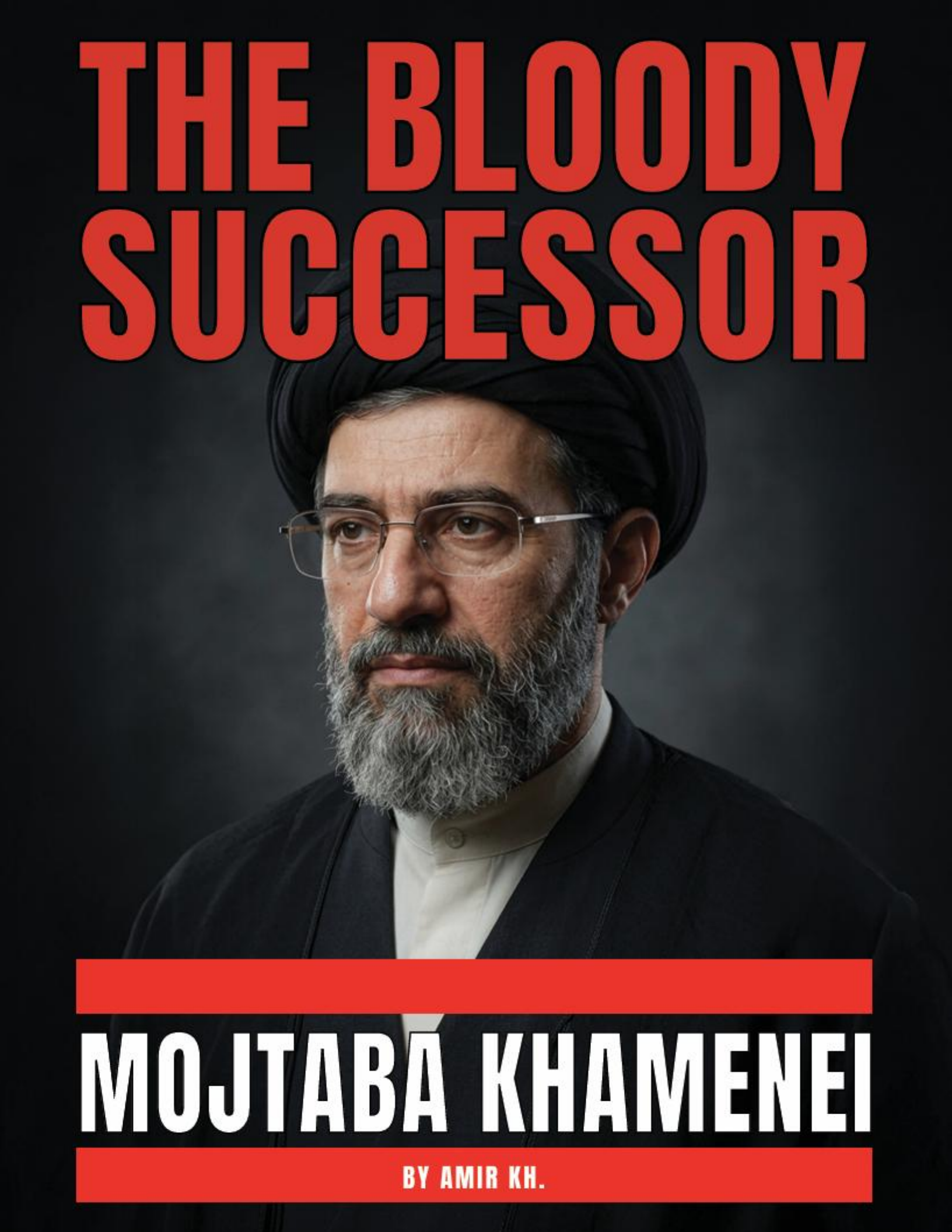
THE BLOODY SUCCESSOR



MOJTABA KHAMENEI

BY AMIR KH.

Amir Kh.

The Bloody Successor

The Rise of Mojtaba Khamenei

This book was written in dark times.

The people of Iran cannot speak freely. The words die on our lips.

The truth is buried in silence, layer upon layer, year upon year.

I would like to shout about this book to every corner of the earth, to sign it with my name with great pride. I cannot. My name will not appear on these pages. Not out of cowardice, but out of love. My family remains in Iran, bound to the same soil where our ancestors lie buried. I will not put them in danger.

I write from behind a curtain. But what I write is true.

This book exists to expose the true face of a man imposed upon my homeland as its leader, enthroned by a small faction that rules Iran by force yet claims they do so in the name of faith. This man, and his father before him, led an ancient and dignified people into decades of murder, degradation, and atrocity.

I have no hatred. I have grief. And grief is a place from which to build.

This book is dedicated to every brother and sister who fell while trying to be heard. Who walked into the streets with empty hands and found a barrel of a gun waiting for them. To my homeland, burning now in the fire of war. And above all, to my children. I am writing for you. In the hope that we leave you a better Iran. An Iran that heals from its wounds. An Iran that returns to giving the world what it gave for so many centuries: Dignity, wisdom and love.

Table of Contents

Preface: The Man Behind the Curtains

On February 28th 2026, when fighter jets dropped the bombs that brought an end to the rule of Ali Khamenei, the name of one man began to surface everywhere, from intelligence briefs in Washington, media offices in London, and all the way to street conversations in Tehran. The name of a man who, for three decades, held no official position, rarely spoke in public, and was seldom seen in photographs. The name of **Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini Khamenei**, the second son of the Supreme Leader. The architect of Iran's contemporary political system. The man who wielded immense power without ever receiving an official title.

This book seeks to tell his story. Not the story of a magnificent ruler, not a biography of a celebrated leader, but rather the story of a man who built an empire of power in an entirely different way.

Mojtaba Khamenei is the direct product of the regime his father shaped, and at the same time he may well be the man who will mark the death of that very regime.

The child who grew up knowing that the state was an enemy. Knowing that words only have meaning so long as they serve political or religious interests. The child who grew up to the sound of the previous regime pounding on doors in the night, whose father educated him in the keeping of a single quiet secret: that real power is not always visible to the eye.

For more than twenty-seven years Mojtaba has played a central role in shaping the face of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He determined elections, suppressed protests, forged alliances with the future commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, and all this without ever appearing in a single official headline. The United States government knew enough to impose sanctions on him as early as 2019, claiming that he filled an official role on behalf of the Supreme Leader despite never having been elected or appointed. It is one of the most precise descriptions of his essence.

This book relies on many sources, written and recorded sources in Persian, Arabic, English, and other languages. Some of which were difficult to obtain. My gratitude is owed to those who agreed to speak. Sadly, some of them paid a heavy price for their willingness to speak to the world.

The story of Mojtaba Khamenei is, in the end, the story of the regime that created him. He is the son most similar to his father. They are not only look-alikes; they are also similar in character and ideology.

Mojtaba Khamenei, the man in the shadows, has now attained the ultimate rank of power – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Now we wait as chaos reigns, fearful of what may come next.

Chapter 1 – The Birth of a Hangman

Tehran of the late 1960s was a city in constant motion. Its streets expanded rapidly, as steel and glass towers began to appear beside the mud-brick walls of traditional alleys. The air was thick: the heavy exhaust of Paykans and imported Buicks mixed with the charcoal smoke of streetside kebab shops and the scent of saffron. With the changes that appeared in Iran, another scent could also be detected in the air: immense differences not only between old and new but between two worlds that were advancing toward yet another collision, another revolution in a nation that experiences upheavals as a matter of course.

On one side stood the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who sought to push Iran into the era of the "White Revolution": economic and social modernization, material wealth complimenting the cultural richness of ancient Persia. In the upscale cafes of north Tehran, the "Golden Youth" donned American fashion, sipped Italian espresso and discussed French cinema. They personified a prosperity that, in the eyes of many, bore the polarizing mark of Western extravagance.

On the other side, beyond the neon lights of Lalezar Street, the "other" Iran was watching with growing resentment. In the seminaries of the holy city of Qom and the mosques of South Tehran, a network of clerics framed the Shah's reforms not as progress, but as *Gharbzadegi*, or "Westoxification." These men saw in every innovation, as well as in this revolution, a direct risk to the spirit of Islam. Meanwhile, student activists and Marxists viewed the glittering towers as hollow monuments to Western imperialism, built on the backs of displaced farmers who filled the slums of Tehran.

Between these two worlds, in September 1969, Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini Khamenei was born. He was the second son of Ali Khamenei, a 30-year-old cleric who had already managed to be arrested several times by the security services. Ali had been interrogated and later exiled due to having run subversive

activity. He simultaneously ran ideological study circles in three different mosques in Mashhad, drawing the constant surveillance of the SAVAK, the Shah's secret police.

The Khamenei family didn't come from the gentry of urban Iran. They are of Azerbaijani origin, with roots in the small town of Khamaneh in East Azerbaijan. His paternal grandfather, Javad Khamenei, was a Shia scholar of limited means. A combination that characterized many clerics of the distant provinces: great spiritual respect, but very little money.

Mojtaba's mother, Mansoureh Khodjasteh Bagherzadeh, came from a somewhat different background – a respectable middle-class family in Mashhad. After marrying Ali Khamenei in 1964, she helped build a home defined by both religious activism and traditional family values.

Mansoureh Khodjasteh Bagherzadeh

Mojtaba did not have a normal upbringing. He grew up in a house filled with visitors coming and going, and a constant feeling that everyone

except *us* was an "unbeliever". Mojtaba and his brothers learned to recognize faces whose names could not be mentioned outside. "Islam grew with blood," they would quote from the sermons of the future "Imam", Ruhollah Khomeini. "One day, we will topple the Satanic power of the Shah. Then, we will fight to achieve our most important goal: the worldwide spread of the influence of Islam."

Family life revolved constantly around religion and politics. At home, Mojtaba and his brothers absorbed a strict education: readings of the Qur'an, sermons, and debates about the state of the "Islamic Ummah." There were constant conversations about the corruption of the Shah. Their father did not allow religion to remain a private affair; for the Khamenei family, it was politics, law, and revolution combined.

The most well-known story about Mojtaba's childhood comes from his father's autobiography. In the winter of 1975, SAVAK agents raided their home before dawn. Mojtaba was six.

The agents, in a small gesture of mercy, told the children that their father was "going on a trip."

Ali Khamenei cut them off. “There is no need to lie to them,” he said. “Tell them the truth.”

It was, in its way, a form of love — the only kind he knew how to give. He looked at his six-year-old son and saw not a child who needed protecting, but a soldier who needed hardening. The agents took him. Mojtaba watched. He understood, in the wordless way children understand things that adults cannot explain, that the world was divided into those who come in the night and those who are taken. He knew on which side he must be.

This was Mojtaba’s true indoctrination. The world was a battlefield. The “unbelievers” were his natural enemies. Even a six-year-old had no right to the sanctuary of innocence.

His father’s activism forced the family to relocate again and again. From Mashhad, to the distant cities of Sardasht and Mahabad.

After spending seven years in the northwestern frontier of Iran, he came away with the sense that the world was beyond his control. It taught him that everything could change on a whim from above, by a power he couldn't reach. Yet.

Ali Khamenei, Mojtaba's father, in a demonstration in the 1970s

In 1977, eight-year-old Mojtaba watched as his father was exiled by the SAVAK, first to arid Zahedan and then to Iranshahr. The move was intended to silence the cleric, burying him in the dust of a remote province. Instead, it backfired. Mojtaba saw firsthand as his father turned a place of banishment into a hub of resistance.

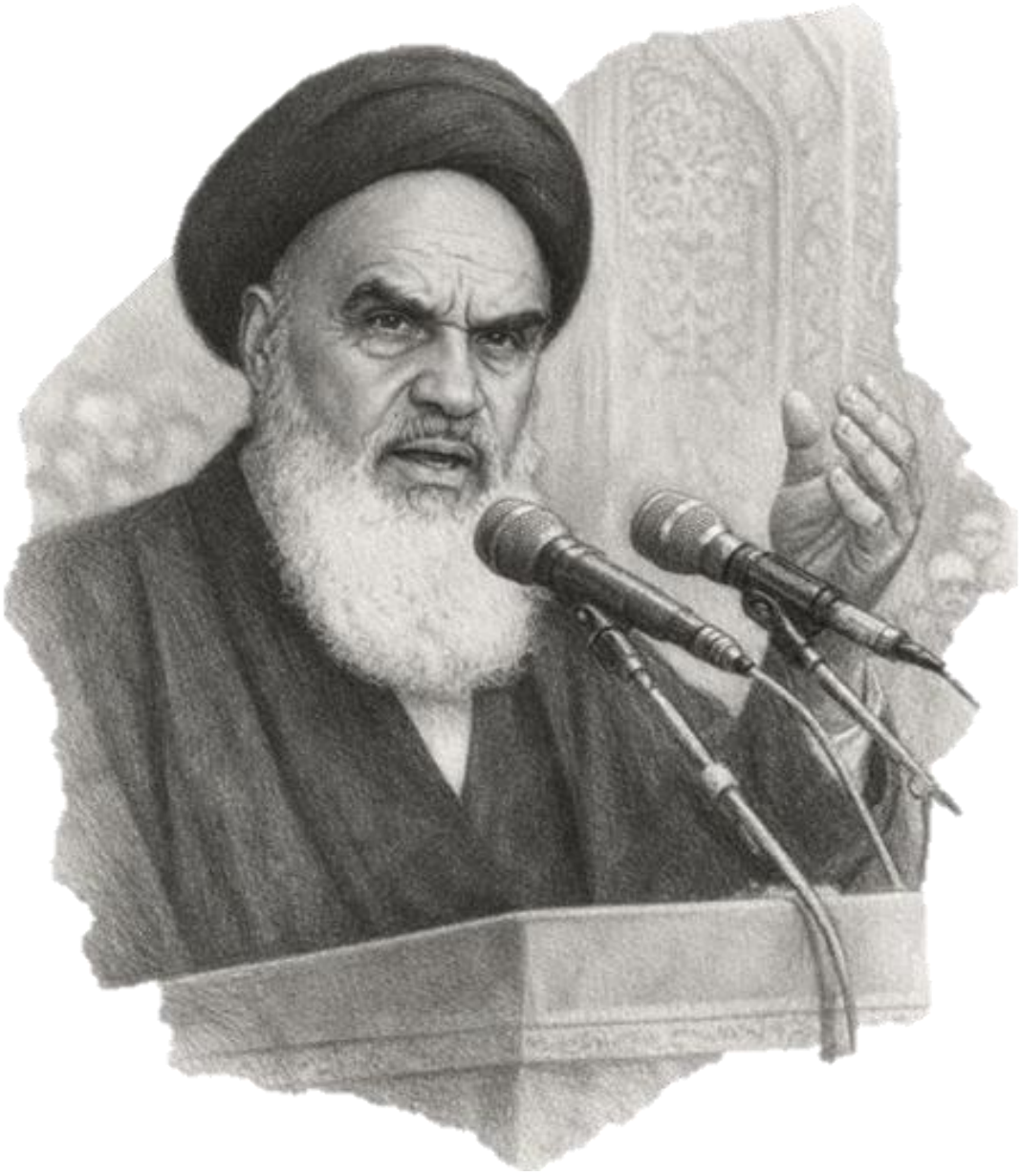
Even in the desert of Iranshahr, at the Al-Rasul Mosque, the whispers followed them. Different classes of people, from local tribesmen to students, began to flow through their home.

The boy saw that true power did not require a palace. It required a network.

From the exile in Iranshahr to the forced move to Jiroft, the family was in constant motion, always one step ahead of the authorities. Mojtaba witnessed the "Great Inversion" beginning in the streets of Mashhad and Yazd. He saw the leaflets his father wrote circulate like wildfire across the country.

The climax of this period occurred on the night of Ashura at the Shrine of Imam Reza. In a moment of defiance, his father broke centuries of tradition. Instead of the customary prayer for the Shah, he invoked the name of the exiled Khomeini. It was a declaration of war.

Chapter 2 – A Child of the Revolution



In mid-1978, Iran descended into chaos. What had begun months earlier as a series of demonstrations and political disputes was rapidly transforming into a nationwide upheaval that threatened the very foundations of the monarchy. Across the country, anger toward the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was boiling over.

By autumn, the protests had spread far beyond the streets. Workers across Iran began walking off their jobs. Refineries fell silent, production collapsed, and the government's revenues began to dry up. Across cities and factories, newly formed strike committees coordinated the shutdown. The Shah hesitated to crush the movement by force, offering wage increases and concessions instead, but the unrest only deepened. By late October, a nationwide general strike had paralyzed the economy, weakening the monarchy more than any street protest ever could.

