

Iran's Khamenei vows to keep up fight against Israel in rare sermon

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Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, delivering a rare Friday sermon in Arabic, defended this week's missile attack on Israel that deepened fears of a regional war and praised allies' defiance. Speaking in front of tens of thousands at a mosque in the capital Tehran, Khamenei said armed groups in the Middle East "will not back down" even after a spate of Israeli killings of militant leaders. In his first public Friday sermon in nearly five years, Khamenei spoke in Arabic to discuss fighting against Israel by the Iran-aligned "axis of resistance", including Lebanon's Hezbollah and Palestinian group Hamas. "The resistance in the region will not back down with these martyrdoms, and will win," Khamenei told the crowd at the Imam Khomeini Grand Mosalla mosque, where supporters carried portraits of slain Hezbollah and Hamas leaders. He hailed the groups' "fierce defence" against Israeli forces over the past year, since Hamas's

October 7 attack sparked the war in the Gaza Strip that has since spread to Lebanon and other parts of the Middle East. The Tehran-backed militants were engaged in “logical and legitimate” action against Israel, Khamenei said, and “no one has the right to criticise them.” Khamenei spoke with a rifle by his side, a common tradition in Iran for Shiite Muslim imams leading Friday prayers, meant to signal preparedness to face an enemy. The speech was preceded by a commemoration ceremony Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah who was killed in an Israeli strike on southern Beirut on September 27 alongside Revolutionary Guards commander Abbas Nilforoushan, dramatically escalating the conflict. Khamenei’s sermon took place days before the first anniversary of the Gaza war, and after Iran this week had fired barrages of some 200 missiles at Israel in retaliation for the killings of Nasrallah, Nilforoushan as well as Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July.

“What our armed forces did was the minimum punishment for the crimes of the usurping Zionist regime,” said Khamenei of the missile fire, Iran’s second-ever direct attack on US-backed Israel.

The Iranian leader charged that Israel was a “malicious regime” which has “only kept itself standing by the injection of American support”. It “will not last long”, he said. “The Palestinians were right” to launch the unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel, Khamenei said, calling it “a logical and legal” action. Iran has hailed the Hamas attack but denied any involvement. Tehran does not recognise Israel and has made support for the Palestinian cause a centrepiece of its

foreign policy since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Khamenei last led Friday prayers in January 2020 after Iran fired missiles at a US army base in Iraq, in response to a strike that killed revered Revolutionary Guards commander Qasem Soleimani. Hamas, Hezbollah and other armed groups in the Middle East are part of the Iran-aligned “axis of resistance” opposed to Israel and its ally the United States. In April Tehran had sent missiles and drones against Israel in retaliation for a deadly Israeli strike on Iran’s consulate in Damascus. In both attacks, nearly all missiles were intercepted by Israel or its allies, according to Israeli authorities.