

The point of no return

Israeli perspective on Iran's President Mahmud Ahmadinejad

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Mahmud Ahmadinejad won the presidency partly thanks to his modest and open image, both in words and action. Even during his tenure as mayor of Tehran, he still lived in a modest home and drove an old Iranian-made Peykan. This image gained support for the educated ideologue, who promised to follow the words of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Many of his predecessors had used similar positions to gather hefty personal fortunes through cronyism and bribery. The Iranian people were not blind to this fact and they became sick of smooth-talking ayatollahs like Hashemi Rafsanjani, who lectured the nation about the need to share wealth, whilst in reality he and his religious ilk were becoming richer and everyone else was getting poorer.

The truth is that the phrase “death to Israel” and “Israel must be eliminated” are Khomeini’s original coin phrases. These are the very words that Khomeini uttered to his first-ever foreign visitor – Yasser Arafat – days after the revolution started in 1979. Khomeini repeated this message until he died. By calling for Israel’s destruction on October 26, 2005, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, the loyal soldier, was staying true to his election promise of following the words of the revolution’s founder.

However, Ahmadinejad’s honesty also had another source, and that is the regime’s sense of anger and acute threat about what is happening around it. On one side, the mighty great Satan (U.S.A.) is establishing military bases all around Iran. Meanwhile, Israel is slowly creeping in around Iran’s borders, too. First, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf met Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at the UN, then Hamed Karzai of Afghanistan talked about an eventual conditional peace with Israel. Meanwhile Iran’s Persian Gulf neighbors, whom Ahmadinejad referred to as “American Petrol stations” during his election campaign, are lifting the boycott on purchase of Israeli goods, whilst one of them (UAE) is even allowing Israeli representatives on its soil. Meanwhile Iran is fast losing Syria, its No. 1 ally in the region, as Assad’s regime is becoming more and more isolated following the Mehlis report.

There is also another notable factor that has left the regime seething with anger, and that is the recent bombings in the Arab-populated Iranian province of Khuzestan. Two weeks ago the town of Ahvaz, the capital of the province of Khuzestan, saw its worst terrorist attack, which left five dead and 90 injured. Meanwhile, to Iran’s fury, the West did not publish statements condemning this act as outright terrorism. This fact made Iran’s leadership more convinced than ever that the terrorist attacks are sponsored by Western countries (especially the UK) who want to punish Iran for its support of Islamic militants in Iraq.

The golden question is why attack Israel, and why do it in such a way that leaves Iran

looking like a country calling for genocide? There are two probable reasons. One is that feeling isolated, the Ahmadinejad administration decided to provoke a response from the West with the goal of using the provocation in its favor. This is a tried and tested method in revolutionary Iran. Previous examples include the attack on the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1980 and attacks on U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf in the late 1980s. In such circumstances, Iran used the West's response to garner support in the region by portraying itself as the victim, which is being punished for its Islamic identity.

The other possibility is that Iran has secretly decided to leave the nuclear talks and is therefore trying to provoke a response from the West that it can then use as an excuse, shifting the blame for its departure from the negotiation table.

Meanwhile, as the world's military analysts try to decide if the military point of no return in Iran's nuclear program is two, five or 10 years away, the fact remains that by openly calling for Israel's destruction, Iran crossed the political point of no return in its foreign and nuclear policy. By doing so Tehran must be made to understand that in a post-Rwanda and Darfur world, calls for genocide are not only unacceptable, but they also carry a very hefty price.

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