

## CHAPTER 5

# THE DOMESTIC ARENA IN IRAN AFTER THE WAR

The desire to ensure the regime's survival in the face of internal and external threats is a top priority for the Islamic Republic and a central driver of its security doctrine. Accordingly, even though developments in Iran's domestic arena during and after the war are not directly tied to changes in its strategy, they cannot be ignored in any discussion of the Islamic Republic's national security concept. Israel did not set the overthrow of the regime in Iran as an objective of the war, which was primarily intended to inflict serious and significant damage on the nuclear program and ballistic missile arsenal.

However, some of the measures Israel took during the war—especially in its second week—including the strike on Evin Prison in Tehran; attacks on IRGC headquarters, among them the Sarollah Headquarters responsible for security in the Tehran area; and on Basij and Internal Security Force facilities, were designed to undermine the regime's foundations and encourage the Iranian public to take to the streets and revive the popular protest movement.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that such actions would have continued and even intensified had the war not ended with a ceasefire after twelve days. In addition, the question of a campaign to change the regime in Iran may resurface and even escalate in a scenario of renewed fighting, which could expand to include attacks on vital national infrastructure and additional regime symbols.

### **The Conduct of the Regime and Public During the War**

There is no doubt that the Iranian regime suffered a severe blow, particularly in light of Israel's impressive opening strike, the strategic surprise, the heavy

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142 Raz Zimmt, "The Iran–Israel war and stability of the regime in Iran." *INSS Policy Paper*, July 29, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/3eb4dzp7>

damage to Iran’s nuclear, missile, and command-and-control systems, and the regime’s inability to provide protection and security not only for its citizens but also for senior commanders and nuclear scientists who were assassinated by Israel. The Supreme Leader himself was forced into hiding for the duration of the war—a step that raised, and continues to raise, questions and doubts about his condition and the extent of his control over decision-making, especially given the fact that his public appearances have significantly declined since the end of the war.<sup>143</sup>

According to analyst Ali Alfoneh, in the absence of Khamenei—who, he claims, was forced to sever contact with the top echelon of the regime during the war for fear of an Israeli assassination attempt—strategic decision-making was transferred to an alternative leadership council. This council is said to have included the heads of the three branches of government: President Pezeshkian, Majles Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje’i, as well as two representatives of the IRGC and the regular army.<sup>144</sup> Even if Khamenei’s absence was only temporary, his advanced age (87) and mounting reports regarding his deteriorating health mean that the debate over succession—and indeed over the extent of his control—is already well underway.<sup>145</sup>

It can be assumed that the prospect, raised during the war, of the Supreme Leader’s possible assassination accelerated the process of reviewing potential candidates to replace him in due course. In parallel with the possible decentralization of some of the Leader’s authority during the war, parts of the president’s powers were also transferred to the provincial governors. According to a government decision published by First Vice President Mohammad

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143 Kian Sharifi, “Khamenei’s bunker leadership: What does it mean for Iran’s future?” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, June 27, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mukkyfm>

144 Ali Alfoneh, “Iran: Emergence of collective leadership amid low-intensity conflict.” Arab Gulf States Institute, *Politics and Governance*, July 16, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/y99tam94>

145 Karim Sadjadpour, “The Autumn of the Ayatollahs: What kind of change is coming to Iran?” *Foreign Affairs*, Nov–Dec 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yc26atja>

Reza Aref, the government's decision-making authority at the provincial level was delegated to the governors in order to manage the situation more effectively and speed up decision-making in the wake of the Israeli attack. Under this decision, governors' executive decisions were to be considered decisions of the president and the government and therefore binding.<sup>146</sup> Interior Minister Esfandiar (Eskandar) Momeni stated that the delegation of authority was carried out in accordance with Article 127 of the constitution, which allows the president, in special circumstances, to appoint one or more representatives to take decisions on his behalf. He noted that this step had led to positive results.<sup>147</sup>

