



President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran

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Background

- Father, Ahmad Saborjhian, business failure, as barber, as grocer. His name, signifying he in rug weaving industry, suggesting peasant background.
- Went to Teheran in construction boom-changed name to Ahmadinejad, “from the race of Prophet Muhammad.”
- Sacrificing for family, whose success would be his.

—The Nuclear Sphinx of Teheran, Melman and Javedanfar

Background (continued)

- Ahmadinejad, known as intelligent, diligent, studious child.
- Excluded from Koran classes because too young, insisted he could read Koran, which he could.
- Excellent student-told fellow students he would be in top 10 nationally in Concours university exams. (150,000 took exam.) Finished #132, top 1%.
- Suggests special sense of self.

Student Political Activist

- Started university studies in civil engineering during second half of 1970s, a time of political turmoil in Iran.
- Founder of Islamic Students Union.
- Involved in radical anti-Shah student magazine.
- Reportedly was a member of the group that planned the takeover of the American embassy in Iran in 1979.

Under the Smiling Facade

Despite cosmopolitan appearance and being at ease before international audiences, Ahmadinejad provocatively extreme.

Committed Advocate of Extremism

- When Ayatollah Khomeini launched his human wave attacks of children, armed only with pink plastic keys to paradise around their necks, this terrifying tactic turned the corner in Iran-Iraq war. It was according to some reports Ahmadinejad that trained the children and purchased some 500,000 pink plastic keys from Taiwan.

Ahmadinejad on Israel

- Spoke of the inequity of "the way the elected Government of the Palestinian people is treated " compared to the "support of the Zionist regime"
- In a conference in Teheran in October 2005 entitled "The World Without Zionism," "the establishment of the Zionist regime was a move by the world oppressor against the Islamic world," and that the state of Israel was illegitimate.
- Referring to Ayatollah Khomeini, "as the Imam said, Israel must be wiped off the map."

Ahmadinejad's Statements on Other Nuclear Powers

- Accusing them of using “the deadly weapons” as “instruments of coercion and threat against other peoples and governments” that “consider themselves as the masters and rulers of the entire world and other nations as only second class in the world order.”

Seeking Chaos?

- Between extreme comments re Israel and pushing for nuclear enrichment, seems to be pushing for confrontation.
- WHY?

There is a messianic tradition within Islam that believe that the Mahdi (the "guided one") who is a descendant of the prophet, will appear at a time of chaos just before judgment day, and this will introduce a period of universal peace under the leadership of Shi'ite Muslims

“Twelver” Branch of Shi’ite Islam

- Refers to the 12th imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, in lineal descent from the prophet, who is said to have gone into state of “occultation” in 874 A.D.
- According to legend, he is not dead but will reveal himself in a period of chaos for a battle of the final days
- Most “twelvers” are quietists, waiting for the arrival of the hidden imam

But there is a group of Mahdists who are religious belligerents, seeking to precipitate the final days by promoting chaos. "Twelver" activists. Ahmadinejad is such an activist.

(This resembles messianic traditions of the "final days" in Christianity and in Judaism. The use of weapons of mass destruction by Shoko Asahara of the Japanese millenarian cult Aum Supreme Truth was designed to precipitate the final apocalypse.)



Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi

- Supporter of the clerical regime of Ayatollah Khomeini
- Supporter of his successor Supreme Leader Khamenei-most conservative member of his inner circle
- Member of the Council of Experts
- Committed activist believer in Twelver Islam-
- It was Yazdi who persuaded the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah al- Khomeini to support Ahmadinejad's presidential candidacy.

Ahmadinejad: A Twelver Activist

- Ahmadinejad was mentored by Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, and is a committed activist twelver Muslim.
- During his tenure as mayor of Teheran he made major investments in preparing the infrastructure for the arrival of the Mahdi, which he informed an Iranian journalist would be in two years.

Activist Twelver

- After surprise victory in presidential election, gave \$ 17 million to Jamkaran mosque-houses a well from which some believe the Mahdi will emerge.
- In Nov. 2005, said publicly that the main mission of the Islamic Republic was to reappearance of the Twelfth Imam.

Dreams of Glory?

- After Sept. 2005 address to UN General Assembly, caught on videotape telling a cleric that during the speech a halo appeared around his head on the podium.





"I felt the atmosphere suddenly change. And for those 27 or 28 minutes, the leaders of the world did not blink...It seemed as if a hand was holding them there, and it opened their eyes to received the message from the Islamic Republic."

So if the apparent drive to develop a nuclear weapon and the calls to wipe Israel off the map seem designed to produce chaos, that may indeed be President Ahmadinejad's goal. As a committed twelver Muslim, a Mahdist religious belligerent who apparently believe that actions that produce chaos can help hasten the arrival on earth of the messiah.

Major implications for deterrability. But, ultimate authority with Supreme Leader

Authority of the Supreme Leader

- Supreme commander of the armed forces.
- Determining the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Power to declare war and peace and general troop mobilization.
- Resolve differences and regulate relations among the three branches of the government.
- Appointing and dismissing:
 - Member of the Council of Guardians
 - Head of Judiciary
 - Director of radio and television networks
 - Chief of staff of the armed forces
 - Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Guards
 - Commander-in-Chief of the military and security services

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei the *vali-e-faqih*

- Because of unquestioning political loyalty to Khomeini, replaced Khomeini as Supreme Leader despite inferior religious background and moral authority. Senior political leader equated with senior religious leader, and he lacked credentials.
- Because of his weakness, always balancing one faction against the other, the moderate Rafsanjani faction vs. the theocratic conservatives.

Is Iran Deterrable?

- Complex of forces, pragmatists vs. theocrats-
 - weak Supreme Leader with ultimate authority and President who is religious conservative with special sense of self, whose authority constrained
 - 2/3 of Iranian population under 25, yearning to join West, and actively informed, on the internet. Reins of theocratic control loosening.