

CHAPTER 1

BETWEEN THE "VICTORY NARRATIVE" AND THE "PARADIGM SHIFT"

The *Am Kalavi* (Rising lion) War between Israel and Iran, which lasted from June 13 to June 24, 2025, was the first full-scale direct confrontation between the two countries. It was initiated by Israel against the backdrop of the failed negotiations between Tehran and Washington to reach an improved nuclear agreement; alarming developments in the weaponization domain within Iran's nuclear program, which raised concerns that Tehran might shorten the time required to produce its first nuclear explosive device; rapid progress in Iran's missile program force-building; and a historic window of opportunity that opened following Hezbollah's defeat in the summer of 2024, the collapse of the Assad regime, the destruction of Iran's air defense systems in an Israeli strike at the end of October 2025, and other operational circumstances.

The war began with a large-scale surprise attack by the Israeli Air Force, which included targeted assassinations of senior commanders of Iran's armed forces—among them the Chief of the General Staff, the Commander of the Revolutionary Guards, and the Commander of its Aerospace Force—as well as the killing of several senior nuclear scientists who served as key centers of knowledge in fields relevant to nuclear weapons development. During the fighting, in which Israel achieved air superiority over Iranian territory, the Air Force carried out hundreds of sorties attacking nuclear facilities, ballistic missile sites, air defense systems, airfields, command and control centers, and headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards and law enforcement forces. Iran responded with an intense barrage of more than a thousand UAVs and about 500 ballistic missiles fired at Israel, some of which penetrated the defense system, causing the deaths of about 30 civilians and extensive property damage. On June 22, the United States joined the campaign and

struck the uranium enrichment facilities at Fordow and Natanz, as well as the nuclear complex in Isfahan.

After 12 days of fighting, a ceasefire was reached through US mediation. The Israeli-American attack caused significant damage to Iran's nuclear program, particularly to its enrichment capabilities, and inflicted extensive harm on Iran's missile arsenal by destroying or neutralizing many launchers and missiles and slowing the Islamic Republic's pace of military buildup in this field.

In October 2025, the Deputy Commander of the Revolutionary Guards for coordination, Mohammad Reza Naqdi, admitted that Iran had been surprised by the Israeli opening strike. In a televised interview, the senior commander noted that Tehran had expected Israel to target nuclear and missile sites but had not imagined it would strike at commanders and scientists sleeping in their homes with their wives and children. "That was a mistake in our assessment," he said.⁹

Amir Pourdastan, head of the Iranian Army's Center for Strategic Studies and Research, also acknowledged the element of surprise. "I say honestly," the senior officer told a conference of the Islamic Student Associations' Federation, "we were in shock [from the Israeli attack]." However, he emphasized that thanks to the leadership and wisdom of Iran's leader, Ali Khamenei, Iran managed to recover from the surprise strike. "A shock was cast over everyone, and the one who awakened us, who gave this weary body of our spirit, life, and energy, and who guided us with his wisdom, was the Supreme Leader and Commander of the Armed Forces, Imam Khamenei." Without the Leader, Pourdastan said, it is impossible to know what would have become of the state. He further added that during the war, President Trump's envoy, Steve

9 "General Naqdi: Our assessment was that the enemy would attack nuclear and missile facilities; we did not anticipate that they would strike our commanders and scientists in their homes together with their wives and children." *Entekhab*, October 19, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mvx4kp4f>

Witkoff, called and asked Iran to cease fire. "If Trump asked for a ceasefire, it wasn't out of strength but because he was truly afraid," claimed the officer.¹⁰

These statements can be seen as reflecting the duality that characterizes the Iranian leadership's perception of the war and its outcomes. On one hand, they demonstrate a clear recognition by the military leadership of the magnitude of the blow suffered by the Islamic Republic, of the intelligence surprise, the initial paralysis of command-and-control systems, and the confusion that spread through the political and security elite. At the same time, they express satisfaction and pride in Iran's ability to recover quickly from the initial shock. Moreover, according to the Iranian narrative, the state succeeded within a short time not only in halting the effects of the attack but also in regaining the initiative—so much so that the United States and Israel were forced to agree to a ceasefire after failing to achieve their objectives in the war. From this perspective, Iran must acknowledge the heavy blow it suffered and draw the necessary lessons from the war, while simultaneously emphasizing its resilience and rapid recovery, which, in its view, serve as further proof of the strength and fortitude of the Islamic Republic.