Meanwhile, the revolution gained a powerful new voice abroad. Pressured by the Shah, Iraq expelled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, forcing him to leave his exile in Najaf. Yet instead of fading into isolation, he relocated to Neauphle-le-Château, a quiet village outside Paris, where global media amplified his message. From there, cassette recordings of his speeches flooded Iran, carried by supporters and broadcast through foreign networks. To millions of Iranians, he became the symbolic leader of the uprising.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi finally left Iran on January 16th, 1979. On the orders of Khomeini, Mojtaba's father, Ali Khamenei, was summoned to Tehran to join the Council of the Islamic Revolution. The family left the provincial shadows for the Refah School in the capital. The boy who had watched his father being led away by agents was now watching him organize the return of "The Imam." The "Satanic" posters of the Shah were torn from the streets and replaced by the stern, unblinking eyes of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Then came the dramatic events of February 1979. Khomeini returned to Tehran, and within days, the Islamic Revolution triumphed. For a child raised in the underground, the revolution was not merely a change in government. It was a total inversion of reality. The men who had arrived at their door in the dead of night were suddenly the men behind the mahogany desks of the state.

His father, who until yesterday had been a prisoner, exile, and wanted man, overnight became one of the central figures of the new Islamic Republic.

Mojtaba was ten years old. Old enough to remember the years in which they constantly undermined the ruling government, the faces of the agents who came to take his father away. And old enough to understand the change. Now, it was

his father who was traveling in government cars and sending agents to take the fathers of other children.

Ali Khamenei was appointed to senior positions. At first, he served as Deputy Minister of Defense. Afterwards, he took responsibility for the new Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a military force established to defend the new order and crush anyone who dared challenge the ideals of the Islamic Revolution. He also served as the Tehran Friday Prayer Leader, a position of immense political and religious prestige.

The reality of the new regime was baptized in blood. In June 1981, Mojtaba learned that mahogany desks provided no shelter. On June 27, while his father was addressing a crowd at the Abuzar Mosque, a bomb concealed in a tape recorder on the lectern detonated. Mojtaba was twelve years old when he saw his father return from the hospital with a useless right arm: a permanent, physical mark of the "Satanic forces" they had been taught to despise. Instead of breaking, Ali Khamenei wore the injury as a badge of martyrdom, continuing his duties without pause. A few months later, he was elected Iran’s president by a landslide vote.

Not long after his father assumed the presidency, Mojtaba enrolled at Alavi High School. In the pre-revolutionary years, Alavi had been a bastion for the religious middle class; now, it was the West Point of the Islamic Republic.

Admission to Alavi was based on rigorous exams in mathematics and Persian literature. However, for the son of the President, the true "entrance exam" had been already passed thanks to his “good genes”.

While the school’s administrators officially vetted candidates for moral values and commitment to the new system, approximately 80% of the students were the scions of the new Islamist aristocracy, the "*Aghazadehs*” – the noble-born.

At Alavi, Mojtaba was not a simple student. He was a peer among the future architects of the state. His classmates were the sons of the commanders of the Revolutionary Guard and the directors of the intelligence agencies. They were a generation raised to believe they were the "pure products" of the revolution, trained in secular sciences to manage the state and religious dogma to control it.

While the public saw the President’s son as a humble student avoiding outward displays of privilege, Alavi provided him with something far more valuable than a diploma. It gave him a ledger of loyalties. In those classrooms, Mojtaba began

to map out the network of young technocrats who would eventually help him run an empire from behind the curtains.

The classrooms of Alavi were high-walled and quiet, a stark contrast to the chaos of the early 1980s. Outside, the "War of the Cities" was beginning. Iraqi Scud missiles were starting to fall on Tehran, and air raid sirens became the soundtrack of Mojtaba's adolescence. At one point, Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein even ordered chemical attacks against Kurdish towns along the border. The town of Sardasht, where Mojtaba had lived as a child, was also struck.

In southern Tehran, large tracts of land turned into fertile cemeteries. An ever-increasing number of graves celebrated the martyrdom of fallen heroes. Worship of the *shahids*, or martyrs, became an integral part of elementary education.

Iran refused to remain silent. At night, retaliatory strikes thundered across the border. Iranian aircraft struck Iraqi targets, and missiles arced toward Baghdad. Border cities shook under artillery fire as both nations tried to show their people that the enemy could be hurt in return.

February 1984 brought one of the darkest moments. On Saddam Hussein's orders, Iraqi aircraft launched coordinated attacks on eleven Iranian cities. For two weeks, explosions and flames scarred urban skylines. Across the front lines,

the war remained strangely immobile. Despite their modern weapons, both armies stumbled in disorganization, machines abandoned, units fighting alone, and commanders unable to deliver a decisive blow. By the end of 1984, the war had hardened into a brutal stalemate.

But stalemate did not mean peace. With fresh money and weapons flowing from abroad, Iraq launched new offensives. Battles raged over marshlands, islands, and highways, most fiercely during Iran's Operation Badr, when tens of thousands of Iranian troops stormed across the marshes toward the Baghdad–Basra highway. For a moment, it seemed the lines might break. Instead, Saddam answered with overwhelming firepower that drifted across the battlefield like invisible death. The Iranians were driven back into the marshes, the highway was reclaimed, and the war ground on. Bloody, unresolved, and far from its end.

Meanwhile, in Tehran's Alavi School, a different kind of hardening was taking place: if Mojtaba's father provided the ideological iron, Alavi provided him with the skills of a politician.

In the spring of 1987, Mojtaba graduated. While many sons of the new aristocracy conveniently discovered a passion for "administrative posts" or

"foreign studies" to avoid the carnage of the front, Mojtaba followed the path of the true believer. He enlisted.

He did not enlist in the regular army, the *Artesh*, with its lingering echoes of the Shah's secular professionalism. Instead, he joined the ranks of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

He was assigned to the Habib ibn Mazahir Battalion, the most elite unit of the 27th Division "Muhammad Rasul Allah." The battalion carried a name laden with Shi'a symbolism: Habib ibn Mazahir was, according to tradition, the first loyal companion to fall beside Imam Husayn at Karbala. Such a name is not chosen lightly. It is a declaration of what is expected from both life and death.

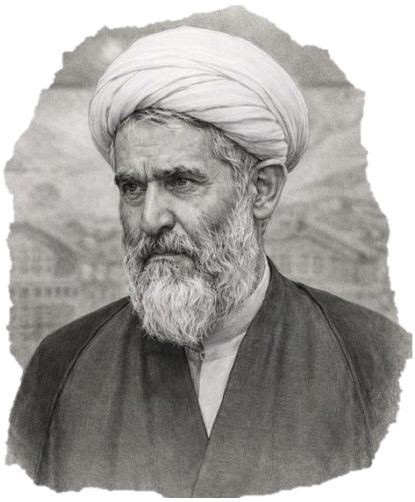
This expectation was rooted in a story every Iranian recruit knew by heart. The Battle of Karbala is a foundational keystone in Shia Islam. The ultimate blueprint for the cult of martyrdom. It recounts the slaughter of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet, and his meager and outnumbered band of followers after they refused to bend the knee to the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid I, a man the Shia viewed as a usurper of the Prophet's legacy. The epitome of evil. The massacre of Husayn and his fellows on the sands of Karbala turned into an

eternal symbol of self-sacrifice. In the hands of the Islamic Republic, Karbala is invoked to sanctify every drop of blood spilled in the name of the "System."

Within the 27th Division fought an entire generation of men whose credibility had been proven in blood, and Mojtaba, the son of the political elite, a boy raised in Tehran and educated at the Alavi School of the revolutionary aristocracy, was thrown into their midst.

His service at the front was not particularly long. According to reports, Mojtaba took part in a series of operations known as Beit al-Moqaddas II, III, and IV, and later in Valfajr 10 and Mersad, an operation carried out after the 1988 ceasefire against the Mojahedin-e Khalq militia that had invaded from Iraqi territory. The war, which killed nearly a million people over eight years, was also a machine for manufacturing networks. Men who fought together in the killing fields of Khuzestan do easily not forget one another.

Here, Mojtaba found his praetorian guard. He shared rations and the nailbiting tension of the frontline with men like Hossein Taeb, Hossein Nejat and Ali Ansari. In the decades that followed, they became some of the most powerful men in the country, bound by personal loyalty to Mojtaba.



Hossein Taeb

Taeb, who lost his brother in Basra during the slaughter of Operation Karbala-5, eventually transformed into the feared head of the IRGC Intelligence Organization. Nejat took the reins of the Tharallah Headquarters—the "iron fist" tasked with ensuring that Tehran could never fall to its own people. Meanwhile, Ansari morphed into one of the most prominent private-sector tycoons in the Islamic Republic, founding the banks, malls, and real estate empires that allowed Mojtaba to consolidate his own vast personal wealth.

To these men, Mojtaba wasn't just the President’s son. He was a comrade who had seen the human waves break against Iraqi fortifications. They had witnessed the machinery of leadership in its most brutal form: hundreds of people, including many

child soldiers, running directly into machine-gun fire simply because “The Imam” promised them entry into paradise. They ran over minefields assured that the plastic keys around their necks would gain them entrance to heaven.

By the summer of 1988, the "drinking of the poison" had occurred. Ayatollah Khomeini had finally accepted the ceasefire with Saddam Hussein. His voice trembled over the radio.

Mojtaba returned to Tehran a hardened veteran at the age of just nineteen. He was shivering with anticipation. The war was over, but a greater tectonic shift was looming. His father, Ali, remained the President, but the Supreme Leader, Ruhollah Khomeini, was fading. The Khameneis were a family of the inner circle, but they were not yet the center of the universe.

On June 3, 1989, “The Imam” finally succumbed. While the masses beat their chests in the streets, Mojtaba Khamenei watched the real drama unfold behind the closed doors of the Assembly of Experts.

His father was in a precarious position. By the laws of the Republic, he was unqualified; he was a middle-ranking cleric, not the *Marja* (Grand Ayatollah) the constitution required. With the intended successor, Ayatollah Montazeri,

already cast out for opposing the mass execution of political prisoners, the state was a ship without a captain.

Mojtaba watched as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Speaker of Parliament, the commander-in-chief and the ultimate kingmaker, performed a masterclass in political theater. Rafsanjani stood before the Assembly and recounted "secret" conversations with the dying Khomeini, claiming that the Supreme Leader had personally blessed Ali Khamenei as his successor. It was a testimony that could not be verified, delivered to a room of men terrified of a power vacuum.

In public, Ali Khamenei played the humble servant. He stood at the podium and protested with calculated modesty, famously claiming his nomination should make the nation "cry tears of blood." But the theater worked. The Assembly bypassed the senior clerics, effectively “elected” Ali Khamenei on the basis of a constitutional revision that had not yet been put to a vote. It was a gamble that paid off. The law was bent in the afternoon, and the constitution was amended by the summer.

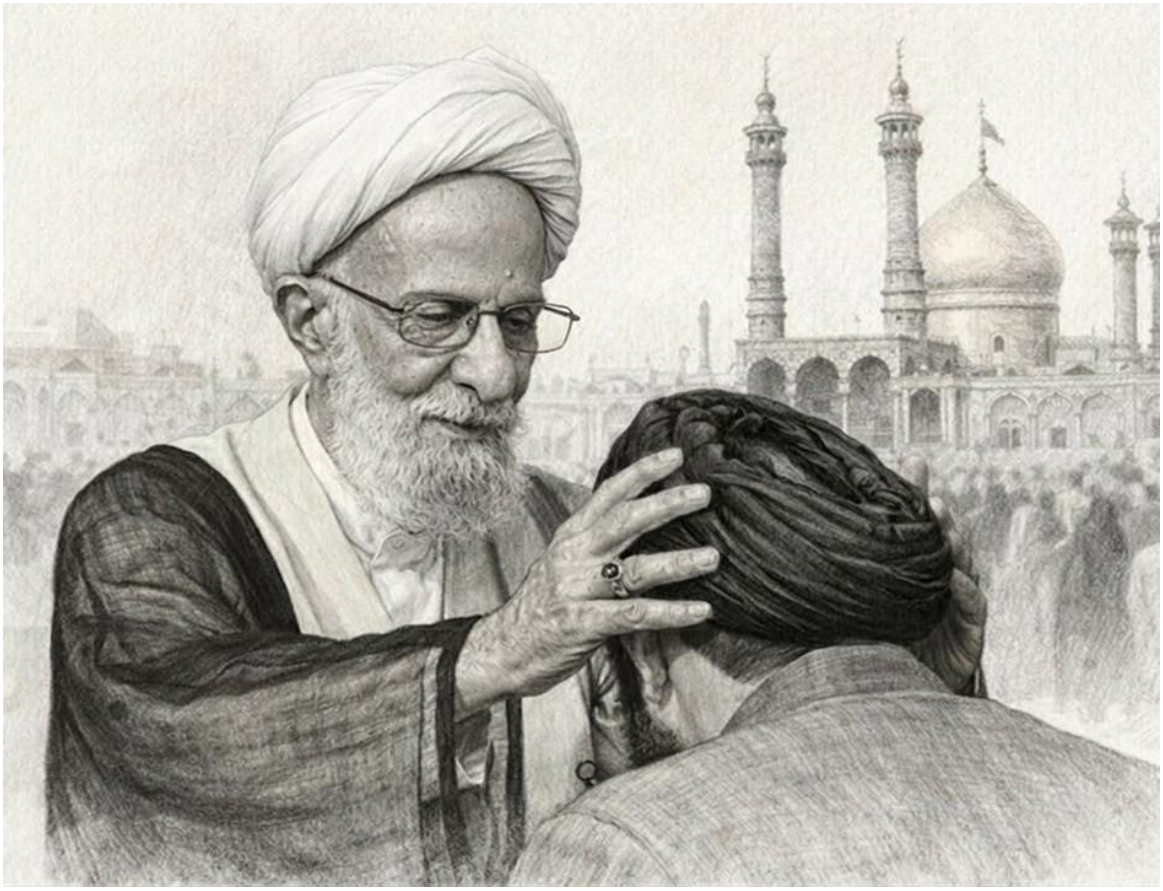
The "deal" behind this elevation was simple: Rafsanjani would run the country as President, while Ali Khamenei would provide the ideological cover as the

Leader. Rafsanjani assumed that because the new Leader lacked a strong clerical following, he would remain a ceremonial puppet.

Rafsanjani underestimated the Khameneis. He did not yet realize that the Khameneis were already looking past the presidency, beginning the decades-long process of rebuilding the power of the state around the seat of the Supreme Leader — a position that remains, to this very day, the country's most potent political and religious authority and the commander-in-chief of its entire military. It is a role beyond reproach, answerable to none.

Suddenly, the world changed. Money that had previously been rationed now flowed like a flash flood, drawn from the enormous foundations built from the seized assets of the Shah. Access to the intelligence and security agencies, once a matter of official requests, opened to Mojtaba without limit. People began to realize that the shortest path to the father ran through the son.

Chapter 3 – Qom



Mesbah Yazdi

The year 1989 did not just change Mojtaba's status. It changed his schedule. While the world watched his father launch his tenure as Supreme Leader, Mojtaba retreated into the silence of the library.

He began receiving instruction from Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, a man who would later preside over Iran's judiciary with an iron gavel. From Shahroudi, Mojtaba learned the art of judicial warfare: how a judge's "interpretation" of Islamic law could be used to supersede the written word of Parliament and strip MPs of their legal immunity. Shahroudi, a tycoon who amassed millions through an export-import business, also taught Mojtaba that a high-ranking cleric could also be a billionaire.

A decade later, in 1999, Mojtaba, left for Qom, the largest center for Shia scholarship in the world. He did not arrive with a motorcade. He arrived with a mission: to vanish into the *Hawza*, the religious seminary, and prove to the skeptical, white-bearded Ayatollahs that his power was earned, not inherited.

Mojtaba sat on the cold stone floors, his head bowed over books; he knew that in the hallways of Qom, the heir who bought his way to the top would be sniffed out as a fraud. He chose the 'Hard Path' because he understood that a throne supported only by bayonets is brittle; to truly rule Iran, one must first master Islamic law.

But every student needs a master, and Mojtaba's choice would define the next thirty years of the Middle East. He found his ideological true north in Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi.

Mesbah Yazdi had a nickname: “Professor Crocodile.” It wasn't metaphorical. He sat in the seminaries of Qom and watched the reformists with the flat, patient eyes of someone who does not need to hurry. Yazdi issued *fatwas,* religious rulings, calling for the assassination of dissident intellectuals. What ensued was the murder of writers, translators and other intellectuals in what the press eventually called the "Chain Murders.” The President at the time, Mohammad Khatami, labeled him the “theoretician of violence.”

