

# A Battle Damage Assessment of the Iranian Regime

by Kamran Bokhari - June 26, 2025

Fighting between Israel and Iran has stopped – at least for now – and all sides are conducting battle damage assessments. Determining the extent of the damage done to Tehran’s nuclear program is critical. However, just as important is assessing how much the Islamic Republic has been weakened by the 12-day war. Though the inner workings of the regime are opaque, there are signs that Iran’s long-running internal evolution – underway for nearly two decades and nearing an inflection point – has accelerated.

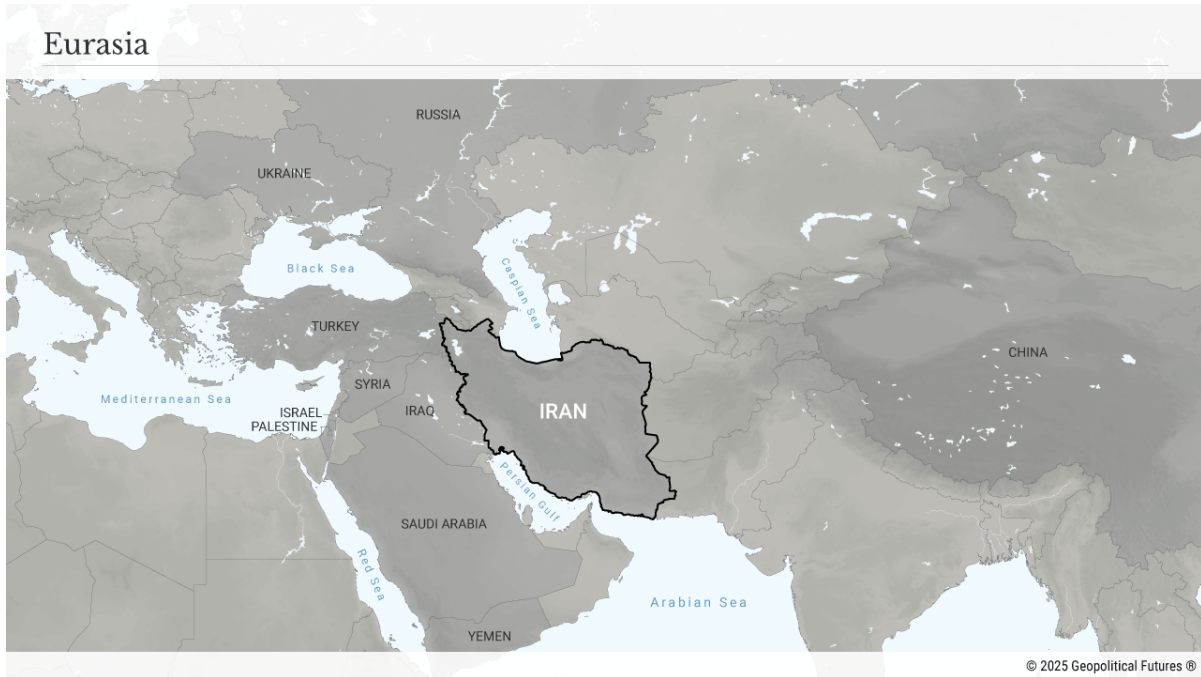
Israel’s intelligence community, which has shown deep penetration into Iran, believes Israeli and U.S. airstrikes inflicted “very significant” damage on Iran’s nuclear facilities, Axios reported June 25. A preliminary U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency assessment, however, suggests the 12 Massive Ordnance Penetrators dropped by six U.S. B-2 bombers failed to destroy the fortified Fordo enrichment site. Comprehensive battle damage assessments, which rely heavily on satellite imagery, take time. Axios quoted an unnamed Israeli official with direct knowledge of intelligence on Iran as saying intercepted communications suggest Iranian military leaders have concealed the extent of the damage from the country’s political leadership. A second Israeli official added, “The Iranians themselves still don’t even have a clear idea what happened to some of their nuclear facilities.”

