

# The World According to Ahmadinejad

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Articles & Testimony

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## The United States must be more proactive in countering Iran's propaganda machine and breathing new life into the suppressed Green Movement.

**A**s Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad prepares to speak at the United Nations, it is tempting to dismiss his anti-American rants as just another propaganda stunt. But what makes his remarks difficult to ignore is that large segments of the Iranian population will buy into them. And that Ahmadinejad, along with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's clerical leadership, appear to believe what they are saying -- fueling a narrative that drives Iran's reckless international behavior.

The notion that the U.S. government deliberately conspired to attack its own people on 9/11 as a pretext for global warfare -- a notion Ahmadinejad famously peddles -- strikes most reasonable observers as preposterous. Yet such an account fits seamlessly into the overarching worldview of Iran's leaders. This worldview, articulated in letters, speeches, and statements at home and abroad, is marked by several attributes:

- *The United States is a sinister power, bent on global oppression.* Routinely described as the "Great Satan" and the "devil incarnate," the United States is perceived as a cruel, greedy, and oppressive power seeking global domination. This view is grounded in a reading of history that sees America -- the leading force behind a liberal, democratic world order -- as overwhelmingly responsible for the immoral and corrupt state of mankind. As Ahmadinejad has stated, "the arrogant regime in the United States is the biggest obstacle against the cause of the prophets."
- *The U.S.-led capitalist system is on the brink of collapse.* Believing that capitalism is the cause of social ills facing the West, including poverty, drugs, and inequality, Iran's leaders see the ongoing global economic turmoil as proof that the capitalist system is approaching its demise. Capitalism has "produced nothing but frustration, disappointment and a dark future" for humanity, according to Ahmadinejad, and will "soon join history in the future."
- *U.S. alliances in the Middle East are crumbling.* Iran's leaders rejoiced at the downfall of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak -- seeing it as vindication of its long-held belief that the days of U.S.-backed dictators are numbered. Similarly, Iran sees Israel -- America's strongest regional ally -- as fundamentally illegitimate and destined to collapse. With Israel seemingly on the defensive, Tehran believes it is just a matter of time before it will succeed in forcing the "Zionist leaders to return to their homes, and to restore Palestine to its original owners."
- *Iran's Islamic revolution is heralding a new global order.* Central to this worldview is the notion that the Iranian revolution provides universal inspiration for a new international system. Ahmadinejad has called for "setting up a new international economic order based on human and moral values and obligations." While vague in describing its form, Iran's leaders have made clear this new world order would limit American and Western influences, replacing it with one in which Iran and its followers would be predominant.

Looking at current events, it is easy to understand why Iran's leaders might exude so much confidence. The West continues to be mired in high levels of debt and unemployment, Israel is struggling in the face of diplomatic isolation, and the Arab Spring rolls on. Recent headlines from Iran's Press TV capture the sentiment: "US, Israel Cannot Stop MENA Uprisings," "US Moving Towards Total Collapse," and "Capitalism on Death Bed."

Superficially, such events may reinforce the Iranian narrative. But viewed in context, Tehran's perceptions are utterly [detached] from reality. True, the global economy continues to sputter, but does anyone else really believe that capitalism and democracy are on their way out? Israel may be outvoted at the U.N., but the region's strongest military power is not about to disappear. And the Arab Spring lives on in Syria -- a close Iranian ally -- while the Iranian revolution has played virtually no role in any of the recent Middle East uprisings.

So does it really matter that Iran's leaders seem to truly believe in this stuff? Absolutely. The warped worldview reflected in Ahmadinejad's remarks is what drives Iran's confrontational posture toward the West -- and serves as the inspiration for its dangerous nuclear ambitions. Given the Islamic Republic's far-reaching ambitions, a nuclear weapons capability could be particularly devastating.

Consequently, Iran must remain at the top of the national security agenda. The U.S. must be more pro-active in countering Iran's propaganda machine and breathing new life into the suppressed Green Movement. At the same time, the United States must be prepared to ramp up sanctions and take all necessary actions to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Given their irrational exuberance, Iran's leaders could use a dose of reality.

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