In Mesbah's private circles, the lessons Mojtaba received were not abstract. The “Republic,” his teacher told him, was like HIV: A secular infection meant to dilute the purity of Islamic rule. The people were not citizens, they were sheep. Elections should be ceremonies of submission to the Leader. If they asked for something else, Mesbah's advice was simple: “Sock them in the mouth.”

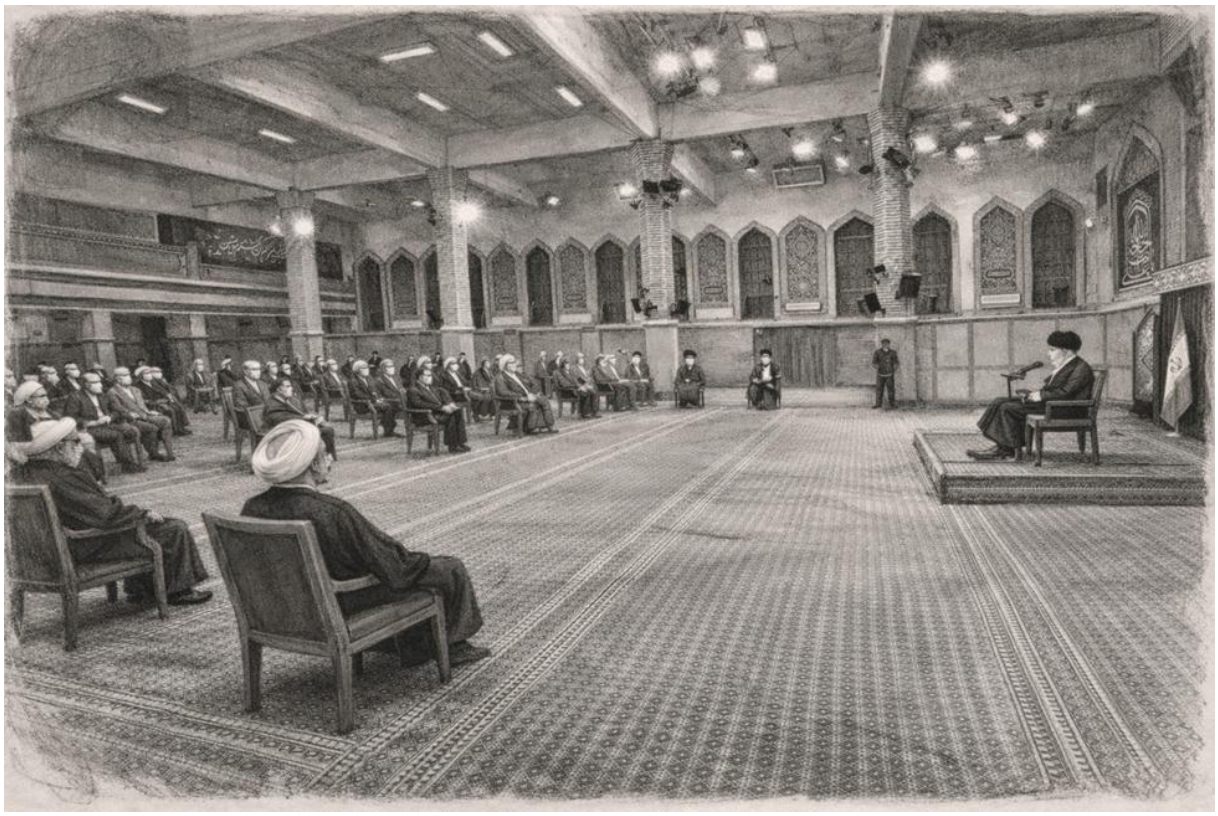
The map of the world Mojtaba learned was equally stark. On one side stood the *faqih*, or the Jurist, and devout Muslims; on the other, a "Satanic coalition" of "servants of dollars and euros" led by the "corrupt Zionists," whom Mesbah branded the source of all earthly evil. This created a permanent state of existential war. In such a fight, any weapon was sanctified. Mesbah made no

secret of his desire for the "special weapons", referring to the nuclear bomb, as the ultimate shield for the Islamic state.

But Mojtaba did not limit his education to the tenets of Shia Islam. While he mastered Arabic to engage with the Quran and the foundational texts of the faith, he also studied English, seeking the ability to communicate with the outside world and navigate whatever path he might eventually carve for himself. He also delved into psychology and psychoanalysis, seeking to decipher the mechanics of the human mind and the hidden impulses that drive it.

By the time Mojtaba returned to Tehran, he was no longer just a student. He was a theological warrior who believed that the survival of the System justified any means, no matter how bloody. Before him lay the decades in which he would become, quietly and in the shadows, one of the most powerful figures in the Middle East. But in 1999, as he walked the sun-scorched courtyards of Qom in his robes, no one knew it yet.

Chapter 4 – The Million-Pound Boy



In the early 2000s, Mojtaba had returned to Tehran, but not to the public eye. While the reformist President Mohammad Khatami captured the world's attention with talk of a “Dialogue Among Civilizations”, Mojtaba was building parallel infrastructure inside the walls of his father's office, in his usual quiet manner.

The Office of the Supreme Leader sits in the center of Tehran. In Persian, it is known as the *Beit-e Rahbari*, literally the House of Leadership, and sometimes simply the *Beit*, or the house. Formally, it is the official address of the highest position in the

Islamic Republic. In practice, it is a government within the government: an institution that coordinates military forces, appoints judges, supervises economic conglomerates, manages state television, and shapes foreign policy — all of it outside any mechanism of election or parliamentary oversight. No one votes on what happens inside the House. No parliament reviews it. No court oversees it.

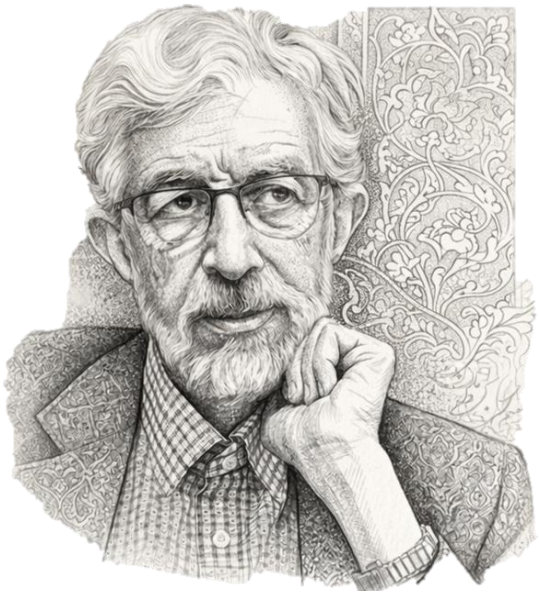
The structure combines the traditional *beit* — the religious office of a senior cleric — with a modern bureaucratic apparatus. Through it, the Supreme Leader issues directives to military, cultural, economic, and political organizations simultaneously. It is, in the language of Iranian politics, the real government. The presidency is its public face.

But access to the House was not easily obtained. Even the President of the Republic saw the Supreme Leader only once every few days, sometimes once a week. Senior generals, ministers, intelligence chiefs, all had to wait, to request, to be admitted. And over time, everyone who operated within the Islamic Republic's upper reaches came to understand the same thing: that the shortest path to the Leader ran through his son. That if you wanted something heard in the House, you first had to be heard by Mojtaba. He did not hold a title. He did not need one. The gate was the government, and he was the gate.

In 1999, Mojtaba married Zahra Haddad-Adel. Their union was far more than a domestic arrangement. It was a bridge between the raw clerical power of the *Beit* and the conservative technocracy of the establishment — the layer of Iran's right wing that did not emerge from the seminaries but from the universities, men who could speak the language of both worlds and were useful to the revolution precisely because of it.

Zahra's father, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, was that kind of man. He built himself as an intellectual of the revolution. Not as a man of the sword, but a man of the written word; He did not wear a turban. He did not speak in the cadences of the ayatollahs. He had come to the revolution through Aristotle and Kant, through the philosophy faculties of Tehran's universities, and he had chosen it (or so he always maintained), out of genuine conviction rather than coercion. That choice made him more valuable than a cleric. A cleric preaches to believers. Haddad-Adel could explain the revolution to skeptics, could dress its impulses in the vocabulary of Western thought and turn them back against the West itself.

Haddad-Adel had written a book arguing that the West's moral rot began with the Renaissance and ended, inevitably, in the strip club — a line drawn from humanism to materialism to what he saw as the total spiritual collapse of a civilization. He had spent decades as head of the Academy of the Persian Language, fighting the encroachment of foreign words. He had translated the Qur'an into Persian across nine years of labor, so that those who could not read Arabic might still hear the voice of God in their mother tongue.



Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel

Haddad-Adel provided a polished, intellectual face for the Khamenei inner circle, while Mojtaba provided the raw power of the *Beit*. For Gholam-Ali, the marriage turned him into more than a politician. It made him a relative of the Supreme Leader. For the Khameneis, it secured a permanent loyalist at the heart of the state. In 2004, Haddad-Adel became the Speaker of Parliament.

He was the first non-cleric to hold the post, ensuring that the *Majlis* would never again be the thorn in his father's side that it had been during the Reformist era.

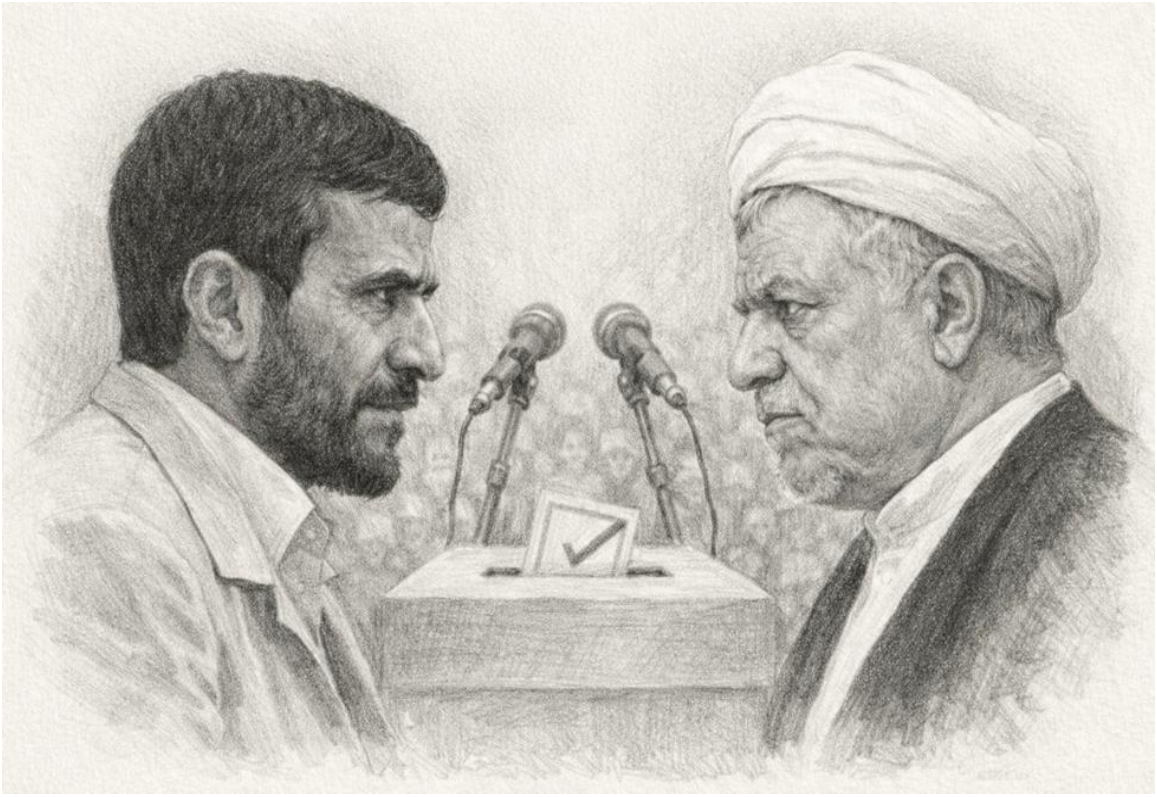
Beyond the cold calculation of political revenue, the marriage gifted Mojtaba something else, perhaps more potent. For reasons that remain unclear, perhaps a genuine belief in the young man's potential, or simply a father's desire to see his daughter's household become the nation's center of gravity, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel became far more than a father-in-law. Some believe that he was the one who pushed the young man to build a legacy that was entirely his own.

The union looked, from the outside, like a perfect calculation. The reality, as it so often is, was messier. The marriage had been under private strain from the beginning. Some sources claimed the couple had struggled to conceive. Some whispered of impotence on Mojtaba's part; others suggested the difficulties lay with Zahra. According to accounts from those familiar with the circumstances, Mojtaba had at one point even considered ending the marriage entirely.

He chose instead to take her to London. They rented an entire floor of the Sheraton Grand Park Lane, on Piccadilly, in the very center of the British capital, for two

months. Twenty bodyguards patrolled the corridors while the Iranian state footed the bill. Zahra underwent fertility treatment. In 2007, she gave birth to a son they named Mohamed Amin. Among the carefully guarded circle that knew of the trip, the boy was referred to quietly as "the million-pound boy." The marriage had finally produced an heir. Two more children followed: a girl named Fatemeh Sadaat and a boy named Mohammad Bagher.

Chapter 5 – A Master himself, not a Master's son



The 2005 presidential election in Iran was not supposed to end as it did.

For several years, Mojtaba had been a figure who operated in the corridors of the *Beit*, yet remained nearly invisible to the public eye. He was a man of two worlds: a scholar who had studied the principles of Islamic law under the iron-willed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi and the arch-conservative Mesbah Yazdi; and a

veteran of the Iran–Iraq war, a man who spoke the language of the Revolutionary Guards.

But as the Islamic Republic prepared for its ninth presidential election, Mojtaba stepped out of the library and into the engine room. It was here that he would execute the most daring political maneuver in his life so far: the transformation of a mayor into a national titan.

The expected order of things was clear. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the religious billionaire and pragmatic patriarch who had practically crowned his father, was supposed to return to the presidency. He enjoyed a rare breadth of support that defied the usual factional lines. While he was a conservative at heart, the reformist alliance claimed him as their own. He became the unlikely consensus candidate, courted by a coalition that spanned the entire spectrum: from the reformist Executives of Construction and the Islamic Labour Party to the staunchly conservative Combatant Clergy Association.

Meanwhile, the top reformist candidate was Mehdi Karroubi, a veteran cleric from Lorestan. A former speaker of the *Majlis* and a student of Khomeini himself, Karroubi was a man of the "Left" who had spent the 1970s in the Shah’s prisons before rising to head the state’s massive charitable foundations. By the time of the

election, he had evolved into a vocal critic of the hardline establishment, positioning himself as a champion for ethnic minorities and a rare advocate for dialogue with the West.

The conservative camp began the electoral campaign in a state of chaos. There was no single "anointed" candidate, but rather a band of competing egos. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Major General and former police chief, appeared to be the natural heir. He was the darling of the technocratic right and, by most accounts, the preferred choice of the IRGC's top brass. Ghalibaf even whispered to his inner circle that he was the man the Supreme Leader would personally vote for.

But Ghalibaf possessed a terminal defect in the eyes of an absolute ruler: an independent streak.

Operating from the Office of the Supreme Leader, Mojtaba began to argue for a different path. He looked past the decorated General and found his instrument in a figure who combined the zeal of a true believer with the absolute loyalty of a subordinate: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Mayor of Tehran. Mojtaba saw him as a "pious technocrat" who could bridge the gap between the ideologues of the mosques and the technocrats of a civil administration. He was also a former student and

"protégé" of the same teacher, Mesbah Yazdi. The two shared a close relationship, and "The Crocodile" even issued a fatwa urging the public to vote for him.

While the public watched the debates, Mojtaba was reportedly overseeing the "behind-the-scene maneuvers" that would leave Ghalibaf stranded and propel Ahmadinejad into the light. It was Mojtaba who acted as the whisperer in the Leader's ear, convincing his father that while Ghalibaf was a soldier of the state, Ahmadinejad was the only candidate reliable enough to be a soldier of the *Beit*.

