

Business and politics in Muslim world

Weekly report on Iran

Report # 112

20th March 2010 to 27th March 2010

Presentation Date: 31st March 2010

M Rashid

- **Summary.....03**
- **Plitical Front.....08**

- **A dangerous Persian game**
- **Experts for new Iran strategy**
- **Iran MP describes Obama Nowruz message as ploy**
- **Ahmadinejad's new 'warning' to Israel**
- **Bin Laden's daughter released from Iran, in Syria**
- **Iran, Bahrain should take common stances on Muslim world issues**
- **President urges confronting Zionists' crimes**
- **akistan May Investigate Nuclear Scientist's Ties to Iran**
- **Iran wasting chance for dialogue: Russia**
- **U.N. tells Iran to end Eutelsat satellite jamming**
- **NATO urges missile defence pact, cites Iran threat**
- **Israel could use tactical nukes on Iran-thinktank**
- **Gates expresses concern over Iranian drones**
- **Iran says Muslims must act over Jerusalem**
- **Iran: The threat and our strategy**
- **Iranian FM Mottaki brushes off Zionists' impudent claims on Beitulmoqaddas**
- **West pressure not to affect Iran's nuclear program**
- **U.S. 'bringing partners along' on Iran - White House**
- **Averting the Iranian Nuclear Flashpoint**
- **Averting the Iranian Nuclear Flashpoint**
- **War with Iran by Any Other Name**
- **ITU urges Iran to end interference hampering EUTELSAT satellite operations Communications**
- **Will Iran Follow Hitler's Example?**
- **Broadcasting body calls on Iran to stop jamming**

- **No US pressure regarding IP gas pipeline project: Lashari**

- **Economic News.....33**

- **Obama Offers Olive Branch to Iran**

- **Pakistan Gas Pipeline Is Iran's Lifeline**
- **Top US lawmaker: Iran sanctions coming soon**
- **Tehran, Ankara to Boost Trade Exchange Volume**
- **Iranian New Year affects Armenian dram rate**

- **Social News.....38**

- **Iran: New Coordinated Attack on Human Rights Groups**

- **Newsweek's Maziar Bahari calls for freedom of Iran's imprisoned journalists**

- **Iran: Eavesdropping of critics' phone conversations revealed**

Summary

A dangerous Persian game

Unlikely to win the United Nations Security Council's backing for stronger sanctions, the EU and its Western allies ponder what to do next about Iran's nuclear programme. The Western powers are facing a dilemma at the United Nations Security Council over Iran's nuclear activities. Because Russia and China hold veto power, the Security Council is unlikely to back sanctions against Iran that are strong enough to be effective, and the sanctions that it is prepared to back are unlikely to be strong enough to be effective.

Iran MP describes Obama Nowruz message as ploy

A senior Iranian parliamentarian has described US President Barack Obama's Nowruz message as an act of "deception."

As long as there is no balance between the comments and actions of the United States, offering dialogue could only be [viewed as] an act of deception," head of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi told ILNA news agency

Ahmadinejad's new 'warning' to Israel

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has given his first official reaction to Israel's plans to build 1,600 new homes in a disputed part of Jerusalem.

Speaking at the opening ceremony for a dam project in south western Iran, Mr Ahmadinejad warned Israelis that they were taking "themselves one step closer to their death" through their actions in east Jerusalem.

Bin Laden's daughter released from Iran, in Syria

Osama bin Laden's teenage daughter has left Iran after living under house arrest there since her family fled Afghanistan in 2001, her family said Tuesday. Iman bin Laden, 18, arrived in Syria last week to live with her mother, according to the girl's brother, Omar, and his wife, Zaina Alsbah.

Iran, Bahrain should take common stances on Muslim world issues

Bahrain's Parliament Speaker Khalifa Ahmad al-Zahrani said in Bahrain on Wednesday that Iran and Bahrain should take common stances on Muslim world issues, Palestine and holy Quds in particular. Al-Zahrani and Iran's Ambassador to Bahrain Amir Abdollahian

also in the meeting discussed ways of expanding bilateral ties, particularly in the parliamentary domain and in the regional and international levels.

President urges confronting Zionists' crimes

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said here Thursday that there is no courageous man in the West to stand against Zionists and check crimes of "the occupiers."
"How can you be a mediator while being on other side of the conflict and support Zionists? Why you do not prevent such savage people who lack any identity? Of course your media might be run by them or be indebted to them," said President Ahmadinejad in an address to western politicians.

pakistan May Investigate Nuclear Scientist's Ties to Iran

The Pakistani government has filed a petition in the nation's High Court seeking to investigate Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani scientist who has confessed to running the world's largest nuclear proliferation network, over recent reports about his ties to Iran's nuclear program, a government lawyer said Monday.

Iran wasting chance for dialogue: Russia

Russia on Friday warned Iran it was missing out on a chance to start a broad dialogue, as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton again sought to win the Kremlin's assent for tougher stance on Tehran.

U.N. tells Iran to end Eutelsat satellite jamming

The United Nations' leading communications agency called on Iran on Friday to end jamming of foreign satellite broadcasts, which is banned under its global regulations. The unprecedented move by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) adds to pressure on Tehran as world powers consider a new round of U.N. sanctions over Iran's nuclear program and it faces simmering social unrest.

NATO urges missile defence pact, cites Iran threat

NATO states should agree at a summit this year to make missile defence systems against states including Iran an alliance mission and look at every opportunity to cooperate on this with Russia, the head of NATO says.

Israel could use tactical nukes on Iran-thinktank

Deeply concerned as it is by the risk of a nuclear-armed Iran, Israel has never even hinted at using atomic weapons to forestall the perceived threat. But now a respected Washington think tank has said that low-radioactive yield "tactical" nuclear warheads

would be one way for the Israelis to destroy Iranian uranium enrichment plants in remote, dug-in fortifications.

Gates expresses concern over Iranian drones

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates expressed concern over Iran's aerial drone program, saying the weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists. "Countries like Iran are developing their own UAVs and already have a UAV capability," Gates told the Senate Appropriations Committee, using the acronym the military uses for drones -- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.

Iran says Muslims must act over Jerusalem

Iran attacked Israel's settlement plans in occupied East Jerusalem on Friday, saying Muslims around the world needed to take action.

Iran: The threat and our strategy

In my 33 years in the diplomatic service, Iran has always featured prominently. There have been issues, notably Afghanistan, on which the West and Iran worked together constructively.

Iranian FM Mottaki brushes off Zionists' impudent claims on Beitulmoqaddas

Tehran, March 26, IRNA - Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki here on Thursday ruled out Zionist officials' "disrespectful" claims on Beitulmoqaddas, saying the claims indicate the intensity of the occupiers' treachery and swindle to judaize the first Qibla of the world Muslims.

West pressure not to affect Iran's nuclear program

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says efforts by the West to halt Iran's nuclear program will not bear fruit.

The Thursday remarks by Ahmadinejad were made during a ceremony marking the inauguration of a dam in southwestern Iran. They were carried live by state television.

U.S. 'bringing partners along' on Iran - White House

IOWA CITY, Iowa (Reuters) - The United States is bringing the world community around to the need to pressure Iran over its nuclear program, the White House said on Thursday

Averting the Iranian Nuclear Flashpoint

Iran's nuclear program, and the world's reaction to it, raise the most profound questions about the strength of international law, the purpose of the United Nations and the rights of states that feel threatened by others. More prosaically, Iran's nuclear ambitions are a potential flashpoint for war in the Middle East.

War with Iran by Any Other Name

This week may be looked back on as the pivotal moment when war with Iran entered the mainstream of political thought in the Obama era. At a time when Iranians are standing up to an Iranian government that has been deprived of the Bush-era shadow of war, that shadow is again emerging.

ITU urges Iran to end interference hampering EUTELSAT satellite operations Communications

The international Communication Union (ITU) urges on Friday Iran to continue its effort in locating the source of interference hampering EUTELSAT satellite operations and to eliminate it as a matter of the highest priority.

Will Iran Follow Hitler's Example?

I firmly believe that unless we learn from history, we will be condemned to repeat it. It seems to me that there are dangerous similarities to the rise of Nazism and the rise of radical Islam and the nuclear weapons ambitions of Iran.

Broadcasting body calls on Iran to stop jamming

The UN's telecommunications agency called on Iran Friday to stop jamming foreign radio and television broadcasts, following European complaints.

No US pressure regarding IP gas pipeline project: Lashari

Secretary Ministry of Petroleum Kamran Lashari said that letter of sovereign guarantee was sent to Iran to finalize the process of Pak-Iran gas pipeline and after due reply from Iran a final agreement will be signed in April in France.

Economic News

Obama Offers Olive Branch to Iran

The ball is once again in Iran's court. US President Barack Obama has reiterated his offer of a comprehensive dialogue with Tehran, wooing Iranians to be part of the bandwagon,

which has a shared future with global economy, peace and security. In his second consecutive message,

Pakistan Gas Pipeline Is Iran's Lifeline

As Iran braces for another broadside of economic sanctions over its nuclear program, Tehran moves closer to opening up a new lifeline -- a natural gas pipeline to Pakistan and possibly India and China as well.

Top US lawmaker: Iran sanctions coming soon

The US Congress will soon take "final action" to approve tough new sanctions on Iran, a top Democratic lawmaker said Monday.

"Congress will soon take final action on sanctions to target the Iranian economy at its weakest point, the refined petroleum it depends on," Steny Hoyer said in a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Tehran, Ankara to Boost Trade Exchange Volume

Iranian Economy and Finance Minister Seyed Shamseddin Hosseini and Turkish Minister of State Hayati Yazici in a meeting in the northern Iranian province of Golestan inked a protocol on promotion of mutual customs cooperation.

