

Policy Brief

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Iran After Succession:
Power, Access, and Institutional Rebalancing under Mojtaba Khamenei

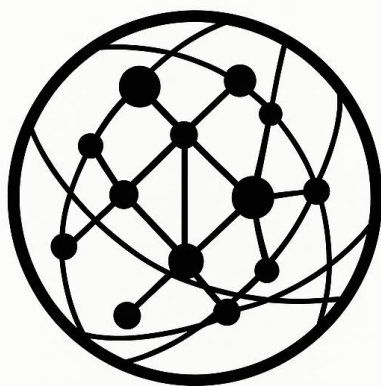
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Core Judgment

Iran’s post-succession order is undergoing a contested redistribution of power rather than a simple hard-line or military takeover. Mojtaba Khamenei’s limited visibility and wartime delegation have increased the importance of access, institutional control, and security coordination. The August 9–10 reshuffle appears to combine partial recentralization with the formalization of wartime authority. The central question is whether this restores leader-centered control or produces a more security-centered political order.

Key Judgments

- **Mojtaba Khamenei’s limited visibility has become a political variable.** Restricted access increases the influence of officials who control information, interpretation, and communication with the Supreme Leader.
- **Iran’s political system remains structurally plural.** Clerical institutions, security organizations, and the elected executive retain distinct powers, resources, and veto points. Current competition is therefore about authority and jurisdiction as much as ideology.
- **Wartime delegation created durable institutional interests.** Authority exercised by the IRGC, General Staff, Khatam al-Anbiya, and SNSC mechanisms cannot simply be reversed. Wartime authority must eventually be returned, institutionalized, shared, or contested.
- **The August appointments reorganize power interfaces rather than merely promote hard-liners.** Rezaei strengthens cross-system coordination, Abdollahi links wartime command to the permanent military hierarchy, while Vahidi and Taeb reinforce the security establishment.
- **Reported personnel disputes reveal recurring jurisdictional fault lines.** Questions over appointments, negotiating authority, information flow, and representation of the state remain central to elite competition.
- **Legacy networks remain both an asset and a constraint.** Mojtaba depends on experienced figures inherited from the Ali Khamenei era, but long-term consolidation will require preventing those intermediaries from becoming autonomous centers of power.



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Executive Summary

Iran's post-succession order is undergoing a contested institutional rebalancing, not a simple shift from clerical to military rule. Ali Khamenei's long tenure allowed him to arbitrate among clerical institutions, elected bodies, and the security establishment through accumulated authority and personal networks. Mojtaba Khamenei inherited the office without the same political capital.

His limited public visibility increases the importance of access. Officials who can brief the Supreme Leader, interpret his preferences, or shape the information reaching him can exercise influence beyond their formal positions. Power therefore depends not only on constitutional authority, but also on access, information, and control over institutional boundaries.

The war added another layer by dispersing operational authority to the IRGC, Khatam al-Anbiya, the General Staff, and security-coordination mechanisms. The August 9–10 appointments appear to reorganize that wartime distribution of power. Rezaei strengthens the connection between the Leader and the SNSC; Zolghadr moves closer to the Leader's office; Abdollahi links wartime command more directly to the permanent military hierarchy; and Vahidi and Taeb reinforce the security establishment.

The elected executive nevertheless remains important. The presidency retains administrative, economic, diplomatic, and formal SNSC responsibilities, while recurring reports of disputes involving Pezeshkian, Araghchi, and Ghalibaf point to persistent questions over appointments, negotiating authority, and the limits of security-sector influence. Legacy networks from the Ali Khamenei era remain both necessary to governance and constraining on Mojtaba's room for maneuver.

The emerging system is therefore best understood as **contested institutional rebalancing**. Mojtaba appears to be recentralizing authority through formal institutions, but doing so may also institutionalize wartime actors and strengthen their bargaining position. The central issue is no longer simply who holds office, but how power, access, jurisdiction, and institutional autonomy are being redistributed within the Islamic Republic.

Why This Matters

Iran's succession struggle is not only about ideology or faction. It is about who controls which functions of the state, and where institutional authority begins and ends.

The Islamic Republic combines clerical authority, elected institutions, military organizations, intelligence bodies, and the SNSC within an overlapping system. Under Ali Khamenei, decades of accumulated authority allowed these competing centers to be managed through personalized arbitration. Mojtaba inherited the office, but not the same political capital.

The war added a second challenge by dispersing operational authority. Institutions that gained autonomy under wartime conditions also gained stronger claims to resources, personnel, and jurisdiction. The central question is therefore how those powers are reallocated without sacrificing capabilities developed during the conflict.

The August reshuffle is the clearest effort so far to address that problem. It redistributes access, formalizes wartime roles, and adjusts the balance among the Leader's office, SNSC, military command, IRGC, and elected executive. Whether this restores centralized control or produces a more durable multi-node bargaining system remains unresolved.

