

Iran president says Israeli leaders face 'doomed end'

Contributed by Ramin Mostaghim and Borzou Daragahi, LATimes
Friday, 16 January 2009

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says Hamas does not need Iranian weapons, "because 1.5 million women, children, elderly and young men are defending it."

Reporting from Tehran and Beirut -- Iran's hard-line president on Thursday warned Israeli leaders of a "doomed end" but pointedly ruled out sending weapons to its ally Hamas or getting involved militarily in the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also said his government welcomed "dialogue and having relations" with the U.S. after the inauguration next week of President-elect Barack Obama, who has said he is open to diplomatic contacts with Iran.

But "if they want to have the previous stance wrapped up in a new package, [talking] will not work," he said. "If the stance is oppressor against the oppressed, it will not be fruitful."

His comments squared with an Iranian pattern of provocative talk meant to put pressure on Arab governments to more aggressively oppose the Israeli offensive, but without committing Tehran to a more direct role in the conflict.

"I believe Gaza has no military solution from the outside," Ahmadinejad said at a wide-ranging news conference Thursday evening. "We do think Hamas does not need weapons because 1.5 million women, children, elderly and young men are defending it."

Israel and the U.S. accuse the Islamic Republic of using the militant group Hamas as a proxy to gain leverage in Tehran's quest to master nuclear technology and increase its regional influence.

Ahmadinejad's authority on military and security matters is constitutionally subordinate to that of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He sidestepped reporters' repeated questions about whether Iran had ever supplied Hamas with weapons, instead accusing the West of equipping Israel.

He called a possible Islamic oil embargo on Israel "a good idea" but did not say Iran would abide by it. "For the time being, it is not on the agenda," Ahmadinejad said.

Iran has been sharply critical of Israel's conduct in the Gaza conflict, in which about 1,100 Palestinians have been killed.

"A bunch of murderers are in charge of the Zionist regime," Ahmadinejad said. "Of course they all come to their doomed end."

During the tumult in Gaza, Iran has cracked down on domestic dissidents, accusing some of not being strident enough in their denunciations of Israel. On Monday, authorities in Tehran arrested Jinos Sobhani, an activist associated with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi's recently shuttered human rights group.

daragahi@latimes.com

Mostaghim is a special correspondent.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-ahmadinejad16-2009jan16,0,3089546.story>