Iranian New Year affects Armenian dram rate

Sharp fluctuations in the national currency of Armenia are mainly conditioned by the influx of dollars into the country, in particular, the influx of tourists from Iran who came to celebrate Novruz (New Year) in Armenia, Andranik Tevanyan, head of Political Economy Research Center told

According to him, unlike the rest of the world, the dollar rate in Armenia is an internal process controlled by the state. At this point, in his opinion, the dram rate is closer to the fixed rate.

Social News

Iran: New Coordinated Attack on Human Rights Groups

Iran's state-owned media, judiciary, and security forces have opened a coordinated attack on human rights groups in recent weeks under the guise of defending the nation against "cyber warfare," Human Rights Watch said today (March 24, 2010).

Newsweek's Maziar Bahari calls for freedom of Iran's imprisoned journalists

Newsweek reporter Maziar Bahari urged fellow journalists to sign a petition calling for the release of imprisoned journalists in Iran last night, in a passionate speech criticising the country's regime and press freedom record.

Iran: Eavesdropping of critics' phone conversations revealed

Following the arrest of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani's grandson and Faezeh Hashemi's son, Hassan Lahooti, Iranian Judiciary authorities have asked him questions which explicitly demonstrate that Iranian intelligence organizations are eavesdropping on phone calls made by Iranian citizens.

Political News

A dangerous Persian game

Unlikely to win the United Nations Security Council's backing for stronger sanctions, the EU and its Western allies ponder what to do next about Iran's nuclear programme. The Western powers are facing a dilemma at the United Nations Security Council over Iran's nuclear activities. Because Russia and China hold veto power, the Security Council is unlikely to back sanctions against Iran that are strong enough to be effective, and the sanctions that it is prepared to back are unlikely to be strong enough to be effective.

A resolution currently being drafted by the Americans, the British and the French – the other three veto-yielding Council members – is expected to be debated next month, but there is little prospect of Russia or China dropping their opposition to sanctions that target Iran's civilian economy.

Short of an invasion...there is not much anyone can do about Iran's uranium programme

Iran says that its nuclear activities – including uranium enrichment – are purely peaceful, an account that is disputed by the West. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog in Vienna, also has its doubts, heightened by the discovery last September of a second, clandestine enrichment facility in Iran.

The allies are now prisoners of their own rhetoric. US President Barack Obama offered to re-engage with the regime in Tehran a year ago, an offer that remains open even after Iran rebuffed it. At the same time, the US administration, backed by the allies, pursued a

second track, threatening “crippling sanctions” unless Tehran returned to multilateral talks on its nuclear programme.

‘Crippling sanctions’

On 1 October, Javier Solana, the then EU foreign policy chief, met Iran's top negotiator in Geneva in the presence of the political directors of the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany – the countries that negotiate with the Iranians on behalf of the international community. A tentative deal was reached, but to this day the Iranians have refused to endorse any implementing provisions. The “crippling sanctions” are therefore back on the table - except that nobody, not even the US administration, wants them to be crippling.

Since 2006 the Security Council has passed three resolutions on Iran, targeting trade in items that could be used in a nuclear weapons programme, banning the country from selling weapons abroad, and restricting foreign business with some of its banks (see box). These measures may have slowed Iran's progress on enriching uranium, and Rouzbeh Parsi, an Iran expert at the Institute for Security Studies, a Paris-based EU agency, considers that they were effective as far as sanctions go, although enforcement could be tightened. But the underlying problem, according to Parsi, is that sanctions are inherently limited in their effects. Others are ready to put the same point more bluntly. “Short of an invasion” – which has no support in the US or Europe – “there is not much anyone can do about Iran's uranium programme,” said one source. The West now wants to test that proposition.

Muted sanction support

China and Russia appear open to the idea of expanding the current UN sanctions, to include additional banks and to add Iranian officials to a list of regime figures who cannot travel abroad. But this is not enough for the West, where the talk is of tougher sanctions being imposed autonomously by the US and the EU, without the UN's endorsement. France and Germany, despite strong business links with Iran, now accept this idea, according to diplomats – on condition that all mechanisms to obtain UN backing are exhausted. The diplomatic focus is now firmly on the Security Council. The British are exploring a ban on investments in Iran's energy sector, although Russia and China are unlikely to back this.

Targeted sanctions

In the US, both Houses of Congress have drafted their own versions of an Iran sanctions bill that would target Iran's energy sector. But the Obama administration is not keen on disrupting energy supplies to Iran, for fear of alienating the country's population (Iran, an exporter of crude oil, does not have sufficient refining capacity to meet domestic demand for fuel, although the US Energy Information Administration expects this to change by 2013). US officials also fear that severe sanctions could drive a wedge between the allies just when unity is needed.

Weekly report on Iran

The broad European view is that any sanctions that would make life more difficult for ordinary Iranians are bound to increase the regime's domestic legitimacy, which suffered badly following a rigged presidential election last June. Nevertheless, planners in the secretariat-general of the Council of Ministers have been drafting options over recent months.

The decision is, in the end, political, not technical. The West has three goals: to preserve unity on Iran; to impede Iran's nuclear programme (or even to persuade the government to abandon it); and to avoid crippling sanctions. But even in the best case, it can have only two out of the three goals.

Cold war-style containment best way to check its nuclear plan

Vienna: With big powers unable to agree tough new sanctions against Iran and military action rife with risks to the West, Cold War-style containment may prove the only realistic way to check Tehran's nuclear ambitions, experts say.

Six world powers held a conference call on Wednesday to discuss a US-drafted proposal for a new round of UN sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme, a Western diplomat said.

China, which had declined for weeks to participate in discussions on a fourth round of UN sanctions against Tehran, took part in the call among senior foreign ministry officials from the five permanent UN Security Council members and Germany, the diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

As expected, they did not agree on a draft sanctions resolution, though the Chinese said they were willing to participate in a further conference call to discuss "more detailed elements" of possible punitive steps, the envoy said.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's airing last year of how Washington might handle a nuclear-capable Iran, by arming Gulf allies and creating a regional defence shield, stunned and angered Israel, which considers Tehran an existential menace.

Obama administration officials hastened to stress then and continue to say now that the world cannot allow a nuclear Iran and harsher sanctions will help forestall any such scenario.

But even Israel's defence minister has suggested an Iran with nuclear "breakout" ability would not doom the world, and policymakers should have a strong fallback plan — even if they don't say it publicly — if sanctions fail to restrain Iran.

Regime protection

Weekly report on Iran

"I don't think the Iranians, even if they got the bomb, are going to drop it immediately on some neighbour. They fully understand what might follow. They are radicals, but not total meshugenah," Ehud Barak said in a speech last month.

He was using the Yiddish word for "nut cases", and alluding to the certain threat to Iran of annihilation by foes with massively greater nuclear firepower if it started a nuclear conflict.

As doubts about the feasibility of effective sanctions or pre-emptive war have grown, debate has arisen about whether a nuclear-ready Iran could be "contained", somewhat as the United States did the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War era.

Containment could make sense, Foreign Policy magazine said in an essay entitled, "After Iran Gets the Bomb", because the Islamic Republic's overriding priority was regime protection.

Iran recognised its limitations, operating "among wary neighbours" whom it did not seek to invade. Rather, the point of the nuclear programme was to establish Iran as the "dominant power in the region while preserving political control at home," wrote James Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, strategic analysts at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

A containment, or deterrence, strategy, they said, could spell out to Iran that it could not start a conventional war, use or transfer atomic know-how, materials or weapons to others, or boost support for militant attacks abroad without triggering US retaliation by any means, including nuclear weapons.

Iran MP describes Obama Nowruz message as ploy

A senior Iranian parliamentarian has described US President Barack Obama's Nowruz message as an act of "deception."

As long as there is no balance between the comments and actions of the United States, offering dialogue could only be [viewed as] an act of deception," head of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi told ILNA news agency.

The remarks came days after President Obama repeated his symbolic offer of dialogue with Tehran, without specifying what concessions Washington is prepared to make.

"We are working with the international community to hold the Iranian government accountable because they refuse to live up to their international obligations," he said in a Nowruz, new Iranian year, message released on Saturday. "But our offer of comprehensive diplomatic contacts and dialogue stands."

Weekly report on Iran

In response to Obama's message, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said Sunday that the actions of the United States run counter to its call for establishing amicable relations with Iran.

"The new [US] administration and president claimed interest in just and fair relations; they wrote letters and sent messages ... saying they are willing to normalize relations with the Islamic Republic, but in practice they did the opposite," the Leader said in a Nowruz address to Iranians in the holy city of Mashhad.

Boroujerdi also added that the US has sent many messages to Iran in the past, calling for dialogue with Tehran.

"They [the Americans] have sent several messages during the past year calling for talks with Iran, but at the same time they passed more than 60 anti-Iranian bills in their Congress that one of them was ratifying a 55-billion-dollar budget against the Iranian nation," he said.

"[President] Obama has become a worthless person in the world public opinion. Therefore his Nowruz message to the Iranian nation is also worthless.

Ahmadinejad's new 'warning' to Israel

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has given his first official reaction to Israel's plans to build 1,600 new homes in a disputed part of Jerusalem.

Speaking at the opening ceremony for a dam project in south western Iran, Mr Ahmadinejad warned Israelis that they were taking "themselves one step closer to their death" through their actions in east Jerusalem.

He said: "Why don't they understand it? They are moving fast down a track that will end in a horrible precipice. This is a warning."

He also directly addressed the West in his speech, urging them to stop "backing" Israel and "keep silent."

The US says the east Jerusalem housing projects - which were announced shortly after Israel and the Palestinians agreed to the first US-mediated indirect peace talks in more than a year - are provocative and prejudice the outcome of negotiations.

