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GLOVES COME OFF AS IRAN MODERATES BATTLE AHMADINEJAD

November 15, 2007 SpaceWar.com reported: "Iran's moderates are intensifying criticism of hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, landing their first blows in a bitter political fight ahead of elections next year. The moderate heavyweights Mohammad Khatami and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani have been unusually explicit in their criticism of Ahmadinejad's economic policies and his analysis of the threat posed by the United States.



Rafsanjani

Ahmadinejad has shot back using language colourful even by his standards, warning he would expose "traitors" in the nuclear standoff and accusing critics of "being less intelligent than a goat". The sharp rhetoric is the upshot of concerns over the mounting international crisis over the Iranian nuclear programme and a sign of the proximity of legislative elections on March 14.

There is exasperation among moderates over Ahmadinejad's brushing-off of UN sanctions action as just "pieces of paper" and his refusal to even countenance the possibility of a US military attack. Political exchanges in Iran are normally marked by the utmost courtesy. But the differences in visions of the country's future means the tensions between the factions are now abundantly clear.

Mohammad Atrianfar, a confidant of Rafsanjani, said the explicit criticism had been triggered by the degree of concern amongst moderates about the state of the country under Ahmadinejad. "Rafsanjani is genuinely worried," the leading newspaper editor told AFP. "He was one of those who created this (Islamic) system and as he was a leader in the (1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war) he knows what war means and what price people have to pay.

"Ahmadinejad does not have a true idea about reality. He has no sense of fear. He thinks that if he adopts radical positions his rivals will step back. The attacks are set to multiply ahead of the elections."

The attacks are coming from a broad front of reformists, moderates and more pragmatic conservatives:

-- Khatami, president from 1997-2005, is an unashamed reformist who until recently refrained from making public criticism of the government. But in the last month he has accused it of "ignorance and lack of expertise" and sounded the alarm over its economic policies, saying inflation was a growing problem which government statistics were trying to conceal.

-- Rafsanjani, president from 1989-1997 but humiliated by Ahmadinejad in the 2005 vote, has also stepped up criticism of the president's confidence that the United States will not attack.

The cleric, who now heads two powerful elite bodies, said the danger from the United States "exists and is very serious", a flat contradiction of Ahmadinejad's position."..."

US HAS NO GOOD OPTION IN A PAKISTAN NUCLEAR 'NIGHTMARE'

November 15, 2007 SpaceWar.com reported: "The US armed forces are virtually powerless to prevent Pakistan's nuclear arsenal from falling into Islamist hands if the political crisis in Islamabad spins out of control, analysts warned. Instead, they said, Washington can do little but help to resolve the crisis and preserve its strong ties with Pakistan's pro-Western military elite, whether or not General Pervez Musharraf stays in power.

"There's no good military option at all," Daniel Markey, a former US government policy planner for South Asia, told AFP on Tuesday in Washington. It would be an "incredibly ugly scenario," he said, for US forces to try to find and secure the nuclear sites in the event of an Islamist takeover because they lack the intelligence needed to do so in such a large country.

"Having some certainty of finding them is just, I think, out of the realm of reality," said Markey, a former State Department official who is now at the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank. Averting such a "nightmare scenario," he added, "means having a good working relationship" with the army, as has been the case for years."..."

If the US government decides to drop Musharraf, he warned, it will have to be careful to avoid burning ties with the institution he heads. "That's the difficult balancing act."

Musharraf's deputy in the army, General Ashfaq Kiyani, would be his obvious successor but the analyst said it is not certain that such a transition would go smoothly, even though he has reasonably good ties with Washington."..."

MILIBAND: EU 'MUST TACKLE GLOBAL CONFLICTS'

November 15, 2007 The London Daily Telegraph reported: "European countries should be more willing to launch military interventions in trouble-spots around the world, David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary, will say today. Mr Miliband will use a speech in Bruges to warn the European Union it faces becoming irrelevant if it is unwilling to deploy "hard power" to promote democracy and tackle conflict beyond its borders.

