

Ali Khamenei

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Ali Hosseini Khamenei (Persian: علی حسینی خامنه‌ای‎ pronounced [ʔæˈliː hoseiˈniː xɑːmeneˈʔiː]; born 17 July 1939)^[1] is the second and current Supreme Leader of Iran^[2] and a Shia Cleric.^{[2][3]} Ali Khamenei succeeded Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Revolution, after Khomeini's death, being elected as the new Supreme Leader by the Assembly of Experts on 4 June 1989. He had also served as the President of Iran from 1981 to 1989. In 2012, *Forbes* selected him 21st in the list of *The World's Most Powerful People*.^[4]

As the head of state, Khamenei is considered the most powerful political authority in Iran.^{[5][6]} Khamenei was the victim of an attempted assassination in June 1981 that paralysed his right arm.^{[7][8]} According to his official website, Khamenei was arrested six times before being sent to exile for three years during Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reign.^[9] Like Ruhollah Khomeini, Ali Khamenei has also issued a fatwa saying the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons is forbidden under Islam.^[10]

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Ali Khamenei

سید علی خامنه‌ای



2nd Supreme Leader of Iran

Incumbent

Assumed office

4 June 1989

President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani
 Mohammad Khatami
 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
 Hassan Rouhani

Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi

Preceded by Ruhollah Khomeini

3rd President of Iran

In office

13 October 1981 – 3 August 1989

Prime Minister Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi Kani
 (Acting)
 Mir-Hossein Mousavi

Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini

Preceded by Mohammad-Ali Rajai

Succeeded by Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani

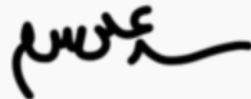
Leader of Islamic Republican Party

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Early life and education

Khamenei holds the title of Sayyid, which means that he has direct patrilineal descent from Muhammad's daughter. Some of Khamenei's ancestors are from Tafresh in today's Markazi Province, and migrated from their original home in Tafresh to Tabriz.^{[11][12]} Born to Seyyed Javad Khamenei and Khadijeh Mirdamadi^[13] (daughter of Hashem Mirdamadi) in Mashhad;^{[1][14]} he is the second eldest of eight children, and two of his brothers are also clerics. His younger brother, Hadi Khamenei, is a renowned newspaper editor and cleric.^[15] Khamenei is of ethnic Azeri background^{[16][17][18][19]} while one source claims that his mother was an ethnic Persian-speaker from Yazd.^[20]

He attended religious studies classes at the rudimentary and advanced levels in the hawza of Mashhad, under his mentors such as Sheikh Hashem Qazvini, and Ayatollah Milani, and then went to Najaf in 1957.^[21] After a short stay he left Najaf to Mashhad, and in 1958 he settled in Qom. Khamenei attended the classes of Seyyed Hossein Borujerdi and Ruhollah Khomeini. Later, he was involved in the Islamic activities of 1963 which led to his arrest in Birjand in Southern Khorasan Province. Shortly thereafter, he was released and resumed teaching in Mashhad's religious schools and mosques, teaching the Nahj al-Balagheh.^[21] According to some sources,

	In office
	15 July 1981 – 15 May 1987
Deputy	Mir-Hossein Mousavi
Preceded by	Mohammad-Javad Bahonar
Succeeded by	Party dissolved
	Personal details
Born	Ali Hosseini Khamenei 17 July 1939 Mashhad, Iran
Political party	Combatant Clergy Association (1977–1979; 1987–present) Islamic Republican Party (1979–1987)
Spouse(s)	Khojaste Bagherzadeh (1964–present)
Children	Mostafa Mojtaba Masoud Meysam Hoda Boshra
Religion	Twelver Shia Islam
Signature	
Website	Official website (http://khamenei.ir)

Khamenei studied and graduated from the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia in the Soviet Union,^{[22][23]} but his official website makes no mention of this.^[24]

According to his official biography, Khamenei spent a "clandestine life" in Tehran, Iran from 1966 to 1967 after which he was arrested by the police and imprisoned.

Literary scholarship

Khamenei is fluent in Arabic in addition to his mother's languages, Persian and Azerbaijani.^[25] He has translated several books into Persian from Arabic, including the works of the famous Egyptian theoretician Sayyid Qutb. He speaks Azerbaijani, his father's native language^{[26][27]}

In his analysis of the Persian poetry of Muhammad Iqbal, he states that "We have a large number of non-Persian-speaking poets in the history of our literature, but I cannot point out any of them whose poetry possesses the qualities of Iqbal's Persian poetry. Iqbal was not acquainted with Persian idiom, as he spoke Urdu at home and talked to his friends in Urdu or English. He did not know the rules of Persian prose writing."^[28]

Like many other politically active clerics at the time, Khamenei was far more involved with politics than religious scholarship.^[29]

Political life and presidency

Khamenei was a key figure in the Iranian Revolution in Iran and a close confidant of Ruhollah Khomeini.