Bin Laden's daughter released from Iran, in Syria

Osama bin Laden's teenage daughter has left Iran after living under house arrest there since her family fled Afghanistan in 2001, her family said Tuesday. Iman bin Laden, 18,

Weekly report on Iran

arrived in Syria last week to live with her mother, according to the girl's brother, Omar, and his wife, Zaina Alsabah.

"She is fine now, she is really healthy," Alsabah, 54, told The Associated Press by telephone from Britain. She said the girl had been at the Saudi embassy in Tehran for months after she ran away from her Iranian guards.

Many of bin Laden's children escaped to Iran after the 2001 U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan. Several siblings lived in a walled compound under Iranian guard after authorities picked them up for entering the country illegally.

"They had traveled on Sudanese passports," Alsabah said. "Their names had been altered by the Sudanese government so it was impossible for them to be identified.

The Iranians treated Iman and her siblings well but they lived in isolation, with only occasional, escorted trips out of the compound, she added.

"About two years ago, Iman, who was 15 at the time, started to deeply miss her mum," Alsabah said. She said the Iranian government had been allowing Iman to call her mother, Najwa.

Osama bin Laden was 17 when he married Najwa, his Syrian first cousin, who was 15 at the time. On Sept. 9, 2001, Najwa left her husband and returned to Syria, taking with her a son and her two youngest daughters. Iman was left behind with her father and siblings.

Omar bin Laden, who was 20 then, had left the family and Afghanistan earlier that year.

Now 29, Omar is urging countries to give refuge to family members still being held in Tehran.

He said there are at least four other siblings and 25 other relatives, among them bin Laden's daughters-in-law and 11 grandchildren.

"They need to live a normal life, in a human way," he told the AP. "They have nothing to do with violence.

Iran, Bahrain should take common stances on Muslim world issues

Bahrain's Parliament Speaker Khalifa Ahmad al-Zahrani said in Bahrain on Wednesday that Iran and Bahrain should take common stances on Muslim world issues, Palestine and holy Quds in particular. Al-Zahrani and Iran's Ambassador to Bahrain Amir Abdollahian also in the meeting discussed ways of expanding bilateral ties, particularly in the parliamentary domain and in the regional and international levels.

He said the Arab and Muslim world support Islamic sanctities in noble Quds and Abraham Mosque.

Bahraini parliament had recently released a statement supporting sacred places in Palestine occupied territories and noble Quds, condemning continued settlement construction and insult to sanctities by the Zionist regime.

President urges confronting Zionists' crimes

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said here Thursday that there is no courageous man in the West to stand against Zionists and check crimes of "the occupiers."

"How can you be a mediator while being on other side of the conflict and support Zionists? Why you do not prevent such savage people who lack any identity? Of course your media might be run by them or be indebted to them," said President Ahmadinejad in an address to western politicians.

Delivering a speech to Karun-4 Dam inundation ceremony, President Ahmadinejad further told western politicians, "If you are not able to oppose Zionists for their crimes and have kept mum, at least stop backing them."

Also referring to the West's support for such terrorists as Abdulmalek Rigi, President Ahmadinejad said, "A criminal kills innocent people in the East and you show his video in your media, claiming that such a move was in support for democracy. How can you defend such crimes?"

He then condemned Zionists' recent aggression on al-Aqsa Mosque, saying, "The more you commit crimes in al-Aqsa Mosque, the closer you get to death. So, rectify your approach, otherwise you will on a divine tradition face the same destiny that criminals throughout history did."

Iranian nation is vigilant and awake with unprecedented solidarity, standing firm until conquering high peaks, he added.

pakistan May Investigate Nuclear Scientist's Ties to Iran

The Pakistani government has filed a petition in the nation's High Court seeking to investigate Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani scientist who has confessed to running the world's largest nuclear proliferation network, over recent reports about his ties to Iran's nuclear program, a government lawyer said Monday.

The petition was filed on Monday, hours before a court in Lahore was to announce a verdict on Mr. Khan's petition to have his travel restrictions relaxed.

The court is expected to issue its ruling Wednesday on both, according to lawyers for the government and Mr. Khan.

Weekly report on Iran

The government filed its request in an effort to investigate Mr. Khan regarding recent news reports in which he was said to have confessed to supplying Iran with information related to the nuclear program.

A copy of the government petition obtained by The New York Times cited two articles published on March 10 and 14 by The Washington Post that “have national security implications for Pakistan as they contain allegations related to nuclear program and nuclear cooperation. Further they have likelihood of adversely affecting friendly ties with the government of Iran and Iraq.” The petition requested the court to direct Mr. Khan to “refrain from interacting with foreign media.”

The article published on March 14 reported that Mr. Khan had disclosed in a written document that Pakistan gave Iran drawings related to a nuclear bomb, parts of centrifuges to purify uranium and a secret worldwide list of suppliers. The article published on March 10 cited a nuclear weapons expert who said members of Mr. Khan’s network had reached out to Saddam Hussein’s government in 1990. Both Mr. Khan and the Pakistani government have denied these claims.

The government appeared to have filed its request partly to stall the court ruling on Mr. Khan’s petition, and it came as Pakistan’s powerful army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, was in the United States for high-level security talks.

Syed Ali Zafar, the lawyer for Mr. Khan, called the government’s petition “irrelevant.”

“Today’s government application is mischief by the government, as it wants to defer the case,” Mr. Zafar said. He added that Mr. Khan had been given a public affidavit saying that his hands are clean.

The government lawyer, Naveed Inayat Malik, declined in a telephone interview to offer further information on how the court had handled the government’s request.

“The court proceedings were held in camera,” he said, referring to a term used here to describe classified proceedings. “It is, therefore, not possible for me to talk about the proceedings.”

A government spokesman told local news outlets last week that the Khan network was a “closed chapter.”

Pakistani authorities have continuously rebuffed international nuclear investigators who want to interview Mr. Khan about his proliferation activities.

Mr. Khan was placed under house arrest in 2004 by President Pervez Musharraf, after confessing to selling nuclear technology to various countries. American officials say they believe that among them were Iran, Libya and North Korea.

But Mr. Khan's role in developing Pakistan's nuclear program also gave him the status of a national hero within the country. Right-wing and Islamist political parties continue to praise him as the "father of the bomb."

Iran wasting chance for dialogue: Russia

Russia on Friday warned Iran it was missing out on a chance to start a broad dialogue, as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton again sought to win the Kremlin's assent for tougher stance on Tehran.

Iran's defiance over its nuclear programme means the country is wasting a chance for talks to find a solution, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said alongside Clinton after her talks with President Dmitry Medvedev.

"It is letting an opportunity to establish dialogue with the international community slip away," Lavrov said.

Later in talks with Clinton, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, believed to have a final say on all issues related to Iran, stressed that sanctions would be counterproductive, his spokesman Yuri Ushakov said.

"A resolution (on sanctions) is possible," Putin said at the meeting. "But sanctions will not contribute in resolving the problem, they could be counterproductive," Ushakov quoted him as saying.

Clinton said Washington was now seeking support for "smart sanctions" against Tehran, a line that recalled the Kremlin's policy that any measures against Iran needed to be intelligent and targeted.

"We pursued the diplomatic track and thought it was correct to do so," she told reporters.

"We... are working very hard in the Security Council to obtain a resolution expressing the international community's disapproval of Iranian actions and pulling together... a regime of smart sanctions as President Medvedev has referred to them," she added.

Lavrov's comments were the latest indication of Russian frustration that Iran has failed to agree a deal with the international community to end the standoff over its nuclear programme.

Lavrov however reiterated Russia's traditional stance that sanctions against Tehran could be inevitable but did not make any public promises beyond that.

Lavrov said Medvedev told Clinton during her second and final day in Moscow that the sanctions against Iran should be "smart, non-aggressive and non-paralysing."

Weekly report on Iran

"As Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said, sanctions rarely work but there may appear a situation when they may end up being inevitable," Lavrov told reporters.

"And we don't rule out that such a situation may appear with respect to Iran."

Russia -- a veto-wielding permanent UN Security Council member -- traditionally has strong ties with Iran but Medvedev has repeatedly said sanctions against Tehran cannot be ruled out if necessary.

Medvedev called for targeted sanctions against Iran on a visit to Paris earlier this month, saying they should be "smart" and not target the civilian population.

On Thursday, the United States and Russia clashed over the launch of Iran's first nuclear plant Russia is building, with Putin saying the nuclear power facility would finally come online this summer.

That remark immediately drew Clinton's criticism, who said that move would send Tehran the wrong message.

Tehran is accused by the West of planning to build a nuclear bomb although it insists its nuclear drive is purely peaceful in nature.

Following Thursday's disagreement, officials sought to gloss over the differences, with Lavrov praising Clinton's visit which he described as "in-flight refueling."

U.N. tells Iran to end Eutelsat satellite jamming

The United Nations' leading communications agency called on Iran on Friday to end jamming of foreign satellite broadcasts, which is banned under its global regulations. The unprecedented move by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) adds to pressure on Tehran as world powers consider a new round of U.N. sanctions over Iran's nuclear program and it faces simmering social unrest.

Iranian authorities have been jamming foreign satellite broadcasts into their territory since late last year, with broadcasters such as the BBC and Deutsche Welle affected. Access to the Internet for Iranian citizens has also been affected.

In a statement, ITU's radio regulations board said interference coming from Iran was harming signals from satellite networks run by Eutelsat, a French satellite operator.

Iran should find the source of the interference -- which affects both radio and television signals -- and "eliminate it as a matter of highest priority."

"In this case there is evidence that there is a deliberate attempt to block the satellite transmissions and so they are saying this should be stopped. This is prohibited under the regulations," ITU spokesman Sanjay Acharya told a news briefing.

