



**The Meir Amit Intelligence
and Terrorism Information Center**



Highlights of the week:

- ✓ 2012 elections: lists of candidates for conservatives released; division in conservative camp now an established fact
- ✓ Government submits state budget for Majles approval; security budget up by 127 percent
- ✓ Cardboard-made revolution: controversy over ceremony marking anniversary of Supreme Leader's return to Iran
- ✓ Iran needs to attack Israel by 2014, Iranian blogger says
- ✓ Iran condemns Samsung over Israeli TV commercial
- ✓ Pictures of the week: student Basij members demonstrate in front of the Majles demanding to stop the export of Iranian oil to Europe

2012 elections: lists of candidates for conservatives released; division in conservative camp now an established fact

This week the two main fronts in the conservative camp, the United Osulgarayan Front and the Steadfast Front, released their lists of candidates in Tehran Province for the upcoming Majles elections slated for March 2.

The United Front's list of candidates in Tehran Province (represented by 30 of the current 290 Majles members) includes 30 candidates, some of whom are Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel, former Majles speaker; Ahmad Tavakoli, chairman of the Majles

Research Center; Mohammad-Reza Bahonar, deputy Majles speaker; Esma'il Kowsari, deputy chairman of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee; Parviz Sorouri, chairman of the Majles Internal Security Committee; and Mas'oud Mir-Kazemi, former petroleum minister. The list includes six women.

The list does not include three currently-serving conservative Majles members who are considered some of President Ahmadinejad's strongest critics: Ali Motahari, Hamid-Reza Katouzian, and Ali Abbaspour. After the list was published, Ali Motahari announced his intention to run in a separate list called Critics of the Tenth Government (i.e., Ahmadinejad's government). If Motahari does field his own list, at least three separate lists on behalf of the conservative camp will run in Tehran Province.

The Steadfast Front also released its list of candidates in Tehran Province. It consists of 20 candidates, including Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel and Mas'oud Mir-Kazemi (two of the five candidates shared by the Steadfast Front and the Osulgarayan Front); Mohammad-Nasser Saghaye Biria, President Ahmadinejad's former advisor on religious affairs; Hojjat-ol-Eslam Qassem Ravanbakhsh, a student of radical cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi; Fatemeh Alya, a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee; and Mohammad Soleimani, former telecommunications minister.

Assembly of Experts Chairman Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani, one of the clerics who support the United Osulgarayan Front, speculated this week that the chances of the two conservative fronts reaching an agreement on a joint list of candidates are slim.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Reza Khatami, a senior reformist figure and brother of former President Mohammad Khatami, announced that the reformist bloc has no intention of running in the coming elections and that the independent participation of several candidates who refer to themselves as "reformists" does not mean that the reformist bloc is taking part in the elections. In an interview to the daily Roozgar, which was consequently shut down for one month by the authorities, Khatami said that the election results are predetermined.

In the next several days the Guardian Council is expected to release the final list of candidates it has approved for the elections. Last weekend the council's

spokesman said that it has approved more than 3,000 of the 5,395 candidates who registered for the elections.

Government submits state budget for Majles approval; security budget up by 127 percent

Last Wednesday, February 1, with a delay of almost two months, President Ahmadinejad submitted the budget proposal for the next Iranian year (1391, 2012-2013) to the approval of the Majles. The annual budget amounts to 510,000 billion rials (over 415 billion dollars), reflecting a slight decrease in the government's routine expenses and a considerable 127%-increase in security expenses. The budget proposal is based on an estimated 85 dollars per barrel of oil and 1,150 tomans per dollar.

In a speech given before the Majles, the president outlined the principles underpinning the proposal. He noted that the main budgetary objectives are to achieve an 8-percent economic growth, lower the unemployment rate, increase production, and minimize social differences.

A number of Majles members protested the considerable delay in the submission of the budget to the Majles' approval. However, Majles Speaker Ali Larijani said that, despite the delay, efforts will be undertaken to complete the approval of the budget before the end of the current year. If that should prove impossible, a relative share of the budget will be approved for the first several months of the year, and the rest will be approved in the beginning of the next year. Ahmad Tavakoli, chairman of the Majles Research Center, strongly criticized the budget proposal, saying it is impractical and has clauses that go against the law.

