

# Iran's Response to Western Warnings: 'First Strike,'

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'Preemptive Attack,' Long-Range Ballistic Missiles, 'Asymmetric [Guerilla] Warfare'

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 By: Y. Mansharof and A. Savyon Introduction

As the Iranian nuclear crisis escalates, Iranian officials have stepped up their threats against the West. Although regime spokesmen have stressed that Iran's security doctrine is defensive,<sup>(1)</sup> the threats issued by senior Iranian leaders and officials indicate that Iran's actual strategy for responding to a Western attack is taking on increasingly offensive and deterrent characteristics.

While in February 2003, then-defense minister Ali Shamkhani stated, "Iran has a deterrent defensive doctrine, which means that it will in no way take an offensive measure... Iran's objectives are of a defensive nature,"<sup>(2)</sup> - the new strategy is gradually revealed in both deeds and statements by regime spokesmen.<sup>(3)</sup>

The offensive elements of this doctrine include a "first strike" and "preemptive attack"; the development of long-range ballistic missiles (the Qadr and the Ashura<sup>(4)</sup>) with ranges of up to 2,000 km; and the development of an "asymmetrical [guerilla] warfare" tactic &ndash; that is, suicide bombings in the Persian Gulf, whether to close off the Strait of Hormuz or to hit targets in the Gulf countries.

## The Preemptive Strike Threat

A September 24, 2007 article published in Sobh-e Sadeq, the mouthpiece of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei among Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), discussed economic and security threats issued by the West, particularly the U.S. The article stressed that following the West's escalation of threats, Iran had upgraded its military strategy to incorporate a doctrine of offense, including "first strike" and "preemptive attack" capabilities. The following are the main points of the article:

"... Today, Iran's military strategists proudly announce that the advanced stages of the plans for [meeting] the multilateral defense needs are complete and ready for implementation. One of the most important and influential parts of this comprehensive defense [plan] has already been set out and brought into operation, based on first-strike advantage and preemptive activity. In Iran's defense doctrine, a special place has been allocated to the right of first strike and to a preemptive attack against the enemy, who is in a state of highest alert. This is because the principle of surprising the enemy is one of the best-known, most accepted, and most logical tactics that a country can adopt when facing imminent threats ..."<sup>(5)</sup>

## The Ballistic Missile Threat

Iranian security circles are seeking to present the country's ballistic capability as a way of deterring a possible attack by the West. The new Qadr 1 missile was introduced in a September 22, 2007 armed forces parade. According to Iranian media reports, the missile is an improved Shihab 3 with a range of 2,500 km, which was developed in Iran and is now being used by the IRGC Air Force.<sup>(6)</sup> Sobh-e Sadeq wrote that the Qadr 1 "has turned a new page in the history of Iran's missile defense capability."<sup>(7)</sup>

Iranian security circles have threatened a number of times that Iran would use its ballistic missile capability to repel any attempted attack. In a September 23, 2007 interview with the conservative Iranian news agency Mehr, Yahya Rahim Safavi, Khamenei's chief armed forces advisor and former IRGC commander, explained: "One of Iran's means of striking the enemy is the IRGC Air Force's deterrent ballistic missile capability. These missiles are already being mass-produced in Iran... The Americans think that they will be able to eliminate this ballistic capability, [but they are wrong,] because we are taking preemptive actions and making the necessary assessments so that this capability remains safe from the enemies' threats..."<sup>(8)</sup>

In an October 30, 2007 interview with the conservative Iranian news agency Fars, IRGC ground forces artillery and missile corps commander Mahmoud Chaharbaghi said: "According to its plan and preparations, in the first minute of an enemy invasion, Iran will hit the enemy's bases with 11,000 rockets and shells. This rapid and wide-scale firing will be

continuous... [The range of] these rockets, which evade radar, covers every area of the Persian Gulf coast, the Gulf of Oman, the Iraqi border, and other areas, as needed. Iran's tactics and weapons are advanced; the accuracy, speed, and range of its rockets are rare in the world, and in some cases second to none..."(9)

