

Ayatollahs' crisis of religion

By Lev Tsitrin

[New York Times'](#) analysis of ayatollahs' dilemma in the wake of Hezbollah's setbacks strikes the right notes – but not all of them.



It surely makes sense that Khamenei would be declaring that it is Hezbollah itself that will be avenging Nasrallah's killing.

After all, Khamenei's strategy is for Iran to fight Israel to the last Lebanese, Palestinian, Iraqi and Yemeni – which is exactly why Iran built the “axis of resistance,” after all. It also makes sense that Khamenei would rather not make even a symbolic strike at Israel from the Iranian soil, for fear of provoking a devastating attack on Iran's nuclear and oil facilities. It certainly makes sense that he would mourn the demise of Nasrallah, a personal friend – and regret that so much of his investment in Hezbollah's military might is now gone. It even makes sense that he feels the needs to move to a secure location, fearing for his own safety.

All this is true – but there is more to it than has been mentioned by the *New York Times*. Khamenei is not just a regular politician, he is not a regular leader of the country

– he is not even a regular dictator. He is the leader of a perfect society, built according to the ultimately rightful articulation of the will of God. Since he channels divine will, Khamenei's decisions cannot be wrong.

Wherein lies his problem, for to all appearances, wrong they are. All too often of late, Khamenei gets proven to be wide off the mark. In May, the helicopter carrying his hand-picked successor, Iran's then-president Raisi dropped from the sky, killing him on the spot. Clearly, this was not supposed to happen – but did happen. Same with Hezbollah and Nasrallah. Being guided by divine will and wisdom, Khamenei built them up – only to see his heavy investment into Hezbollah's leaders and weaponry go up in smoke.

A question inevitably arises: how could this happen?

To any observer, something just isn't right here; Khamenei's will simply isn't God's will. Khamenei willed that Raisi be Iran's president (and his successor as the Supreme Leader) – but God clearly willed otherwise. Khamenei willed that Nasrallah should lead Hezbollah's glorious victory over Israel – but it didn't work out that way. Hence, the inevitable treacherous thoughts. Is Khamenei really channelling God's will? Is Iran's system indeed divinely-sanctioned, as he insists? Does Khamenei know what he is talking about?

It is this question, it is this doubt, that likely worries Khamenei much more than Nasrallah's fate. It is this that makes him mourn Nasrallah's demise: does it presage his own, and the regime's? Once the notion that Khamenei channels God gets popped like a balloon, the clerical system introduced by the Islamic revolution will collapse, and Iran's Islamic regime will collapse with it.

After all, once it became public knowledge that not all was well with the Soviet system (requiring its "perestroika"), the system collapsed. The prospect that the wide Iranian public

will realize that the Islamic Republic is no more a reflection of God's will, no more a blueprint for the inevitable human destiny than the Soviet Union was threatens its collapse too.

This is what must be so troubling to Khamenei about the recent events, this is what must make him worry. Indeed, that according to the punchline of the *New York Times'* report, "dissidents, victims of the government's brutal crackdowns and many ordinary Iranians ... rejoiced at [Nasrallah's] death, dancing in the streets and passing boxes of sweets at traffic stops in several cities, ... cars that passed by honk[ing] their horns in support" does not augur well for Khamenei and his regime.

Though the *New York Times* does not report it, Iran's problem is not just political, or even military. It is religious – and for a regime rooted in religion, this is the greatest threat of all.

Lev Tsitrin is the author of "The Pitfall [Of Truth: Holy War, Its Rationale And Folly](#)"