Those media affiliated with the president's opponents also criticized the delay in the submission of the budget, as well as the budget proposal itself. The daily Mardom Salari questioned the feasibility of implementing the budget, and argued that the delay in submitting it to the approval of the Majles reflects the government's intention to keep the influence Majles members have over the budget as limited as possible. The reformist daily Sharq said that the budget proposal is a reflection of the government's lack of understanding of Iran's difficult economic situation in light of the unemployment and inflation rates, negative growth, increase in the dollar's exchange rate, government debt to the banks, and international threats to Iran. If the government understood that, it

would have submitted the budget proposal earlier and formulated a better budget with the assistance of economy experts and universities, Sharq said.

Cardboard-made revolution: controversy over ceremony marking anniversary of Supreme Leader's return to Iran

To mark the 33 years since the return of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, to Iran, the Iranian authorities held a ceremony last Wednesday, February 1, which included a reenactment of Khomeini's arrival at the Tehran airport. The ceremony, attended by members of the Iranian air force, featured a large cardboard cutout of Khomeini.

The revolution leader's cardboard cutout sparked a wave of derision and satire from regime opponents on blogs and social networks, particularly from Iranian exiles who live abroad.

Many of those who commented on the photographs published by Iran's official media claimed that the ceremony reflects the bleak situation of the Islamic revolution. The Iranian leadership has become hollow, and all that is left from the revolution is a cardboard Khomeini.

Iranian web surfers discussed the fate of many of those who accompanied Khomeini upon his return to Iran in 1979, including former President Abolhassan Bani Sadr, who was removed from office in 1981 and went into exile abroad; former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, currently under house arrest; Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has been excluded from positions of power in Iranian politics; and Khomeini's grandson, Ahmad, who has become a critic of the regime and supporter of the reformist opposition. Many of those who accompanied Khomeini have been eliminated, exiled, or placed under house arrest, and the current regime, according to one blogger, is made up of those who opposed the revolution or collaborated with the old regime.

Many bloggers mocked the photographs from the ceremony. One blogger discussed the use of a cardboard model of the revolution leader from the perspective of Iran's growing economic distress, and sarcastically commented that, according to a statement released by the Supreme Leader's office, Khomeini's picture was initially supposed to appear on toilet paper because of the sanctions and the increasing price of cardboard. Another blogger commented on the photographs by saying, "Now I understand why the American Barbie doll has

been banned" (the doll was recently taken off the shelves on orders from the authorities).

Another blogger mentioned Israel in connection with the decision to use a cardboard cutout of Khomeini, saying that, since the Mossad wanted to assassinate Imam Khomeini, it was decided to keep him two-dimensional to ensure his well-being. Those who do not believe that can use 3-D glasses and see for themselves.

The use of the cardboard cutout of the Islamic revolution leader was also criticized this week by Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, and a number of Majles members. Rafsanjani said that those who organized the festivities marking the events surrounding the revolution need to present the revolution's achievements instead of using inappropriate means that can be exploited by the enemies of the revolution.

Iran needs to attack Israel by 2014, Iranian blogger says

Last Saturday, February 4, a number of conservative news websites in Iran published an article by blogger Ali-Reza Forghani. The article was first published (in Persian and in English) on Forghani's personal blog, and then republished on several news websites affiliated with the conservative faction.

Ali-Reza Forghani, born 1983, is a blogger who expresses the views held by the radical right wing of the Iranian political system. He has a degree in computer engineering and strategic management, is a Basij member, and was an activist in the radical group Ansar-o Hezbollah when he was younger. He describes himself as a supporter of the principle of "rule of the religious jurispudent" in its strict interpretation (where the religious jurispudent enjoys complete authority).

Forghani began the article by discussing the rationale behind an attack on Israel from the point of view of Islamic religious law, based on interpretations of the term "jihad" in Islam and the thought of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution. After the introduction, Forghani examined the military aspects of an Iranian attack on Israel. To attack Iran, Israel needs assistance, approval, and coordination with the West and the United States. In the current state of affairs, where the United States and the West remain passive, Iran has the ability to destroy Israel, the author claimed. Given the unique characteristics of the current Iranian regime under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, and

considering the Islamic awakening in the region, influenced by the Iranian regime, Iran has to attack Israel by 2014 and before the end of the current government term (in 2013).