The Iranian "Victory Narrative"

Despite the blow Iran suffered in June 2025, since the war, senior Iranian officials have continued to promote a "victory narrative," which emerged immediately after the ceasefire took effect on June 24, 2025. This narrative rests on several key arguments. First, Iran recovered relatively quickly from the initial strike. Second, it waged a campaign not only against Israel but also against the United States—and succeeded in confronting both. According to Iranian officials, without US support, Israel would not have been able to continue fighting. For example, the Deputy Commander of the Iranian Army

10 "Amir Purdastan: In the 12-Day War, we were struck with shock." *Donya-ye Eghtesad*, September 19, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/4hu7zxyz>

for Coordination, Sayyari, declared that without the assistance of the United States and NATO, Israel would have had no capacity to fight.¹¹

Third, Iran inflicted severe damage on Israel's home front—damage that, according to the Iranian perspective, was partly concealed by Israel.¹² Tehran claims that the extent and severity of these strikes forced Israel to agree to a ceasefire before achieving its war objectives. Yahya Rahim Safavi, senior adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader, stated that the hundreds of missiles fired from Iran toward Israel caused extensive damage to infrastructure throughout the country, including refineries, power stations, and research centers. These attacks, he said, resulted in severe losses, even though Israel sought to suppress their disclosure.¹³

A fourth point is that Iran retained significant capabilities in its nuclear and missile programs despite the damage they sustained, allowing for relatively easy reconstruction. Responding to President Trump's claim that the attacks on Iran had destroyed its nuclear program, Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei said in October 2025: "Very well, let him keep imagining." He noted that Trump boasted of eliminating Iran's nuclear scientists, but "their knowledge cannot be destroyed."¹⁴ The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Mohammad Eslami, addressed the war's implications for the nuclear program in a September 2025 interview with Sky News. He stated that it is entirely natural for facilities to be damaged and infrastructure destroyed during a military attack. However, what matters, he emphasized, is that Iran's science,

11 "Analysis by the Chief Coordination Officer of the Army regarding Iran's two imposed wars." *Khabar Online*, September 25, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/ym7594ha>

12 "An unprecedented France 24 report on the 12-Day War: How did Iran respond, and what did Israel censor?" *Khabar Online*, August 6, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/4pd9n4dc>

13 "General Rahim Safavi: We launched 500 missiles toward Israel; 16 pilots of the [Zionist] regime were killed; the damage was severe." *Tasnim*, September 29, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mt7a4yfb>

14 "Statements by the [Leader] in a meeting with champions and medalists in sports and global scientific Olympiads." *Website of Iran's Supreme Leader*, October 20, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/uezxpghy>

knowledge, technology, and industry are deeply rooted and have a long tradition, and that the nuclear facilities destroyed in the war will be rebuilt.¹⁵

Fifth, Israel and the United States failed to achieve their primary goal: the overthrow of the Iranian regime. Moreover, the Iranian public rallied in support of the government. From Iran's Supreme Leader's perspective, Israel's strikes on symbols of power during the war provided further proof that Israel sought not only to damage the nuclear program or the missile system, and not even merely to topple the regime, but to dismantle Iran and sow chaos. According to him, Iran's enemies believed that by assassinating several commanders and senior officials, their agents would ignite unrest within the country—especially in Tehran—bring citizens into the streets, and trigger an uprising against the Islamic Republic. That, he claimed, was their goal, and they had even planned in advance what would occur after the regime's collapse. Yet, even during the war, they realized they would not achieve this. The commanders were replaced almost immediately, the armed forces remained firm, and the public did not respond to calls for rebellion. They did take to the streets—but not against the Islamic regime, rather against the enemy.¹⁶