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Analytical Note

This brief distinguishes formal authority, operational authority, access to the Supreme Leader, and inferred political influence. Official Iranian sources and constitutional provisions establish appointments and formal responsibilities. Reuters reporting is used for succession dynamics, leadership visibility, access, and wartime decision-making. Opposition-media reporting is treated as unverified and used primarily to identify recurring jurisdictional disputes rather than establish events as fact.

The Phase II–III framework follows the EPINOVA analytical chronology. In MCCM v2.3.4, Phase II covers Analytical Days 96–131 and Phase III begins on Day 132 (Wu, 2026b). Each analytical day runs from 12:00 p.m. ET to 12:00 p.m. the following day. The cutoff for this assessment is August 12, 2026, 3:16 a.m. ET, within the August 11 analytical day.

Factional labels describe policy tendencies and institutional alignments, not fixed blocs. The analysis therefore emphasizes position, access, jurisdiction, resource control, and policy incentives rather than ideology alone.

1. The Inherited Architecture: A Hybrid State with Overlapping Authority

Iran's current struggle begins with the structure created after the 1979 revolution. The constitution combines republican institutions with the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, or guardianship of the Islamic jurist. The Supreme Leader possesses ultimate authority over core security and state matters, commands the armed forces, appoints senior military and judicial figures, and influences institutions that can constrain elected officials. At the same time, the president, cabinet, parliament, ministries, and administrative bureaucracy carry responsibility for governing the economy, implementing policy, managing foreign relations, and delivering public services (Constitute Project, 1989; Reuters, 2026l).

This creates neither a conventional presidential system nor a single military hierarchy. It creates overlapping authority and partially overlapping chains of accountability. The Guardian Council can vet candidates and review legislation; the Assembly of Experts formally selects and can remove the Supreme Leader; the judiciary is institutionally linked to the Leader; the Expediency Council arbitrates disputes and advises on strategic questions; the IRGC answers to the Supreme Leader while operating military, intelligence, political, and economic networks; the regular armed forces (Artesh) remain institutionally separate; and the SNSC links elected, military, intelligence, judicial, and clerical authority in a single coordinating body.

The resulting state has always depended on mediation. Under Ali Khamenei, personalized arbitration was a principal mechanism that kept institutional overlap from becoming permanent jurisdictional conflict. His office controlled access and appointments; his long tenure gave him accumulated knowledge of the actors he was balancing; and his ties with the IRGC reinforced both the Leader's authority and the Guards' institutional position (Nader, 2010; Sadjadpour, 2015).

That historical pattern matters because the post-succession problem is not the creation of institutional competition. Competition was already built into the system. The change is that the principal arbiter who managed it disappeared while war simultaneously increased the autonomy of several security institutions.

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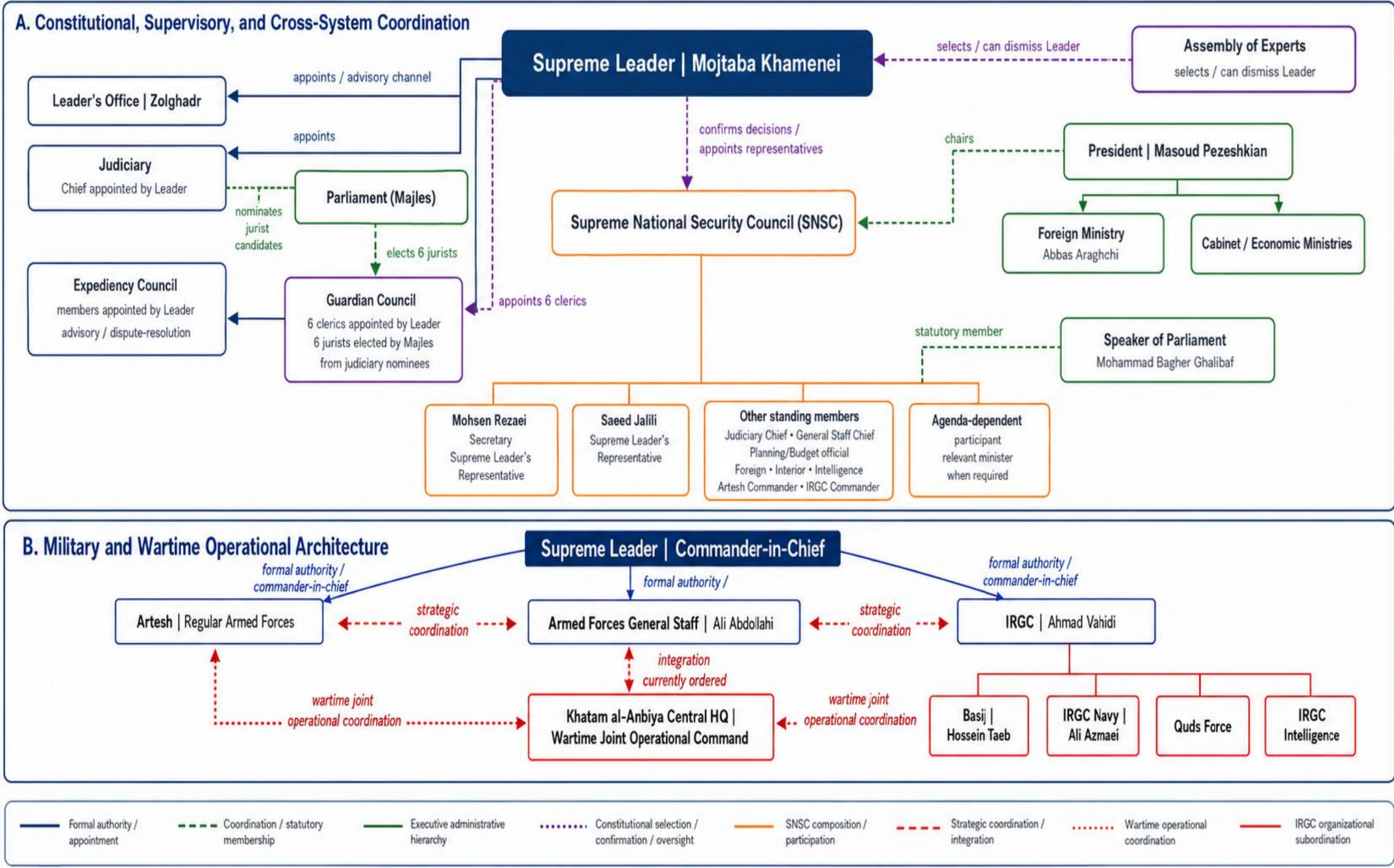


