

## Call Them Out, Mr. President

Sep 22, 2009



Articles & Testimony

The agreement by the United States and other world powers to launch negotiations with Iran on October 1 -- despite the regime's refusal to discuss ending its uranium enrichment program -- makes clear that there will be no meaningful progress to stop Iran's drive for the bomb when world leaders, led by President Obama, gather this week at the United Nations General Assembly. All the more reason, then, that the president should use the occasion, and his considerable political skills, to at long last rally the international community on behalf of the beleaguered Iranian people -- who last Friday took to the country's streets yet again by the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, to voice their contempt for the regime of supreme ruler Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The facts of the past three and a half months are well known but bear repeating: A stolen presidential election on June 12. A brutal crackdown against peaceful protesters demanding their votes be counted. Young women murdered in broad daylight by rooftop snipers. Old men beaten bloody by plain-clothed thugs. University students terrorized in their dormitories in the middle of the night by axe-wielding vigilantes. Detainees, male and female alike, repeatedly sodomized and raped. Others tortured to death. Weekly Stalinist show trials. Threats from the regime's highest levels of large-scale purges to come, including the forceful targeting of top opposition figures.

Making matters infinitely worse is the fact that the Iranian people have had to endure this systematic assault on their human rights largely alone -- to the great shame of the United States, Europe's major democracies, and the rest of the free world. Millions of Iranians have heroically sought to secure through peaceful means their most basic democratic rights. Untold numbers have been subjected to violence, illegal detention, torture, and even murder at the hands of a tyrannical regime that also happens to be the world's leading state-sponsor of terrorism. They deserve far better from America and the democratic community of nations than deafening silence.

This is especially true in light of the decision to take up Iran's wholly unsatisfactory proposal for negotiations starting October 1. The fact is that since the disputed June 12 elections, the Iranian opposition has consistently requested that the rest of the world refrain from recognizing the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. At Friday's demonstrations in Tehran, protesters chanted "Obama, Obama, your talks should be with us [not the regime]." Leading Iranian human rights activists have pleaded for other states to avoid steps that would confer legitimacy on the regime and grant it psychological succor -- while demoralizing its democratic opponents.

As things stand today, however, that is precisely the result threatened when the United States and its international partners finally sit down to deal with an Iranian dictatorship whose hands are freshly stained with the blood of peaceful demonstrators. There's no doubt that Ahmadinejad and his henchmen will seek to portray such talks as a major triumph, a sign that no matter what horrors the regime inflicts on its own citizens, the world is prepared to look the other way in a desperate effort to accommodate the Islamic Republic's rising power. The message conveyed to the Iranian people will be clear: You are alone and forgotten. Further resistance is futile.

The United States should not allow itself to become an accomplice in Ahmadinejad's power play. That is why even as engagement with the regime proceeds next week, Obama needs to make the plight of the Iranian people a top priority. Doing so, of course, has the virtue of keeping faith with America's highest ideals. But more importantly it

also serves U.S. strategic interests.

Through their popular uprising, the Iranian people have mounted the most serious challenge to the Islamic Republic in its 30-year history. The regime is frightened and confused, on the defensive, never closer to unraveling. The United States should do nothing that needlessly risks relieving that pressure and giving comfort to Iran's rulers. At a minimum, speaking up loudly about human rights will increase U.S. leverage in any forthcoming negotiation. At maximum, it could help sustain a movement whose ultimate success in toppling Iran's anti-American theocracy holds out the best hope of ending the nuclear crisis short of war.

This month's gathering of world leaders at the United Nations offers President Obama a critical opportunity to reset America's posture toward Iran's post-June 12 turmoil, and to demonstrate that negotiations over Iran's nuclear program will not come at the Iranian people's expense. With his extraordinary political skills and international popularity, President Obama is uniquely positioned to challenge the global body to make clear, at long last, the civilized world's profound concern with Iran's elections and their bloody aftermath. He should call not only for the release of all those detained in the recent protests, but for an international inquiry of this summer's large-scale human rights abuses, including the use of officially-sanctioned rape, torture and lethal violence.

President Obama entered office promising to pursue a policy of engagement with Iran that would be tough and principled. We are about to find out if he really meant it. The Iranian people -- and U.S. national interests -- deserve no less.

John Hannah is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute. ❖

Weekly Standard

---

## RECOMMENDED

---

### BRIEF ANALYSIS

#### [Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



### ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

#### [How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## [Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022



Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy\)](#)

### TOPICS

[Arab & Islamic Politics \(/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics\)](#)

[Democracy & Reform \(/policy-analysis/democracy-reform\)](#)

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](#)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iran \(/policy-analysis/iran\)](#)