On the very day the ceasefire was announced, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian declared a "historic victory" in the 12-Day War imposed by Israel. He stated that the great Iranian nation had demonstrated steadfastness and resistance and had forced the enemy to agree to a ceasefire. Pezeshkian added that the enemy had suffered a complete failure in achieving its objectives and that the collapse of its image and the widespread destruction inflicted on Israel sent the world a clear message that the price of adventurism against Iran is grave and terrible.¹⁷

15 "Some of Iran's nuclear facilities were 'destroyed' by US strikes, nuclear chief admits." *Sky News*, 24 September 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/ye2y78vm>

16 "Televised address to the Iranian people." *Website of Iran's Supreme Leader*, September 23, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/254pua5c>

17 "Pezeshkian's message to the citizens: The honor for this victory belongs entirely to the great Iranian nation." *Fararu*, June 24, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/pt8mztd9>

In a recorded message to the Iranian people, Supreme Leader Khamenei declared that Iran had defeated the “fake Zionist regime,” which had almost completely collapsed under the Islamic Republic’s attacks. He stated that Iran’s armed forces had destroyed many military and civilian areas in Israel with their missiles and advanced weaponry, proving to the “Zionist regime” that any act of aggression against Iran would exact a heavy price. Khamenei added that Iran had also defeated the United States, which intervened directly in the war only after realizing that if it did not, Israel would be completely destroyed. The United States, he said, tried to save Israel but achieved nothing and failed to cause significant damage to the nuclear facilities.¹⁸

On July 16, Khamenei delivered his first public speech after the war, at a meeting with senior members of the judiciary. This event provided him another opportunity to present the victory narrative. He emphasized the self-confidence displayed by the Iranian people in the face of the United States and Israel, which he called “its dog in the region.” He stressed that Iran had not sought war, but when attacked, its response was decisive.¹⁹

The victory narrative was also reflected in official statements by Iran’s military institutions. A statement by the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Abdolrahim Mousavi, declared that the armed forces had employed all their capabilities, that their response to the “aggressive Zionist enemy” was painful and extensive, and that they had succeeded in halting its war machine, relying solely on local capabilities and domestically produced weapons. As a result, the statement continued, the leaders of the United States were forced to request a ceasefire through mediation by regional states and, in effect, surrendered to the will of the Islamic Republic.²⁰

18 “Third televised message addressed to the Iranian people following the attack by the Zionist regime.” *Website of Iran’s Supreme Leader*, June 26, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/3hw7hpk5>

19 “Statements in a meeting with the head and senior officials of the Judiciary.” *Website of Iran’s Supreme Leader*, July 16, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/42avetdf>

20 “Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces: Iran imposed its will on the United States and the Zionist regime in the recent war.” *ISNA*, June 26, 2025.

A statement by the Revolutionary Guards, asserted that Iran had succeeded in preserving the key components of its nuclear program and the infrastructure of its missile and defense systems, and had shattered the myth of the enemy's multilayered and "invincible" air defense. The statement added that the entry of the US military into the battlefield to rescue the "Zionist army" had failed to alter the balance of power and that, while Israel had initiated the war, its conclusion was dictated by "the brave sons of the nation in the armed forces," especially the Aerospace Force of the Revolutionary Guards.²¹

The spokesman for the Revolutionary Guards, Ali-Mohammad Naeini, also addressed Iran's achievements in the campaign, asserting that not only had Israel and President Trump failed to achieve their objectives in the war, but they had also come to see the Islamic Republic's ongoing missile attacks as a genuine threat to the very existence of the "Zionist regime." According to him, the war proved that the residents of the "occupied lands" [Israel] were defenseless in the face of the power of Iran's missiles and drones, and there was no doubt, from the standpoint of public opinion, that Iran was the absolute victor in the campaign.²²