Weekly report on Iran

"Iran has not admitted it is sending out these signals that are interfering with Eutelsat. They have said they will investigate," he added.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Iranian authorities have been clamping down on reformists since last year's June disputed presidential election returned hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power, sparking protests and clashes. Iran has blamed other nations for stoking unrest.

On Monday, European Union foreign ministers also urged Iran to stop jamming transmissions and said they were prepared to take action to put an end to the interference.

France raised the issue at the closed-door talks of ITU's 12-member experts board and provided evidence that there were signals from Iran which interfered with Eutelsat, ITU said.

"This is the first time that the radio regulations board has had to take this step," Acharya told Reuters, noting that the case involved a "deliberate attempt to block a signal."

Previous disputes brought to the ITU involved satellites from different European states interfering with each other, or Cuba complaining about U.S.-based terrestrial operators sending signals into the communist island, he said.

The board has no policing powers to enforce its decision, but its appeal is expected to put pressure on Iran, which is one of 191 ITU member states, to stop the practice, Acharya said.

"We will put as much pressure as possible and this is the beginning of that," he said.

ITU's ruling Council could take up the issue at its annual meeting being held in Geneva from April 13-22, but bilateral efforts were expected to continue in the meantime, he said.

"Iran is a member of the ITU and has to adhere to treaties that have been signed on radio regulations," Acharya said. "No one is allowed to block signals, that is clear."

NATO urges missile defence pact, cites Iran threat

NATO states should agree at a summit this year to make missile defence systems against states including Iran an alliance mission and look at every opportunity to cooperate on this with Russia, the head of NATO says.

In a speech prepared for delivery at a conference in Brussels on Saturday, alliance Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said a NATO-wide missile defence system would show collective will to defend against a growing threat.

Weekly report on Iran

"We need a decision by NATO's next summit in November that missile defence for our populations and territories is an alliance mission. And that we will explore every opportunity to cooperate with Russia," Rasmussen said in an advance text of the speech made available by NATO.

In reiterating his wish to see collaboration with Russia, Rasmussen said this required a decision by Moscow "to see missile defence as an opportunity, rather than a threat".

He said current trends showed a "real and growing" threat from weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, with more than 30 countries possessing or developing missiles with greater and greater ranges.

"In many cases, these missiles could eventually threaten our populations and territories," he said.

IRANIAN MISSILE THREAT

Iran, which the West suspects of working to produce nuclear weapons, has said it possesses missiles with a range that would put NATO members Turkey, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria within reach, Rasmussen said.

If Tehran were to complete development of intermediate and intercontinental missiles after taking a key step in introducing its SAFIR 2 space-launch vehicle last year, "then the whole of the European continent, as well as all of Russia would be in range", he said.

"Proliferators must know that we are unwavering in our determination to collective defence."

Russia reacted positively when Rasmussen called last September for cooperation in missile defence, but has questioned the motives of the U.S. system any pan-NATO system would be linked up with, saying it should be properly consulted on plans.

Last year, U.S. President Barack Obama shelved Bush-era plans to install a land-based missile shield in Europe to guard against long-range threats from Iran, in favour of sea-based interceptors and a second-phase of land-based systems to which existing anti-missile hardware in NATO states could be linked.

Some security experts say that despite NATO enthusiasm for Russian missile defence involvement, technical and security problems mean this would take years and cooperation was unlikely to go beyond limited exchange of early warning data.

Israel could use tactical nukes on Iran-thinktank

Weekly report on Iran

Deeply concerned as it is by the risk of a nuclear-armed Iran, Israel has never even hinted at using atomic weapons to forestall the perceived threat. But now a respected Washington think tank has said that low-radioactive yield "tactical" nuclear warheads would be one way for the Israelis to destroy Iranian uranium enrichment plants in remote, dug-in fortifications.

Despite the 65-year-old taboo against carrying out -- or, for that matter, mooting -- nuclear strikes, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) says in a new report that "some believe that nuclear weapons are the only weapons that can destroy targets deep underground or in tunnels".

But other independent experts are on record warning that such a scenario is based on the "myth" of a clean atomic attack and would be too politically hazardous to justify.

In their study titled "Options in Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Program", CSIS analysts Abdullah Toukan and Anthony Cordesman envisage the possibility of Israel "using these warheads as a substitute for conventional weapons" given the difficulty its jets would face in reaching Iran for anything more than a one-off sortie.

Ballistic missiles or submarine-launched cruise missiles could serve for Israeli tactical nuclear strikes without interference from Iranian air defences, the 208-page report says. "Earth-penetrator" warheads would produce most damage.

Israel is widely assumed to have the Middle East's sole atomic arsenal. Israeli leaders do not comment on this capability other than to underscore its deterrent role; President Shimon Peres has said repeatedly that "Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the region."

A veteran Israeli defence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said preemptive nuclear strikes were foreign to the national doctrine: "Such weapons exist so as not to be used."

A fixture of NATO and Soviet arsenals, tactical nuclear weapons are designed to deliver focussed devastation with less contamination than city-killing bombs like those the United States dropped on Japan to end World War Two.

That damage containment would, in theory, off-set diplomatic fallout for whichever country were to use such arms on a foe.

FALLOUT

There has been speculation that the United States -- which, like Israel, has not ruled out military force to deny Iran atomic arms -- could itself resort to tactical nuclear strikes.

Weekly report on Iran

The Pentagon's 2002 Nuclear Posture Review, which was leaked to the media, spoke of the need to develop new "mini-nukes" for defeating bunker systems. The review cited Iran among potential enemies that might eventually warrant a U.S. nuclear deployment.

Yet Toukan and Cordesman think it "very unlikely that any U.S. president would authorise the use of such nuclear weapons, or even allow ... a strong ally such as Israel to use them, unless another country had used nuclear weapons against the U.S. and its allies".

They say the United States would be central to any diplomatic solution to the Iranian standoff and is the only country that could launch a successful military strike on Iran.

International experts who contributed essays to the 2003 book "Tactical Nuclear Weapons" mostly shied from hawkishness.

"Who could predict what might happen next if (the) taboo on the use of nuclear weapons were to be broken?" wrote former CIA director Stansfield Turner. "Getting tactical nuclear weapons under control, rather than attesting to their use by building new ones, should be our goal."

Princeton University physicist Robert Nelson assailed the idea that tactical nuclear weapons, detonated below ground, would pose tolerable risks for civilians and the environment.

"This is a dangerous myth. In fact, shallow buried nuclear explosions produce far more local fallout than air or surface explosions of the same yield," he argued.

Sam Gardiner, a retired U.S. air force colonel who runs wargames for various Washington agencies, said an Israeli decision on using non-conventional weapons against Iran would come down to how far its nuclear programme was to be retarded.

Israel supports efforts by world powers to rein in Iran -- which denies seeking the bomb - - through sanctions, and some experts say any pre-emptive Israeli strike would aim to jolt international diplomats into finally knuckling down on Tehran.

"If a 3-to-5 year delay were the Israeli objective, I expect it would drive their target people to say the only way it could be done is with tactical nuclear weapons," Gardiner said.

"I expect the Israeli objective to be more like a year. That is doable without tactical nuclear weapons."

Gates expresses concern over Iranian drones

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates expressed concern over Iran's aerial drone program, saying the weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists. "Countries like Iran are

developing their own UAVs and already have a UAV capability," Gates told the Senate Appropriations Committee, using the acronym the military uses for drones -- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. "That is a concern, because it is one of these areas where -- if they chose to, in Iraq, in Afghanistan -- they could create difficulties for us."

Iran says Muslims must act over Jerusalem

Iran attacked Israel's settlement plans in occupied East Jerusalem on Friday, saying Muslims around the world needed to take action.

Announcements by Israel's right-wing government of new building projects in East Jerusalem -- which the Jewish state seized in a 1967 war -- have spoiled U.S. plans to get Palestinians and Israelis back into peace negotiations.

"Expansion of Israeli settlements, destruction of Islamic and Christian sites and wide-scale construction of new synagogues ... show the Zionist plans to accelerate Judaisation of East Jerusalem and unfortunately it is approved by American officials," Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said in comments reported on Iranian state radio.

"This has raised the alarm for all people around the world and doubled the need for Muslim and other countries to act seriously," he said, adding that the 22-nation Arab League should take a strong stance at its meeting in Libya this weekend.

U.S. officials have sought to coax Israel into suspending further East Jerusalem projects and discussing core issues such as borders and the status of Jerusalem as part of indirect talks with the Palestinians that have been blessed by the Arab League.

Iran is locked in dispute with the United States and its allies, including Arab states, over its nuclear energy programme which they fear will allow Tehran to develop nuclear weapons. Iran says it has no such intention.

Israel says it considers a nuclear Iran as an existential threat and analysts say Israel, itself regarded as a nuclear power, could carry out raids on Iranian sites.

Iran, a major oil and gas producer, sees itself as the main champion of the Palestinian cause among Muslim countries.

Iran: The threat and our strategy

In my 33 years in the diplomatic service, Iran has always featured prominently. There have been issues, notably Afghanistan, on which the West and Iran worked together constructively.

Weekly report on Iran

But since the 1979 revolution, Iran has usually preoccupied foreign policymakers for the wrong reasons — such as state-sponsored terrorism internationally and a deteriorating internal human rights record. One major issue has absorbed international attention recently: concern that Iran is trying to acquire nuclear weapons.

Policymakers are right to be concerned.

For Iran to acquire nuclear weapons could be profoundly destabilizing, harming the Middle East balance of power and triggering an arms race. It could also irreparably damage the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, a cornerstone of international security since the 1960s.

The international community has given Iran a choice between engagement and isolation. It knows from experience that it is hard to stop a determined proliferator. Iran is no exception. But the world is not without leverage.