Figure 1. Formal and Operational Power Architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran, August 2026

Sources: Author’s synthesis based on the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Reuters structural reporting; official Iranian descriptions of the SNSC and August 2026 appointments; and Critical Threats Project–Institute for the Study of War assessments.

Note: This is a selective analytical map of overlapping authority, not a complete constitutional organization chart. Solid blue lines indicate formal appointment or command authority; purple dotted lines indicate constitutional selection, oversight, or confirmation; green dashed lines indicate SNSC membership or coordination; red dashed lines indicate strategic coordination or ordered integration; and red dotted lines indicate wartime operational coordination. Khatam al-Anbiya is shown as a wartime joint operational layer subject to an ordered integration process with the General Staff, not as a superior command over the Artesh or IRGC.

Table 1. Power Domains, Institutional Interests, and Current Post-Succession Tensions

Power Domain / Political Network	Principal Nodes	Core Institutional Interest	Current Post-Succession Tension
Supreme Leader / Leader’s Office	Mojtaba Khamenei; Zolghadr; advisers and gatekeepers	Preserve ultimate authority, appointments, agenda control, and access to the Leader	Low visibility increases reliance on intermediaries whose influence can strengthen or constrain the Leader.
Clerical-supervisory establishment	Guardian Council; Assembly of Experts; Judiciary; senior clerical networks	Preserve velayat-e faqih, ideological legitimacy, legal oversight, and institutional continuity	Security power is rising, but clerical legitimacy and constitutional supervision remain essential to regime continuity.
Security-military establishment	General Staff; Khatam al-Anbiya; IRGC; Basij; Quds Force; intelligence bodies	Control war-making, coercive assets, intelligence, internal security, and strategic deterrence	Emergency authority can be disciplined through integration or entrenched through formalization.

Table 1. Power Domains, Institutional Interests, and Current Post-Succession Tensions (Cont.)

Power Domain / Political Network	Principal Nodes	Core Institutional Interest	Current Post-Succession Tension
SNSC / cross-system brokers	Mohsen Rezaei; Saeed Jalili; President; Speaker; Judiciary Chief; General Staff Chief; senior ministers	Coordinate security policy, reconcile institutions, and shape strategic sequencing	Gains importance when direct personalized arbitration is weaker or leadership access is uncertain.
Elected civilian-technocratic executive	Pezeshkian; Araghchi; Cabinet; economic ministries	Preserve administrative authority, diplomacy, economic recovery, and appointment prerogatives	Security institutions can narrow independent executive discretion over personnel, negotiations, and crisis policy.
Pragmatic conservative / parliamentary network	Ghalibaf and institutional conservatives	Preserve establishment continuity while limiting economically unsustainable confrontation	Acts as broker but competes with security and ultra-hard-line actors over negotiation and political direction.
Ultra-hard-line ideological network	Paydari / Stability Front; Saeed Jalili-linked actors	Prevent concessions viewed as weakening revolutionary principles or strategic autonomy	Can exert veto pressure without controlling the full operational apparatus.

Sources: Author’s synthesis based on Constitute Project (1989); Nader (2010); Sadjadpour (2015); Reuters (2026a, 2026d, 2026l); Fattah et al. (2026); and Wells et al. (2026).