Ahmad Vahidi, senior adviser to the Commander of the Revolutionary Guards and former Minister of the Interior, also referred to Iran's victory. In an interview with Iranian television, Vahidi responded affirmatively when asked whether Iran had won the war. He stated that had Iran not won, its enemies would not have been under such heavy pressure that they were forced to request a ceasefire. Vahidi emphasized that Iran had fought the war with a very limited budget and modest technology compared to the most advanced weaponry in the world, yet it had succeeded in compelling Israel to agree to a ceasefire. He added that the Islamic Republic's missile doctrine

21 "Final statement by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps regarding the imposed war." *Tabnak*, June 26, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yvtn7x22>

22 "IRGC spokesperson: We advise Trump to stop his nonsense". *Tasnim*, June 28, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/25v2dmfa>

had triumphed on the battlefield over all the aircraft, satellites, intelligence efforts, and command-and-control centers in West Asia.²³

Although many of these claims involve significant exaggeration, it would be unwise to dismiss them entirely as baseless propaganda. The statements coming from Tehran echo, to some degree, earlier stages of the “victory theory” adopted by the “Resistance Camp” from the early 1990s through 2021. At its core lies the concept of victory through non-defeat—the idea that mere survival in confrontation constitutes victory, since the opposing side fails to achieve a clear, decisive triumph.²⁴ Since the Second Lebanon War in 2006, this theory evolved into a new phase of “victory on points,” meaning deterrence capability and, ultimately, coercion against the State of Israel. In recent years, this concept has undergone further modification, based on a reassessment by pro-Iranian axis actors of the balance of power between them and Israel, and an emerging sense of confidence in their ability to defeat Israel in a coordinated, multi-front war.²⁵ However, it is still too early to assess whether the victory narrative that Iran has promoted since the war reflects an acknowledgment of its weakness and a need to redefine its concept of victory over Israel, given the constraints it now faces as a result of the war.

Conceptual Change or Strategic Adjustment

Despite the victory narrative that Iran seeks to project both domestically and internationally, the failures of the war have not escaped the attention of the authorities in Tehran. Even within conservative and hardline circles, there is an acknowledgment of the need to draw lessons and correct the deficiencies that were exposed. Yet, while the hard core of regime supporters, as noted,

23 “Did we win the war with Israel? / General Vahidi’s account.” *Tasnim*, July 24, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/53rwjscw>

24 Itai Brun and Carmit Valensi, “The Military Affairs Revolution of the Radical Axis,” *Ma’arachot*, 432 (August 2010), pp. 40–53. <https://tinyurl.com/ysmv9ee7>

25 Itai Brun, “The Five Stages in the Development of the ‘Victory Theory’ of Israel’s Enemies,” *Ha’Uma*, 237 (February 2025), pp. 27–32. <https://tinyurl.com/4h8pydxz>

was quick to present the outcome of the war as proof of the Islamic Republic's triumph, their critics in the pragmatic-reformist camp sought to use the war's results to advance fundamental changes that, in their view, are essential to securing Iran's future. From their perspective, the major challenges facing Iran require a deep and fundamental paradigmatic shift—centered on the urgent need to address internal crises, foremost among them the economic crisis, through far-reaching reforms in both domestic and foreign policy.

In contrast, their conservative-hardline critics argue that the problem does not lie in the strategic concept itself but in its implementation. According to them, even if Iran's path requires reassessment, the blows suffered by Iran and its proxies do not justify altering the Islamic Republic's core strategic objectives. The war, they claim, actually reinforced the belief that there is no substitute for the path of resistance and steadfastness in the face of Israel and the United States. The Israeli-American strike, in their view, served as further proof of Washington's treachery and the futility of attempts to negotiate with it—a process now seen, in hindsight, as a deception meant to mislead Iran in preparation for military attack. Under these circumstances, the solution does not lie in conceptual change or retreat from fundamental principles but in limited adjustments within existing frameworks.

