

round of diplomacy fallen into the war trap? Was the whole negotiation process just a smoke-screen for war?

In the foreign policy toolbox, there are various instruments: military, security, defense, political, economic, commercial, and cultural. Foreign policy is not a box with only one tool inside. Depending on the issue, circumstances, and the country's situation, one tool may be used more, or all may be brought into play at the same time. Using diplomacy alongside military power is both logical and necessary. I have previously said that foreign policy can be likened to a twin-engine aircraft. You can't say the left engine is more important than the right; the two complement each other. These two paths — diplomacy and military — are like two parallel rails that intersect at the station of national interests and security. Sometimes we board the diplomacy train, sometimes the military train, and sometimes both carry us more quickly to our destination. In any case, our destination is the station of national interests and security. Diplomacy never shuts down during wartime; Rather, it moves at different speeds depending on the circumstances. In times of peace, it's only natural for diplomacy to take the driver's seat. Now that we have used our military tools to their limits, diplomacy will, by nature, step up and play a greater role. During the war, diplomacy backed up military power; Now, the field must rally behind diplomacy. These two forces must work hand in glove — they are two sides of the same coin, like the blades of a pair of scissors. At this juncture, we need an active diplomacy. Active diplomacy means setting the agenda, the terms, the manner, and the venue of talks ourselves. In my view, Iran should lay out clear objectives and state under what conditions it is prepared to negotiate. Whether we call it direct negotiation, dialogue, or a summit makes little difference; The substance remains the same. Wars usually wind down through diplomacy. There are two ways a war ends: Either one side is completely wiped out — which hasn't happened — or military operations are halted, as is the case now. From this point forward, diplomacy must chart the exit strategy. That means, on the diplomatic and political front, we must have a clear plan for disengagement. Whether now is the right time for talks depends on the judgment of decision-makers and policymakers, but we must certainly hammer out clear goals and a transparent agenda — under what conditions we negotiate, and under what conditions we do not. Even talks with Europeans, if they can be called negotiations or dialogue, should be put under this microscope. One of the most crucial functions of diplomacy during war is to translate military might into political power and to realize national objectives. The foreign ministers of the three European countries and the EU's foreign policy chief must get the message loud and clear: The strategic designs of the West, Israel, or the US have not panned out, and this is how we defend our interests. They shouldn't expect that if we are attacked, we will simply turn the other cheek. If they are fighting under the assumption that we must give up our nuclear and missile capabilities, that's simply not realistic. Diplomacy is sometimes mistaken for surrender, but surrender is not negotiation — words matter. In Persian, when we say "let's negotiate," we do not mean "let's sur-



People help firefighters to get to their destination during Israel's ruthless attacks on residential buildings in Tehran, Iran, on June 13, 2025. ● TASNIM

render." We have a separate word for surrender. So, it's important to note that negotiation does not necessarily mean backing down or admitting defeat. In fact, one can go into talks with an assertive and proactive approach, setting clear and specific terms for dialogue. Naturally, someone who has failed to achieve their aims on the battlefield should not expect to win them at the negotiating table. Anyone who could not bring us to our knees or cripple our missile power in battle should know not to expect such outcomes in negotiations. If Trump's idea of negotiation is to achieve such goals — or if Europe harbors similar ambitions (which is even worse as it plays a destructive role behind the scenes) — we must enter talks with a well-crafted plan. Israel, in a sense, acts as a proxy for the West and the US in the region and wages war against us. Therefore, we too must map out a diplomatic and political solution and draw up an exit strategy, and we will certainly need support from the field. Without such backing, diplomacy is like a gun with no bullets; Just as when someone comes to the table with a power-based approach, we must meet them on equal footing.

Should the cessation of aggression hold, what changes should the Islamic Republic of Iran make in its relations with neighbors, its two strategic partners Russia and China, and Europe? Do these relationships need to be reassessed, for better or worse?

Most experts believe a balanced foreign policy is the right fit for Iran, both in terms of its diplomatic, geographical, and regional portfolio. Naturally, our policy "basket" should give special weight to neighborly relations, regionalism, and an Eastern outlook, while also keeping ties with the West — provided these are based on mutual respect and shared interests. I have often said that if the US recognizes three things — the existence of the Islamic Republic, the identity of our political establishment, and Iran's national interests (none of which are outlandish by international standards) — based on mutual respect, then we can strike a balanced relationship with all countries. I am not a proponent of an "all-East or all-West" policy, but our diplomatic portfolio should be diverse and varied so we can draw on different options as needed. We must put national interests front and center and weigh what those interests require — whether ties with the West, East, South, or the region should be conditional or not. The neighborhood policy must be bolstered as one of the bright spots during this recent aggression was the support from neighboring and regional countries, as well as their efforts to head off the war. In my view, Israel — or even

Trump himself — more than deceiving us (which I do not believe), had pulled the wool over the eyes of some regional countries. The Arab states have now come to realize that Iran's geopolitical weight is a stabilizing anchor in the region, and that only Iran can keep the balance in check against Israel and, by extension, the US. This is a historic lesson for the Arabs. Some of the support and condemnation — even from a country like Egypt, which surprisingly took on a mediating role and adopted positive positions, or from Pakistan — shows that everyone has come to the conclusion that if the Islamic Republic were absent, a power vacuum would emerge and Israel's black hole would swallow up the entire region.