Forghani suggested first destroying strategic targets in Israel with long-range Sejil missiles, focusing on the residents of Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa and attacking power plants, sewage facilities, energy sources, airports, nuclear facilities (including the top-priority reactor in Dimona), as well as transportation and telecommunications infrastructure. Shihab-3 and Qadr missiles should then be used against urban population centers until all Israelis are eliminated. Forghani went on to detail Iran's ground-to-ground capabilities and the types of missiles it has available, and speculated that Iran can destroy Israel in less than nine minutes.

The article was written by a private individual and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Iranian leadership. However, its circulation in media affiliated with the conservative camp may be an indication that the growing discourse in Israel and the West about a possible military attack on Iran is having an increasing effect. It could also signify the beginning of a public and media discourse in Iran about the need for a preemptive attack against Israel or against Western targets.

The article drew numerous reactions from Iranian internet users on the websites where it was published. A few web surfers on the Alef website expressed support for the opinion of the author and justified an attack against Israel, saying that it is a "cancerous tumor" in the heart of the Muslim commonwealth. Israel's military abilities are not as impressive as they are often said to be, some web surfers claimed, proof of which is the second Lebanon war and the campaign in Gaza.

Most web surfers, however, had reservations about the content of the article and even criticized the editors of Alef for deciding to publish it. Some of them argued that the article overestimates Iran's abilities and ignores the likely response of Israel's allies, mainly the United States, in case it is attacked by Iran. Other web surfers said that it would be better to invest in improving the quality of life in Iran and developing its economy instead of focusing on a possible attack against Israel. The author's call to destroy the people of Israel drew particularly strong criticism. Many web surfers said that the proposal is immoral, that Iran has no problem with the Jews but only with the "Zionist regime", and that the editors of the website should not have published an article which calls for genocide.

Iran condemns Samsung over Israeli TV commercial

An ad for an Israeli cable TV company showing characters from the popular Israeli series *Asfur* blow up a nuclear plant in the city of Esfahan provoked strong reactions in Iran. The target of the Iranians' anger was Samsung, the South Korean electronics company whose tablet was the subject of the ad.

Arsalan Fathipour, chairman of the Majles Economy Committee, said that the Majles is looking into the possibility of reexamining Iran's relations with Samsung and passing a law that would ban the import of its products due to the "anti-Iranian ad". Majles member Seyyed Ali Mousavi said that Samsung offended the Iranian people to please the Zionists, and that the offense will cost it dearly.

Conservative media also defined the ad as offensive. Fars News Agency gave a detailed report about the ad, saying that it mocks the assassination of Iran's nuclear scientists by the Mossad and ridicules Iran. Fars wondered whether Iran can also broadcast an anti-Israeli ad for Samsung products, and use it to threaten Israel with assassinations and terrorist attacks in its territory. According to Fars, the fact that the ad aired only days after the assassination of the Iranian nuclear scientist provides Iran with a possibility to file a complaint against Samsung for supporting terrorism, and exposes the Israelis' fear from Iran and its military capabilities. The Mashregh website also strongly condemned the ad and said that the "Zionist regime" uses humor to evade responsibility for its acts of terrorism against Iran.

In addition to criticizing Samsung, this week the internal security forces removed that company's billboards in Tehran. Furthermore, the Ministry of Islamic Guidance prohibited Iranian commercial companies from cooperating with Samsung in the field of advertising or giving away its products as prizes.

2012 elections: lists of candidates for conservatives released; division in conservative camp now an established fact

This week the two main fronts in the conservative camp, the United Osulgarayan Front and the Steadfast Front (Jebhe-ye Paydari), released their lists of candidates in Tehran Province for the upcoming Majles elections slated for March 2.

The United Front's list of candidates in Tehran Province (represented by 30 of the current 290 Majles members) includes 30 candidates, some of whom are Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel, former

Majles speaker; Ahmad Tavakoli, chairman of the Majles Research Center; Mohammad-Reza Bahonar, deputy Majles speaker; Ali-Reza Zakani, chairman of the United Front election headquarters; Esmā'il Kowsari, deputy chairman of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee; Parviz Sorouri, chairman of the Majles Internal Security Committee; and Mas'oud Mir-Kazemi, former petroleum minister. The list includes six women. The list of candidates recommended by the United Front was formulated at a meeting of its central council (Fars, February 6).