The reformist political activist Saeed Shariati explained the internal Iranian debate over the lessons of the war in an interview with the news website *Jamaran*, pointing to the need for a paradigmatic shift based on a transition from the concept of "expanding strategic depth" (توسعه عمق استراتژیک) to that of "Iran First" (ایران اول). According to him, the strategy that had guided Iranian foreign policy until now focused on achieving strategic depth and strengthening the "Resistance Front." However, developments in the two years since October 7, 2023, have brought about a profound change in the required strategy, and Iran's political system is now divided into two main camps: one believes the focus should shift to "Iran First," that is, prioritizing the Islamic Republic's internal challenges; the other continues to believe

in the need to expand and consolidate Iran's "strategic depth," despite the blows suffered and the heavy costs involved.²⁶

The internal debate over the implications of the war and the changes that should be adopted in light of its lessons erupted shortly after its end. The first shot of this public discussion was fired by 180 economists and academics identified with the pragmatic camp, who published a statement calling for a "paradigm change" (تغییر پارادایم) in the Islamic Republic. Although the signatories condemned the attacks by Israel and the United States, they called for the adoption of a new policy—both domestic and foreign—that would enable Iran to extricate itself from its deepening crisis. They argued that persistent inefficiency, rigid foreign policy, and the erosion of public trust in state institutions jeopardized the country's future. Their declaration included a series of recommendations, among them political and economic reforms, the expansion of political and civil freedoms, renewal of negotiations with the United States, improvement of relations with the West, and the cessation of military involvement in the economy.²⁷

Similarly, the pragmatic politician Mohsen Hashemi argued that a paradigm shift was an essential condition for addressing the roots of the crisis following the war. In an interview with the reformist newspaper *Shargh*, the son of former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani stressed the need to create a more open and diverse political space, to lift restrictions on the media, to restore public trust, and to adopt a realistic foreign policy—including toward Israel—that prioritizes national interests over ideological considerations. This, he said, would enable the country to move from its current state of crisis and stagnation to a path of development and progress.²⁸

26 Saeed Shariati: "The 'national matter' is a paradigm shift in the discursive space of the country's overall politics." *Jamaran*, August 5, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/m98btmzh>

27 "It's time for a paradigm shift!" *Fararu*, July 8, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/4tuwcfuw>

28 "From the ashes of war to a new horizon." *Shargh*, July 13, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mryb5k26>

The call for sweeping changes was joined by senior politicians, foremost among them former president Hassan Rouhani and his foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif. In a meeting with his advisers, Rouhani urged the adoption of a new national strategy following the war with Israel. He stated that Israel and the United States had failed to achieve the two main objectives of their campaign: the overthrow of the Iranian regime and the destabilization of the Middle East. Israel had long sought to realize its "Nile-to-Euphrates" vision, while the United States had attempted to advance its goals through the "New Middle East" plan. However, once Jerusalem and Washington realized that they could not achieve their aims—and following Iran's forceful response—they were compelled to agree to a ceasefire. Nonetheless, Rouhani emphasized that Iran must prepare for the future, draw the necessary lessons from the war, compensate for its weaknesses, and strengthen its sources of power. He asserted that the country must deepen its ties with the international community and be ready for dialogue with any party interested in doing so, with the goal of reducing tensions with Europe, its neighbors, and the United States.

Rouhani also called for a renewal of the relationship between the state and its citizens, with better reflection of public opinion. He emphasized that Iran belongs to the entire Iranian people and that their will and perspectives must be heard and represented. He further stressed the need to prevent the involvement of the armed forces and intelligence services in non-security domains—including the economy, domestic affairs, and foreign policy. He urged the formulation of a new national strategy grounded in the will of the people and attentive to developments in the region and within Iran over the past two years, while addressing existing shortcomings. Developing a national strategy, strengthening national unity, and shaping a government that reflects the people's will, he argued, would help prevent another war.

