The Right Side of History

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November 1979

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Words of Wisdom

> **Our courageous, faithful, young university students stormed the American embassy and uncovered the true nature and identity of that embassy, which was none other than a Spy Den, and they showed this to the eyes of the world. Our youth named the American embassy a "Spy Den." Today, more than 30 years after that day, American embassies in the US's closest allied countries are called "Spy Dens." This means that our youth were 30 years ahead of their time.**
>
> From Martyr Imam Khamenei's speech on Nov. 3, 2013

Word for Word

This is what our nation is like today. At this moment in time, the Iranian nation doesn't confront just a single government or a single fortress or wall. Rather, it's confronting an entire system. The Iranian nation confronts a vast imperial power today. It confronts imperialism.

If until yesterday only the oppressed in Iran supported this movement, today all the oppressed people of the world will support it. In the history of the domination of the West's political and economic empires, this is the first time that a nation — with its whole being, with all its strength, with the force of its feelings, with the power of its energy and its oil, with its political minds, with the strength and pressure of its diplomacy — has risen up in the world against the global domination of US imperialism.

The reality of the matter today — in Iran, in our political sphere, and in the political sphere of the world — is this that a nation which was lashed by imperialism for many years, a nation that was plundered, today — after ripping the chains off its hands and feet, and after winning its independence and freedom without relying on any power other than its own — rushes to the aid of others who are oppressed. This struggle of yours isn't for the Iranian nation alone. It's a struggle for all the oppressed people of the world.

In this political struggle, two powers stand opposed to one another. One power is the power of the Iranian nation with all its strength and force, which must be recognized and considered. And the other power is the satanic power of imperialism with all its machinery, pomp, glory, and arrogance. We've stepped into this field boldly. We've entered this arena of conflict willingly.

In this movement and in this struggle, victory is ours. We see this victory as clearly as the morning that follows the night. Yesterday, too, the powers that were standing against the Iranian nation — neither they themselves, nor the impartial, indifferent onlookers and observers — believed that a nation

could overcome such outward pomp and glory, which was rotten and hollow within despite all its glitter and splendor. Today, too, some may not believe this, but it's a divine promise, a promise that will never be broken. We're victorious, and we have no doubt of this.

First, we must consider which of us two opposing powers — the power of this nation or the power of the US imperialist government — is the aggressor and transgressor. Today, we face the public opinion of the world's peoples. The enemy's propaganda is powerful, but we have a legitimate point to make, and that point must be conveyed to every ear. And we will do this.

Who began this? Who started the aggression? Who reached out an oppressive hand? The Iranian nation can tell the whole world and can prove that the US government has committed aggressions and transgressions against the Iranian nation; they've insulted the dignity of the heroic, courageous, self-sacrificing people of this land; and they've given refuge to the enemy of this people. The US government has given refuge to a criminal who is the number-one enemy of a living, courageous nation. Therefore, they've transgressed against us. We haven't.

Our ideology tells us to respect every human being — indeed, every living creature, every living being. Our ideology tells us that if someone hasn't stretched out a hand of aggression toward us, even if his thinking and ideas aren't the same, we don't stretch out a hand of aggression and transgression toward him. But this same ideology has taught us that we mustn't remain silent in the face of transgression and aggression. This is a human principle. A nation that accepts oppression doesn't deserve to live. A nation that doesn't defend itself against aggression and attacks shouldn't expect to have the right to live.

We were attacked. Those who came in the name of being political representatives — but actually came for conspiracy — gathered in our house in the heart of our country. They attacked us, gave refuge to our enemies, and brought pressure on our friends. We were forbearing, but our ideology tells us that this forbearance ceases to be forbearance and becomes foolishness when we remain silent in the face of aggression. When the enemy attacks you, your silence and indifference isn't called forbearance. It's foolishness.

On the day they turned the embassy establishment into a den of espionage, the Iranian nation shouldn't have tolerated that, and they didn't. So the aggressor is that same power which today, using its propaganda machines, cries out in the world and speaks of the violated rights and laws of man! Our answer is, "Which laws do you mean? Which of the human, international laws have you ever respected during this time with regard to the oppressed nations — including ourselves?"

Today, the executioner of this nation enjoys the protection of the US government. This nation will never forgive that government.

