

Iran's President Did Not Say "Israel must be wiped off the map"

By Arash Norouzi

01/18/07 "Information Clearing House" -- -- Across the world, a dangerous rumor has spread that could have catastrophic implications. According to legend, Iran's President has threatened to destroy Israel, or, to quote the misquote, "Israel must be wiped off the map". Contrary to popular belief, this statement was never made, as this article will prove.

BACKGROUND:

On Tuesday, October 25th, 2005 at the Ministry of Interior conference hall in Tehran, newly elected Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad delivered a speech at a program, reportedly attended by thousands, titled "The World Without Zionism". Large posters surrounding him displayed this title prominently in English, obviously for the benefit of the international press. Below the poster's title was a slick graphic depicting an hour glass containing planet Earth at its top. Two small round orbs representing the United States and Israel are shown falling through the hour glass' narrow neck and crashing to the bottom.

Before we get to the infamous remark, it's important to note that the "quote" in question was itself a quote— they are the words of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, the father of the Islamic Revolution. Although he quoted Khomeini to affirm his own position on Zionism, the actual words belong to Khomeini and not Ahmadinejad. Thus, Ahmadinejad has essentially been credited (or blamed) for a quote that is not only unoriginal, but represents a viewpoint already in place well before he ever took office.

THE ACTUAL QUOTE:

So what did Ahmadinejad actually say? To quote his exact words in farsi: "Imam ghoft een rezhim-e ishghalgar-e qods bayad az safheh-ye ruzgar mahv shavad."

That passage will mean nothing to most people, but one word might ring a bell: rezhim-e. It is the word "Regime", pronounced just like the English word with an extra "eh" sound at the end. Ahmadinejad did not refer to Israel the country or Israel the land mass, but the Israeli regime. This is a vastly significant distinction, as one cannot wipe a regime off the map. Ahmadinejad does not even refer to Israel by name, he instead uses the specific phrase "rezhim-e ishghalgar-e qods" (regime occupying Jerusalem).

So this raises the question.. what exactly did he want "wiped from the map"? The answer is: nothing. That's because the word "map" was never used. The Persian word for map, "nagshah", is not contained anywhere in his original farsi quote, or, for that matter, anywhere in his entire speech. Nor was the western phrase "wipe out" ever said. Yet we

are led to believe that Iran's President threatened to "wipe Israel off the map", despite never having uttered the words "map", "wipe out" or even "Israel".

THE PROOF:

The full quote translated directly to English:

"The Imam said this regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time".

Word by word translation:

Imam (Khomeini) ghoft (said) een (this) rezhim-e (regime) ishghalgar-e (occupying) gods (Jerusalem) bayad (must) az safheh-ye ruzgar (from page of time) mahv shavad (vanish from).

Here is the full transcript of the speech in farsi, archived on Ahmadinejad's web site www.president.ir/farsi/ahmadinejad/speeches/1384/aban-84/840804sahyonizm.htm

THE SPEECH AND CONTEXT:

While the false "wiped off the map" extract has been repeated infinitely without verification, Ahmadinejad's actual speech itself has been almost entirely ignored. Given the importance placed on the "map" comment, it would be sensible to present his words in their full context to get a fuller understanding of his position. In fact, by looking at the entire speech, there is a clear, logical trajectory leading up to his call for a "world without Zionism". One may disagree with his reasoning, but critical appraisals are infeasible without first knowing what that reasoning is.

In his speech, Ahmadinejad declares that Zionism is the West's apparatus of political oppression against Muslims. He says the "Zionist regime" was imposed on the Islamic world as a strategic bridgehead to ensure domination of the region and its assets. Palestine, he insists, is the frontline of the Islamic world's struggle with American hegemony, and its fate will have repercussions for the entire Middle East.

Ahmadinejad acknowledges that the removal of America's powerful grip on the region via the Zionists may seem unimaginable to some, but reminds the audience that, as Khomeini predicted, other seemingly invincible empires have disappeared and now only exist in history books. He then proceeds to list three such regimes that have collapsed, crumbled or vanished, all within the last 30 years:

- (1) The Shah of Iran- the U.S. installed monarch
- (2) The Soviet Union
- (3) Iran's former arch-enemy, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein

In the first and third examples, Ahmadinejad prefaces their mention with Khomeini's own words foretelling that individual regime's demise. He concludes by referring to Khomeini's unfulfilled wish: "The Imam said this regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time. This statement is very wise". This is the passage that has been isolated, twisted and distorted so famously. By measure of comparison, Ahmadinejad would seem to be calling for regime change, not war.

THE ORIGIN:

One may wonder: where did this false interpretation originate? Who is responsible for the translation that has sparked such worldwide controversy? The answer is surprising.

The inflammatory "wiped off the map" quote was first disseminated not by Iran's enemies, but by Iran itself. The Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran's official propaganda arm, used this phrasing in the English version of some of their news releases covering the World Without Zionism conference. International media including the BBC, Al Jazeera, Time magazine and countless others picked up the IRNA quote and made headlines out of it without verifying its accuracy, and rarely referring to the source. Iran's Foreign Minister soon attempted to clarify the statement, but the quote had a life of its own. Though the IRNA wording was inaccurate and misleading, the media assumed it was true, and besides, it made great copy.

