

Iranian President Stands by Call to Wipe Israel Off Map

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TEHRAN, Oct. 28 - The president of [Iran](#) stood by his earlier call to "wipe [Israel](#) off the map" on Friday, while other Iranian officials played it down and some commentators here suggested it was a sign of what they considered his amateurism.

The president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was cheered by thousands of supporters during an anti-Israel rally in Tehran on Friday. "My words are the Iranian nation's words," he said of his statement, which was widely condemned around the world, the Iranian news agency IRNA quoted him as saying. "Westerners are free to comment, but their reaction is invalid."

State media reported that hundreds of thousands took part in the annual demonstrations across the country. Protesters chanted "death to America" and "death to Israel" and set fire to American and Israeli flags.

The secretary of the National Security Council, Ali Larijani, who has headed Iran's nuclear talks since August, said at the demonstration that the news media had misused the president's comments, made at a speech to students on Wednesday.

"We still have the same position and believe the Palestinian people must decide for their future," the Iranian Student News Agency quoted him as saying. He added that the foreign news media and a few countries had manipulated the president's comments to spread suspicion that Iran was seeking nuclear weapons.

Ahmad Nateq Nouri, a senior conservative cleric and member of the Expediency Council who spoke at the ceremony, also played down the president's comments, saying: "What the president meant was that we favor a fair and long-lasting peace in Palestine," the Iranian Student News Agency reported.

The Iranian Embassy in Moscow issued a statement that minimized Mr. Ahmadinejad's comments, saying "he did not have any intention to speak up in such sharp terms and enter into a conflict."

Just three months after taking office, the new president is facing a storm of criticism of his foreign policy statements, from overseas and from inside the country as well.

"It is becoming more and more clear among both reformist politicians and some of his own supporters that Mr. Ahmadinejad has neither the political experience nor the knowledge to run the country," said Issa Saharkhiz, a reformist politician and journalist in Tehran. "It seems that time has frozen for him and he is repeating the same slogans when he was a student now in the position of president."

Most politicians and religious leaders who have been vocal in the past have maintained a public silence over his performance. But in private many express worry.

The criticism has focused on Mr. Ahmadinejad's failure to select four new cabinet ministers after his first choices were rejected by Parliament. His critics have also pointed to wide-ranging changes at government ministries and the replacement of many officials.

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, head of the Expediency Council, criticized Mr. Ahmadinejad on Wednesday and told reporters that this was the first time since the revolution that a president had failed to introduce four ministers, calling it a "fault for the government."

Mr. Ahmadinejad's critics also point to his speech at the United Nations in September, which offered confrontational policy with the West over Iran's nuclear program rather than using the opportunity to improve relations, as some here had hoped.

At the United Nations on Friday, the Security Council issued a statement saying it "condemned" Mr. Ahmadinejad's remarks. The original text, introduced by [Britain](#), included the word "strongly," but it was dropped because of objections from [Algeria](#), the sole Arab country on the 15-member panel.

The two-paragraph statement said the Council supported the comment on Thursday from Secretary General [Kofi Annan](#) "that, under the United Nations Charter, all members have undertaken to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

The critics blamed the president's confrontational policy when a trip by Iran's foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, to [Saudi Arabia](#) was canceled by Saudi officials this month after Britain accused Iran of supporting insurgents in southern [Iraq](#).

In what the critics consider another blow to Iran's foreign policy, Mr. Ahmadinejad removed four veteran ambassadors from their posts this week - Sadegh Kharrazi in Paris, Hossein Adeli in London, Shamsedin Khaghani in Berlin and Mohammad Alborzi in Geneva.

"The system is rapidly losing its efficiency and credibility," said Mahmoud Shamsolvaezin, a political analyst and journalist. "Most former officials are watching in awe. An unknown and inexperienced movement has taken over and their incapability is gradually becoming evident."

Some analysts have viewed the recent move by the supreme religious leader, Ayatollah [Ali Khamenei](#), to increase the authority of Mr. Rafsanjani, a veteran politician, as part of his effort to limit the political blunders made by President Ahmadinejad.

The council announced this week that it was preparing a draft to define its role to supervise Parliament, the judiciary and the executive branch.

But an aide to Mr. Rafsanjani said the council lacked the apparatus to enforce any authority.

Warren Hoge contributed reporting from the United Nations for this article.

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