First, unlike Saddam's Iraq, Iran desires international respectability and goes to extraordinary lengths to portray its nuclear program as legitimate.

International censure by bodies such as the United Nations Security Council is a powerful pressure point. Since 2005, Britain, France and Germany have worked with the United States, Russia and China — the “E3 plus 3” process — to maintain a strong international consensus.

Second, the international community has many things that Iran needs — above all, technology and money — if it is to meet the demands of its growing population, nearly 70 percent of which is younger than 30 and which has a strong desire to reintegrate with the world.

Third, unlike North Korea, Iran has a pluralistic system of government and a surprisingly open society.

It is no democracy — as it showed last summer. But there are many power centers. The regime must be mindful of public opinion. This gives the international community an opportunity to influence debate inside Iran.

At the heart of international diplomatic strategy is a calculation that the right combination of policies can change the cost-benefit calculation of the regime.

Since 2005, the E3 plus 3 has pursued a carrot-and-stick strategy, offering Iran generous benefits if it suspends elements of its nuclear program that cause proliferation concerns — above all, the enrichment program, which could produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon.

At the same time, we have increased pressure on Iran for failing to respect the wishes of the international community. Since 2006, the Security Council has adopted five resolutions to turn the screws.

The European Union went further, imposing sanctions that target additional individuals, banks and other entities. The Security Council is considering a further resolution, with additional sanctions, which EU leaders say they will again augment.

Iranian FM Mottaki brushes off Zionists' impudent claims on Beitulmoqaddas

Tehran, March 26, IRNA - Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki here on Thursday ruled out Zionist officials' "disrespectful" claims on Beitulmoqaddas, saying the claims indicate the intensity of the occupiers' treachery and swindle to judaize the first Qibla of the world Muslims.

Mottaki in a statement voiced concern over tragic events in Beitulmoqaddas, saying brazen statements of the Zionist occupying regime officials and the series of events and developments over the past few months have tolled bell of danger and alarm for whole the world, making it ample necessary for all the Muslim nations and countries to take appropriate measures and mobilize all their facilities in response.

He said such a big plot by Zionists has many grave and dangerous consequences, so it would be necessary for the world Muslim nations and countries to take due comprehensive measures and reactions.

He added that construction of diversified and wide-ranging settlements and reckless destruction of residential places and the Islamic and Christian monuments, wide-scale construction of synagogues and Zionist temples, and change of the ancient and historical signs and names of Beitulmoqaddas and more shamefully the last move of Zionists - the so-called Jerusalem mayor's labeling international resolutions and approvals on Beitulmoqaddas as "nonsense" and Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claims that eastern Beitulmoqaddas, the unchallenged sovereignty of the Israeli officials, is inseparable - are all indicative of Zionists' pre-mediated and well-calculated plan to expedite judaization of eastern Beitulmoqaddas. Such affaires unfortunately get American officials' seal of approval in Washington, regretted the Iranian top diplomat.

He went on to say, "Remaining a mere supervisor, sitting idle and dormant and wasting time in favor of the Zionist and American officials' long-term and fundamental plans is not the key to the problem."

Weekly report on Iran

The Iranian Foreign Minister added that cries and calls of Beitulmoqaddas people and residents all point to the degree of sensitivity of the Zionist officials' plots, making it necessary to show authoritative and swift reaction to the "call of innocence."

Moreover, it will be appropriate for senior officials of the Muslim and Arab states, especially the Arab League summit, which is underway in Tripoli, Libya, to investigate serious dangers facing the Arab and Muslim world and put the issue of Beitulmoqaddas and grave dangers of the occupiers' aggressive move on their agenda, trying to find and workout related practical and efficient mechanisms in different levels.

"We, as representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, have different proposals on our agenda, which mandate forming a joint committee of foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League in the first possible chance to seriously follow up as a special work and make appropriate decisions on Quds events through holding routine consultations and emergency sessions. Hope that the initiative will serve as a small step to address calls of Quds residents for assistance and soothe their sufferings and pains."

West pressure not to affect Iran's nuclear program

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says efforts by the West to halt Iran's nuclear program will not bear fruit.

The Thursday remarks by Ahmadinejad were made during a ceremony marking the inauguration of a dam in southwestern Iran. They were carried live by state television.

Addressing the West, he said: "Rest assured that your efforts will be fruitless."

The United States and its allies, including Israel, are pushing for a new round of sanctions against Iran because they fear that its nuclear program is geared toward making weapons. Iran denies the charge.

Ahmadinejad also urged the West to stop supporting Israel

U.S. 'bringing partners along' on Iran - White House

IOWA CITY, Iowa (Reuters) - The United States is bringing the world community around to the need to pressure Iran over its nuclear program, the White House said on Thursday.

Weekly report on Iran

"We're at a point in bringing the international community along, and in bringing our partners along, that we've never been at," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs told reporters while travelling in Iowa

US softens Iran sanctions plan to win support
West 'fussing' over nuclear drive: Ahmadinejad
Afp, Washington/ Tehran

The United States has stepped back from a series of harsh measures against Iran and softened proposed UN sanctions to win the backing of China and Russia, the Wall Street Journal reported yesterday.

The newspaper said proposals that would have effectively closed international airspace and waters to Iranian state-owned air cargo and shipping lines had been scrapped.

The proposed package of sanctions had also been stripped of plans targeting insurance for certain Iranian companies and the sale of Iranian bonds.

The United States is working to develop consensus among the five veto-wielding permanent members of the United Nations Security Council on sanctions punishing Tehran for its nuclear programme.

But while the United States, Britain and France agree on the need for tough new measures, Russia and particularly China have been more reluctant to sign off on new sanctions.

The Journal said the revised sanctions would more narrowly target "major power centres in Iran, in particular the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps," and would firm up existing pressure on Tehran.

The scrapped proposals included tough new measures that would increase Iran's isolation to unprecedented levels.

The United States had hoped to get a new round of UN sanctions passed early this year, possibly around April, the newspaper said, but difficulty securing support could push the effort back into the summer.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Thursday accused Western countries of stirring up a "fuss" about the Islamic republic's nuclear programme.

"They are saying we are worried that Iran may be building a bomb," Ahmadinejad said in a speech at the inauguration of a new dam in southwest Iran that was broadcast on state television.

"But we are saying you have built it and even used it. So who should be worried? We or you? They are just making a fuss. They have ended up humiliating themselves.

Averting the Iranian Nuclear Flashpoint

Iran's nuclear program, and the world's reaction to it, raise the most profound questions about the strength of international law, the purpose of the United Nations and the rights of states that feel threatened by others. More prosaically, Iran's nuclear ambitions are a potential flashpoint for war in the Middle East.

I am concerned that in too many countries, the dangers are seen as theoretical, the time frame leisurely. We have not yet reached the crunch, but all members of the United Nations Security Council need to recognize the stakes and the options if we are to avoid it.

Dealing with Iran, we are prisoners of our history. Over the decades, there have been missteps by the West, including but not only by the U.K., and mistakes by Iran, that have created something worse than a climate of mistrust — a standoff in which both sides talk past each other. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, says it is un-Islamic to have nuclear weapons, but Iranian actions don't give credence to this claim. President Obama reaches out to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and his offer is dismissed either as a P.R. stunt or part of a crafty plot — and certainly not seen for what it was, a ground-breaking offer to change U.S.-Iran relations.

In the last six months, engagement with Iran has become far more complex. Because the country is itself undergoing a searching examination of what it stands for — led by its own people on the streets. Because getting Iran's leaders to abandon duplicity and opacity in respect of their nuclear intentions, and to engage in a broader rapprochement with the world, is hard to choreograph when they are divided among themselves. And because there are many Irans.

One Iran is seen in a highly educated, entrepreneurial people, with a celebrated culture and civilization. That Iran exists in diasporas around the world, but is also clearly present among those in Iran demanding a right to have a say in the future of their country .

Then there is an Iran whose economy is a mess. Despite sitting on the world's second largest gas reserves, it imports gas. Corruption is rife — Transparency International ranks Iran 168 out of 180 countries. According to the I.M.F. it has the highest brain drain in the world. This Iran destabilizes its neighborhood by supporting terrorism; isolates itself from international cooperation on Afghanistan; rants about the destruction of Israel and suggests that U.S. support for a devastated Haiti is a ploy to invade it. This Iran restricts access by its educated citizenry to international media for fear of what they might learn.

The regime deliberately confuses these Irans. It talks of winning the battle for technology when it launches worms into space 40 years after man went to the moon. It claims to be a defender of human rights while Iranians who assert their basic freedoms are imprisoned, beaten, shot in the streets and executed after show trials.

Weekly report on Iran

The resolution of the nuclear issue, and an active process to achieve its resolution, matters because the two alternatives — Iran with the bomb or Iran bombed to deny it getting one — are, as President Nicolas Sarkozy said, horrific.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has said that it is unable to verify that Iran's nuclear program is for exclusively peaceful purposes. Iran offers no credible explanation for producing fissile material with a clear military application, while refusing to address I.A.E.A. questions about past contacts with the nuclear black market.

Meanwhile, after months of stalling, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Iran was ready for a deal with the I.A.E.A. to provide fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor. Because of the politics in Tehran, other leaders immediately opposed it. And just days later Mr. Ahmadinejad announced Iran would enrich uranium up to 20 percent — a significant step closer to weapons-grade material, and with no civilian end use because Iran, despite grandiose claims, cannot turn this uranium into usable fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor or for nuclear power stations that have not been built

War with Iran by Any Other Name

This week may be looked back on as the pivotal moment when war with Iran entered the mainstream of political thought in the Obama era. At a time when Iranians are standing up to an Iranian government that has been deprived of the Bush-era shadow of war, that shadow is again emerging.

