

THE NUCLEAR SPHINX OF TEHRAN¹

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*Soon the newly elected president declared his goal was to “establish an advanced, powerful, and exemplary society, so that it becomes a blueprint for the people of the world and thus ultimately serves as a platform for the reappearance of the Mahdi.” Ahmadinejad doesn’t want to wait for the Mahdi—he wants to hasten his arrival.*³

I. Introduction

The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran provides an academic account of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s rise to President of Iran,⁴ his subordinate role to Iran’s Ayatollah,⁵ and the paramount role Islamic religion plays regarding Iranian nuclear policy.⁶ Author Yossi Melman is an Israeli expert on Israeli intelligence who has written numerous books on terrorism and covert diplomacy.⁷ Co-author Meir Javedanfar is an Iranian-born political analyst.⁸ The authors attribute most of the book’s facts and findings to anonymous intelligence officials and nuclear specialists due to the material’s sensitive nature.⁹ Despite this concern, the authors’ investigative reputations, balanced perspectives, and unique insights bring credibility to this book.¹⁰

At first glance, the book’s title and jacket give the strong impression that this volume will focus exclusively on Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his pursuit of nuclear weapons.¹¹ However, this is a misleading assumption. *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran* actually offers a much deeper account of the often misunderstood political underpinnings of Iranian policies while also suggesting a rationale for Iran’s relentless pursuits to acquire nuclear capability. Specifically, this book artfully scrutinizes Iran’s recent nuclear shenanigans with the international community, covers their suspected terrorist involvements, and provides ways for the international community to deal with Iran’s nuclear program. Most importantly, the book’s thesis enlightens the reader on the paramount role the Shia Islamic religion plays over all Iranian foreign affairs and nuclear policies. At a time when Iran is constantly in the headlines due to their suspicious nuclear activities, coupled with speculation over what makes Iran tick, this book could not be more relevant to a military audience.

¹ YOSSEI MELMAN & MEIR JAVEDANFAR, *THE NUCLEAR SPHINX OF TEHRAN* (2007).

² U.S. Marine Corps. Written as partial completion of an LL.M., 56th Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General’s Legal Ctr. & Sch. (TJAGLCS), U.S. Army, Charlottesville, Va.

³ MELMAN & JAVEDANFAR, *supra* note 1, at 46.

⁴ *Id.* at 21–41.

⁵ *Id.* at 145.

⁶ *Id.* at 41–57.

⁷ Langtons International Agency, *Nonfiction Authors*, <http://www.langtonsinternational.com/nonfiction.html> (last visited May 29, 2008). Yossi Melman is an Israeli writer and journalist. *Id.* Receiving his B.A. from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, he was also a Nieman Fellow at Harvard. *Id.* Melman is currently an intelligence correspondent with *Haaretz* and considers himself a left-wing Israeli. The Center for Public Integrity, *ICIJ Member Biographies*, <http://www.icij.org/icij/bios.aspx?act=bios> (last visited May 29, 2008).

⁸ Meir Javedanfar, *Nukes Trouble in Paradise*, Oct. 15, 2005, <http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/2005/October/Syria/index.html>. Meir Javedanfar is an Iranian born and Iranian and British educated Middle East analyst based in Tel Aviv. Meepas.com, *The Middle East Analyzed*, <http://www.meepas.com/aboutmeepas.htm> (last visited May 29, 2008). Javedanfar has extensive experience in the analysis of Middle Eastern economic and political issues. *Id.* He is the Director of the Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company. *Id.*

⁹ MELMAN & JAVEDANFAR, *supra* note 1, at ix. Very few sources agreed to be named and most demanded anonymity. *Id.* These sources were Iranian professionals from both inside and outside Iran. *Id.*

¹⁰ Meepas.com, *The Middle East Analyzed*, <http://www.meepas.com/meepasandmedia.htm> (last visited May 29, 2008).

¹¹ MELMAN & JAVEDANFAR, *supra* note 1, at front cover.

