An audio recording of what some experts believe to be a secret speech by Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was shown on a Persian news channel in London. The audio culminated with his criticism of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and their late commander Qassem Soleimani. The leaked tape is believed to have been aimed at undermining any hope of Zarif running for president, while other experts believe it may be his excuse for the failures of the Iranian foreign policy he leads. Regardless of all this, the audio tape exposes the “backroom war” that has recently escalated in the system, and will hold hardliners, who are likely to win the presidential election in June, responsible for the country’s economic ills if diplomatic negotiations with the West fail.

It would seem that Tehran’s perspective on foreign policy has changed. But this is only at first glance, and nothing has happened in Iran’s permanent foreign policy course. In a televised speech, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei emphasized the role of Iran’s elite Quds Force in helping Iran conduct active diplomacy in the West Asian region. He stated clearly and explicitly that the Quds Force has played a crucial role in strengthening the diplomatic course in the region, noting that these forces have actualized an independent and dignified Iranian foreign policy in the region. The leader noted that the Quds Force protected the country and its people from submission to the West, which constantly insists that the country’s foreign policy be oriented toward them.

Under such circumstances, Zarif had no choice but to thank the leader of the Islamic Revolution for his
international community. Previously, he was Iran's ambassador to the United Nations from 2002 to 2007. Zarif is participates. A career diplomat and American-educated scholar, Zarif spent many years representing Iran in the incumbent President Hassan Rouhani, might be the main reformist candidate if he changes his mind and repeatedly dismissed speculation about presidential aspirations, Mohammad Javad Zarif, foreign minister under 2017. Incidentally, Raisi is also a candidate put forward by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Although he has running, but he does not have strong support and is considered a second-tier politician. The conservatives have So far, there is no strong contender for the presidential election on the part of the reformists. Mostafa Tajzadeh is candidate must be vetted by the Guardian Council, so he must be approved by the supreme leader. The Iranian Despite the resumption of negotiations on the nuclear deal, the Iranians have somehow lost hope of any real change line, but no real change has happened so far. Disagreements themselves are increasingly taking hold in the system and often, especially in recent times, enter into some kind of contradiction with each other. And Zarif willingly or unwillingly exposed them. He pointed out one of the main problems of Iranian political life. But the history of sanctions against the regime, which began with the start of the 1979 revolution and the hostage crisis, has nurtured the ideology the IRGC espouses. A sense of deprivation, of oppression, according to the Saudi Arab News, drove its foreign policy, which was interpreted as containing the enemy, and the militias and cells as necessary friends in an unfriendly environment of other countries. From the very beginning, however, the West strongly disliked this and with all its might attacked this Asian country, disregarding the fact that sanctions primarily harm the Iranian people. Many professionals believe, and rightly so, that the IRGC’s philosophy has always been a key obstacle to Iran’s “opening up” and to improving relations with the West. This audio also shows how the IRGC has undermined a number of Zarif’s diplomatic efforts, such as the 2016 capture of American soldiers whose boat was drifting in Iranian waters and the release of footage of them kneeling in humiliation. Another time, at the insistence of the IRGC leadership, a photo of a missile test was published in the press with an inscription in Hebrew that read: “Israel must be wiped off the face of the earth.” The IRGC has tried not only to usurp the country’s foreign policy, but it also has a large share of the economy and controls some of the country’s resources. For example, the largest Iranian contractor, Hatam al-Anbiya, is owned by the IRGC. Funds from several of the country’s assets go directly to fund the IRGC without going through the state budget. While hardliners have accused Zarif of leaking information and asked that he be punished, the truth is that the tape is a revelation to the average Iranian. People now understand that no matter who is elected, the Washington Post believes, the supreme leader and the IRGC will have their control. This exposure of the internal struggle in Iran could lead to a low turnout in the June elections, ensuring victory for hardliners. There is a huge movement in Iran to boycott the vote because people feel that the election does not even matter. The Iranians have had eight years of Mohammad Khatami and eight years of Hassan Rouhani, interrupted by eight years of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s hard line, but no real change has happened so far. Despite the resumption of negotiations on the nuclear deal, the Iranians have somehow lost hope of any real change in the system, since the authority of the supreme leader is enshrined in the constitution. Every presidential candidate must be vetted by the Guardian Council, so he must be approved by the supreme leader. The Iranian people have reached the point where they are passive and see that the situation is “blocked,” as it was written in one of the opposition publications. Infighting is bad for Iran. The executive branch belongs to the reformists, while the judiciary and legislature belong to the hardliners. Many Iranians, though they dislike hardliners, are in favor of harmonizing the system. Their logic is that once the IRGC gets it all, it should behave itself and be reconciled to the world. So far, there is no strong contender for the presidential election on the part of the reformists. Mostafa Tajzadeh is running, but he does not have strong support and is considered a second-tier politician. The conservatives have Ebrahim Raisi weighing his options for starting a campaign. He is the head of the judiciary who lost to Rouhani in 2017. Incidentally, Raisi is also a candidate put forward by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Although he has repeatedly dismissed speculation about presidential aspirations, Mohammad Javad Zarif, foreign minister under incumbent President Hassan Rouhani, might be the main reformist candidate if he changes his mind and participates. A career diplomat and American-educated scholar, Zarif spent many years representing Iran in the international community. Previously, he was Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations from 2002 to 2007. Zarif is
known as the architect of the landmark nuclear deal between Iran and initially the world’s six largest countries, signed in 2015. However, that agreement was in crisis due to the US unilateral withdrawal in May 2018.

The veto power of the IRGC and the Supreme Leader, according to the Saudi newspaper Arab News, is the main obstacle between Iran and interaction with the West and Arab countries. Many experts are well aware that it is useless to negotiate with Rouhani and Zarif because they are not in command, but only high-ranking officials. When the whole world has this impression of the country’s elected officials, the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram asks, how can we build any trust or take negotiations with them seriously? The new rationale adopted by Iranians is that if this false distinction between hardliners and reformists disappears, the IRGC and the supreme leader must take responsibility for their actions to the people of the country and the world. They can no longer control the situation, leaving the responsibility to the executive branch. If the situation in the country deteriorates because of their militancy and adventurism, they will bear responsibility for everything they have done.

_Viktor Mikhin, corresponding member of RANS, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”. _