Khomeini appointed Khamenei to the post of Tehran's Friday prayers Imam in 1979, after forced resignation of Hussein-Ali Montazeri from the post. He served briefly as the Deputy Minister for Defence and as a supervisor of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards. He also went to the battlefield as a representative of the defense commission of the parliament. In June 1981, Khamenei narrowly escaped an assassination attempt when a bomb, concealed in a tape recorder at a press conference, exploded beside him. He was permanently injured, losing the use of his right arm.^[30]

Candidate	Votes	%
Ali Khamenei	16,003,242	95.02%
Ali Akbar Parvaresh	342,600	2.03%
Hasan Ghafourifard	78,559	0.47%
Reza Zavare'i	62,133	0.37%
<i>Blank or invalid votes</i>	356,266	2.12%
Total	16,841,800	

In 1981, after the assassination of Mohammad-Ali Rajai, Khamenei was elected President of Iran by a landslide vote in the Iranian presidential election, October 1981 and became the first cleric to serve in the office. Ruhollah Khomeini had originally wanted to keep clerics out of the presidency but later changed his views.

In his presidential inaugural address Khamenei vowed to eliminate "deviation, liberalism, and American-influenced leftists".^[31] Vigorous opposition to the government, including nonviolent and violent protest, assassinations, guerrilla activity and insurrections, was answered by state

repression and terror in the early 1980s, both before and during Khamenei's presidency. Thousands of rank-and-file members of insurgent groups were killed, often by revolutionary courts. By 1982, the government announced that the courts would be reined in, although various political groups continued to be repressed by the government in the first half of the 1980s.^[32]

Khamenei helped guide the country during the Iraq–Iran War in the 1980s, and developed close ties with the now-powerful Revolutionary Guards. As president, he had a reputation of being deeply interested in the military, budget and administrative details.^[30] After the Iraqi Army was expelled from Iran in 1982, Khamenei became one of the main opponents of Khomeini's decision to counter-invade into Iraq, an opinion Khamenei shared with Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, with whom he would later conflict during the 2009–10 Iranian election protests.^[33]

In its 10 April 1997 ruling regarding the Mykonos restaurant assassinations, the German court issued an international arrest warrant for Iranian intelligence minister Hojjat al-Islam Ali Fallahian^[34] after declaring that the assassination had been ordered by him with knowledge of Khamenei and Rafsanjani.^[35] Iranian officials, however, have categorically denied their involvement. The then Iranian Parliament speaker Ali Akbar Nategh-Nouri dismissed the ruling as being political, untrue and unsubstantiated. The ruling led to a diplomatic crisis between the governments of Iran and several European countries, which lasted until November 1997.^[36]

Abdollah Shahbazi, an Iranian political historian and an intelligence expert, believes that the Mykonos killings were conducted by Israeli Mossad infiltrators in Iranian intelligence with the purpose of reviving the KDPI's waning tendency to armed struggle against Iranian government. Shahbazi argues that there was no motive and gain for Iranian government to provoke into violent retaliation an already pacifying insurgent group that had recently decided to give up armed struggle and instead turn to non-violent opposition.^[37]

Darabi and Rhayel were finally released from prison on 10 December 2007 and deported back to their home countries.^{[38][39]}

Supreme Leader

Ali Khamenei succeeded Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Revolution, after Khomeini's death, being elected as the new Supreme Leader by the Assembly of Experts on 4 June 1989. Initially, a council of three members, Ali Meshkini, Mousavi Ardebili and Khamenei, was proposed for Leadership. After the assembly rejected the idea of a Leadership Council (Khamenei and Rafsanjani were both supporting a council), and Grand Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Golpaygani received only around 14 votes, Khamenei was elected Leader by 60 members out of 74 members present.^{[40][41][42]} Since Khamenei was not a Marja' at the time, which the Iranian constitution required, he was named as the temporary Supreme Leader. Later, the constitution was amended and the Assembly of Experts reconvened on 6 August 1989, to reconfirm Khamenei with 60 votes out of 64 present.^[43]

The concept that the ruler of the land should be an Islamic jurist serving as "guardian" (*Vali faqih* ولی فقیه in Persian), was developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in a lecture series made book. In this kind of theocratic "guardianship" leadership (*Velayat-e Faqih*, ولایت فقیه), no political decision is lawful until it is approved by the guardian jurist who is called Leader (*Rahbar* رهبر in Persian) by the Iranian constitution. Even the taking of office by the democratically elected president is subject to the approval of the Leader.