II. Analysis

The first three chapters are entirely dedicated to describing President Ahmadinejad's modest beginnings, educational background, and ambitious professional and political careers.¹² It is compelling to learn that President Ahmadinejad was raised in a poor, rural area and that his family made numerous sacrifices to educate him, which allowed him to earn a PhD in engineer traffic planning (traffic is a huge problem in Tehran).¹³ The authors successfully develop President Ahmadinejad's ambitious personality in these beginning chapters, which sets a captivating tone for the remainder of the book. The authors provide detailed facts on how he was elected to president largely on a promise to attack Iranian poverty and eliminate governmental corruption.¹⁴ It becomes abundantly clear why the authors dedicated so much of the book to President Ahmadinejad's religious influence during his rise to Iranian President. Ostensibly, the authors present President Ahmadinejad's personal background to show that he is a man who has always succeeded, overcoming great odds in his life, because of one primary personality trait: self-determination. This is critically important to understand because it describes how President Ahmadinejad views Iran relative to the outside international community. In reality, he views Iran like he views himself, an overwhelming underdog that can overcome significant challenges when faced against insurmountable odds. The authors present President Ahmadinejad as a man who is a proven winner and credible threat. Accordingly, he should be taken very seriously by the international community.

The book's thesis begins to really develop in chapter two when reading about President Ahmadinejad's religious training and deep spiritual convictions that stem from the riveting religious story of a Shiite Messiah named Mahdi.¹⁵ The book's thesis is that Iran's leadership is devoted to expediting Mahdi's resurrection by becoming an advanced and powerful society; Iran's nuclear proliferation is the means to that end. Specifically, Melman and Javedanfar imply that President Ahmadinejad's regime is obsessed with making Iran a strong country, which would accelerate Mahdi's return and ultimately establish an Islamic dominated world republic.¹⁶ The more daunting proposition implied by the authors is President Ahmadinejad's fervor to cause an international crisis, sacrifice his own life for spiritual perfection, and thereby become a religious martyr in exchange for an ultimate Islamic world empire.¹⁷ To support their thesis, the authors expertly describe how President Ahmadinejad becomes closely associated with the Hojjatieh society and its messianic movement, which is inspired by Mahdi.¹⁸ Melman and Javedanfar further detail that President Ahmadinejad makes few decisions without his closest advisor, Mojtaba Samare Hashemi, who also subscribes to the same religious principle.¹⁹ Both President Ahmadinejad and Hashemi strictly adhere to the religious teachings of a messianic Shia cleric named Mesbah Yazdi, who maintains that Muslims can not compel Mahdi's return and the end of the world; they can only "strive to hasten it" by becoming the model society for humankind.²⁰ In essence, Yazdi maintains that Iran should cultivate nuclear production to become a powerful country and thus induce Mahdi's presence and ultimate apocalypse.

The notion of President Ahmadinejad's martyrdom is also grounded in his religious view that the natural world is at the absolute bottom of existence, which is illustrated by the martyrdom story of Imam Hussein.²¹ President Ahmadinejad's regime admires the holy story of Imam Hussein since Hussein fought courageously to death for his Islamic cause with a small army of seventy-two against an army of four thousand.²² Imam Hussein's bravery inspires Iran's religious leadership by exemplifying that an underdog like Iran must battle to death against a much larger infidel international community to uphold

¹² *Id.* at 1–6 (discussing his family background and society status), 4–9, 28–57 (discussing the importance of the Islamic Shiite religion in President Ahmadinejad's life), 9–10 (generally discussing President Ahmadinejad's early success as a traffic engineer and career as Mayor of Tehran).

¹³ *Id.* at 3–5.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 24, 37.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 42–57. The advent of Mahdi is not a universally accepted concept in Islam. Looklex.com, *Muhammad al Mahdi*, <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/12thima.htm> (last visited May 29, 2008). There are basic differences among different sects of Muslims about the timing and nature of his advent and guidance. *Id.* Most Muslims believe that the Mahdi will change the world into a perfect and just Islamic society alongside Jesus. *Id.*

¹⁶ MELMAN & JAVEDANFAR, *supra* note 1, at 46.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 51.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 45.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 47.

²⁰ *Id.* at 45.

²¹ *Id.* at 51–52.

²² *Id.*

Islamic religious convictions. By providing these two straight-forward religious accounts, the authors skillfully manage to reinforce their theme that Iran is currently led and driven by the Islamic Shiite religion.

Just as it seems the book is going down the one-lane President Ahmadinejad religion inspired track, it quickly shifts gears by giving a historical framework on Iran's past and present nuclear programs.²³ One criticism of the book is that the first third is exclusively dedicated to President Ahmadinejad's life and belief system, and without notice or smooth transition, it suddenly shifts into political gamesmanship between Iran and the international community over Iran's nuclear programs and the Ayatollah's supreme authority in Iran. Even with these twists and turns, the reader quickly catches on and resumes interest. The unexpected topic shift to Iran's nuclear program and the Ayatollah's surprising superior influence quickly becomes relevant when learning that President Ahmadinejad is not working alone to achieve nuclear prowess.