Amid heated wrangling over Iran's nuclear program, and months of continuous, unfounded accusations against Iran in an attempt to rally support for preemptive strikes against the country, the imperialists had just been handed the perfect *raison d'être* to invade. To the war hawks, it was a gift from the skies.

It should be noted that in other references to the conference, the IRNA's translation changed. For instance, "map" was replaced with "earth". In some articles it was "The Qods occupier regime should be eliminated from the surface of earth", or the similar "The Qods occupying regime must be eliminated from the surface of earth". The inconsistency of the IRNA's translation should be evidence enough of the unreliability of the source, particularly when transcribing their news from Farsi into the English language.

THE REACTION:

The mistranslated "wiped off the map" quote attributed to Iran's President has been spread worldwide, repeated thousands of times in international media, and prompted the denouncements of numerous world leaders. Virtually every major and minor media outlet has published or broadcast this false statement to the masses. Big news agencies such as The Associated Press and Reuters refer to the misquote, literally, on an almost daily basis.

Following news of Iran's remark, condemnation was swift. British Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed "revulsion" and implied that it might be necessary to attack Iran. U.N. chief Kofi Annan cancelled his scheduled trip to Iran due to the controversy. Ariel

Sharon demanded that Iran be expelled from the United Nations for calling for Israel's destruction. Shimon Peres, more than once, threatened to wipe Iran off the map. More recently, Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, who has warned that Iran is "preparing another holocaust for the Jewish state" is calling for Ahmadinejad to be tried for war crimes for inciting genocide.

The artificial quote has also been subject to additional alterations. U.S. officials and media often take the liberty of dropping the "map" reference altogether, replacing it with the more acutely threatening phrase "wipe Israel off the face of the earth". Newspaper and magazine articles dutifully report Ahmadinejad has "called for the destruction of Israel", as do senior officials in the United States government.

President George W. Bush said the comments represented a "specific threat" to destroy Israel. In a March 2006 speech in Cleveland, Bush vowed he would resort to war to protect Israel from Iran, because, "...the threat from Iran is, of course, their stated objective to destroy our strong ally Israel." Former Presidential advisor Richard Clarke told Australian TV that Iran "talks openly about destroying Israel", and insists, "The President of Iran has said repeatedly that he wants to wipe Israel off the face of the earth". In an October 2006 interview with Amy Goodman, former UN Weapons Inspector Scott Ritter referred to Ahmadinejad as "the idiot that comes out and says really stupid, vile things, such as, 'It is the goal of Iran to wipe Israel off the face of the earth' ". The consensus is clear.

Confusing matters further, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad pontificates rather than give a direct answer when questioned about the statement, such as in Lally Weymouth's Washington Post interview in September 2006:

Are you really serious when you say that Israel should be wiped off the face of the Earth?

We need to look at the scene in the Middle East — 60 years of war, 60 years of displacement, 60 years of conflict, not even a day of peace. Look at the war in Lebanon, the war in Gaza — what are the reasons for these conditions? We need to address and resolve the root problem.

Your suggestion is to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth?

Our suggestion is very clear:... Let the Palestinian people decide their fate in a free and fair referendum, and the result, whatever it is, should be accepted.... The people with no roots there are now ruling the land.

You've been quoted as saying that Israel should be wiped off the face of the Earth. Is that your belief?

What I have said has made my position clear. If we look at a map of the Middle East from 70 years ago...

So, the answer is yes, you do believe that it should be wiped off the face of the Earth?

Are you asking me yes or no? Is this a test? Do you respect the right to self-determination for the Palestinian nation? Yes or no? Is Palestine, as a nation, considered a nation with the right to live under humane conditions or not? Let's allow those rights to be enforced for these 5 million displaced people.

The exchange is typical of Ahmadinejad's interviews with the American media. Predictably, both Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes and CNN's Anderson Cooper asked if he wants to "wipe Israel off the map". As usual, the question is thrown back in the reporter's face with his standard "Don't the Palestinians have rights?, etc." retort (which is never directly answered either). Yet he never confirms the "map" comment to be true. This did not prevent Anderson Cooper from referring to earlier portions of his interview after a commercial break and lying, "as he said earlier, he wants Israel wiped off the map".

Even if every media outlet in the world were to retract the mistranslated quote tomorrow, the major damage has already been done, providing the groundwork for the next phase of disinformation: complete character demonization. Ahmadinejad, we are told, is the next Hitler, a grave threat to world peace who wants to bring about a new Holocaust. According to some detractors, he not only wants to destroy Israel, but after that, he will nuke America, and then Europe! An October 2006 memo titled Words of Hate: Iran's Escalating Threats released by the powerful Israeli lobby group AIPAC opens with the warning, "Ahmadinejad and other top Iranian leaders are issuing increasingly belligerent statements threatening to destroy the United States, Europe and Israel." These claims not only fabricate an unsubstantiated threat, but assume far more power than he actually possesses. Alarmists would be better off monitoring the statements of the ultra-conservative Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, who holds the most power in Iran.

