

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian: Islamic Republic of Iran Foreign Minister

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In August 2021, [President Ebrahim Raisi](#) proposed Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to serve as his Foreign Minister and he was ratified by the Islamic Consultative Assembly on August 25, 2021. Known in Western media as a [hawkish diplomat](#), Amir-Abdollahian is close to the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#) and [presents](#) himself as the diplomatic face of the IRGC in the Middle East.

Rapid Rise in Foreign Ministry Due to IRGC Connections

Amir-Abdollahian was born in the small Semna Province city of Damghan in 1964. Amir-Abdollahian apparently did not [enlist](#) to fight in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), instead of registering for entrance in the Foreign Ministry College, where he earned a bachelor's degree. He entered the diplomatic corps in the "Persian Gulf First Office" as a political analyst in 1992 or early 1993.

Amir-Abdollahian advanced unusually fast in the Foreign Ministry due to his strong ties with the IRGC. After receiving his master's in international affairs from Tehran University, Abdollahian, was promoted to the position of deputy Ambassador in Baghdad at the age of 33, a very sensitive posting. After serving in that post for four years, Amir-Abdollahian moved to the Foreign Ministry Persian Gulf First Political Desk Directorate in 2001. During the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Amir-Abdollahian served as deputy to the special assistant for Iraq in the Foreign Ministry.

In 2007, Amir-Abdollahian was [assigned](#) to a team of Iranian negotiators who met with an American delegation led by then-Ambassador Ryan Crocker to discuss Iraq. Amir-Abdollahian was joined by the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Hassan Kazemi Qomi and his eventual successor, Hassan Danai-Far. Both men were senior Qods Force officers.

In 2007, then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appointed Amir-Abdollahian as Tehran's Ambassador to Bahrain, another sensitive Arab file. As scholar Alex Vatanka [notes](#) in his biography of Amir-Abdollahian, his "first few years were distinguished by his ability to help reduce tensions with the Sunni governing Bahraini elites that rule over a Shiite majority. On his watch, Iran and Bahrain began to look for an expansion in trade, and serious talks were held about Iranian gas exports to Bahrain. But Amir-Abdollahian's gains in Bahrain were nearly entirely overturned when a former Iranian speaker of the Parliament, Ali-Akbar Nateq Nouri, in 2009, called Bahrain 'Iran's 14th province.' This left the Bahrainis fuming, and it fell on Amir-Abdollahian to reassure the Bahrainis about Iran's respect for the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty."

In 2010, Amir-Abdollahian was [appointed](#) to the Foreign Ministry, Persian Gulf and Middle East Area Director-General. Several accounts in Iranian media state that he held the post for a year.

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At the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, Amir-Abdollahian was appointed deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, a position he held for five years, including through the early years of the Rouhani administration that came to power in 2013.

Tenure During Rouhani Administration, Fired From Foreign Ministry

When former Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was appointed to his post, the only holdover from the previous administration who was not removed was Amir-Abdollahian, reflecting the latter's clout among the IRGC. In other words, as Vatanka has also [noted](#), Amir-Abdollahian acted as the chief liaison between the IRGC and the Foreign Ministry, and its spokesman in the Foreign Ministry during a tumultuous period in the Middle East when the IRGC was escalating its operations primarily in military intervention in the Syrian war to defend President Bashar al-Assad at all costs, but also [increasing](#) its support of [Houthis](#) in [Yemen](#). Tehran's relationship with Arab-Sunni neighbors deteriorated rapidly in that time period.

In 2016, Zarif fired Amir-Abdollahian from the Foreign Ministry. Zarif had offered Amir-Abdollahian the ambassadorship post to Oman, to which he protested. Hardline and IRGC-linked media [allege](#) that Zarif removed Amir-Abdollahian according to a request from US officials, while others believe that Amir-Abdollahian's sharp tongue against Arab neighbors was a reason behind tense ties, and that his replacement Hossein Jabbari- Ansari was a better choice for improving relations with Arab countries (Ansari didn't earn the same trust from the IRGC that Amir-Abdollahian did).

After his removal from the Foreign Ministry, Amir-Abdollahian was appointed special adviser to Parliament Speaker and Parliament Speaker International Affairs Director-General, a position he maintained after [Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf](#) replaced Ali Larijani as speaker in 2020.

In a leaked audio recording in 2021, Zarif [described](#) Amir-Abdollahian as a figure who was interested in appearing before the camera and "interview a lot." In the same audio, he discussed and complained in length about how the priorities of the "field," the IRGC and the Qods Force consistently trumpeted "diplomatic" priorities.

What we can expect from Amir-Abdollahian

Under Amir-Abdollahian, the Foreign Ministry will be more closely aligned with the priorities of Khamenei and the IRGC. This includes stronger ties with the "Resistance Axis," or the alliance of state and non-state actors led by Tehran, which includes designated terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah. Amir-Abdollahian has had a long working relationship with Lebanese [Hezbollah](#) leader Hassan Nasrallah. In 2018, he [recounted](#) that he met with Nasrallah in 2010 or early

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2011, meeting with him once every several months in meetings that could last “between three to six hours.”

Amir-Abdollahian will also vigorously pursue better ties with Russia and China as a bulwark against the US. Notably, although his predecessor Zarif also pursued better ties with the two and signed the 25-year strategic agreement with Beijing, he also advocated better ties with the West, something Amir-Abdollahian will likely not prioritize.

On the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Amir-Abdollahian will probably pursue Raisi’s stated policy of seeking sanctions relief, although negotiations on rejoining may be more difficult should Tehran push for more demands.

Amir-Abdollahian will also probably focus on pursuing stronger ties with neighboring countries, which Raisi believes would help grow the Islamic Republic’s economy against US-led sanctions. It remains to be seen how he would fare in improving ties with [Saudi Arabia](#). It is key to note that Riyadh, facing military setbacks, including in Yemen and increasing US desire to reduce regional footprint under Trump and Biden administrations, has [signaled](#) it would be willing to improve and better manage ties with Tehran.

Within the Foreign Ministry, Amir-Abdollahian will likely purge holdovers from Rouhani and rank-and-file allied with the former President, instead of bringing in figures and staff more closely aligned with the IRGC.