



Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during a meeting with a group of commanders and personnel of the Iranian Air Force in Tehran on February 5, 2024

## Khamenei Appears Concerned About Regime's Legitimacy

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Iran's 84-year-old ruler Ali Khamenei once again hinted at his doubts about the political challenges his regime faces on Monday, expressing concern over election turnout and other issues.

Khamenei has been sounding increasingly concerned about his regime's legitimacy and influence over the population following mass anti-regime protests in 2022-2023. The October 7 Hamas invasion of Israel and the ensuing war has further challenged the regime's ability to ease Iran's economic crisis.

**In his latest speech on Monday**, one week before the anniversary of the 1979 revolution, Khamenei brought up the issue of his regime's authority, the decline in support for the Islamic ideology, and the expected low turnout in the March 1 election, as a barometer of the people's support for the regime.

The keywords in his speech were authority, the February 11 revolution rally, and a high-turnout election. Although it was not the first time he used those keywords during the past year, but every time he has sounded weaker and more worried.

He also has deep concerns about his own security after the January 3 terrorist attack in Kerman that killed 95 people and was claimed by the ISIS branch in Afghanistan. The serious security breach makes the February 11 rally more of a threat than an opportunity to garner popular support. The regime even ignored a US warning, delivered privately, which could have saved all the lives lost.

Khamenei's sense of insecurity during recent weeks has been so serious that instead of going to places such as **an industrial fair** and the agricultural market in Tehran, **he had the fair and the market brought to his residence** where he reviewed his regime's "achievements" in his fortified underground.



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During his Monday speech, Khamenei expressed concerns about insiders and elites, reviving his fears about their loyalty and raising alarms about potential foreign infiltration among his staff. His disconcerted demeanor during the speech became evident when, recounting a pre-revolution visit by the Iranian imperial air force to Ayatollah Khomeini, he praised the country's air force, oblivious to the fact that the imperial air force no longer exists. Its US-made aircraft are over 50 years old, and its few Russian-made jets frequently crash during training flights.

What remains in terms of military power is an aerospace force that develops and launches missiles at neighboring countries. Ironically, this strategy creates more trouble and insecurity than it does project power and authority. Khamenei also praised the Shah's air force for its officers' interactions with Khomeini, claiming that these interactions helped pave the way for the victory of the Islamic revolution.

Since October 7, Khamenei's departure from his hardline revolutionary stance has diminished his standing among his fervent supporters in Iran. As he abandoned his proxy groups in Gaza, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, he lost the support he had hoped to gain in the Middle East. He not only renounced his previous boasts about the Resistance Movement but also urged proxy groups to distance themselves from Tehran. Consequently, figures like Lebanese Hezbollah Leader Hasan Nasrallah, who once asserted that everything Hezbollah possessed came from the Islamic Republic, now vehemently deny any association with Tehran. Iraqi groups have similarly disavowed links to the Islamic Republic under pressure from Tehran.

Furthermore, Khamenei called on academics, students, politicians, businessmen, members of the press, and military personnel to distance themselves from perceived enemies. Ironically, this plea comes as hardline clerics routinely accuse academics, journalists, and entrepreneurs of being spies and agents of the enemy.

Khamenei's emphasis on dividing insiders from outsiders is underscored by the recent arrests, and possibly executions, of at least two of his high-ranking insiders—an intelligence minister and an IRGC intelligence chief—on charges of espionage for Israel.

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