



AYATOLLAH'S ENDGAME: IRAN'S POWER PUZZLE CRACKS OPEN

ABSTRACT

After reinstatement of UN sanctions on Iran and the war effects on the country, Iran's supreme leader has become deeply unpopular, and the apex officials of the country are fearing a regime change or a systematic change in leadership.

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Ayatollah's Endgame: Iran's Power Puzzle Cracks Open

Introduction

A strange yet interesting phenomenon occurred on August 30, 2025, in the post-1979 history of Iran. A meeting takes place between the cabinet of President Masoud Pezheshikan and Supreme leader Ali Khamenei during the government week. What was different was its timing. For the first time, it happened eight days after the week.

For decades, the annual late-August meeting between Khamenei and the sitting government was seen as a symbolic affirmation of the regime's cohesion. This year, however, the gathering was postponed due to "security considerations." The delay underscores not only the regime's fear of unrest but also Khamenei's transformation into a reclusive and increasingly insulated figure.

This act by the Pezheshikan led government has led to anxiety in the highest levels of power regarding the future of the regime particularly of the Supreme Leader. What was also interesting is the fact that on previous occasions too, there have been protests challenging the authority of Khamenei or his predecessor Khomeini. But, for the first time, such an act has come from the side of the government. Khamenei's behaviour has also increased suspicion.

Over the years, he has made lesser public appearances and shorter speeches among many acts that can raise eyebrows. Many have claimed that the United Nations reimposing the sanctions on Iran is a major failure of Khamenei's regime. This factor now may serve as a catalyst for future uncertainty. The current state of turmoil in the nation also contributes negatively to his popularity.

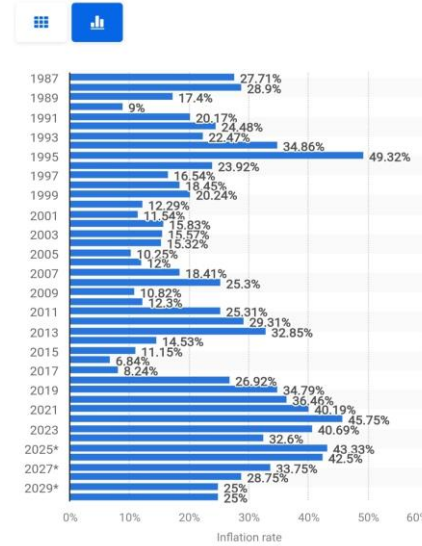
The potential causes of rift



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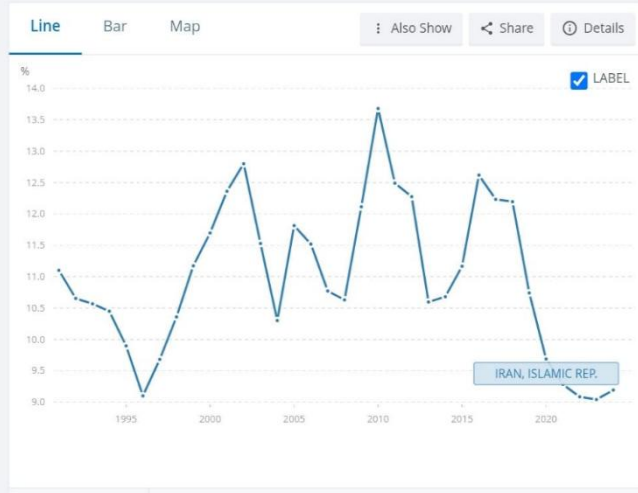
Iran: Inflation rate from 1987 to 2030 (compared to previous year)