"Bomb Bomb Iran" may be finally crossing over to the pop charts.

While Iran war rhetoric is nothing new in Washington, for the first time it has been given a vehicle. This week, a resolution in the House of Representatives is being circulated by Texas Republican Louie Gohmert that explicitly endorses an Israeli military strike on Iran if "no other peaceful solution can be found within reasonable time." The resolution does not specify what peaceful solution its supporters are willing to endorse, what timeframe they would consider "reasonable", or what kind of "support" the United States would provide to Israel if they bombed Iran. The resolution also does not specify what sort of Israeli military action the U.S. would support.

But in the National Review this week, neoconservative pundit Daniel Pipes raised the specter that, if Israel bombs Iran, it will be with nuclear weapons. Pipes offers this as yet another reason the President must be cajoled into bombing Iran first (he has previously urged that Obama attack Iran to win reelection).

This was also the week that AIPAC convened its annual conference in Washington, in which many of the speakers, including U.S. lawmakers, focused on the importance of imposing "crippling sanctions" on Iran and rallied AIPAC members to lobby Congress on this point. While it was the "crippling" gasoline sanctions that were on the marquee, the conference's subtext was clearly war.

Weekly report on Iran

"To our friends in Israel, to AIPAC," Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina proclaimed to the conference on Monday, "Congress has your back!"

"All options must be on the table. And you know what option I'm talking about," Graham declared.

"When you talk about war you should never talk about it with a smile on your face. But sometimes it's better to go to war than it is to allow the holocaust to develop a second time," asserted Graham, thus reducing the debate on Iran policy to a false choice between all out war or a second holocaust.

And then, having committed himself to the former option, Graham laid the groundwork for his vision for war.

If military options go forward, Graham said, "The Iranian government's ability to wage conventional warfare against its neighbors and our troops in the region should not exist; they should not have one plane that can fly or ship that can float."

Whether this message was intended for Israeli generals or for American war planners, Graham's message was clear a military option must be "decisive" and the U.S. and Israel need to act soon because "we do not have time on our side".

"I hope and pray that other options will work," Graham insisted. "I hope and pray that is not the option we have to seek." But if figures like Graham are so hopeful that other options will work, it is odd that they have worked so effectively to systematically undercut and eliminate those other options every step of the way.

Already, multilateral sanctions the Obama Administration is attempting to construct with partners and at the U.N. have been declared dead before arrival. Prior to that, it was the engagement track that was prematurely eulogized after a mere twelve weeks. And once "crippling sanctions" are circumscribed to an artificial timeline and fail to miraculously fix everything, we will soon have exhausted our entire diplomatic playbook with remarkable swiftness. The path will be cleared for war.

This is not keeping all options on the table, this is clearing the table for only one option.

On Sunday, Michael Makovsky, foreign policy director of the Bipartisan Research Center, revealed the true pathway upon which "crippling sanctions" will place the U.S. In a column in the San Francisco Chronicle, Makovsky clearly connected the dots between a "crippling" gasoline embargo and war with Iran.

ITU urges Iran to end interference hampering EUTELSAT satellite operations Communications

The international Communication Union (ITU) urges on Friday Iran to continue its effort in locating the source of interference hampering EUTELSAT satellite operations and to

eliminate it as a matter of the highest priority.

According to a press release from the (ITU), France, on behalf of the EUTELSAT satellite operator, notified the Radio Regulations Board (RRB) of the interference emanating from the territory of Iran.

The Radio Regulations Board (RRB) determined that EUTELSAT satellite networks, operating in the orbital positions at 9E, 13E, 21.5E and 25.5E are receiving harmful interference.

The interference is reported to have persisted for some time, adversely affecting the operation of several EUTELSAT satellite transponders and channels. The Radio Regulations Board urged the Administration of Iran.

The Administration of France and the ITU Radio communication Bureau have been called upon to assist the Administration of Iran in identifying the source of the interference.

Will Iran Follow Hitler's Example?

I firmly believe that unless we learn from history, we will be condemned to repeat it. It seems to me that there are dangerous similarities to the rise of Nazism and the rise of radical Islam and the nuclear weapons ambitions of Iran.

A look back at a time that gave rise to Nazi Germany and a look at today's rise of a nuclear Iran show many eerie similarities:

- Europe and the world were fatigued by the loss of life and economic strife in the wake of World War I. Likewise, America is fatigued by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. We are experiencing the worst economy since the Great Depression.
- Jews did not believe the threats leveled by the Nazis would come to pass. And while Israelis understand the threat from Iran and radical Islam, do the Americans?
- Hitler told the world of his ultimate intentions when he wrote "Mein Kampf" and made speeches prior to coming to power, similar to the way the president of Iran tells the world of his intentions to rid the planet of Israel.
- Hitler used laws to justify his lawless and inhuman intentions and even invoked the name of God to show his authority to govern. Hitler said, "I believe I am acting in accordance with the will of the almighty creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." Ahmadinejad invokes the name of Allah to justify his belief that "Israel must be wiped off the map" and uses law to further his lawless and inhuman intent.
- Hitler made pacts with foreign leaders that bought him time to seize and secure power and armaments. Iran makes agreements with the IAEA and governments with no intention to honor agreements in an effort to buy time.
- Hitler used Jews as scapegoats while advancing and justifying a radical agenda. Iran uses Jews and the West as scapegoats in advancing and justifying a radical agenda.

Weekly report on Iran

- Hitler sought to destroy the Jewish people, murdering millions. The president of Iran seeks the total destruction of the state of Israel and the Jewish people.
- Hitler got so powerful, while Europe turned a blind eye, that collectively they could not stop Nazi Germany when war was eventually waged. Iran is arming in violation of law, while the world sits back and fails to stop it.
- Hitler, in defiance of law and treaty, built weapons upon which ultimately made his threats a reality. Iran is building nuclear weapons in violation of law which makes it more of a reality.
- Hitler indoctrinated children and at the end of the war, sent them to their deaths. Iran indoctrinates their children to hate Jews and the West. Radical Islam has sent children into markets strapped with bombs to kill innocents.
- Sixty million people perished from the earth during World War II with much cruder weapons than we have today. Iran threatens the destruction of the state of Israel that he claims will come to pass. Millions are in jeopardy.

Right now, Iran is building the means to make good on its threats. They do so in complete disregard of international law and treaty. The world is turning the same blind eye to the government of Iran as it did with the rise of Nazi Germany.

We must stop Iran from obtaining the means to make good on their threats.

Hitler could have been stopped. The power to stop him was not exercised because no one could imagine Nazi Germany's threats could ever be realized.

I take Ahmadinejad at his word and his country's ability to build nuclear weapons. The world cannot afford to give the Iranian regime the "benefit of the doubt."

Forget about sanctions. They won't work and they will only delay the inevitable. Iran must be stopped and stopped now. If Iran is not stopped in time, millions will be wiped off the face of the earth.

Broadcasting body calls on Iran to stop jamming

The UN's telecommunications agency called on Iran Friday to stop jamming foreign radio and television broadcasts, following European complaints. Skip related content International Telecommunications Union spokesman Sanjay Acharya said that "interference emanating from the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran... appear to be of a nature which is forbidden under radio regulations."

The ITU's radio regulation board "urged the administration of Iran to continue its efforts in locating the source of interference and to eliminate it as a matter of the highest priority." he added.

Weekly report on Iran

The regulation board issued its call following a complaint lodged by France on behalf of the management of the Eutelsat telecommunications satellite whose emissions to Iran were being jammed.

Acharya acknowledged that the ITU could not impose any sanctions against Tehran before its next world congress in some two years' time.

"What we can do at this moment is to add pressure on the government of Iran," he said.

EU foreign ministers on Monday vowed to "act" against the Iranian state's unacceptable jamming of satellite broadcasts and Internet controls, showing the bloc's increasing impatience with Tehran.

Nearly 70 foreign radio and television stations that transmit via the Eutelsat satellite to Iran were jammed on February 11, the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, they said.

Iranian authorities have cracked down on the media and arrested scores of journalists since anti-government protests erupted after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election last June.

The Islamic regime has been targeting the BBC's Persian-language broadcasts in particular.

EU sources said that Iranians' text messages were also being intercepted by the authorities in Tehran.

The bloc's foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton said she was "extremely concerned" about Iran's jamming tactics, without saying what precisely Europe would, or could, do to counter Tehran's tactics.

No US pressure regarding IP gas pipeline project: Lashari

Secretary Ministry of Petroleum Kamran Lashari said that letter of sovereign guarantee was sent to Iran to finalize the process of Pak-Iran gas pipeline and after due reply from Iran a final agreement will be signed in April in France.

Talking to DawnNews, Lashari said that after this agreement the two countries would not be able to withdraw from the project.

He said there is no pressure from the United States on IP gas project.

Lashari said that Pakistan is in negotiations with China for the availability of technical equipment for laying the pipeline.

However, official sources also confirmed that China is interested to invest to initially \$2.5 billion to this project.

China is also interested in gas pipeline extension to its territory and a Sino delegation would visit Pakistan during the second week of April, said sources.

Gas Sales Purchase Agreement already finalized between Pakistan and Iran will provide 750 million cubic feet of gas to Pakistan per day for the next 25 years.

Economic News

Obama Offers Olive Branch to Iran

The ball is once again in Iran's court. US President Barack Obama has reiterated his offer of a comprehensive dialogue with Tehran, wooing Iranians to be part of the bandwagon, which has a shared future with global economy, peace and security. In his second consecutive message,

on the eve of the Nouroz festival, Obama said that his administration's will to walk the extra mile for engaging Iran in a constructive dialogue stands undeterred. But he had no qualms in making it clear that Tehran's clandestine nuclear programme, especially its un-kept promises with the international community, is a source of irritation. He was, nonetheless, categorical in saying that sanctions against the regime are just round the corner, if concerns over its enrichment profile are not addressed post-haste.

