

'Iran talks an opportunity for Israel'

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The new US administration's willingness to begin a dialogue with Iran over its suspected nuclear weapons program is an "opportunity" for Israel even though the Islamic Republic's track record in international negotiations is one of "prevarications, lies and master manipulators of time," former Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy said Tuesday.

"On the issue of Iran, the aims of the US and Israel are identical," Halevy said in an address to the gathering of the New York-based World Jewish Congress in Jerusalem. "If they want to try a different way on Iran we should not consider this as a threat but as an opportunity."

His remarks come one day after US President Barack Obama reiterated in an Arabic television interview that he is interested in engaging Iran in dialogue.

Halevy said that Israel must be "cool-headed" in its approach to the Islamic Republic, which he called "one of the most implacable foes" the Jewish state has had to confront since its establishment 60 years ago.

He noted that the Islamic Republic was motivated by religion, but would do everything to ensure the preservation of their regime.

"If they feel they regime is in danger, they will change their views," Halevy said, citing the Iranian decision to call for a cease-fire during the 1980s Iran-Iraq War after the then US backed Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein began shelling Tehran with missiles. "In extreme cases we might even find Iran of today changing course."

Halevy, who immigrated to Israel from the UK as a teenager in 1948, has previously broken ranks with the Israeli establishment over the seriousness of the Iranian threat as well as by advocating talks with Hamas despite the Islamic's regime open commitment to Israel's destruction.

Israeli officials have previously voiced concern that the new US administration will take a softer line against the Islamic Republic.

In his address, the former Mossad chief said that the moment of reckoning with Iran was "fast approaching," and noted that the Islamic Republic is facing a wave of internal tensions, sparked by falling oil prices, which include a 30 percent inflation rate, and unprecedented unemployment figures on the eve of Presidential elections.

Halevy opined that an "indestructible" Israel should be "serious, anxious, but confident" as it deals with the looming nuclear threat.

"We must prepare ourselves in a cool-headed manner for a day when all other means are exhausted," he said. "It is necessary to be aware of the threat but we should be imbued with confidence that we are able to meet it head-on if necessary."

In a separate address, former Israeli Ambassador to Iran Uri Lubrani said that "nothing" will prevent Iran from attaining nuclear capabilities.

Lubrani, who served as Ambassador prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, said that Israel needed to do "whatever possible" to prevent Iran from attaining a nuclear weapon but added that it was nearly "mission impossible."

"It is not a question of whether they will have it or not but who will be in charge and who will have the finger of the button," Lubrani said.

He added that he did not envision any reason why the Islamic regime would want to forgo its nuclear weapons program when it is "on the threshold" of attaining a bomb short of the Iranian people - backed by the West - taking action.

"The Iranian regime is on a war-path with the West," he said.

He proposed tightening and deepening sanctions "so that they really bite."

"The people will not stand this indefinitely," he concluded.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has repeatedly called to "wipe Israel off the map" and has dismissed the Holocaust, in which six millions Jews perished, as a "myth."

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