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The photo released by the Leader's official website on July 10, 2026, shows the resting place of the martyred Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and his family members at the holy shrine of Imam Reza (رضی) in the northeastern city of Mashhad, Iran. [khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir)

### Four decades of Leader's military statecraft

Ayatollah Khamenei saw dependence as red line

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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Iran's martyred Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei was an exceptionally well-rounded and unparalleled figure in Iran's modern history over the past two centuries. Throughout his life, he consistently engaged with experts across a wide range of fields, including military affairs.

#### Early days of revolution

Following the Revolution in 1979 and upon taking office at the Ministry of Defense, Ayatollah Khamenei issued a landmark directive stipulating that no military contract was to be canceled and no new military agreement signed without his approval. The order came at a time when the provisional government was seeking

to terminate military contracts with the United States, a move that Ayatollah Khamenei blocked, drawing on his deep understanding of the strategic environment. His decision was driven not by militarism but by the belief that competing interests among major powers would inevitably draw Iran into future conflicts, making a strong defense capability indispensable.

That assessment was soon borne out in confrontations with counter-revolution groups in Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchistan, and Turkmen Sahara, before reaching its peak with Saddam Hussein's military invasion of Iran (1980). One of his most consequential decisions during this period was preventing Iran from returning its F-14 fighter jets. Those aircraft played a crucial role throughout the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, supporting numerous military operations. In later years, Iranian Air Force personnel upgraded and kept the fleet operational, allowing the aircraft to remain in service until the recent

40-day war.

He also strongly opposed retaining American military advisers in Iran under newly created titles. As a result, the chapter of the US military presence in Iran was permanently closed.

#### Direct involvement in Iran-Iraq war

During the eight-year war, he played an active and influential role on the battlefield.

One of the most enduring episodes of the war was the battle for Susangerd. Then-President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr had ordered military brigades to pull out of the city and redeploy elsewhere, but Ayatollah Khamenei strongly opposed the move. In a handwritten note—now preserved in a museum—addressed to the division commander in the area, he warned that the withdrawal would be a grave mistake and would result in the fall of Susangerd. With a thorough understanding of the battlefield situation, he convinced the commander

to reverse the decision. Susangerd was subsequently saved and liberated.

The episode reflected his ability to rise above political divisions and narrow considerations. Every decision, in his view, was measured against Iran's national interest.

In 1983, the late Imam Khomeini tasked him with reviewing every aspect of the military situation, including developments within the armed forces and the war with Iraq, and reporting directly to him.

Although he was serving simultaneously as president and chairman of the Supreme Defense Council, Ayatollah Khamenei effectively acted as Imam Khomeini's deputy on armed forces affairs.

His absence from certain front-line areas, however, stemmed from a religious exemption granted by Imam Khomeini.

#### Strategic foresight in prisoner exchanges

Following the end of the eight-year war

and his election as Leader, one of his less-publicized achievements was the careful management of prisoner exchanges.

In 1990, while Iran held around 40,000 Iraqi prisoners of war, he ordered that one Iraqi prisoner be released for every Iranian captive returned. The remaining roughly 30,000 Iraqi prisoners were released gradually under his direction. Until Saddam Hussein's downfall, a number of prisoners—including non-Iraqi detainees—were deliberately retained to prevent Saddam from using Iranian prisoners as leverage. The policy reflected his long-term strategic outlook.

#### Separation of Army, IRGC missions

At a time when calls to dissolve the Army were gaining traction in various quarters, he strongly opposed any plan to merge the Army with the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC).

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