Though it would not be difficult to assume the Iranian reaction, Tehran should take a deep breath before making its point. Political compulsions have kept the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on the edge, as it continues to offend the international community. The bitter power struggle at home, in the wake of controversial presidential election on June 12, has further complicated the situation. The orthodox establishment believes that any rapprochement with the West would be suicidal for its political fortunes, and the best way to stay put in power is to raise the stakes. This approach has pushed Iran into a deep morass, crippling its socio-economic and political conditions.

A country, which has second largest oil reserves in the world, is resorting to rationing, and inflation is at an all time high. The proposed sanctions by the major powers will only add to the misery of the Iranians — enabling the government to further radicalise its policies at home and abroad.

President Obama, however, has come up with a couple of firsts in his policy prescription. Hoping for a new beginning, irrespective of stubbornness of Tehran, Obama has offered educational exchanges for Iranian students, as well as working to increase access to Internet technology. The intention is to open up the Iranian society, providing it with an opportunity in the social and intellectual realms to interact with the world at large. But

this is going to be contested by the hardliners, who will interpret it as interference in its internal affairs to weaken the revolutionary zeal. However political Washington's approach may be to make inroads into Iranian society, it will be an uphill task for the Islamic republic to resist it for long in this age of globalisation and interdependence. The offer and its possible rejection is likely to stir unrest at home, where the people have been campaigning for civil liberties, reforms and openness.

Tehran should see that Obama administration's approach is altogether different from his predecessor, George Bush, who was bent upon taking a militaristic course to ensure regime change. The only option for Iran in these trying times is to reciprocate by unclenching its fist and joining hands for a sustained dialogue on issues of bilateral interest. Iran should see it as an opportunity in disaster, and make use of it to the best of its merits. The olive branch shouldn't be trampled upon.

Pakistan Gas Pipeline Is Iran's Lifeline

As Iran braces for another broadside of economic sanctions over its nuclear program, Tehran moves closer to opening up a new lifeline -- a natural gas pipeline to Pakistan and possibly India and China as well.

If everything goes as planned, this much-delayed, controversial project could wreck U.S. efforts to check Iran's expansionist ambitions.

U.S. energy analyst Gal Luft said the pipeline could also "have profound implications for the geopolitics of energy in the 21st century and for the future of South Asia."

Iran and Pakistan signed an agreement for the construction of the 560-mile, \$7.5 billion pipeline from the huge offshore South Pars gas field in the Gulf through Pakistan's unruly Balochistan province to Sindh province.

The project is crucial for Pakistan's growing energy requirements. Iran will supply 750 million-1 billion cubic feet of gas per day by mid-2015.

The project was first mooted in 1994. It was intended to carry gas through Pakistan to India in a 1,724-mile pipeline. But India, under intense pressure from the United States, withdrew in 2009, citing disputes over prices and transit fees. There was also deep misgivings in New Delhi about dealing with its longtime foe Pakistan.

India has invested instead in nuclear power to meet its ever-rising demand for energy in its burgeoning economy. It signed a landmark deal with the United States in 2008 for nuclear equipment.

There has been no official explanation about why the Americans would allow Pakistan to go ahead and sign a pipeline agreement with Iran at a time when Washington is striving to isolate the Islamic Republic and paralyze its economy.

Weekly report on Iran

But the Americans cannot afford to antagonize Pakistan at a time when Washington needs Islamabad's support to fight al-Qaida and the Taliban. Pakistan is already suffering serious energy shortages with an electricity shortfall of 3,000 megawatts. These cause politically troublesome long and frequent blackouts.

The United States had been pressing for a pipeline to South Asia from gas-rich Turkmenistan in Central Asia via Afghanistan that would bypass Iran. But the security situation in Afghanistan made such a project unlikely.

India hasn't closed all doors to the project and may still rejoin. It is expected to require 146 billion cubic meters of gas per year by 2025 and its options are limited.

China, ever hungry for energy to fuel its mushrooming economy, has indicated that it might sign on and run an extension of the pipeline from Pakistan.

It may provide financial assistance to Islamabad for the project, which would provide an overland energy corridor less vulnerable to interference by the United States -- or others -- than the long tanker route from the Gulf across the Indian Ocean to the Pacific.

China is the main obstacle preventing the United States mustering the U.N. Security Council behind new sanctions on Iran. Sanctions would cut 10-12 percent of China's oil imports and jeopardize oil contracts worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

Iran desperately needs this project. Its potential in the energy sector is enormous. It has the second largest gas reserves in the world after Russia, roughly 15 percent of the world's gas supply.

But U.S.-led sanctions have prevented it from exploiting this through high-volume exports. The pipeline to Pakistan, and possibly the massive markets in India and China as well, could change all that and immunize Tehran from U.S. pressure.

The geopolitical implications of the Iran-Pakistan pipeline going through are immense. If the Americans relent, they may secure concessions from Iran and would certainly win influence in Pakistan by helping it out of a worsening energy crisis.

"By connecting itself with the world's second largest gas reserves, Pakistan would guarantee reliable supply for decades to come," says Luft, director of Washington's Institute for Analysis of Global Security, which focuses on energy security.

"If the pipeline were to be extended to India it could also be an instrument of stability in often tense Pakistan-India relations as well as a source of revenue for Islamabad through transit fees." One estimate puts that at around \$600 million a year.

But, Luft concludes, "Should the worst happen and a Taliban-style regime takes over in Pakistan, the economies of the world's most radical Shiite state and that of what could be

the world's most radical Sunni state would be connected to each other for decades to come, like conjoined twins."

And there's one other thing. Pakistan already has nuclear weapons and, under that scenario, Iran would, too

Top US lawmaker: Iran sanctions coming soon

The US Congress will soon take "final action" to approve tough new sanctions on Iran, a top Democratic lawmaker said Monday.

"Congress will soon take final action on sanctions to target the Iranian economy at its weakest point, the refined petroleum it depends on," Steny Hoyer said in a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Because of a lack of domestic refining capacity, oil-rich Iran is dependent on gasoline imports to meet about 40 percent of domestic consumption.

The House and Senate have been working to reconcile rival versions of legislation aimed at that vulnerability, producing one compromise version both chambers would approve and send to Obama to sign into law.

"These sanctions will demonstrate the high cost of Iran's self-imposed isolation," said Hoyer, who vowed he would defend Israel's security.

The top two Republicans in the House of Representatives also pressed for tough new sanctions on Iran and urged the White House to defuse a feud with Israel over illegal settlements in order to focus on the threat from Tehran.

"The administration can and should move forward to impose meaningful and targeted sanctions now and urge all nations to follow suit," Republican House Minority Leader John Boehner said in a statement.

Boehner lamented "a predictable pattern" in Obama's diplomacy of "concessions to countries acting contrary to US national interests" while it "ignores or snubs" key allies, citing the illegal Israeli settlement dispute.

The number two House Republican, Representative Eric Cantor, told AIPAC that "Iran must be dealt with firmly, with real sanctions that have real teeth" in order to make clear that "our willingness to use force is on the table."

"The message should be clear: If you deal with Iran, you are not welcome to deal with the US," said Cantor, the only Jewish House Republican.

"We are in a critical time. Now is not the time to be picking fights with Israel in what seems to be an attempt to curry favor with the Arab world. Now is the time when the US

must stand with Israel in the global struggle against the threats posed by radical Islam," said Cantor.

Israel is the only country in the Middle East that actually has nuclear bombs.

Iran says it needs to generate nuclear energy for its growing population which is already dependant on importing 40% of its gasoline needs

Tehran, Ankara to Boost Trade Exchange Volume

Iranian Economy and Finance Minister Seyed Shamseddin Hosseini and Turkish Minister of State Hayati Yazici in a meeting in the northern Iranian province of Golestan inked a protocol on promotion of mutual customs cooperation.

"So doing (signing customs protocol) Iran and Turkey actually took a serious step towards having \$30bln trade volume in the future," Hosseini told reporters after signing the document.

Noting that finalization of the protocol had been important for the two neighbors, Hosseini said that Iran-Turkey ties are now in the highest possible level and governments of the two sides have opened a new chapter in the two-way ties.

To have such a trade volume, abundant measures have been and will be adopted and to this end customs relations will be given prominence, he added.

Yazici for his part hailed signing of the deal, and said Ankara and Tehran follow economic ties from a special angle.

He also said that after talks between Iranian and Turkish leaders, bilateral ties have gained a momentum and efforts should be made to find new grounds for cooperation and investment.

Iranian New Year affects Armenian dram rate

Sharp fluctuations in the national currency of Armenia are mainly conditioned by the influx of dollars into the country, in particular, the influx of tourists from Iran who came to celebrate Novruz (New Year) in Armenia, Andranik Tevanyan, head of Political Economy Research Center told. According to him, unlike the rest of the world, the dollar rate in Armenia is an internal process controlled by the state. At this point, in his opinion, the dram rate is closer to the fixed rate.

Sharp fluctuations are not expected, Andranik Tevanyan said.

Weekly report on Iran

On March 17 at the foreign exchange market the rate of Armenian dram to U.S. dollar exceeded the "psychological" mark and reached 400.10 dram/dollar, after which the rate of drama gradually devalued. In recent days the situation on the foreign exchange market started to stabilize, and today the rate is 394.62 dram/dollar.

According to the representative of RA Ministry of Economy Mekhak Apresyan , the tourism sector recorded significant growth. "Only within March 15-17 thousands of Iranian citizens arrived in Armenia, at least three times more than during the same period of 2009,"

Social News

Iran: New Coordinated Attack on Human Rights Groups

Iran's state-owned media, judiciary, and security forces have opened a coordinated attack on human rights groups in recent weeks under the guise of defending the nation against "cyber warfare," Human Rights Watch said today (March 24, 2010).