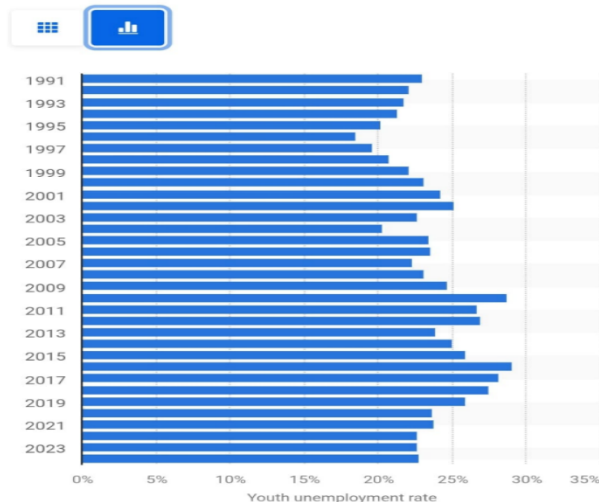
Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate) - Iran, Islamic Rep.

ILO Modelled Estimates database (ILOEST), International Labour Organization (ILO), uri: iloostat.ilo.org/data/bulk, publisher: ILOSTAT, type: external database, data accessed: January 07, 2025.

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Youth unemployment rate in Iran from 1991 to 2024



Above are the figures pertaining to the GDP, unemployment and inflation in the country. The figures make it clear that the current regime has not been able to solve these problems. The country is suffering without even any partial sign of relief. Not just limited to that, the social infrastructure has also suffered. The hospital wards in the state are closing due to nursing shortages.

The financial burden and difficult working conditions, worsened by the recent 12-day war with Israel, have contributed to high attrition and increased requests for migration certificates. Five nurses were killed



during the conflict in June, with more casualties potentially unreported due to their involvement with military medical teams.

Even the ministers of the state have gone on record saying that 95,000 children have dropped out of school leading to a serious educational crisis. The water crisis is deepening. Chronic mismanagement, climate stress, and lack of investment in rural infrastructure are forcing Iran's villagers into the slums of major cities, deepening poverty and social unrest. Also, the censorship on social events like that of Homayoun Shojairan has caused civil unrest along with the mass executions. As per **Amnesty International**, Iranian authorities have executed over 1,000 people thus far in 2025, the highest number of yearly executions in Iran that the organization has recorded in at least 15 years.

What do we expect from Masoud Pezheshikan?

Called a reformist, President Pezheshikan, a former health minister and cardiac surgeon was seen as a changemaker when he defeated the hardliner **Saeed Jalili** to become the president of the Islamic republic. His election was also talk of the town pertaining to the fact that he might pose a challenge to the Supreme leader Khamenei.

However, he has asserted that he works under the guidance of Ayatollah Khamenei and is a principality reformist. Someone who has a soft stand on some aspects of governance or social causes but is loyal to Khamenei.

Also, if, hypothetically, he pushes for a more liberal approach towards governance or that of Islam, he will create a branding disaster for Iran, as the **axis of resistance (Houthis, Hezbollah and Hamas)** has been the key element of Iran's foreign policy and he favours them too. There is also a fear that he may face backlash from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or hardline lawmakers due to his stance of supporting the protesters.

Hardliners not the supreme leader

Amid the reimposed sanctions, the hardline lawmakers of the country have asked the government to start building a nuclear bomb, calling for a change in deterrence doctrine. The country is also considering withdrawing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).



What's important here is not the process but the actors. The hardliners or the principalities have raised their voice high, but the Supreme leader has stayed silent and has made no concrete remarks over the same.

The US interest?

To be precise, the United States of America under President Trump argues for the denigration of Iran's nuclear facility. The recently concluded 36-hour operation midnight hammer which destroyed three heavily fortified nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. Having said that, President Trump has also said that he is not looking for regime change, asserting that it brings chaos.

He has gone on saying that the US can't get totally involved in that in a situation when we can't even run ourselves properly. Instead, he has signalled for peace. While meeting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Israel at the Oval Office on the sidelines of the leader's week at the United National General Assembly, Trump also made remarks that no one can expect he thinks that Iran can join the **Abraham Accords** - A pact initiated by Trump himself in his first time where four Muslim nations normalized relations with Israel.