The list does not include three currently-serving conservative Majles members who are considered some of President Ahmadinejad's strongest critics: Ali Motahari, Hamid-Reza Katouzian, and Ali Abbaspour. These three Majles members were disqualified by the Interior Ministry during the first stage of vetting, but ultimately approved in the later stages. According to some conservative media, the decision not to put the three Majles members on the list of candidates has to do with their silence during the riots that broke out after the presidential elections in the summer of 2009. Raha Press, a website affiliated with the president's allies, reported, however, that the decision not to include the three Majles members in the list has to do with internal power struggles in the United Osulgarayan Front between, on one hand, former Majles Speaker Haddad Adel, who was given the top spot on the United Front list and is allegedly interested in running for Majles speaker again, and on the other, current Majles Speaker Ali Larijani and Tehran's Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (Raha Press, February 6).

After the list was published, Ali Motahari announced his intention to run in a separate list called Critics of the Tenth Government (i.e., Ahmadinejad's government) (Fararu, February 6). If Motahari does field his own list, at least three separate lists on behalf of the conservative camp will run in Tehran Province.



The Steadfast Front also released its list of candidates in Tehran Province. It consists of 20 candidates, including Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel and Mas'oud Mir-Kazemi (two of the five candidates shared by the Steadfast Front and the Osulgarayan Front); Mohammad-Nasser Saghaye Biria, President Ahmadinejad's former advisor on religious affairs; Hojjat-ol-Eslam Qassem Ravanbakhsh, a student of radical cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi; Hamid Rasa'i, a Majles member; Fatemeh Alya, a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee; and Mohammad Soleimani, former telecommunications minister.

Assembly of Experts Chairman Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani, one of the clerics who support the United Osulgarayan Front, speculated this week that the chances of reaching an agreement between the two conservative fronts on a joint list of candidates are slim (Mehr, February 6).

Meanwhile, Mohammad Reza Khatami, a senior reformist figure and brother of former President Mohammad Khatami, announced this week that the reformist bloc has no intention of running in the coming elections and that the independent participation of several candidates who refer to themselves as "reformists" does not mean that the reformist bloc is taking part in the elections. In an interview to the daily Roozegar, which was consequently shut down for one month by the authorities, Khatami said that the election results are predetermined. He noted that the reformists are under heavy pressure from the authorities and suffering from organizational weakness, but are still enjoying considerable popularity and influence with the Iranian society (Kalemeleh, February 5).

In the next several days the Guardian Council is expected to release the final list of candidates it has approved for the elections. Last weekend Abbas-Ali Kadkhoda'i, the council's spokesman, said that it has approved more than 3,000 of the 5,395 candidates who registered for the elections.

Government submits state budget for Majles approval; security budget up by 127 percent

Last Wednesday, February 1, with a delay of almost two months, President Ahmadinejad submitted the budget proposal for the next Iranian year (1391, 2012-2013) to the approval of the Majles. The annual budget amounts to 510,000 billion rials (over 415 billion dollars), reflecting an increase of 127 percent in security expenses. The budget proposal is based on an estimated 85 dollars per barrel of oil (compared to last year's budget, which was based on an estimated 80 dollars per barrel) and 1,150 tomans per dollar.

In a speech given before the Majles, the president outlined the principles underpinning the proposal. He noted that the main budgetary objectives are to achieve an 8-percent economic growth, lower the unemployment rate, increase production, and minimize social differences.



The president submits the budget proposal to the Majles speaker

Ahmadinejad stated that the budget reflects a 5.6-percent drop in routine government expenses, an increase of nearly 90 percent in non-oil dependent state revenues, and an increase of nearly 40 percent in expenses for construction projects across Iran. Also according to Ahmadinejad, the budget places particular emphasis on strengthening culture, national unity, and Islamic Iranian identity.

The president discussed the government's economic achievements in the outgoing fiscal year, and expressed his hope that the promise to create 2.5 million new workplaces will be delivered in full by the end of the current year. He called on Majles members to try and complete the approval of the budget before the end of the year, even though they are currently busy preparing for the Majles elections. He noted that there have been no considerable changes in the budget compared to last year, and that therefore the Majles should have no difficulties approving it (Fars, February 1).