In any case, not only is there no indication that the measures taken by Israel during the war to undermine the regime's foundations advanced this goal; some of them appear to have had the opposite effect—at least for now. For example, the strike on the notorious Evin Prison, which serves among other things to incarcerate regime opponents and was ostensibly intended to galvanize public mobilization around the attack on one of the regime's symbols of repression, resulted in the deaths of many civilians. This in turn sparked harsh criticism of Israel, including from government critics and opponents of the regime inside and outside Iran.<sup>148</sup> Likewise, the attacks on Internal Security Force and Basij headquarters and assets did not lead to significant public mobilization, and it is highly doubtful that they seriously impaired the regime's repressive capabilities. In the final analysis, regime opponents did not seek to exploit the opportunity to advance political change, and citizens—some of whom were forced to evacuate their homes—had

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146 "Which government authorities were transferred to the provincial governors?" *Tasnim*, June 28, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/3r6c2urc>

147 "Interior Minister: Part of the government's authorities have been transferred to provincial governors. *Asr-e Iran*, October 28, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/3bch8rtm>

148 Lee Yaron, "Israel's attack on Iran 'caused deep injustice to opponents of the regime.'" *Haaretz*, September 25, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/jhc7s697>

very limited capacity to go out into the streets and protest in the midst of the Israeli strikes.

During the war, the Iranian public demonstrated a considerable degree of “rallying around the flag” (the Iranian flag, not necessarily the flag of the Islamic Republic).<sup>149</sup> This is a familiar phenomenon with historical precedent—for example, the mobilization of the Iranian public in the early stages of the Iran–Iraq War, or the Soviet population’s rallying around the flag during World War II, despite the repressive and murderous policies pursued by the Stalinist regime before the war. However, this does not indicate a change in the public’s fundamentally hostile attitude toward a regime suffering from an ever-deepening legitimacy crisis, but rather a willingness to defend the homeland in its time of need against an external enemy.

Moreover, the harm inflicted on civilians and civilian infrastructure during the war triggered a wave of anti-Israeli sentiment even among regime opponents and critics, many of whom—including within the Iranian diaspora—are known for a critical or even hostile stance toward Israel. Among some segments of Iranian society, the war heightened fears that Israel seeks not only to damage the nuclear program or even to change the regime in Tehran, but also to fragment Iran and undermine its territorial integrity. The Israeli attacks intensified concerns about a slide into anarchy and civil war, which could allow radical domestic elements or foreign actors to impose on Iran a new political order not necessarily aligned with the will of its citizens. The sporadic signs of protest that had characterized the months before the war—mainly over economic issues such as the truck drivers’ protests—almost completely disappeared.<sup>150</sup> And even after the war there is still no sign of a structured,

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149 Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar, “The Islamic Republic’s new lease on life: How the U.S.–Israeli strikes empowered the Iranian regime.” *Foreign Affairs*, July 8, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mry7xayu>

150 Nitsan Freizler, Mora Deitch, and Raz Zimmt, “Iran from within: Analysis of protest events and regime support.” *INSS, Spotlight*, September 16, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/edbvw66r>

organized opposition with a clear leadership capable of exploiting the severe blow to the regime, to challenge its very existence.

Furthermore, the regime demonstrated internal cohesion and a relatively rapid ability to recover from the initial strike it had suffered. It is unclear, however, to what extent it will be able to maintain this internal cohesion over time, especially in view of the growing internal criticism that has emerged over the past year from radical, revolutionary circles within the regime's own ideological support base. This criticism has focused, among other things, on the lack of response to the Israeli strike at the end of October 2024 and on the suspension of enforcement of the hijab law by order of the Supreme National Security Council.<sup>151</sup>

In any event, the Iranian regime will continue to see its survival as a supreme goal and act to preserve it as far as it can. At the same time, the Islamic Republic continues to grapple with a persistent and deepening legitimacy crisis, a worsening economic crisis, and severe structural hardships, foremost among them shortages of water and electricity. In recent years there has been a clear erosion of public trust in state institutions, alongside growing despair over the economic situation and a widening gap between the public and the ruling establishment.<sup>152</sup>

In addition, Iranian society continues to be characterized by internal disagreements and deep polarization. Already in the first days after the ceasefire, debate resumed between radicals and pragmatists on both foreign and domestic policy. The pragmatic-reformist camp called on the authorities to take confidence-building steps toward the public that could help preserve internal cohesion after the war.