Note: These domains overlap. Individuals may belong to more than one network, and the table does not imply cohesive or formally organized factions.

2. Succession Without Presence: Visibility, Access, and Gatekeeping

Mojtaba Khamenei’s public absence is not only a symbolic or medical issue. It changes the mechanics of power. Reuters reported in July that the new Supreme Leader had remained out of normal public view after succeeding his father and had not supplied the continuous public presence traditionally associated with the office. Earlier reporting attributed the absence partly to severe injuries sustained in the February 28 strike and said he continued to participate in major decisions through remote or restricted channels (Reuters, 2026b, 2026e, 2026f).

The cause of low visibility is less important for this brief than its institutional effect. A leader can retain constitutional supremacy while losing some of the everyday political advantages that come from being continuously present. When direct access is scarce, three forms of secondary power become more valuable: access power, or the ability to reach the Leader; interpretive power, or the ability to explain what his preferences mean; and transmission power, or the ability to carry instructions from the apex to institutions that must implement them.

Reuters’ April assessment described a wartime order in which the IRGC and SNSC had gained greater practical weight and Mojtaba’s role was reported by insiders as more dependent on endorsing or legitimizing outcomes produced through a security-centered process. That reporting relies significantly on unnamed sources and should not be treated as a complete map of decision-making. It nevertheless supports a narrower conclusion: the loss of a highly personalized arbiter increased the political value of intermediaries and formal coordinating institutions (Reuters, 2026d).

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Pezeshkian's statements illustrate the same problem from the civilian side. He said in July that his interactions with Mojtaba were increasing, but later described communication as very difficult. State media subsequently publicized a late-July meeting covering military affairs, foreign-exchange management, energy use, resources, and international economic relations. The breadth of that agenda indicates that direct access was relevant not only to security decisions but also to the civilian government's ability to manage economic and diplomatic policy (Islamic Republic News Agency [IRNA], 2026e; Reuters, 2026g).

Access therefore becomes a political bottleneck. A leader who is less visible may still be fully capable of making decisions, but the system around him must decide who presents information, which disputes reach him, how quickly decisions are transmitted, and which institutions can claim to be acting on his intent. That creates incentives for gatekeepers to protect their position and for excluded actors to seek alternative institutional channels.

3. Wartime Delegation: Emergency Authority Creates Institutional Stakes

The succession shock occurred during war, which meant that Iran could not wait for a clean institutional reset. Leadership losses, repeated strikes, maritime confrontation, and negotiation pressure required surviving institutions to act before the post-succession hierarchy was fully stabilized. Operational authority therefore became more distributed even while constitutional authority remained formally centralized. Reuters' March assessment of the surviving command structure likewise documented how wartime leadership losses redistributed practical authority across senior institutions (Reuters, 2026m).

Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters illustrates this process. Before Ali Abdollahi became chief of the Armed Forces General Staff in August, he was already running the wartime joint command and briefing Mojtaba on armed-forces readiness and operational guidance. The IRGC likewise exercised substantial wartime authority before several appointments were formally regularized (Reuters, 2026d, 2026h).

Political coordination also adapted. Abbas Araghchi described a special SNSC mechanism able to make negotiation-related decisions when direct contact with the Supreme Leader was unavailable. CTP-ISW treated this as evidence of unusually significant wartime delegation, although the body's exact composition, permanence, and legal basis remain uncertain (Fattah et al., 2026).

Earlier EPINOVA analysis documented two related processes. The first was Phase II systemic realignment after the initial war-termination period; the second was Iran's effort to institutionalize surviving wartime leverage by embedding Hormuz, sanctions relief, nuclear sequencing, and security guarantees into bargaining architecture. The domestic analogue is that wartime authority itself can become institutionalized. An organization that acquires information, personnel, command routines, and veto capacity under emergency conditions develops both capability and an interest in preserving at least part of that position (Wu, 2026a, 2026c).

Emergency authority does not simply disappear when the emergency changes. It must be returned, institutionalized, shared, or contested. This is the central bridge between wartime command and post-succession politics. The August reshuffle can simultaneously represent an attempt by Mojtaba to recover control over delegated authority and an attempt by the institutions that carried the war to convert de facto power into durable jurisdiction. Those two processes are not mutually exclusive.

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4. Competing Centers of Power: Interests, Jurisdiction, and Legacy Networks

The resulting political competition is more complex than a reformist-versus-hard-liner split. At least four broad interests overlap: preservation of Supreme Leader supremacy; protection of clerical-revolutionary institutions; retention of security-sector authority acquired during war; and preservation of the elected government's administrative and diplomatic space. Parliamentary conservatives and ultra-hard-line ideological actors cut across these domains rather than fitting neatly into a single camp.