So we were attacked, and we didn't attack first. They attacked us, gave refuge to our executioner, and set their mercenaries to spy on us. We've responded to an assault with a counterassault, and we will continue to do so. And let the world know that we haven't separated ourselves from our ideology. It's Islam that tells us what to do. It's Islam that gives us life. It's Islam that drives us to confront the aggressors. And it's Islam that will, in the end, bring down the enemy of the world's oppressed. That is, global, devouring imperialism.

This nation has many supporters and many backers. This nation has many crushing weapons. Don't say that the US's weapons are more modern. I don't speak of material weapons or firepower. I

speak of the weapon of the fire of the wrath of human beings and nations. And how beautiful, how eloquent, how profound, is that saying of our Imam that nations are boundless oceans, and the oceans are connected to one another.

O captains of the rotting ships that sail to and fro upon these boundless oceans; O captains of the boats headed for defeat! Know that if this boundless ocean is stirred into a storm, if the wrath of nations and human beings is roused and set ablaze, these ships will be shattered into splinters, and you, the tyrannical captains, will be drowned. We, with our legitimate words, with the proof of our sincerity and our righteousness, will bring this boundless ocean to a boil. We'll make the nations understand who the bloodthirsty oppressors of this age truly are.

In the heart of the US itself, and in the lands that live in that same manner, there are countless deprived human beings. We'll convey our message to them. We, with the oppressed state we are in, with our sacrifice, and with our human power, which is superior to any other power, will force our enemy to retreat. We'll stir the ocean of human wrath into a storm. The nations are with us. If the governments and the heads of the reactionary regimes have been bought by our enemy and are his property, the nations are still with us and are our brothers. We'll call on them for help. We'll clip the wings of our treacherous enemy in this region and in the world. We'll spread the anti-imperialist movement throughout the globe. But this isn't the only force of this nation. Our nation doesn't rely solely on the force of the brotherly feelings of other Muslim and non-Muslim nations. That's a great weapon, but we have other weapons too. We have other weapons too.

Our first weapon is each and every person in our nation. We'll arm this nation. Don't underestimate our nation! The day the Imam wills it, and in that same order, in that same manner, and in that same arrangement that the Imam decrees, this nation will be mobilized from first to last. That day will be the day of the death of the power of imperialism, and it will be the day its buried in this land.

My brothers and sisters! We stand at a sensitive point in the history of Iran. Indeed, it's a sensitive point in the history of the world. We've become the axis of history. The future of history is looking at us. The future of history speaks of us. Today, we can determine the destiny of the weak, oppressed nations. We ourselves who are in the middle of the scene and at the center of events don't feel the heat of the battlefield. But the onlookers who are looking from afar, the observers across the span of history, feel the importance of these moments fully. We must stand firmly. The future of the oppressed in subjugated lands and the future of Iran depend on the resistance of our nation. We must continue this resistance with our whole being.

From Martyr Imam Khamenei's speech on November 1979 outside of former US embassy

Memorable Frame



The key to your freedom lies with those who have given shelter to criminals!

On April 14, 1980, less than six months after Iranian students seized the US embassy and uncovered documents revealing America's conspiracies and actions against the Islamic Revolution and its government, Imam Khamenei visited the detained embassy staff.

John Limbert, a foreign service officer at the US embassy in Tehran who spoke fluent Persian, met and spoke with Imam Khamenei that day.

During their conversation, Limbert repeatedly tried to express his dissatisfaction with his detention through sarcasm and indirect complaints, until Imam Khamenei finally responded with an interesting remark.

Limbert said: "One problem with Iran is that its people are too polite... When a guest comes, they don't want the guest to leave at all. They keep trying to make their guest stay... This excessive politeness makes a person uncomfortable."

Imam Khamenei, a man who had devoted his youth to fighting the repressive Pahlavi regime and had spent long years away from his family due to exile and imprisonment under that regime, replied:

"Of course, these people [the students] do not want you to stay here at all. On the contrary, as far as I know, both the young people [the students] and the entire Iranian nation—because these young people are not acting on their own; they are, in fact, a reflection of the people's sentiments—do not want you to be here. Quite the opposite: they want you to leave as soon as possible. The only thing is that the key to this is not in their hands, nor is it in ours. It is in the hands of those who refuse to respond to the legitimate demand of a nation... I think any fair-minded person can understand this. He [Mohammad Reza Pahlavi] is a criminal. He must come here and stand trial."

These words clearly reflected the sentiments of the Iranian youth who had opened the embassy gates and taken control of the building. From 1953 to 1979, under the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, an entire generation of Muslim Iranians was imprisoned, tortured, martyred, and deprived of its national dignity. By granting Mohammad Reza Pahlavi refuge, the United States demonstrated that it had been behind all those events.

