

Ahmadinejad's Principalist Doctrine: Sovereign Rights to a Nuclear Arsenal

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Abstract

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the election in 2005, on behalf of the Principalists, a hardline secular opposition, that considered the clerical establishment corrupt and soft on foreign policy. In particular, the Principalists railed against the NPT, describing it as a product of Western hegemony. Ahmadinejad asserted that Iran, like other nations, had a sovereign right to run a nuclear program. Hinting broadly that Iran would not be dissuaded from weaponizing, Ahmadinejad proceeded to fashion a "civil religion" around the alleged nuclear prowess of Iran. Nuclear Day was celebrated around the country as part of a new secular nationalist identity. But in his customary contradictory and occasionally unpredictable and even bizarre manner, the president also claimed that pursuing the nuclear program is part of his mission ordained by the Mahdi.

Ahmadinejad's "in your face" nuclear diplomacy, coupled with his penchant for messianic visions and denial of the Holocaust, rattled the West. Unsure whether Ahmadinejad spoke for himself or for the regime, the international community became alarmed that Iran crossed the threshold from nuclear rationality to messianic irrationality. The SC reacted by imposing a series of increasingly punitive sanctions on Iran.

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