Though it will take time, Iran will eventually have the clearest picture of the damage to their nuclear program. For the United States, Israel and the broader international community, the immediate concern is the status of the program now. For Tehran, as important as the program is, the broader concern is the extent of damage to the regime – especially the military.

Most of the top leadership of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was killed in Israeli strikes. This delivered a serious blow to Iran’s core political system, creating a power vacuum that must be filled. Subordinates are being promoted, but they need time to settle into their roles and cannot immediately replicate the command and control once exercised by their predecessors.

This challenge is compounded by the presence of a parallel military institution, the Artesh. Historically sidelined, the Artesh has lacked the IRGC’s elite status. The IRGC enjoys influence in domestic and foreign policy as well as control over major segments of Iran’s economy. In contrast, the Artesh has been barred from political involvement and received limited funding.

But the IRGC’s aggressive regional power projection has backfired, and Iran suffered major reversals across the region over much of last year. Just six months after the destruction of Hamas and Hezbollah (two of Tehran’s most important proxies) and the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, Israel launched a devastating attack on Iran itself. With the IRGC seriously weakened, the Artesh has a historic opportunity to expand its own influence.



[\(click to enlarge\)](#)

The IRGC was created in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian revolution to protect the clerical regime from internal threats. It was still just a militia when the Iran-Iraq war broke out the following year, so the regime needed the Artesh to defend the country – even though it suspected the force was loyal to the old monarchical order and had subjected it to a sweeping purge. Had the war not happened, the regime likely would have consolidated the military under a single structure, subsuming the Artesh into the IRGC. Instead, the two forces, though fundamentally different, fought side by side against the Iraqi invasion.

Lasting from 1980 to 1988, the war cost at least a million Iranian lives and a billion dollars in economic damage. It transformed the IRGC into a military force, so that by the conflict’s end, Iran was left with two parallel armed forces: the IRGC as the guardian of the revolution and the Artesh as the more secular, nationalist and professional military force charged with external defense.

After becoming supreme leader in 1989, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei established the Armed Forces General Staff within the Defense Ministry to unify both institutions under a joint command. He also sought to bring the Artesh into ideological conformity with the regime, appointing loyalist commanders and embedding clerics as advisers. Ultimately, the IRGC emerged as the dominant institution while the Artesh struggled for relevance.

This remained the case until the current crisis. Now, with the regime's stability threatened at a crucial moment of internal transformation, both forces are under pressure to close ranks. But the crisis is also generating friction – between the Artesh and the IRGC, and within the IRGC itself. Someone will have to answer for the disastrous policy of investing heavily in regional proxies while leaving the homeland without a viable air defense network.

The Israeli air force's dominance over Iranian airspace and its ability to strike with impunity have likely had a demoralizing effect. The IRGC's reputation has also been severely damaged. Some officers will likely want to distance themselves from past decisions. The Artesh, whose *raison d'être* is national defense, will want to take charge and steer the country away from further damage.

Signs of a changing balance of power are already visible. After Maj. Gen. Mohammad Bagheri was killed in a June 13 Israeli airstrike, the commander in chief of the Artesh, Maj. Gen. Abdolrahim Mousavi, was named chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, placing him in command of both forces. Between Mousavi, his successor, Maj. Gen. Amir Hatami, and Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Aziz Nasirzadeh, the Artesh now has three seats on the Supreme National Security Council, Iran's top national security decision-making body. The IRGC holds only one, occupied by its newly appointed commander in chief, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Pakpour. His predecessor, Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami, was killed on the first day of the Israeli strikes.

The key variable is how much control the Artesh can assert over the security establishment. To succeed, it will need the cooperation of like-minded elements within the IRGC. It is a delicate process – one that hinges on power-sharing during a national emergency and the impending leadership transition toward a post-Khamenei era. If mishandled, the result could be a rupture within the armed forces and, by extension, the regime – as has happened in Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Sudan in recent memory.

**Author: Kamran Bokhari**

[Read more from this author on geopoliticalfutures.com](#)