Moreover, IRGC joint staff operational officer Ali Fazli declared, "[The achievements resulting from] the progress of Iran's military cannot be compared to its previous [capabilities]... Today, Iran has the capability to manufacture, and launch, missiles with a range of 2,000 km... America lacks the courage to attack Iran &ndash; but if it does carry out such a silly act and launches an attack of any kind, [Iran's] response will break its teeth, and [the U.S.] will no longer be the one to finish the incident."(10)

Armed forces joint chief of staff Hassan Firouzabadi stated, "Iran has the capability to respond to a military action by the enemy until [the enemy] is completely destroyed; the range of [Iran's] total military response surpasses 2,000 km from its borders." (11)

Top IRGC officer Mohammad Hassan Kousehchi noted, "We are proud today that we are capable of striking the enemy at a range of 2,000 km from Iran, and that we can courageously stand fast in the face of any kind of hostility, because of the weapons that we have... Everyone sees Iran's Shihab 3 missile, and knows that any invader who makes the smallest movement will encounter an absolute and resounding 'No,' and will immediately be attacked. Our current control of the region is such that it does not permit the enemy to [even] imagine attacking [Iran]." (12)

#### Threats to Attack U.S. and Western Targets Worldwide Using "Asymmetrical Warfare" Tactics

On September 24, 2007, Sobh-e Sadeq, quoting a knowledgeable source, warned that "170 targets constituting U.S. interests are within range of Iran's missiles." The source also stated, "For the past two years, Iran has carried out comprehensive and complex research in the matter of American interests, and if Iran is attacked, America's interests will encounter retaliatory Iranian attacks, as part of a carefully timed and calculated plan. These targets are chosen so that irreversible damage will be inflicted upon the enemy... Iran's tactic is a blow that is crushing, aggressive, and comprehensive." (13)

In an interview with the Mehr news agency, Khamenei's chief armed forces advisor Yahya Rahim Safavi threatened that if the U.S. attacked, Iran would strike U.S. forces stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are within missile range:

"The Americans must realize that their 200,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are today in range of Iran's missiles. Once, when the Americans were in the oceans, they were outside our range of fire; now, however, when their [forces] are close to Iran, we can easily hit them... Under the current circumstances, the U.S. and its allies are applying a great deal of political and diplomatic pressure to Iran. But they must know that Iran will never surrender... Asymmetrical warfare is the [warfare doctrine] that Iran turned into a deterrent strategy some four and a half years ago, even though the Americans, after invading Iraq and Afghanistan, brought new conditions to the region, with the presence of 51,000 of their troops in Afghanistan and 161,000 of them in Iraq..." (14)

In a September 28, 2007 interview with Iran's Al-Alam TV, armed forces joint staff deputy chief for logistics and industrial research Mohammad Reza Naqdi threatened that if the U.S. attacked, Iran would sink U.S. aircraft carriers across the world: "The closer America comes to Iran, the less threatened we feel by it. This is because [the Americans] become more vulnerable... America cannot anticipate how many aircraft carriers it will lose worldwide, and at what location in the world it will lose them, in the event of a possible attack." (15)

In a September 26, 2007 interview with Iranian TV, Iranian Army Chief of Staff Abdolrahim Mousavi stated: "We have carefully analyzed [the developments of] the past five years, and we are fully aware with regard to the [Americans] strengths and vulnerabilities. We know our enemy's situation, on a daily basis. We have come up with ways of dealing with all their vulnerabilities, and we have found ways of protecting ourselves against their strengths." (16)

A September 24, 2007 Sobh-e Sadeq article likewise stated that in the event of a U.S. attack, IRGC forces would attack U.S. targets worldwide. The following are excerpts from the article:

"Iran's defense and response model is planned in such a way that [Iran's] enemies cannot avoid the consequences of their invasion... 'Rapid response' means that Iran will not wait for international organizations and bodies to condemn the enemy invasion. 'Comprehensive response' means that Iran will attack the interests of the invaders [i.e. the U.S.] worldwide, and that there will no longer be any enemy target outside [Iran's] range of fire. 'Targeted response' means that... because of Iran's familiarity with the enemy's strong and weak points, it will employ diverse responses and tactics in the arena of battle. 'Non-stop active defense' [will be] the most crushing [feature] of Iran's [plan]. It is possible that Iran will, for some reason, give the enemy the right of the first blow. But the right of 'finishing the battle' will undoubtedly be Iran's, because how [the war ends] will be a nightmare for the enemies of Iran." (17)

In a speech at a conference of Iranian Defense Ministry directors in mid-October 2007, Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar warned that Iran's response to a U.S. attack would be harsher than expected: "Iran will use all options

necessary to defend itself against pressures and threats by the [forces of] 'the global arrogance' headed by the U.S.... America must keep in mind that Iran's response to [aggressive] operations against it will be harsher than they expect&hellip;"(18)

Najar added: "Regarding the repeated [American] claims that '[they] are also considering other options,' [we say that] we too have other options and diverse responses to these threats and options, and that we will use them as necessary and in accordance with the circumstances&hellip;"(19)

In an article in the conservative Iranian daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami, which is affiliated with the Islamic religious seminaries in Qom, columnist Fathallah Parishan stated, "with more than 200,000 soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. has placed itself within range of Iran's missiles, which will humiliate it as it brings the main part of its military capability to the melting [point]. Thus&hellip; America will encounter a crushing Iranian response&hellip;"(20)

The commander of the Iranian army's navy,(21) Habibollah Sayyari, stated during a speech at a military parade: "Iran will act against the interests of any country that seeks to take steps against it anywhere, and is certain of its victory... All [territorial] waters to the south and north of Iran are under the control of Iran's naval forces, and all types of movement through the waters of the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the northern Indian Ocean are under [Iran's] full oversight."(22)

In a November 11, 2007 address to IRGC commanders and officers, Hossein Shariatmadari, editor of the daily Kayhan and close associate of Supreme Leader Khamenei, stated: "Today, Islamic Iran poses a danger to the interests of America and its allies in the Middle East, as well as in most other regions of the world. This reality is quite clear, and there is undeniable evidence and signs [of it]."(23)

### Threats Against the Gulf States

Another element of Iran's military doctrine is attacking the Gulf states. Speaking at a September 22, 2007 military parade, IRGC commander Mohammad Ali Aziz Jafari stated: "Any country that allows its airspace to be used for an attack on Iran will be considered an ally of the enemy, and will receive a response from Iran&hellip; [Although] the enemy has the advantage over us materially, particularly in the air, we can, with our unique advantages and [fighting] methods, neutralize such an advantage and capability... We will give a crushing response to any kind of idiocy on their part, by precisely identifying the enemy's weak points and by using unique methods [of warfare]."(24)

In another interview, with Al-Alam TV on September 23, 2007, Jafari again emphasized, "It is Iran's natural and indisputable right [to attack]... When the enemy situates himself on the territory of a friendly Muslim country and uses it [as a base] for military operations against us, we will naturally strike the enemy where he is."(25)

### Threats of Suicide Operations, Closing Off Hormuz Strait

In addition to attacking Gulf states that host Western forces, Iran is also threatening to carry out other operations in the Persian Gulf that would cause severe losses to Western forces and to the Gulf states, and would harm the Western economy. It threatens to carry out suicide operations by IRGC and Basij soldiers, and to use the "oil weapon" by closing off the Strait of Hormuz.

