

MEMMO

June 4, 2009

Iran: We Will Continue Nuclear Pursuit Regardless of Election Outcome

Regardless of who wins the June 12 Iranian elections, the regime has vowed to continue its pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability and support for terrorist groups undermining Middle East peace. Iran's national security policies are controlled by the unelected head of its theocratic regime, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and are unlikely to be altered by any of the four candidates for president of the Islamic Republic. The United States should intensify its efforts to determine if Iran will seriously engage in negotiations, while exploring the prospect of more robust sanctions to persuade Iran to end its illicit activity.

Regardless of who wins the Iranian election, the regime will continue to press ahead with its nuclear program.

- Khamenei, who controls the regime's foreign and nuclear policy, has hailed Iran's illegal nuclear program as a "great victory" and is determined to continue it: "We will continue on our path with power and will not allow the oppressors to deny this nation's right."
- Presidential media adviser Mehdi Kalhor told Reuters on June 1 that only Khamenei can make decisions on Iran's nuclear program and relations with the United States. "No one but the leader can decide about any move to renew ties with America and Iran's nuclear work," Kalhor said. "Such issues cannot be traded by any president."
- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has described his country's nuclear pursuit as a "train... without brakes" and has ruled out negotiations with other nations on its nuclear program, saying, "Iran's nuclear issue is over."
- Mir-Hossein Mousavi—considered to be the main challenger to Ahmadinejad—said in an interview with the *Financial Times* that he will push ahead with Iran's nuclear ambitions and will never halt uranium enrichment, adding, "No one in Iran will accept suspension."
- Acknowledging that he has no power to control policy on the nuclear issue, candidate Mehdi Karroubi has said he will defer to the supreme leader on Iran's nuclear efforts because the program "is not within [my] domain."
- Moshen Rezai, who served for 16 years as the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), has long supported Iran's nuclear programs. In 2007, the United States designated the



Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has stated repeatedly that Iran has no intention of ceasing its nuclear activities.

IRGC as an entity of proliferation out of concern for its efforts to obtain nuclear-sensitive components.

All Iranian presidential candidates have refused to acknowledge Israel's right to exist and have voiced support for terrorist organizations.

- Ahmadinejad has repeatedly called for the destruction of the State of Israel and denied the Holocaust. "The Zionist regime has lost its raison d'être," he said last year. "... [T]he Zionist regime has reached a total dead end. Thanks to God, your wish will soon be realized, and this germ of corruption will be wiped off."
- Mousavi, a reputed "moderate" who served as prime minister in the 1980s, refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist and his campaign has vowed to continue Tehran's hostile stance toward the Jewish state, saying, "Our main and everlasting enemy is Israel."
- Karroubi, who formerly served as speaker of the Iranian parliament, has vowed to continue Iran's support of the terrorist groups Hamas and Hizballah. Karroubi has previously said the peace process is useless and the only option the Palestinians have is to fight Israel.
- Rezaei, who is wanted by Argentina in the 1994 bombing of a Buenos Aires Jewish center that killed 85 people, volunteered in 2008 to carry out suicide attacks against Israel.

Iran's elections are far from democratic and are manipulated by a cadre of hard-line clerics.

- Khamenei tightly controls nearly all aspects of the presidential elections, including appointments to the Guardian Council, the powerful group of 12 high-ranking mullahs and jurists who strictly vet presidential candidates.
- Of the 475 Iranian citizens who submitted paperwork to run in the June 12 elections, only four were approved based on the Guardian Council's strict interpretation of loyalty to the 1979 revolution. Iran has never approved the candidacy of a woman for president.
- Khamenei has tacitly endorsed Ahmadinejad, encouraging voters not to support pro-Western candidates. Khamenei recently instructed Ahmadinejad to make government plans for the next five years.
- The social networking website Facebook was recently blocked by government authorities in what opposition candidates said was an effort to sabotage their challenges to President Ahmadinejad.

Iranian elections must not be used by the U.S. and our allies as an excuse to delay addressing Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program.

- Regardless of the outcome of the Iranian elections, the United States should attempt to begin engagement with Iran as soon as possible. This process must not be open-ended and needs to have clear benchmarks in order to ensure that Iran will not merely exploit negotiations to advance its nuclear program.
- President Obama has made clear that the United States would not "talk forever" if Iran does not respond positively to America's outreach, saying, "We're not going to create a situation in which the talks become an excuse for inaction while Iran proceeds with developing... and deploying a nuclear weapon."
- U.S. engagement should be backed by the prospect of tougher sanctions in order to demonstrate the consequences for Iran if it continues to use America's genuine desire for better relations as a way to continue its pursuit of nuclear weapons capability.