

Trump warns Khamenei to be 'careful with his words' following Tehran sermon

US President mocks Iranian supreme leader, writes in support of the 'noble people of Iran,' after Khamenei attacks America and Europe in speech.



US President Donald Trump at a ceremony in the White House, January 17, 2020, in Washington. (AP/Steve Helber)

US President Donald Trump on Friday mocked and warned Ayatollah Ali Khamenei after the Iranian supreme leader called him a "clown" earlier in the day as he addressed prayers in Tehran.

"The so-called 'Supreme Leader' of Iran, who has not been so Supreme lately, had some nasty things to say about the United States and Europe," Trump wrote on Twitter, apparently referring to Khamenei's speech.

"Their economy is crashing, and their people are suffering. He should be very careful with his words!" Trump said.

Trump followed up by writing in support of the Iranian people in response to an earlier tweet by Khamenei.

"The noble people of Iran—who love America—deserve a government that's more interested in helping them achieve their dreams than killing them for demanding respect. Instead of leading Iran toward ruin, its leaders should abandon terror and Make Iran Great Again!" Trump wrote in English and Farsi.

Khamenei had written on Twitter earlier Friday that "The villainous US govt repeatedly says that they are standing by the Iranian ppl. They lie. If you are standing by the Iranian ppl, it is only to stab them in the heart with your venomous daggers."

The statement was in response to Trump on Saturday writing in support of Iranian protesters.



Donald J. Trump@realDonaldTrump

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Make Iran Great Again!

https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1218141834842660864 ...

The villainous US govt repeatedly says that they are standing by the Iranian ppl. They lie. If you are standing by the Iranian ppl, it is only to stab them in the heart with your venomous daggers. Of course, you have so far failed to do so, & you will certainly continue to fail.

Khamenei said in his Friday speech that Trump will “push a poisonous dagger” into the Iranian nation’s back. He said the outpouring of grief at the funeral for Iran’s top general, who was killed in a US airstrike on January 3, showed that Iranians support the Islamic Republic. It was Khamenei’s first time addressing Friday prayers in Tehran since 2012.

The Iranian leader said America had been “cowardly” when it killed the most effective commander in the fight against the Islamic State group, general Qassem Soleimani, the deputy commander of the extraterritorial Quds Force.

In response to the US airstrike, Iran launched a barrage of ballistic missiles targeting US troops in Iraq, without causing serious injuries. Khamenei said the missile attack was a “blow to America’s image” as a superpower. In part of the sermon delivered in Arabic, he said the “real punishment” would be in forcing the US to withdraw from the Middle East.

As Iran’s Revolutionary Guard braced for an American counterattack that never came, it mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian jetliner shortly after it took off from Tehran’s international airport, killing all 176 passengers on board, mostly Iranians.



In this photo released by the official website of the office of the Iranian supreme leader, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei waves to worshipers prior to delivering his sermon in the Friday prayers at Imam Khomeini Grand Mosque in Tehran, Iran, January 17, 2020. (Office of the Iranian Supreme Leader via AP)

Khamenei called the shoot-down of the plane a “bitter accident” that saddened Iran as much as it made its enemies happy. He said it should not overshadow Soleimani’s “sacrifice” for the country.

Iran’s belated admission that it shot down the plane sparked protests in Tehran and other cities, shattering the national unity that came following Soleimani’s killing.

Trump has spoken out in favor of the Iranian protesters and warned the regime against cracking down on demonstrations.

“The government of Iran must allow human rights groups to monitor and report facts from the ground on the ongoing protests by the Iranian people,” Trump tweeted last week in English and Farsi. He has also warned Tehran against killing protesters.

In November, tens of thousands of Iranians took to the streets in protests ignited by rising gasoline prices, but which quickly evolved into protests against the regime. Iran has been in the grip of a severe economic crisis since the Trump administration withdrew the US from the 2015 nuclear deal and imposed crippling sanctions.



Iranian police officers take position while protesters gather in front of Amir Kabir University in Tehran, Iran, January 11, 2020.(AP Photo)

Tehran responded by shutting down the internet, essentially cutting Iran off to the outside world, and violently crushing the protests. Some 1,500 protesters were killed, according to some estimates.

Khamenei said Friday that protesters were unrepresentative of the Iranian people

as a whole, who had turned out in their hundreds of thousands for Soleimani's funeral.

He said Iran's enemies had seized on the plane crash to question the Islamic Republic, the Revolutionary Guard, and the armed forces. "Our enemies were as happy about the plane crash as we were sad ... happy that they found something to question the Guards, the armed forces, the system," he said.

He also lashed out at Western countries, saying they are too weak to "bring Iranians to their knees." He said Britain, France, and Germany, which this week triggered a dispute mechanism to try and bring Iran back into compliance with the unraveling 2015 nuclear agreement, were "contemptible" governments and "servants" of the United States.

He said Iran was willing to negotiate, but not with the United States.

Thousands of people attended the Friday prayers, occasionally interrupting his speech by chanting "God is greatest!" and "Death to America!"



Iranian worshipers chant slogans during Friday prayers by a banner showing slain Iranian Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, left, and Iraqi Shiite senior militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and a banner which reads in Persian: "Death To America, "at Imam Khomeini Grand Mosque in Tehran, Iran, Jan. 17, 2020. (Office of the Iranian Supreme Leader via AP)

Khamenei was speaking opposite a huge portrait of Soleimani hung behind the congregation. Thousands of worshipers crammed into the mosque and more spilled over onto the streets outside, kneeling in the snow.

Police were out in force as they have been since the protests erupted over the downing of the airliner.

Khamenei has held the country's top office since 1989 and has the final say on all major decisions. The 80-year-old leader openly wept at the funeral of Soleimani and vowed "harsh retaliation" against the United States.

After Soleimani was killed, Iran announced it would no longer be bound by the

limitations in the nuclear agreement. European countries who have been trying to salvage the deal responded earlier this week by invoking a dispute mechanism that is aimed at bringing Iran back into compliance and could result in even more sanctions.

Khamenei was always skeptical of the nuclear agreement, arguing that the United States could not be trusted. But he allowed President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate, to conclude the agreement with US President Barack Obama. Since Trump's withdrawal, he has said there can be no negotiations with the United States.

Khamenei last delivered a Friday sermon in February 2012, when he called Israel a "cancerous tumor" and vowed to support anyone confronting it. He also warned against any US strikes on Iran over its nuclear program, saying the US would be damaged "10 times over."

Source:

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