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151 Raz Zimmt, "Overtaking on the right: The Iranian ultra-conservative challenge and its implications for regime unity." *Strategic Assessment*, 28(2), July 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yc7x5xyn>

152 Raz Zimmt, "Regime change and the overall campaign against Iran." *INSS Insight*, No. 1934, February 4, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yn5xewr4>

The reformist cleric Mohammad Taghi Fazel Meybodi called for curbing extremist circles which, in his view, cause great harm and undermine national unity. In a press interview, Meybodi noted that radicals have penetrated key positions in government and behave as if there were no problems in the country, whereas it is perfectly clear that Iranian society faces many hardships and is in need of calm and cohesion.<sup>153</sup> Sociologist Mehran Solati stressed the responsibility of the Islamic Republic's authorities to reduce the deep gap that has emerged between the regime and the people. In his view, defending the country against future attacks will not be achieved solely through military build-up, but also through listening to the people; strengthening elected institutions; releasing political prisoners; expanding popular participation in decision-making processes; promoting economic development; integrating into the global economy; and redefining Iran's relations with the global powers.<sup>154</sup>

In August 2025, the Reform Front issued a statement listing demands for far-reaching changes in Iran's domestic and foreign policy. These demands included: renewing negotiations with the United States; suspending uranium enrichment in return for the lifting of sanctions; releasing all political prisoners; abolishing the Islamic dress code; and removing the IRGC from political involvement.<sup>155</sup>

### **Rising Repression Alongside Efforts to Ease Internal Tensions**

Despite growing calls from more moderate circles in Iran to respond to public demands, political and civil repression has not only failed to subside—it has intensified since the war. The sense of persecution and paranoia that

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153 “Fazel Meybodi's warning regarding the plan extremists have for the government.” *Khabar Online*, September 11, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yre4b82a>

154 “Mehran Solati: 12 lessons from 12 days of war!” *Turkmen Sahara Media*, June 29, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yymmuhfcu>

155 “In Iran, reformist call for broad policy U-turn sparks fierce backlash.” *Amwaj Media*, August 20, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/bt8rs9d7>

characterizes the Iranian regime even in normal times—let alone during emergencies—has led to an escalation of repressive measures and tighter monitoring of individuals and groups perceived as threats to the regime. These measures included arrests, executions under the pretext (real or imagined) of pursuing spies and agents working for Israel, as well as the mass expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees.<sup>156</sup>

Although over time such actions may deepen the divide between the regime and the citizenry and reinforce radicalization trends in society, in the short term they help the authorities cope with internal challenges. Moreover, even after the 2024 election of Masoud Pezeshkian to the presidency, state institutions remain dominated by conservatives. No change is evident in the president’s status relative to other power centers, particularly the Leader’s office and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The August 2025 appointment of Ali Larijani—a pragmatic conservative—to the post of Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council likewise did not significantly alter the balance of power.

Nevertheless, aware of the deepening domestic crisis, the regime sought after the war to mobilize the public around ideas of nationalism, sovereignty, and territorial cohesion, including through the use of symbols associated with Iran’s pre-revolutionary and even pre-Islamic past.<sup>157</sup> This is not a new phenomenon: the regime has long worked to cultivate a religious-Islamic nationalism and rally the public around motifs of Iranian national identity,<sup>158</sup> but the war accelerated this trend.<sup>159</sup> For example, the Supreme Leader’s

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156 “Iran: Authorities unleash wave of oppression after hostilities with Israel.” Amnesty International, September 3, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mwy2cehm>

157 Negar Mojtahedi, “Dented by war, Islamic Republic reaches for nationalism to shore up support.” *Iran International*, July 18, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mr255u8u>

158 Raz Zimmt, “Solidarity in crisis: Collectivism and national identity in the Islamic Republic in an era of protest.” *Strategic Assessment*, 26(1), March 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/484xkece>

159 Erika Solomon & Sanam Mahoozi, “Iran’s leaders turn to a new brand of nationalism after Israeli and U.S. attacks.” *The New York Times*, July 22, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yabfub3z>

public appearance on the eve of the Shiite Ashura holiday—his first since the outbreak of the war with Israel—drew considerable attention when he asked Mahmoud Karimi, one of Iran’s prominent religious preachers, to sing the patriotic anthem “*Ey Iran*,” a song made famous during the Shah’s rule.<sup>160</sup> A commentary in the state-run newspaper *Iran* highlighted the need to combine the religious and pre-Islamic cultural components of Iranian identity, writing:

Ancient Iranian civilization, with its millennia-old roots, is rich with noble values. The adoption of Islam did not weaken this culture—on the contrary, integration with the spiritual depth of Islam led to even greater flourishing. This synergy created a unique identity that distinguishes Iranians from others. The Islamic–Iranian culture, with its distinctive authenticity, not only withstood cultural and political invasions but remained stable as a unifying axis during decisive moments in history.<sup>161</sup>

The Iranian leadership found encouragement in the national mobilization around solidarity and patriotism, and in the fact that regime critics did not exploit the external threat to instigate revolt. In a speech on 16 July 2025, Supreme Leader Khamenei said that Israel expected an attack on Iran to weaken the regime and spark an uprising by dormant opposition cells and anti-regime elements, leading masses into the streets. In reality, he asserted, the opposite occurred. Citizens indeed took to the streets—but in the opposite direction from what the enemy intended: in support of the regime.<sup>162</sup>

From the Leader’s perspective, the war demonstrated not only the public’s supposed support for the regime but also confirmed his view that Iran’s

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160 Fatemeh Torkashvand, “Leader blurs lines between faith and nation with ‘Ey Iran’ performance.” *Tehran Times*, July 7, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yc8pc8k7>

161 “The three pillars of Iran’s stability and endurance.” *Iran*, July 10, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mvzy7x5>

162 “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>

enemies—foremost the United States and Israel—are striving to topple the regime by supporting its opponents at home and abroad and by applying political, economic, and military pressure. According to Khamenei, the nuclear program serves merely as a pretext for the West to pressure, isolate, and weaken Iran as part of a broader strategic goal: regime change. For example, in a speech marking the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution, Khamenei claimed that American politicians tell Iranian officials that they do not seek regime change, but they are lying: “They would not hesitate for even a minute if they could destroy the foundations of the Islamic Republic.”<sup>163</sup>

Alongside the effort to rally society around national solidarity, Iranian authorities showed some willingness to be flexible and to respond to certain public demands. A prominent example is the reduced enforcement of the Islamic dress code, particularly in Tehran, where increasing numbers of women appear in public without a headscarf and face no interference.<sup>164</sup> In a speech in August 2025, President Pezeshkian emphasized the need to promote internal unity and stated that the hijab issue cannot be addressed through coercion, which generates resistance and may even lead citizens to abandon their faith and develop alienation or hatred toward religion.<sup>165</sup> The government also decided to withdraw a controversial bill intended to combat the spread of “fake news” on social media, following public criticism that it would severely damage the already limited freedom of expression.<sup>166</sup>

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163 “Khamenei: US wants regime change in Iran.” *Islamweb.net*, February 9, 2014. <https://tinyurl.com/mrx4n2yy>

164 Fereshteh Ghazi & Farangis Najibullah, “Iran’s streets ‘transformed’ as more women shun the mandatory hijab.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 11, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/5t37nny7>

165 “Pezeshkian: I do not want to increase fuel prices for the underprivileged.” *Eqtesad-e Mo’aser*, August 10, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/43fkb56m>

166 “Iran withdraws ‘fake news’ bill after public outcry.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 30, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/2p5bvruv>

However, these measures do not represent a fundamental policy shift, nor do they address the deepening domestic crises. Moreover, even these limited steps provoked criticism from hardline factions. Ayatollah Abbas Ka'abi, a member of the Assembly of Experts, criticized what he called insufficient enforcement of the hijab mandate, saying it is an explicit constitutional obligation and that neither the government nor the Supreme National Security Council has the authority to prevent its implementation.<sup>167</sup> Comments by Mohammad-Reza Bahonar, a member of the Expediency Council, who expressed reservations about strict hijab enforcement, also sparked intense reactions. Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor of the hardline daily *Kayhan*, attacked the former Majles member, saying that if hijab is a religious obligation and a legal requirement, there is no reason not to enforce it.<sup>168</sup>

### **Structural Changes in the Political–Security Leadership**

The process of drawing lessons and rethinking security doctrine, force building, and modes of operation after the 12-Day War is also evident in the early implementation of structural changes at the top of Iran's political–security system. The news site *Noor News*, affiliated with former Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani, recommended organizational reforms in the security system following the war. In a July 2025 article, the site argued that Iran's threat environment had changed after the war, requiring a reorganization of the state's decision-making system.