The authorities have arbitrarily arrested human rights defenders, shut down websites run by human rights groups, and opened media campaigns accusing civil society groups of collaborating with foreign intelligence agencies and terrorist groups.

"Yet again, the government has drawn upon its tired playbook of foreign espionage and conspiracy theories to silence the few remaining critical voices in the country," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "This smacks of a desperate tactic to find one more excuse to attack human rights activists."

On March 13, 2010, a week before the Iranian New Year, Tehran's Public and Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office announced that security forces had arrested 30 people, contending they were involved with a CIA-funded project to destabilize the government with "cyber warfare."

The prosecutor's office contends that a network of opposition groups implemented the project, code named "Iran Proxy," under the cover of local human rights organizations, including the Committee of Human Rights Reporters, the Center for Defense of Human Rights, and Human Rights Activists in Iran. The prosecutor's office has not revealed who was arrested or when.

The government has attacked the groups publicly and shut down several websites run by Human Rights Activists in Iran. The judiciary, which includes the prosecutors, accused the network of various offenses, including hacking into state-owned websites; organizing and supporting foreign opposition and terrorist groups, including the banned Mojahedin-e

Weekly report on Iran

Khalq; conducting illegal protests; publishing false information; and engaging in "psychological warfare" and espionage. The authorities have not provided specific evidence to support their allegations.

Although the government made no official announcement of the identities of the 30 arrested individuals accused of being part of the alleged plot, local human rights groups fear that some of their colleagues arrested during security sweeps in the past few weeks are among them. In a series of articles issued immediately after the announcement by state-affiliated media outlets, including *Fars News Agency*, *Kayhan News*, and *Gerdab* (a website administered by Iran's Revolutionary Guards), for example, the Prosecutor's Office accused The Committee of Human Rights Reporters of playing an instrumental role in planning and executing the "Iran Proxy" project. The group describes itself as an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to documenting and reporting human rights violations in an effort to improve the lives of all Iranians.

A spokesperson for the group told Human Rights Watch: "According to their families, arrest warrants carried by agents who raided the homes of [human rights activists] included the word 'cyber.' Now that these accusations have been announced, the families have just begun to realize what the authorities are up to."

The government has held 3 of the 10 members of the group's Central Committee identified in the articles - Shiva Nazar Ahari, Koohyar Goodarzi, and Navid Khanjani - for weeks without charges in Tehran's Evin Prison. Nazar Ahari and Goodarzi were arrested in December 2009 and Khanjani in March 2010.

Both of the other groups the government identified as part of the "cyber warfare" campaign - the Nobel Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi's Center for Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), and Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA) - describe themselves as non-political groups dedicated to improving the human rights situation inside Iran.

The HRA has been particularly hit hard by the recent series of attacks. In a statement provided to Human Rights Watch, the group indicated that "security forces undertook a massive coordinated operation to arrest members and colleagues" of the organization on March 2 of this year. According to the statement, the operation resulted in 29 attempted and 15 actual arrests of the group's members or supporters. None of those detained have been charged with any crimes. Among those arrested was Farideh Rafiee, the sister of the group's former executive director, Keyvan Rafiee, who currently lives outside Iran. The group maintains that Ms. Rafiee is not a member.

On March 14, the website *Gerdab* announced that the Revolutionary Guards had successfully shut down "29 websites belonging to the spy network ... that operated under the false cover of the human rights activists." Three days later, after the government shut down its Persian and English language websites, the HRA accused Iran's security forces of gaining access to the websites by torturing one of the group's site administrators and forcing him to reveal website passwords.

Weekly report on Iran

As part of its campaign against these human rights groups, state-run television broadcast the names, pictures and personal information of individuals allegedly affiliated with these groups. Human rights advocates believe that at least some of this information was obtained by security agents from the hard drives of individuals arrested during the crackdown. The pictures and other personal information were used to allege, in part, that high-ranking members of some of these organizations, including the HRA, have contacts with terrorist opposition groups.

"If there's anyone guilty of 'cyber warfare,' it's the government itself, in its all-out propaganda offensive against local human rights groups and efforts to monopolize all internet expression," Stork said.

During the past few weeks, all three groups issued statements denying any involvement with the alleged "Iran Proxy" project, confirmed their financial independence from foreign governments, and accused Tehran of conducting a dishonest and dangerous smear campaign. The Center for Defense of Human Rights, which was forced to close its doors in December 2008 but still maintains its website, called the attacks nothing more than a "frame job against human rights activists and civil society."

In an interview conducted by Rooz Online, a Persian-language website, on March 21, Ahmad Batebi, the spokesperson for Human Rights Activists in Iran and a former student activist who currently lives in the United States, dismissed Tehran's charges that his organization has cooperated with foreign governments. He said that, "To date, the HRA has received no [monetary] support from any organization or government.

Newsweek's Maziar Bahari calls for freedom of Iran's imprisoned journalists

Newsweek reporter Maziar Bahari urged fellow journalists to sign a petition calling for the release of imprisoned journalists in Iran last night, in a passionate speech criticising the country's regime and press freedom record.

"The reason I'm asking [you to sign] is that it is because of those petitions that I am here," Bahari told audience members gathered for the Index on Censorship awards last night. An Iranian-Canadian, he was imprisoned in Tehran from June to October 2009 when he was released on bail.

"I can say these words on this platform because of the support from the international community. I was lucky enough to be writing for a newspaper. My colleagues there went beyond the call of duty and rallied all their contacts in the international media and diplomatic community to call for my release."

Bahari personally thanked IOC, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), who all back the Our Society Will Be a Free Society campaign, for their work in securing his release on bail.

According to recent figures from the CPJ, more journalists are currently imprisoned in

Iran than have been held by any other country since 1996 when the committee found 78 imprisonments in Turkey.

Iranian authorities are now holding at least 47 journalists in prison, the CPJ says on its website, with at least 26 journalists jailed between December and February alone.

"Being a journalist in Iran is one of the most insecure jobs in one of the most insecure countries run by one of the most insecure governments in the world. The Islamic Republic has made noted it's prime target: more than 100 journalists have been arrested since the contested governmental elections last summer. It's very difficult to be precise with the exact figure in prison, because it's a revolving door," said Bahari.

"In the days of satellite and broadcast television, Facebook, Google and Twitter, the Iranian government wants to change the tide of history. It wants to take Iran back to the era of shortwave radio and terrestrial television - media they can easily control and censor. A wise government would listen to the voices of its own people; the Iranian government shoots the messenger."

"The guards arrested me nine days after the elections. On the first day my interrogator told me, 'There is no difference between journalism and espionage. You gather information and sell it.' (...) For 118 days in 2009 I witnessed an ignorant and confused regime trying to fight its own people."

International news organisations that are banned by the Iranian regime should take action, said Bahari. The European Union this week said it would put pressure on Iran to stop jamming satellite broadcasts from the BBC and other international channels, but the BBC should take legal action against the regime, he said

Iran: Eavesdropping of critics' phone conversations revealed

Following the arrest of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani's grandson and Faezeh Hashemi's son, Hassan Lahooti, Iranian Judiciary authorities have asked him questions which explicitly demonstrate that Iranian intelligence organizations are eavesdropping on phone calls made by Iranian citizens. This indicates that Iranian judicial authorities are taking people's private conversations as admissible evidence for criminal conduct.

"Insulting regime leaders during telephone conversations," is a question/accusation Hassan Lahooti faced when he was arrested on Sunday night after his plane from London landed in Tehran. Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani's grandson was arrested by Imam Khomeini International Airport officers, acting on orders from the Judiciary. A source close to Hashemi Rafsanjani told BBC Persian that Mr. Lahooti was interrogated about two issues: One, regarding "insulting regime leaders during telephone conversations," and the other "participating in June 15, 2009 protests in Tehran."

Weekly report on Iran

Several articles of Iranian Constitution prohibit investigation of people's beliefs. Tapping telephones and using telephone conversations is clearly included in this prohibition. Article 23 of the Iranian constitution holds that "the investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief." Article 25 is even more explicit about this: "The inspection of letters and the failure to deliver them, the recording and disclosure of telephone conversations, the disclosure of telegraphic and telex communications, censorship, or the willful failure to transmit them, eavesdropping, and all forms of covert investigation are forbidden, except as provided by law."

Many Iranian political and media activists have previously talked about taps on their home and cell phones by security authorities, but this is a rare occasion where telephone conversations are used as the basis for a charge made by the Iranian judicial authorities.

Over the past few years and especially following the arrests made after the Iranian presidential elections of last June, several released prisoners told International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran that they were presented with printed transcripts of their telephone conversations and that things they had said on the phone were used as means to pressure them. One of these released prisoners told International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran: "First they showed me a list of telephone numbers I had called and asked me to identify the people I had called. Then they showed me transcripts of several telephone calls I had made during which I had expressed my personal opinions about certain individuals and certain events. They told me that with the things I had said they could keep me in prison for two to three years. I told them this was illegal, but my interrogator believed that Iran Telecommunications is a government organization and using government services, even if one pays for them, is regarded as "public space."

Tehran General and Revolutionary Courts Prosecutor, Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi, told Fars News Agency's legal section reporter about Lahooti's arrest: "Lahooti was arrested at Imam Khomeini International Airport on Sunday morning based on a judicial order, with certain security charges. This afternoon, following some investigations by the interrogator, Lahooti expressed remorse for his actions and upon posting of his bail of \$73,000, he was released from prison on orders of his interrogator and confirmation by Tehran Prosecutor."