

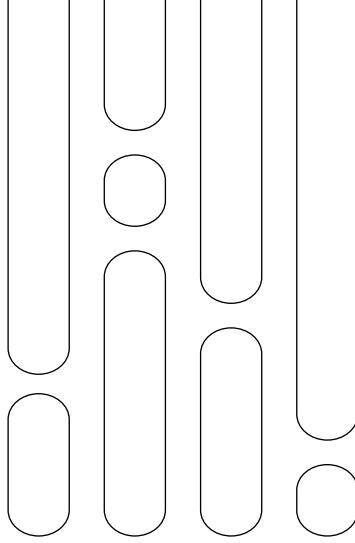
REPORT

KHAMENEI'S RECENT SERMON — KEY THEMES

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Since the 1979 revolution, Iranian strategists have prioritized the idea of safeguarding Iran by extending its strategic reach beyond its borders. This approach aims to prevent any threats from approaching Iran's heartland. As a result, Iran developed strategies centered on exporting its revolutionary ideology, supporting non-state groups and factions. These groups are loyal to Tehran, guided both politically and jurisprudentially by the supreme leader, and demonstrate unwavering allegiance to him. On the other hand, Israeli strategists have recently reassessed their approach to dealing with Iran's proxies, recognizing that their longstanding confrontations with Iran-backed groups are insufficient for addressing the broader challenge posed by Iran. They now argue that a more direct confrontation with Tehran itself is necessary to address the cause of the issue. Amid these contrasting strategies, there are regional and international actors advocating for a path that avoids a full-scale conflict, emphasizing the need for coexistence. They support the right of Palestinians to establish an independent state based on the 1967 borders and stress the importance of respecting civilians on all sides, aiming to position themselves as moderates amidst the more extreme positions on either side.

In a significant move, on October 4, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei personally delivered the Friday sermon, a rare occurrence since it was his first in five years. This came after the death of Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah, in an Israeli airstrike on the group's headquarters in Beirut's southern suburb on September 27. Khamenei's appearance followed Iran's missile attack on Israel, part of the operation dubbed True Promise 2, an extension of the initial operation True Promise, in response to the earlier Israeli targeting of the Iranian consulate in [Damascus](#). Notably, Khamenei delivered the sermon in Arabic, targeting his message to the broader Arab world, particularly Palestinians and Lebanese. Khamenei's choice of Arabic perhaps reflects the significance of the moment given that the only other time he chose to deliver a public address in Ar-

abic was during the 2011 regional uprisings. In Iran, the Friday sermon is considered a significant act of state authority. While the supreme leader, or guardian of the jurist, typically delegates this responsibility, he reserves the right to deliver it himself during pivotal moments when he wishes to communicate important messages to both domestic and international audiences. Khamenei has taken to the pulpit at critical junctures, such as in February 2012 and January 2020, following Iran's missile retaliation against the US base at Ain al-Assad after the killing of Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, and most recently, after Nasrallah's death. His decision to personally deliver the sermon in these moments underscores the gravity of the messages he seeks to convey. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the content and nuances of his sermon in order to understand Iran's strategic calculations and its broader geopolitical behavior.

Addressing Iranians and the Wider Shiite Community

In his recent sermon, Khamenei framed the ongoing conflict as part of a broader historical struggle central to the Shiite community's identity. He began by invoking blessings upon Prophet Muhammad, his "pure family," and specifically, the Twelver Imams, notably excluding all his companions. This approach underscores Khamenei's focus on rallying the Shiite base, particularly the Wilayat al-Faqih loyalists, while aiming to reinforce unity among Shiite factions.

