

# Ali Baqeri-Kani: Acting Foreign Minister

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## Ali Baqeri-Kani

In September 2021, [Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian](#) appointed Ali Baqeri-Kani as Deputy Foreign Minister and director of the Foreign Ministry Political Directorate. His predecessor, Abbas Araqchi, directed the nuclear negotiations that resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Baqeri-Kani previously served as a lead nuclear negotiator during Ahmadinejad administration in the late 2000s and early 2010s and continued to perform a similar role as Deputy Foreign Minister. In May of 2024, he ascended to become Acting Foreign Minister after Amir-Abdollahian's unexpected death along with President Ebrahim Raisi.

## Well-Connected Family

The Baqeri-Kani family [exercises](#) significant political influence and is related to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei through marriage. Ali's brother, Mesbaholhoda, married Khamenei's daughter, Hoda. Their father, Mohammad-Baqer, was previously a member of the Assembly of Experts, a powerful body ostensibly tasked with exercising oversight over and managing the appointment of Supreme Leaders. Khamenei appointed Mohammad-Baqer as a board member of Imam Sadeq University, which counts many senior politicians among its alumni and is tasked with [indoctrinating](#) the next generation of Iranian bureaucrats.

The Baqeri-Kani family has controlled the University for decades, presiding over its evolution into an [exclusive, cult-like institution](#) designed to foster a cohort of fanatical bureaucrats—referred to as *Imam Sadeghis*. Ali's uncle, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani, was dean of the University from its founding in the 1980s until his death in 2014. He was also a prominent political figure, serving as chairman of the Assembly of Experts. His brother, Mohammad-Baqer, was a deputy dean for a period as well. In these roles, the brothers [inserted](#) other family members in prominent positions and posts at the University. In 2018, then-Judiciary chief Sadeq Larijani appointed Hossein-Ali Sa'di, Assembly of Experts member, to replace Mohammad-Said Mahdavi-Kani as the interim dean following his death.

The University generates revenues through an investment holding that operates the Jame'eh factory, Hayan pharmaceutical, and two prominent shopping malls in Tehran. It also [relies](#) on assistance from the regime and wealthy benefactors, and political corruption. In recent years, the university-owned pharmaceutical company [acquired](#) a government rate of foreign exchange, which was significantly lower than the free market rate, and used it to import steam cleaners.

The University essentially acts as a training pipeline for the regime's political cadre and elite, designed to indoctrinate Iran's next generation of civil servants. Established shortly after the Islamic Republic's founding in the early 1980s, the curriculum is based on teaching seminary

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studies to every student in addition to modern sciences and humanities. Its campus is located at the site of Harvard University's branch in Iran that was confiscated following the Revolution. In recent years, the Imam Sadeghi cohort has attained significant political power across Iran's bureaucracy. It attained key positions in Ebrahim Raisi's government and bureaucratic institutions – with the aim of fulfilling Khamenei's vision of a more ideologically pure regime and a "[second phase](#)" in the Islamic Revolution.

### Career

Ali Baqeri-Kani was born in 1967 and graduated from Imam Sadeq University with a degree in economics and Islamic studies. In the 1990s, he briefly [worked](#) at the [Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting \(IRIB\)](#) before working for the Foreign Ministry's international directorate. In 2007, Saeed Jalili was appointed Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) and left the Foreign Ministry. He convinced Baqeri-Kani, who was serving as European Affairs deputy at the time, to move to the SNSC Secretariate in 2008. Baqeri-Kani acted as Jalili's deputy at the SNSC. Through the end of the Ahmadinejad administration in 2013, Jalili and Baqeri-Kani served as lead nuclear negotiators for the Islamic Republic. Their term was marked by Tehran's intransigence, increasing international isolation, and mounting sanctions imposed by the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union.

In 2013, Baqeri-Kani acted as the campaign director for Jalili's unsuccessful run for the presidency. After the Rouhani Administration assumed power in 2013, Baqeri-Kani was promptly removed from the SNSC due to differences in political perspectives. Subsequently, he acted as a critic of nuclear negotiations that culminated in the JCPOA on IRGC-linked television outlets like the Ofogh network. He also wrote on the subject for a website linked to the Basij paramilitary University and Imam Sadeq University. Furthermore, he [penned](#) an unusually long introduction to the Persian translation of the memoir of American official Wendy Sherman about the nuclear negotiations, in which he defended his own tenure as a negotiator and criticized the Rouhani administration.

In 2019, then-Judiciary branch chief [Ebrahim Raisi](#) appointed Baqeri-Kani as international affairs deputy and the director of the Judiciary Human Rights Center. This move [signaled](#) that Baqeri-Kani, along with other Imam Sadeghis, had become closer to Raisi – as per Khamenei's direction. As Raisi's political stock was rising with Khamenei's support, Baqeri-Kani abandoned Jalili, whose political influence continued to wane (Jalili ran and lost again in the 2021 presidential race). Baqeri-Kani was among several former Jalili associates who had become closer to Raisi in recent years, reflecting Khamenei's efforts to consolidate his authority through the elevation of select ideological allies.