Conclusion

The reinstatement of the nuclear sanctions and the growing isolations of the Supreme Leader Khamenei amid the socio-economic turmoil reflects a serious situation in the state which can turn into a potential cause for change in the governance model of the country. Khamenei is becoming more isolated whereas the hardline lawmakers are demanding stringent and horrifying measures against Israel, USA and the West. The reformists are out of picture. Even the flag bearer of reformism, as considered once, has taken a much radical stand which is contrary to the popular belief which analysts had on his swearing in.

Taking into the same, the Iranian government can become more orthodox and hardcore in its approach in the coming time as a retaliation, at primary level and then as practice, once it comes to habit. However, what's interesting to note is the role of Khamenei, as questions on his role are obvious, citing failures combating the economic and social problems.

From the analysis above, two things are clear - First, there will be a change in governance with the country becoming more hardcore and fundamentalist. First as a retaliatory practice and then as a habitual one. Second, the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei will not be in the same role and will potentially be overthrown or will be shifted to a more ceremonial role, not like the one which he enjoys in the present where with him rests the ultimate veto power.

The **IRGC** however is deeply engaged in all affairs of Iran and wouldn't allow any substantive ideological change. The names that have appeared in the cleric group as potential successor who have IRGC backing, are

- **Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani** – Member of Assembly of Experts and from Clerical family
- **Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi**– former head of Assembly of Experts
- **Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati** – Chairperson of the Guardian Council

What is in it for India?

If a more orthodox leader is to come in Iran, it might lead to instability and emergence of extremist groups. India is walking on a tight rope balancing Israel, Palestine, the USA and China, this could complicate the relations with Iran given its position in the regional conflict and its position on J&K. India also depends on Iran for its energy security, a liberal regime might enhance these ties and a cleric's favourite might degrade them, given that USA's sanctions have already stressed the bilateral relations.



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September News Review

S. No.	Sector	Date	News Headline	Source
1.	Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy	25/08/25	Iran, E3 to reconvene as snapback deadline looms	Iran Daily
2.		26/08/25	China says will continue to uphold 'objective, fair position' on Iran's nuclear issue	Iran Daily
3.		27/08/25	IAEA inspectors to return to Iran for fuel replacement at Bushehr	Tehran Times
4.		28/08/25	NPT and diplomacy will be dismantled after 'snapback' activation, source tells Tehran Times	Tehran Times
5.		29/08/25	Araghchi says E3 efforts to revive pre-2231 UNSC resolutions are invalid	Islamic Republic News Agency
6.		30/08/25	IRGC dismantles terrorist group linked to Mossad in NE Iran	Iranian Students News Agency
7.		30/08/25	Tehran rejects claims of Iranian involvement in Russia Ukraine conflict	Iranian Students News Agency
8.		31/08/25	Ayatollah Khamenei urges full	TehranTimes



		implementation of Iran-China 25-year strategic partnership	
9.	1/09/25	Iran Ready for Cooperation with Pakistan to Ensure Regional Peace, Prosperity	Tasnim News Agency
10.	2/09/25	China voices support for Iran peaceful nuclear plan	Mehr News Agency
11.	2/09/25	Iran eager to find diplomatic solution to nuclear standoff	Iran Daily
12.	3/09/25	Iran urges Europe to adopt 'credible' stance on Israel	Tehran Times
13.	4/09/25	Iran ambassador denounces US's 'hostile' policies toward Venezuela as illegal, violating UN charter	The Jerusalem Post
14.	5/09/25	Araghchi: Misunderstanding with Qatar resolved	Nour News Agency
15.	5/09/25	US considers banning Iranians from shopping at Costco during UN meeting	Associated Press
16.	6/09/25	Muslim unity is key to victory over arrogance and Zionism, IRGC chief says	Islamic Republic News Agency
17.	7/09/25	Iran, IAEA Hold Technical Talks in Austria	Tasnim News Agency
18.	7/09/25	Iran's Education Crisis Deepens as Nearly One Million Students Drop Out	Irannewsupdate.com
19.	7/9/25	Iran, Astrakhan officials push trade, transport ties under INSTC	Tehran Times
20.	8/9/25	Ayatollah Khamenei Urges Islamic Nations to Cut Economic, Diplomatic Ties with Israel	Tasnim News Agency
21.	8/9/25	UK deems Iran 'core security priority' as IRGC recruits men for terror activities	The Jerusalem Post