During the Majles meeting at which the president presented the budget proposal, a number of Majles members protested the considerable delay in its submission. The government was required by law to submit it to the approval of the Majles as early as in December 2011, which would have given Majles members time to complete its approval by the end of the current Iranian year. Ahmad Tavakoli, chairman of the Majles Research Center, said during the meeting that the delay will make it impossible for the Majles to approve the entire budget by the end of the year, and that the Majles will have to approve only the portion of the budget allocated for the beginning of the year, which was also done last year (Fars, February 1). Speaking about the budget proposal itself, Tavakoli said it is impractical and has clauses that contradict the law (Mehr, February 5).

Now that the president has submitted the budget proposal, Majles members have ten days to submit their comments on it to the various Majles committees that are supposed to discuss it. Majles Speaker Ali Larijani said that, despite the considerable delay in the submission of the budget, efforts will be undertaken to complete its approval before the end of the current year. If that should prove impossible, the budget will be approved in several portions.

Those media affiliated with the president's opponents also criticized the delay in the submission of the budget, as well as the budget proposal itself. The daily Mardom Salari argued that the considerable delay in submitting it to the approval of the Majles has robbed many Majles members of their motivation to seriously discuss the proposal. The way that the budget was submitted to the approval of the Majles reflects the government's intention to keep the influence Majles members have over the budget as limited as possible, and the budget will remain just another one of the government's clichés (Mardom Salari, February 2).

The reformist daily Sharq said that the budget proposal is a reflection of the government's lack of understanding of Iran's difficult economic situation in light of the unemployment, inflation, negative growth, increase in the dollar's exchange rate, government debt to the banks, and international threats to Iran. If the government understood that, it would have submitted the budget proposal earlier and formulated a better budget with the assistance of economy experts and universities. Progress towards self-reliance cannot be made with the proposed budget, the daily said, and Majles members need the assistance of experts to formulate a budget that will guarantee national pride, welfare for Iranians, and development (Sharq, February 2).

Cardboard-made revolution: controversy over ceremony marking anniversary of Supreme Leader's return to Iran

To mark the 33 years since the return of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, to Iran, the Iranian authorities held a ceremony last Wednesday, February 1, which included a reenactment of Khomeini's arrival at the Tehran airport (the ceremony used an Iranian airplane instead of the Air France airplane in which Khomeini returned in 1979). The ceremony, attended by members of the Iranian air force, featured a large cardboard cutout of Khomeini.



The revolution leader's cardboard cutout sparked a wave of derision and satire from regime opponents on blogs and social networks, particularly from Iranian exiles who live abroad. Many of those who commented on the photographs published by Iran's official media claimed that the ceremony reflects the bleak situation of the Islamic revolution and the regime's shift away from the values of the revolution and those of its founder. The Iranian leadership has become hollow, and all that is left from the revolution is a cardboard Khomeini. One blogger wrote that the values of the revolution have collapsed under the leadership of Khamenei, who is referred to by his supporters as "imam", a title formerly reserved for Khomeini. All that is left from Khomeini's legacy is a cardboard cutout (<http://sogholmeh.wordpress.com/2012/02/01/hyperreal-emam>).

Another blogger claimed that the humiliation of the regular army soldiers, which was evident at the ceremony when Air Force personnel were required to salute a cardboard figure, demonstrates the need for army commanders and officers to rise up. The Iranian army, which was one of the most renowned armies in the world and for many years protected Iran's independence and the freedom of the Iranian people, has been humiliated by the country's leadership. The army commanders and officers need to realize that they must not remain silent over the regime's conduct, and that they must stand together with the people, rise up, and save Iran from the cardboard regime (<http://jomhoriyat.wordpress.com>).

Other web surfers discussed the fate of many of those who accompanied Khomeini upon his return to Iran in 1979, including former President Abolhassan Bani Sadr, who was removed from office in 1981 and went into exile abroad; former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who has been under house arrest for more than a year; Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has been excluded from positions of power in Iranian politics; and Khomeini's grandson, Ahmad, who has become a critic of the regime and supporter of the reformist opposition. Many of those who accompanied Khomeini have been eliminated, exiled, or placed under house arrest, and the current regime, according to one blogger, is made up of those who opposed the revolution, such as radical cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, or collaborated with the old regime (<http://pyknet.net>).