The most important takeaway from the 12-day war against Iran was the remarkable outpouring of public support for the country. How do you assess this solidarity? Has safeguarding the concept of "Iran qua Iran" shot back to the top of the public agenda?

First of all, let's not sell ourselves short or beat ourselves up. The Iranian nation has shown its true colors as a people with deep roots. A nation with 2,500 years of history is a far cry from a regime cobbled together by the Sykes-Picot Agreement. This was a major lesson for the region, and we must also wake up to this self-awareness. I must admit, the conduct of the Iranian people was a real eye-opener. People whom no one expected to stand up for Iran's existence did just that, and the Iranian nation swept aside the false dichotomy between "the Islamic Republic" and "Iran" altogether. This war produced two major surprises: first, our offensive and missile capabilities. Everyone knew we had the hardware, but I don't think anyone expected this level of quality and quantity. The second, and perhaps even more important, was the strategic surprise delivered by the Iranian people. The regime-change strategy of Israel and the US was, in my view, well thought out — except for one thing: They misjudged the Iranian nation, and it backfired spectacularly. They assumed the people would rise up in revolt, but instead, Iranians proved to be the backbone of the establishment — and we must cherish this core not only in wartime but in peace as well. If today we say the diversity of tastes, languages, ethnicities, and races all rallied to defend the territorial integrity and existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and if the whole nation shouldered the burden of war, then we must also preserve this diversity. The lesson is that the nation at war is the same nation at peace, and this unity must be maintained.

The resurgence of public support and people power was a strategic game-changer that threw a wrench into the entire strategic playbook of Israel and the US — a point of utmost importance. Iran's national power or deterrence stands on four pillars: missile, regional, nuclear, and popular. If you ask me, the most crucial pillar of Iran's power and deterrence is its people. With all the strength and impact of the armed forces — which I would never want to downplay — it was the Iranian people, in the form of popular forces and the Basij, who stood their ground and defended Iran's territorial integrity. In this second sacred defense, the people's role was paramount. Though the war lasted just 12 days, if you ask me, the Iranian people pulled off wonders worthy of 12 centuries. We must preserve this diversity and vibrancy as it is Iran's greatest national and security asset.

Given that during these 12 days, many analysts hammered home the idea that the ultimate goal of the US and Israel was the disintegration of Iran, what approach should the government and leadership take on board to ensure Iran does not fall into that trap?

The Iranian people were truly astonishing in their support. Interestingly, someone asked me why there were so many attacks on Tabriz. One theory was that the aim was to stir up separatists and show that being part of the Islamic Republic comes at a cost. But you didn't see a single person lashing out in a negative way. If even one had, you can bet various networks would have blown it out of proportion! The fact that they couldn't find even one such case is incredibly valuable. Historically, our ethnic groups have always been on the front lines defending Iran's existence. Even if they don't

speak Persian and live on the borders, they have shown the greatest courage in defending Iran's frontiers. When you look at Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, Ilam, and Ahvaz, you have to tip your hat. The people went above and beyond, and now it's our turn. Anyone who can serve this nation now has a historic duty on their shoulders. Despite all the grievances, criticism, and dissatisfaction, what became clear in these circumstances was the difference between patriots and those who are rootless — their true nature was revealed. It became obvious that anti-national elements are a tiny minority. Their numbers are negligible; If they could, they'd be stirring up anti-Islamic Republic protests abroad. But no true patriot was willing to team up with the enemy against their homeland and mother. As someone once said, Iranian art isn't just about showing the Persian language; Persian speakers are few, but Iranians are many. It was shown once again that being Iranian and being a Persian speaker are not one and the same. One interviewee who spoke for the homeland could barely speak Persian, but he was Iranian. In the reconstruction phase, we must act justly. If you ask me, the priority is the borders — the border regions, the deprived areas. It's fine to rebuild Tehran, but let's start with those who have lost everything — their only apartment, their only shop. They must come first. Restorative justice is about rebuilding fairly; We must prioritize deprived areas and people and treat everyone equally. This nation has proven itself as the backbone of the establishment. In war, you see what is just talk and what is reality. These people now need services, social security, insurance, and healthcare. Many compatriots are now wounded, disabled, or bereaved, their homes destroyed, their loved ones lost. We must tap into other budgets for these people and simply prioritize fairly. Right now, it is the government's duty to see to the needs of those who have been hit hardest and are most vulnerable. We must serve these people. In these circumstances, a "service jihad" must be kicked off — in the public sector, municipalities, government, and even among the people themselves. One of the wonders was that, just like in the early days of the Islamic Revolution, people banded together and helped each other. In the end, one can only salute the honor of the Iranian nation — it's hard to find words to thank these people enough.

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The conductor of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra pays respect to the audience that came to see them give an open-air performance at the Azadi (liberty) square of Tehran on June 25, 2025, to commemorate the Iranians martyred in the Israeli military attacks. ● TASNIM