The article claimed that Iran must adjust to confronting hybrid threats that undermine both its soft and hard power, carry out structural reforms in its security apparatus, and improve its efficiency amid growing threats.

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167 Ayatollah Ka'abi: The hijab is an explicit constitutional obligation, and the government cannot say it has no involvement in the matter / The Supreme National Security Council cannot prevent the Hijab and Chastity Law. *Khabar Online*, October 19, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yv8x36cf>

168 “Top Iranian conservative sparks fury with claim of no ‘binding’ hijab law.” *Amwaj Media*, October 14, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/374b7frz>

The site emphasized that the end of the war does not signal the end of the crisis or the beginning of a period of calm. Iran faces a new phase requiring redefinition of the foundations of power and improvements in governance and decision-making capabilities to meet emerging strategic challenges. This includes shifting from tactical and reactive decision-making to strategic decision-making based on scenario analysis rather than merely responding to concrete threats. *Noor News* recommended creating new institutions, among them a Strategic Command Center, to meet the complex needs of the security, economic, and diplomatic sectors. It also noted that restoring public trust is essential to national security, alongside military strength.<sup>169</sup>

Indeed, in early August 2025, the Supreme National Security Council announced the establishment of the Defense Council (Shura-ye Defa'), to be chaired by the president and composed of the heads of the three branches, the Leader's two representatives on the Supreme National Security Council, the intelligence minister, the chief of staff of the armed forces, the IRGC commander, the regular army commander, and the commander of Khatam al-Anbia Emergency Headquarters. The Council was tasked with the centralized review of defense plans and upgrading the capabilities of the armed forces.<sup>170</sup>

The Defense Council may be considered a modern—though distinctly different—version of the Supreme Defense Council established after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and responsible for managing the security system during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988). That council included seven members: the president (as chair), the prime minister (a position abolished in 1989), the defense minister, the chief of staff, the IRGC commander, and two representatives appointed by Khomeini. After the outbreak of the war, its powers were expanded and it became the top coordinating body for all military operations, including

169 “Strategic Command Center: The engine of post-war governance.” *Noor News*, July 29, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/bdhyf3c>

170 Raz Zimmt, “Changes in Iran’s Supreme National Security Council: Systemic Overhaul or Cosmetic Adjustment?” *INSS Insight*, No. 2026, August 26, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/2zx8s8zr>

strategic decision-making, resource allocation, and coordination among forces. It was dissolved after the war with the establishment of the Supreme National Security Council.

In parallel with the establishment of the new council, the Supreme Leader appointed his adviser and former Majles speaker Ali Larijani as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and his representative on the council, replacing Ali-Akbar Ahmadian. Before serving as Majles speaker (2012–2020), Larijani had been Secretary of the Council and Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator. In 2007, only two years after becoming secretary, he resigned following sharp disagreements with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He was replaced by Saeed Jalili, identified with the radical camp and one of the harshest critics of the nuclear negotiations conducted during Hassan Rouhani’s presidency and of the 2015 nuclear agreement.

Larijani is considered a pragmatic conservative who, like other conservative politicians, accepted the need to adjust revolutionary ideology to contemporary conditions. During his tenure as Majles speaker, he supported President Rouhani’s policies, drawing the ire of hardliners. His presidential bids in 2021 and 2024 were disqualified by the Guardian Council. Nevertheless, after the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in May 2024, his involvement in political affairs increased. In late 2024 he was sent as the Leader’s special envoy to Lebanon and Syria (before the fall of the Assad regime), and in July 2025 Khamenei sent him on an official visit to Moscow, where he met Russian President Vladimir Putin. His return to the top of the political hierarchy likely reflects Khamenei’s desire to bring experienced veteran politicians back into the decision-making circle in Tehran—a desire strengthened after the war, particularly following the elimination of several senior Iranian commanders in Israel’s opening strike. Larijani’s appointment was also likely intended to send a conciliatory message both domestically and internationally, though the radical Jalili remains one of the Leader’s two representatives on the Council.