On the night of June 17th, 2005, Karroubi, the leading reformist candidate, went to sleep believing that he had secured his place in history. The early results from the first round of voting showed him comfortably in second place, trailing only the formidable Rafsanjani. He decided to lay down for a few hours of rest, expecting to wake up as a finalist for the second and final round.

The politics of the Islamic Republic had been rewritten while he slept.

In a surge that defied every opinion poll, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had leaped from the bottom of the pack into the runoff. The "miracle" was not divine, Karroubi suspected, but man-made. He alleged that a vast network of mosques and the Basij, the violent volunteer militia charged with the defense of the Islamic Revolution, had

been mobilized in the dead of night, ballot boxes stuffed and voters "guided" with surgical precision.

At the center of this mobilization, Karroubi claimed, was one man. After receiving an initial dismissive rebuff from the Leader's office, Karroubi took the unprecedented step of airing his grievances publicly. In an open letter that shattered the Leader's inner circle, he pointed a finger directly at Mojtaba. He wrote:

> "Despite the transparency of your positions, there have been reports that your respected son—Mr. Sayyed Mojtaba—has supported one of the candidates. Then, I heard that a high official has told you that, 'Your son has supported one of the candidates,' to which you have reportedly responded, 'He is his own man, not just my son,' which made it clear that [his] support was his own personal view... At the same time there were reports about his support for another candidate—whose star suddenly dimmed three days before the elections and the kindness and support moved toward the other candidate—and that he had even had an active role in the campaign of that candidate... I ask you with utmost sincerity not to allow another bitter experience to be added to those of the past. You are the successor to the Imam [Khomeini] who... ordered, despite

> [his son Mostafa's] intellectual and religious significance, that 'he must not intervene in my affairs.'"

The response from the *Beit* was swift and chilling. The Supreme Leader framed the allegations against them as the failure of the man who dared to speak. In a terse letter, Ali Khamenei told Karroubi that such accusations were "completely beneath" his position. Then, the mask dropped to reveal the true nature of the absolute ruler.

"Feeling the full wrath of God and His power," the Leader wrote, "I for one will not allow any individual to create a crisis in this country."

It was a warning that transformed a political dispute into theology. To touch the son was now to risk the "wrath of God." Defending Mojtaba against Karroubi's label of the "master's son," Khamenei issued the definitive decree that confirmed the verbal message his office had already leaked:

> "He is a master himself, not a master's son."

The 2005 election did more than just install Ahmadinejad and his brand of radicalism in the presidency. It served as the public debut of a new kingmaker. As Ahmadinejad rode his old Peugeot into the halls of power, the man who had cleared

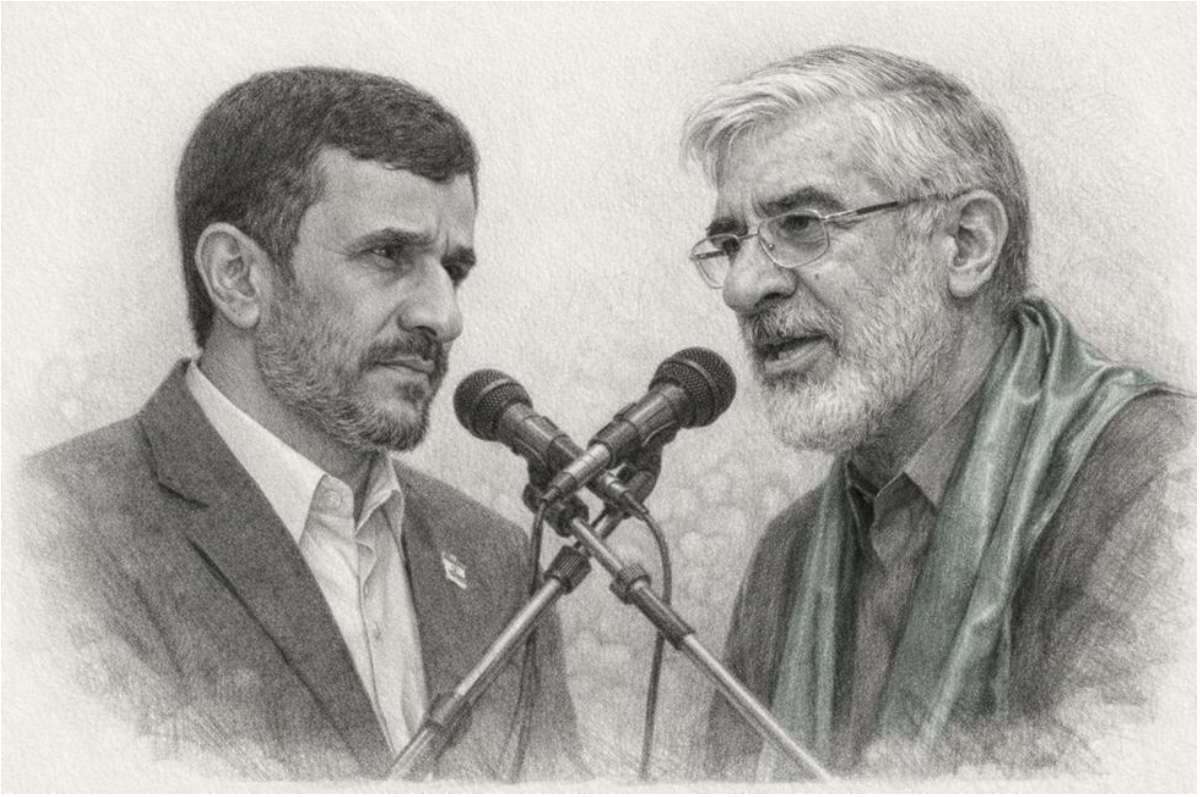
his path remained in the shadows. Mojtaba had proved that the library and the war room were not two separate worlds, but two halves of a single, absolute power.

Yet, as this shadow influence grew from a campaign "project" into a permanent fixture of the state, it began to leave a paper trail. The first true crack in the wall of silence appeared not through a protestor's banner, but in the dry, clinical prose of a classified U.S. diplomatic cable from 2007.

The document, later published by WikiLeaks, quoted an Iranian physician close to conservative circles in Tehran who claimed Mojtaba exercised a “direct and negative influence on the shaping of Iranian policy.”

This was no longer just a son assisting his father. The regime was undergoing a fundamental change that shifted its very axis. The physician argued that Khamenei’s son “exerts real power over his father’s decision-making,” warning that Mojtaba was no longer just an advisor, but the rising architect of Iran’s new political order. The line between the two men had finally blurred: the real power over the state's trajectory now rested in the hands of the man who never spoke in public.

Chapter 6 – The Summer of Fire



The sun set over Tehran on June 12th, 2009 with a deceptive sense of hope. For weeks, the city had been draped in green, the color of Mir-Hossein Mousavi's campaign, but also the color of a sudden, desperate optimism.

Mousavi, a soft-spoken revolutionary leader turned reformist hero, had begun to speak of a free society and the non-negotiable right to freedom of speech. He did not shy away from accusing Ahmadinejad of hurting Iran's image and opening the

way for a new dictatorship. His statements sparked a fire in the youth that looked, for a brief moment, like it might actually consume the status quo.

Inside the Beit-e Rahbari, the mood was tense, stretched to the breaking point. The internal polls—the real ones, handled by the Ministry of Intelligence—showed a narrowing gap that no one in the inner circle was prepared to accept.

The Supreme Leader’s inner circle understood that this wasn't just another election, but an existential threat to the very foundations of the Islamic Republic, and the Khamenei family power. The country had seen reformist leaders before, but Mousavi had pushed the boundaries too far for the state to tolerate. He wasn't just asking for a seat at the table. He was about to flip the table over.

While the voters were still standing in the cool evening air of North Tehran, waiting to cast their ballots, the "engine room" was already at work.

Mojtaba had seen this movie before. Just four years prior, he had pivoted the state’s weight behind a dark horse. But 2009 was different. This time, it was about the survival of the system.

Sources close to the security apparatus would later describe a frantic series of meetings in the hours before the polls closed. Mojtaba knew that if the count went

to a second round, the momentum of the "Green Wave" might become an unstoppable flood.

The order went out: the "miracle" would happen tonight.

While millions were still standing in line, and before the polls had even officially closed, IRNA, the state-run news agency, flashed a bulletin that sent a shockwave through the country. It declared Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the "definite winner." It was a glitch in the matrix. The announcement of victory for a race that was still being run.

Inside his campaign headquarters, Mousavi realized the game was already fixed. He didn't wait for the morning. At 11:15 PM, he walked before a forest of microphones and cameras. He announced that based on his own campaign's monitoring of the districts, he was the definite winner by a wide margin. He warned the nation not to be fooled by the "theatrical" results about to be broadcast. For a moment, Iran had two presidents.

As the clock struck midnight and the polls finally closed, the Ministry of Interior, led by Ahmadinejad's close ally and former IRGC commander Sadeq Mahsouli, shut the doors. Reformist observers, legally entitled to observe the count, were kicked out of the counting centers. The Ministry began releasing "preliminary"

results in massive, improbable blocks of millions. From the first million to the forty-millionth, the ratio never wavered: Ahmadinejad was held at a constant, unshakeable 62%.

By the pre-dawn hours of June 13th, the maneuver was complete. The Ministry announced that with over two-thirds of the ballots "counted," the result was final. In a country where every ballot is hand-marked and many must be transported by mule or jeep from remote mountain villages, the regime had supposedly tallied 40 million votes in just four hours.

As the sun rose, the shock in the streets was replaced by a cold, sharp fury. Tehran woke up to the realization that the ballot box was a prop. By mid-afternoon, the first crowds began to gather. They were asking a simple question: *"Where is my vote?"*

Inside the Ministry of Interior, the career bureaucrats were in a state of paralysis. They knew the numbers were faked, and they feared the millions of people now moving toward Enqelab Square like a slow-moving tide.

But Mojtaba had already moved beyond the bureaucrats. He had turned to the one force that didn't care about election laws or international media: the Basij. In one

moment, Mojtaba’s role transitioned from political strategist to paramilitary commander.

Mojtaba reportedly set up a shadow command center, bypassing the traditional chain of command. He called upon Hossein Taeb, his old brother-in-arms from the Habib Battalion, to mobilize the Basij. But there was a problem. General Ali Fazli, a man whose face bore the scars of the Iran-Iraq War and who commanded the IRGC in Tehran, was not a "yes man."

When the order came down to use "all necessary means" to clear the streets, Fazli balked. He was a soldier of the Republic, and he knew that firing on your own people was a line you could never un-cross. Reports from within the security services suggest a brutal confrontation. Fazli and even the overall IRGC commander, General Ali Jafari, were dismayed by the way the Supreme Leader's son was suddenly dictating military policy.

To the old guard, Mojtaba was a "reckless" amateur playing with fire. But Mojtaba had his father’s ear and the Basij’s absolute loyalty. Fazli was sidelined, and Mojtaba took the reins. He gave the order that the regular police had been too terrified to give: Release the motorbikes.

By June 15, the roar of thousands of motorbikes filled every ear in Tehran. These were the *lebas-shakhsi*—plainclothes militia who answered to no one but the *Beit*. They didn't carry shields; they carried batons, chains, pipes and maces.

The strategy was the surgical application of terror. While the world watched the massive, silent marches on CNN and YouTube, Mojtaba's units were working the side streets. They were raiding dormitories at Tehran University in the dead of night, dragging students out by their hair, and shattering windows to ensure that no one felt safe behind closed doors.

It was a "political liquidation." The goal wasn't just to stop the protests. It was to break the will of the generation. A doctor at a central Tehran hospital watched the results of this strategy firsthand. He saw the "conveyor belt" of the dead. He saw the Basij "ghosts" patrolling the wards, making sure no names were recorded, no evidence of the carnage left behind. "They removed the bodies on the back of trucks," the doctor later recalled to *The Guardian*, "before we were even able to get their names."

By the third week of June, the protesters realized that Ahmadinejad was just a puppet. The anger shifted. It moved past the President, past the Cabinet, and up to the rooftops.

In a bitter irony of history, the people reclaimed the "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) chant, the very signature of the 1979 Revolution against the Shah.

And then came the sound that no one in the *Beit* had prepared for. From the rooftops of Tehran, in the dark, in the hours after curfew, voices began to rise. Not the organized chanting of a demonstration. Those could be dispersed. This was different. It was neighbors, alone on their own rooftops, in the dark, shouting into the night sky with no crowd to hide in and no leader to follow. They were shouting a name. A name that four years earlier almost no Iranian outside the inner circle had ever heard:

> *"Mojtaba, be-miry, Rahbari-ro na-biny!"*
>
> *(Mojtaba, may you die; so you never see the Leadership!)*

The son who had spent his entire life perfecting his invisibility had, in a single summer, become the most hated name in Iran.

The cost of silencing those voices remains unknown. The government officially admitted to 36 deaths, but the Green Movement documented 72 names, a symbolic figure mirroring the martyrs of Karbala. Human rights groups, tracking clandestine burials, estimate the toll exceeded 110. At the time, these numbers were a moral

earthquake that fractured the regime's conscience. Yet, they would eventually be dwarfed by the industrial-scale violence of later years, especially the cost in blood required to suppress the nationwide protests of 2026.

Mojtaba had won the battle for the streets, but the victory left behind scorched earth. While the Green Movement's momentum was broken, the regime's most potent weapon, its legitimacy among the masses, was lying in the gutter alongside the spent shell casings of the Basij.

Nevertheless, Mojtaba had proven his embrace of his tutor's ideas: the political philosophy of "The Crocodile." Elections were un-Islamic and should be no more than a symbolic approval of the Supreme Leader. The Iranian people were sheep who needed to be disciplined.

After 2009, Mojtaba's position within the *Beit* underwent a change that was not announced and not officially acknowledged, but was visible to everyone who operated inside the machinery of the Islamic Republic.

A decade later, the U.S. Treasury Department, in a sanctions order, would choose its words carefully: Mojtaba, it stated, "represents the Supreme Leader in an official capacity, despite never having been elected or appointed to a government position," and that the Leader had "delegated part of his leadership responsibilities" to his son.

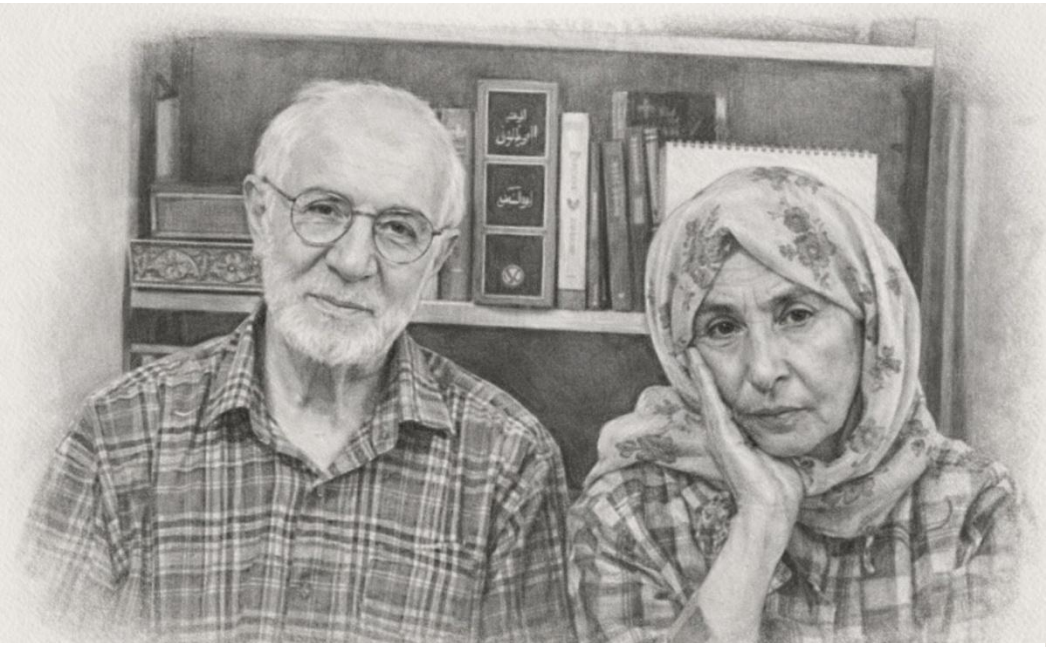
A former official at the state television network, Mohammad Sarafraz, wrote about this structure in detail. From 2009, he described, Mojtaba assembled a group of senior security-sector managers inside the *Beit-e Rahbari* that functioned, in Sarafraz's words, as "a state within the structure of the official state." Television directors understood that their effective authority was not the Supreme Leader but his son. Another director, Abd-ol-Ali Askari, acknowledged maintaining direct and urgent contacts with Mojtaba, bypassing the formal chain entirely.