Khamenei and Hussein-Ali Montazeri, 1978



Khamenei and some of Iranian commanders in Iran-Iraq war

Political philosophy and image

Khamenei's era as leader has differed from that of his predecessor Khomeini. He has continued Khomeini's policy of "balancing one group against another, making sure that no single side gains too much power."^{[30][44]} But lacking Khomeini's charisma and clerical standing, he has developed networks, first inside the armed forces, and then among the clerics administering the major religious foundations (or bonyads), and seminaries of Qom and Mashhad.^[44] According to Vali Nasr, he has brought many of the powers of the presidency with him into the office, turning it into an "omnipotent overseer of Iran's political scene". Officials under Khamenei influence the country's various powerful, and sometimes bickering, institutions, including "the parliament, the presidency, the judiciary, the Revolutionary Guards, the military, the intelligence services, the police agencies, the clerical elite, the Friday prayer leaders and much of the media", as well as various "nongovernmental foundations, organizations, councils, seminaries and business groups".^[30] Under him, the government is said to resemble "a clerical oligarchy more than an autocracy."^[44]

To maintain "the image of the Leader as 'guide', rather than executive", Khamenei stays aloof from day-to-day politics. He gives no press conferences or interviews, and, as noted in Hooman Majd's book:

He speaks only at special gatherings, such as an occasional Friday prayer or commemoration ceremonies of one sort or another. The Leader meets with foreign dignitaries (almost exclusively Muslim) but limits any televised and public words to generalities, such as Iran's support for the country (or entity like Hamas or Hezbollah) whose emissary he is meeting, Iran's peaceful and Islamic nature, and Iran's eagerness to expand trade and contacts with the friendly country in question. He pointedly does not meet with representatives of Western powers. The Leader does not travel overseas; if anyone wishes to see him, that person must travel to Iran.^[45]

Apart from his time in Najaf as a student, Khamenei travelled to Libya during his time as President.^{[46][47]}

Despite this policy, as leader, Khamenei reserves the right to "inject himself into the process and 'correct' a flawed policy or decision."^[48]

In his speeches Khamenei regularly mentions many familiar themes of the 1979 revolution: justice, independence, self-sufficiency, Islamic government and resolute opposition to Israel and United States, while rarely mentioning other revolutionary ideals such as democracy and greater government transparency.^[31] Dealing with the presidents who have served during his reign, Khamenei has successfully sculpted President Rafsanjani's attempts to find a modus vivendi with the United States, President Khatami's aspirations for a more democratic Islamic state, and President Ahmadinejad's desire for confrontation.^[31]

Election as Supreme Leader

Ruhollah Khomeini had recommended Khamenei to be his successor, stating, "He enjoys that level of ijtiḥād required to be a Wali al-Faqih". In the First Assembly of the Assembly of Experts which after the demise of Khomeini, Ali Khamenei was elected as the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists by two-thirds of the votes.^[49] Though Khamenei opposed this and argued heavily against the decision, he eventually accepted the decision after debating with the mujtahids (experts in many Islamic fields) of the Assembly.^[50] This new amendment to the constitution had not been put to a referendum yet, so after voting for Khamenei, the Assembly of Experts internally titled him a temporary office holder until the new constitution became effective.

Dispute regarding status as Grand Ayatollah

His status as Marja' is controversial. In 1994, after the death of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Araki, the Society of Seminary Teachers of Qom declared Khamenei a new *marja*. However, four of Iran's dissident grand ayatollahs declined to recognize Khamenei as a *marja*.^[51] Khamenei's acceptance of *marja'iyat* for Shi'as outside Iran does not have traditional precedence in Shi'ism. *Marja'iyat* can be, and in modern times it increasingly is, transitional.^[52]

Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Shirazi, who was under house-arrest at the time for his opposition to Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, did not accept Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as a *marja*. According to "Human Rights in Iran" (2001) by Pace University's Reza Afshari, Shirazi was "indignant" over recognition of Khamenei as the Leader and a *marja*. Shirazi (who died in late 2001) apparently favored a committee of Grand Ayatollahs to lead the country. Other *marjas* who questioned the legitimacy of Khamenei's *marja'yat* were dissident clerics: Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, Grand Ayatollah Hassan Tabatabai-Qomi and Grand Ayatollah Yasubedin Rastegar Jooybari.^[51] In 1997, the more senior Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, "questioned the powers of the Leader" and was punished with the closure of his religious school, an attack on his office in Qom" and a period of house arrest.^[3]

Fatwa regarding companions of the prophet

In 2010, Khamenei issued a fatwa which bans any insult to the Sahabah (companions of Muhammad) as well as Muhammad's wives. The fatwa was issued in an effort to reconcile legal, social, and political disagreements between Sunni and Shia.^[53]

Amman Message

Khamenei is one of the Ulama signatories of the Amman Message, which gives a broad foundation for defining Muslim orthodoxy.^[54] as well as elaborating on the factors needed to create Islamic unity, he argues: “neither the Shia Muslims allied with the British MI6 are Shias, nor the Sunni mercenaries of the American CIA are Sunnis, as they are both anti-Islamic.”^[55]

Fatwa against nuclear weapons

Khamenei has issued a fatwa saying the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons was forbidden under Islam.^[10] Iran's nuclear program has been a subject of international debate for decades. The Iranian government claims the purpose of its nuclear development is to produce electricity, while some countries accuse it of trying to create nuclear weapons.