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22.		10/9/25	Iran says more talks needed to bring about IAEA inspections	Reuters
23.		12/9/25	Iran, Armenia emphasize expanding energy coop	Nour News Agency
24.		12/9/25	Iran expects a prisoner swap with France, including an Iranian woman held in France over Gaza posts	Associated Press
25.		12/9/25	Iran in talks with Chinese firms to expand solar, energy storage projects	Tehran Times
26.		13/9/25	Iranian president to travel to Qatar, New York Monday	Iran Front Page
27.		14/09/25	Minister: Iran-Russia ties lay groundwork for multipolar world	Iran Daily
28.		15/09/25	'Additional confrontations with Iran are inevitable,' Defense Ministry D-G Baram says	The Jerusalem Post
29.		15/09/25	Iran-Pakistan Joint Economic Commission holds meeting in Tehran	Nour News Agency
30.		17/09/25	Discounts for Iranian oil widen in China on record stocks, even as sanctions curb shipments	Reuters
31.		17/09/25	France's Macron says Europe likely to reimpose sanctions on Iran soon	Al Jazeera
32.		19/09/25	Iran withdraws resolution banning attacks on nuclear sites following US pressure	Associated Press
33.		20/09/25	Foreign ministry cautions Indian citizens over fake jobs in Iran	Hindustan Times
34.		21/09/25	Tehran warns of IAEA deal collapse if UN sanctions reinstated	Iran Daily
35.		22/09/25	Iran's nuclear chief in Moscow to sign power plants deal as UN ponders sanctions	Reuters
36.		22/09/25	Hardline lawmakers demand nuclear bomb as Iran braces for UN sanctions	Al Jazeera



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37.		24/09/25	Leader dismisses talks with US as 'sheer loss'	Iran Daily
38.		26/09/25	Iran and Russia sign \$25bn nuclear plant deal	Al Jazeera
39.		26/09/25	IAEA agreement will remain valid only as long as no hostile action is taken against Iran: FM	Fars News Agency
40.	Economy	25/08/25	Iran hopes to start gas supplies from Russia in near future	Iranian Students News Agency
41.		26/08/25	Iran installs over 1,000 MW of solar panels, president says	Islamic Republic News Agency
42.		27/08/25	Iran, Uzbekistan sign MoU on joint steel, iron projects	Iran Daily
43.		28/08/25	Iran sets joint transit tariffs with six states to boost China-Europe rail freight	Iran Daily
44.		27/08/25	Iran exports non-oil products valued at \$603m to Pakistan in 4 months	Tehran Times
45.		29/08/25	Annual aluminum output reaches 560,000 tons amid energy shortages	Tehran Times
46.		30/08/25	Industry Ministry unveils support package for industries	Tehran Times



47.		30/08/25	Iran-Eurasia free trade agreement marks milestone for administration: Official	Nour News Agency
48.		30/08/25	President remotely launches two oil pipelines, 722 industrial projects	Iran Daily
49.		31/08/25	Oil output capacity up 127,000 bpd over past year, minister says	Iran Daily
50.		1/09/25	Iran's currency hits new low as 'snapback' looms over nuclear programme	Al Jazeera
51.		3/09/25	Iran produces 32m tons of petrochemicals in 5 months	Mehr News Agency
52.		4/09/25	Iran wasting 45 percent of primary energy in conversion and distribution processes: Report	Khorasan
53.		7/09/05	Iran, Astrakhan officials push trade, transport ties under INSTC	Tehran Times
54.		7/09/05	Iran reports significant rise in exports to African countries	Iranian Students News Agency
55.		7/9/25	Agriculture Ministry should overhaul crop planning, spending discipline: Pezeshkian	Iran Daily
56.		8/9/25	Russia energy officials to visit Tehran for gas export deal talks: envoy	Tehran Times
57.		10/9/25	Projects defined to construct 3-MW solar power plants	Tehran Times
58.		14/09/25	Iran voices 'practical commitment' to renewables at IRENA meeting	Iran Daily
59.		16/09/25	MAPNA starts building first H-class gas power plant	Tehran Times



