

IRAN LEADER'S MESSIANIC **END-TIMES MISSION**

Ahmadinejad raises concerns with mystical visions

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Iranian President Mahmoud's Ahmadinejad's mystical pre-occupation with the coming of a Shiite Islamic messiah figure – the Mahdi – is raising concerns that a nuclear-armed Islamic Republic could trigger the kind of global conflagration he envisions will set the stage for the end of the world.

While Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been making headlines lately by questioning whether the Holocaust actually happened, by suggesting Israel should be moved to Europe and by demanding the Jewish state be wiped off the face of the earth, his apocalyptic religious zealotry has received less attention.

In a videotaped meeting with Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli in Tehran, Ahmadinejad discussed candidly a strange, paranormal experience he had while addressing the United Nations in New York last September.

He recounts how he found himself bathed in light throughout the speech. But this wasn't the light directed at the podium by the U.N. and television cameras. It was, he said, a light from heaven. According to a transcript of his comments, obtained and translated by Joseph Farah's G2 Bulletin, Ahmadinejad wasn't the only one who noticed the unearthly light. One of his aides brought it to his

attention.

The Iranian president recalled being told about it by one of his delegation: "When you began with the words 'in the name of Allah,' I saw a light coming, surrounding you and protecting you to the end." Ahmadinejad agreed that he sensed the same thing.

"On the last day when I was speaking, one of our group told me that when I started to say 'Bismillah Muhammad,' he saw a green light come from around me, and I was placed inside this aura," he says. "I felt it myself. I felt that the atmosphere suddenly changed, and for those 27 or 28 minutes, all the leaders of the world did not blink. When I say they didn't move an eyelid, I'm not exaggerating. They were looking as if a hand was holding them there, and had just opened their eyes - Alhamdulillah!"

Ahmadinejad's "vision" at the U.N. is strangely reminiscent and alarmingly similar to statements he has made about his personal role in ushering in the return of the Shiite Muslim messiah. He sees his main mission, as he recounted in a Nov. 16 speech in Tehran, as to "pave the path for the glorious reappearance of Imam Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance."

According to Shiites, the 12th imam disappeared as a child in the year 941. When he returns, they believe, he will reign on earth for seven years, before bringing about a final judgment and the end of the world. Ahmadinejad is urging Iranians to prepare for the coming of the Mahdi by turning the country into a mighty and advanced Islamic society and by avoiding the corruption and excesses of the West.

All Iran is buzzing about the Mahdi, the 12th imam and the role Iran and Ahmadinejad are playing in his anticipated return. There's a new messiah hotline. There are news agencies especially devoted to the latest developments. "People are anxious to know when and how will He rise; what they must do to receive this worldwide salvation," says Ali Lari, a cleric at the Bright Future Institute in Iran's religious center of Qom. "The timing is not clear, but the conditions are more specific," he adds. "There is a saying: 'When the students are ready, the teacher will come.'"

For his part, Ahmadinejad is living up to at least part of his call to the faithful. According to reports, he lives so modestly that declared

assets include only a 30-year-old car, an even older house and an empty bank account.

Ahmadinejad and others in Iran are deadly serious about the imminent return of the 12th imam, who will prompt a global battle between good and evil (with striking parallels to biblical accounts of "Armageddon"). An institute set up in 2004 for the study and dissemination of information about the Mahdi now has a staff of 160 and influence in the schools and children's magazines.

In Iran, theologians say endtimes beliefs appeal to one-fifth of the population. And the Jamkaran mosque east of Qom, 60 miles south of Tehran, is where the link between devotees and the Mahdi is closest. Ahmadinejad's cabinet has given \$17 million to Jamkaran.

Shiite writings describe events surrounding the return of the Mahdi in apocalyptic terms. In one scenario, the forces of evil would come from Syria and Iraq and clash with forces of good from Iran. The battle would commence at Kufa – the Iraqi town near the holy city of Najaf.

Even more controversial is Ahmadinejad's repeated invocation of Imam Mahdi, known as "the Savior of Times." According to Shiite tradition, Imam Mahdi will appear on Judgment Day to herald a truly just government. Missed by some observers in Ahmadinejad's speech at the U.N. was his call to the "mighty Lord" to hasten the emergence of "the promised one," the one who "will fill this world with justice and peace."

Who stands in the Mahdi's way? A top priority of Ahmadinejad is "to challenge America, which is trying to impose itself as the final salvation of the human being, and insert its unjust state [in the region]," says Hamidreza Taraghi, head of the conservative Islamic Coalition Society. Taraghi says the U.S. is "trying to place itself as the new Mahdi." This may mean no peace with Iran, he adds, "unless America changes its hegemonic ... thinking, doesn't use nuclear weapons, [or] impose its will on other nations."