By early 2011, Mojtaba moved to finally silence the architects of the “Green Revolution.” The method, however, became a subject of debate within the *Beit*.

The hardliners initially contemplated the ultimate sanction: the execution of Mousavi and Karroubi. However, Mojtaba immediately saw the trap. A state-sanctioned killing could have forced the hand of US President Barack Obama, triggering a global response that the regime was not yet prepared to weather. Instead, the decision was made to "kill them softly." They would be placed under a strict, indefinite house arrest. A living death that would effectively erase them from public life without the blowback of a funeral.

This "soft" detention became one of the longest in modern political history. It wasn't until March 2025, after fourteen years of detention without a single day in court, that Mehdi Karroubi's house arrest was finally lifted. Even then, the "freedom" was conditional. Security officers remained stationed near his home under the guise of "protection."

As of early 2026, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, remain in house arrest. They continue to be the ghosts of a revolution that Mojtaba successfully buried, but whose name, and the curse shouted from the rooftops, he can never truly outrun, as later events would prove.



Mir-Hossein Mousavi and his wife

As he sat in the quiet of the *Beit*, Mojtaba had to face a new, permanent reality. He was no longer the invisible ghost within the machine.

By ordering the thugs into the streets, he had traded his greatest asset, his anonymity, for his father’s survival. He had saved the throne, but in the eyes of an entire generation, he had become the face of tyranny.

The man who had spent a lifetime avoiding the "tongues of the people" was now the name screamed from the rooftops in the dark.

Chapter 7 – Everything, Nothing Official

There is a street in north London called The Bishops Avenue. Estate agents refer to it as "Billionaire's Row," a name that somewhat flatters reality.

What you find, if you walk it on a gray English morning, is a long, quiet stretch of mansions behind tall hedges and blacked-out gates. Private guards sit in dark SUVs.

Almost nothing moves. Many of the houses are empty. They have been for years. To the neighbors, they are simply expensive vacancies, monuments to wealth that has no interest in being lived in.

Behind the facades of several of these houses, registered to a company called Birch Ventures Ltd., incorporated in the Isle of Man, sat an answer to a question that most Iranians could not even formulate. Where had the money gone? After thirty years of revolution, of oil wealth and sanctions, of NGOs and *bonyads* (charitable trusts) nominally dedicated to the poor, of a regime that had wrapped itself in the language of the dispossessed. Where had the actual money gone?

Part of it had gone here. To Bishops Avenue. To Mallorca. To Frankfurt. To a penthouse in the Four Seasons Private Residences in Toronto, sold in 2020 for C$10.5 million. To a villa in a corner of Dubai so wealthy it had been nicknamed the "Beverly Hills of the Gulf." To bank accounts in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank and shell corporations registered in Saint Kitts and Nevis.

The name on most of the documents was not Mojtaba Khamenei. It was never going to be.

The name that surfaced in these records was Ali Ansari. The same young adolescent whom Mojtaba had first met during the Iran-Iraq War. Ali Ansari had come a long way since those days. He has built his own financial empire.

Ansari’s father had arrived in the capital around the time of the revolution, drawn by the same promise that pulled hundreds of thousands of working-class families

toward Tehran in those years: the promise that the new Islamic leaders would redistribute the Shah's wealth downward, that the poor would finally inherit something. The elder Ansari found work in the reconstruction committees of the early republic, restoring mosques and shrines, moving through rooms that contained senior clerics, including men from the Khamenei inner circle.

It was modest work. But in the Islamic Republic, proximity to the right men was its own form of capital, and it compounded.

The son built on what the father had founded. In the late 1980s, drafted into service during the latter years of the war, the younger Ansari crossed paths with Mojtaba Khamenei for the first time. Mojtaba, still a teenager, was already collecting the loyalties that would define the rest of his life. The two men were not equals. They were never going to be. But the connection was made, and in Iran, a connection made in the right room at the right moment is not something that expires.

By the 2000s, Ansari had become one of the most prominent private-sector figures in the republic. He created a bank. He built Iran Mall on the western edge of Tehran. He also accumulated shipping interests, petrochemical licenses, state contracts. He moved through the industries that, in Iran, have always served as the standard method for moving government money offshore.

When British authorities sanctioned him in October 2025, they called him a corrupt banker who had financially supported the Revolutionary Guards. Ansari's lawyers issued a denial. He had never, they stated, had any financial or personal relationship with Mojtaba Khamenei. He intended to challenge the designation. Mojtaba did not respond to requests for comment.

But the documents that investigators had spent years assembling did not require a confession.

The money had moved in ways that were, taken individually, entirely ordinary.

A transfer here, a company registration there. A leisure firm incorporated in Saint Kitts and Nevis, with Ansari and an Iranian-born British solicitor named Moris Mashali listed as directors. That firm, Ziba Leisure, was the sole owner of a hotel management company in Germany, which in turn had owned the Hilton Frankfurt Gravenbruch: a four-star property with ballrooms and a spa and a long history of hosting international dignitaries.

In 2024, Hilton signed a management deal for the property and issued a press release celebrating its distinguished past. The press release said nothing about who actually owned it.

There were other entities. An Isle of Man holding company called Birch Ventures, which investigators linked to more than a dozen London properties, including several on The Bishops Avenue. One of those properties had cost £33.7 million in 2014.

The total British portfolio ran to over a hundred million pounds. There were UAE-registered trading companies, a dissolved leisure firm, a Liechtenstein account and a Swiss account. The funds began as Iranian oil, traded through informal channels and front companies because sanctions had long since pushed the official trade underground. They arrived after passing through enough hands and enough jurisdictions, as the unremarkable assets of unremarkable European businesses.

In 2016, Ansari obtained a Cypriot passport through the island's citizenship-by-investment program, which had become, in certain circles, notorious for the questions it did not ask. The passport opened European banking relationships that an Iranian passport would have foreclosed. It also made his name on a company registration look like that of a businessman from a stable EU member state rather than a sanctioned revolutionary theocracy. Officials on the island began debating whether to revoke it. They were still debating when the British sanctions came down.

Farzin Nadimi, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who had spent years mapping this network, offered the plainest summary: Ansari, he concluded, was the primary account holder for a structure in which Mojtaba held effective control across entities both inside Iran and abroad.

The man whose name was never on the documents owned everything.

But a skeptic would reasonably ask: how do we know it was his? Ansari was a wealthy man in his own right. The companies were in his name. The properties were in his name. The bank was his bank. Why not simply conclude that this was Ansari's empire, and that Mojtaba Khamenei was a powerful acquaintance rather than a hidden owner?

Two sources with direct knowledge of the relationship told investigators that Ansari met privately and repeatedly with Mojtaba. They did so in a house in Zafaraniyeh, one of Tehran's wealthiest districts, and in the private offices of Bank Ayandeh.

These were not the meetings of a businessman briefing a well-connected acquaintance. They were the meetings of a man reporting to the person he worked for.

The US Treasury Department's 2019 sanctions designation did not target Ansari. It targeted Mojtaba. It stated that he represented the Supreme Leader in an official capacity and that the Leader had delegated part of his responsibilities to his son, but it went further than the political. The designation placed Mojtaba at the center of a financial network, identifying him as the controlling figure rather than a peripheral beneficiary. The Treasury does not sanction people for being near money. It sanctions them for directing it.

Then consider what a leading Western intelligence agency, whose assessment Bloomberg's investigation drew on directly, concluded after its own analysis: that Mojtaba oversaw the investment empire, and that Ansari's role within it was that of a financial conduit. Not a partner. Not a co-investor. A conduit. A pipe through which someone else's water flows.

And finally, consider the architecture itself. Ansari was wealthy, but wealthy Iranian businessmen do not typically need shell companies in four jurisdictions to hold a hotel in Frankfurt. The concealment was calibrated to a threat level that Ansari, on his own, did not face.

The structure was built for someone who could never afford to be found in it. Someone whose name, appearing on a property deed or a bank transfer, would

trigger a crisis of global proportions. Someone for whom the distance between the asset and the owner was not a tax efficiency but a matter of political survival.

Mojtaba was not alone in this. He was simply the most disciplined practitioner of a method that ran through the entire family.

Each of the Khamenei brothers had devised his own methods to hide wealth accumulated through their father’s political power. Together, they represented three different answers to the same question: how power protects itself when it cannot afford to be seen.

Mojtaba's younger brother Masoud had chosen the institutional path. He embedded himself in the bodies that reported to their father, the economic structures that operated in the Supreme Leader's name. He was the interface, the man who translated the family's will into institutional decisions without anyone needing to put anything in writing.

Alongside this role he had accumulated, according to those who tracked the family's financial footprint, substantial holdings in Western banks. The same Western governments whose human rights reports condemned the Islamic Republic year after year.

One of his more reliable income streams was control over the marketing rights for Renault vehicles in Iran, a commission-generating arrangement that required neither effort nor explanation to sustain.

The youngest brother, Meysam, had taken a different approach: a strategic marriage into the family of a prominent Grand Bazaar merchant, bridging the Khamenei family's religious and political authority with the old commercial networks of the capital. He participated alongside Masoud in the Renault arrangement and accumulated his own considerable wealth quietly alongside it.

That system required a layer of public legitimacy, and the Khamenei family had access to two institutions that provided it. Both answering, in different ways, directly to the Supreme Leader's office.

The first was the Mostazafan Foundation, the "Foundation of the Oppressed". It was built on the ruins of the Shah's Pahlavi Foundation, seized after the revolution on the grounds that it had been the corrupt instrument of a corrupt king, and presented to the public as its moral opposite. An institution dedicated to those the old regime had exploited.

The Supreme Leader appoints its director personally. It does not report to parliament, submits to no independent audit, and operates under no transparency obligation that anybody with genuine enforcement authority can impose.

In practice, it had become, during the decades of Ali Khamenei's rule, an economic empire: factories, agricultural enterprises, contractors, mines, commercial ventures across multiple sectors. All managed under the Leader's direct authority, all beyond the reach of public scrutiny. The oppressed, in whose name it had been established, had no mechanism by which to examine what was done in their name.

The second was Astan Quds Razavi, the institution that administers the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, the Khamenei family's home city, and one of the holiest sites in the Shia world.

The Supreme Leader appoints its custodian. Masoud Khamenei maintained a close relationship with it for years. Millions of pilgrims arrived annually, and with them came donations, commerce, and the quiet accumulation of land and property that accrues to any institution controlling a place people will always come to.

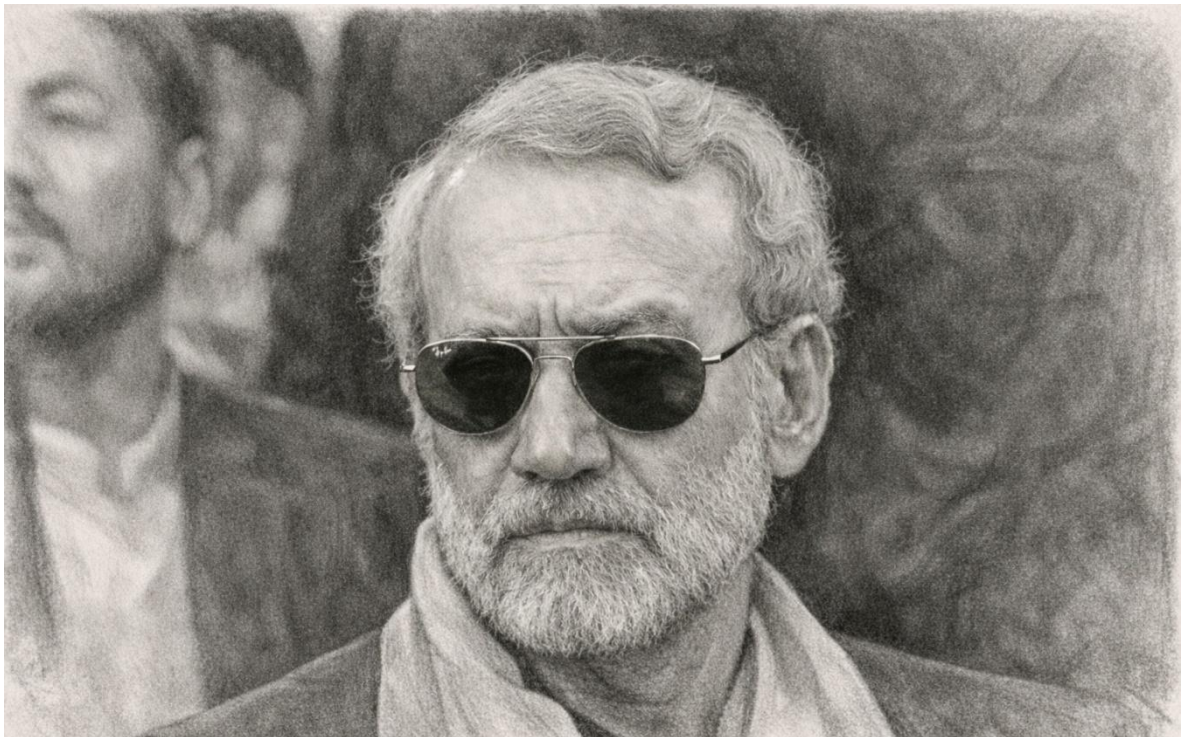
Its holdings spread across industries and properties throughout the country, shielded from examination by the religious gravity of Imam Reza's name. To question Astan

Quds Razavi was to question the Imam himself. The shield was theological, and therefore impenetrable.

Among all the members of the family, Mojtaba remained the most invisible. Not a minister, not a president, not a recognizable face on the evening news. He had built an empire that existed everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, that could be traced in its outlines but never quite gripped at its center.

It was, in the end, the perfect preparation for what he was about to become.

Chapter 8 – Two Lions in One Cage



Ali Larijani

Iran does not produce lone wolves. It produces families.

The Islamic Republic, for all its founding cries of revolutionary equality, had by the 2000s quietly reorganized itself along dynasty-like lines.

In Iran, power often flows through networks of kinship and loyalty. Brothers hold different ministries. Cousins sit on opposing councils. Fathers groom their sons for the next generation of control.

The Khameneis are not unique. They are the most powerful example of a pattern that runs through the entire structure of the state.

The family that comes closest to matching them are the Larijanis.

For three decades, the Larijani family had managed to insert themselves into almost every significant institution the Islamic Republic possessed. Ali, the eldest and most publicly visible, had served as secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, as head of state broadcasting, and for years as Speaker of Parliament. This position made him one of the most consequential political figures in the country.

Ali ran for the presidency as a conservative candidate in 2005 but finished in a distant sixth place, trailing far behind Ahmadinejad and Ghalibaf, the two other candidates from his camp. Although he shared views similar to those of the victorious candidate, Ahmadinejad, he was not Mojtaba's choice. This defeat deeply wounded Ali's pride. However, he soon secured another central role, as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, where he helped draft the Supreme Leader's nuclear policies.

Ali's younger brother Sadeq, a cleric, served as the head of the judiciary for a decade and later as the chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council. The body that

arbitrates disputes between parliament and the Guardian Council, and whose institutional importance expands dramatically in moments of crisis.

Unlike his brothers, Sadeq followed a traditional clerical path, studying under his father, Grand Ayatollah Hashem Larijani, and eventually marrying into the family of Grand Ayatollah Vahid Khorasani. He presided over the brutal suppression of the Green Movement, sanctioning the torture and execution of protesters and targeting the families of activists, a record of human rights abuses that earned him sanctions from both the European Union and the United States.

Mohammad Javad served as a foreign policy adviser to the Supreme Leader and maintained deep ties to the IRGC. Trained in mathematics and long associated with Tehran's Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics, he became an influential voice within Iran's conservative establishment. For a long time, he also served as the secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, which maintains that the 'true face' of human rights should be sought only through Islam.

Another brother, Bagher, pursued a career in medicine, eventually rising to become the director of Tehran University's Endocrinology and Metabolism Research Institute. Meanwhile, Fazel took a leadership role within Islamic Azad University and even spent time in Canada. His career was eventually eclipsed by a political

ambush. On February 3, 2013, President Ahmadinejad, Mojtaba's candidate of choice, played a video on the parliament chamber's large screens. It showed Fazel in a meeting with the notorious prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi, where he appeared to offer his brothers' judicial and legislative influence to a businessman in exchange for private interests. That became one of the most explosive public exposures of the corruption of the Aghazadeh, the "noble-born", in the history of the Islamic Republic.