The People Rise Up

Should any event befall this country, Almighty God will raise these people to confront it. The people will be the ones who will stop it.

Martyr Khamenei
Feb. 1, 2026







Each year on Nov. 4 — the anniversary of Iranian university students seizing the former US embassy in Tehran — Iranians observe National Students' Day and the National Day of Fighting Global Arrogance. Across the country, they take to the streets to express their resistance to Arrogant Powers and to American interference.

Opinion

Seizure of US Embassy in 1979: Rational or impulsive?



In the case of the seizure of the Spy Den (US Embassy), the American side constantly insists that the existence and activities of US Embassy in Iran were normal. Accordingly, they describe the movement of the Iranian university students who seized the Spy Den as being wild, irrational, and in violation of international laws. Dr. Foad Izadi, Associate Professor of American Studies at Tehran Univ., discusses this issue.

In international law, we have the Vienna Convention of 1963. This Convention defines matters relating to embassies. Article 40 of the Convention provides immunity for embassies and consulates. For this reason, when we talk about the physical immunity of embassies or the immunity of diplomats – diplomats fall under Article 31 of the Convention – diplomats are covered in one article and the location of embassies are covered in a separate article. When talking about this immunity, we make reference to Articles 40 and 31. However, the Convention also has Article 41 that says when a country receives this immunity it must observe two matters.

The first thing is respecting the laws of the host country. So, even though an embassy has immunity, this does not mean that it can violate the laws of the host country. We can't violate the laws and have immunity at the same time. The second point is that they should not interfere in the host country's internal affairs. And this is also an important point that is included in Article 41 of the Vienna Convention of 1963. With regard to the Spy Den, the Americans had been violating Article 41 for many years. That is, they violated Iran's laws and interfered in the country's internal affairs far more than what is considered to be just interference.

First of all, they staged a coup d'état in 1952 and changed the government of Iran, which is a greater crime than interfering in a country's internal affairs. If one reads all these memoirs of the US ambassadors who were here those years or the documents found in the Spy Den, there are hundreds and thousands of documents that prove their interference in Iran's internal affairs. So, we can see that the Americans were not abiding by the Vienna Convention of 1963. They have not abided by it for years. They were not in the Convention. And when you violate the Convention in such an extensive manner, it is no longer possible to tell others that they should implement Article 40 or Article 31 of the Convention.

Yes, attacking an embassy is an offence. This is covered in Articles 31 and 40 of the Convention. However, that building was not an embassy. It was being used as a spy den for many years according

to the thousands of documents that are proof of this. This is the first point, not the second one. Plus, what the students did was not out of excitement. It was a very rational move. Why? Because they were preventing the violation of that same Convention. In other words, when you are sure that the Americans are violating international laws, preventing the violation of those laws is not something that is irrational or something that is done due to excitement.

One might ask, "Why didn't the government do it? Why did students do it?" Well yes, perhaps the government should have taken some measures in this regard as well. But in the first months after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian government was not a very strong government. Because of the developments due to the Revolution, it may not have been able to implement its duties in this area in a proper fashion. Actually, this idea that sometimes ordinary citizens can enforce a law is one of the principles that is given attention to and recognized in the US itself, in all states and with no exception. It is called "citizen's arrest." This means that if you see someone doing something illegal and the police are not around, or even if they are, you can intervene and prevent that crime. This means a "citizen," a national of that country, can "arrest" or seize someone with legal authority. Who can they arrest? The perpetrators of the crime. What did the students do? They arrested the American spies in Tehran. They conducted a "citizen's arrest," as the Americans would call it. What the students did here was in relation to the US. Now this may not be an issue in other countries. The Americans claim that their embassy is their territory. If that embassy was American territory, then actually US laws were in place there and "citizen's arrest" took place there. The work of the spies who were carrying out destructive activities against Iranian and international laws under the guise of diplomacy was brought to an end. You must be aware of this fact that in that same year, Dr. Richard Falk – a professor at Princeton University who is still alive to this day – wrote an article covering the concepts I just talked about. In a way, he supported the action of the students, although he also paid the price for doing so and was harassed very much because he had stated this as an American citizen inside the US.