Rouhani added that it was possible to assist Muslims in the region, but if concern for others were to come at the expense of the Iranian people's well-

being, it would be a mistake. He stressed that Iran must first and foremost care for its own citizens. In doing so, Rouhani expressed the "Iran First" concept, which holds that Iran must focus its efforts on tackling its internal challenges—foremost among them the economic crisis—in order to improve, over time, its ability to respond effectively to security challenges as well. According to this view, Iran should pursue an arrangement with the West on the nuclear issue that could ease sanctions, continue the trend of reducing tensions with its Arab neighbors, promote economic reconstruction and development processes, and narrow the widening gap between the regime and the broader public.²⁹

Mohammad Javad Zarif also articulated the need for a fundamental reassessment and major shift in Iranian policy. In an article published in *Foreign Policy* in August 2025, titled "The Time for a Paradigm Shift Is Now," Zarif argued that developments in the Middle East—foremost among them the ongoing campaign in the Gaza Strip and the 12-Day War—had underscored the need for a bold diplomatic initiative and a historic transformation for Iran and the entire region. At the core of this transformation, he wrote, should be a transition from a deeply ingrained "threat paradigm" to an "empowering possibilities paradigm," based on the creation of a new regional partnership in West Asia and the renewal of dialogue with Europe and the United States.³⁰

At a conference held in Tehran in October 2025, Zarif stated that while missiles are indeed important for Iran's security, "the people are more important," as they are the ones who have safeguarded the country throughout history and are its primary source of strength. According to him, Iran must continue to strengthen its military power, but first and foremost it must ensure the economic welfare of its people. The former foreign minister reiterated the

29 "Hassan Rouhani's analysis of the 12-Day War: Now is the time for a new national strategy. *Asr-e Iran*, August 16, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/spdpz8eu>

30 Mohammad Javad Zarif, "The time for a paradigm shift is now." *Foreign Policy*, August 15, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/5n6bjyf7>

need to deepen ties with the countries of the region and to conduct diplomatic negotiations with Iran's adversaries.³¹

President Pezeshkian himself also expressed recognition of the need to implement significant changes in light of the lessons of the war, adopting a more pragmatic approach both domestically and in foreign policy. In a speech he delivered in August 2025, the president emphasized the importance of promoting internal unity while focusing on resolving Iran's domestic challenges, including the economic crisis, water scarcity, and the crisis of trust between the public and the regime. Pezeshkian also expressed support for dialogue with the West and made clear that negotiating with enemies is not equivalent to surrender.³² However, it is important to stress that nothing in his remarks suggests that the president—who has previously voiced support for the core components of Iran's security doctrine—has retreated from his backing of the Islamic Republic's continued commitment to the "Resistance Front," and certainly not from his affirmation of the importance of Iran's strategic military capabilities, foremost among them its strategic missile arsenal, as a central deterrent.

Within the conservative camp as well, there was acknowledgment of the importance of drawing lessons from the war, particularly given the widespread assessment that a resumption of hostilities is only a matter of time, and that Israel is determined to renew the campaign—indeed, to exploit the next round to advance regime-change objectives, not merely to strike nuclear sites or missile infrastructure. Thus, for example, Safavi, an adviser to Iran's Leader, argued that Iran is merely in a stage of latent war that could reignite at any

31 "It is possible to influence the United States / On the current state of international relations, Iran's position, and the tools at its disposal." *Ham-Mihan*, October 9, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mm9h39pv>

32 "Pezeshkian: I do not want to raise fuel prices for the underprivileged." *Eqtesad-e Mo'aser*, August 10, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/43fkb56m>

moment.³³ However, in the radical camp, calls for a paradigm shift were rejected, and especially harsh criticism was leveled at initiatives pointing toward reform or moderation.