What made the Larijanis formidable was precisely what made them threatening to Mojtaba: they were not dependent on the Khamenei family for their position. Their roots run deep enough to exist independently. Ali Larijani had his own alliances, his own history of service, his own standing among the factions that mattered. He did not need the *Beit*'s blessing to walk into a room and be taken seriously. In a political culture where almost everyone's authority traced back, eventually, to the Supreme Leader's office, that kind of independence is not just unusual. It is dangerous.

The tension between the two families did not erupt. It accumulated.

For years, it simmered under the surface.

A coolness in certain meetings, an absence of certain endorsements, a pattern of appointments and disappointments that each side understood but neither named.

Iranian politics operates in exactly this register. The frozen smile. The public courtesy. The knife is kept carefully out of sight until the moment it is needed.

The first clear signal came in 2021. Presidential elections were called following the end of Hassan Rouhani's second term, and Ali Larijani registered as a candidate. By any conventional measure he was eminently qualified. He was a pillar of the system.

The Guardian Council disqualified him. The official justification was vague: insufficient qualifications, the standard formula applied when the real reason cannot be stated. Inside the regime, the explanation that circulated was more precise. The hand behind the decision, according to figures close to Larijani, was Mojtaba's. Not a direct order, nothing so crude. But whispered suggestions to the right members of the council, conversations in unmonitored rooms, signals that the Supreme Leader's office would regard a certain outcome favorably.

The presidency went to Ebrahim Raisi, known as the “Butcher of Tehran”. A man of absolute loyalty to the Khamenei household, a judge who had signed death warrants by the thousands and asked no questions about the orders he received. For

Mojtaba, it was a clean result. A reliable figure in the presidency. A dangerous rival was removed from the board.

For Ali Larijani, a permanent enemy had been made.

He did not retire. He maintained his alliances, kept his presence in the institutions he and his family still controlled, and waited. In Iranian politics, waiting is not weakness. The man who moves too early exposes himself. The man who waits for the right moment, for the crisis that reshuffles the deck, can find that time has worked in his favor.

The deck was reshuffled sooner than anyone anticipated. In May 2024, Ebrahim Raisi died, or “was martyred in a crash,” as state TV put it, when his helicopter went down in the foggy mountains of northwestern Iran.

After crowds were seen celebrating in the streets, Tehran police issued a warning: anyone that appeared publicly happy over Raisi's death would face prosecution. New presidential elections were called. Larijani registered again. The Guardian Council disqualified him again.

This second disqualification was a statement of intent. In a system where a man of Larijani's history and achievement can be barred twice in succession from running

for an office he is objectively qualified to hold, the message is unambiguous: someone has decided that he will not be permitted to accumulate any more formal power than he already holds.

The presidency, in the end, went to Masoud Pezeshkian, a mildly reformist figure who was formerly a heart surgeon and a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War. Having previously served as Minister of Health under Khatami and as a long-serving deputy speaker of the Majlis, he positioned himself as a pragmatic outsider whose legitimacy rested on a reputation for personal integrity.

The Iranian people greeted the result with indifference. They understood that the presidency, after all, was not the real game. The voter turnout was the lowest in the history of the Islamic Republic. In the eyes of Mojtaba and his circle, they were merely sheep to be managed.

Behind the veneer of the honest technocrat, Pezeshkian was, in the end, just another pawn in Mojtaba's bigger game. The real game was succession.

Ali Khamenei was in his mid-eighties and his health was the subject of constant speculation. The question of who would follow him had been the organizing anxiety of Iranian elite politics for a decade. Everyone who mattered had a position on it, even those who were careful never to state one publicly.

The Larijani family's position was legible, even if unspoken. Sadeq Larijani, the cleric of the family, has genuine religious credentials and a decade of judicial experience. In the right circumstances, he could be a plausible candidate for the leadership itself. He had the clerical standing that Mojtaba lacked. He had institutional experience running one of the state's most powerful branches. He sat atop the Expediency Discernment Council, which gave him a structural position of considerable leverage in any succession process. And his brother Ali, whatever formal title he held at any given moment, remained one of the most capable politicians in the country.

Mojtaba understood the connotations. A succession that went to Sadeq Larijani was a succession that went to the Larijani network. It would mean the end of the Khamenei family's central position in the Islamic Republic.

The apparatus that Mojtaba had spent thirty years building, the layers of military loyalty, the control of information, the accumulated wealth, and the web of appointments, would survive the transition only if the man at the top owed his position to it, not to an independent power base of his own.

The logic was inescapable, and Mojtaba followed it to its conclusion. Every move along the way: the disqualifications, the installation of reliable figures in key

positions, the steady accumulation of IRGC loyalty, was about building Mojtaba's own path to the leadership. To ensure that no alternative path remained open to the Larijanis.

It was not a struggle that could be won cleanly. The Larijani roots ran too deep for simple elimination. What could be done was restriction: keeping Ali out of the presidency, keeping Sadeq's institutional base contained, ensuring that when the moment came, the IRGC would move in one direction rather than waiting to see which way the wind blew.

Chapter 9 – Ayatollah

By 2020, Mojtaba Khamenei was fifty years old, and the question that had circulated in whispers for a decade had begun to circulate more loudly. Ali Khamenei was eighty-one. He had survived a prostate cancer diagnosis that the regime had never officially confirmed, but also never convincingly denied. His public appearances had grown shorter, his movements more careful. The men around him had begun, in the way that courtiers always begin when a dictator ages, to think about what would come next.

For years, clerics close to the Supreme Leader had been making quiet visits to the seminaries of Qom, speaking privately with renowned scholars and asking a specific question: what would it take to elevate Mojtaba to the rank of Marja, a source of religious emulation, the highest clerical rank in Shia Islam?

The question was not theological. It was political. The constitution of the Islamic Republic required its Supreme Leader to be a senior jurist of that standing.

Mojtaba, whatever his credentials at the seminary, had not achieved that rank through the normal processes of religious recognition. He had studied under Mesbah Yazdi and under Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi. He had taught courses on Islamic theology in Qom. But the white-bearded Ayatollahs who controlled the ladder of

clerical promotion had not, on their own initiative, elevated him. Someone was going to have to push.

In July 2022, an Iranian news agency published a routine announcement about registration for a *Kharij-e Fiqh* (advanced jurisprudence) course at the Qom seminary. The announcement referred to the instructor by a title. The title was Ayatollah. Mojtaba has finally become a *mujtahid*, a cleric qualified to release *fatwas*, or religious rulings.

There was no ceremony. Instead, the system chose the kind of thing that might easily go unnoticed. Except it didn't. Within hours, the significance of the title had been parsed by every analyst who followed the Islamic Republic's internal politics. The regime's own news infrastructure had, apparently, decided that Mojtaba Khamenei was now an Ayatollah.

Then, in 2024, Mojtaba did something that surprised people who thought they understood him. For years he had been making the drive from Tehran to Qom three or four times a week — nearly two hours each way on a good day. He gave lectures at the seminary. They were well attended, sought-after even. They were open to anyone who wanted to come in person, and in the years since COVID had normalized remote participation, to anyone who wanted to join online.

But in October 2024, without prior notice, he released a short video message announcing that he was suspending the classes. He described the decision as a matter between himself and God. He offered nothing further.

Among analysts in the West, the suspension prompted careful reading. The most common interpretation was that it was a calculated withdrawal: that Mojtaba, aware of the sensitivity surrounding hereditary succession, was removing himself from the clerical arena to reduce the appearance of a father formally installing his son in the theological establishment. The grooming, having achieved what it needed to achieve, was being quietly walked back. He had the title. He no longer needed the classroom.

A second interpretation circulated alongside the first: that the suspension was preparation. That the man who was about to move from the background to the foreground of Iranian power was clearing his schedule.

But in the background, there was Mahsa Amini.

She arrived in Tehran in September 2022 as a visitor. Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two-year-old woman from Saqqez, a Kurdish town in northwestern Iran, was traveling with her family before the start of her university studies. By every account of those who knew her, she was not politically active. She was shy, her social world largely

limited to family, her ambitions modest and entirely ordinary: to study, to become a doctor, to live. She was not someone who read the news or attended demonstrations or thought about the architecture of power in the Islamic Republic.

On September 13th, 2022, the morality police detained her at the entrance to a Tehran highway. The stated offense was an improperly-worn hijab. Her brother was standing nearby when they took her. He was told she would be released within an hour.

She never came back.

In the days that followed, the Islamic Republic did what it always does when the mechanism produces an outcome that cannot be displayed: it manufactured an alternative version of events. State television reported a sudden heart attack at the police station. Officials released security camera footage, which her father immediately rejected as edited. An alternative medical history was produced. It spoke of a brain tumor removed at age eight, a pre-existing condition that explained everything. The coroner's report, released weeks later, determined that her death had not been caused by blows to the head.

Her father told the BBC what he had seen when he finally viewed his daughter's body before the funeral. She had been wrapped entirely, only her face and the soles

of her feet visible. The soles of her feet were bruised. He had asked to see the body cameras of the officers who detained her. He was told that the batteries had run out.

The grave of Mahsa Amini

Hackers leaked what appeared to be CT scans of her skull, showing a bone fracture, cerebral bleeding and edema. Photographs from the hospital showed blood from her ear and bruising beneath her eyes. A senior physician stated that such findings are not consistent with a cardiac event. They are consistent with a severe head injury.

Within hours of Mahsa Amini's death, Iran began to burn.

The protests that erupted were unlike anything the Islamic Republic had faced since its founding. They began at the hospital and spread within days to every province, every major city and every demographic that the regime had spent four decades trying to keep separate and manageable. Women removed their hijabs in the streets. They cut their hair on camera and posted the videos. They burned their headscarves in the middle of intersections. In city after city, in Tehran, Saqqez and Sanandaj, and in Mashhad, Isfahan and Tabriz, the same three words filled the air that had come from Kurdish feminist tradition now became the battle cry of a generation: *Zan, Zendegi, Azadi.* Woman, Life, Freedom.

The hashtag surpassed eighty million posts. Protests of solidarity erupted from Melbourne to Brussels to Toronto. World leaders mentioned her name from the podium of the United Nations. The European Parliament awarded the movement its highest honor, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. Mahsa Amini's family

was not permitted to attend the ceremony. Their passports had been confiscated by the Iranian authorities.

Two years later, the United Nations Human Rights Council published its determination: Mahsa Amini died as a result of physical violence sustained while in the custody of the morality police. The Iranian government had not only failed to conduct an independent investigation: the authorities had actively worked to conceal the truth and intimidate her family.

The West condemned, shouted, and supported, but did nothing.

By December 2022, the organization Iran Human Rights had documented at least 476 people killed by security forces during the crackdown. Amnesty International reported the firing of live ammunition into crowds. Protesters were beaten to death in the streets. The courts processed detainees at industrial speed, and by early 2023 the first executions of protesters began. Young men were hanged in the pre-dawn hours in prisons unknown to their families, their bodies released afterward with instructions not to hold public funerals.

Publicly, Mojtaba said nothing. He never does.

But those who watched the architecture of the state's response during those months, including the coordination between the IRGC's intelligence apparatus, the Basij, and the judicial system that processed the arrests, recognized the signature of the *Beit* in the response.

His father, when he finally spoke publicly, called the protests “riots,” and described them as a foreign conspiracy.

The protests of 2022 did not topple the regime. They did something perhaps more lasting: they consumed whatever remained of its moral authority among the generation that would have to live under its yoke the longest. And they accelerated, within the inner circles of the *Beit*, the conversations about what came next.

It was in this context that a document surfaced in March 2023 that offered, for the first time, a window into the internal debate about Mojtaba that had been conducted, until then, entirely out of public sight.

The document was forty-four pages long. It contained minutes from a meeting held on January 3, 2023, at the Supreme Leader's office.

On this day, the *Beit* hosted a gathering of senior IRGC commanders and clerics convened on the anniversary of the death of Qasem Soleimani, the Quds Force

commander killed by an American drone strike three years earlier. Soleimani's death had been, for the regime, a wound that had not fully closed: the most celebrated military figure in the Islamic Republic's history, assassinated at Baghdad airport on the orders of the American president.

Yadollah Bouali, the Revolutionary Guard's commander in the southwestern province of Fars, spoke about interventions by Mojtaba and the forces under his command, and he said those interventions were disrupting the security structure of the country. He said that changes to senior-level positions based on the opinions of a small group could be "disastrous."

Other commanders pushed back. Avaz Shahabi-Far, the IRGC commander in the Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province, recalled a meeting at which the late Soleimani himself had been present, a meeting at which Soleimani had praised Mojtaba as a scholar in military science. On the basis of that memory, Shahabi-Far said he believed it was in the country's best interest for Mojtaba to intervene in the matters he was permitted to address.

Next spoke Hossein Nejat, the commander of the Tharallah Base, the IRGC's most important ground force headquarters in Tehran. He stated that he received reports of disobedience and leaks of military information every day. He added that someone

like Mojtaba at the helm of the intelligence and security apparatus could help resolve such problems. Nejat was acting out of the same bond that had been forged between him and Mojtaba in the mud of Khuzestan thirty-five years earlier. A bond that had survived intact ever since.

Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the commander of the IRGC's Aerospace Force, took a step forward. He said he appreciated the help of Mojtaba's office in overcoming the problems of the air force, both in procurement and in operational results. The man who commanded Iran's missile forces was now thanking the Supreme Leader's son, privately, for assistance that had no official name or channel.

The document had been leaked. By whom, and with what intention, was not entirely clear. It appeared first in the hands of journalists close to Ahmadinejad — the former president who had spent a decade in the cold after his power struggle with the *Beit*, and who had accumulated, during those years, a considerable archive of material that could be deployed at the right moment.

Ahmadinejad’s relationship with Mojtaba had soured since the 2009 election. Having been carried to power on the shoulders of the Basij and the blessing of the *Beit*, Ahmadinejad mistakenly believed his disputed victory gave him a mandate independent of the clergy. This friction escalated into a struggle for the very soul of

the state as Ahmadinejad and his advisor, Mashaei, began promoting a "deviant" brand of messianic nationalism, prioritizing a Persian-centric "Iranian School of Islam" over the universal authority of the Jurist. Clerics close to Ali Khamenei accused the faction of prioritizing nationalism over Islam and undermining the doctrine of *Wilayat al-Faqih* (rule of the jurist).

The tension reached a breaking point in April 2011 when Ahmadinejad forced the director of the Ministry of Intelligence, Heydar Moslehi, to resign, intending to bring the state's surveillance apparatus under his own control and protect his "deviant" inner circle from security probes.

The Supreme Leader issued a rare public veto to reinstate Moslehi, cementing his ultimate authority on matters of state. In response, Ahmadinejad retreated to a twelve-day "stay-at-home" strike. His mutiny was futile. Ahmadinejad emerged humiliated, his standing within the *Beit* shattered. He was a "deviant" who had dared to place the crown of Iranian nationalism above the turban of the Jurist.

The fallout was personal and permanent. In his desperate attempts to regain leverage, Ahmadinejad turned his sights on the Leader's inner circle, eventually accusing Mojtaba Khamenei of embezzling from the state treasury.

For Mojtaba and the security apparatus, Ahmadinejad had become the ultimate proof that even the most loyal populist could become a liability. This realization paved the way for the eventual systematic purging of Ahmadinejad's political life.

Whether the leak of the meeting was intended to expose Mojtaba, to embarrass the IRGC commanders who had defended him, or simply to demonstrate that the former president still had reach inside the security apparatus, was a question without a clean answer. Perhaps all three simultaneously.

What the document confirmed, for anyone still uncertain, was that the debate about Mojtaba's role was no longer a matter of speculation by the Iranian opposition or a Western intelligence assessment. It was a debate happening inside the meeting rooms of the Revolutionary Guard itself, among the senior commanders of the most powerful institution in the Islamic Republic.

The fact that the defenders outnumbered the critics in that room told its own story. After all, the objections of one officer were answered by three separate commanders who spoke in Mojtaba's favor. Mojtaba was one step away from winning the complete loyalty of the regime's security apparatus.

Chapter 10 – The Revolution That Almost Was

There are moments in history when the accumulated weight of decades of defiance, miscalculation, and brutality implodes like a dying star. The mass protests of January 2026 and the conflict that erupted in late February 2026 were such a moment. To understand how Iran found itself burning, its leadership decapitated, its military forces crushed, and its people celebrating the death of their own rulers in the streets, one must understand the long road of choices that made it inevitable.

No figure stood closer to the center of that road than Mojtaba Khamenei: the son who had spent thirty years building a system that finally, in the winter of 2026, consumed everything it had built.

