in a time of crisis.

Rouhani's efforts appear to have triggered concern among his longstanding hardline rivals. Regime hardliners, including Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani, have circulated statements criticizing Rouhani and his moderate stance.[6] These narratives could serve to discredit Rouhani and block any political comeback.[7] Zakani-affiliated outlet Jahan News resurfaced on June 30 an old remark by IRGC Aerospace Force Commander Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajji Zadeh criticizing Rouhani's government for opposing missile tests and military exercises.[8] Rouhani criticized missile tests in 2017 that featured missiles with anti-Israel slogans because he feared that such tests would endanger the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).[9] Tabnak, which is affiliated with former IRGC Commander Mohsen Rezaei, similarly accused Rouhani on July 1 of "strategic betrayal" for canceling a Chinese fighter jet deal in favor of "worn-out" French aircraft, claiming that this decision ultimately hurt Iran during the recent war.[10] An Iranian source close to the regime told Newsweek on July 1 that, while some political factions may try to use the post-war period to push reforms, the regime is focused on "national unity, rebuilding capacities, and reinforcing strategic doctrines." [11] He added that any reforms would take place strictly within the Islamic Republic's constitutional framework and would preserve the core principles of the "Islamic Revolution and [Iran's] independence." [12]

Rouhani may seek to work with members of the regime who have larger power bases than himself. Rouhani left the presidency in August 2021, and the Guardian Council disqualified him in January 2024 from competing in the Assembly of Experts election.[13] Rouhani has relied on his relationships with the Larijani family during his political career. Former Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani pushed the JCPOA through parliament in 2015, and Rouhani appointed Ali Larijani to negotiate the Iran-China strategic cooperation agreement in 2020.[14] Rouhani, Ali Larijani, and Expediency Council Chairman Sadegh Amoli Larijani reportedly tried to contact Khamenei during the Israel-Iran War to encourage Khamenei to resume talks with the United States.[15] Rouhani could also try to work with other moderate actors in the regime, including President Masoud Pezeshkian, to try to increase his political influence in the regime. Pezeshkian, Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei, and Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi, reportedly supported a pragmatic approach to the Israel-Iran War.[16]

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reportedly appointed Ali Abdollahi Ali Abadi as the new Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander.[17] Ali Abadi had served as the Armed Forces General Staff coordination deputy since 2016.[18] Coordination deputies in Iran serve in a capacity similar to a chief of staff in the US military. Ali Abadi has held leadership roles in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and several internal security positions throughout his career.[19] Ali Abadi is originally from Gilan Province and commanded the IRGC Ground Forces 16th Quds Operational Division in the province. He also served as the governor of Gilan and Semnan provinces in northern Iran.[20] Ali Abadi later served as the Law Enforcement Command deputy chief and the Interior Ministry's deputy minister for security and law enforcement. Ali Abadi's appointment is consistent with CTP-ISW's assessment that the Iranian regime is prioritizing regime security in the wake of the Israel-Iran War. The United States sanctioned Ali Abadi in January 2020 for advancing the regime's "destabilizing objectives" and his involvement in the Iranian ballistic missile attack targeting US forces at Ain al Asad Airbase in Iraq in 2020.[21] Khamenei initially appointed former Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Coordination Deputy Ali Shadmani to command the headquarters after Israeli strikes killed former Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Major General Gholam Ali Rashid.[22] Israeli airstrikes killed Shadmani on June 17.[23]

Western countries have maintained their positions on Iran's nuclear program from before the Israel-Iran War. Iran has also not changed its position on uranium enrichment. The G7, which includes the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom, issued a joint statement on July 1 reaffirming their stance that Iran “can never have nuclear weapons.”[24] The G7 ministers urged Iran to refrain from reconstituting its “unjustified enrichment activities.”[25] The statement called on Iran to resume nuclear negotiations and full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), including by providing verifiable information about nuclear material and granting access to nuclear sites.[26] This statement is consistent with previous G7 and E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) statements that emphasized that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon.[27]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi cast doubt on the possibility of European involvement in future nuclear negotiations. European Union (EU) Foreign Policy Chief Kaja Kallas and Araghchi held a phone call on July 1 to discuss future nuclear negotiations.[28] Kallas told Araghchi that the European Union is ready to facilitate talks between Iran and the United States and urged Iran to immediately resume negotiations.[29] French President Emmanuel Macron also expressed interest on July 1 in participating in nuclear talks with Iran to discuss key policy issues, including domestic uranium enrichment.[30] Araghchi told Kallas that several European countries are taking a “destructive approach” to Iran that is complicating diplomatic efforts.[31] Araghchi also posted on X following his call with Kallas that the European Union and the United Kingdom’s participation in any future negotiations is “irrelevant and therefore meaningless.”[32] Araghchi said that Kallas “disregards the provisions of the” Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and said that Iran has the right to “develop, research, and use nuclear technology” under the NPT.[33] Senior Iranian officials have repeatedly reiterated that Iran will not accept demands for zero uranium enrichment following the end of the Israel-Iran War.[34] Iran also made the recognition of its right to enrich uranium a precondition for cooperation with the IAEA on June 26.[35]

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