Ironically, Iran's leadership possessed a tight grip on the reigns of Iranian nuclear ambition long before President Ahmadinejad came to power.²⁴ Melman and Javedanfar underscore that Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons are anchored in its history, beginning when the United States loyally supported the Shah of Iran's nuclear efforts nearly forty years ago.²⁵ Notably, the book impresses that President Ahmadinejad neither possesses the power to single-handedly order military attacks or principally control Iran's nuclear program.²⁶ Rather, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, calls the shots concerning Iran's nuclear pursuits.²⁷ Interestingly, the authors assert that Ayatollah Khamenei is much more pragmatic since he does not desire to acquire nuclear arms nor start an international crisis.²⁸ However, the book's thesis that Shiite Islamic ideology dominates Iran's nuclear policy is supported again when analyzing Ayatollah Khamenei's Fatwa (religious decree) against nuclear weapons provided to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2005.²⁹ At first, Ayatollah Khamenei's declaration appears legitimate and comforting. Whether intended or not, the authors quickly dispel this peaceful posture by educating the reader on the Shiite concept of *taghiye*, which condones lying for self-preservation.³⁰ By using such religious deceit, justified by Islamic ideology, the logical conclusion offered is that Ayatollah Khamenei is appeasing the international community, creating confusion, and stalling for more time to acquire nuclear weaponry so Iran can expedite Mahdi's return to establish an Islamic world republic.

The remainder of the book focuses on the trials and tribulations of the Iranian nuclear saga and its numerous Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons violations; specifically, Iran's failures to report plutonium experiments and hidden nuclear sites that were discovered by IAEA investigators and Israeli and United States intelligence agencies.³¹ To their credit, the authors provide detailed accounts into both Israel and the United States' dealings with Iran's nuclear efforts over the past twenty-five years and offer several logical proposals as to how the international community may cope with Iran's nuclear production.³² Melman and Javedanfar give a well-developed, compelling account of how Iran artfully engages in deceit and concealment of their hidden network of nuclear installations beyond the reach of the IAEA as well.³³ Again, the authors' thesis is reinforced in these chapters. It is illogical to conclude that Ayatollah Khamenei can deny his desire of nuclear production on religious grounds and then allow his country to engage in evasive tactics with international nuclear inspectors. In fact, the authors firmly establish that Ayatollah Khamenei is a hypocrite for allowing President Ahmadinejad to espouse Iran's inherent right to nuclear capability while he consistently rejects nuclear proliferation efforts to the outside world.³⁴ Perhaps, the real "Sphinx of Tehran" is not President Ahmadinejad, but rather Ayatollah Khamenei himself. He is

²³ *Id.* at 73–87.

²⁴ *Id.* at 131–45.

²⁵ *Id.* at 83–85.

²⁶ *Id.* at 145.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.* at 98.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.* at 111, 126–27. See 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) (May 2–27, 2005), <http://www.un.org/events/npt2005/npttreaty.html> (international treaty to limit the spread of nuclear weapons, opened for signature on July 1, 1968.). There are currently 189 states party to the treaty, five of which have nuclear weapons: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China. *Id.*

³² MELMAN & JAVEDANFAR, *supra* note 1, at 190–200.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.* at 98.

the one who appears responsible for deceitfully denouncing Iran's nuclear ambition while simultaneously turning a blind eye to his country's nuclear progress. Or, is he complicit with Iran's nuclear program ambitions? Either way, the authors demonstrate that Ayatollah Khamenei is keeping the international world guessing about his true nuclear desires. Hence, the riddle of the sphinx remains largely unsolved in this context.³⁵

Although much of the book's information concerning Iran's nuclear program is not new and has been largely covered in other recent novels, this book, far better than others, entices the reader to think more critically and raise questions about the challenges a nuclear Iran presents.³⁶ *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran* would especially stimulate a military audience to consider and deliberate on many international and operational issues such as: What right does the United States and Israel have to repress Iranian nuclear progression? Should the West entertain negotiation requests from Iran? Would imposing economic sanctions or striking key Iranian nuclear sites backfire and serve as a rallying cry for Iran?³⁷ Can the U.S. and Israel afford to wait for Iran's regime to implode? How does the United States deal with Russia, China, and Pakistan for supplying Iran with uranium enrichment products?³⁸ With the current challenges faced in Iraq, is the United States even capable of hindering Iranian nuclear progress? Does international law support a U.S. military strike based on anticipatory defense in accordance with the Article 51 of the United Nations Charter?³⁹ And most importantly, is Iran pursuing nuclear capability as a means of achieving Islamic world domination via Mahdi? The book is masterful at raising these dilemmas while impressing the necessity for more immediate world attention to the real Iranian nuclear threat. Despite raising more questions than answers, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran* provokes serious thought of these relevant issues.