The fatwa was cited in an official statement by the Iranian government at an August 2005 meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna.^[56] It's been widely discussed by international officials and specifically recognized by the US administration. Doubts have been cast by some experts from US or Israeli-affiliated think tanks on either the existence of fatwa, its authenticity or impact.^[57] However substantiating the existence and authenticity of the ruling, Iranian official website for information regarding its nuclear program, documents numerous instances of public statements by Khamenei wherein he voices his opposition to pursuit and development of nuclear weapons in moral, religious and Islamic juridical terms.^[58] Khamenei's official website specifically cites a 2010 version^[59] of these statements in the fatwa section of the website in Farsi as a fatwa on "Prohibition of Weapons of Mass Destruction."^[60]



Khamenei and Fatwa against nuclear weapons

Relationship with the press

In 2000, he was listed by the Committee to Protect Journalists as "one of the top ten enemies of the press and freedom of expression",^[61] and was named to the Time 100 in 2007.^[62] Opposition journalists Ahmad Zeidabadi, Mohsen Sazegara, Mohammad Nourizad and Akbar Ganji were arrested and investigated^{[63][64][65][66]} for spreading critical articles containing unproven charges against Khamenei's policies as the leader and some organizations.^{[67][68]} According to the Iran's Press Law "spreading rumors and lies and distorts the words of others" is not allowed.^[69] Also, according to the law, "spreading libel against officials, institutions, organizations and individuals in the country or insulting legal or real persons who are lawfully respected, even by means of pictures or caricatures" is not allowed.^[69]

Among his controversial actions were his rejection of a bill presented by the Iranian parliament in 2000 that aimed to reform the country's press law, and the disqualification of thousands of parliamentary candidates for the 2004 Iranian legislative election by the Guardian Council he appointed.^[3]

Political power following reform era

According to Karim Sadjadpour of the American Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, several factors have strengthened Khamenei in recent years:

- (1) A vast network of commissars stationed in strategic posts throughout government bureaucracies, dedicated to enforcing his authority;
- (2) the weak, conservative-dominated parliament, headed by Khamenei loyalist Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel (whose daughter is married to the Leader's son);
- (3) the rapidly rising political and economic influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, whose top leaders are directly appointed by Khamenei and have always been publicly deferential to him;
- (4) the political disengagement of Iran's young population; and
- (5) most significant[ly], the 2005 presidential election, which saw hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad trounce Khamenei's chief rival ... Hashemi Rafsanjani ...^[31]

According to an investigative report by Reuters news agency, since around 2006 the organization known as *Setad* (or "Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam"), has developed into a conglomerate worth an estimated \$95 billion. The organization—allegedly under the control of Khamenei—is said to provide financial resources giving him financial independence from "parliament and the national budget, insulating him from Iran's messy factional infighting" according to Reuters. The "revenue stream" provided by Setad, "helps explain why Khamenei has not only held for 24 years but also in some ways has more control than even his revered predecessor", according to the report.^[70]

Challenges following 2009 election protest

In mid-August 2009, a group of unnamed former reformist lawmakers appealed to the Assembly of Experts – the constitutional body charged with electing and (in theory) supervising and removing the Leader – to

investigate Leader Ali Khamenei's qualification to rule.^[71] A week later another anonymous letter was issued "calling Iran's leader a dictator and demanding his removal," this one by a group of Iranian clerics.^[72] The letters were called a blow to Khamenei's "status as a neutral arbiter and Islamic figurehead"^[72] and an "unprecedented challenge to the country's most powerful man"^[71] though not a blow to his actual power as leader. The New York Times reports "the phrase 'death to Khamenei' has begun appearing in graffiti on Tehran walls, a phrase that would have been almost unimaginable not long ago."^[72]

The letter was addressed to the head of the Assembly of Experts, Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a "powerful former president" who also questions the election results. According to the Associate Press it is unlikely the letter's demands would be met as "two-thirds of the 86-member assembly are considered strong loyalists of Khamenei and would oppose" any investigation of him.^[71]

According to The New York Times an 11-page anonymous letter by a group of Iranian clerics was issued 15 August "calling Iran's leader a dictator and demanding his removal."^{[73][74]}

According to The New York Times, a "prominent Iranian cleric and a former lawmaker said on Sunday that they had spoken to some of the authors and had no doubt the letter was genuine." According to this cleric the letter's signatories number "several dozen, and are mostly midranking figures from Qum, Isfahan and Mashhad," and that a "the pressure on clerics in Qum is much worse than the pressure on activists because the establishment is afraid that if they say anything they can turn the more traditional sectors of society against the regime," "^[72]