The security establishment is itself not monolithic. IRGC officers can disagree over risk, timing, negotiations, and the distribution of authority. Historical analysis of the Guards has long emphasized internal factional variation despite strong institutional interests in protecting the regime and the organization's prerogatives (Nader, 2010). Current CTP-ISW analysis likewise distinguishes a Vahidi-linked security tendency willing to negotiate under restrictive conditions from Paydari-linked actors more categorically opposed to U.S. negotiations (Wells et al., 2026).

The elected executive has a different institutional interest. Pezeshkian and his ministries bear the cost of inflation, energy shortages, reconstruction, currency pressure, public services, and sanctions. They therefore have incentives to preserve diplomatic maneuvering room and administrative authority even when they share the broader state objective of maintaining strategic leverage. Ghalibaf occupies an intermediate position: he is a conservative with an IRGC background, but also a parliamentary broker with incentives to prevent war costs from overwhelming state capacity.

Legacy figures add another layer. Rezaei and Zolghadr belong to networks built over decades of revolutionary-state consolidation. Their authority is partly contemporary and partly historical. Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar offers a useful example of continuity: he served as defense minister and interior minister, remains an IRGC brigadier general, and is identified in 2025 European Union records as a senior adviser to the Chief of the General Staff on knowledge and technology industry. Current public evidence does not place Najjar at the center of the August appointments, so he should not be treated as a principal decision-maker in this rebalancing. His continued position nevertheless illustrates the persistence of older military-administrative networks beneath visible leadership turnover (Council of the European Union, 2025).

This produces a structural dilemma for Mojtaba. He needs experienced networks to govern a complex state under wartime pressure, but the more indispensable those networks become, the more difficult it is to recreate the personal supremacy associated with his father. Personal consolidation therefore requires both using and bounding the institutions that made succession and wartime continuity possible.

5. The August 9–10 Rebalancing: Personnel, Institutions, and Boundary Shifts

The August appointments are best understood as boundary changes rather than a simple list of promotions. They move people across institutional interfaces where access, coordination, operational authority, and domestic control meet.

On August 9, Mojtaba Khamenei appointed Mohsen Rezaei as his representative to the SNSC. President Pezeshkian then appointed Rezaei as SNSC secretary following Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr's resignation, while Khamenei appointed Zolghadr as his political adviser. The distinction in appointment authority matters: the arrangement simultaneously preserves the presidency's formal role in the SNSC secretariat and gives Rezaei a direct mandate from the Supreme Leader (IRNA, 2026c, 2026f; Reuters, 2026i).

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Rezaei’s importance is not reducible to being a former IRGC commander. He links the revolutionary military generation, the Expediency Council, economic administration, the presidency, the SNSC, and the Supreme Leader’s office. His placement therefore creates a broker able to connect institutions whose interests are not identical. Zolghadr’s transfer works differently. Moving from the SNSC secretariat into the Leader’s advisory structure reduces his formal secretariat role but potentially increases his proximity to the apex and his relevance as an access or interpretive node.

The August 10 military appointments further redraw the command boundary. Abdollahi became chief of staff of the Armed Forces and was instructed to complete integration between the General Staff and Khatam al-Anbiya. Kioumars Heydari became deputy chief of staff, preserving a visible regular-Army presence. Vahidi was formally confirmed as IRGC commander; Mostafa Izadi became deputy commander; Ali Azmaei took formal command of the IRGC Navy; and Hossein Taeb returned to the Basij (IRNA, 2026a, 2026b, 2026d).

Table 2. August 9–10 Personnel Shifts and Their Power-Boundary Effects

Official	New / Formalized Role	Previous / Wartime Position	Power-Boundary Effect
Mohsen Rezaei	SNSC secretary + Supreme Leader representative	Former IRGC commander; Expediency / economic roles; leadership adviser	Creates a cross-institutional broker linking Leader, presidency, security system, and legacy networks.
Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr	Political adviser to Supreme Leader	SNSC secretary	Shifts from formal secretariat coordination toward proximity, advice, and potential gatekeeping around the Leader.
Ali Abdollahi	Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces	Commander, Khatam al-Anbiya Central HQ	Carries wartime joint-command experience into permanent hierarchy; integration order can both recentralize and institutionalize emergency authority.
Kioumars Heydari	Deputy Chief of Staff	Senior Artesh commander	Preserves a regular-military node inside a more security-centered command structure.
Ahmad Vahidi	IRGC Commander-in-Chief	Senior wartime security figure; reported de facto IRGC command role	Formalizes the Guards’ wartime centrality and institutional weight.
Mostafa Izadi	Deputy IRGC Commander	Senior IRGC / Khatam-linked roles	Supports continuity across integrated and cross-domain military functions.
Ali Azmaei	IRGC Navy Commander	Senior IRGC naval officer; wartime maritime role reported in open-source assessments	Institutionalizes leadership over the force central to Iran’s Hormuz coercive leverage.
Hossein Taeb	Head of Basij Organization	Former Basij and IRGC Intelligence chief	Reconnects domestic mobilization and internal security to the broader longer-term security rebalancing.

