

Khamenei's Dilemma

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 22.06.2025

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, is facing one of the most critical and decisive moments of his life and political career. His lifelong mission—to preserve the Islamic Revolution entrusted to him by Khomeini in 1989—is now under unprecedented threat.

Despite his June 18 warning to Trump not to enter the war or suffer “irreversible consequences,” the U.S. ignored him. Early this morning (June 22), American forces struck Iran's nuclear facilities, including its crown jewel: the underground Fordow site.

Khamenei's threats are losing their potency. He had repeatedly insisted Israel was incapable of striking Iran—until Israel proved him wrong, eliminating top commanders in their sleep in a surprise attack. The regime is now also losing its frontline nuclear scientists, critical to advancing and safeguarding Iran's nuclear expertise—long a source of pride and deterrence for Khamenei.

The Supreme Leader has vowed a response. Since this morning, the regime has issued escalating threats. Yet Khamenei never intended to find himself in such a position of distress. Arriving here is a profound failure of strategic judgment.

Iran's national security doctrine centers on avoiding direct war, preferring to operate through proxies painstakingly built over decades. Now, with Assad's regime collapsed and Hezbollah defeated by Israel, Iran stands exposed and vulnerable—despite Khamenei's recent insistence that the resistance axis remains strong.

He must now decide whether to strike U.S. assets in the region—potentially triggering a full-scale war with America. This would mark a radical departure from past strategy, and Iran's own military brass have admitted their inferiority in any direct confrontation. Yet inaction could be equally dangerous, signaling weakness and inviting further escalation.

By clinging to Iran's “right” to enrich uranium, Khamenei is now risking his life's work—and possibly the regime's survival.

This is Khamenei's first war as Supreme Leader. In the 1980s, Iran fought a brutal eight-year war with Iraq. But since then, it has projected power through proxy wars in Iraq, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen—even parts of Africa. That strategy has now collapsed.

Iranian society has changed dramatically in recent years. The regime cannot

survive a war of attrition. Yet provoking U.S. intervention could shake the very foundations of the Islamic Republic. With national internet access cut off to suppress unrest, the specter of a fourth revolution in 200 years looms.

Khamenei is now searching for a way to preserve the regime's fragile balance—without handing the United States and Israel a historic victory.

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