The first spark of the chain reaction caught in the traditional heartbeat of Iranian history: the labyrinthian alleys of the Bazaar.

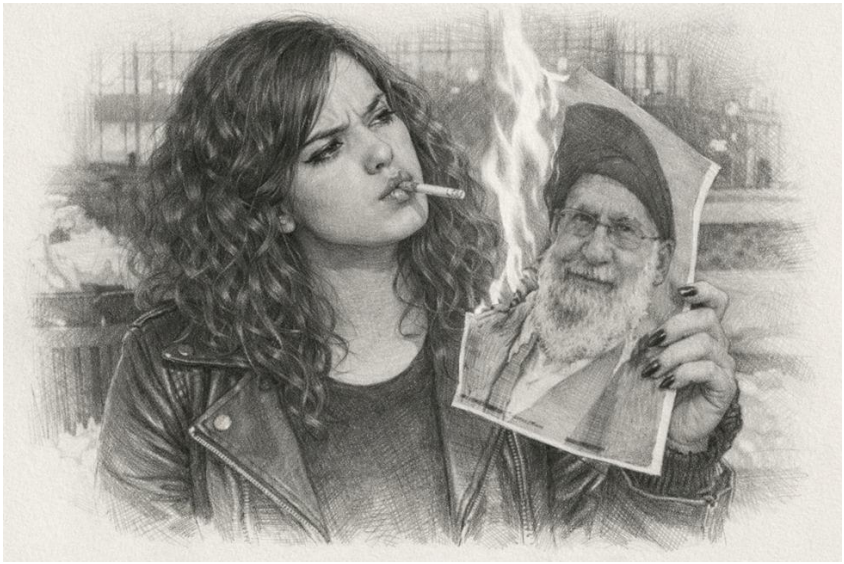
In late December 2025, the shopkeepers of Tehran's Grand Bazaar closed their shutters. It was not a political act, at least not at first. It was the act of men who had done their math and could not make the numbers work. The Iranian rial, which had been in slow-motion collapse for years, had in the final months of 2025 entered a

freefall that made previous crises look like minor corrections. By early January the US dollar had reached approximately 145,000 tomans.

Food prices had risen 72 percent year on year. The government's own statistics office reported inflation at 42 percent in December, a figure that the population understood instinctively to be an undercount.

Energy shortages had produced rolling blackouts. Gas disruptions left families without heat in the winter months. Just a few months earlier, there were talks of a water shortage so severe it would require moving the capital from Tehran to another area. President Pezeshkian, elected in 2024 on promises of reform, had appeared on state television to apologize for the electricity cuts, a gesture so inadequate it functioned as its own kind of provocation.

The protests that began in the final days of December were unlike anything the Islamic Republic had confronted in its forty-seven-year history. They began with the *bazaari*, the merchants and shopkeepers who had, in 1979, been among the revolution's most important constituencies, the class whose closure of their shutters had helped bring down the Shah. Now their shutters were closing again, and this time against the revolution itself. University students joined them within days. Workers joined the students. The demonstrations spread from Tehran to Isfahan, Mashhad, Tabriz, Shiraz, Sanandaj, Ahvaz, Rasht, and hundreds of smaller cities and towns. By January 8th, according to European intelligence sources, one and a half million people had gathered in Tehran alone. By January 9th, the figure nationwide was five million.



The slogans had quickly moved well past economics. People chanted “Death to the Dictator”, the dictator being the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. They chanted

“Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, my life for Iran”, in defiance of the regime's decades-long policy of funding proxy groups across the Middle East while the country's own infrastructure collapsed.

Student groups released a statement declaring that the criminal system had taken their future hostage for forty-seven years and would not be changed by reform or false promises.

The loss of faith was not only in the Supreme Leader. The reformist President Pezeshkian had overseen the electricity cuts and the currency collapse and the water shortages, and had failed to deliver on even the modest promise of lifting internet censorship. The protests were not asking for a better version of the Islamic Republic. They were asking for its end.

The regime's response was calibrated at the highest level. According to multiple sources, including the New York Times, Ali Khamenei himself issued a direct order to the Supreme National Security Council: crush the protests by any means necessary. The orders given to security forces were to shoot to kill and show no mercy.

What followed was the largest massacre in the modern history of Iran.

On January 8th, security forces opened fire on protesters in Tehran, Isfahan, Kermanshah, Rasht, Karaj, and dozens of other cities simultaneously. Hospitals across the country entered crisis mode. An internet blackout was designed to prevent the documentation and transmission of what was happening: to kill the evidence alongside the protesters.

What was documented, despite everything, was enough.

Security forces used live ammunition, metal pellet shotguns, DShK heavy machine guns, snipers, and tear gas. Some reports indicated that the forces even used what appeared to be chemical agents. A spokesperson from the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights cited evidence that even when using supposedly less lethal weapons, security forces were deliberately targeting heads, eyes, genitals, and vital organs. They did not aim to stop the crowd, but to maim it. To produce visible, permanent damage that would function as a warning to everyone who had not yet come out into the streets. At least one young girl was shot in the pelvic area and was in critical condition. A medic in Tehran reported direct shots to the heads and hearts of young people.

Security forces later raided hospitals to arrest injured protesters. In Ilam, forces in full riot gear stormed Imam Khomeini Hospital, attacked medical personnel with tear gas and shotgun pellets, and arrested the wounded.

In Tehran, staff reported that security forces had entered hospital wards and forcibly removed the corpses of protesters, loading them onto vehicles before families could identify them.

In Rasht, according to Iran Human Rights, security forces surrounded protesters inside the Grand Bazaar, set it on fire, shot those who tried to flee, blocked fire trucks from responding, and finished off the wounded in the streets and in hospitals.

At the Kahrizak morgue in Tehran, videos leaked by a local journalist showed hundreds of bodies in black bags in sheds and outdoor areas, a computer monitor displaying photographs and names of the dead, a truck unloading corpses. According to HRANA, approximately 250 bodies were in that single morgue alone.

The families who came to collect their dead were charged for the bullets that had killed them. The fee reportedly ranged from approximately 480 to 1,720 US dollars per bullet, depending on the case. Families who refused to state that their children had been Basij members, the regime's standard method of reclassifying protesters as combatants, were denied the bodies. Some bodies were buried in mass graves in

locations far from where the deaths had occurred, without notifying the families. Reports emerged of women's bodies being returned with missing uteruses, the crime concealed by mutilation.

The death toll became, in itself, a contested battlefield. The Iranian government confirmed 3,117 deaths. Iran International, based on its own documentation, put the figure at 36,500. The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency verified 7,007 deaths by name and detail, with an additional 11,744 cases under investigation. Time magazine, citing Iranian health ministry officials and hospital records, reported approximately 30,000 deaths on January 8th and 9th alone. The Guardian, relying on a network of more than eighty medical professionals across twelve provinces, estimated that less than ten percent of deaths were being officially registered, and concluded that the true total could exceed 30,000. The UN Special Rapporteur stated that the evidence justified investigating whether the killings constituted crimes against humanity, and called for the International Criminal Court to examine Ali Khamenei's personal culpability.

In addition to its own forces, the regime imported foreign militias to supplement the crackdown. Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces, Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon, the Pakistani Liwa Zainabiyoun, and the Afghan Liwa Fatemiyoun were reported

operating in Iranian cities. They were brought across the border under cover of a religious pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, assembled at a base in Ahvaz, and deployed to cities across the country. By January 15th, nearly 5,000 fighters from Iraqi militias had crossed the border. Eyewitnesses in Karaj reported that some of the men doing the killing did not speak Persian. They spoke Arabic. Some of them were photographed taking selfies with the bodies.

By January 19th, the government had, by its own account, reasserted control. The protests continued in waves. One surge occurred in western Iran in mid-February, followed by student protests at universities on February 21st and 24th. Nevertheless, the mass mobilization of early January had been broken.

An AP News report, published in the midst of the killings, noted that the government's overwhelming use of violence had given rise to hopes among some citizens for an American attack. The people in the streets had looked at every available option and concluded that their own regime killing them was less dangerous than the future that regime was preparing.

On January 13th, 2026, Donald Trump posted on Truth Social: "Iranian Patriots, Keep Protesting... Help is on the way." The United States began moving massive forces into the region. By February 19th, the US military buildup in the Middle East

had become the largest since the 2003 Iraq War. Two carrier strike groups were already in position, ready to strike.

Meanwhile, Iranian and American representatives met for indirect nuclear negotiations. Oman's foreign minister announced a breakthrough; peace, he claimed, was within reach. US diplomats, however, learned something else: Iran had insisted on its "inalienable right" to enrich uranium, boasting that its 60 percent enriched stockpile was already sufficient for eleven nuclear bombs. The world watched, waiting to see which would arrive first: a diplomatic agreement that would grant the regime a lifeline, or a military intervention.

Chapter 11 – Epic Fury

The morning of February 28th, 2026 began, in Tehran, like most winter mornings. The city was cold, though its skies were clear. The streets carried the particular quiet of a weekday morning in a country still processing the previous seven weeks: the protests, the massacres, the internet blackouts. The semi-trailer trucks, filled with bodies, that had replaced ambulances. The families still waiting at morgue gates. The negotiations in Geneva had produced, depending on whom you believed, either a breakthrough or a dead end.

The American armada had been around for weeks. Watching the horizon had lasted so long it had become its own form of exhaustion.

At the *Beit* compound on Pasteur Street in central Tehran, where Ali Khamenei's official residence stood, the morning had a different texture.

Senior officials were gathering for a meeting. This was, by the standards of the preceding months, an unusual circumstance. After the Twelve-Day War with Israel in June 2025, the Supreme Leader had reorganized his existence around the logic of survival. The bunker beneath his compound was deep enough that its elevator took more than five minutes to reach it.

He had grown reclusive, the way men grow when they understand that their location is the most valuable intelligence target in the Middle East. He moved rarely, appeared publicly less, and when he descended into the bunker, he stayed there.

But on the morning of February 28th, he was above ground. So were the men around him.

The CIA had been tracking the patterns for months. At some point in the preceding weeks, intelligence identified that a meeting of senior officials was scheduled, with Khamenei in attendance, at his official residence, above ground, in daylight. The

Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had called Trump on February 23rd, according to Axios, to convey information about the meeting's location and timing. Five days later, at 3:38 in the afternoon Eastern Standard Time, Donald Trump, flying on Air Force One toward Texas, gave the order to proceed.

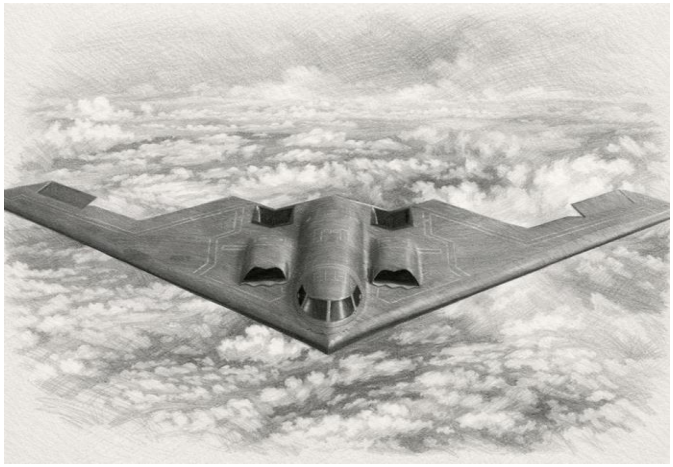
The operation had two names. The Americans called it Epic Fury. The Israelis called it Roaring Lion. In the situation room at Mar-a-Lago, members of Trump's cabinet had assembled to watch. In Tel Aviv, the planning that had taken months was now irreversible.

9:45 AM, mid-morning, Tehran. A day not unlike any ordinary Saturday, filled with the usual commuters and traffic. In one moment, everything changed.

Approximately two hundred Israeli jets struck five hundred military targets across western and central Iran. American missiles and drones struck simultaneously from multiple directions, from bases across the Middle East and from one or more aircraft carriers in the region. They destroyed air defenses, missile launchers, military bases, and command infrastructure. Over 1,200 bombs were used in the first twenty-four hours. Cyberattacks hit military infrastructure and state-controlled media.

Iran’s first response was to disconnect the Internet. It dropped to between one and four percent of normal levels. The country went dark.

On Pasteur Street, thirty bombs fell. Blue Sparrow air-launched ballistic missiles came down alongside them. Strikes hit simultaneously at two other locations in the city, to ensure success. Meaning that if the first wave failed, or if Khamenei moved between the first and second strikes, the redundancy would compensate.



The building that had been the center of Iranian state power for thirty-seven years was, within minutes, rubble.

What followed was several hours of chaos. Iranian state media came on the air first, as they always do, with the message that had been prepared for exactly this scenario: the Supreme Leader was safe and sound.

The Foreign Ministry's spokesman stated that Khamenei had been transferred to a secure location outside Tehran. State television showed maps, read prepared statements, maintained the fiction as long as it could be maintained. The Iranian news agencies Tasnim and Mehr announced that Khamenei was alive, steadfast and firm in commanding the field.

In Tel Aviv, unnamed Israeli officials were telling journalists something different: that the body had been found in the rubble, that a photograph had been shown to the Prime Minister. Netanyahu spoke of growing signs. He did not yet say the word dead, but his language pointed in only one direction.

At Mar-a-Lago, Trump watched. At some point in the afternoon, before any official confirmation had been issued by either government, he called it justice for the people of Iran. It was, in its way, a preview of the confirmation.

The hours passed. The state held its position. Shortly before midnight Tehran time, an unnamed Israeli official confirmed what Israeli intelligence had concluded: the body had been identified. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran was dead.

Early on March 1st, the Supreme National Security Council made it official. The same body that seven weeks earlier had received Khamenei's order to crush the protests by any means necessary now announced his death to the world. The state declared forty days of mourning and a seven-day national holiday.

The reports of what else had been in the compound arrived through the hours that followed, delivered in the flat language of official news bulletins that cannot quite contain what they are conveying.

Mojtaba's sister Hoda, dead. His brother-in-law, dead. His wife, Zahra, dead. Their second son, dead. On March 2nd, the final report came. His mother, Mansoureh Khojasteh Bagherzadeh, died from her injuries.

In the space of seventy-two hours, Mojtaba Khamenei had lost his father, his wife, one of his children, and his mother. Everything the family had built across a lifetime. Everything except his father's throne.

In the streets of Iranian cities, the news arrived differently. In Isfahan and Karaj, Kermanshah and Qazvin, and Sanandaj and Shiraz, people came out into the cold. Not to mourn. Videos circulated online of crowds cheering, of voices raised in a register that had not been heard publicly in Iran since January.