Sources: IRNA appointment reports and decrees of August 9–10, 2026; Reuters (2026h, 2026i, 2026k); Critical Threats Project & Institute for the Study of War (2026); and United States Institute of Peace (2023).

Note: “Power-boundary effect” is an analytical interpretation. Formal appointments establish officeholders but do not by themselves prove the practical redistribution of influence described in the final column.

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5.1 Strategic and Operational Integration

The General Staff-Khatam order is the most important institutional change because it can be interpreted in two directions at once. From the perspective of the Supreme Leader, moving Abdollahi into the General Staff may place wartime command under a clearer formal hierarchy. From the perspective of the wartime command network, integrating Khatam into the General Staff may preserve its procedures, personnel, and operational authority inside the permanent system. The same decree can therefore be an instrument of recentralization and a mechanism of institutionalization.

5.2 Security and Domestic Control

Vahidi, Izadi, Azmaei, and Taeb extend the rebalancing across strategic deterrence, cross-domain operations, Hormuz, and domestic security. Their appointments increase the coherence of the security layer but do not erase the presidency, Artesh, parliament, judiciary, or clerical institutions. The more precise conclusion is that security institutions have gained greater connective weight inside a still plural constitutional order.

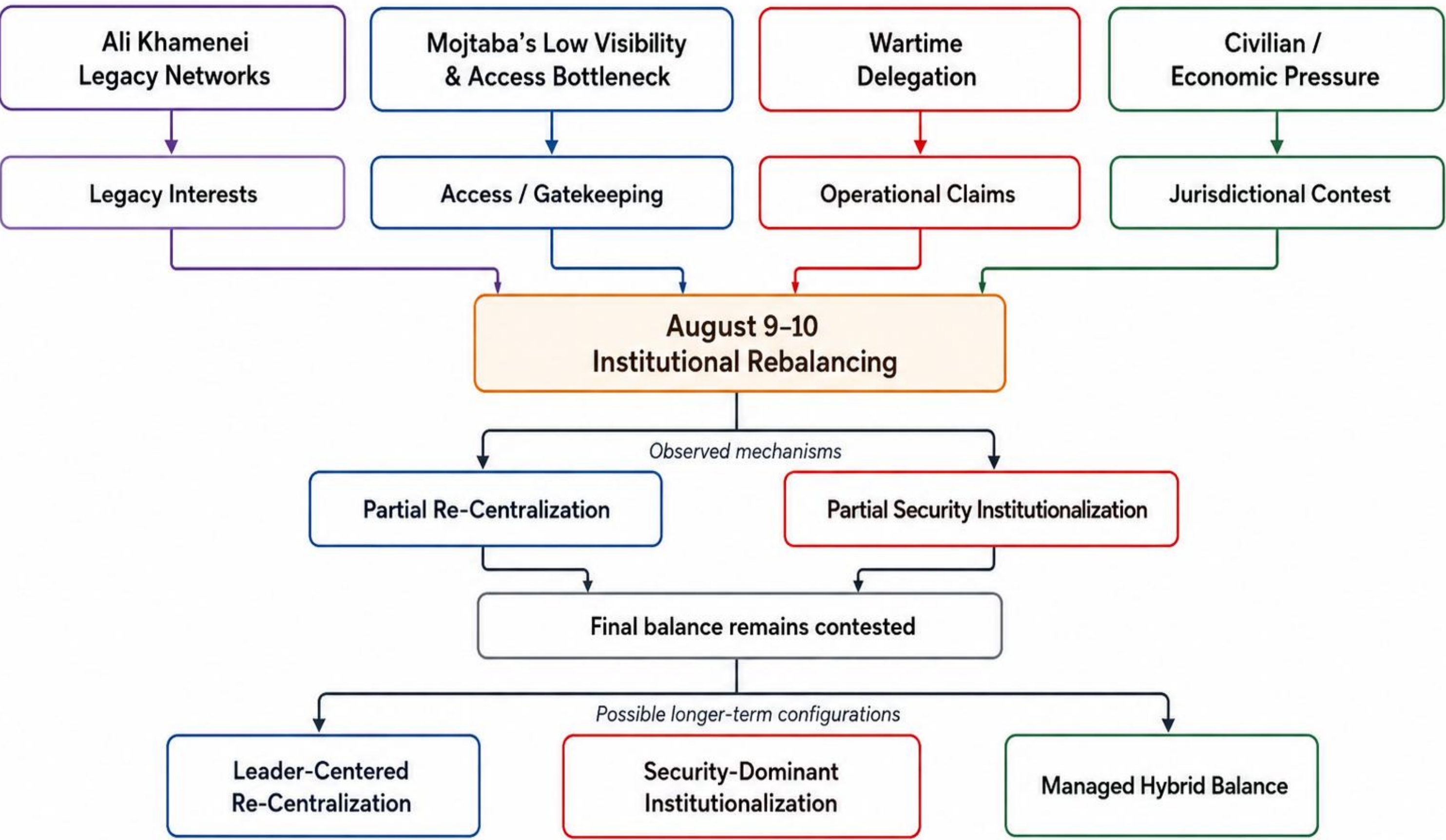


Figure 2. Post-Succession Power Rebalancing: Legacy Authority, Wartime Delegation, and Emerging Gatekeepers