Many bloggers mocked the photographs from the ceremony marking the anniversary of Khomeini's return to Iran. One blogger discussed the use of a cardboard model of the revolution leader from the perspective of Iran's growing economic distress, and sarcastically commented that, according to a statement released by the Supreme Leader's office, Khomeini's picture was initially supposed to appear on toilet paper because of the sanctions and the increasing price of cardboard, but the idea was cancelled due to the Supreme Leader's objections (http://dara1390.blogspot.com/2012/02/blog-post_01.html).

Another blogger (<http://azadi-esteqlal-edalat.blogspot.com/2012/02/blog-post.html>) commented on the photographs by saying, "Now I understand why the American Barbie doll has been banned" (the doll was recently taken off the shelves on orders from the authorities).



"Khomeini's historic photographs" (<http://www.cardboardkhomeini.blogspot.com>)

Another blogger mentioned Israel in connection with the decision to use a cardboard cutout of Khomeini, saying that, since the Mossad wanted to assassinate Imam Khomeini, it was decided to keep him two-dimensional to ensure his well-being. Those who do not believe that can use 3-D glasses and see for themselves (<http://patriot1988.blogspot.com/2012/02/007.html>).

The use of the cardboard cutout of the Islamic revolution leader was also criticized this week by Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, who said that those who organized the festivities marking the events surrounding the revolution need to imbue them with meaningful content instead of using inappropriate means that can be exploited by the enemies of the revolution (Mehr, February 4). Similar criticism was voiced by a number of Majles members in the past several days.

Iran needs to attack Israel by 2014, Iranian blogger says

Last Saturday, February 4, a number of conservative news websites in Iran published an article by blogger Ali-Reza Forghani. The article was first published on Forghani's personal blog, and then republished on several news websites, including Alef, Asr-e Emrooz, and Raja News. It was also republished by Fars News Agency, which noted that the article does not necessarily reflect its views. The article was originally published (also on the Alef website) in Persian and English.



After the introduction, Forghani examined the military aspects of an Iranian attack on Israel. To attack Iran, Israel needs assistance, approval, and coordination with the West and the United States. In the current state of affairs, where the United States and the West remain passive, Iran has the ability to destroy Israel, the author claimed. Given the unique characteristics of the current Iranian regime under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, and considering the Islamic awakening in the region, influenced by the Iranian regime, Iran has to attack Israel by 2014 and before the end of the current government term (in 2013).

The initial objective is to destroy strategic targets in Israel with long-range Sejil missiles. The attack should focus on the residents of Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa, as well as power plants, sewage facilities, energy sources, airports, nuclear facilities (including the top-priority reactor in Dimona), and transportation and telecommunications infrastructure. Shihab-3 and Qadr missiles should then be used against urban population centers until all Israelis are eliminated. Forghani suggested hitting Israeli Air Force bases (whose names were mentioned based on reports in the overt media) and vessels (the author suggested hitting vessels and submarines with missiles, Iranian special forces operating worldwide, and underwater mines). He went on to detail Iran's ground-to-ground capabilities and the types of missiles it has available, and speculated that Iran can destroy Israel in less than nine minutes.

The article was written by a private individual and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Iranian leadership. However, its wide circulation in media affiliated with the conservative camp may be an indication that the growing discourse in Israel and the West about a possible military attack on Iran is having an increasing effect. It could also signify the beginning of a public and media discourse in Iran about the need for a preemptive attack against Israel or against Western targets.

The article drew numerous reactions from Iranian internet users on the websites where it was published. A few web users on the Alef website expressed support for the opinion of the author and said that Israel is a warmongering country seeking to take over the region and is a "cancerous tumor" in the heart of the Muslim commonwealth, which therefore should be fought in order to purge the region of "oppression, imperialism, and heresy". A number of web users argued that Israel's military abilities are not as impressive as they are often said to be, proof of which is the second Lebanon war and the campaign in Gaza.