Established in the 2000s, the Judiciary Human Rights Center acts as the diplomatic arm of the Judiciary branch, representing the Islamic Republic in international conventions regarding

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human rights. Baqeri-Kani's predecessor was Javad Larijani, an adviser to Supreme Leader and brother of former Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani. At the Judiciary Human Rights Center, Javad Larijani denied reports that have documented and alleged human rights violations in Iran and attacked international human rights institutions. Larijani also rejected international human rights conventions, arguing for the regime's "Islamic" human rights conventions. Baqeri-Kani [essentially continued](#) those actions and sought to globalize the regime's so-called Islamic human rights conventions.

After Raisi was declared winner in the 2021 presidential race, Iranian media [speculated](#) whether Baqeri-Kani would be the next Foreign Minister, since he was [photographed](#) in Raisi's meetings with foreign dignitaries. However, he eventually appointed [Hossein Amir-Abdollahian](#), who maintained deep connections to the Quds Force and was more experienced in the Foreign Ministry. From a policy angle, Amir-Abdollahian also had greater experience on Arab affairs, a shortcoming Baqeri-Kani has since sought to [improve](#).

### Tenure as Deputy Foreign Minister

In September of 2021, after Raisi ascended to the presidency, Baqeri-Kani was [appointed](#) as Deputy Foreign Minister for political affairs. When he took office, his track record indicated that he would continue to act as a hardline revolutionary diplomat, given his close personal, professional, and family ties to the Supreme Leader and his connections to the increasingly influential Imam Sadeghi cohort.

As Deputy Foreign Minister, Baqeri-Kani has [resumed](#) his earlier role as one of the regime's key nuclear negotiators. In the years after taking office, he repeatedly defended continued nuclear negotiations. His most significant argument is that they are an "instrument for securing (Iran's) national interests," given that they provide the opportunity for exacting significant concessions. According to Baqeri-Kani, one of the most important concessions would be a significant [reduction](#) or [suspension](#) of United States (U.S.) sanctions on Iran. As a result, pushed for JCPOA negotiations to continue, even after talks [collapsed](#) in March of 2022. Further demonstrating that he was not working in good faith, Baqeri-Kani maintained [distance](#) from International Atomic Energy Agency officials. In many ways, these efforts appear have succeeded. The U.S. has [continued](#) to communicate with Iranian officials and tacitly support continued negotiations, even after acknowledging that the JCPOA is effectively "dead." Moreover, the Biden administration has continually [offered](#) sanctions waivers to the regime as a negotiating strategy, playing directly into Baqeri-Kani's hand.

As Deputy Foreign Minister, Baqeri-Kani also supported Raisi's efforts to pivot Iran toward authoritarian allies, by conducting official visits to [Russia](#) and [China](#), facilitating efforts to [cooperate](#) on circumventing international sanctions, and arguing in favor of Iran's [accession](#) into BRICS. Furthermore, he worked to develop ties between Moscow and Hamas, [facilitating](#)

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meetings between leaders of the terrorist organization and Russian diplomats shortly after the attack against Israel on October 7, 2023. These activities coincided with Baqeri-Kani's [threats](#) to "pulverize" Israel, and promises to support Iran's terrorist proxies. Additionally, Baqeri-Kani took a key role in Raisi's [overtures](#) toward Latin American and African states in an effort to expand Iran's global reach.

### Ascension to Acting Foreign Minister

Though he had long been seen as a potential future foreign minister, unexpected events accelerated Baqeri-Kani's career. On May 19, 2024, Raisi's helicopter [crashed](#) while travelling from Azerbaijan, killing the president and key government officials, including Amir-Abdollahian. After the Iranian government admitted that the president did not [survive](#), Baqeri-Kani was [confirmed](#) as acting foreign minister by the Supreme Leader.

Given Baqeri-Kani's track record of seeking to exploit JCPOA negotiations for the Islamic Republic's benefit, facilitating Iran's overtures toward other authoritarian states, and supporting the axis of resistance, it is likely that he will further the Raisi administration's foreign policy approach. If the U.S. remains [accommodating](#) toward Iran and fails to adequately deter its malign activities, these activities will intensify – especially given Baqeri-Kani's close ties to Khamenei and the influential Imam Sadeghi cohort.

Ultimately, Baqeri-Kani's unexpected ascension will bring further synergy between the Office of the Supreme Leader, the IRGC, and government bureaucracies, facilitated by increased ideological alignment. This benefits Khamenei's [ambitions](#) to further "purify" the regime, personalize his authority, and elevate hardline allies. Given his close personal and political ties to Khamenei, it appears that Baqeri-Kani's influence and power will continue to increase within the regime in the near term.