Relations with President Ahmadinejad

Early in his presidency, Ahmadinejad was sometimes described as "enjoy[ing] the full backing" of the Supreme Leader **Ali Khamenei**,^[75] and even as being his "protege."^[76] In Ahmadinejad's 2005 inauguration the supreme leader allowed Ahmadinejad to kiss his hand and cheeks in what was called "a sign of closeness and loyalty,"^[77] and after the 2009 election fully endorsed Ahmadinejad against protesters.^[78] However as early as January 2008 signs of disagreement between the two men developed over domestic policies,^[75] and by the period of 2010–11 several sources detected a "growing rift" between them.^[79] The disagreement was described as centering on Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, a top adviser and close confidant of Ahmadinejad^[80] and opponent of "greater involvement of clerics in politics",^[81] who was first vice president of Iran until being ordered to resign from the cabinet by the supreme leader. In 2009 Ahmadinejad dismissed Intelligence Minister Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, an opponent of Mashaei. In April 2011, another Intelligence minister, Heydar Moslehi, resigned after being asked to by Ahmadinejad, but was reinstated by the supreme leader within hours.^{[76][82]} Ahmadinejad declined to officially back Moslehi's reinstatement for two weeks and in protest engaged in an "11-day walkout" of cabinet meetings, religious ceremonies, and other official functions.^{[79][82]} Ahmadinejad's actions led to angry public attacks by clerics, parliamentarians and military commanders, who accused him of ignoring orders from the supreme leader.^[80] Conservative opponents in parliament launched an "impeachment drive" against him,^[81] four websites with ties to Ahmadinejad reportedly were "filtered and blocked",^[76] and several people "said to be close" to the president and Mashaei (such as Abbas Amirifar and Mohammed Sharif Malekzadeh) were arrested on charges of being "magicians" and invoking djinns.^[79] On 6 May 2011, it was reported that Ahmadinejad had been given an ultimatum to accept the leader's intervention or resign,^[83] and on 8 May he "apparently bowed" to the reinstatement, welcoming back Moslehi to a cabinet meeting.^[84] The events have been said to have "humiliated and weakened" Ahmadinejad, though the president denied that there had been any rift between the two,^[80] and according to the semiofficial Fars News Agency, he stated that his relationship with the supreme leader "is that of a father and a son."^[81]

In 2012, Khamenei ordered a halt to a parliamentary inquiry into Ahmadinejad's mishandling of the Iranian economy.^[85]

Domestic policy

Khamenei is regarded by some as the figurehead of the country's conservative establishment.^[3] He is the commander in chief of all armed forces and appoints the head of judiciary system and national radio and television.

Khamenei supported Mesbah Yazdi describing him as one of Iran's most credible ideologues prior to the 2005 election, but has reportedly "recently been concerned about Mesbah's political ambitions."^[86] Mesbah is a critic of reform movement in Iran and was seen as President Ahmadinejad's spiritual guide.

In 2007, Khamenei requested that government officials speed up Iran's move towards economic privatization. Its last move towards such a goal was in 2004, when Article 44 of the constitution was overturned. Article 44 had decreed that Iran's core infrastructure should remain state-run. Khamenei also suggested that ownership rights should be protected in courts set up by the Justice Ministry; the hope was that this new protection would give a measure of security to and encourage private investment.^{[87][88]}

Additionally, Khamenei has stated that he believes in the importance of nuclear technology for civilian purposes because "oil and gas reserves cannot last forever."^{[89][90]}

On 30 April 2008, Ali Khamenei backed President Ahmadinejad's economic policy and said the West was struggling with more economic difficulties than Iran, with a "crisis" spreading from the United States to Europe, and inflation was a widespread problem. The Iranian leader said that the ongoing economic crisis which has crippled the world has been unprecedented in the past 60 years. "This crisis has forced the UN to declare state of emergency for food shortages around the globe but foreign radios have focused on Iran to imply that the current price hikes and inflation in the country are the results of carelessness on the part of Iranian officials which of course is not true", he said. Khamenei emphasized that no one has the right to blame the Iranian government for Iran's economic problems. He also advised people and the government to be content and avoid waste in order to solve economic problems. "I advise you to keep in your mind that this great nation is never afraid of economic sanctions", he added.^{[91][92][93][94]}

Science and technology

Ali Khamenei has been supportive of scientific progress in Iran. He was among the first Islamic clerics to allow stem cell research and therapeutic cloning.^{[95][96]} In 2004, Khamenei said that the country's progress is dependent on investment in the field of science and technology. He also said that attaching a high status to scholars and scientists in society would help talents to flourish and science and technology to become domesticated, thus ensuring the country's progress and development.^[97]

Minorities

The Bahá'í Faith is the largest religious minority in Iran, with around 300,000 members (8,000,000 members



Khamenei standing beside the tomb of General Ali Sayyad Shirazi, Chief of the Ground Forces of The Army of Iran during the Iran–Iraq war

worldwide) and is officially considered a dangerous cult by Iranian government. It is banned in Iran and several other countries,^[98] while others have expressed concern about the group. Khamenei has approved new legislation against Bahá'ís in Iran and lessen their influence abroad.^[99] According to a letter from the Chairman of the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces in Iran addressed to the Ministry of Information, the Revolutionary Guard and the Police Force, Khamenei has also ordered the Command Headquarters to identify people who adhere to the Bahá'í Faith and to monitor their activities and gather any and all information about the members of the Bahá'í Faith.