The newspaper *Vatan-e Emrooz* claimed that it is in fact the intellectuals' paradigm of thought that needs to change, as they remain captive to romantic illusions about the West. According to the paper, the war with Israel proved that the West recognizes only the language of force, and that Iran can survive only through forceful struggle and national resistance.³⁴ The conservative daily *Khorasan* likewise argued that although the war necessitates a reassessment of domestic and foreign policy, this should not be done on the basis of outdated modes of thinking that have already proven ineffective. The paper maintained that recommendations such as releasing political prisoners or expanding civil liberties—precisely at a time when Iran faces security challenges and Western cognitive warfare—could serve external actors seeking to undermine the Islamic Republic's social cohesion.³⁵

The pro-regime newspaper *Kayhan* sharply criticized the "Western-leaning" (*gharb-garayan*) and argued that Western orientation is not an intellectual current but a "chronic political disease," whose symptoms include distrust in domestic capabilities, admiration for Western smiles, the denigration of the "Resistance," and the glorification of appeasement. According to the hardline daily, any talk of reconciliation is in fact synonymous with surrender, and any compromise with the West inevitably leads to destruction—as demonstrated by the historical experience of Iraq and Libya. Conceding to the West, it argued, does not bring security; rather, it encourages the enemy "to swallow the country whole." Thus, for example, Libya's ruler Muammar Qaddafi—who

33 "Rahim Safavi's important statements regarding the Israeli attack on Iran: I estimate there is a possibility of another war." *Khabar Online*, August 17, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yd4kzhwt>

34 "The time has come to change the paradigm of Iranian intellectuals." *Vatan-e Emrooz*, July 9, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/4y9knz5m>

35 "A return to repetitive paradigms." *Khorasan*, July 9, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/heavtw48>

believed that relinquishing his nuclear program would end Western hostility—received in return NATO’s bombings of Tripoli and his own elimination. These are, *Kayhan* maintained, living warnings to anyone seeking to sell Iran a formula for accommodation.³⁶

Senior IRGC official Yadollah Javani likewise rejected calls to adopt a more conciliatory approach following the war. In a speech delivered at a conference of Basij militia members in Mashhad, Javani stated that the recent war proved that the discourse of resistance is effective and well-grounded, whereas the theory of appeasement leads nowhere. According to him, universities, lecturers, and the media must explain to the younger generation that Iran can progress only through resistance and reliance on its internal capabilities in all fields—science and technology, medicine and industry, as well as defense and security. He criticized those who cast doubt on the abilities of the Iranian people and who, instead of relying on domestic resources, propose adopting foreign models, fundamentally altering policy, negotiating with the United States, and returning to agreements that undermine Iran’s independence and capabilities. Presenting such approaches in Iran—after it has won the war and succeeded in establishing superiority on the battlefield—constitutes a grave danger, he argued, since the enemy still seeks to limit Iran in the areas of missiles, nuclear capabilities, and regional influence; any retreat under current conditions would give the enemy an opportunity to pursue these goals.³⁷

The internal debate over the lessons to be drawn from the war reflects a longstanding, bitter discourse between the country’s principal political camps, which themselves are not monolithic: conservative-hardliners versus pragmatist-reformists. Moreover, the reformists see the current moment—a

36 “Crocodile tears for Gaza, or a recipe for surrender for Iran.” *Kayhan*, October 5, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/2t4cthhk>

37 “Political Deputy of the IRGC: The recent war proved that the theory of compromise will lead nowhere.” *Asr-e Iran*, September 1, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/23m4t2eb>

period of drawing lessons from the upheaval that struck the Islamic Republic—as a renewed opportunity to strengthen their political standing after having been excluded from decision-making processes in recent years. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that Tehran’s governing institutions remain largely controlled by the conservatives. At this stage, there is no indication of any substantial change in the political structure or in the balance of power at the top of the regime, and it is doubtful that fundamental transformations aligned with the reformists’ calls for conceptual change can occur so long as there is no shift in the regime leadership—particularly no change of the Supreme Leader.

Furthermore, even the reformists do not generally advocate major concessions on core strategic issues, including support for the “Resistance Front,” continued development of the missile program, and Iran’s right to enrich uranium on its own soil, but at most certain adjustments in the national order of priorities.