Sources: Author’s synthesis based on Reuters reporting from March–August 2026; IRNA appointment decrees; Critical Threats Project–Institute for the Study of War assessments; and prior EPINOVA analysis of Phase II–III institutional change.

Note: The figure separates observed mechanisms from possible longer-term configurations. Partial re-centralization and partial security institutionalization may combine in different ways; neither maps one-to-one onto a single outcome. The final balance remains contested.

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6. Who Speaks for Iran? Jurisdictional Conflict Behind Personnel Rumors

One recurring indicator of internal competition has been the repeated appearance of reports, counter-reports, and official denials involving senior civilian officials. These episodes should not be treated as confirmed personnel events when the evidence is weak. They are analytically useful because the disputes repeatedly concern jurisdiction.

In late May, Iran International reported that Pezeshkian had offered his resignation because the IRGC had excluded the government from major decisions. The administration and Tasnim publicly denied that he had resigned and said he remained in office. The appropriate conclusion is not that a resignation occurred. The significant point is that the rumor itself centered on the president's claim to meaningful executive authority under wartime security dominance (Iran International, 2026b; Tasnim News Agency, 2026a).

A similar pattern surrounded Araghchi. Iran International reported in April that Pezeshkian and Ghalibaf were considering his removal because he was allegedly following Vahidi's instructions in negotiations without adequately informing the president. The report relied on unnamed sources and was not independently verified. Yet it described the same institutional question: whether the foreign minister's chain of political accountability runs principally through the elected executive or through the security system that defines national-security red lines (Iran International, 2026c).

Negotiating-team rumors produced a third example. Iran International reported that Ghalibaf had stepped down as head of the negotiating team after internal disagreements, while the parliament's media center later denied that he had left the role. Separate reporting described disputes over the negotiating team's composition and mandate, including whether security officials should constrain what civilian negotiators could discuss (Iran International, 2026a, 2026d; Tasnim News Agency, 2026b).

Official Iranian messaging repeatedly stressed unity, and some allegations came from an opposition outlet with a strong adversarial posture toward the Islamic Republic. The reports therefore cannot be used as a literal transcript of elite deliberations. Their evidentiary value lies in the recurring pattern: appointments, negotiation mandates, information flows, and access to the Supreme Leader are the boundaries around which internal competition is repeatedly alleged to occur.

Thus, the central question is not simply "who is a hard-liner?" It is "who is authorized to decide, to transmit, to veto, and to speak for the state?"

7. What Happens to Wartime Power? Return, Institutionalization, Sharing, or Contestation

The longer-term disposition of wartime delegated authority is the most important unresolved structural issue. Emergency power can follow four broad pathways.

- **Return.** Authority flows back into statutory peacetime institutions, and wartime bodies lose exceptional autonomy.
- **Institutionalization.** Emergency nodes, procedures, and personnel are absorbed into the permanent structure, converting temporary power into durable jurisdiction.
- **Sharing.** Overlapping authority becomes a managed feature of governance, with the SNSC, General Staff, Leader's Office, and executive negotiating recurring boundaries rather than eliminating duplication.

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- **Contestation.** Institutions resist the loss of wartime prerogatives, producing disputes over appointments, negotiations, intelligence, resources, and operational control.

The August evidence supports a hybrid of the second and third pathways, with elements of the first. Abdollahi's transfer and the integration directive can bring wartime authority into a formal chain, but they also preserve the wartime command system inside that chain. Rezaei's dual roles increase the SNSC's potential as a mechanism for sharing and coordinating power, but they also increase the importance of a broker who stands between the presidency and the Supreme Leader. Vahidi's formal confirmation institutionalizes a role that open-source reporting had already attributed to him during wartime.

The result is not a simple power grab by one faction. It is a bargaining process over the ownership of emergency authority. The Supreme Leader has an interest in converting distributed wartime power into a system he can supervise. Security institutions have an interest in preserving the autonomy, resources, and agenda influence acquired under pressure. The elected executive has an interest in restoring administrative jurisdiction over appointments, diplomacy, and economic policy. Legacy actors have an interest in protecting networks built before succession. These interests overlap enough to sustain the regime, but differ enough to prevent a clean institutional settlement.