His remarks reflect simmering anger in the UK government that EU members like France and Germany have refused to deploy large

numbers of troops in Afghanistan, leaving British forces bearing a disproportionate military burden there.

"There is a clear fork in the road," Mr Miliband will say, telling European leaders that if they "focus on internal not external challenges; institutions rather than ideals" then the consequence will be "losing our hard power by not being prepared to intervene".

Mr Miliband will also call for Europe to work together to tackle environmental concerns and propose that the free trade zone be extended into north Africa by 2030."..."

SOLANA: ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE DEAL POSSIBLE BY THE END OF 2008

November 14, 2007 Haaretz.com reported: "An Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement could be in place by the end of next year, European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said Wednesday at a joint news conference with Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in Jerusalem. "My impression is that the whole process is doable, it can be done. Everyone has to work so the process ends up well," he said.

Earlier, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office said he told Solana that "the foundation for the post-Annapolis negotiations with the Palestinians be recognition of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people".

Differences over the issue emerged this week when Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said Palestinians would not accept Israel as a "Jewish state," a definition that could enable Olmert to argue against the right of return for refugees in a final deal.

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad echoed Erekat's statement on Wednesday. "We do not accept conditions of this type, not at all," he said on Al Arabiya television. However, Olmert told Solana that the matter was non-negotiable.

Livni, for her part, agreed with Solana that the upcoming international Annapolis peace summit was an opportunity for the peace process to move forward.

She said, however, that what was important about the meeting was "the day after." The success of the parley, she went on, lay in the fact Javier Solana that it could re-launch an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which has been dormant for the past seven years, since the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising in September 2000."..."

US PLANS NEW SPACE WEAPONS AGAINST CHINA

November 15, 2007 The London Daily Telegraph reported: "The Pentagon is spending billions of dollars on new forms of space warfare to counter the growing risk of missile attack from rogue states and the "satellite killer" capabilities of China.

Congress has allocated funds to develop futuristic weapons and intelligence systems that operate beyond the Earth's atmosphere as America looks past Iraq and Afghanistan to the wars of the future.

The most ambitious project in a new \$459 billion (£221.5 billion) defence spending Bill is the Falcon, a reusable "hypersonic vehicle" that could fly at six times the speed of sound and deliver 12,000lb of bombs anywhere in the world within minutes. The bombs' destructive power would be multiplied by the Earth's gravitational pull as they travelled at up to 25 times the speed of sound towards their target.

The cost of the vehicle has not been revealed, but a spokesman for the Pentagon's Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (Darpa) said a first test flight was scheduled for next year."..."

Loren Thompson, a leading defence analyst in Washington, said the focus of the project was attacking "time sensitive targets" in states such as North Korea and Iran, which have either developed nuclear weapons without international approval or are suspected of doing so."..."

BILL AGAINST J'LEM DIVISION PASSES PRELIMINARY READING

November 14, 2007 YnetNews.com reported: "The Knesset approved by a large margin a bill in its preliminary reading aimed at dividing Jerusalem on Wednesday. The bill was initiated by Likud faction chairman, Knesset Member Gideon Sa'ar, and Knesset members were given a free hand by their coalition to vote according to their views on the issue.

Many coalition members, including ministers Avigdor Lieberman (Yisrael Beiteinu), Ariel Atias (Shas), and Rafi Eitan (Pensioners Party) supported the proposal. Nay sayers included former Defense Minister Amir Peretz (Labor).

The bill is a clause to a basic law. It states that Jerusalem is Israel's capital, and that a Knesset majority is needed for any changes to the city's boundaries. Any decision on the city must have a majority of 80 Knesset members, rather than the 61 votes set by law today.

Sa'ar's proposal came following various proposals recently heard over the issue of dividing Jerusalem, before any agreements with the Palestinian Authority. Vice Premier Haim Ramon recently said that the upcoming Annapolis peace conference would include discussions the division of Jerusalem.

Speaking after the vote, Sa'ar said, "The passing of the bill, two weeks before the Annapolis conference, is an important and clear signal to the entire international community, indicating that there is widespread unity among the Israeli people and Knesset against making sacrifices in Jerusalem."..."