In the end, what the students did was very important from a rational, legal, political point of view. That is why Imam Khomeini (ra) described the capture of the Spy Den as being the "Second Revolution", which was more important than the first Revolution. This is because in the first Revolution the American puppets in Iran were fired, [but] that big idol was still present in Iran. It had an office. It had a Spy Den. The Second Revolution was greater since it destroyed the big idol and expelled it from Iran. In my opinion, if the Den had not been captured, a repetition of the coup d'état that took place on August 19, 1953 was something that would not have been unexpected to happen again. Anyway, the Americans supported the Shah's regime until the very last moment. After the collapse of the Shah's regime, they continued to support him 100 percent until the last moment, until the moment of his death. There was a difference of opinion in the US government between the US Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was Carter's national security advisor. Brzezinski believed that the Shah should be supported until the very last moment, while Vance had doubts about this. But in the end, Carter agreed with Brzezinski's opinion. He always agreed with Brzezinski whenever there was disagreement over a matter. The 4th of November should therefore be commemorated because of the extremely important event that took place on that day.

Narrating the Art



They fed the documents into the shredder believing they were burying the truth. Strips of paper, cut thin and crossed, meant for the incinerator, meant for silence.

But the revolutionary students were faster than the machines. They gathered the shreds by the handful and began the patient, painstaking work of putting them back together — strip against strip, line against line, until the fragments surrendered what they had been designed to hide.

And when the picture finally came into view, it was not a picture the United States wanted anyone to see.

There were the conspiracies. There were the plans. There were the names of the men who had been bought, the networks that had been built, the operations that had been drawn up against a nation that had only just taken its future into its own hands. The Spy Den had been keeping its own record of its crimes — and now that record lay open on the table before the Iranian people.

This is what the art before you holds: the moment the shredder failed. The moment the truth, cut into a thousand pieces, refused to die. The strips of paper in this image are not debris — they are testimony. Every fragment is a sentence the United States had hoped to erase. Every reconstructed page is a confession it never intended to make.

That is why November 4 is more than a date on the calendar. It is the day the Iranian nation proved that no shredder is deep enough, no secrecy strong enough, to bury what has been done. The documents spoke then. They speak still.

A Word to My Martyred Leader

To Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,

There was a time when I stood in quiet opposition to you—not always loudly, but deeply enough that it shaped my perception. I saw through the lens of doubt, through the echo of others, through a world that often speaks before it understands. I mistook complexity for contradiction, and firmness for harshness.

But truth, I have come to learn, does not reveal itself to the impatient heart. It unfolds only to the one who is willing to question himself.

In time, I began to reflect—not merely on you, but on the nature of leadership, resistance, and faith itself. I began to understand that standing at the helm of a Ummah is not a matter of ease, but of endurance, of sabr, of carrying burdens that others cannot even perceive.

The Qur'anic call to justice, patience, and steadfastness started to resonate differently within me. I realized that political resistance, when rooted in conviction, is not merely strategy—it is ibadah in motion. It is a form of striving (jihad al-nafs and beyond) against forces both internal and external.

I once saw politics in isolation.

Now I see it as an extension of belief.

And in that realization, I began to see you not merely as a political figure, but as a symbol of istiqamah—steadfastness in an age where compromise is often mistaken for wisdom.

Your firmness, which I once questioned, I now see as a refusal to let principles dissolve under pressure. Your voice, which I once doubted, I now recognize as one shaped by decades of trial, sacrifice, and unwavering conviction.

And this is where my regret finds its home.

Not because I changed—but because I changed late.

Because understanding came after hesitation.

Because clarity came after distance.

Because I now recognize truths I once ignored.

There is a deep lesson in this for me:

that haqq is not always loud,

that truth is not always convenient,

and that those who stand firm upon it are often misunderstood in their time.
If there is anything I ask, it is not forgiveness from you alone—but from Allah for the arrogance of premature judgment.
And if there is anything I promise, it is this:
That I will no longer inherit opinions—I will seek truth.
That I will no longer follow noise—I will follow conviction.
That I will strive to align my understanding with justice, not comfort.
Perhaps this is the real transformation:
not in changing sides,
but in changing the depth at which one sees.
May Allah preserve those who stand with sincerity, and guide those, like me, who come to understanding only after reflection.
One who learned to see, but later than he should have
What pains me the most is not just that you are gone, but that I did not come to this understanding while you were still alive. I wish I had recognized these truths earlier. I wish I had supported you when it mattered most. I wish I had not let ignorance shape my view of you.

By Ubair Hussain Zehrai