In an October 29, 2007 interview with the Fars news agency, IRGC deputy naval commander Ali Fadavi said that if Iran were to be attacked, the Basij forces would carry out suicide operations in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz: "Even small operations can greatly impact the strategic Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz... It is not the number of Basij soldiers that counts in realizing this plan, but their quality &ndash; because each of them is capable of doing excellent work as a martyr... The Basij forces are still seeking martyrdom, and now this spirit is prevailing throughout the IRGC... If necessary, we will take advantage of [this willingness] for self-sacrifice... The IRGC and the Basij forces have begun to collaborate closely, and the fruits of these plans will be visible [to all] when the enemies become so stupid as to start posing an actual threat to Iran."(26)

An October 17, 2007 article in the weekly Parto-ye Sokhan, which is affiliated with Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-e Yazdi, the mentor of Ahmadinejad, stressed the importance of controlling the Hormuz Strait: "One of the most important steps that Iran [can take] in the event of an attack by its enemies is to close off the Hormuz Strait and [thus] obstruct the flow of oil to the Western countries. This step has a special place in Iran's defense doctrine, and its importance is reflected in statements by senior Iranian officials."(27)

Also, in an October 11, 2007 column in Jomhuri-ye Eslami, columnist Fathallah Parishan warned: "Control of the [Hormuz] Strait, which is sensitive, primary and essential to [the flow] of oil worldwide... is one of Iran's trump cards... In the battle with the West, Iran can use the weapon of oil and gas, which are considered a lifeline for the U.S., Europe, and Japan. [It can] jeopardize the transport of more than 65% of the world's petroleum from the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf, raising the price of oil to hundreds of dollars a barrel, and thus bringing about economic instability in the

world..."(28)

Deputy Interior Minister and former deputy IRGC commander Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr also discussed the worldwide upheaval that Iran could cause in the event of a Western attack: "The West cannot realize its threats and implement the sanctions against the Iranian nation, for these sanctions are not a simple matter: they will affect the transport of oil, [which] will deliver significant shocks to the international economy. The great powers will be the first to suffer the resulting damages."(29)

### Threats Against Israel

In a September 30, 2007 interview, former Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani told the U.K. daily Financial Times that if the U.S. attacked Iran "it would receive [in return] Israel in a wheelchair." He added that such an attack would be, for the U.S., like "sticking its hand into a wasps' nest."(30)

On September 19, 2007, Iranian army air force deputy commander Mohammad Alavi pointed out, "In addition to the fact that all of Israel's territory is within the range of Iran's missiles, Iran can [also] attack Israel with its fighter jets, and can respond to any [Israeli] attack &ndash; unlikely though [such an attack] may be. This plan is not an empty threat; we are carrying out all the [necessary] preparations with proper planning and by achieving the necessary readiness. Thus, Israel must put out of its mind any [thought of carrying out] a stupid act of any kind... Israel knows what kind of blow it will receive from Iran's missiles and jets. Obviously, Iran cannot reveal its plans, but Israel must know that, if necessary, such operations will certainly be implemented."(31)

In a September 24, 2007 editorial, the daily Kayhan, which is close to Khamenei, stated that in response to a Western attack, Iran would carry out a series of attacks along with "the local fighters in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine," and would "create hell for the American and Israeli soldiers." The following are the main points of the editorial:

"[The Americans] know full well that it is America and its army &ndash; not Iran &ndash; that are being held hostage in the Middle East... America's military bases in the region are all within range of Iran's diverse missiles. Israel &ndash; should it make a mistake [and attack Iran] &ndash; is likewise within the reach of hundreds of long-range missiles. All these &ndash; along with the local fighters in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine &ndash; can simultaneously create hell for the American and Israeli soldiers..."

"The American forces in the region are like a person trapped in the middle of a minefield with many IEDs around his feet. In such a situation, a single mistake &ndash; [even] the smallest one &ndash; will trigger not only one blow, but a chain of attacks and explosions.