Most web users, however, had reservations about the content of the article and even criticized the editors of Alef for deciding to publish it. Some of them argued that the article overestimates Iran's abilities and ignores the likely response of Israel's allies, mainly the

United States, in case it is attacked by Iran. Despite Iran's military progress, it is incapable of destroying Israel, a web user wrote.

Another web user argued that Iran's economic, social, and political situation makes it impossible for it to start a war, and that the Iranian people, already under severe economic pressure, do not need the additional problem of American and Israeli missiles in response to a military attack on Israel. This web user, and several others, said that it would be better to invest in improving the quality of life in Iran and developing the country instead of focusing on a possible attack on Israel.

A number of web users criticized the author of the article and wondered why he did not suggest attacking Russia or China when those countries attacked Muslims in Chechnya and western China.

The author's call to destroy the people of Israel drew particularly strong criticism. Many web users said that the proposal is immoral, and that the website should not have published an article which calls for genocide. Iran has no problem with the Jews but only with the leaders of the "Zionist regime", one of the web users said. Even Israel does not call for the elimination of the Iranian people, and calling for the elimination of Israelis is completely unjustified. Another web user claimed that the article serves Israel, which can now claim that Iran no longer simply calls for the destruction of Israel but also seeks to eliminate the Jewish people.

Iran condemns Samsung over Israeli TV commercial

An ad for an Israeli cable TV company showing characters from the popular Israeli series *Asfur* blow up a nuclear plant in the city of Esfahan provoked strong reactions in Iran. The target of the Iranians' anger was Samsung, the South Korean electronics company whose tablet was the subject of the ad.

Arsalan Fathipour, chairman of the Majles Economy Committee, said that the Majles is looking into the possibility of reexamining Iran's relations with Samsung and passing a law that would ban the import of its products due to the "anti-Iranian ad". He noted that the law will make the company sorry for the insulting ad, and that the company has forgotten that it does substantial business in Iran. Asking the Iranian people for an apology is necessary but not sufficient, the Majles member said (Alef, February 1). In an interview to Fars News Agency, Majles member Seyyed Ali Mousavi also discussed the ad and said that Samsung offended the Iranian people to please the Zionists, and that the offense will cost it dearly. He noted that

the Majles Economy Committee will discuss the issue in the coming week and consider its response (Fars, February 1).

Conservative media defined the ad as offensive to the Iranian people, particularly Iranian women. Fars News Agency gave a detailed report about the ad, saying that it mocks the assassination of Iran's nuclear scientists by the Mossad. Iranians were also angry about the way their country is portrayed in the ad. According to Fars, Iran is portrayed as a dust-filled stone-age country whose people are cut off from civilization and whose women sit on the ground. The news agency pointed out that a picture of top Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Ayatollah Sistani was hanging on the wall of the café depicted in the ad, showing that the advertising company lacks basic political knowledge.

Fars wondered whether Iran can also broadcast an anti-Israeli ad for Samsung products, and use it to threaten Israel with assassinations and terrorist attacks in its territory. If the answer is no, what justification does Samsung have to produce an ad that offends Iranians and their culture? Furthermore, doesn't the production of such an ad several days after the assassination of the Iranian nuclear scientist provide Iran with a possibility to file a complaint against Samsung for supporting terrorism? According to Fars, the ad exposes the Israelis' fear from Iran and its military capabilities and the considerable value they attribute to Iran's nuclear activity (Fars, February 1). The Mashregh website also strongly condemned the Israeli ad and said that the "Zionist regime", which is responsible for acts of terrorism against Iran and the assassination of its nuclear scientists, uses ridicule to evade responsibility for these acts (Mashregh, January 25).

This week the internal security forces removed Samsung's billboards in Tehran. In addition, the Ministry of Islamic Guidance prohibited Iranian commercial companies from cooperating with the company in the field of advertising or giving away its products as prizes. A protest rally was also held in front of the company's offices in Tehran (Roos Online, February 5).

Pictures of the week: student Basij members demonstrate in front of the Majles demanding to stop the export of Iranian oil to Europe



ISNA/PHOTO: ROOBOLLAH VARDATI



ISNA/PHOTO: ROOBOLLAH VARDATI



ISNA/PHOTO: ROOBOLLAH VARDATI



ISNA/PHOTO: ROOBOLLAH VARDATI



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