III. Criticisms

It is somewhat disconcerting that such a well-researched book could contain numerous spelling and punctuation errors; although, this is mitigated when factoring in the book's overall value and that neither author is a native English speaker. Another frustration is the book's lack of photos. The reader would significantly benefit by viewing pictures of some key Iranian leaders since the English reader is challenged by having to comprehend page after page of Iranian personnel with unfamiliar Arabic and Persian names. Some key pictures would ease this strain and facilitate the reader's immediate understanding. The biggest criticism of the book, however, is that the reader is left pondering how these two authors could disclose so many intricate details about President Ahmadinejad's upbringing and religious persuasion and then offer so little factually about his 1979 Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq War involvement. Likewise, the authors fail to describe whether Ayatollah Khamenei authorizes President Ahmadinejad to make inflammatory statements such as eradicating Israel off the planet and denying the existence of the Holocaust.⁴⁰ The reader is left speculating on whether Ayatollah Khamenei supports such controversial clamor or whether it is by design to hasten Mahdi's return and eventual establishment of an Islamic world republic. Finally, this raises the question as to whether the authors were themselves misled to some extent during their research; similar to Iran's cat-and-mouse games that deceived the United Nations and the IAEA.⁴¹ Even with these shortcomings, the authors successfully reinforce the book's primary purpose of planting the seed that Shia Islamic religion currently drives Iran's obsession to gain nuclear capability as a means to become powerful and achieve Islamic world superiority.

³⁵ PITTSBURGH PUBLIC THEATER, UNRAVELING THE RIDDLE OF OEDIPUS: STUDY GUIDE 11 (2006), available at <http://www.ppt.org/documents/SG3201OedipusTheKing1.pdf> ("In Greek legend, the Sphinx devoured all travelers who could not answer the riddle she posed: 'What is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three in the evening?' The hero Oedipus gave the answer, 'Man,' causing the Sphinx's death.").

³⁶ See, e.g., SHAHRAM H. CHUBIN, IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS (2005); ALIREZA JAFARZADEDEH, THE IRAN THREAT: AHMADINEJAD AND THE COMING NUCLEAR CRISIS (2006).

³⁷ MELMAN & JAVEDANFAR, *supra* note 1, at 185.

³⁸ *Id.* at 157-58.

³⁹ U.N. Charter art. 51 (United States' view of "inherent right" to self-defense under customary international law encompasses anticipatory self-defense).

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 200.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 123-27.

IV. Conclusion

The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran could not be timelier as it is a tremendous guide to Iran's nuclear past, perilous present, and unpredictable future. Anyone concerned with world security or the spread of nuclear technology should read this book. From misconceptions of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's true influences and power to the rising Iranian nuclear threat, Melman and Javedanfar give unique and insightful perspectives to Iran's current nuclear landscape. Not only is the book educationally relevant to military servicemembers, it also keeps the reader's attention cover to cover. The authors educate its readers on both the religious mindset and hierarchy of Iran's leadership. For instance, it is enlightening to discover that the true Iranian Supreme Leader is Ayatollah Kahmeini, not President Ahmadinejad as Iran projects to the outside world.⁴²

Additionally, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran* compels the reading audience to reflect on the current challenges faced by the United States in the Middle East in addition to the Global War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unequivocally, the reader is educated on the core principle that Iran is as equally determined as the United States to spread its form of government in the Middle East and other parts of the world. The authors successfully instill the harsh reality that Iran's leadership is completely driven by their plight to achieve Islamic world supremacy. To that end, the critical lesson learned from *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran* is Iran's international political motivations are firmly rooted in their desire to become a world superpower, accomplished by nuclear proliferation, so they can accelerate Mahdi's presence. Religion makes Iran tick.

After reading this book, it is blatantly obvious that Iran is determined to achieve nuclear capability. Because this book provides so much insight on Iran's leadership and the religious principles that inspire them, it is a must read for all U.S. servicemembers, especially if the United States draws closer to a potential military conflict with Iran. This book cleverly prompts serious debate on whether Iran's nuclear efforts should be dealt with now or later, either diplomatically or militarily. For these reasons, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran* should be placed on the essential reading list for U.S. military servicemembers and should be read with an open, inquisitive mind.

⁴² *Id.* at 145.