"The Iranian response will not be blow for blow. The era of hit-and-run attacks is over... Obviously, the Iranian nation does not rush into battle &ndash; but the moment the arena of jihad opens... [the Iranian nation] will embrace it, and will not flee from it. The Iranian nation sees jihad as one of the gates of Paradise..."(32)

### The IRGC's Battle Readiness

Senior IRGC officers have stated that in a possible conflict with Western forces, IRGC forces would repel the threats with smart bombs and independent guerilla units.

In an October 8, 2007 article in Sobh-e Sadeq, IRGC ground forces deputy commander Abbas Nilforoushan said: "In a confrontation with an enemy not from the region, [some IRGC] fighters will arrange themselves into 9,000 small, separate groups,... which act independently of their mother units. [They will] position themselves at the enemy's weak points and in important regions, and act against the invaders while defending themselves in the best possible manner... Some of these units are armed with anti-aircraft weapons; others are armed with anti-armor weapons, and some are commando units that operate independently and are capable of carrying out various operations such as ambush, invasion, and penetration [of enemy targets]." (33)

IRGC ground forces artillery and missile corps commander Mahmoud Chaharbaghi said that the IRGC had rockets, missiles and smart bombs capable of striking moving targets such as vehicles. He added: "The proper use of the arsenal, and particularly of smart ammunition and optic systems, as well as the use of trained and skilled forces and of advanced guidance equipment, improves the IRGC's effectiveness."(34)

In addition, on September 22, 2007, armed forces joint staff deputy chief for logistics and industrial research Mohammad Reza Naqdi announced that Iran had successfully manufactured an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) called the Pahpad, "capable of cruising at 700 km/hr."(35) The UAV was also mentioned by Yahya Rahim Safavi, Khamenei's chief armed forces advisor. Safavi stated that its range was 700 km, and that "along with... intelligence gathering and transmission of photographs, it could be used to identify enemy bases and warships, and to discover the enemy's location in regions around Iran, [thus enabling the Iranian forces] to prepare accordingly." Safavi added, "The UAV is invisible to radar, and

cannot be easily intercepted... It has passed the experimental stage; it is now being mass-produced, and can be used operationally." (36)

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#### Endnotes:

- (1) In public statements, Iran's regime leaders have been dismissing the possibility of a Western attack or of additional sanctions on Iran, and they are continuing to state that Iran's security doctrine is defensive. For example, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, addressing the U.S. and Europe, said: "If they want to impose sanctions on Iran, they must know that they are the ones who will be hurt by doing so... The great Iranian nation is not worried about their angry faces and their sanctions." Mehr, Iran, November 7, 2007.
- (2) Shamkhani, who today heads Iran's Strategic Defense Research Center and serves as security advisor to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, noted in February 2003 that "Iran's defense and security doctrine sees 'confronting and neutralizing threats' as the basis of its policy... We are trying to speed up the [building of our capability] to stand fast in the face of the first enemy strike... and to [preserve] this steadfastness... However, defense from 'surprise threats' means adopting a means of deterrence. Defensive deterrence causes the enemy to relinquish its threats, because under such circumstances every country must [take into consideration] the risk it runs if it takes offensive measures against Iran." For more on Iran's defense doctrine and statements by Shamkhani, see MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 502, "Iranian Defense Minister on Iran's Defense Doctrine," May 9, 2003, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=iran&ID=SP50203>.
- (3) A recent speech by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on November 25, 2007, reveals some of its offensive characteristics: "... In order to defend ourselves, we must target the weakest point of the enemy. This is because they want to break through our borders by means of a satanic attack, and if we sit idly by, the result will be nothing but defeat." Kayhan (Iran), November 26, 2007. Also, in a statement cited by Kayhan on September 23, 2007, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said "These [Western] threats only increase the readiness of the nation and the regime... Anyone who attacks [Iran] will bear the full weight of the consequences... Waiting for the enemy's [move only] increases our readiness on various [levels]."
- (4) In late November 2007, Iranian Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar stated that Iran had added yet another missile to its ballistic arsenal – the Ashura, with a range of 2,000 km. Fars (Iran), November 27, 2007.
- (5) Sobh-e Sadeq (Iran), September 24, 2007.
- (6) Kayhan, Jomhuri-ye Eslami (Iran), September 23, 2007.
- (7) Sobh-e Sadeq (Iran), September 24, 2007.
- (8) Mehr (Iran), September 23, 2007.
- (9) Fars (Iran), October 20, 2007.
- (10) Sobh-e Sadeq (Iran), October 15, 2007.
- (11) Javan (Iran), September 26, 2007.
- (12) Fars (Iran), September 16, 2007.
- (13) Sobh-e Sadeq (Iran), September 24, 2007.
- (14) Mehr (Iran), September 23, 2007.
- (15) ISNA (Iran), September 28, 2007.
- (16) See MEMRI TV Clip No. 1613, "Iranian Army Chief of Staff Gen. Abdolrahim Mousavi: Like an Elephant that Cannot Turn Its Neck, the Americans Have Vulnerabilities," September 26, 2007, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1613.htm&srch=3&prov=gogl&utf8>.
- (17) Sobh-e Sadeq (Iran), September 24, 2007.
- (18) Fars (Iran), October 17, 2007.
- (19) Kayhan (Iran), September 20, 2007.
- (20) Jomhuri-ye Eslami (Iran), October 11, 2007.
- (21) The Iranian army is separate from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The army was loyal to the Shah, and with the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini formed the IRGC as a parallel military body loyal to and defending the new regime. Since then, the IRGC has become Iran's main military body, more professional, more skilled, better trained, and better equipped than the regular army. Each organization has branches such as an air force, navy, etc.
- (22) Kayhan (Iran), September 23, 2007.
- (23) Kayhan (Iran), November 12, 2007.
- (24) Kayhan (Iran), September 23, 2007.
- (25) Al-Alam TV, September 23, 2007. See MEMRI TV Clip No. 1569, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1569.htm>.
- (26) Fars (Iran), October 29, 2007.
- (27) Parto-ye Sokhan (Iran), October 17, 2007.
- (28) Jomhuri-ye Eslami (Iran), October 11, 2007.
- (29) Kayhan (Iran) October 21, 2007. In June 2007, Zolqadr threatened that, if the U.S. undermined the security of the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, oil prices would skyrocket to \$250 a barrel. See MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis No. 377, "Iran Determined to Continue Nuclear Program Despite International Pressures," July 23, 2007, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=iran&ID=IA37707>.
- (30) Financial Times (U.K.), September 30, 2007.
- (31) Aftab (Iran), September 19, 2007. At his weekly press conference, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini threatened that an Israeli attack on Iran would trigger "an unprecedented Iranian response." ISNA (Iran),

November 11, 2007.

(32) Kayhan (Iran), September 24, 2007.

(33) Sobh-e Sadeq (Iran), September 24, 2007.

(34) Fars (Iran), October 17, 2007.

(35) According to Naqdi, the UAV was introduced in the September 22, 2007 military parade. IRNA (Iran) September 24, 2007.

(36) Fars (Iran), September 22, 2007.

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Reference to Slogan on the Side of the Shahab 3 Missile:

World Leaders Condemn Iranian's Call to Wipe Israel 'Off the Map'

By Mary Jordan and Karl Vick

Washington Post Foreign Service

Friday, October 28, 2005; A16

LONDON, Oct. 27 -- Leaders around the world on Thursday condemned a call by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that Israel be "wiped off the map," and a top Iranian official said that mass demonstrations in his country on Friday would rebuff the rising criticism from abroad.

"I have never come across a situation of the president of a country saying they want to . . . wipe out another country," British Prime Minister Tony Blair said at a summit outside London of the 25 leaders of the European Union's member states.