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60.		18/09/25	Pezeshkian urges economists to propose blueprints for spending cuts, foreign trade boost	Iran Daily
61.		20/09/25	US withdraws waiver for Iran's Chabahar port, hitting India's investment	Iranian Students News Agency
62.		22/09/25	Iranian Currency Hits New Low as Dollar Rate Crosses 1,060,000 Rials	Iran Wire
63.		22/09/25	Iran says multi-national projects in Chabahar undeterred by US sanctions	Iran Front Page
64.		24/09/25	Iran launches first mobile oil desalination unit in Dehloran	Islamic Republic News Agency
65.		24/09/25	Iran's Workers Crushed by Poverty as Regime Pursues War and Nuclear Escalation	Irannewsupdate.com
66.		26/09/25	India signals interest in resuming oil imports from Iran	Tehran Times
67.		26/09/25	Iran's Pharmaceutical Industry in Crisis: A Structural Failure Endangering Public Health	National Council of Resistance of Iran
68.	Politics	2/09/25	Iran's parliament vows strong response if snapback mechanism is triggered	Iran Front Page
69.		3/09/25	Iran's Annual Report on Terrorism in Iran 2024 Released	Islamic Republic News Agency
70.		5/09/25	IRGC Appoints Ali Abdollahi as New Commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters	Iran Wire
71.		6/09/25	Cancelled concert shows political, social rifts in Iran amid war tensions	Al Jazeera
72.		10/9/25	Iran's Regime Escalates Executions and Arrests Amid Growing Domestic Threats	Irannewsupdate.com



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73.		11/9/25	Amnesty International Warns of “Execution Crisis” in Iran	Irannewsupdate.com
74.		12/9/25	With Khamenei Unreachable, Iranian Officials Fear for His Health and the Regime	Iran Wire
75.		17/09/25	Nuclear Deal with IAEA Sparks Accusations of Betrayal in Iran	Iran Wire
76.		25/09/25	Iran’s Clerical Regime Faces Deepening Internal Crisis Amid Growing Social Alienation	Irannewsupdate.com
77.		26/09/25	Iranian parliament to debate lawmakers’ call for nuclear strategy shift	Iran Front Page
78.	Health	6 September	Nursing shortage forces hospital ward closures in Iran, officials warn	Iran Front Page
79.	Education	7 september	Iran’s Education Crisis Deepens as Nearly One Million Students Drop Out	Irannewsupdate.com
80.	Science and Technology	8/09/25	Iran set to launch Kowsar, Zafar, and Paya satellites	Iranian Students News Agency
81.	Security	14/09/25	Zahedan Resistance Units Defy Regime Repression, Reject Dictatorship in All Forms	Irannewsupdate.com
82.		17/09/25	Iran executes man accused of selling information to Israel	The National
83.		23/09/25	Domestic and foreign experts should be utilized to solve water crisis: VP Aref	Islamic Republic News Agency
84.		25/09/25	Iranian min.: Iran has identified 189 Israeli scientific, military experts	Iranian Students News Agency
85.	Environment	18/09/25	Water Shortages Drive Migration to Tehran, Fueling Growth of Informal Settlements	Irannewsupdate.com
86.		19/09/25	Lake Urmia’s Disappearance Exposes	Irannewsupdate.com

			Four Decades of Regime Mismanagement	te.com
87.	Defence	24/09/25	Iran's Air Force receives batch of Russian MiG-29s	The Jerusalem Post
88.		26/09/25	Iran has likely carried out an undeclared missile test, satellite photos analyzed by the AP show	Associated Press

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