As Iran's U.N. Press Officer, M.A. Mohammadi, complained to The Washington Post in a June 2006 letter:

It is not amazing at all, the pick-and-choose approach of highlighting the misinterpreted remarks of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in October and ignoring this month's remarks by Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, that "We have no problem with the world. We are not a threat whatsoever to the world, and the world knows it. We will never start a war. We have no intention of going to war with any state."

The Israeli government has milked every drop of the spurious quote to its supposed advantage. In her September 2006 address to the United Nations General Assembly, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni accused Iran of working to nuke Israel and bully the world. "They speak proudly and openly of their desire to 'wipe Israel off the map.' And now, by their actions, they pursue the weapons to achieve this objective to imperil the region and threaten the world." Addressing the threat in December, a fervent Prime Minister Ehud Olmert inadvertently disclosed that his country already possesses nuclear weapons: "We have never threatened any nation with annihilation. Iran, openly, explicitly and publicly threatens to wipe Israel off the map. Can you say that this is the same level,

when they are aspiring to have nuclear weapons, as America, France, Israel, Russia?"

MEDIA IRRESPONSIBILITY:

On December 13, 2006, more than a year after The World Without Zionism conference, two leading Israeli newspapers, The Jerusalem Post and Haaretz, published reports of a renewed threat from Ahmadinejad. The Jerusalem Post's headline was Ahmadinejad: Israel will be 'wiped out', while Haaretz posted the title Ahmadinejad at Holocaust conference: Israel will 'soon be wiped out'.

Where did they get their information? It turns out that both papers, like most American and western media, rely heavily on write ups by news wire services such as the Associated Press and Reuters as a source for their articles. Sure enough, their sources are in fact December 12th articles by Reuter's Paul Hughes [Iran president says Israel's days are numbered], and the AP's Ali Akbar Dareini [Iran President: Israel Will be wiped out].

The first five paragraphs of the Haaretz article, credited to "Haaretz Service and Agencies", are plagiarized almost 100% from the first five paragraphs of the Reuters piece. The only difference is that Haaretz changed "the Jewish state" to "Israel" in the second paragraph, otherwise they are identical.

The Jerusalem Post article by Herb Keinon pilfers from both the Reuters and AP stories. Like Haaretz, it uses the following Ahmadinejad quote without attribution: ["Just as the Soviet Union was wiped out and today does not exist, so will the Zionist regime soon be wiped out," he added]. Another passage apparently relies on an IRNA report:

"The Zionist regime will be wiped out soon the same way the Soviet Union was, and humanity will achieve freedom," Ahmadinejad said at Tuesday's meeting with the conference participants in his offices, according to Iran's official news agency, IRNA.

He said elections should be held among "Jews, Christians and Muslims so the population of Palestine can select their government and destiny for themselves in a democratic manner."

Once again, the first sentence above was wholly plagiarized from the AP article. The second sentence was also the same, except "He called for elections" became "He said elections should be held..".

It gets more interesting.

The quote used in the original AP article and copied in The Jerusalem Post article supposedly derives from the IRNA. If true, this can easily be checked. Care to find out? Go to: www.irna.ir/en/news/view/menu-234/0612134902101231.htm

There you will discover the actual IRNA quote was:

"As the Soviet Union disappeared, the Zionist regime will also vanish and humanity will be liberated".

Compare this to the alleged IRNA quote reported by the Associated Press:

"The Zionist regime will be wiped out soon the same way the Soviet Union was, and humanity will achieve freedom".

In the IRNA's actual report, the Zionist regime will vanish just as the Soviet Union disappeared. Vanish. Disappear. In the dishonest AP version, the Zionist regime will be "wiped out". And how will it be wiped out? "The same way the Soviet Union was". Rather than imply a military threat or escalation in rhetoric, this reference to Russia actually validates the intended meaning of Ahmadinejad's previous misinterpreted anti-Zionist statements.

What has just been demonstrated is irrefutable proof of media manipulation and propaganda in action. The AP deliberately alters an IRNA quote to sound more threatening. The Israeli media not only repeats the fake quote but also steals the original authors' words. The unsuspecting public reads this, forms an opinion and supports unnecessary wars of aggression, presented as self defense, based on the misinformation.

This scenario mirrors the kind of false claims that led to the illegal U.S. invasion of Iraq, a war now widely viewed as a catastrophic mistake. And yet the Bush administration and the compliant corporate media continue to marinate in propaganda and speculation about attacking Iraq's much larger and more formidable neighbor, Iran. Most of this rests on the unproven assumption that Iran is building nuclear weapons, and the lie that Iran has vowed to physically destroy Israel. Given its scope and potentially disastrous outcome, all this amounts to what is arguably the rumor of the century.

Iran's President has written two rather philosophical letters to America. In his first letter, he pointed out that "History shows us that oppressive and cruel governments do not survive". With this statement, Ahmadinejad has also projected the outcome of his own backwards regime, which will likewise "vanish from the page of time".

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