National Radio and Television

Khamenei directly appoints the head of IRIB and the organization works under his responsibility. The state controls most radio and television news outlets, and it is often these pro-government voices that disseminate the official hard-line rhetoric.^[100]

Interpretation of Islamic law

In 2000, Ali Khamenei sent a letter to the Iranian parliament forbidding the legislature from debating a revision of the Iranian press law. He wrote: "The present press law has succeeded to a point in preventing this big plague. The draft bill is not legitimate and in the interests of the system and the revolution."^[101] His use of "extra-legislative power" has been criticized widely by reformists and opposition groups. In reaction to the letter, some Parliament members voiced outrage and threatened to resign.^[102] *Kayhan* and *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* are two newspapers published under the management of Khamenei.

In late 1996, following a fatwa by Khamenei stating that music education corrupts the minds of young children, many music schools were closed and music instruction to children under the age of 16 was banned by public establishments (although private instruction continued).^[103] Khamenei stated, "The promotion of music [both traditional and Western] in schools is contrary to the goals and teachings of Islam, regardless of age and level of study."^[104]

In 1999, Khamenei issued a fatwa stating that it was permitted to use a third-party (donor sperm, ova or surrogacy) in fertility treatments. This was in clear opposition to the fatwa on ART by Gad El-Hak Ali Gad El-Hak of Egypt's Al-Azhar University in the late 1980s which permitted ART (IVF and similar technologies) as long there is no third-party donation (of sperm, eggs, embryos, or uteruses).^[105] This led to an upspring of fertility tourism in Iran.^[106]

In 2002, he ruled that human stem cell research was permissible under Islam, with the condition that it be used to create only parts as opposed to a whole human.^[107]

In 2002, after protests erupted in the capital, Khamenei intervened against the death sentence given to Hashem Aghajari for arguing that Muslims should re-interpret Islam rather than blindly follow leaders. Khamenei ordered a review of the sentence against Aghajari and it was later commuted to a prison sentence.^[3]

In July 2007, Khamenei criticized Iranian women's rights activists and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW): "In our country ... some activist women, and some men, have been trying to play with Islamic rules in order to match international conventions related to women," Khamenei said. "This is wrong." Khamenei made these comments two days after Iranian women's rights activist Delaram Ali was sentenced to 34 months of jail and 10 lashes by Iran's judiciary.^[108] Iran's judiciary works under the auspices of the supreme leader and is independent from the government.

With regard to women's dress, Khamenei believes in the need for compulsory hijab.^[109]

Ali Khamenei believes in gender segregation.^[110]

Khamenei claims that "Today, homosexuality is a major problem in the western world. They [western nations] however ignore it. But the reality is that homosexuality has become a serious challenge, pain and unsolvable problem for the intellectuals in the west."^[111]

In 2007, Iranian police under the direction of Khamenei launched a "Public Security Plan", arresting dozens of thugs to increase public security.^[112]

On his official website, Khamenei claimed that shaving the beard is ḥarām.^[113]

Presidential and parliamentary elections

As Supreme Leader, Khamenei has influence over elections in his appointment of half of the members of the Council of Guardians, who approve or disqualify candidates for office. In February 2004 the Council of Guardians, disqualified thousands of candidates, including 80 incumbents (including the deputy speaker), many of the reformist members of the parliament, and all the candidates of the Islamic Iran Participation Front party from running in the 2004 parliamentary elections. It did not allow to run in the election. The conservatives won about 70% of the seats. The parliamentary election held on 20 February 2004 in Iran was a key turning point in that country's political evolution. The election marked the conclusive end of the campaign for political and social reform initiated by Mohammad Khatami after he was elected president in a landslide vote in May 1997.^[114]

During the 2005 presidential election, Khamenei's comments about importance of fighting corruption, being faithful to the ideals of the Islamic revolution, as well as on the superior intelligence and dynamism of those who studied engineering, were interpreted by some as a subtle endorsement of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (who had a PhD in traffic engineering).^[31] After the election, and until recently, Khamenei was outspoken in his support for Ahmadinejad, and "defended him publicly in ways which he never" had reformist president Khatami. Khamenei would later certify the results of the 2009 Iranian Presidential election.^[31]

Khamenei has taken a firm stand against what has been described as "the greatest domestic challenge in 30 years" to the leadership of the Islamic Republic – the 2009–10 Iranian election protests. He has stated that he will neither reconsider vote results nor bow to public pressure over the disputed reelection of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.^[115] "By Allah's favor, the presidential election was accurately held, and the current matters should be pursued legally."^[116] In a public appearance on 19 June he expresses his support for the declared winner Ahmadinejad and accused foreign powers – including Britain, Israel and the United States – of helping foment protest against the election results.^[117] In particular, he singled out Britain, perceiving the country as the "most evil" of its enemies.^[118] He said that the Iranian people will respond with an "iron fist" if Western powers meddle in Iran's internal affairs.^[119]

Human rights

Khamenei has called human rights a fundamental principle underlying Islamic teachings, that precedes western concern for human rights by many centuries. He has attacked Western powers who have criticized the rights record of the Islamic Republic for hypocrisy saying that these countries economically oppress people in Third World countries and support despots and dictators. In response to Western complaints of human rights abuses in Iran he has stated that the American administration has committed many crimes and is therefore not fit to judge

the Islamic Republic.^[120]

In a visit with cleric Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi, Khamenei praised Mesbah's books and thoughts as being original, very useful, solid and correct. He also stated that the Islamic world needs these ideas today more than any time in the past.^[121] Mesbah Yazdi advocates a return to the values of the 1979 Iranian revolution and is a prominent opponent of the Reformist movement in Iran.