Groups associated with Iran’s pragmatic and reformist camp welcomed Larijani’s appointment and expressed hope that it signaled the beginning of a new, more moderate and conciliatory era in Iran’s foreign policy. This expectation stems from the strategic crossroads the Islamic Republic faces after the 12-Day War, including forthcoming decisions on whether to return to negotiations with the United States or escalate further against the U.S. and Israel. Mahmoud Vaezi, former chief of staff to President Rouhani, said that Larijani’s return would symbolize a change of approach, a correction of previous policies, and gratitude to the public that supported the regime in unprecedented numbers during the war.<sup>171</sup>

Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, former member of the Majles Committee on Foreign Policy and National Security, argued that Larijani’s presence on the council would send a message to the West that Iran views its national security through a diplomatic and realist lens. It would also strengthen the political–civilian composition of the council, whose increasing dominance by military representatives in recent years had harmed its ability to seize diplomatic opportunities before the outbreak of the June 2025 war.<sup>172</sup>

Mohammad-Mehdi Mojtahedi, head of research at the Center for Strategic Studies in the presidential office, expressed hope that Larijani would focus—as part of the re-evaluation of Iran’s national security doctrine—on uniting all national assets around a shared fate. He emphasized that revising the national security strategy is the most urgent and essential task. After the war, with the danger of renewed conflict still present, all officials—especially the new secretary—should prioritize strengthening Iran’s resilience in the framework of a “strong society, strong state” approach. This requires national dialogue

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171 “Va’ez: If Larijani’s return is the first step in a change of approach, it is a constructive step.” *Khabar Online*, August 4, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/yc6wammy>

172 “Larijani’s presence in the Supreme National Security Council carries a message for the West.” *Tabnak*, August 3, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/6tu5xehz>

and a sense of collective destiny to ensure Iran's preservation, defense, and survival in the face of internal and external threats.<sup>173</sup>

Supporters of the Defense Council's establishment argued that the measure was necessary due to the war, increasing security challenges, and the tightening of sanctions on Iran following the activation of the snapback mechanism. In their view, these challenges require more efficient decision-making during emergencies and better preparedness for complex security scenarios. The Council's creation would support, they argued, greater administrative centralization and faster, more effective decision-making in emergencies, such as a renewed Israeli attack.

Esmail Kowsari, a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, stated in an interview that when the country is in a state of war, changes must be made in the management of the national security apparatus so that appropriate wartime decisions can be made more quickly and so that Iran can surprise the enemy.<sup>174</sup> The reformist daily *E'temad* argued that the establishment of the Council is not merely a technical step but a paradigmatic change that will improve crisis management and decision-making under the Supreme Leader's command in wartime.<sup>175</sup> The conservative SNN news agency similarly argued that the presence of senior commanders alongside the heads of the three branches and the Leader's representatives would improve the efficiency of military decision-making and allow the Supreme National Security Council to focus on shaping the overall strategic policy of national security, including economic, social, political, and international dimensions. Moreover, a centralized, powerful security decision-making

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173 "The regime stands at a historic crossroads / Many of those disqualified [from elections] can also be appointed to positions like Larijani." *Khabar Online*, October 5, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/msd93m3a>

174 "The Supreme Defense Council was established to surprise the enemy / In wartime decisions must be taken quickly." *Dana*, August 4, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mtykarnm>

175 "From the 'Supreme Defense Council' to the 'Defense Council.'" *E'temad*, August 4, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/d23h93jz>

body would send a clear deterrent message to Iran's enemies that the state is determined to defend its sovereignty and national interests and possesses all necessary mechanisms to cope with any crisis.<sup>176</sup>

Since the announcement of the Defense Council's creation, Iranian media have not reported on its activity areas, and it is unclear whether it has indeed discussed Iran's updated strategy or any operational plans. In any case, it is doubtful whether the Council's establishment provides the Iranian leadership with the tools needed for comprehensive, improved management of the post-war reality. Only far-reaching changes to Iran's security strategy—adapted to the dramatic developments in Iran and the region—together with significant improvements in strategic military capabilities, institutional reforms not only in the security realm but also in political, economic, and social spheres, and shifts in foreign policy, could help the Islamic Republic improve its ability to meet the challenges it faces.

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176 "Strengthening national-level management of the war arena / The Defense Council re-established after 36 years." *SNN*, August 4, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/mrwjupp7>