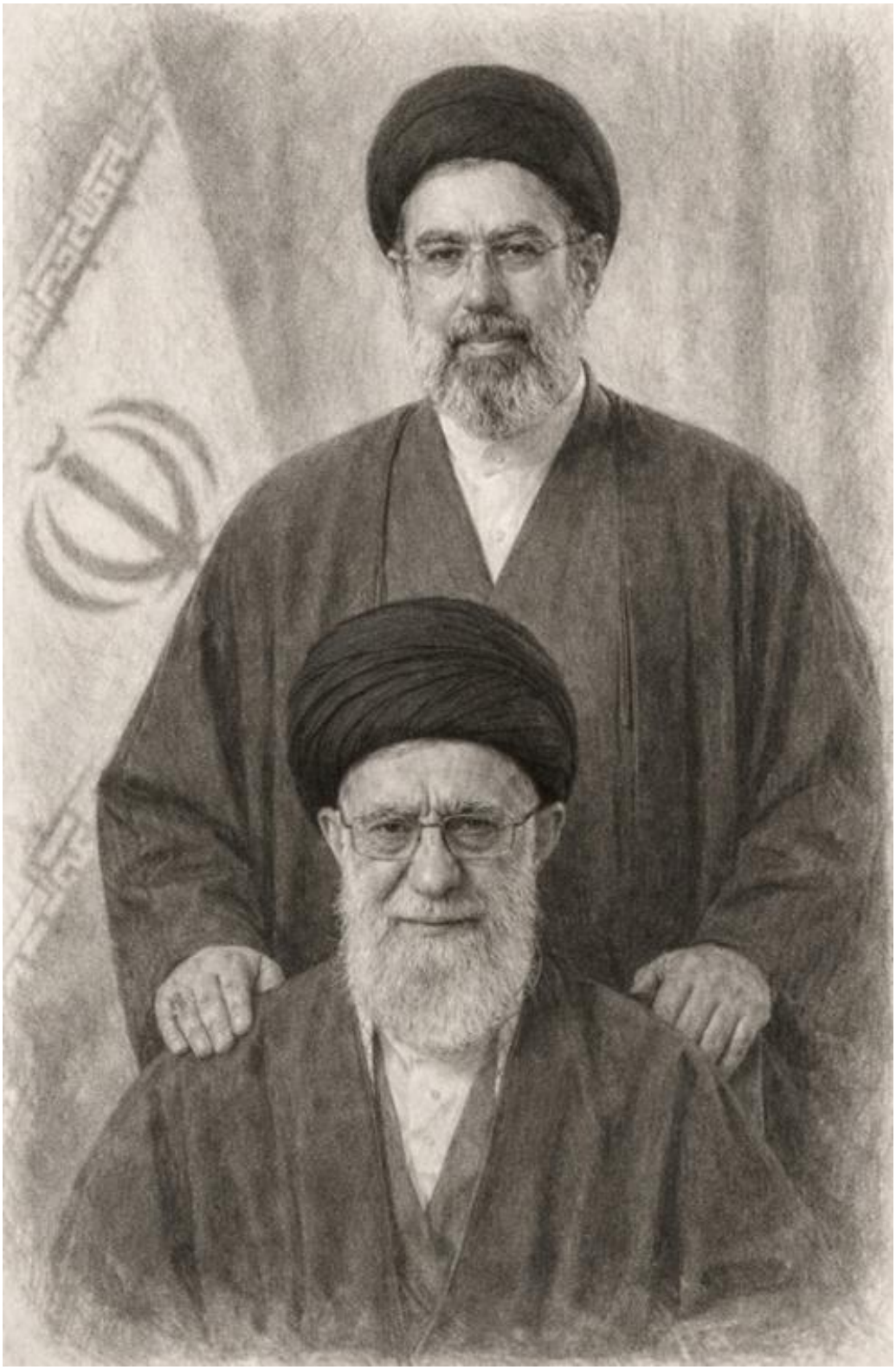
Security forces were deployed immediately. Footage showed them opening fire on the celebrants. People were killed for celebrating in the streets the death of the man who had, seven weeks earlier, ordered them killed for protesting in those very streets.

At Mar-a-Lago, Trump stood before cameras and announced Khamenei's death. He said that a large part of Iran's leadership had been killed. He said the attack was so successful that it knocked out most of the candidates for succession, and that it wouldn't be anybody we were thinking of because they are all dead.

But somewhere in Tehran, in a location that was not the Pasteur Street compound, in a room whose address was not in any intelligence file that had been acted upon that morning, one man was alive. Wounded — Iran's state television would later refer to him, with the regime's characteristic instinct for mythologizing its own damage, as a *Jaanbaz*, a veteran injured in the service of the faith. His family destroyed. His father's empire on fire. The most wanted person in the country he was about to inherit.

The network he had built, the layers of military loyalty and the IRGC relationships, was the only functioning power structure in a state whose formal institutions were being systematically dismantled from the air. The IRGC needed a face. The face needed to be his.

Chapter 12 – The Inheritance



The constitutional framework for what came next existed on paper. Article 111 of the Islamic Republic's constitution mandates that the Assembly of Experts convene as soon as possible following the death of a Supreme Leader to appoint a successor. An Interim Leadership Council would exercise the Leader's functions in the interim. The process was designed for an orderly transition in peacetime, by men who had written a constitution in 1979 and could not have imagined this particular morning in 2026.

What the framework faced instead was wartime, a fractured clerical establishment, and an IRGC that had its own view of the correct outcome and the institutional weight to enforce it. And somewhere in all of this, wounded, in an undisclosed location, his family destroyed, the bombs still falling, was the man the Revolutionary Guards had already decided would wear the title.

Mojtaba had not spent thirty years building toward this moment in order to lose it now. For years he and his allies had ensured that the Assembly's composition tilted in the right direction. That the men who would vote, when the moment came, were men who owed their positions to the *Beit*.

Ali Larijani stepped forward first, as he always did in moments of crisis. The competent politician, the man who knew where all the levers were.

As secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, he announced the Interim Leadership Council on March 1st: President Pezeshkian, Chief Justice Mohseni-Eje'i, the cleric Alireza Arafi. He did it with the authority of a man who had waited a long time for a room without Mojtaba's shadow in it, and who understood that the next few days represented his last real window. His brother Sadeq, chairing the Expediency Discernment Council, was positioned. The Larijani network, patient for years, was finally in motion.

The candidates were named across the following hours: Alireza Arafi, Sadeq Larijani, Hassan Khomeini, Mahdi Mirbagheri. And Mojtaba Khamenei.

From the first hours, IRGC commanders were working the phones. Members of the Assembly of Experts were subjected to repeated contact, psychological and political pressure exerted by men who commanded the country’s elite military institution. It was the same mechanism Mojtaba had utilized for years, now operating on his behalf with or without his direct instruction. The system he had built was protecting itself by protecting him.

On March 3rd, the Assembly convened online. Those who spoke against Mojtaba were given limited time. Discussion was cut off before it could become genuine deliberation. A vote was held. The motion forced through by the weight of a Revolutionary Guards command structure that was not prepared to wait for consensus.

Then, before the count could be completed, US and Israeli bombs struck the Assembly of Experts office in Qom. The timing was precise enough to generate its own debate: a Telegram channel reported that the strike had specifically targeted the session. It is not clear whether the bombs were aimed at disrupting the process, demonstrating that no institution was beyond reach, or specifically eliminating Mojtaba. Either way, the effect was to throw the succession into further procedural chaos. The votes had been cast, but the count was interrupted. The result existed in an uncertain state, somewhere between decision and announcement, while the building burned.

Eight Assembly members announced they would boycott the follow-up session. A conservative commentator stated that appointing a leader during active wartime was divisive and should be avoided.

Then Sadeq Larijani made his move: the Expediency Discernment Council, which he chaired, moved to suspend the Assembly's authority entirely and shift power to the Interim Leadership Council. A constitutional maneuver of extraordinary audacity, the kind of move that only makes sense if you believe you can win what comes next. According to Iran International, Ali Larijani was simultaneously pushing for his brother to be named Supreme Leader under the resulting arrangement.

It was the most open that the two families had ever been about what they wanted. The frozen smiles were gone. The knives were out.

The succession was being conducted under fire, with the power that had killed the previous leader threatening to kill the next one. Meanwhile, the internal factions fought each other in bombed buildings and online sessions and constitutional gambits that everyone understood were really about something much simpler: which family would control Iran.

In the middle of all this, a story began circulating. It moved through diaspora channels, opposition media and the networks of people who had spent careers watching the Islamic Republic from close range. It was the kind of story that is impossible to verify and impossible to ignore.

The story concerned Ali Khamenei's will.

For years, the question of whether the Supreme Leader had formally designated a preferred successor had been the organizing anxiety of Iranian succession politics. Various leakers and analysts had offered various accounts. In November 2024, a government leaker had stated that Mojtaba had left the seminary to prepare for succession. An Israeli news site had reported that Khamenei had selected his son. The regime's Tehran Times had denied it. Khamenei himself had said, publicly, that the selection must be made based on truth, the need of the country and God – a formulation that named no one and committed to nothing.

But the New York Times, during the strikes, identified three senior clerics, Mohseni-Eje'i, Asghar Hijazi, and Hassan Khomeini, as the candidates the Supreme Leader had nominated in case of his assassination. Reuters stated he had supported either Eje'i or his son, Mojtaba. These accounts, if accurate, described a father who, at least in his contingency planning, was reluctant to choose his son.

The allegation was this: Mojtaba, in the hours or days following his father's death, had obtained and destroyed the will before the Assembly could act on it. The allegation has not been verified by any independent source. But consider what we know about the man it describes. This is the son who learned, at age six, to watch

his father being taken by agents in the night and understand the lessons embedded in his exile. The son who spent thirty years managing the gates of Iran's single most important office, deciding what reached the desk and what did not, controlling the picture that the most powerful man in the country saw of his own government.

Whether the will was burned, hidden in a safe that has not been opened, or simply overridden by the pressure of bombs and Revolutionary Guards, the outcome was identical. The father's wishes, whatever they were, did not determine the result. The three clerics Khamenei had reportedly designated were considered and did not prevail. The candidate the IRGC wanted was the one who was announced.

On March 6th, a member of parliament stated that two candidates remained in the running, that both were reluctant to accept the position, and that the new Supreme Leader would be introduced by March 8th.

The position being offered was the leadership of a state under active aerial bombardment, whose predecessor had been killed from the air eight days earlier. Its institutions were being systematically destroyed from above. Its population had endured two months of violent crackdowns in the streets. This country now faced the combined military capacity of the United States and Israel. Its navy was sunk and its air force was losing aircraft it could not replace. The Israeli Defense Minister

had confirmed that the successor, whoever it was, would be a legitimate assassination target.

This was the inheritance. This was what thirty years of building in the shadows had produced: the opportunity to sit in the most dangerous chair in the Middle East, in a country on fire, surrounded by enemies, with a legitimacy contested by a significant portion of the institution that had just been pressured into granting it.

Mojtaba Khamenei had waited for this moment his whole life. He accepted the position.

On March 8th, 2026, the Assembly of Experts announced Mojtaba Khamenei as the third Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The son who had no official title had become the man with the only title that mattered.

Epilogue

On the day the announcement came, before the ink on the newspaper reports had dried, details about Mojtaba Khamenei's medical history were already circulating on news networks. Certain articles claimed he had traveled in the 1990s to London, for treatments related to his fertility. Journalists pounced on them with appetite, as journalists always do when a piece of human weakness falls into their hands concerning someone at the center of events.

But the real story was never there.

The real story was in what the trip represented. Not the treatment itself. Every person, whatever their standing, is entitled to seek the best medical care available to them.

However, Mojtaba is not a private individual looking for a good doctor. He stands at the center of a system that turned revulsion toward the West into a state religion. He grew up in the shadow of a regime that built its legitimacy on a single, uncompromising cultural opposition: us versus them. Islamic purity versus Western rot. The faithful versus the corrupt. The UK, in the official discourse of the republic

his father built, is not merely a foreign country. It is a symbol. The old colonial hegemony that continues, in a different form, to reach for the Muslim soul.

An ordinary citizen in Tehran cannot travel to London for medical treatment, even if he wants to. He lacks the passport, lacks the hard currency, lacks the connections. Mojtaba lacked none of these. He booked a floor of the Sheraton Grand Park Lane. He charged it to the state. He flew home and continued building the system that made the trip impossible for everyone else.

This is not an isolated incident. It is a pattern. Properties in London registered under names that are not his name. Accounts managed through intermediaries in countries he denounces in public. A financial empire structured across four jurisdictions precisely so that the man at its center is never revealed.

The gap between what the regime demands of the Iranian people and what it permits itself is not a contradiction that emerged as revolutionary ideals faded. It was a deliberate design. It was conceived, built, and maintained by those who understood both sides of that divide perfectly. The people who climbed from the rags of the periphery into the riches of the inner circle.

Hypocrisy, at its purest level, is not an accidental moral flaw. It is a method. It allows a person to preserve the ascetic image of the believer alongside the material comfort of one who does not believe at all.

Yet the believer need not indulge in this wealth personally. He may maintain a performative simplicity while wielding capital as a blunt instrument of power. In this system, wealth is less about luxury than it is about leverage. A means to secure the absolute loyalty of a curated elite.

This method works as long as the gap between what is required of others and what is permitted to oneself remains invisible, covered in layers of guardianship, loyalty, and silence. Mojtaba proved, across decades of practice, that he had learned it better than anyone.

The bombs that fell on February 28th, 2026 were in some measure the return address on everything he helped build. The chain that led to that morning began long before Operation Epic Fury, long before the protests of January, long before the Twelve-Day War of June 2025. It was forged through decades of deliberate choices: the obsessive expansion of nuclear and ballistic missile programs, the ideological compulsion to export the revolution, and the cultivation of the "Axis of Resistance": proxy networks stretching from Beirut to Sanaa to Baghdad. Underpinning it all was

forty-seven years of domestic repression, a system that prioritized the survival of the *Beit* over the basic rights of its subjects.

Decisions made inside the system Mojtaba helped construct and ran from the shadows of his father's office. The infrastructure of regional conflict that his father spent decades building produced, in the end, a train of consequences that came back across the border and fell on Pasteur Street at 9:45 in the morning.

On March 8th, 2026, eight days after the bombs fell and some of his closest relatives died, Mojtaba Khamenei was announced as the third Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The announcement was made by a body that had deliberated online, under IRGC pressure, in sessions interrupted by bombs, with eight of its members absent in protest. It had not been ratified by popular vote. It had not received the endorsement of the senior clerical establishment. The constitutional requirement that the Leader be a recognized senior jurist was handled, as it had been with his father in 1989, with the flexibility the system applies when the alternative is a power vacuum.

The succession was conducted under fire, contested from within and threatened from afar, its legitimacy disputed by a significant portion of the institution that had

just been pressured into granting it. It was, in every formal sense, the weakest foundation on which a Supreme Leader had ever stood.

And yet he stood on it. Because he had spent thirty years ensuring that when this moment came, standing on it would be possible regardless of his weakness. The Assembly's composition had been shaped over years to tilt the right way when the right moment arrived. The IRGC's loyalty had been cultivated through decades of quiet alliance. The Larijani challenge, patient and well-positioned, had been outmaneuvered in the chaos of the first week. The system he had built protected itself by protecting him. It was, in the end, exactly what it had been designed to do.

What comes next, no book published in early March 2026 can fully answer.

The war continues. The economy is in freefall. The clerical establishment is divided. The people, oppressed and massacred, watch its tormentors consolidate power in the rubble of the strikes that were supposed to end them. The mass graves from January are still being identified. The internet is still intermittently cut.

Into this, Mojtaba Khamenei walks as Supreme Leader. Wounded, his family destroyed, his legitimacy contested, his enemies named and armed and watching.

The most dangerous address in the Middle East is now his address. Despite the vast amount of blood on his hands, he survived everything the book describes. The question the book cannot answer is what survival, in these circumstances, actually means. For him, and for the country he now owns.

Iran is an ancient civilization. It has outlasted every system imposed upon it, every dynasty that believed it had finally solved the question of how to govern a people who have never been easily governed. The Islamic Republic, in the forty-seven years of its existence, has survived wars, sanctions, protests, assassinations, and now the killing of its founder's successor from the air.

But endurance is not the same as legitimacy. And legitimacy, for the man who sits in the House of Leadership in the spring of 2026, is the one thing that thirty years of building in the shadows, and the bombs, and the IRGC's phones calls to Assembly members in the middle of the night, could not manufacture.

Mojtaba is, in the end, exactly what the republic that made him deserves. Faithful to the faithlessness. And yet.

Iran is not the Islamic Republic. It never was. Beneath the apparatus, beneath the *Beit* and the Revolutionary Guards and the *bonyads* and the shell companies, there is a civilization five thousand years old that has survived everything imposed upon

it and outlasted every system that believed it had finally solved the question of how to govern a people who have never been easily governed. The men and women who walked empty-handed into the streets in January 2026 and found rifle barrels waiting for them were not the exception in Iranian history. They were the continuation of something very long and very stubborn: a people's refusal, repeated across centuries and dynasties and polities, to become only what their rulers needed them to be.

The children who were born in the years of the protests, who will grow up in the shadow of the war and the mass graves, will inherit a country scarred and bruised. But from the ashes of tyranny and repression, Iran will rise again. Persian poetry survived the Mongols. Persian culture survived the Arabs. Persian identity survived Khomeini and survived Ali Khamenei. It will survive his son.

The Iran that exists beneath Mojtaba Khamenei, the Iran of its writers and its scientists and its women who cut their hair in the streets and its young men who stood on rooftops and screamed his name into the dark in fury, that Iran has not been extinguished. It has only been waiting, as it has always waited, with the patience of a people who understand that systems end and civilizations continue. That Iran will outlast this, too. It always has.

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THE STORY OF

MOJTABA KHAMENEI

BY AMIR KH.

- How the shadow figure who evaded every media appearance became the strongest force in the Islamic Republic's empire of money and repression

- In the month of April, two months before the elections in the year 2009, Mojtaba had already decided to assassinate Mir Hossein Mousavi and his partner Mehdi Karroubi

- How he accumulated a personal fortune estimated by some estimates in the billions of dollars

- With the outbreak of the January riots he established for himself a personal team isolated from his father in which he carried out brutal suppression operations whose scope has not yet been seen in the Middle East