The Iranian government has regularly been criticized by the United Nations and human rights groups for its human rights record. Areas of criticism include torture, political prisoners, elections and crime and punishment.^{[122][123]}

Foreign policy

Khamenei has "direct responsibility" for foreign policy, which "cannot be conducted without his direct involvement and approval". He has a foreign policy team independent of the president's "which includes two former foreign ministers" and "can at any time of his choosing inject himself into the process and 'correct' a flawed policy or decision."^[124] His foreign policy is said to steer a course that avoids either confrontation or accommodation with the West.^[31]

Opposition to United States foreign policy

On 4 June 2006, Khamenei said that Iran would disrupt energy shipments from the Persian Gulf region (about 20% of the world's daily supply of oil passes from the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz very close to Iran's coast^[125]) should the country come under attack from the US, insisting that Tehran will not give up its right to produce nuclear fuel.

On 14 September 2007, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (on the 1st Friday prayer of Ramadan) predicted that George W. Bush and American officials will one day be tried in an international criminal court to be held "accountable" for the U.S. led invasion of Iraq.^[126] He has also blamed the United States for "blind terrorism" after its invasion of Iraq.^[127] He asserts that the United States is the main cause of insecurity in Iraq.

On 21 March 2009, a day after US President Barack Obama claimed to offer Iran a "new beginning" of diplomatic engagement between the two old foes, Khamenei said a change of US "words" was not enough and added: "We will watch and we will judge (the new US administration) ... You change, our behavior will change."^[128]

In June 2011, Khamenei accuses the United States government of terrorism and rejected the American definition of terrorism; he was quoted as saying, "The U.S. and the European governments that follow it describe Palestinian combatant groups who fight for the liberation of their land as terrorists."^[129]

In June 2012, Khamenei again spoke of "hatred of the West".^[130]

Condemnation of September 11 attacks



Vladimir Putin in Iran 16–17 October 2007



Khamenei talking with former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

After the September 11 attacks, Khamenei condemned the act and the attackers and called for a condemnation of terrorist activities all over the world, but warned strongly against a military intervention in Afghanistan.^[131] He is quoted as saying, "Mass killings of human beings are catastrophic acts which are condemned wherever they may happen and whoever the perpetrators and the victims may be."^[131]

Israel and the Palestinians

Khamenei remains an opponent of the State of Israel and Zionism. Khamenei and the Iranian government have been widely criticized for rhetoric which has been described as racist and anti-Semitic, and for making threats against the State of Israel. On 15 December 2000, Khamenei famously remarked that "this cancerous tumor of a state Israel should be removed from the region"^[132] and that "no one will allow a bunch of thugs, lechers and outcasts from London, Washington and Moscow to rule over the Palestinians." On the same occasion he proposed that "Palestinian refugees should return and Muslims, Christians and Jews could choose a government for themselves, excluding immigrant Jews."^[133]

According to anti-regime change activist Abbas Edalat, in 2005 Khamenei responded to a remark by then-President Ahmadinejad which had been widely translated as saying that the regime occupying Jerusalem should be "wiped off the map" by saying that "the Islamic Republic has never threatened and will never threaten any country."^[134]

In a sermon for Friday prayers in Tehran, Iran on 19 September 2008, Khamenei stated that "it is incorrect, irrational, pointless and nonsense to say that we are friends of Israeli people," and that he had raised the issue "to spell an end to any debates".^[135]

In a September 2009 sermon, Khamenei was quoted as saying, "the Zionist cancer is gnawing into the lives of Islamic nations."^[136] "Israel is on the steep path of decline and deterioration" said Khamenei in February 2010 and continued: "God willing, its destruction will be imminent."^[137] He returned to the theme in a speech on 3 February 2012, when he referred to Israel as a "cancerous tumour that should be cut and will be cut".^[138] In another report of the same speech, he stated: "From now onward, we will support and help any nations, any groups fighting against the Zionist regime across the world, and we are not afraid of declaring this..."^[137]

In a speech before 50,000 soldiers on 20 November 2013, he lamented that the Zionist leaders are called humans.^[139] On the same day, Khamenei went further to say that France had genuflected to Israel.^[140] In another report, Khamenei called Israel a "rabid dog".^[141] France was guilty of "kneeling" before Israel, Khamenei said, while Israel was led by people unworthy of the "title human".^[142] On 21 March 2014, Khamenei used a morning speech marking Nowruz, the Persian New Year, to call into question the Holocaust. He said, "the Holocaust is an event whose reality is uncertain and if it has happened, it's uncertain how it has happened".^[143] In 2014, Khamenei tweeted, "This barbaric, wolflike & infanticidal regime of Israel which spares no crime has no cure but to be annihilated."^[144]

