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After Khamenei: Relief, Fear, and the Rule of Law

Donald Trump's announcement that a joint U.S.–Israeli operation killed Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, triggered a profoundly mixed reaction here on the North Shore.

For many of Iranian descent, it was a moment they never believed they would see. For others, it raises grave questions about international law, precedent, and escalation. As the MP for North Vancouver - Capilano, I cannot pretend those tensions do not exist - or that one statement can neatly resolve them.

I have heard from many Iranian Canadians who are frankly jubilant. They or their families have lived through executions, torture, the crushing of dissent, and decades of gender apartheid under the Islamic Republic. They see Khamenei not as a distant head of state, but as the architect of a system that exiled them, scarred them, and stole people they loved. For them, his death is not an abstraction but the end of a man who presided over some of the darkest chapters of their lives.

We must honour that lived experience. It is not “celebrating violence” to recognize that people who have suffered under a brutal regime may feel relief, even joy, when its most powerful figure is removed. It is an honest human reaction to decades of repression. As Canadians, we should listen with humility to those stories, and remember that our foreign policy debates are, for many of our neighbours, intensely personal.

At the same time, we cannot avoid the hard questions about how the launch of military operations and the killing of Iran's senior leadership occurred.

Rule of law

These operations took place on foreign soil, outside any declared war, against the top officials of a sovereign state. A number of legal scholars and international organizations have suggested that, *prima facie*, these actions may appear inconsistent with international law and risk eroding the rules meant to restrain great powers. Those rules are not academic. They are the same ones we invoke to defend Ukraine against aggression, to condemn the downing of Flight PS752, and to protect civilians caught in conflict.

Canada's commitment to a rules-based order matters most when it is uncomfortable - when great powers, including our allies, stretch or test those rules. Acknowledging good-faith questions about the legality of this war does not diminish the Iranian regime's terrible crimes or confuse oppressor with oppressed. It simply insists that international law and norms apply universally.

In the weeks ahead, Parliament will examine Canada's response. My commitment to you is this: I will continue to strongly support the Iranian people's struggle for freedom and justice, while also working to ensure that future actions are taken in accordance with international law and that further escalation of the current conflict is avoided. We owe you honesty about the dangers, empathy for lived experiences, and a foreign policy that keeps faith with both.

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