Khamenei's remarks suggested an awareness of potential discontent among the supporters of Wilayat al-Faqih, especially in light of tensions following the assassination of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. He sought to mitigate the risk of internal divisions by reminding his audience that Nasrallah was the natural successor to prominent figures like [Musa al-Sadr](#) and Abbas al-Musawi. Mentioning Sadr was particularly significant as Sadr holds a revered status in the Lebanese Shiite collective memory and is remembered for a more inclusive and cross-sectarian approach different from that of Wilayat al-Faqih

loyalists. By invoking his name, Khamenei appeared to extend an olive branch to the followers of the Amal Movement, fostering a sense of unity between them and Hezbollah, despite the significant ideological and practical differences between Nasrallah and Sadr.

Khamenei's emphasis on Sadr is also noteworthy because it aimed to bridge the historical dispute between the Iranian leadership and the Sadr family, particularly after the incident involving Sayyed Reza al-Sadr, Musa al-Sadr's brother. Reza al-Sadr faced insults in Iran after defending his mentor, the influential cleric Muhammad Kazem Shariatmadari. By downplaying these tensions, Khamenei attempted to unify the Lebanese Shi'ite ranks around Nasrallah, framing him as a dedicated soldier of the supreme leader and a key figure in the resistance against external adversaries.

Throughout the sermon, Khamenei appealed directly to both Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, addressing them with a galvanizing message, "My dear ones, the loyal people of Lebanon, the enthusiastic youth of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement! My sons, this is also the request of our martyred Sayyed [Nasrallah] today from his people, the resistance front, and the [entire](#) Islamic community." At the same time, he condemned Israel, accusing it of deliberately targeting civilians because of its inability to defeat the resistance and Hezbollah militarily. This narrative served to rally support for Hezbollah, portraying Israel as the aggressor and deflecting responsibility for civilian casualties as a result of Hezbollah's actions.

In a symbolic departure from his usual practice of leaving immediately after delivering Friday sermons, Khamenei remained with the congregation this time to lead the afternoon prayer. This move was likely intended to project resilience and calm in the face of reports that he had sought shelter after Nasrallah's assassination. The manner of Nasrallah's killing appeared to have unsettled many in Iran, particularly among Wilayat al-Faq-

ih adherents. By choosing to stay and lead the prayer, Khomeini sought to reassert his status as a revolutionary leader and supreme authority for the Shiite community, demonstrating a defiant stance against both Israel and the United States.

This calculated effort was aimed at restoring morale among his followers and maintaining a sense of unity within the Shiite ranks, even after the significant loss of Nasrallah. Khomeini's sermon, delivered at a critical juncture, reinforced his role as the spiritual and political leader of the Wilayat al-Faqih loyalists, emphasizing his message of resistance against external threats. His strategy seemed to resonate with his followers and emulators, particularly within the Shiite [community](#).

Highlighting Lebanon's Virtues

In an effort to address the Lebanese people and quell concerns over their potential disillusionment with Hezbollah, Khomeini emphasized the longstanding historical ties between Iran and Lebanon. He remarked, "We Iranians have known Lebanon and its virtues for a long time. Lebanese scholars lavished their abundant knowledge on Iran during the Sarbadari and Safavid eras, during the eighth, 10th, and 11th centuries AH, including the martyr Muhammad bin Makki al-Amili, Ali bin Abd al-Aal al-Karaki, the martyr Zayn al-Din al-Amili, al-Husayn bin Abd al-Samad al-Amili, his son Baha' al-Din, known as Sheikh al-Baha'i, and other [clerics and scholars](#)." By invoking these historical figures, Khomeini appeared to address critics in Lebanon who argue that Hezbollah is involving the country in a conflict that primarily serves Iranian interests. He sought to frame the relationship between Iran and Lebanon as deep-rooted, but he notably focused exclusively on shared Shiite religious ties, rather than the broader cultural and diplomatic relations between the two nations. This approach suggests a deliberate attempt to justify Hezbollah's role in the conflict as part of a historical debt to Lebanon, positioning the battles in which Hezbollah has engaged as acts of service and repayment to the Lebanese people.