Public diplomacy

Islamic awakening

On February 2011, Ali Khamenei supported the Egyptian uprising against their government, describing it as Islamic awakening instead of Arab Spring. Trying to communicate with Arab people, he addressed Egypt's protesters in Arabic.(Iranians are not Arabs, and Iran's official language is Persian) He introduced himself as

“your brother in religion,” while praising the “explosion of sacred anger”.^[145] Later, in "Islamic Awakening conferences" which were held in Tehran, Khamenei praised the Muslim youths of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain for what he described as Islamic awakening. He also paralleled these events with Islamic revolution in Iran during his Nowruz oration in 2011.^[146]

Public letter to the Western youths

On January 21, 2015, prompted by the terrorist attacks in Paris early that month that was blamed on Muslims, Khamenei wrote an unprecedented public letter to the Western youth in an attempt to tackle the ensuing "Islamophobia" by promoting objective study of Islam. At the opening of his Letter To the Youth in Europe and North America, he wrote:

I am addressing you, [the youth], not because I overlook your parents, rather it is because the future of your nations and countries will be in your hands; and also I find that the sense of quest for truth is more vigorous and attentive in your hearts.

In the letter he encouraged the youth to look beyond prejudices and hatred, and not allow the “hypocritical governments” to introduce “their own recruited terrorists as representatives of Islam” but rather seek their own understanding of Islam from “its primary and original sources.”^{[147][148][149]}

The letter received wide coverage in both Western and Mid-Eastern press.^[150]

Personal life

Khamenei has six children. Mostafa, Mojtaba, Masood, and Meysam are his sons and also Boshra and Hoda are his daughters.^{[151][152]} One of his sons, Mojtaba, married with daughter of Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel.^[153]

Health

Khamenei's health has been called into question. In January 2007, after he had not been seen in public for some weeks, and hadn't appeared (as he traditionally does) at celebrations for Eid al-Adha, rumours spread of his illness or death. Khamenei issued a statement declaring that "enemies of the Islamic system fabricated various rumors about death and health to demoralize the Iranian nation," but according to author Hooman Majd he appeared to be "visibly weak" in photos released with the statement.^[154]

On 9 September 2014, Khamenei underwent prostate surgery.^{[155][156]}

Government posts

Since the founding of the Islamic Republic, Khamenei has held many government posts.^[1]

- 1979 – Founded the Islamic Republic Party, along with like-minded clerics such as Mohammad Beheshti, Mohammad Javad Bahonar, Abdul-Karim Mousavi Ardebili, and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.
- 1980 – Secretary of Defense.
- 1980 – Supervisor of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards.

- 1980 – Leader of the Friday Congregational Prayer.
- 1980 – The Tehran Representative in the Consultative Assembly.
- 1981 – Ayatollah Khomeini's Representative in the High Security Council.
- 1981 – Elected President of the Islamic Republic of Iran after assassination of Mohammad-Ali Rajai, and was re-elected to a second term in 1985.
- 1982 – Chairman of the High Council of Revolution Culture Affairs.
- 1988 – President of the Expediency Discernment Council.
- 1989 – Chairman of the Constitution Revisal Committee.
- 1989 – Khamenei became the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran by choice of the Council of Experts, after the death of Ruhollah Khomeini.

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- *Lessons from the Nahjul-Balaghah*^{[160][161]}
- *Human Rights in Islam*
- *The Charter of Freedom*^{[162][163][164]}
- *Essence of Tawhid: Denial of Servitude but to God* (<http://www.khamenei.de/books/tawhid.htm>)

See also

- List of national leaders
- List of current Maraji
- To the Youth in Europe and North America (Letter)
- Letter4u (twitter hashtag)

footnotes

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External links

Photo

- Ali Khamenei gallery in Khamenei's website (http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_mhasgallery&Itemid=33)

Official

- The e-office of the Supreme Leader of Iran (<http://www.leader.ir/>)
- The official website of Ayatollah Khamenei (<http://english.khamenei.ir/>)
- Official English-language twitter account (https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir)

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- Works by or about Ali Khamenei (<http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n87-935094>) in libraries (WorldCat catalog)

Videos

- Video Archive of Ayatollah Khamenei (<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/video-index>)
- Ayatollah Khamenei in the city of Ardabil reading different poems in Azerbaijani language about Imam Hussein and events in Karbala. (<http://irannegah.com/Video.aspx?id=423>)

Political offices		
Preceded by Mostafa Chamran	Minister of Defense 1980	Succeeded by Javad Fakoori
Preceded by Mohammad-Ali Rajai	President of Iran 1981–1989	Succeeded by Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani
New office	Chairperson of the Expediency Discernment Council 1988–1989	
Preceded by Ruhollah Khomeini	Supreme Leader of Iran 1989–present	Incumbent
Party political offices		
Preceded by Mohammad-Javad Bahonar	Leader of the Islamic Republican Party 1981–1987	Succeeded by Party dissolved
Order of precedence		
First	Order of Precedence of Iran <i>as Supreme Leader</i>	Succeeded by Hassan Rouhani <i>as President</i>

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