Blair said Ahmadinejad's comment was "completely and totally unacceptable."

In a joint statement, the E.U. leaders "condemned in the strongest terms" the Iranian president's call, saying it "will cause concern about Iran's role in the region and its future intentions." President Jacques Chirac of France told reporters that Ahmadinejad risked Iran "being left on the outside of other nations."

Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in Israel, called the Iranian president's statement "unacceptable."

The statement was widely reported in the Arab world; leaders there reacted for the most part with silence. Most Arab countries have no diplomatic relations with Israel. But the Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, said, according to the Associated Press: "We have recognized the state of Israel and we are pursuing a peace process with Israel, and . . . we do not accept the statements of the president of Iran. This is unacceptable."

U.S. and European leaders have grown increasingly worried about the bellicose attitude of Iran at a time when it is pursuing a nuclear program that they have said may be intended to produce a nuclear weapon.

The E.U. has engaged in contentious and so far unsuccessful negotiations with Iran to try to persuade it to drop parts of the program that could be used to make bombs. Iran says its nuclear program is entirely peaceful and aimed at generating electric power for its citizens.

Iran's foreign minister said mass public demonstrations were planned for Friday in Tehran, the Iranian capital, to show support for the country's president. Manouchehr Mottaki was quoted on state-run television saying that the "Zionist regime is illegitimate" and that "the world will see the anger of the Islamic world against this regime."

Ahmadinejad made his remarks in a speech Wednesday to 4,000 students attending a conference called "The World Without Zionism." He was quoting the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who led the 1979 Islamic revolution that established Iran's theocratic government and made fierce opposition to Israel a matter of political orthodoxy.

Ahmadinejad also called the 1948 establishment of Israel, on territory also claimed by Palestinians, the fall of "the last trench of Islam."

Virulent anti-Israel sentiment remains strong in the hard-line circles from which Ahmadinejad emerged to win the presidential election in June. "Israel Should Be Wiped Off the Map" was the slogan draped on a Shahab-3 ballistic missile during a military parade in Tehran a month ago. Six of the missiles, which, with a 1,250 mile range, could reach Israel, were the high point of the parade. "We Will Trample America Under Our Feet," read another banner.

The landslide that carried Ahmadinejad into office was grounded in promises of economic improvement, tapping broad public appetite for social justice similar to the sentiments that fueled the 1979 overthrow of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Since taking office in August, Ahmadinejad has moved to share the wealth from Iran's oil exports, offering legislation to establish what officials call a "love fund" to distribute cash to newlyweds.

But as a foreign policy novice, he has stumbled frequently in dealings with the outside world. The strident tone of a speech he delivered to the U.N. General Assembly in September alienated many of the diplomats who Iran was trying to influence before a possible vote on its nuclear program.

"He has not yet moved from a leader of an ideological faction to the presidency of the country," said Nasser Hadian-Jazy, a political science professor at Tehran University who has known Ahmadinejad since childhood.

By contrast, Ahmadinejad's predecessor, Mohammad Khatami, was known for erudition and for softening Iran's international image with frequent calls for "a dialogue between civilizations."

At Friday prayers last week, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's supreme leader, appeared to subtly distance himself from the new president and at the same time urged Iranians to give his government time "to get on with it."

"It is a short period of time since the establishment of the government, some two or two-and-a-half months," Khamenei said. He then continued on to attack Israel and the "war-mongering and extremist American administration, attempting to create an empire and to dominate the world."

In Tel Aviv, Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres said: "I don't see such a crazy declaration being made by a head of state, a member of the United Nations. . . . It is unbearable. He cannot remain a member."

In Washington, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Iran must "start behaving in a responsible manner as a member of the international community, cease its pursuit of nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program, end its support for terror, and stop oppressing its own people."

Vick reported from Istanbul. Correspondent Scott Wilson in Jerusalem and staff writer Robin Wright in Washington contributed to this report.

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