

Ali Baqeri-Kani: Deputy Foreign Minister

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In September 2021, [Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian](#) appointed Ali Baqeri-Kani as the 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 so is likely to perform a similar role.

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, which is theoretically tasked with exercising oversight over and appointing Supreme Leaders. Khamenei appointed Mohammad-Baqer as a board member of Imam Sadeq University, which counts many senior politicians among its alumni.

The Baqeri-Kani family controlled the University for decades. Ali's uncle, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani, who died in 2014, was dean of the University from 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 father's 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 government assistance. In recent years, the university-owned pharmaceutical company [acquired](#) a government rate of foreign exchange, which was significantly lower than the free market rate, to instead import steam cleaners.

The University essentially acts as a training pipeline for the Islamic Republic's political cadre and elite, especially for Principlists, or those who profess commitment to the ideals of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Established in the early 1980s, the curriculum is based on teaching seminary studies to every student in addition to modern sciences and humanities. The University is located at the site of Harvard University's branch in Iran that was confiscated after the 1979 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 and its 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 briefly European Affairs deputy at the time, to go 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 were the 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 to office in 2013, Baqeri-Kani was promptly removed from the SNSC, subsequently acting 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 33-page introduction to the Persian translation of the memoir of American official Wendy Sherman about the nuclear negotiations, during which he defended negotiations under his tenure and Jalili's 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. That signaled that Baqeri-Kani had become closer to Raisi, the political stocks of whom were rising, and abandoned Jalili, the political influence of which has been waning (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.

Established in the 2000s, the Judiciary Human Rights Center acts as the diplomatic affairs arm of the Judiciary branch and represents the Islamic Republic in international conventions to answer allegations and accusations of human rights violations. 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 centers. 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.

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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, [Hossein Amir-Abdollahian](#), who has had deep connections to the Qods Force and more experience in the Foreign Ministry, was eventually tapped as the Foreign Minister. Furthermore, from a policy angle, Amir-Abdollahian has worked on Arab affairs, and his selection reflects Raisi's policy priority of focusing on improving ties with neighboring countries.

What we can expect from Baqeri-Kani

Baqeri-Kani's track record indicates that he's a hardline revolutionary diplomat who owes his career to familial connections and ties to the Supreme Leader. His diplomatic record does not show much success, but he is an ideologue and has the right connections, which explains why he has been promoted throughout his career. If he does indeed become a lead nuclear negotiator again, that could mean a more intransigent Iranian negotiations team, but Baqeri-Kani and Raisi ultimately answer to the Supreme Leader, who has the final say on the course of negotiations. Khamenei can choose to have officials like Baqeri-Kani and Raisi take responsibility for the talks so that he can deflect blame for any negative outcomes. Baqeri-Kani's family connections make him a figure to watch for years to come.