Khamenei's reference to the Safavid era is particularly telling. He did not shy away from mentioning this period, despite its controversial history, especially the Safavids' well-documented persecution of Sunni Muslims, which even Shiite historians have acknowledged. By invoking the Safavids without addressing these sectarian tensions, Khamenei seemed to be signaling his focus on consolidating Shiite unity and aligning the Shiite community behind Iran's leadership. This underscores his strategic intent to rally the Shiite base behind Hezbollah and Iran, contrasting sharply with his repeated claims to represent the interests of the entire community.

Israel's Imminent Demise

The Iranian leadership has persistently emphasized the narrative of "Israel's demise," framing it as a fragile state that cannot sustain itself. Despite this rhetoric, the reality on the ground is different. Israel has carried out high-profile assassinations, including targeting Iranian generals in Damascus, assassinating Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) headquarters, and eavesdropping on and eliminating Hezbollah leaders — all met with prolonged silence from Iran before the operation dubbed True Promise 2, which Iran described as a period of "strategic patience." In his sermon, Khamenei reiterated this narrative, stating, "This malicious entity, rootless, fake, and unstable, has barely kept itself afloat through America's support, and it will not survive, God willing." He pointed to the financial and military aid Israel has received from the United States and Western allies, contrasting this with Israel's perceived inability to decisively overcome the resistance from "a few thousand fighters and mujahideen" in Gaza and Lebanon, who were left isolated and without external aid. Khamenei's statements about Israel's defeat at the hands of a small group of fighters raise critical questions about his definition of victory and defeat. He failed to address the heavy toll, including the killing of thousands of [civilians](#), the targeted assassinations of resistance leaders, and

the widespread destruction in Gaza, Beirut, and other regions in Lebanon. The conflict's potential to spread to Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and even Iran itself seems to have been downplayed. If such losses do not prompt a reevaluation of strategy or intellectual reconsideration, then the question arises: what does Khamenei consider to be a true defeat or a true victory? This perspective highlights a significant issue: the Iranian leadership appears willing to continue its regional confrontations, prioritizing ideological objectives over the protection of its leaders' lives and the safety of civilians. This aligns with statements made by Abu Obeida, the spokesperson for Hamas, on October 7, the anniversary of the events of October 7, 2023, reflecting a shared vision of enduring resistance.

Moreover, Khamenei's claim that Israeli leaders have admitted to being unable to defeat Hamas and [Hezbollah](#) lacks specifics — he did not provide evidence or reference the sources of such admissions, relying instead on populist rhetoric. This speech aimed to bolster his image as a steadfast leader and to present Iran as the defender of Shiite interests, especially amid accusations that Iran engages in proxy battles far from its own borders, prioritizing the security of Tehran over that of its allies' capitals. By framing the ongoing struggle as a perpetual path to victory, Khamenei sidesteps the necessity for any introspective or strategic review. This rhetoric is at variance with the grim ground realities in both Gaza and Lebanon.

The Centrality of Martyrdom and Justifying Assassinations

In a bid to reassure the “resistance members” of Hezbollah, Hamas and others, Khamenei referenced the period of intense internal turmoil in Iran during the early 1980s, often referred to by some as a civil war. During that time, Iran faced a wave of assassinations targeting key political and religious figures. Addressing the fighters in Lebanon and Palestine, he declared, “Oh our resistance people in Lebanon and Palestine! Oh brave fighters! Oh patient and loyal people! These martyrdoms and

this spilled blood do not shake your resolve, but rather increase your steadfastness. In Islamic Iran, during three months in the summer of 1981, dozens of our prominent and distinguished figures were assassinated, such as Mohammad Beheshti and a president like Rajai. Each one of them was a pillar of the revolution at the local or national level, and their loss was not easy, but the revolution did not stop or retreat, but rather [accelerated](#).”