This is why "security-centered coordination" should be treated as a current mechanism, not a final regime type. The mechanism may stabilize the system while Mojtaba rebuilds personal authority. It may also become the basis of a durable order in which the Supreme Leader remains formally supreme but relies on increasingly autonomous security and brokerage nodes to govern.

8. Implications and Indicators to Watch

8.1 Supreme Leader Authority and Visibility

The first indicator is whether Mojtaba becomes more publicly and institutionally present. Regular direct meetings, public appearances, signed directives tied to specific policy choices, and evidence that competing institutions seek his personal arbitration would support recentralization. Continued low visibility combined with greater dependence on intermediaries would support a gatekeeper-centered model.

8.2 Access and Gatekeeping

The composition of the Leader's office matters as much as formal cabinet changes. Zolghadr's role, the identity of military and clerical advisers, and evidence about which officials can reach Mojtaba directly will reveal whether access is broadening or becoming concentrated in a narrow security network.

8.3 Civilian-Security Jurisdiction

Appointments to the intelligence ministry, economic-security posts, foreign-policy bodies, and provincial administration will test whether the presidency is regaining administrative discretion. Repeated public denials of removal rumors do not settle the issue if the government's formal authority is constrained by informal security vetoes.

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8.4 General Staff–Khatam Integration

Implementation matters more than the decree. Personnel transfers, merged staffs, shared planning procedures, reporting lines, and budget authority will show whether Khatam is being subordinated to the General Staff, merged with it, or preserved as an exceptional operational layer.

8.5 Negotiations and Hormuz

Foreign policy remains a key test of who speaks for the state. The relevant question is whether Pezeshkian and Araghchi can shape negotiating proposals or mainly implement conditions produced by the SNSC and security establishment. Hormuz is especially revealing because it combines diplomacy, IRGC Navy control, sanctions relief, economic pressure, and national-security legitimacy. Earlier EPINOVA analysis showed how Iran sought to institutionalize Hormuz and other wartime leverage in settlement bargaining; the internal question is which institution controls that leverage and the authority to exchange it (Reuters, 2026c, 2026j; Wu, 2026a, 2026e).

8.6 Legacy Networks and Generational Turnover

Further appointments will show whether Mojtaba is building an independent cohort or relying on figures formed under his father. Rezaei and Zolghadr currently favor continuity; a broader replacement of older intermediaries by officials tied personally to Mojtaba would indicate a second stage of succession consolidation.

8.7 Domestic Governance

Taeb's Basij role links the power rebalancing to internal stability. Economic recovery still requires civilian ministries and technocratic competence, while the security system retains incentives to preserve coercive capacity. The resulting order may therefore become more centralized in security policy while remaining dependent on the elected executive for economic resilience, a dual-layer trajectory identified in earlier EPINOVA analysis (Wu, 2026d).

Limitations

Iran's senior decision-making system remains highly opaque. Formal office, operational authority, access to the Supreme Leader, and implementation influence do not necessarily coincide. Official Iranian sources establish appointments and formal roles, while Reuters reporting on succession and wartime command relies partly on unnamed sources. The brief therefore distinguishes documented institutional change from inferred political effects.

Several episodes illustrating jurisdictional conflict come from opposition-oriented reporting and were denied by Iranian officials. Reports concerning Pezeshkian, Ghalibaf, Araghchi, or alleged IRGC vetoes are not treated as confirmed events. Their relevance lies in the recurring institutional boundaries they identify, not in the verification of individual claims.

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Finally, the August configuration remains unsettled. The appointments and General Staff–Khatam integration order indicate a direction of institutional change but do not establish how authority will ultimately operate. The parallel between Phase II–III wartime restructuring and personnel change is therefore interpretive rather than demonstrably causal.

Conclusion

Iran’s post-succession struggle is not simply a contest between hard-liners and pragmatists or a shift from clerical to military rule. It is a renegotiation of power within a system already built around overlapping authority.

Ali Khamenei’s death removed the long-standing arbiter of that system. Mojtaba inherited formal supremacy without the same accumulated political authority, while wartime delegation had already expanded the practical role of security institutions and emergency coordination mechanisms.

The August 9–10 reshuffle is the clearest effort to reorganize this inheritance. Rezaei and Zolghadr reshape the interface between institutional coordination and access to the Leader. Abdollahi and the General Staff–Khatam integration order bring wartime command closer to the permanent hierarchy. Vahidi, Izadi, Azmaei, and Taeb consolidate security capacity across military, maritime, and domestic domains. The elected executive nevertheless remains essential to administration, economic recovery, and diplomacy.

The result is a provisional balance rather than a settled order. Mojtaba is seeking to recover authority dispersed during wartime, while the institutions being formalized have incentives to preserve their expanded roles. Iran’s trajectory will depend on whether the Supreme Leader can bound and arbitrate these institutions faster than they can make their wartime influence structurally indispensable.

The central question is therefore not simply who holds office, but who controls access, jurisdiction, coercive assets, and the practical meaning of Supreme Leader authority.

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