By recalling these events, Khamenei aimed to emphasize that despite the loss of influential figures, Iran’s revolution remained resilient and even gained momentum. He sought to draw a parallel, implying that the resistance groups would similarly remain steadfast despite the loss of their leaders. He concluded that ultimate victory would favor the resistance, suggesting that Israel’s primary focus on self-preservation since its founding has made it vulnerable to the pressure applied by the resistance, which he claimed has set back Israel’s objectives by decades.

Khamenei’s message was meant to inspire the Lebanese and Palestinian people by framing the “martyrdom in the way of God” as a catalyst for the resistance’s continued strength against Israel. However, he overlooked the fact that the early 1980s assassinations in Iran were part of an internal struggle, largely confined to domestic factions, without the direct involvement of international powers as is the case in Lebanon and Palestine today. His call for unrelenting confrontation, even without adequate preparation or strategic balance, could be seen as pushing for a dangerous escalation. It reflects a willingness to engage in battles on foreign soil to avoid direct conflict within Iran itself, indicating that Tehran might sacrifice the groups it has long supported if it serves to protect Iran’s national security and its larger ideological ambitions.

Islamic Unity in the Face of the Enemy

In his speech, Khamenei emphasized the theme of unity among Muslims and the broader Islamic world to counter the “Israe-

li enemy.” He began by stating, “This speech is directed to the entire Islamic nation, but it is specifically directed to the dear Lebanese and [Palestinian](#) peoples.” Despite this call for unity, he did not provide a concrete roadmap or even clarify what he meant by the “Islamic nation.” He left ambiguous whether he was referring only to those who adhere to his ideological leadership or if he included those who differ with him in methodology and doctrine. His focus remained solely on Shiite heritage, referencing historical periods like the Sarbadari and Safavid eras and exclusively praising Shiite scholars and imams. He notably excluded any recognition of Sunni scholars or figures in his discussion of Islamic unity. This selective approach to history aligns with a speech he gave a few weeks earlier on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Hussein bin Ali, where he framed the struggle as an eternal battle between the “Husseini front” and the “Yazidi front.” Khamenei’s underlying message appears to be that his vision of the Islamic nation consists only of those who accept his authority as the guardian jurist (wali al-faqih) for all Muslims. From an Iranian strategic perspective, this authority is meant to transcend geographical and sectarian boundaries. For those who reject this authority, they fall into what he metaphorically describes as the “Yazidi front,” suggesting a deeper ideological divide. The narrative Khamenei presents frames the ongoing conflict as a battle between two entities: Iran, which he positions as the defender of true Islamic values and leadership under the guardian jurist, and Israel, which he claims seeks to reshape the entire Middle East, driven by what he describes as religious ambitions outlined in the Old Testament, stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates.

Conclusion

Khamenei’s intention in leading the Friday sermon was to reestablish unity among Iranians and the broader Shiite community, aiming to boost morale that had significantly diminished following a series of setbacks. These included incidents like Israel’s targeting of the Iranian consulate in Syria and the high-profile

assassinations of figures such as Ismail Haniyeh, Fouad Shukur, and other Hezbollah leaders, culminating in the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah. These events fostered a sense of despair, defeat and humiliation among Shiite circles, turning Iran's narrative of "strategic patience" into what was perceived as a strategic triumph for Israel.

The Iranian response, which included missile strikes on Israeli cities, was followed by Khamenei's rare public sermon — his first in five years. This was a strategic move aimed at rekindling the Shiite collective spirit, emphasizing the values of jihad and martyrdom in the name of God. Khamenei aimed to convince his audience that ultimate victory would belong to the resistance in Lebanon and Gaza and that Israel, described metaphorically as a "malicious tree uprooted from the earth," lacked stability and endurance. His speech was deeply infused with religious and sectarian rhetoric, a form of spiritual mobilization that left no room for political pragmatism or diplomatic gestures. This approach underscores that the primary goal was to maintain internal unity within the ranks of the resistance and the Shiite communities that support it. At the same time, it sought to reaffirm Khamenei's own leadership and legitimacy, which was questioned amid accusations of weakness, fragility and disappearance from the public scene.



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